

**The Importance of the Teacher-Student Relationship in Contributing To Adolescent EAL  
Newcomer Success in Secondary School**

By

Troy Scott

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### **Abstract**

Over the past decade, Manitoba has welcomed over 100,000 permanent residents from abroad (Manitoba Immigration, 2011), resulting in a significant increase in the number of English as an Additional Language (EAL) students in public schools throughout the province (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2008). This phenomenon has posed a unique challenge for schools as they look for ways to best welcome, transition and support the diverse educational and cultural needs of newcomer EAL students. The purpose of this study was first to describe the impact of the relationship between adolescent newcomers in South Winnipeg secondary schools and their teachers. Additional sub-questions examined teacher valuation of newcomer's cultural background and solicited advice for both EAL newcomers and educators. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews with recent EAL adult graduates that arrived in Manitoba between the ages of 13-17, with the intent of discovering common themes from their experiences. Results revealed the importance of EAL newcomers having a caring, patient teacher with a sense of humour that has a sincere interest in who they are and in their cultural heritage. They also clearly show the need for schools to look for more effective and authentic ways to connect newcomers with their Canadian peers. This report concludes with recommendations for teachers and administrators to consider when developing teacher PD and programming for newcomer adolescent EAL students.

Keywords: education, English as an Additional Language (EAL), cultural proficiency, relationship, student, teacher

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**Table of Contents**

Title Page..... i

Acknowledgements..... ii

Abstract ..... iii

Table of Contents ..... iv-vii

Definitions ..... viii

Chapter 1: Introduction ..... 1

    Overarching Research Question ..... 3

Chapter 2: Literature Review..... 8

    Cultural Proficiency: Attitudes and Approaches to Diversity ..... 9

    Current State of Teacher – EAL Student Relationship Research in Manitoba and Beyond  
    ..... 11

    Initial language and Cultural Needs of Incoming EAL Students..... 13

        Language needs ..... 13

        Cultural challenges and needs of EAL newcomers ..... 15

    Teacher - Student Relationship Research ..... 17

        Teacher-student research..... 17

        Teacher - EAL student relationship research..... 19

    Student Voice..... 22

Chapter 3: Methodology ..... 24

    Transcendental Phenomenological Research..... 24

    Researcher’s Role ..... 26

        Trust ..... 26

Data Gathering .....	28
Participant selection .....	29
Developing an Interview Guide.....	29
Introduction and rapport building.....	30
Teacher-student relationships.....	32
Suggestions for improvement.....	33
Sources of Data .....	34
Analysis: the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method.....	34
Personal experience.....	34
Interview journal.....	35
Individual Participant Experience.....	35
Group (Composite) Experience.....	35
Validity .....	37
Limitations and delimitations .....	38
Ethical Considerations.....	39
Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings .....	41
Description of Personal and Professional Experience with EAL students.....	41
Description of Participants.....	42
Individual Participant Descriptions of Experience.....	43
Participant #1: Diego .....	43
Participant #2: Pan .....	45
Participant #3: Ahmed .....	48
Participant #4: Divya.....	51
Participant #5: Sonia.....	54

Participant #6: Amina .....	58
Participant #7: Akash .....	60
Participant #8: Minjoon .....	62
Themes Generated From Group Experience.....	65
First experiences as a newcomer student in Canada .....	65
Isolation.....	65
Difficulty making friends .....	66
Fear of being made fun of.....	66
Positive interactions with teachers .....	67
Supportive teacher-student relationships .....	67
Caring.....	68
Sense of humour .....	69
Interest in students .....	69
Patience.....	70
Teachers' valuing the cultural background of their students.....	71
Participant advice for newcomer EAL students and educators.....	73
Advice for EAL newcomers.....	73
Advice for educators.....	75
Synthesis of Group Experience .....	77
Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations.....	79
Future Research.....	82
Recommendations.....	83
Administrators.....	83
Teachers .....	85

Participant struggles .....	87
Conclusion.....	88
References.....	91
Appendix A: Interview Guide.....	95
Appendix B: Interview Questions for Participants to Pre-Read.....	98
Appendix C: Interview Journal.....	100
Appendix D: ENREB Approval Certificate .....	109
Appendix E: Letter of Informed Consent .....	110
Appendix F: Pembina Trails School Division Letter of Approval.....	114

**Definitions**

EAL	English as an Additional Language (current term used by Manitoba Education)
ESL	English as a Second Language (past term used by Manitoba Education)
ELL	English Language Learner
L1	Mother Tongue
L2	A subsequent language learned after mother tongue
PD	Professional development
SLA	Second language acquisition
EA	Educational Assistant
ELA	English Language Arts



## Chapter 1: Introduction

Having worked to teach, create programs, and develop teacher professional development (PD) in the area of English as an Additional Language (EAL) education for the past 10 years, I have become increasingly interested in the teacher-EAL student relationship and its impact on school success. In particular, I wanted to gather the stories of recently graduated EAL students in hopes of discovering common experiential themes which could be shared with educators to improve the newcomer school experience. Through this study I have developed a richer understanding of the importance of the teacher-EAL student relationship in helping newcomer immigrant students achieve school success.

Throughout my 10-year education career, I have worked in a high school drawing from the South Winnipeg area; a community that has experienced a consistent and rapid increase in its EAL student population in all of its schools. This trend has been largely due to the Province's acceptance of increasing numbers of immigrants via the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program as part of its economic growth plan (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2012). Since 1999, numbers have increased from 3,725 arrivals to 15,962 new immigrants in 2011 (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2012). This has consequently led to a drastic increase in the EAL student population in public schools throughout Winnipeg, where 84% of newcomers to the Province have been settling (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2012). Manitoba education reported a 91% increase in the number of EAL students in schools between 2003 and 2008 alone (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2008), and yearly increases in the number of immigrant newcomers entering the Province has undoubtedly kept EAL student numbers growing (Manitoba Teachers' Society, 2010).

My personal connection to EAL education comes via my Irish-Pilipino background; my parents immigrated to Canada in the early 1970's, my Mother from the Philippines and my Father from Northern Ireland. English was a second language for my Mother, and although she found

immediate acceptance in Canada, I have witnessed some of the passive aggressive stereotyping and differential treatment that she experienced at times during my childhood. However, both of my parents always preached tolerance, understanding, and consideration for others throughout my childhood. I can't help but think that these values, along with my multicultural background and Mother's experiences, have contributed to my interest in the area of EAL education and my ability to relate to and connect with EAL students.

Although my parents were new to the country, they both had well-developed English and had lived in Canada for over a decade when I entered the Manitoba public school system. I consequently possessed the linguistic, parental, cultural and social advantages that most newcomer EAL students and their families do not enjoy when they immigrate to Canada. With schools being an immediate requirement for newcomers, their teachers often assume the primary roles of advocate and voice for EAL students as they navigate their way through their new social and educational learning environment (Roessingh, 2006). This role often extends to supporting immigrant parents, many of whom are unfamiliar with the education system and have varying levels of English competency (Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel & Martin, 2009). Therefore, teachers have a significant part to play in helping EAL students find success in the education system (Peguero & Bondy, 2011).

These aforementioned personal and professional experiences have made me wonder more about the experience of immigrant teenagers that come to Canada and need to adapt to learning a new language, culture and education system. What would they say helped them to succeed or held them back? What made the difference to them as adolescent EAL newcomers in this transition? How did their teachers support their learning?

With these questions in mind, I performed a mini-study as part of a qualitative research method Masters Course in 2013 in which I explored the educational experiences of three adolescent EAL newcomers that had recently graduated from high school. My open-ended interview questions

were geared toward having my three participants describe aspects of their high school experience that helped them learn and achieve graduation. The overwhelming commonality in their responses was to refer to their caring and supportive teachers, usually a go-to individual, and to tell stories of how key teachers helped and supported them along the way academically and emotionally. This has made me want to dig deeper into the teacher – adolescent EAL student relationship by speaking with additional, recently graduated, adult EAL students in order to shine a light on the importance of this bond in supporting newcomer educational success.

The overarching question that this thesis examines is: For a newcomer adolescent EAL student, how did the relationships with their teachers impact their ability to achieve success in the form of graduation? Additional sub-questions include:

1. What was it like to be a newcomer adolescent EAL student?
2. What kinds of teacher-student relationships best supported their learning?
3. Did their teacher value their cultural background in the classroom and how did this affect their experience and success?
4. What advice would EAL students have for educators to improve newcomer connection to the school community and language acquisition?

This study focuses on the experiences of newcomer adolescent students that arrived in Canada between the ages of 13-17 and have now graduated from high school. These EAL students are now young adults between the ages of 18-23, and are in a unique position of being able to reflect on their not-so-distant past educational experiences (Roessingh, 2006). Review of teacher- EAL student relationship literature in Chapter Two illustrates that there is a notable lack of research in the area of the *lived* experiences of K-12 newcomers (Carhill & Paez, 2008; Hersi & Watkinson, 2012; Kanno & Dermer Applebaum, 1995). This study looks to partially address this void and contribute

to the local EAL research base which is minimal due to the recent trend of increased immigration into Manitoba.

In Chapter Three I explain my methodological approach and its appropriateness for this type of research question. Moustakes' phenomenological approach to research was utilized as a framework for developing the questions, methods, and analysis. Moustakes (1994) states that:

In phenomenological research, the question grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic. The researcher's excitement and curiosity inspire the research. Personal history brings the core of the problem to focus. (p. 104)

It is evident from my personal and professional context that this approach was the best fit in terms of gathering and sharing the experiences of EAL adolescents. Participants were asked eleven semi-structured and open-ended questions exploring the relationships with their teachers. These interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analyzed using Moustakes' modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data (1994, p. 122).

Mitra (2003) states that, "seeking student views on school problems and possible solutions reminds teachers and administrators that students possess unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate" (p. 289). EAL students can often be overlooked in this regard due to their minority backgrounds and lack of English proficiency, plus the fact that many EAL students may not even think they have the right to voice their opinions (Kanno & Dermer Applebaum, 1995). Having experienced the impact of student voice during a past professional development day in which two grade 12 EAL students shared their experiences of learning English with a group of teachers, I am hopeful that the study will provide that *student voice* to the critical importance of a positive and caring teacher-EAL student relationship. Promotion of this aspect of EAL education is doubly important within the Manitoba context where the majority of

teachers have not received formal training or significant PD in EAL education, and are struggling to deal with the wave of EAL students entering their classrooms.

In Chapter Four I present the results and analysis of my interviews with eight participants that immigrated to Canada between the ages of 13-17 and are now graduated from high school. Syntheses of participant descriptions of their first days in Canada included stories of welcoming teachers and struggles with learning English and making friends. Most participants developed initial friendships with newcomers in their sheltered EAL classes, but they also expressed disappointment with not being able to connect with their Canadian-born peers prior to developing abilities with conversational English.

The focus of this study, investigating the importance of the teacher-student relationship, generated compelling stories of teachers supporting newcomers academically and emotionally with their transition and/or success into the Canadian school system. The four most frequently disclosed qualities of teachers that fostered positive relationships were: caring, humour, patience, and showing interest in students as individuals. The teacher-student relationship was seen to have the greatest importance for participants in the first year due to limited English proficiency and lack of friendships upon arrival to Canada.

When participants were asked about how their teachers acknowledged and supported their cultural identity, it was clear that this validation occurred and played a large role in fostering caring and trusting relationships. Participants appreciated how their teachers and educational assistants took initiative to learn about their culture and, in some cases, asked them to share their experiences with others. These experiences built confidence in participants as English speakers and empowered them to pursue more active roles in their classes and schools.

Participant advice for EAL newcomers was to look for as many opportunities to speak English as possible, the best way being to find friends that did not speak the same mother tongue. It

was felt that learning English opened up the doors to additional friendships and opportunities in both the school and workplace.

Participant's key piece of advice for educators was to look for ways to connect newcomers with their Canadian peers. It was apparent in participant responses that there was disconnect in this regard and a need to look for improved ways to foster these relationships. Additional advice for educators included taking interest in their cultural background, being patient, and taking initiative to build connections with often shy newcomers.

In Chapter Five I discuss my findings, limitations of this study, recommendations for educators, and areas for further research. Analysis of participant responses demonstrated a positive correlation between the relational attributes that participants expressed through their stories and the teacher-student relationship research evaluated in Chapter Two. In particular, the qualities of caring, interest in EAL newcomers as individuals and cultural validation were most prevalent.

Recommendations for teachers focused on classroom strategies such as the use of visual representations, and being strategic with student groupings to promote connections with newcomers and their peers. Recommendations for administrators included evaluating the programs and structures in place to support EAL newcomers in their schools. The Cultural Proficiency model was utilized to perform a rudimentary evaluation of where this school, where all participants attended, was on the continuum. This framework has the potential to be of great utility for educators as a lens for assessing and identifying areas of growth for supporting diversity in schools.

Within the context of educating teenage EAL newcomers, there is considerable time pressure to outfit them with the requisite cultural, social and language skills to be successful citizens in Canadian society prior to graduation. A newcomer student arriving at the age of 14 has only four years before they can vote and, potentially, have to navigate the adult and post-secondary education world where there are significantly fewer available supports to provide guidance. In addition,

English language proficiency is the single biggest predictor of future academic success for EAL students (Suarez-Orozco, Rhodes & Milburn, 2009; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008; Watt, Roessingh & Bosetti, 1997). Thus, it is incumbent on teachers and educational systems to recognize the urgency and importance of their work with EAL adolescent newcomers.

Imagining one's self as a monolingual English speaker emigrating from Winnipeg to China at the age of 14 puts the task that these students face into perspective.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In Chapter Two I consider literature in the area of EAL education and teacher- student relationships. In order to gain a greater understanding of the challenges facing adolescent newcomers entering high school, I examine the following elements and their connection to my study:

1. The concept of Cultural Proficiency and its impact on the overall experience of the EAL newcomer.
2. The current state of teacher – EAL student relationship research in Manitoba and beyond.
3. The initial language and cultural needs of incoming EAL students. Both of these elements add a dynamic to the teacher-student relationship that needs to be considered in this investigation.
4. Evaluate relationship research for both the teacher-student and the teacher-EAL student frame.
5. Examination of “student voice” literature as a way of informing EAL programming.

This literature review is organized in a way that reflects the educational pathway that an EAL student takes when they arrive in a Canadian school. First, examining the concept of cultural proficiency; creating a welcoming environment for newcomers that celebrates the diversity they bring to the classroom. Then, supporting the language and cultural needs of these newcomers and developing caring and supportive teacher-student relationships throughout their school experience. Finally, once these students have developed proficiency in English and graduate with their high school diploma, soliciting their voice to provide valuable feedback on their school experience that informs future EAL programming.



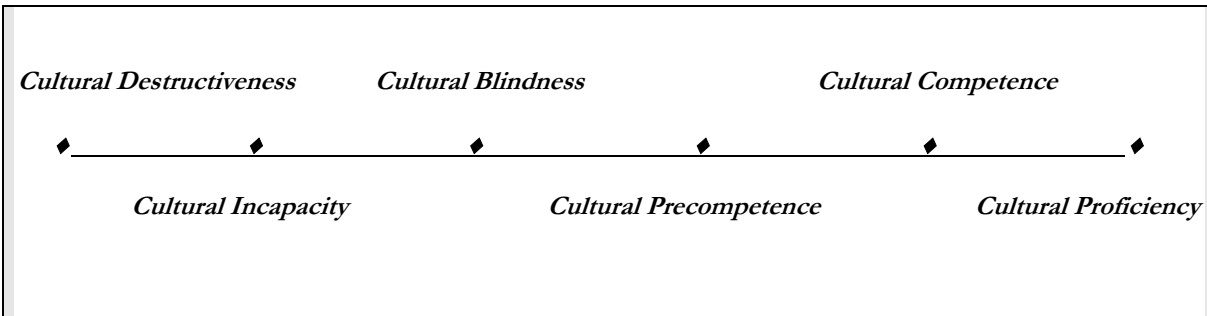
### **Cultural Proficiency: Attitudes and Approaches to Diversity**

Although this study examines the impact of a positive teacher-EAL student relationship on success, the foundation for this relationship is significantly affected by greater school-wide attitudes, policies and beliefs towards student diversity (Coelho, 2004; Lindsey, Robins & Terrell, 2009). For example, if a school does not have a formalized intake process and a well-developed school plan to support EAL newcomers, one would tend to believe that newcomer EAL students would be at an immediate disadvantage. Thus, the first part of this literature review considers the overall school approach to diversity and, consequently, EAL learners using the framework of Cultural Proficiency.

Cultural proficiency is, “a way of being, a worldview, and a perspective that are the basis for how one moves about in our diverse society” (Lindsey, Robins & Terrell, 2009, p. 5). The central tenet of cultural proficiency holds that change is from the inside-out, and that one must be able to recognize one’s own assumptions in order to retain those that facilitate culturally proficient actions and change those that impede such actions (Lindsey, Graham, Westphal Jr. & Jew, 2008). At a teacher-student level, being culturally proficient means knowing, valuing and using diversity (cultural backgrounds, languages, and learning styles) within the context of teaching. This process extends outwards to examination of entire school policies and practices that either facilitate cultural proficiency or hinder it (Lindsey, Robins & Terrell, 2009). Simply put, cultural proficiency is about a school’s overall attitude and approach towards diverse student populations.

The cultural proficiency framework includes a continuum for educators and schools to self-evaluate their practices and approaches towards diversity (See Figure 2.1). The first three points on the left side of the continuum beginning with *cultural destructiveness* refer to schools with unhealthy values and behaviours, including elimination of *other* cultures and a lack of acknowledgement of minority groups in a school (Lindsey, Robins & Terrell, 2009). The opposite end of this

continuum culminates with *cultural proficiency* describes schools that have an awareness of, a positive approach towards, and a commitment to using diversity as strengths within the school community.



**Figure 2.1. The Cultural Proficiency Continuum (Lindsey, Robins & Terrell, 2009, p. 58)**

The cultural proficiency continuum has utility for this qualitative study because individual participant responses along with the general group themes arising will permit a basic evaluation of where their school is on this scale. Having worked at my participants' high school for 10 years (I moved to a local Junior High in January 2014), I would tend to believe that it is much closer to the culturally proficient end. However, what do the students think? This feedback will provide the school with areas for improvement as well as inform my current administrative practice as Principal of a very culturally diverse junior high in the same neighbourhood.

With regards to school improvement, the cultural proficiency model appeals to me because it provides a road map for working with staff to interrogate their own assumptions and beliefs and to create a school ethos which values and celebrates diversity in all regards. Lindsey, Robins & Terrell (2009) comment about the critical role of the school leader with regards to cultural proficiency,

Culturally proficient school leaders redirect the conversation from explaining why groups of students fail to engaging colleagues in collaborative dialogue about creating powerful teaching-learning environments that ensure student access they respond to both individual and group differences and they organize human and material resources of the school in a

manner that considers the education of all students the fundamental responsibility of the school (p. 56).

When applied to the EAL frame, an examination of all facets of the school including program structure, staff attitudes and beliefs, applicable professional development, and human resource allocation is required. For administrators, this requires a commitment of appropriate staffing for EAL student intake and classroom support as well as commitment to EAL PD for all staff. For teaching staff, this means being open to learning new teaching strategies and approaches (such as the cultural proficiency model) for working with the increased number of EAL students in their classes.

The theme of taking leadership of EAL programming as the school administrator, and then working with staff to take ownership for their work in creating classroom environment that celebrates diversity, is apparent. It is also a critical element of being a culturally proficient leader that I'd like to be known as.

### **Current State of Teacher – EAL Student Relationship Research in Manitoba and Beyond**

With the increased immigration to Manitoba being more of a 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomena, local research in this area of EAL education is understandably minimal. Diana Turner, Manitoba Education EAL consultant and Manager of the EAL Development Unit, explains that although EAL education has been around for 30 years, the spotlight really only began to shine on EAL in 2005 when the provincial document, “Belonging, Learning, and Growing Kindergarten to Grade 12; Action Plan for Ethnocultural Equity” was released by the Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (D. Turner, personal communication, August 15, 2013). The intent of this action plan was to standardize the EAL delivery model across the province via development of common curricula, align funding and consultative supports, and creation of divisional policy and practice (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2005).

A very low percentage of teachers in Manitoba have formalized EAL training, in part due to the recent influx of newcomers in schools making this a new professional development need. Throughout my undergraduate education degree from 2000 - 2002, little reference was made to EAL instruction or teaching strategies. This was in part due to lower numbers of EAL students in schools, and the premise that EAL was a specialist area similar to that of resource or counselling which required additional education in the form of a post-baccalaureate or a Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Certificate. Although Manitoba universities are beginning to respond to this emergent trend by hiring professors with EAL backgrounds to facilitate education courses for teachers-in-training, there are only a handful of practicing EAL academics employed in the province.

There is more EAL research in areas of Canada that have had longstanding EAL student populations, such as British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2012), and in areas of the United States which have entertained significant immigration for more than a century. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education doctoral students Yasuko Kanno and Sheila Dermer Applebaum (1995) commented,

Although the last 20 years of SLA research has revealed a great deal about L2 learners, what has been revealed is not so much the learners' experiences as the effects of learner variables such as aptitude, strategies, motivation, age, and first language on the process and result of L2 acquisition. The focus has been on the phenomenon of L2 acquisition, not on the living individual human being (p. 33).

Examining individual factors that impact EAL language acquisition are important considerations, but, from my experience, the real-life narratives of the EAL student journey are what connect with teachers and inspire them to adjust their practice. Hersi and Watkinson (2012) remark,

While special schools and programs for ELL students and recent immigrants have been around for over a decade, there has been very little research into policies, teacher practice, and the experiences of students attending these schools (p. 99).

The collection of this *living experience* is the prime objective of this inquiry, an area which seems to be currently lacking in adolescent language acquisition research (Carhill & Paez, 2008; Hersi & Watkinson, 2012; Kanno & Dermer Applebaum, 1995). This collection of student experience also has utility for informing instruction and professional development for educators.

### **Initial language and Cultural Needs of Incoming EAL Students**

**Language needs.** One of the biggest challenges for adolescent EAL students with respect to language acquisition is the time pressure that they are under to become competent speakers and writers of English. It is estimated that it takes five to seven years for EAL beginner language learners to develop levels of English (English level or competency refers to the ability to speak, listen, read, and write English) equivalent to native English speakers (Carhill & Paez, 2008; Coelho, 2004; Suarez-Orozco, Rhodes & Milburn, 2009), and up to nine years to develop equivalence with high school level academic language (Coelho, 2004).

Figure 2.1 demonstrates that later arriving EAL students are faced with an increasingly greater vocabulary deficit as compared to their native peers. Whereas a student arriving at eight years old may have a vocabulary gap of up to 4000 words, the gap can be as much as 10,000 words for adolescent arrivals (See Figure 2.1). Although older arrivals may have developed a common underlying proficiency that makes it easier for them to make meaning of English language in their first language (Roessingh, 2008), these students are under considerable time pressure, and often parental pressure, to develop their English and academic language proficiency prior to completing high school. Carhill and Peaz (2008) wrote,

Immigrant students who arrive in the middle and high school years encounter less support for language learning in school, have more complex academic content to learn, and have less time to catch up to their native-speaking peers before encountering age-keeping assessment that have serious consequences for their future (p. 1156).

Although Carhill and Peaz bring an American perspective to standards assessment, their research has local merit with respect to the time pressure to prepare for grade 12 provincial standards tests and university academic and English-language entrance requirements. In the Manitoba context, K-12 schools with increasing EAL populations have begun to recognize this urgency to develop appropriate programming to support EAL students. However, from attending provincial EAL meetings, it is evident that there are inconsistencies amongst schools and work to do in the area.

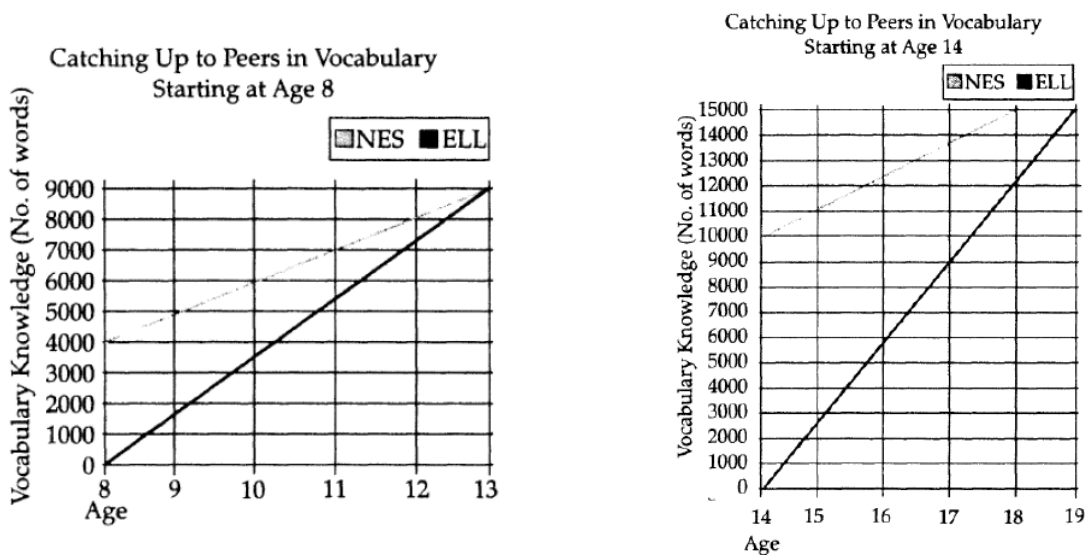


Figure 2.1. Catching up to peers in vocabulary at ages 8 and 14. (Coelho, 2004, p.94)

Newcomers also include refugees with interrupted schooling and arrivals that have struggled to learn in their first language, making the process of developing sufficient programming more complex and challenging for school teachers and administration. These language needs along with

cultural and social challenges discussed later in this chapter, make newcomer EAL students especially vulnerable to academic disengagement, making it even more essential that they be given the same attention as other at-risk school populations (Green, Rhodes, Heitler Hirsch, Suarez-Orozco & Camic, 2008).

**Cultural challenges and needs of EAL newcomers.** Manitoba Immigration (2012) reported that in 2011, 85% of new immigrants to Manitoba arrived from the Asia-Pacific (68%) and African- Middle Eastern (17%) regions. This trend is reflected in the student population at my former high school in which Mandarin, Korean, and Punjabi are the top 3 languages spoken by EAL students, and the total EAL population has grown from 10% to over 35% of the 1100 student population in just 10 years. Due to the fact that North American culture is different from those of many incoming immigrant students, the adjustment for EAL newcomers can be particularly difficult in the beginning (Li, 2004). Watt, Roessingh & Bosetti (1996) expand, “The dual burden of acquiring language proficiency sufficient to compete in the academic environment of high school and dealing with what is popularly known as *culture shock* militates against the success of many ESL students” (p. 200). The teacher thus becomes the key player in alleviating these stressors through development of positive relationships and validation of immigrant students’ cultural heritage (Hersi & Watkinson, 2012; Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel & Martin, 2009; Roessingh, 2006).

In addition to the social and familial differences between Asia-Pacific or Middle Eastern cultures to Canadian culture, there are significant dissimilarities in the educational systems that educators need to be aware of when developing EAL programming (Derderian-Aghajanian & Cong Cong, 2012). Table 2.1 illustrates the contrast between the Asian teacher-centered performance model and the learner-centered and collaborative Canadian approach. These differences would be similar to the Middle Eastern context where fact-based, teacher-centered teaching practices prevail (Derderian-Aghajanian & Cong Cong, 2012). These differences add an additional layer of challenge

to the adjustment processes for newcomers, and help to justify many EAL students' initial reluctance to actively engage in discussion and collaboration in the classroom. They also reinforce the need for teachers to be sensitive to these starting points when planning activities for EAL students in their classes.

<b>Table 2.1 Chinese and Canadian education: Some points of comparison</b>	
<b>China</b>	<b>Canada</b>
Teacher fronted	Learner centered
Prizes memorization of vast amounts of information within a transmission framework	Promotes inquire, problem solving, and critical thinking within a constructivist framework
Performance and examination driven “testocracy” or “examination hell” (sihom chiok)	Both process and product (outcomes) oriented
Emphasizes individual effort and achievement; highly and coldly competitive	Features collaborative, cooperative group work centering on projects
Students are more passive/receptive	Learners are more active/engaged
Large class sizes (40-70+ students)	Small class sizes (30-35 students)
<b>Source : (Roessingh, 2006, p. 567)</b>	

Although an extensive examination of the EAL student - parent dynamic is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to recognize this area as an important part of the cultural adjustment process. Upon arrival, many parents of EAL students lack the English proficiency and understanding of the Canadian school system to be active participants in the educational planning process (Roessingh, 2006). There can also be significant changes to the family dynamic upon



arrival; students taking on the role of family translator; time apart from family due to parents arriving at different times; and parents working multiple jobs at inopportune times, all of which can contribute to estrangement (Yeh, Kim, Pituc & Atkins, 2008).

Parental dynamics coupled with language needs, adapting to a learner-centered education model and the lack of friendships make the potential for EAL newcomer isolation very high.

Therefore,

Because the ESL teacher is likely to have the most direct contact with these students and their families, on the one hand, and the larger school community, on the other, he or she plays a key role in mediating the new experiences in the L2 educational and cultural milieu (Roessingh, 2006, p. 571).

This underscores the importance of the teacher's role in developing a trusting and caring connection with new EAL students and their families.

In my experience, being able to initially evaluate and support newcomer EAL students cultural and language needs has been critical for early success. Also, training teachers to understand the various starting points and educational approaches that these students were exposed to in their previous country has been very effective in supporting their adaptation to the Canadian student-centered teaching model. For this study, I will be asking participants to describe their first days in a Canadian high school, and probe for how teachers supported them during this undoubtedly stressful time in their lives.

### **Teacher - Student Relationship Research**

**Teacher-student relationship research.** There is a plethora of educational research available regarding the contribution of a caring and supportive teacher-student relationship to positive educational outcomes (Christiansen, 2002; Peguero & Bondy, 2011; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008). In his recent book *Visible Learning* (2009), John Hattie ranks the

teacher-student relationship 11<sup>th</sup> out of 138 classroom influences in impacting student achievement. So what elements contribute to a positive teacher-student relationship? Hattie (2009) summarizes that a positive teacher-student relationship developed through listening, empathy, caring and having positive regard for students has a significant impact on student achievement.

When examining the make-up of a strong teacher-student association, a teacher is more than just the subject area expert. Peguero and Bondy (2011) refer to the many hats a teacher wears in supporting student learning,

Because students have consistent interactions with teachers, who are perceived as mentors, role models, sources of encouragement and support, and representatives of the educational system, students' relationship with teachers is a critical aspect of a student's educational progress and success. (p. 166)

Peguero and Bondy are referring to the need for teachers to develop a trusting and caring relationship with their students. From my own teaching and administrative experience (teacher observation), the ability to create strong connections with students was essential to creating a positive and effective learning environment where they could take chances with their learning and feel comfortable approaching their teachers for support. This multi-faceted role of both academic and social-emotional support is consistently referred to throughout the literature as being essential for student buy-in. Fouts and Poulson (2001) expand,

In order to move forward academically, many students seem to need a sense of emotional connection and validation that is brought by the spontaneous matching and synchronicity of emotions between the teacher and themselves (p. 2).

A teacher's ability to develop these connections via taking a genuine interest in their students is an essential part of creating a caring and trusting learning environment which in turn fosters a comfort level and trust that promotes risk taking (Christiansen, 2002). Teachers that initially build

strong connections and relationships with their students create a strong foundation for future learning and ultimately increase student achievement (Hattie, 2009, Suarez-Orozco, Rhodes & Milburn, 2009; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008; Peguero & Bondy, 2011).

The literature is very clear in making a direct correlation between positive teacher-student relationships and academic achievement. Although the same premise extends to the teacher - EAL student dynamic, there are additional transitional factors that need to be considered.

**Teacher-EAL student relationship research.** Research in the area of teacher - EAL student relational dynamic has many similarities to the general teacher - student frame but includes the added layers of language, cultural and social needs. Key themes that emerge in the literature include the link between positive relationships leading to effective transitions for EAL students, and the use of culturally sensitive approaches in building strong connections with newcomers.

Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel and Martin (2009) refer to the importance of the teacher-EAL student relationship,

Connections with teachers, counsellors, coaches, and other supportive adults in the school are particularly important to the academic and social adaptation of adolescents in general and appear to be particularly important for immigrant adolescents (p. 717).

Teenage EAL newcomers are vulnerable to isolation considering that they often have lower levels of English proficiency, little knowledge of Canadian culture, and have few (if any) friends when they first arrive at school. Therefore, the role of the educator in developing a strong relationship becomes essential in providing newcomers with safe outlets for learning cultural norms and information vital to success in their new location (Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel & Martin, 2009).

Relational engagement is consistently referred to in the literature as being an important contributor to successful outcomes for EAL students (Green, Rhodes, Heitler Hirsch, Suarez-Orozco & Camic, 2008; Hersi & Watkinson, 2012; Suarez-Orozco, Rhodes & Milburn, 2009).

Relational engagement refers to the degree to which students are connected with the teachers and adults in their schools (Suarez-Orozco, Rhodes & Milburn, 2009). Suarez-Orozco, Rhodes and Milburn (2009) refer to this in their research concerning relational engagement in recently arrived immigrant youth,

Researchers have suggested that positive relational engagement with teachers and school staff may be even more significant for students who are at risk for negative outcomes, as they help to bridge the gap between home and school cultures and provide important feelings of safety and opportunities for academic success (p. 24).

The negative outcomes being referred to, such as academic disengagement and connecting with negative peer groups, can lead to drop-out and criminal consequences. Educators have a unique opportunity to guide newcomers through their transition to a new culture and schooling system. It is evident that development of a caring and supportive teacher - EAL student relationship is essential for facilitating a smooth transition into the new learning environment and to overall success of EAL newcomers.

As newcomer families often are unfamiliar with the educational practices, it becomes incumbent on the teacher to bridge this gap between the home and school. Roessingh (2006) refers to this dynamic,

The ESL teacher often has the most intense and sustained contact with immigrant students, and it is to this person that students and their parents turn to mediate the demands of educational achievement. Building, bonding and bridging social capital-trust is critical to this process (p. 583).

Roessingh is essentially referring to the opportunity teachers have to become the *go-to* person for EAL newcomers when they have academic, social and emotional needs. The ability of a teacher to develop a trusting relationship with both the student and their parents becomes paramount to the

success of EAL newcomers. Also, due to the language discrepancy that a newcomer EAL student often enters Canadian schools with, teachers can become their de facto advocates.

There is an emerging body of research in the area of cultural awareness and the positive use of diversity as a vehicle for fostering student engagement and developing strong bonds with EAL students. These connections are fostered through caring relationships in which teachers get to know student's cultural backgrounds and connect this diversity to the curriculum and the interests of their students (Hersi & Watkinson, 2012). In a previous mini-study that I completed for a Masters course, participants often referred to the validation they felt when their EAL teacher took an interest in their cultural background and imbedded it into their EAL tutorial lessons. The ability of a teacher to authentically embed cultural and linguistically responsive teaching practices is a significant contributor to student's learning (Hersi and Watkinson, 2012).

Sandra Schecter and Jim Cummins (2003) present a framework for academic language learning which includes the triad of teacher-student interaction, maximum cognitive engagement and maximum identity investment (p. 9-15). Their work centers upon the use of classroom diversity as a resource and access point for connecting with newcomers. They summarize the importance of the teacher to this process,

For students to invest their sense of self, their identity, in acquiring their new language and participating actively in their new culture, they must experience positive and affirming interactions with members of that culture. Nobody is more important in this process than the teacher. Teachers have the opportunity to nurture student's growing understanding of who they are and who they want to be (p. 11).

Schecter and Cummins' work speaks to the contribution of identity investment in helping build a strong and trusting teacher-student relationship and learning environment where EAL newcomers feel valued and safe to take risks. It also compliments the cultural proficiency

framework discussed earlier in this chapter. Their work led me to create the following interview question for this study: How did your teachers take interest in and/or recognize your culture in the classroom? I was curious to explore, from the perspective of the EAL student, how teachers are connecting classroom diversity and cultural awareness to instructional practice.

### **Student Voice**

As this phenomenological study was grounded on the testimonials of recent EAL student graduates, it is important to consider the literature in the area of student voice. Mitra (2003) states that, “seeking student views on school problems and possible solutions reminds teachers and administrators that students possess unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate” (p. 289). This consultative process also has been proven to build positive teacher-student relationships and served as a catalyst for change initiatives in schools (Mitra, 2003).

EAL students can often be overlooked in this regard due to their minority backgrounds and lack of English proficiency. In addition, the past educational experiences in their home countries may lead EAL students to believe that they do not have the right to voice their opinions (Kanno & Dermer Applebaum, 1995). However, having experienced the transformative impact of student-voice during a past PD day in which two grade 12 EAL students shared their experiences of learning English to a group of teachers, I learned that this is one of the most powerful ways of positively shifting teacher beliefs. I am hopeful that the results of this study provide that student voice to the critical importance of a positive and caring teacher-EAL student relationship and its impact on school success.

Promotion of this aspect of EAL education is doubly important within the Manitoban context in which the majority of teachers have received little EAL PD or training, and are struggling to deal with the recent wave of immigrant students entering their classrooms.

In this chapter, I introduced the cultural proficiency framework as a way of highlighting of overall school approach to diversity and consequently EAL learners. I examined the current state of local and North American teacher- EAL student relationship research and reviewed the cultural and language challenges that adolescent EAL newcomers to schools are faced with. I explored the teacher- student relationship literature in both the general sense and the specialized EAL context. I concluded by exploring the importance of student voice as a contributor to school change.

### Chapter III: Methodology

In Chapter Three, I discuss the methodology for this transcendental phenomenological study including a rationale for my chosen method, the researcher's role, data gathering, development of my interview guide, analysis of data, limitations and delimitations, and ethical considerations.

The purpose of this study was to answer the overarching question: As a newcomer adolescent EAL student, how did the relationships with their teachers impact their ability to achieve success in the form graduation? Additional sub-questions included:

1. What was it like to be a newcomer adolescent EAL student?
2. What kinds of teacher-student relationships best supported their learning?
3. Did your teacher value their cultural background in the classroom and how did this affect their experience and success?
4. What advice would EAL students have for teachers to help support their transition into school and best facilitate the language learning process and success in school?

#### **Transcendental Phenomenological Research**

I chose to utilize the transcendental phenomenological approach as the methodology in this study. Moustakes (1994) defines this method as,

Transcendental phenomenological research engages in disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated (*Epoche* process) in order to launch the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience and professional studies to be completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience (p. 22).

Having been immersed in a high school that has received hundreds of newcomer students over the past decade, I have many experiences and preconceived notions regarding adolescent EAL



education. Conducting this study within the methodology of the transcendental phenomenological approach will keep me mindful of my biases and maintain *Epoche* throughout the data gathering process. *Epoche* is a Greek term meaning to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things (Moustakas, 1994). My attempt to abstain from making suppositions and focus on the topic freshly and naively during the interview and analytical process was, I believe, essential to the authenticity and validity of my findings and conclusions (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

When speaking about the use of the phenomenological approach in one of her EAL case-studies, Hetty Roessingh (2006) adds,

Perhaps the most salient feature of the present inquiry is the invitation to those who would otherwise remain simply numbers in the longitudinal data to voice their insights into their academic success. They become advocates for their younger siblings and unknown classmates who might otherwise remain voiceless and powerless (p. 573).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I have experienced this advocacy in a past mini-study in which EAL graduates were eager to speak about their educational experiences in hopes that their story would benefit future EAL newcomers.

Creswell (2007) comments on the phenomenological approach,

The type of problem best suited for this form of research is one in which it is important to understand several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon. It would be important to understand these common experiences in order to develop practices or policies or to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon (p. 60).

As I will be interviewing multiple EAL graduates, the phenomenological approach appears to be the best fit for understanding the essence of this relational phenomenon and its impact on academic success. It is important to note that I did consider the narrative research approach, as

described in Creswell's book: *Quantitative Inquiry and Research Design* (2007). However, I felt that the narrative approach was better suited to illustrating a more in-depth personal journey of one or two participants, rather than exposing the commonalities of group experience that I was looking for. It is also my hope that the findings of this study will help inform my practice and be of utility to administrators and educators when planning for EAL students in their schools.

### **Researcher's Role**

As the sole researcher in this study, I was keenly aware that my personal background and past and current positions in EAL-heavy schools has the potential to create bias in this investigation. Creswell (2007) addresses the issue of familiarity,

Researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interaction and they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their past experiences. Thus researchers make an interpretation on what they find, an interpretation shaped by their own experiences and background (p. 21).

I was aware that my analysis would be influenced by my personal and professional background but decided to utilize Moustakes' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach to guide my work and maintain *Epoche* (Moustakes, 1994) throughout the process of data collection and analysis.

Moustakes (1994) writes that his most significant learnings have come not from books but from direct observation, perception and intuition. I assumed the role of interviewer in this study as I believe that it was essential for me to be able to interact with the participants and choose the appropriate probing questions. Although I am not an expert in body language I have a past relationship with these students, and had a sense of when to push and when to ease up with the questioning.

**Trust.** Performing a study that required interviews with EAL participants added additional considerations of trust and familiarity to the interview process. Newcomers may be unfamiliar with

the interview process and suspicious of the researcher's intentions, especially where this person is a relative stranger. Therefore, having a past relationship or connection with the participants is beneficial in convincing them to take part in the study (Moustakes, 1994). My EAL participants were young adults who had successfully graduated from the high school I previously worked at, but most had only been in the country between four to six years and were relatively new to Canada. Therefore, being someone that the participants knew, and felt comfortable with, was important for me for eliciting honest and in-depth responses.

As will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, Rubin and Rubin's (2005) *Responsive Interviewing Model* was utilized for conducting qualitative interviews. Rubin and Rubin (2005) state that, "people are more willing to be interviewed if they know you – know where you live, where you work, who your boss is and what your project is about"(p. 5.14). They go on to link this familiarity to trust building. All of my EAL participants were familiar with me in these areas as their past vice-principal and, from previous EAL research experience, I believe that this created the foundation for successful interviews. Roessingh (2006) believes that having a relationship with the participant is important for this type of cultural study,

Phenomenological inquiry focuses on the individual as the unit of analysis. It advocates for the in-depth knowledge and relationship of the participants and the researcher, and encourages retrospective reflection in a quest for meaning and understanding (p. 573).

I therefore feel that the benefits of having a past relationship with participants outweighed the drawbacks of being their past administrator. It was also a significant help in the recruitment process as relative newcomers are for many reasons hesitant to speak to a stranger wanting to ask them questions. It is important to note that I no longer work at the school that they attended, and I believe that this added a level of comfort for participants to give critical feedback.

## Data Gathering

**Participant selection.** I employed criterion sampling to recruit participants for this study. To be eligible for this investigation, participants had to be immigrants who arrived in Canada between the ages of 13-17 years old. Although there was no standard level of English proficiency upon immigration required, participants were recruited from a variety of non-English speaking regions such as Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. My rationale was that English language acquisition is a key determinant in academic success for EAL newcomers, and I wanted participants to reflect on this learning process as it applied to relationships with their teachers.

Interviewees had to be adults (18 years or older) who had achieved high school graduation, which was my measure of school success. They were selected from the high school that I previously worked in. Roessingh (2007) justifies interviewing past students citing that:

With the passage of time, these students have matured; they have also experienced educational success in contexts where the academic bar is set very high, and these two factors, in combination, permit a more reasonable and reasoned assessment of and reflection on the journey (p. 573).

Roessingh (2007) adds that these students are eager to, “become advocates for their younger siblings and unknown classmates who might otherwise remain voiceless” (p. 573). I believe that my participants’ ability to achieve graduation in a new country and in a new language has created a confidence that will lead to productive dialogue during interviews.

In a phenomenological study, the participants may be located at a single site, although they need not be. Most importantly, they must be individuals that have all experienced the phenomenon being explored and can articulate their lived experiences (Creswell, 2007, p. 120).

Participants were recruited from a single site to ensure the common experience. For this study, all of the participants immigrated to Canada as teenagers and graduated from the same high school. However, for future studies, considering additional sites with varying demographics would be beneficial to the validity of such relational research.

For this investigation I chose a sample size of eight. My interview guide was developed to elicit a depth of lived experiences and stories regarding their school experiences and relationships with their teachers. Yin (2011) encourages purposeful sampling to gather diverse perspectives on a particular phenomenon. With this in mind, my aim was to recruit participants from as many different countries as possible to gather a diversity of stories and experiences within the teacher-student relational frame.

### **Developing an Interview Guide**

The framework of Rubin and Rubin's (2005) *Responsive Interview Model* was used to develop an interview guide (Appendix A) with the primary purpose of having participants describe their relationships with their teachers. An MP3 recorder was utilized to record my interviews, and then later transcribed to produce interview transcripts. My interviews consisted of eleven open-ended questions that were emailed to participants to review upon their agreement to participate. When participants arrived, they were given a bottle of water and a copy of the interview questions (Appendix B) to again review for five minutes at the beginning of the interview. This strategy was employed to minimize the surprise factor, give participants time to re-familiarize themselves with the questions and to collect their thoughts. As participants had varying levels of English proficiency, I allowed them to keep a copy of the questions in front of them to refer to throughout the interview.

My interview questions were divided into three sections; introduction and rapport building, teacher – student relationships, and suggestions for improvement. The purpose of this order was to

first create a warm and safe environment prior to exploring the more emotional aspects of their relationships with teachers along with areas for improvement.

**Introduction and rapport building.** A significant characteristic of a culturally proficient school, as described in my literature review, is the attitude of its staff towards welcoming and supporting newcomer EAL students. Therefore, these introductory questions served a dual purpose of establishing rapport and harvesting feedback on the initial attitude and demeanour of their teachers upon arrival.

My aim at the beginning of the interview was to create a relaxed and positive atmosphere. Moustakes (1994) states, "the interviewer is responsible for creating a climate in which the research participant will feel comfortable and respond honestly and comprehensively" (p.114). As many of my participants have never been through a research interview before, they could very well have been nervous. Therefore, I felt that it was important to smile a lot and to be very positive and welcoming.

In addition, I scripted an introduction that reflected my sincere personal and professional interest in the area of EAL programming (Appendix A). Rubin and Rubin (2005) state that; "A certain amount of disclosure is essential. It facilitates a sense of trust and mutuality and it increases the comfort level of the narrator" (p. 56). Revealing my personal background, specifically my parents' immigration story, was important for me in creating a climate of comfort and commonality at the beginning of our session. Also, by explicitly stating my belief that their advice would help inform future EAL programming, I was hoping to assure my interviewees that I would be "present" and that their responses were important to me.

After the introduction, the first three open-ended questions of my interview were designed to re-connect with the participant, be relatively easy to answer and to develop a solid rapport:

1. Where you are from and when did you arrive in Canada? What have you been up to since graduating from high school?

2. Describe your experiences/memories of what your first days at school were like?
3. What parts of your educational experience helped you learn at school?

The purpose of the first question was to demonstrate my interest in my participants and to get them comfortable in the interview environment. Asking participants about their first memories of being in school in Canada for question two was another attempt to continue building a rapport and to get participants thinking back to their high school experience. Participants have graduated and were up to four years removed from high school, so a certain amount of warm-up to get them in the “head-space” of their grade school experience was necessary. Question three regarding helpful aspects of their educational experience was a general open-ended question to have participants again start to reflect on the supports they received when they came to school in Canada.

I developed additional probing questions to supplement my open-ended queries in order to provide structure and to demonstrate interest and empathy (Appendix A). Rubin and Rubin (2005) refer to this,

Another crucial personality attribute that affects interviewing is how empathetic you are, that is, your ability to show caring interest in the content of what the interviewee is saying and the emotion expressed. You show empathy by asking questions to obtain the details that allow you imagine what your interviewees have experienced, even if the questions are slightly off topic (p. 54).

The depth of interviewee response determined the extent to which I probed for more details, but I made sure that I maintained appropriate eye-contact and a keen interest throughout the interview. I also made a conscious decision to not take observational notes until after the interview was over, to reinforce my attentiveness and to avoid distracting the participants. I maintained an interview journal (Appendix C) and took time after each interview to document my observations and reflections. I made sure to book two and half hours in my calendar per participant to ensure

that the interview was not rushed and that I had ample post-interview time to document my reflections.

**Teacher – student relationships.** This bank of questions endeavoured to address the focus of this study: the impact of teacher – student relationships on the success of adolescent EAL newcomers. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 clearly stipulates the importance of having caring and supportive teachers for EAL newcomers, who are at-risk of disengagement and isolation to their initial language and cultural deficiencies.

Questions four to seven focused on getting participants to describe the relationships that they had with their teachers and the impact of these connections on their learning:

4. How did your teachers help you learn in your classes?
5. If you had to pick one adult in the school that helped you the most, who would that be and how did he/she support you?
6. Did your teacher value your cultural background in the classroom and how did this affect your experience and success?
7. What advice would you give to teachers to help them develop trusting and caring relationship to support their EAL students?

The purpose of question four was to get participants thinking in general terms how their teachers helped them succeed in their classes. Questions five to seven focused on getting students to describe and tell stories about their relationships with their teachers. These questions were essential to answering the overarching question for this study; the importance of a positive teacher-student relationship to the success of EAL learners.

Question six was asked to determine how much teachers promoted and used classroom diversity as strengths in their classrooms. There is a significant amount of research that supports teachers using cultural awareness to develop relationships and connections with EAL learners (Hersi



& Watkinson , 2012; Schecter & Cummins, 2003). I therefore wanted to find out if this was a tool being used effectively by my participants' teachers.

**Suggestions for improvement.** The intention of questions eight to eleven was to solicit advice from participants on how to further develop EAL programming and transitioning into school:

8. Time to discuss the challenges! What would you say were some of the biggest struggles for you in school?
9. What do you think was missing from your school experience that would have improved things for you?
10. What advice would you give to school educators to improve the educational experience(s) of future EAL immigrants in our schools?
11. Before I end the interview, is there anything else that you would like to share or did I miss anything?

These questions were purposefully placed at the end of the interview as asking participants to discuss challenges and suggestions for improvement requires a significant amount of trust and empathy to have been developed throughout the interview (Moustaskas, 1994; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Naturally, some participants provided more descriptive responses than others so if their answers spanned into an upcoming question, I made sure to tell them that they had already started to answer the question prior to asking it. This gave participants an opportunity to add additional commentary or to move to the next question to avoid repetition.

The following quotation from Rubin and Rubin (2005) summarizes the essence of my interview approach to this study,

Personal involvement is a great strength of the responsive interviewing model, because empathy encourages people to talk, and yet active involvement can also create problems, as

your own emotions and biases can influence what you ask and how your interviewee responds. To be a successful interviewer, you have to sensitize yourself to these biases and learn to compensate for your own slant (p. 2.15).

It is of value to know my participants but I am keenly aware of my biases and plan to ensure that I maintain a neutral and open-mind throughout the interview process.

### **Sources of Data**

Using Creswell's (2007) *Compendium of Data Collection Approaches* (p. 130) as a guide, there were two methods of data collection chosen for this study. The primary source of data came from the in-depth interview method, in which participants answered semi-structured questions, with responses MP3 recorded over a span of approximately one hour (Appendix A). Interviews were transcribed verbatim and pseudonyms were assigned to participants to protect their identities.

The second source of data was my interview journal (Appendix C) to document significant statements, reflections, ideas, and emergent themes throughout the data collection and analysis process. The interview journal had significant utility in documenting reflections generated during review of the participant interview transcripts.

**Analysis: the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method.** The Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method as adapted by Moustakes (1994), and further simplified by Creswell (2007), was chosen as the approach for analyzing data collected for this phenomenological study. Figure 3.1: Collection and Analysis of Data, depicts the process that I used to collect and analyze data that will be presented in Chapter 4 of this study.

**Personal experience.** I first describe my own personal and professional experience with the teacher - adolescent EAL student relationship phenomenon being investigated. Moustakes (1994) refers to the term *Epoche*,

In the Epoche, the everyday understanding, judgments, and knowing's set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure transcendental ego (p. 33).

Using the same method of analysis that I utilize with my participants will help me set aside my past experiences and judgments prior to starting the interview and analysis process.

**Interview Journal.** A summary is provided of the interview journal (Appendix C) that I maintained throughout this process to document my insights, reflections, and themes.

**Individual Participant Experience.** Using the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Figure 3.1), I describe “what” and “how” of each participant’s experiences as follows:

- Description of participant
- Initial experiences in Canadian school
- Relationship with teachers and valuing you culture
- Advice for educators
- Advice for newcomers EAL students

This structure follows the process indicated in Figure 3.1: Collection and Phenomenological Analysis of Data.

**Group (Composite) Experience.** In this section I developed a composite textural-structural description of the common experience for the entire group from each of the preceding individual participant experiences. The purpose of this section was to describe the *essence* of experience (Creswell, 2007; Moustakes 1994) pertaining to the teacher- EAL student relationship and its importance in helping newcomers achieve success. This was accomplished by organizing the



Figure 3.1. This model based on the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method for analysis of phenomenological data (Creswell, 2007; Moustakes, 1994). It describes the path of data collection and analysis for this study.

emergent themes under the questions being examined in this thesis:

1. What was it like to be a newcomer adolescent EAL student?
2. What kinds of teacher-student relationships best supported their learning?
3. Did their teacher value their cultural background in the classroom and how did this affect their experience and success?
4. What advice would EAL students have for educators to help support newcomer connection to the school community and language acquisition?

**Validity.** Creswell (2007) recommends that researchers engage in at least two validation strategies in any given study. I have decided to use three of Creswell's (2007) validation strategies (p.207-208):

1. **Triangulation:** Use of multiple and different sources of data to provide evidence (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). My sources of data include my literature review, my own experiences, and interview transcripts, in order to provide sufficient triangulation of data.
2. **Clarifying Researcher Bias From the Outset:** The Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Creswell, 2007; Moustakes, 1994) that I employed for data analysis required me to describe my personal experiences, in the arena of EAL education, in the results section (Chapter Four) prior to conducting participant interviews. Creswell (2007) states, "in this clarification, the researcher comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation of the approach to the study" (p. 208). Reflecting on my past family history of immigration and my experiences as an educator with EAL students was important in allowing me to be aware of my views, and then be able to put them aside for the purpose of this study.
3. **Member Checking:** Once I completed a rough draft of my presentation of findings (Chapter 4), I emailed participants an electronic copy of the individual participant experience that I generated from their interview. Lincoln & Guba (1985) consider this

validation strategy to be, “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). I invited them to make comments on the accuracy of the content and to provide alternative language if necessary and general suggestions for improvement via email, phone call or an in-person meeting. Being able to meet with each participant in-person would have been optimal, but all of my participants have busy lives that include a variety of post-secondary schooling, work obligations, and family commitments. I did not feel it appropriate to burden them with a 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting if they were too busy.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Participant’s level of English competency and familiarity with the interview process make up the biggest limitations for this study. All of the participants have successfully graduated from high school but, with most having only been in Canada for less than a decade, the nuances of the English language can still be challenging. I tried to support this by emailing questions out upon consent, allowing time for review of questions prior starting the interview, and providing a copy of the questions for participants to refer to throughout the session. Being asked about their past experiences in an interview format with a tape recorder was a new experience for many of the participants. Therefore, I went to great lengths to create a comfortable environment and to emphasize that I was looking to learn from them and their experiences.

A delimitation of this study was that it was performed with participants that had attended the same high school. This was due to the challenge of finding participants that fit my rigid criteria and were familiar with me. Having a past relationship or familiarity with the interviewer (as opposed to being a stranger) is an important aspect of recruitment and trust in cultural studies (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). A suggestion for future expansion of this relational study would be to ask my interviewees to recommend friends that attended other high schools. Another delimitation of this study is that it only includes EAL students who successfully graduated from high school. A

further extension of this study would be to interview past EAL students that timed out (could not finish high school by the age of 21), had to finish high school in adult education or did not graduate and are working instead.

### **Ethical Considerations**

As previously mentioned in this chapter, participants were invited to participate in this study via a University of Manitoba Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board approved letter. Although I had a previous relationship with my participants, I went to great lengths to protect their anonymity and to ensure that they felt comfortable throughout the interview process.

To protect participant confidentiality, I used pseudonyms reflective of common names from the country they were born in. Apart from referring to their school being located in south Winnipeg, I did not refer to the name of the schools that participants attended and I removed all proper names and geographic references from the participants' quotes used in this thesis. All of the field notes and paper collected in this research were stored in a locked drawer in my home office throughout the research process. Digital recordings of the interviews were immediately transferred to my computer and duplicated onto a back-up flash drive that was also locked in my home office. Both of these files were kept in password protected folders. After verification of successful transfer of data, I deleted the recordings from the SD card. At the conclusion of this study, all of the field notes and any physical records were shredded and all electronic data was deleted in both the stored folder and in the recycle bin. Electronic communication from member checking was deleted.

To ensure that my participants were comfortable during the interview process, I told them prior to starting that they could skip any question, take a break when needed, and request that any response(s) could be retracted during or after our meeting. I also made a point of dressing casually in an attempt to minimize my positional authority. As trust is even more important with immigrant newcomers that are not necessarily familiar with this process (Roessingh, 2006), I felt that this pre-

work was essential in establishing the comfortable and relaxed atmosphere that was present during my eight interviews. Being a Canadian-born individual with Irish and Pilipino parents, I also wondered if it made a difference to my multicultural participants, in terms of comfort level, that I am a person of color as well.

In this chapter I provided a description of my transcendental phenomenological methodological approach to this study. I described the researcher's role, data gathering, development of my interview guide, analysis of data, limitations and delimitations, and ethical considerations.



### **Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings**

In chapter 4, I present my findings using the model based on the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method for analysis of phenomenological data (Creswell, 2007; Moustakes, 1994).

I start by presenting my personal and professional experiences with the EAL newcomer frame in order to bracket them and set aside pre-judgments. I then share a description of the challenges faced during the research process and a demographic summary of the participants. For each participant, I provide an analysis of their individual interviews based on “what” each experienced and “how” the experience happened. The final section describes the themes generated from the common experiences of the group and *how* these experiences happened. This chapter concludes with a summative description of the *essence* of experience of navigating the Manitoba education system as a newcomer adolescent EAL student.

#### **Description of Personal and Professional Experience with EAL Students**

Being born to first generation immigrants to Canada, my mother from the Philippines and my father from Northern Ireland, I have multi-cultural lens and personal interest in how newcomers are supported and transitioned into Canadian society. Upon my parents respective arrivals in Canada, each quickly fell in love with local customs and Canadian/North American culture. I was consequently raised as a *Canadian* with very little connection and understanding of my respective parent’s distinct cultures and my Mother’s mother tongue. Apart from periodic phone calls with overseas relatives I did not identify with my heritage until my 20’s when I began to travel extensively and started teaching. In particular, my first trip to the Philippines in 2006, and Ireland in 2012, re-connected me with my heritage and enhanced my pride in my cultural background.

At the time of these trips to my parents’ homelands, I had worked as a teacher and then administrator in a South Winnipeg high school which experienced an exponential increase in its cultural diversity. The combination of personal and professional experience have undoubtedly led

to my passion for working with EAL students and developing programming to support their success in our schools. As a teacher I looked for ways to connect with newcomer EAL students through their culture. As an administrator I have facilitated a variety of teacher PD sessions and initiated multiple school programs to support newcomers and connect EAL students and their parents to my schools. The ultimate goals for these newcomers are language acquisition, friendships, connection to community and academic success in the form of graduation. Throughout this time, I have done a significant amount of professional reading, consultation and developed links with educational leaders in the area of EAL for knowledge and advice.

However, I feel that a missing component of my work is the feedback from EAL students that have *lived* the experience of being an EAL newcomer in the South Winnipeg education system. When EAL students graduate or leave our school system, it is often difficult to ask them, “how did it go?” as from my experience they are quite migratory. It is critical that I set aside my experiences, pre-conceptions and considerable knowledge of EAL education to fully “listen and learn” from my participants.

### **Description of Participants**

My participants all arrived in Canada between the ages of 13-17 and were between the ages of 18-22 years old when interviewed. Each has graduated from the high school I previously worked at and arrived with varying levels of English competency (See Table 4.1). There were five male and three female participants which was not purposeful but provides a relatively equitable gender balance. The participants’ cultural diversity in this study is extensive, including students from eight different countries spanning four continents.

The biggest challenge with this investigation was finding eight participants to agree to be interviewed. I sent invitations to 35 prospective participants and followed up multiple times over a five month period to achieve my goal of eight participants. I discovered that many of the potential

contributors had moved out of their last known address, often to pursue post-secondary education in other Canadian cities. There were six participants that declined the invitation.

<b>Table 4.1 General demographic data from EAL student interviews</b>						
<b>Participant Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Age at time of interview</b>	<b>Male / Female</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Language(s) Spoken</b>	<b>Length of time in Canada</b>	<b>Self-Described Level of English upon arrival (1-5)</b>
Diego	19	Male	Columbia	Spanish	72 months	1
Pan	22	Male	China	Mandarin	72 months	1
Ahmed	18	Male	Egypt	Arabic	48 months	0
Divya	18	Female	India	Punjabi	24 months	3
Sonia	19	Female	Rwanda	Kinyan, French	36 months	1
Amina	20	Female	Afghanistan	Pashto	60 months	0
Akash	20	Male	Bangladesh	Bengali	48 months	0
Minjoon	20	Male	South Korea	Korean	60 months	3

**Individual Participant Descriptions of Experience**

For each participant, I provide a personal description of their background and anecdotes of their first days in school to give a sense of their initial mindset and cultural-English starting point. I then go on to illustrate participant responses to the four main themes of my research: relationships with their teachers, teacher recognition of their cultural background, struggles in school, and advice for educators and newcomer EAL adolescents.

**Diego.** Diego is a 19 year-old male from Colombia that spoke basically no English when he arrived in Canada six years ago. Diego’s first home was in a town just outside of Saskatoon, and he was the only student in his school that did not speak English. On Diego’s first day of school, he

accidentally walked into the girl's bathroom because there were no signs, just words. Diego had pleasant memories of his initial experiences because the students took an interest in him and he had a student who acted as his translator during his first year at his school. Diego played soccer and basketball with Canadian friends almost every day, and says that sports really helped him make friends and feel comfortable in Canada.

Diego was very appreciative of the support that his teachers offered throughout his time in three Canadian schools. In particular, he remembers his first resource teacher that used to pull him from class for 90 minutes a day to teach him basic vocabulary in spoken and written form. Diego did not recall any socio-emotional connections with his teachers above and beyond the standard teacher – student academic relationship. When I asked Diego what advice he would give to teachers regarding teaching EAL students, he repeatedly referred to the interest that teachers took in him and his cultural background as a key motivator for his learning. Diego's feelings are summarized best in the following excerpt,

If a teacher shows an interest in the student it's obviously, it's going to be a bond back and forward. But if it's like, one teacher gives you a bad mark and doesn't tell you what you did wrong, you're just going to mess up again with the language because you just don't know what you're doing wrong till you actually get it explained to you (Diego, interview transcripts, June 12<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Diego worried about how Canadian students and adults would treat him due to some of the negative stereotypes such as drugs and cocaine associated with Columbia, but appreciated that his teachers would ask him about the positive aspects of his culture like soccer, music and coffee. It was clearly evident throughout our interview that Diego's connection with his teachers and their recognition of his cultural identity was very important to him.

When asked about what advice he has for newcomer students, Diego recommends that they not isolate themselves within their own cultural group. He believes that the best way to learn is to practice speaking and writing English as much as possible. He told a story about being able to speak better English than another student that had been in Canada 18 months longer than him. Diego felt that this was due to the other student speaking his mother tongue in-class and to friends rather than practicing English. Diego, on the other hand, was the only EAL student in his first Canadian school when he first arrived and believed that this isolation forced him to learn English.

When asked about the struggles of adjusting to life in Canada, he told a story about a student trying to get him to say that N-word to an older African Canadian student. He approached this older student and asked him, “What’s a nigger? So I just wanted to know what I was going to call you first” (Diego, Interview transcripts, June 12<sup>th</sup> 2014). The African-Canadian student got really mad but instead of beating him up, he told him what the word meant and how offensive the word was. Diego was thankful for this person’s non-violent approach, and decided not to be friends with the person who had put him in this situation. This story speaks to the vulnerability of newcomers with beginner English skills to manipulation and being taken advantage of.

Overall, Diego was very positive about his experience of coming to Canada and was thankful of all the extra help and interest that his teachers took in him. Diego’s commitment to learning English on a day-to-day basis and his ability to make Canadian friends through sport have allowed him to transition rather quickly to life in Canada. Diego is currently a second-year university student with a goal of becoming a police officer.

**Pan.** Pan is a 22 year-old male from China and is currently enrolled in a university Engineering program. Pan arrived in Canada at the age of 16 as an international student with what he would describe as *horrible* English language skills. He attended a Vancouver school for one year prior to coming to Winnipeg at 17 years of age. Pan prepared for our interview by writing out

written responses to my pre-sent interview questions to guide his answers. His first memories of Canadian schooling included not being able to understand a word that his teacher was saying or not being able to read the notes he was copying from the board (Pan, Interview transcripts, April 29<sup>th</sup> 2014). Pan relied heavily on an electronic translator to translate words first to Chinese, then to try to understand one sentence at a time, and then tried to pronounce the sentence in English.

When asked about his relationships with his teachers, Pan spoke of his guidance counsellor and his EAL teacher. Pan's goal was to be an engineer prior to coming to Canada and was appreciative of his counsellors giving him a blueprint for what he needed to do in school in order to get into engineering in university. He spoke multiple times about one of his EAL teachers being there for him whenever he had questions about English. Pan told a story about a time when one of his friends passed away tragically during the school year. He recalled this teacher approaching him at school to see if he was OK, and offering to meet with him if he needed to talk about the situation. Although Pan didn't end up speaking to the teacher, he felt that the teacher really cared about him and he appreciated the gesture.

When I asked Pan what helped him succeed academically, he was quick to point out the multi-lingual tutoring program available to EAL students at his high school. When he first came to school in Winnipeg, he used the tutoring program daily to help him understand math concepts in Mandarin before translating them back to English. Pan remarked that he later went on to become a tutor to help Mandarin-speaking newcomers as he saw the immense value of the program.

Pan's main counsel for teachers is that they have to be friendly and patient with their students,

The main advice is be patient to the student because sometimes they cannot express their mind very well. Just be patient, trying to understand them. And the relationship will be

better; the student will think the teacher will be friendly to them. They will pay more attention to the subject they are trying to attend (Pan, Interview transcripts, June 12<sup>th</sup> 2014).

This response demonstrates the importance of the teacher-student relationship and how the student perceives their teacher feels about them. Pan expands on this statement with; “Because that’s more psychological, yea. When the people trying to care, they can help the student more, the student will prepare more” (Pan, interview transcripts, June 12, 2014). Clearly, the ability of a teacher to create a caring and friendly relationship was significant for Pan’s success.

Pan had ample advice to help improve school programs and experiences for EAL newcomers. Pan’s biggest struggles upon coming to Canada were with learning the language and trying to understand the community, which culturally was very different than his native China. He referred to his first school in Vancouver in which the student council facilitated evening events, such as dances and extra-curricular events with newcomers in mind, to get students from different cultures to interact with one another. He elaborated, “Then for the other cultural people, nobody will (not) get close to them. That kind of event will make them get closer” (Pan, Personal Interaction, June 12<sup>th</sup> 2014). Pan referred to these extra-curricular opportunities in a few different ways throughout our interview, and I suspect that this was his way of telling me that these authentic opportunities were not as readily available at his school in Winnipeg.

Pan had a Mandarin speaking counselor in his Vancouver school, and thought that it would be beneficial for Winnipeg schools to have teachers who could speak Mandarin if there was a large Mandarin population of incoming Chinese students.

Pan’s last piece of advice for teachers was to help prepare EAL students for university by working on public speaking in all classes,

I know the thing I’m missing is public speaking. We need to learn this public speaking from many class. So no matter English or Social Study, we need to learn how to present and then

public speaking to face many people, not only one or two (Pan, interview transcripts, June 12<sup>th</sup> 2014).

This is great advice for teachers of all subjects regarding the need for speaking and language skills to be developed in all subjects, not just EAL and English classes.

Pan continues to work hard to reach his career goals. Although he didn't have any compelling relationships with his teachers, he felt that they were there for him when needed. Pan had lots of advice for schools to improve their work with EAL students, especially looking for ways to facilitate meaningful interactions between newcomers and Canadian students.

**Ahmed.** Ahmed is an 18 year-old male that came to Canada at the age of 14 from Egypt. He just recently graduated from high school and is doing his Bachelor of Science at a local university with the goal of getting into a program like Medicine or Dentistry. Ahmed comes from a medical career-oriented family; his mother and sister are both doctors and his father is a veterinarian. When Ahmed arrived in Canada his self-assessed English competency was "below one". However his spoken English in our interview is now quite strong.

When I asked Ahmed about his first memories in a Canadian school, he told me a story of entering school alone, and a gym teacher noticed that he looked lost. That gym teacher showed him the way to his first class and also, by coincidence, happened to be his homeroom teacher. This teacher spent time with him throughout the morning and at a barbeque lunch asking him questions about Egypt. Ahmed really appreciated this teacher's actions on that first day, and wanted me to know that it really helped him feel welcome and comfortable in the school.

Ahmed went on to share his initial impressions about how different school in Canada was, When I go to school back home, we just, just go into that class, not even my desk, just sitting somewhere, learning from a teacher, like always listening to the teacher, not saying a word, and then just leaving and doing homework at home. Coming the next day doing the



same thing. But when I came here, the school was just all different. Um. There's a lot of, uh, teacher-student interactions. Um. There are lot of, like extracurricular activities there. Like we can do a lot of things other than just academic success when you're in high school here (Ahmed, Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Ahmed's comments illustrate the differences between the Western and Middle-Eastern education systems. In addition, it became evident that Ahmed was thankful for the exposure to a variety of extra-curricular opportunities that he didn't have in Egypt.

When asked about the elements of Ahmed's schooling that helped him learn, he spent a considerable amount of time talking about the relationship with his EAL teacher. He liked that his EAL teacher, "didn't only focus on learning English, she also focused on teaching us about the culture here. How you're supposed to interact with other people. Uh. Some, even some exercise or activities that we do here. Like building a snowman" (Ahmed, Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Ahmed went on to share a powerful anecdote about his EAL teacher's caring ways,

But like it just the help I get from the teacher. She, like she cares about each one personally. She comes and checks with everyone. Um. Yes, she's the teacher and she's controlling the whole class but she has a personal relationship with each student. She knows how each one is doing and she knows how to improve each one (Ahmed, Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014).

He also disclosed that this teacher visited his parent's restaurant a few times and would discuss her experiences with him. In Ahmed's graduation year, this teacher invited him to act as a buddy for other Egyptian newcomers and asked him to talk to groups of EAL teachers about his immigration experiences. Ahmed said that these invitations made him feel "special" and built-up his self-confidence. Ahmed valued the effort that this teacher put in to develop a personal connection with him and felt that she sincerely cared about his success.

When I asked Ahmed for his advice to educators working with EAL students, he referred to teachers needing to be patient, be willing to repeat what they say, and to build personal connections with students. He felt that his EAL classes, in which he was grouped with other English language learners, really helped him build friendships and his confidence with speaking English,

So like since EAL courses don't really have that like strict kind of, that line you have to follow they can, they can take their time to, uh, build strong connections with the other, with other students around them. Uh. They can make them feel more comfortable, make the school feel like home. Uh. Even help them produce friendships (Interview transcripts, July 7 2014).

Ahmed recommended a mix between EAL and regular classes with his Canadian peers to practice his English. He liked EAL classes because he felt that he could take risks with newcomer peers when practicing speaking, and felt less socially awkward being at the same level as others in the class. Ahmed feared that if a newcomer with poor English tried speaking in a regular class, that other students would be mean to him/her and would not be able to make friends. These comments express some of the fears of rejection that EAL students have when coming to Canadian schools. Upon reflection, I wish that I would have probed deeper with Ahmed to determine if he was speculating or speaking from personal experience.

Ahmed also shared a teaching strategy that really helped him learn to speak English; one day each week, students had to share something about themselves to the class and, slowly people started to tell longer stories as they felt more comfortable. Ahmed felt that being consistently asked by the teacher to speak to his peers, however anxiety-provoking, helped him improve his English speaking skills quickly.

In terms of struggles, Ahmed was quite vocal about his challenges with his grade 12 English Language Arts (ELA) course, and he referred to this three separate times during our interview. This

was his first university English-level course and he noticed a definite disconnect between his EAL courses and the materials presented in this course. He felt that although his teacher had a lot of experience, “there is always that line between, uh, the knowledge a teacher has and the skills they have for teaching” (Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014). Ahmed felt that this teacher had great knowledge, but had difficulty connecting with him, and would get frustrated with Ahmed’s lack of background knowledge. For example, some assignments were based on prior Shakespearian readings that he had not been exposed to in his prior EAL classes. This was very frustrating for Ahmed and reveals the need to examine the curricular flow of outcomes for EAL students as they progress through the system.

Overall, Ahmed felt that he had a great experience in his Canadian high school and that the culturally diverse student population, the combination of EAL and regular classes, and his relationship with key teachers really helped him navigate the system and graduate from high school with his age-group. He did, however, share some valuable advice in the area of vertical planning for English language learners for teachers and for administrators to consider for future EAL programming.

**Divya.** Divya is an 18 year-old female that immigrated to Canada from India two years ago. She described her English as a three out of five, and said that she had the ability to understand everything her teachers were saying when she arrived. Although Divya could write and understand what others were saying, she felt that her spoken English was more of a *professional* than casual form. This type of spoken English was learned from a textbook, and Divya felt that this was a problem for her during her first year at school and contributed to her being very shy and embarrassed to ask questions in class.

Divya arrived in Winnipeg in June which gave her three months to get used to life in Canada prior to starting school. Divya had older cousins attending the same school already which she said

helped her navigate the school on those first few days. However, Divya didn't know anyone else and said that she was very shy due to her self-perceived difficulties with spoken English. She felt that the teaching styles were very similar to those in India, and that she didn't have problems learning from them. I thought that this was interesting as Divya was the only one of my eight participants to refer to Canadian teaching styles as being similar to those of her homeland. It is possible that she may have attended a private international school with teacher from English speaking countries prior to immigrating to Winnipeg, but this is unconfirmed.

Divya described her relationship with teachers to be predominately academic, but felt that she had great relationships with them. She told a story about the first teacher she met at school, her EAL teacher, and how he shared his past travels in India. Divya said that they talked for a very long time about her home country and that this really made her feel comfortable to talk to him. Divya told another story about having to present a cultural artifact from her home country, India, to the class and how this other teacher took interest in the Bollywood song that she shared. These two stories that Divya chose to share demonstrated the impact of educators showing interest in newcomer culture and the connections that develop as a result of this curiosity.

When I asked Divya to describe a teacher that had an impact on her learning, she took a few minutes to consider her answer and then spoke of three teachers. As she described her relationship with these teachers (two EAL teachers and one English teacher) it became clear that these teachers each used humour to develop connections with her. Divya referred to humour more than any other teaching quality during our interview, "so this is the biggest point I ever looked into a teacher, like he should be funny to, to connect with us" (Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014). For a shy Divya, humorous teachers opened the door to her feeling comfortable asking questions in class and thus developing stronger relationships with her teachers.

Divya had a significant amount of advice for teachers and administrators to consider with regards to supporting newcomers. As Divya felt she was a quiet student, she encouraged teachers to really make an effort to get to know their newcomer students by approaching them individually to see how they are doing. Divya also encouraged teachers to consistently connect with EAL students to probe for questions or problems with the material, as she felt that newcomers are often too shy and embarrassed to ask questions.

Divya talked about her disconnect with Canadian students when she first arrived, “they have their own groups. They don’t really talk to newcomers (Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014). She elaborated on this point,

They have their own groups, right, so they don’t, they couldn’t come to talk to any, to new people. They, they would prefer to be in their own groups, right. Even in the classes, right. They will talk to the people they know. They wouldn’t come to us and talk about anything, right. Unless we’re intelligent, we’re very smart, then they would come to us [chuckle]  
(Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Divya’s comments illuminate the need for schools to look for authentic ways to connect newcomers with Canadian students. Divya also had a suggestion for this challenge: having the teacher create random groups at first rather than allowing students to decide on their own. Divya shared how one of her teachers used this strategy for the first half of the course and then later allowed students to choose their own groups. Divya felt that this was successful because by the time students could choose their own groups, everyone had made friends with one another.

Divya expanded on this connection piece when talking about trying to get involved in the clubs and student leadership committees throughout the school. Divya was a leader in her home country but, when she tried to get involved in the organization of a cultural sharing event at her school, she was unsuccessful, “The old, the people who are here before, uh, for so many years are

doing that but no new one can come and you can join them” (Interview transcripts, July 7 2014).

This is another example of how schools need to look for ways to involve newcomers in the various extra-curricular aspects of school life, not just in the classroom.

Divya came to Canada as a shy 16 year-old and really appreciated the interest that teachers took in her culture and the humour they used to build connections and alleviate her shyness. Divya had some really valuable suggestions for schools to more effectively connect immigrants with their Canadian peers and to give newcomers roles in the greater school community.

**Sonia.** Sonia is a 19 year-old Rwandan female that arrived in Canada three years ago. As a 16 year-old Kinyan and French speaking grade 10 student, Sonia defined her beginner English skills as being confined to “hi,” “good morning,” and a few other basic words. Sonia’s self-described academic strengths are in the area of mathematics, as evidenced by the fact that she was able to build up enough English to take advanced placement physics in just her third year in Canada. This was no small feat considering her limited English proficiency upon arrival.

Sonia described first month in high school as being very difficult. Sonia recalled sitting in the same chair in the second floor hallway of her school between classes for a few weeks without really connecting with any of her peers. Sonia shared that people would smile as they passed, which was comforting, but no one ever stopped,

Although I didn’t know anyone, they kind of friendly because, you know, in my country you don’t pass by someone and they smile at you for no reason. Like when I pass they were smiling and they were like saying hi, although like they don’t know me. So say my impression was very good. Like I really liked it but also hard (Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Sonia’s story illustrates the isolation and loneliness that newcomer students potentially face when they arrive in a new school in addition to the language and cultural challenges.

When asked questions about her relationships with teachers, Sonia had many positive stories to tell. Sonia's initial impression of her teachers was about how funny and friendly they were, Like when you're going in your school and you don't know anyone, you always have that poker face on because you don't have anyone to talk to, right. If you go to, like in a class and that teacher's funny at least you have, you've got that smile on your face. So it was, it's really helpful (Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Sonia felt that her teacher's humour and kindness allowed her to let her guard down and helped to fill the void in those weeks before she made friends. In particular, she spoke about her EAL teacher, and how this teacher would tell stories about his own life to make connections with his EAL students and to make them laugh. When reflecting on how this teacher helped her, Sonia felt that this EAL teacher was, "always there for everyone," and available to translate for her. She said that this teacher's actions inspired her to want to do the same for Kinyan-speaking newcomers in her later years in high school.

When asked about this teacher's helpful qualities, she said: positive, energetic, and funny.

Sonia felt that he was always in a good mood and energetic every day,

(He) made me feel like I have to be positive every day. Like even if you down, you kind of have to show the bright side of yours because it really makes other people's days better, you know. Yea. Yea, his way of being positive, always smiling, always willing to help people (Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014).

It was clear from our conversation that this teacher had a huge impact on Sonia and provided a safe place of acceptance for her.

Sonia commented multiple times during our interview how her teachers and educational assistants (EA) made her feel good about her culture. She felt that her teachers always wanted to learn about the food, dress, dance, and language of her Rwandan heritage. One EA would ask Sonia

to speak her language because she loved the sound of the Kinyan language. She summarized the cultural validation she felt; “Like you feel kind of you belong somewhere. Kind of like that. You feel like it’s, no, like no one’s putting you down. Like no one is putting your culture down so it still exists somewhere there” (Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014). Sonia’s comments can be linked to the positive end of the cultural proficiency continuum in which the adults in the building continually reinforced and valued her cultural identity.

When I asked Sonia for advice, she had a plethora of suggestions for teachers and students that focused on ways for schools to authentically connect newcomers with Canadian students, and ways newcomers to learn English quickly and effectively. Advice to teachers and administrators started with this insightful statement,

I’ll say for them to kind of put themselves in those students’ shoes. Like, well like to kind of ask themselves like how would you feel if you were to move to another country where you know no one. You don’t know the language. You’re kind of starting from zero. Like how do you feel, you know. Like if they ask themselves those kind of questions they will be even better (Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Educators need to continue to remember how difficult it is to start over in a new country with different language, culture and educational norms.

Sonia found it hard to initially socialize with Canadian students, and felt that teachers needed to do a better job of mixing up groupings when doing activities. She noticed that Canadian students obviously gravitated to those they knew rather than interacting with newcomers. Sonia felt that mixing up the groups would help newcomers make friends and also allow the Canadian students to help the newcomers. She also spoke about the need for Canadian students to take an active role in this process,



Maybe to get more, um, to kind of teach other, those students who have been here long to teach them to approach the newcomers. Like if you, if they don't approach us then we're going get afraid to talk to them because we don't speak their language first of all. And if we talk to them and they kind of, not laugh at us, but look at us in the way of what's she saying. So it's going to be hard. So maybe for the students to, to be kind of easy going with us  
(Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Sonia's comments show the fear of rejection that newcomers struggle with when they are trying to adjust to the new language and fit into the school community.

Sonia suggested the creation of a language club in which Canadian student mentors and newcomers would meet to have authentic in-school and community experiences together. Sonia felt that this would allow newcomers to feel more comfortable, connected with the school, and improve their English while Canadian students would get a chance to reap the rewards of mentorship and learning about other student cultural groups in the school.

As for advice for EAL newcomers, Sonia strongly encouraged them to find friends to speak English with, not just friends from their own cultural groups. She also encouraged immigrant students to join an extra-curricular club or sport. Sonia met many of her English-speaking friends in a philanthropy club and credits these friendships with forcing her to speak English and, therefore, learning the language quicker.

Sonia felt that her greatest school challenges was at first making friends due to her lack of English, and the difficulty of penetrating long-standing friendship structures that exist among students in high school. This feedback gives me significant pause for reflection and shines a light on the need to look for more authentic ways to connect newcomers with their peers and the school community.

**Amina.** Amina is a 20 year-old female that immigrated to Canada five years ago from Afghanistan. Amina had *zero* English when she arrived and recalled being very scared of what school in Canada would be like. Amina said that she was initially placed in a class in which all of the students knew English and was very confused about what was happening. However, there were other Afghani students in her class with better English that she quickly befriended and they started interpreting for her.

Amina used the word “shock” to characterize her first days in Canadian schools due to the language, cultural differences and, in particular, the differences in dress between Afghani and Canadian students. She said that the EAL teacher in her first Canadian school was young and new to teaching, and spent 80% of class time sitting at his desk and talking to the class rather than moving around and getting to know them. However, her Afghani friends interpreted everything for her so she felt that she was “lazy” in learning English. Amina did not feel that she had a connection with this teacher because of his delivery style. After six months, Amina moved to a different high school in south Winnipeg and did not have any friends to interpret, which she felt forced her to learn English.

Amina described the relationship with teachers and educational assistants in her second school, the one she would graduate from, as being meaningful and confidence building. Amina credits her EAL teacher for fostering her confidence with speaking English in public and recalls this teacher’s words of encouragement,

It’s OK, Amina no one, no one gonna, if they, like if they laugh at you, it’s OK. They know English is your, um, your second language, it’s not your first language. You should be proud of yourself you’re talking English. Maybe other, like there’s tons of people here they just know one language and you know more than one language. He was great (Interview transcripts, July 9<sup>th</sup> 2014).

This teacher also took her class on community outings to order food at restaurants and purchase items at a local convenience store so that they could practice their English. Amina remarked that these motivational conversations and real-life experiences got her speaking English and, ultimately, led to her feeling more independent and confident when later dealing with visa officials and personal business.

Amina also spoke fondly of her work experience teacher that she said was always “open,” which I interpreted to be approachable, and helped her learn functional workplace skills such as typing and resume writing. This teacher set her up to volunteer at a local elementary school working with children and, later, at a local daycare where she later ended up getting hired as a paid employee. Amina credited these experiences with helping her learn English, Canadian culture, and for giving her employability skills.

Amina was the only participant interviewed who could not think of any ways that teachers referred to or asked her questions about her culture.

Amina’s found that sometimes her teachers spoke too fast and referred to past units of study that she was not present for. She felt that this was frustrating in her geography/history classes and classes where she was expected to take written notes from lectures. Her remedy for this was for teachers to post their notes and lessons on-line so that EAL students had additional opportunities to process the information. Amina wants teachers to be kind and considerate of the situations that EAL students are coming from,

You have to understand these kids when they come in from back home, they coming from different countries they had a problem, that’s why they came to here. So they have to understand them” (Interview transcripts, July 9<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Amina’s advice for newcomers is to speak English as much as possible, “don’t just stay within your cultural group” (Interview transcripts, July 9<sup>th</sup> 2014). Amina experienced both sides of

this at the two Canadian high schools she attended in Canada, and believes that finding English-speaking friends was essential. Amina felt that she would be much further advanced in her English if it were not for all the interpretation assistance she received in her first school.

When asked what was missing from her high school experience, Amina referred to the lack of a developed after-school tutoring program where she could improve her English skills. The school library was open for 30 minutes after school but she did not feel that this was enough time for studying and for making progress with her English. Amina did get involved in the various philanthropic activities at school for causes in India, Africa and around Aboriginal water issues. However, she secretly dreamt that the school would do something for her country. This made me wonder how we as educators can help empower newcomers to speak out about the challenges of their home country and become active agents for change.

Amina is currently taking a year off from university and working full-time to save money for future coursework.

**Akash.** Akash is a 20 year-old male from Bangladesh that has lived in Canada for four years. Akash said that he had learned very little in his English classes in his home country and classified his level of English upon arrival as zero out of five.

Akash characterized his first days in school as “terrible” because he didn’t have any friends and could not speak English. Akash was very shy and was worried that teachers would be mean to him so he initially sat at the back of the classroom. These factors led to Akash’s initial feelings of isolation.

Akash valued his relationships with his teachers and believes that the most important qualities for teachers are that they are friendly and make an ongoing effort to approach and engage shy newcomers. Akash recounted a story about his favourite teacher, his EAL teacher, and how he once gave him a ride to his cricket match, stayed to watch, and then gave him a ride home. Akash

was surprised that a teacher could be so helpful and supportive considering that at home, a student would be beaten for being absent or not handing in homework. Akash shared that this teacher helped him and his friends start-up the school's first ever cricket team. This teacher also supervised the team and, knowing that many of the students didn't have money, only charged them five dollars by getting the principal to support the team financially.

Akash said that teachers never asked him about his culture, and questioned if teachers should even ask in the first place. Akash prays five times daily and was able to get a key to a room to pray at school,

I appreciate my school because I prayed every day which is, I asked the teacher, and they gave me key. And we, whole bunch of students prayed together which is very impressive. I would say please continue that (Interview transcripts, July 14<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Akash mentioned a few times in our interview how he appreciated the trust that teachers placed in him to have the key to this room and respected their religious traditions.

He told me that he sometimes felt forgotten in class because he was nervous and wouldn't approach his teachers. Akash's advice for teachers was that they needed to make an ongoing effort to approach EAL students to see if they need help, as many newcomers are too shy to initiate a conversation. He also suggested that EAL students should be purposefully seated closer to the front of the class to make it easier for teachers to check-in on them.

This was the first piece of feedback from Akash, which was that there should be more field trips around the city to learn about Canadian life. One of Akash's favourite school experiences was his law class trip to the Manitoba Law Courts to watch a live trial. Akash also thought that the lunchtime student tutor program really helped him improve his reading and writing in English.

While Akash first struggled to connect with students he said that his later academic struggles were due to an excessive work schedule. Akash decided to get a job at a restaurant to help support

his family and ended up working 40 hour weeks during the school year. He recalled always being sleepy in school and rarely handing in his homework, which caused him to fail a few classes. Upon reflection, Akash wished that he didn't have to work as much but felt that he needed to for his family. Interestingly, Akash's first piece of advice for newcomers was to focus on their studies and not work too much.

Akash is currently working full-time as a cook at a local restaurant and hopes to someday become a police officer.

**Minjoon.** Minjoon is a 20 year-old South Korean male that came to Canada as an international student at the age of 15. Minjoon started in a grade nine junior high in south Winnipeg and rated his English speaking ability as three out of five when he first arrived. Minjoon described his initial days in school as very challenging due to his difficulties making friends. Minjoon told me that, in the beginning, making friends was a greater priority for him than learning English. He set a goal of making five friends on his first day of school but, after two weeks, he had only made a few friends that spoke Chinese all the time. Around this time, Minjoon said that he broke down crying and called his parents in South Korea to say that he wanted to go home. Minjoon also spoke of his initial difficulties with writing in English but how his physical education teachers interviewed him instead of expecting him to write, as they knew he understood the material. He ended up with a really good mark, and made a point of telling me how much he appreciated these teachers adapting for him in this regard.

Minjoon shared multiple stories about how his teachers helped him settle in at school. The first person that came to Minjoon's mind when I asked about his relationships with his teachers was his high school counsellor. He referred to her as a kind, loving, and caring person who always made him feel welcome,

Whenever I had questions, um, she always like tried to welcome me like to her office and she said, just come to my office whenever like you want to. And then I think all of them were, I'm sure like there are a lot of reasons why she did it. One was that she is a really, really, um, she's really nice, loving person I think (Interview transcripts, October 8<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Minjoon's goal upon coming to Canada was to graduate from school and get accepted into a Canadian University and he credited this counsellor's openness, advice and guidance with helping him achieve his goal.

When asked about how teachers valued his cultural background, Minjoon spoke about his Spanish and Physics teachers. His Spanish teacher was an immigrant as well, and made Minjoon feel better about his poor English by sharing her own English-learning experiences with him. Minjoon felt that she really understood him and was approachable whenever he had a question. Minjoon joked about his physics teacher being the only Caucasian person in his class, but how interested she was in all of her students' cultures. Minjoon smiled when he recalled his teacher at one point asking him for suitable Korean pop songs to download because of the songs he had previously shared with her. He bought her a Christmas sweater as a gift, and felt very honoured and accepted when she wore it to class the next day.

Minjoon's initial challenge was with making Canadian friends. However, he overcame this by connecting with other students via the band program and participating in school-wide activities like culture day. Minjoon shared a "bad memory" from his grade 10 year in drama class where his classmates would laugh at his broken-English when he read scripts throughout the semester. However, he was quick to point out that as a newcomer, you have to make the best of these situations and keep trying.

Although Minjoon struggled to make new friends he remembered his counsellor's words,

If you cannot make any friends because of English, um, wait for one week or two weeks and if you can still not do it, I'm sure you can, but if you still can't do it after being here for two weeks. Come see me. I'll introduce you to new friends (Interview transcripts, October 8<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Minjoon remarked how this really made him feel comfortable and hopeful as he really wanted to make friends outside of his comfort zone of Korean friends in order to learn English.

Minjoon talked at length about his Korean friends being isolated in their own cultural community within the high school. Minjoon believed that this was why their English did not develop at the same rate as his because he was actively seeking English-speaking friends and looking for opportunities to connect with the greater school community. Minjoon's main advice for newcomers is to "just try" to join school activities and get involved in the school community, even though he knows it is very hard.

Minjoon's counsel for teachers is that they actively approach newcomer students to get them to answer questions in English as many are too shy to speak-up. He recommended that welcome programs should include a buddy system in which a newcomer is paired with a well-established student that can speak both the newcomer language and English. This would help the newcomers acclimatize to their surroundings and start to connect them with the school community.

Minjoon is currently attending post-secondary school in British Columbia with hopes of becoming a school teacher, and he is also volunteering to help Korean newcomers learn English. As Minjoon was so involved with the school band and culture day activities, I got to know him pretty well in his grade 12 year through his leadership and involvement in school activities. He made a point of telling me that he only accepted my interview request because of this.



### Themes Generated From Group Experience

Analysis of the combined group experience for this investigation was achieved by reading interview transcripts several times and reviewing each of the individual participant descriptions of experience. Participant themes have been grouped under the four questions explored by this thesis;

1. First Experiences as a Newcomer Student in Canada
2. Supportive teacher – student relationships
3. Teachers valuing the cultural background of their students
4. Participant advice for newcomers and educators

This thematic information will then be used to address the overarching question that this thesis attempts to address: As a newcomer adolescent EAL student, how did the relationships with your teachers impact their ability to achieve success in the form of graduation?

**First experiences as a newcomer student in Canada.** The themes identified within participant description of their first experiences in school were: isolation, difficulty making friends, fear of being made fun of, and positive interactions with teachers.

**Isolation.** Most of the participants reported feeling isolated and lonely during their first days in Canadian schools due to initial lack of friendships and limited English speaking ability. Ahmed from Egypt spoke about only knowing one boy of a family friend that had his own friends and paid little attention to him, while Sonia from Rwanda sat by herself at a hallway window seat between classes for almost a month before making any friends. Akash from Bangladesh characterized his first days in school as “terrible” because he didn’t have any friends and could not speak English. He was very shy and was worried that teachers would be mean to him so he initially sat at the back of the room. Minjoon from South Korea had a goal to make five friends on the first day but after two weeks, he only had two friends that spoke primarily Chinese and barely spoke to

him in English. Minjoon shared that he almost returned to South Korea in the first month because he was so lonely.

***Difficulty making friends.*** Ahmed shared how tough it was to go from having lots of friends in Egypt to being socially awkward in his new school and starting from “nothing.” Sonia discussed how when she first arrived, people would smile at her while passing by, which made her feel good, but she found it hard to make friends. Sonia revealed that it was very difficult starting from “zero;” and commented, “I’ll say mostly Canadians was hard to socialize with them. And know the accent too. Like you have accent. They don’t have the accent so it’s like, I don’t know. Yea” (Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014). Sonia was implying that the cultural differences with her Canadian peers created a barrier which made it difficult to develop friendships with them. Akash felt that students were maybe scared of him because he was tall, mature looking for his age, and shy. Akash believes that these pieces combined with his poor English skills made it difficult for him to connect with peers in his first year in Canada. Divya from India was able to make friends with other EAL students but, when asked about friendships with Canadian students, she remarked, “The Canadian students, they have their own groups. They don’t really talk to the newcomers” (Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014).

***Fear of being made fun of.*** Three participants spoke specifically about their fear of being laughed at or told stories of being ridiculed because of their accent. Ahmed appreciated his EAL classes because he felt that he could take more risks with his English language development than the regular classes. When Sonia was giving her advice, she recommended that Canadian students be encouraged to take initiative to engage newcomers and to not “laugh” at EAL students like her when they spoke in class. Minjoon talked about how students in his grade 10 drama class laughed at him throughout the year when he would perform.

**Positive interactions with teachers.** Every participant had one or more stories about their positive experiences of support and connection with their teachers. Egyptian participant Ahmed recalled that on his first day of school in Canada, a physical education teacher noticed that he looked lost and took the initiative to show him his homeroom and later ate lunch with him at a welcome BBQ. Minjoon’s initial impressions about his Canadian teachers were much friendlier than the ones he had in South Korea. He was impressed that his teachers actually learned his name (they called him “student” in his school in South Korea), and that they really tried to get to know him and make him feel part of the community.

**Supportive teacher – student relationships.** The second question set posed to participants asked them to describe the teacher-student relationships which best supported their learning. Each participant had their own story to tell about how their teachers supported them and the qualities that they appreciated most (See Table 4.2). Each of the attributes listed in Table 4.2 contribute to positive teacher – student relations. However, I have chosen to expand on the four attributes which came up the most frequently: caring, sense of humour, interest in students, and patience.

<b>Table 4.2. Key Teacher Attributes for supporting EAL newcomers</b>	
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Key Teacher Attributes</b>
Diego (Columbia)	• interest in their students, patient
Pan (China)	• Caring, friendly, patient, understanding
Ahmed (Egypt)	• caring, interest in their students, patient
Divya (India)	• sense of humour, interest in their students
Sonia (Rwanda)	• energetic, sense of humour, positive
Amina (Afghanistan)	• approachable, caring, confidence builders

Akash (Bangladesh)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• helpful, friendly, sense of humour</li> </ul>
Minjoon (South Korea)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• caring, kind, loving, welcoming</li> </ul>

**Caring:** Being perceived as a caring teacher was the most frequently identified teacher attribute and was mentioned at some point in each participant interview.

Ahmed from Egypt spoke fondly of his EAL teacher/counsellor and how, “she was always, uh, open, like I don’t even have to book an appointment, I would just be sitting outside. If she’s available, she’s be like, come on in” (Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014). Ahmed felt that she was always there to assist him with his English, course selection and to talk to whenever he was stressed out about exams. This teacher also helped Ahmed make friends, “she introduced me to other people. So she cared enough to actually kind of produce friendships for me” (Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014). Ahmed made it clear to me that this teacher was the most important contributor to his successful social integration and academic success.

Pan alluded to the fact that, when teachers care about their students, they are in turn more engaged, “When the people trying to care, they can help the student more, the student will prepare more” (Interview transcripts, April 29<sup>th</sup> 2014). Minjoon felt that his counsellor at his second school actually cared about his future and the courses he took and this led to him visiting her often for advice.

Amina spoke about how kind her teachers were and how they gave her the confidence to speak English and take risks in school. For example, she spoke about how her work experience teacher got her volunteer position at a local daycare and how her confidence in speaking English grew while working with little kids. Amina said that she later got a summer job at this daycare. She described this teacher as having a “good heart” and being very kind.

The many participant anecdotes shared, regarding the caring nature of their teachers, reinforced the relational literature reviewed earlier in this thesis. My professional experience would also support this notion: that teachers demonstrating a caring and empathetic approach to supporting their students have positive teacher-student relationships that lead to successful outcomes.

***Sense of humour.*** Two participants in particular, Divya and Sonia, spoke at length about humour being the key characteristic that a teacher should possess as many newcomers are shy and nervous about speaking English.

Divya from India recalled being very quiet and scared to ask questions but spoke about her three favourite high school teachers and how each used humour to connect with their students. For example, her English teacher made it easy to ask questions, “he answered very well. It was like humorous. It was everything, Yea, it was entertaining ... So this is the biggest point I ever looked into a teacher, like he should be funny too, to connect with us” (Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Sonia from Rwanda had a self-described “poker face” in her first days of school because she didn’t know anyone and could not speak English. However, Sonia recalled that her first three Canadian teachers were all funny people that made each class fun and comfortable environments for her. She specifically talked about one of her teachers telling the class about funny stories from when he was a teenager, and how he was always walking around making jokes to put smiles on his EAL students’ faces.

***Interest in students.*** When Diego arrived from Columbia, he recalled being the only EAL student in the school, and that the school had an assembly to introduce him to everyone. He felt a bit embarrassed at first but that, after this event, his teachers and classmates were, “Real friendly, open people who like basically take you in and like integrate you into society, you know. They took the time, like individually teaching me” (Interview transcripts, April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2014). Diego later shared

another anecdote in this regard, “It felt like they were taking an interest in me. And like giving back, to getting an interest in like learning, you know ... Feels like that’s more where you’re going to learn because the teacher’s taking an interest in himself to show you something that would benefit you.” (Interview transcripts, April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2014). Diego was telling me that the more a teacher shows interest in their students, the more students will want to engage in learning.

Akash from Bangladesh spoke at length about the friendship he had with his EAL teacher and referred to him as an “awesome” guy, who supported him in school with humour and was with his favourite sport, cricket. This teacher became the manager/supervisor of the inaugural school cricket team, gave him rides to games and persuaded administration to pay the tournament entry fees and purchase team jerseys.

Participant responses confirmed my belief that demonstrating an interest in students, EAL or not, show that you care about them as individuals and fosters strong connections.

***Patience.*** Pan from China spoke repeatedly about the need for teachers to be patient with EAL newcomers; “the student cannot speak good English so they, the teacher need to be patient to understand what they are talking about” (Interview transcripts, April 29<sup>th</sup> 2014). Ahmed recalled how a teacher patiently worked with him in his EAL class to understand information given to him on first day of high school in Canada,

And I didn’t get part because every time I would get like a new idea, I would understand something new, and she would always like look at people. Like have eye contact with the student and be like, so do you understand what I’m talking about here? Or like what I’m saying here? And then, if they don’t, then she would just like come closer to them on their table and explain to the whole table with them. And, uh, yea, she cared a lot. Person, personal connections (Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014).

This anecdote illustrates the importance of teachers taking the time to check for understanding and how effective the strategies were in building caring connections with students.

**Teachers valuing the cultural background of their students.** The third sub-question of this thesis explored how the participant’s teacher recognized and valued their culture. Significant statements and events with regards to teachers recognizing participant’s culture are documented in Table 4.3 with all but one participant sharing anecdotes.

<b>Table 4.3. Significant statements or stories shared by participants with regards to teachers recognizing and/or valuing their cultural background</b>	
<b>Participant (Country)</b>	<b>Significant Statements or Stories</b>
Diego (Columbia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“For me being from Columbia, because the people when they hear being from Columbia, all they hear is about drugs and cocaine and like girls and like. I don’t know, it seemed more the teachers were, were just trying to keep the best of it. Like soccer, music, coffee like. They tried integrating the good part about Columbia. And that’s kind of what I’m most like because like, everyone when you talk about Columbia, they’re not giving positive outcomes, just negative outcome. But the teachers seemed like they were, just like any teacher, they were just very friendly and just taught me everything I needed to”</li> </ul>
Pan (China)	None
Ahmed (Egypt)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many teachers were interested in his culture and were interested in the ancient history of Egypt, especially in history or English class</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It made me, like I feel like I had an advantage over some people because just, I don’t know, I have more cultural background. Like it’s not really an advantage, it just feels special when someone asks you about back home”</li> </ul>
Divya (India)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On her first day interview assessment, teacher said that he had been to India and they talked at length about the trip</li> <li>• Students asked to present on a song in their culture in EAL class, the teacher was interested in her cultural presentation of Bollywood</li> <li>• Teacher offered to let her use classroom for a special language club</li> <li>• “And then they (students) will be more comfortable with the teacher and with the school too because they know that someone knows their culture”</li> </ul>
Sonia (Rwanda)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers would ask Sonia to speak her native language, Kinyan, because they liked the sound of it</li> <li>• Teachers asked her to show her cultural dance, clothes, main food dish</li> <li>• When asked about how this interest in Sonia’s culture made her feel: “Like you feel kind of you belong somewhere. Kind of like that. You feel like it’s, no, like no one’s putting you down. Like no one is putting your culture down so it still exists somewhere there”</li> </ul>
Amina (Afghanistan)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First day of school; EAL teacher told her that she should be proud to be speaking English many students just know one language</li> <li>• Didn’t have any additional stories when later asked</li> </ul>



<p>Akash (Bangladesh)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EAL teacher volunteered to manage and help start up inaugural cricket (national sport) team at his school and persuaded administration to purchase jerseys</li> <li>• Teachers allowed him to set up a prayer room in a classroom and he was given a key</li> </ul>
<p>Minjoon (South Korea)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biology teacher was really into Korean pop music because of him, he thinks</li> <li>• Administrator asked him to perform a famous Korean pop song alongside him at a holiday concert, happiest moment in high school</li> </ul>

Educator valuation of student’s backgrounds made participants feel like their culture was important, respected and something to be proud of. This made them feel connected to their classes and their school community, a critically important piece when students are struggling with trying to find their new identity in a new country.

Many of the participant comments shared in Table 4.3 reinforce the work of Schlector and Cummins (2003), reviewed in Chapter 2, which advocates for teachers to use student diversity as a strength for fostering acceptance within diverse classroom settings.

**Participant advice for newcomer EAL students and educators.** The fourth question explored was participant advice for both newcomer EAL students and educators. I added a third element to this section, participant struggles, as I felt that identification of these struggles would provide additional pause for reflection and improvement.

**Advice for EAL newcomers.** The overwhelming counsel from participants was for newcomers to look for as many opportunities to speak as much English as possible. Five of the eight participant’s primary advice was for newcomers to look for friendships with students from

other cultural groups. Their rationale was that connecting with students that spoke other languages would force them to communicate in English rather than their native language. Diego from Columbia said that he learned English much faster than other EAL students in his graduating class because most of the friends he made through sports spoke English. Ahmed from Egypt believes that newcomers need to focus on learning English first as this will make it easier to make friends.

Sonia from Rwanda reflected on learning English through her friends that did not speak Kinyan or French,

I'll say, right, like most people want to look for people who speak their language because it makes life easier for them. They don't have to go, to think of what you're going to say, right. But if you have those people who don't speak your language, it's even better because you'll learn your English really fast. So you don't have to speak your language. The more you speak your language, the less you learn. But the more you speak English, the more you learn (Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Amina from Afghanistan had many Afghani friends that acted as interpreters in her first Winnipeg school and, consequently, felt that she learned very little English in her first year in Canada. She had no Afghani friends in her next school and this forced her to make friends from other cultural groups and in turn learn English faster. She used this story to illustrate that she felt currently "behind" in her English language development and that she would have a better job if she would have started speaking English sooner.

Additional counsel was for newcomers to try to get involved in school clubs and extra-curricular activities as a way of meeting new friends, learning English, and stepping out of the comfort zone of one's own cultural group. There was recognition from participants that this is a difficult thing to do, but it is important to be resilient and to keep trying.

*Advice for educators.* Participant advice for educators working with EAL students is summarized in Table 4.4. A primary theme from participant feedback is that it is very important for teachers to personally connect with newcomers to build trusting relationships with them and to ensure that they understand what is being taught. Multiple participants reported being quite shy and nervous to speak when they first entered school in Winnipeg and thus encouraged teachers to take initiative to speak with newcomers and get them communicating in English.

<b>Table 4.4. Participant advice for educators working with newcomer EAL students</b>	
<b>Participant (Country)</b>	<b>Advice</b>
Diego (Columbia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers need to take interest in newcomers students and their culture so that they do not feel isolated</li> <li>• 1-on-1 time with teachers/EA will accelerate language development</li> <li>• Use lots of visuals</li> </ul>
Pan (China)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers need to be patient and understand that EAL students cannot express themselves very well</li> <li>• Tutoring program with same-language tutors is very helpful</li> </ul>
Ahmed (Egypt)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EAL teachers have to have “perfect” English to teach newcomers learning English</li> <li>• Patience and willingness to repeat things</li> <li>• Don’t assume prior knowledge</li> <li>• Building personal connections with students</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EAL courses give time to learn English; “it was better to put us all together at times. But at times you just have to be separated and learn English”</li> <li>• Mixed in-class groupings with newcomers and Canadian students</li> </ul>
Divya (India)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater focus on talking to newcomers to build connection</li> <li>• Approach newcomers to ensure that they understand, don’t assume they do</li> </ul>
Sonia (Rwanda)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher should put themselves in the newcomer student’s shoes to better understand what it would be like to move to a new country and know no one</li> <li>• Mixed-groupings in class to allow newcomers to get to know Canadian students</li> <li>• Check for understanding, don’t just move on right away</li> </ul>
Amina (Afghanistan)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don’t assume that EAL students have past knowledge from prior grades</li> <li>• All teachers should have an online homework site to post assignments and videos as EAL students take longer to comprehend English instruction</li> <li>• Be kind and understand that newcomers have come from different countries that had problems, that’s why they came to Canada</li> </ul>
Akash (Bangladesh)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers need to approach EAL students to see if they need help as many are shy and nervous</li> <li>• Student tutoring program at lunch helps newcomers practice their written English</li> <li>• Field trips help with learning and expose newcomers to different aspects of the city</li> </ul>

Minjoon  (South Korea)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approach students to talk and answer questions as they will be too shy to speak up</li> <li>• Be patient and check for understanding</li> <li>• Teachers can't assume prior knowledge</li> </ul>
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Multiple participants spoke of teachers looking for more opportunities to connect EAL newcomers with their Canadian peers. This aspect will be examined in greater detail Chapter 5 which documents participant struggles in the recommendations section.

**Synthesis of Group Experience**

The synthesis of group experience in this section describes the *essence* of adolescent EAL newcomer experiences with their teachers in a south Winnipeg high school. I used my primary research question as a framework for creating this composition: As a newcomer adolescent EAL student, how did the relationships with their teachers impact your ability to achieve success in the form of graduation?

Participant’s general description of the first days and months in Canada can be characterized by stories of welcoming teachers interspersed with the struggles of learning English and feelings of isolation due to this lack of ability to communicate. High school friendships were difficult for most participants to develop in the beginning and most participants made their first connections in EAL classes.

The importance of the teacher – student relationship, investigated within the EAL context, first generated teacher qualities which participants felt were important to their success in adapting to school in Canada. The four most frequently disclosed qualities were: caring, sense of humour, patience and interest in them as individuals. When asked about a specific relationship with a supportive teacher, each participant spoke fondly of at least one educator, and shared stories

describing how this relationship supported their academic or socio-emotional needs. The relationships described seem to have their greatest significance upon arrival in Canada as connections with teachers really helped fill the void created by lack of friendships and familiarity with their surroundings. Participants appreciated how their teachers and educational assistants made them feel welcome and took initiative to get to know their culture.

Although only one question was posed to participants regarding cultural identity, it was clear that teacher validation of newcomer's background played a large role in fostering caring, trusting and positive relationships. Participants felt that teachers took a sincere interest in their cultural heritage and encouraged them to be proud of whom they are as individuals. They felt both validated and special when asked to share their customs in-class and in a few instances, their immigration story with large groups. These experiences built confidence in participants as English speakers and helped empower them to become more active members of the community.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

In Chapter Five I discuss the findings of this inquiry, limitations of this study, recommendations for educators, and areas for further research. Drawing from literature in the areas of cultural proficiency and teacher – student relationship (both general and EAL) research, I noticed that there appears to be a gap in the research with regards to the *lived experience* of being an adolescent EAL newcomer to school in Canada. Current EAL literature, especially in the Canadian context, focuses primarily on factors which promote academic success such as motivation, teaching strategies, parental factors, friendships, engagement and language acquisition rather than personal reflection of experience. This inquiry endeavoured to address this void and provide guidance to me in my role of Principal of South Winnipeg School with a burgeoning EAL population.

This investigation included interviewing eight recent high school graduates that came to Canada between the ages of 13-17 years old and for the most part had low English proficiency upon arrival. The overarching question that this thesis looked to answer was: As a newcomer adolescent EAL student, how did the relationships with their teachers impact their ability to achieve success in the form of graduation? Additional sub-questions include:

1. What was it like to be a newcomer adolescent EAL student?
2. What kinds of teacher-student relationships best supported their learning?
3. Did their teacher value their cultural background in the classroom and how did this affect their experience and success?
4. What advice would EAL students have for teachers to help support their transition into school and best facilitate the language learning process and success in school?

After interviewing the eight participants and analyzing interview transcripts, many of the relational factors that the participants expressed through their stories aligned with the student-teacher relationship research reviewed in Chapter Two. Of note, the level to which teachers

developed connections with EAL newcomers and took interest in them as individuals and culturally, was instrumental in promoting successful outcomes.

The first sub-question explored participant recollection of their initial educational experiences in Canada. Themes generated included isolation; difficulty making friends; fear of rejection; and positive interactions with teachers.

The second sub-question asked participants to describe the teacher-student relationships which best supported their learning. The four attributes of their teachers which came up most frequently were: caring, sense of humour, interest in the student, and patience. Each participant shared a compelling story about how a teacher supported them during their time in school. These anecdotes, as shared in individual participant description section of Chapter Four, provide compelling *real life* feedback for further reflection.

The third sub-question explored teacher valuation of EAL student's cultural background in class. When teachers showed interest in this regard and infused cultural diversity into their practice, participants reported feeling accepted, valued, and more comfortable in their classes. Sonia from Rwanda summarized this best when describing the interest her teacher and educational assistant took in the many aspects of her Rwandan heritage; "Like you feel kind of you belong somewhere. Kind of like that. You feel like it's, no, like no one's putting you down. Like no one is putting your culture down so it still exists somewhere there" (Interview transcripts, July 7 2014). Considering that I only asked one question about this topic, I received a rich amount of feedback and participant narratives, making cultural affirmation an area of opportunity for future investigation.

The fourth sub-question, advice for students and educators, will be discussed later in the recommendations section of this chapter.

Limitations which came to light during the interview and analysis process started with the fact that I was only interviewing EAL participants that had graduated from high school.



Consideration of participants that did not graduate or had interrupted schooling as a result of disengagement or work responsibilities would be useful for soliciting a greater spectrum of feedback.

Another limitation of this study is that it is difficult to provide an accurate evaluation of where this school is at on the cultural proficiency continuum with only participant interview data. A more comprehensive assessment would include going into this school and examining the newcomer welcome process in greater detail, evaluating current staff capacity in the area of EAL education, and examining school routines and administrative structures such as staffing and budget allocation. However, an appraisal, as proposed in this inquiry, using the participant interview data would place this school in the *culturally competent* location of the cultural proficiency continuum (See Figure 2.1). Culturally competent schools and educators;

Accept and respect differences; carefully attend to the dynamics of difference; continually assess their own cultural knowledge and beliefs; continually expand their cultural knowledge and resources and variously adapt their own belief systems, policies and practices (Lindsey, Robins & Terrell, 2009).

There were many links to these culturally competent artefacts described by participants of their school and teachers: the welcome process included a language assessment; there was EAL counsellor position to support EAL students; sheltered EAL classes were available; teachers generally had positive and patient attitudes towards EAL students; teachers demonstrated periodic interest in EAL student's culture; and there was mention of an annual cultural celebration day.

Areas for growth towards the culturally proficient end of the continuum include: looking for ways to connect newcomers with supportive Canadian mentors or buddies to assist with welcome process; finding authentic ways to connect newcomers with their peers both in class and in extra-curricular activities; and promoting leadership opportunities for EAL newcomers which would increase connection and empower more EAL students to get involved. In addition, looking for

ways via classroom teaching strategies and greater school context to celebrate cultural diversity and frame it as a communal strength would be an area of opportunity. Although only a peripheral evaluation was possible, this process demonstrates the utility of cultural proficiency as form of inquiry for evaluating school's practices and approaches to the diversity.

While this study focused on the *teacher* in the student – teacher relationship, participants also spoke fondly of their educational assistants and, specifically, the interest their EA's took in them as individuals and in their cultural background. It is imperative to recognize the importance of the role EA's play in supporting EAL newcomers. The nature of their job which involves a significant amount of direct one-on-one support creates a tremendous opportunity to develop a trusting and supportive relationship EAL newcomers. In reflection, I have been fortunate to work with EAL EA's that were incredibly effective in this regard.

### **Future Research**

Future research identified by this inquiry includes evaluating the cultural proficiency framework and its utility for assisting school leaders in identifying areas for growth and improvement in the arena of diversity. A deeper examination of the welcome process for EAL newcomers including but not limited to English language assessment, parental involvement, class/course placement, teacher training, and connection to students and community would also prove a worthwhile pursuit. Expanding this investigation to possibly include current EAL high school students, newcomers that are struggling or have dropped out of school, and adding participants from multiple high schools in Winnipeg and throughout Manitoba would provide a greater depth of research and perspective. It is also important to recognize that none of my eight participants were refugees. The refugee population in Manitoba has been steadily increasing over the past decade, making an examination of the refuge student – teacher relationship a timely endeavour.

## Recommendations

As a teacher and administrator in schools which have received a large influx of EAL students over the past decade, I have been a part of the development of school-wide EAL programs, processes, assessment practices, teacher/EA professional development and establishment of outside agency programming to support EAL newcomers. These educational experiences have led me to study and complete my Master's thesis in the area of EAL to better understand the impact of the teacher – student relationship on adolescent EAL newcomer success. I believe that this combination of experiences and inquiry make me relatively qualified to make recommendations as they apply to promotion of EAL student success in both a social and academic sense. The recommendations cited below for administrators and teachers were generated from participant advice and my reflections resulting from analysis of interview transcripts. I also included a *participant struggles* section at the end of this section to further honour the recommendations that participants shared with me.

**Administrators.** The following recommendations were generated from participant feedback and interwoven with personal experience and EAL relational literature.

1. Welcoming and transition programming for EAL newcomers: It is advisable to first examine how one's school welcomes newcomer EAL students with regards to the intake/assessment process, course/class selection, and fosters supportive connections with adult and Canadian peers. Literature reviewed indicates that these first few months are critical in establishing newcomer engagement, as immigrant youth with low language and cultural capital are at-risk of isolation and susceptible to negative influences (Suarez-Orozco, Rhodes and Milburn, 2009). Therefore, evaluation of this entry/transition process is an important starting point for administrators. This is also congruent with the cultural proficiency model which promotes a well-developed entry process, dedicated

- EAL programming and positive teacher attitudes towards welcoming and teaching EAL newcomers (Lindsey, Robins & Terrell, 2009).
2. Mentorship programs: One of the gaps identified by participants in this study was the lack of student buddy or mentorship program in their high school to connect newcomers to their Canadian peers. This shortcoming is addressed in the previous teacher recommendation section, but is worthy of discussion within the context of educational leadership. In my experience, administrators in local schools have the autonomy and freedom to establish programs such as these in their schools. Therefore, taking action to engage staff and students in identifying opportunities that promote authentic connection between EAL newcomers and their Canadian peers via classroom activities or extra-curricular programs would be an excellent starting point, and a key aspect of culturally proficient leadership.
  3. Cultural proficiency as a framework for change: Review of the cultural proficiency model, as described by Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2009) and utilized in this study, provides a road map for administrators to evaluate current policy, practice, and attitudes towards supporting diverse student populations in their schools, then to tend to the identified gaps.
  4. Professional development: PD should include past or present EAL student narratives of their school experiences. The heartfelt stories and anecdotes shared by my participants such as; "The Canadian students, they have their own groups .They don't really talk to the newcomers" (Divya, Interview transcripts July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014), generate an emotional reaction and impetus for change. One suggestion would be to invite past EAL students back to form a multi-cultural student panel to share their experiences and answer questions from both staff and students. I have used this strategy to great effect in

building empathy and understanding for the challenges EAL newcomers face, amongst staff and students in my schools.

5. The class review model: This process brings together teachers, specialists, and administrators early in the school year to identify the strengths, explore individual classroom dynamics and to generate proactive strategies for addressing the various needs within diverse classrooms. From an EAL newcomer perspective, this process gives EAL specialists a chance to provide classroom teachers with additional personal and academic information of EAL students in their classroom. This in turn provides classroom teachers with context for some of the unique challenges that EAL newcomers may be facing and builds understanding and compassion. This activity also creates an authentic opportunity for sharing of EAL teaching strategies which benefit all students in the classroom. I have found this classroom review model to be a very effective way of information sharing and creating a team approach toward supporting both EAL students and the many other student needs within individual classes.

**Teachers.** Recommendations for teachers working with EAL students to foster stronger relationships and support more effective social integration include:

1. Academic: Use of visual representations is very important for beginner English learners and suggested by multiple participants. Incorporating questioning strategies with EAL newcomers is an important step getting them to start speaking English, as many participants shared their hesitation to initially speak English in their classes. Teachers need to consider EAL newcomer's diverse range of prior knowledge and life experience when lesson planning and look for ways to use this diversity as a teaching tool to promote positive perception of the various cultures within a classroom. This can empower newcomers and stimulates connection to the school community. For example,

- one participant from Egypt appreciated his history teacher's acknowledgement of his country's past while another was invited by his teachers to perform at a school assembly. Positive promotion of diversity aligns with Schector and Cummins's (2003) work, reviewed in Chapter Two, on maximum identity investment. Specifically, the belief that teachers that actively embrace and authentically bring students personal (and therefore cultural) backgrounds into their lessons, create stronger connection and buy-in from their students (Schector & Cummins, 2003).
2. Welcoming EAL newcomers: Participants encouraged teachers to actively approach newcomer EAL students to quickly build connections and to promote their speaking of English in-class. In addition, looking for ways to learn about EAL newcomer's home culture was seen as a very effective way of developing positive teacher – EAL student relationships. Both of these recommendations are consistent with the relational literature evaluated for this thesis which encourages teachers to initiate meaningful relationships with EAL newcomers and to position themselves as the go-to person for EAL newcomers, to help them navigate the complexities of a foreign school system (Green, Rhodes, Heitler Hirsch, Suarez-Orozco & Camic, 2008; Hersi & Watkinson , 2012; Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel and Martin, 2009; Suarez-Orozco, Rhodes & Milburn, 2009; Roessingh, 2006).
  3. Social inclusion: Teachers need to use proactive strategies to authentically connect newcomer EAL students with their Canadian peers during activities and collaborative projects. Examples suggested by participants included seating plans to break up cliques of students and using pre-arranged grouping instead of random groupings to promote relationship-building. When supervising clubs and extra-curricular activities teachers should look for opportunities within the structure of these groupings to promote EAL

newcomer involvement and even leadership roles. This involvement in the greater school community was seen by participants as a great way to build confidence, foster friendships and connection to the school community.

These first two recommendations made by participants align quite closely with the cultural proficiency model with respect to the general attitudes of schools towards welcoming, teaching, and supporting newcomers. Participants in this study advocated for teachers to take an active role in connecting with newcomers, getting to know them and their backgrounds, and positively affirm their identities. The third recommendation regarding social inclusion was not explicitly found in the literature reviewed for this investigation. Participants consistently referred to the need for teachers to do a better job of linking newcomers with their established Canadian peers. This was probably the biggest learning for me throughout this investigation, and I feel that there would be real merit in researching school's that have successfully established programs which promote friendships in this regard.

**Participant struggles.** This section includes themes generated from participant description of their struggles, as previously illustrated earlier in this chapter, within the participant description of experience section. From an educational administration perspective, I felt it important to include this summary to further highlight areas for improvement recommended by my participants.

The most prevalent challenge identified by participants was the struggle to find authentic friendships with their Canadian peers. Divya from India remarked; "The Canadian students, they have their own groups .They don't really talk to the newcomers" (Personal Communication, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014). Sonia from Rwanda had a similar experience; "I'll say mostly Canadians was hard to socialize with them. And know the accent too. Like you have accent. They don't have the accent so it's like, I don't know" (Interview transcripts, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2014). Ahmed struggled with being popular with many

close friends in Egypt to knowing absolutely nobody when he arrived and it was tough to make friends for the first two years.

When asked about what was missing from their Canadian school experience, answers focused primarily on ways for schools to more effectively connect newcomers to their Canadian peers and the greater school extra-curricular community. Sonia and Divya encouraged teachers to be proactive with EAL student placement when planning group activities so that they get to know their Canadian peers. Sonia also recommended some form of a language or welcome club with Canadian student mentors and EAL students having field trips and activities together to make the newcomer students feel more comfortable.

Akash sometimes felt forgotten during class and recommended that EAL students should be seated in closer proximity to the teacher at the front of the class.

Amina wished that there was an after-school program to practise her written and spoken English as well as to get help to finish assignments. She really liked the lunchtime tutoring program, but said that her school library was only open for 30 minutes after school and then she was on her own to finish assignments.

Pan's school has a large Chinese population, and he said that a Mandarin speaking teacher or counsellor would have been helpful.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to examine the impact of the teacher-student relationship in contributing to success, in the form of graduation, for adolescent EAL newcomers. Research in the area of teacher – student relationships identifies the characteristics of caring, empathy, and genuine interest in the student, as contributors to strong teacher-student relationships and in-turn, school success (Hattie, 2009, Suarez-Orozco, Rhodes & Milburn, 2009; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008; Peguero & Bondy, 2011). The results of this study aligned with the literature



reviewed, as participants most frequently identified the teacher attributes of caring, sense of humor, interest in students, and patience when discussing their positive relationships with their teachers. Although participants did not use the word *empathy* when speaking of their experiences, they often used the word *patience* to indicate when their teachers being understanding of their additional language and social needs.

It is of significant note that each of the eight participants shared multiple stories of how their teachers supported them with their learning and acclimatization to the Canadian school system. These powerful stories depicted teachers encouraging, assisting, going above-and-beyond, and being sensitive towards their struggles upon arrival. Therefore, I would surmise that this investigation supports the premise that a caring and supportive teacher – student relationship is a key contributor to immigrant newcomer success in the form of high school graduation.

The next step for educators is to evaluate the mechanisms and attitudes in their schools for supporting immigrant newcomers and, most importantly, for fostering strong relationships with EAL students and their teachers. There would be great merit for future investigation into the use and effectiveness of the cultural proficiency model as a framework for responding to the dynamics of diversity in schools. In addition, most participants remembered specific stories of their teachers valuing their cultural backgrounds and how this positively impacted their feeling of self-worth. These affirming interactions, as discussed by Shecter and Cummins (2003) in their book *Multilingual Education in Practice*, hold great potential for promoting positive engagement in EAL students and would be worth exploring further.

Personally, this was a great experience that enriched me both personally and professionally. The stories shared of adapting to a new culture, learning a new language, finding their place in school after starting with *nothing* and then graduating, demonstrated the incredible resiliency and courage of the adolescent EAL newcomer. My hope is that the stories and advice provided by my

eight participants inspire educators to look for opportunities to address the diversity needs in their schools. EAL books and academic research provide educators with excellent frameworks for improvement, but it is the individual stories told by our students, and, in this case, adolescent EAL newcomers, which provide the impetus for educational change.

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**Appendix A: Interview Guide:** The Importance of the Teacher-Student Relationship in  
Contributing to Adolescent EAL Newcomer Success in Secondary School

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Place: \_\_\_\_\_ Stop Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_ Permission signed: YES/NO  
Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_  
(pseudonym)

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Thank-you for participating in this study, examining the relationships between newcomer adolescent EAL students and their teachers. I am interested in learning more about this area for two reasons:

1. **Personal Interest:** Having a multi-cultural background myself with parents that both immigrated to Canada. My Mom in particular came from the Philippines and English was her second language and she has a lot to adjust to culturally as well when she arrived. So I have an interest in understanding this adjustment process
2. **Professionally:** As you know, we were both in the same school when you were a high school student and it had a lot of newcomer EAL students. This trend continues and I am interested in making sure that we do a good job of welcoming newcomers and that our EAL programs are the best they can be. So I'd like to learn from your experiences to help inform teachers and administrators how to best plan for EAL learners!

I will be asking you 11 questions throughout this interview that will be approximately one hour in length. Here is a copy of the questions for you to refer to throughout the interview (see Appendix B), I will give you 5 minutes now to pre-read them. If there are questions that you do not feel comfortable answering, please let me know and we will move to the next question. If at any time you require a break or would like to stop the interview, you may do so.

**--Wait 5 minutes for participant to read questions (Appendix B)--**

1. We'll start with some easy questions! Where you are from and when did you arrive in Canada? What have you been up to since graduating from high school?
  - Prompts: Work? School?
2. Describe your experiences/memories of what your first days at school were like?
  - Prompts: Do you remember walking in? What were your impressions?
3. What parts of your educational experience helped you learn at school?
  - Prompts: classroom experiences, friendships, activities, compare to school in home country
4. How did your teachers help you learn in your classes?
  - Prompts: Support academically, language, emotionally,
5. If you had to pick one adult in the school that helped you the most, whom would that be and how did he/she support you?
  - Prompts: Support academically, emotionally, tell me story of how he/she supported you
6. Did your teacher value your cultural background in the classroom and how did this affect your experience and success?
  - Prompts: Did this help you feel more comfortable in class? Did they refer to your country of origin? Ask you questions about your cultural or where you were from?
7. What advice would you give to teachers to help them develop trusting and caring relationship to support their EAL students?
8. Time to discuss the challenges! What would you say were some of the biggest struggles for you in school?
  - Prompts: Struggles with language? Learning? Friendships? Teachers? Cultural?



9. What do you think was missing from your school experience that would have improved things for you?
  - Prompts: Classroom, cultural, teachers, programming, tutoring
10. What advice would you give to school educators to improve the educational experience(s) of future EAL immigrants in our schools?
11. Before I end the interview, is there anything else that you would like to share or did I miss anything?

*Thank-you for participating in this interview. Looking at your consent form, I will provide you with a summary of my research at the conclusion of this course. If you have any questions, here is my business card for you to contact me.*

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**Appendix B: Interview Questions for Participants to Pre-Read:** The Importance of the  
Teacher-Student Relationship in Contributing to Adolescent EAL Newcomer Success in Secondary  
School

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I will be asking you 11 questions throughout this interview that will be approximately one hour in length. If there are questions that you do not feel comfortable answering, please let me know and we will move to the next question. If at any time you require a break or would like to stop the interview, you may do so.

1. Where you are from and when did you arrive in Canada? What have you been up to since graduating from high school?
2. Describe your experiences/memories of what your first days at school were like?
3. What parts of your educational experience helped you learn at school?
4. How did your teachers help you learn in your classes?
5. If you had to pick one adult in the school that helped you the most, whom would that be and how did he/she support you?
6. Did your teacher value your cultural background in the classroom and how did this affect your experience and success?
7. What advice would you give to teachers to help them develop trusting and caring relationship to support their EAL students?
8. Time to discuss the challenges! What would you say were some of the biggest struggles for you in school?
9. What do you think was missing from your school experience that would have improved things for you?

10. What advice would you give to school educators to improve the educational experience(s) of future EAL immigrants in our schools?
11. Before I end the interview, is there anything else that you would like to share or did I miss anything?

**Appendix C: Interview Journal**

This interview journal has been arranged in the order of the key questions explored in this investigation. As I reviewed and analyzed the interview transcripts, I documented key statements for each participant. My personal reflections are bolded and the numbers refer to the page numbers from participant interview transcripts.

<b>Sub-Question #1: What was it like to be a newcomer adolescent EAL student?</b>	
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Response</b>
Diego	Was the only EAL student in his school. Had lots of support. Connected through sport.
Pan	No English, used an electronic translator
Ahmed	Only knew one person, teacher came and showed him around. School at home was traditional, lots more to do here!
Divya	Arrived in Canada in June so she had 3 months to get used to things prior to coming to school. Had older cousins at the same school whom helped her navigate her way around. Diversity of school and other Indian students made her feel comfortable.
Sonia	Very hard. Had a sister in grade 12 studying all the time and didn't know anyone for two weeks. <b>Very heartbreaking and sad. Speaks to the isolation and loneliness. She must have been so lonely Maybe need a buddy system?</b> She would just sit in a chair by a window in a corner each day. People were friendly and they would smile, which was different than Rwanda. Friends didn't speak

	Kinyan so was forced to speak "fake English" (167)! School was much different, no eye contact in Rwanda (202) and very strict. Not as much fresh food!
Amina	Very scared of going to school in Canada, that teacher wouldn't talk to them. Confused. Worried about dressing different. Culture shock first few days. Young EAL teacher that talked too much about himself. Sat in his chair and spoke for 45 minutes out of 1hr class! Didn't learn English in her first school because she had Afghani friends that spoke good English and translated for her so she was "lazy" learning English. She then moved to a 2nd school in South Winnipeg and didn't know anyone so had to learn English
Akash	Very nervous, had to sit at the back and had no friends. Need a buddy system? Was worried that teachers would be mean to him
Minjoon	First day at junior high was hard because Minjoon made a goal to make 5 new friends on his first day but when he got to school, it was difficult for him due to his lack of English and he wanted to give up. Was crying after two weeks because he had only made Chinese friends whom spoke Chinese all the time and hadn't learned any English. Teachers are much more friendly and personable. Called students by their names as opposed to Korea, they said "student".
<b>Sub-Question #2: Describe your relationships with your teachers. Did they value or recognize your culture?</b>	
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Response</b>

Diego	Repeatedly talks about interest his teachers had in him and his cultural background and how it motivates students to work for their teachers EAL teacher
Pan	Caring, patient, friendly teacher. Tutoring program. EAL teacher/counsellor: career planning. Clearly, the ability of a teacher to create a caring and friendly relationship was significant for Pan's success
Ahmed	Focus on language and culture in EAL. How caring his teacher was, getting to know everyone. Extra time to ask questions. E course teachers patient, repeated things. Caring and patient (300-326). Relationship with EAL counsellor. Felt special because people asked him about his culture (379, 404). Felt safe. Loved the diversity of his high school and meeting people from around the world
Divya	None
Sonia	Three favourite teachers were funny, poker face quote 107-109). Teacher connected through telling personal stories. <b>Relationship with teachers really helped fill the void before Sonia was able to make friends.</b> (148)Visuals helped due to language. Was always happy so didn't need extra social-emotional support but had other EAL friends that got help. Teachers would talk to students who were feeling down. Connection with EAL teacher was very strong. He help translate for her and inspired her to want to translate for other newcomer Rwandans later on. Teacher qualities: positive, energetic, funny. Great quote on positivity: 284-287 & 301-302. Teachers and EA's valued her culture in many ways: language, dance, food, and accent. Great quote: 341-43 & 346-348. Asked many questions. Connection with teachers and cultural. Cultural proficiency! Favourite teacher was accounting and work experience teacher

<p>Amina</p>	<p>EAL teacher pushed her talk, gave her confidence. Quote- 44-46. Valuing Culture: Great quote about being proud to speak two languages: 120-122. Teacher took her and class on community outings to order food, buy things using English. Gained confidence when she later had to call to make an appointment for government, Rogers cell bill. Quote: 580-583. EA's really helped explain things and help her understand. Work experience teacher was her favourite classroom teacher: got her speaking. Encouraged her to try speaking and when she got that volunteer position in an elementary school working with kids, this gave her confidence in her speaking skills. Taught her typing, resume and other functional workplace skills. <b>Volunteering programs in the community is a truly authentic way for EAL students to learn English, engage in the community, and link to possible employment.</b> Giving EAL students authentic community experiences improves functional English and builds confidence. She as very kind and "open" meaning approachable. Valuing culture: didn't have stories nor did not recall teachers ask her about her culture.</p>
<p>Akash</p>	<p>Math teacher and English teacher were nice and friendly. Help if you don't understand. EAL teacher, didn't know cricket but supervised his team when they made on. Gave Akash a ride to cricket game and watched it, always appreciated that. Quote: 188-89. Teacher connected these students by going above-and-beyond. Law teacher took him to the law courts and is thinking of a career in law enforcement. Teachers didn't ask Akash where he was from but they did give him a room to pray in. Quote: 545-548. <b>Need to have a prayer room in schools?</b></p>

Minjoon	<p>At first had trouble writing English but gym teachers would interview him and give him full marks as they knew he could understand! Appreciated how his school counselors would sit down with EAL students and their families to explain course selection. Picked his counselor and how supportive she was in helping him plan and prepare for university. She was kind, caring and loving. She always welcomed him to her office and told Minjoon to come by whenever he needed to. Another teachers (whom was in immigrant herself from South America) related well to him and made him feel better about not having great English through her own experiences learning English. Physics teacher talked with student a lot about their cultures and wanted to listen to Korean pop music that Minjoon was into. He gave her a Christmas sweater and she wore it the next day which made him feel very accepted by this teacher. Told me that if I wouldn't have gotten to know him in grade 12, he wouldn't have trusted me to do this interview.</p>
<b>Sub-Question #3: Advice for teachers and EAL students</b>	
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Response</b>
Diego	Speak as much English as possible; connect with students in other cultural groups.
Pan	Look for ways to develop authentic relationships between newcomers and Canadian students. (dance story)
Ahmed	Teachers: patience, repeat things, personal connection. Liked EAL courses as they allowed for connections to be built (448-60). Students: learn English first (590-620). Asking students to share something about themselves with the class.
Divya	48: Visual learner, don't speak too fast. Communicating with new students to get to know them and get them to speak more (328). Teachers need to take initiative



	<p>to approach students to see if they have problems so they won't go to the teacher (336-338). When making groups, mix the students up so they get to know each other (474). Connecting newcomer to activity planning (student counsel, leadership) so they feel ownership and part of the school (495). <b>Suggestion: having teachers create roles for newcomers to give them some ownership and connection?</b></p>
Sonia	<p>Got involved in charity club, made both Rwandan and multicultural friends which was perfect mix for her. Find friends that you can speak English with (180). Teachers need to put themselves in EAL student's shoes. 390-392. Teacher PD in cultural diversity, activity with just language or assignment in another culture and then you have to figure it out! Check for understanding (don't go to fast). Social inclusion: mixed groups to promote cross cultural socializing: 453. Have ways for Canadian students to approach EAL students (great quote 519-522). Maybe a peer support group? Advice from Sonia to fix this? Language club with both Canadian mentors and newcomers to learn English and have authentic experiences together, make newcomers feel comfortable, wicked idea!!! Advice for EAL students: get involved in clubs and school activities. Have the courage to try to speak English. Think about how easy Canadian kids can give up on something in class, and then you have a resilient newcomer that has to struggle to put themselves out there.</p>
Amina	<p>Advice for teachers: remember that EAL students don't have the past knowledge of prior grades. Made it very difficult to understand this class. Teachers would sometimes talk too much and fast, no notes to refer to after (online?). <b>All</b></p>

	<p><b>teachers should have a homework online site? Flipped classroom.</b> Post notes on-line so they can review later as it takes longer to comprehend. Be kind and understand that newcomers have from different countries where they had problems, (quote: 962-964) Advice for newcomers: speak English, don't just stay in your own cultural group. Amina has lots of friends from an Asian country that are really good at writing and reading English but always speak in their mother tongue and have poor speaking skills. Don't be afraid to ask for help! Regrets that she was so shy and didn't ask for help much at first, thus feels behind.</p>
Akash	<p>Advice for Teachers: Approach EAL students to see if they need help as many are shy. Theme: engaging shy newcomers. Liked the tutoring program and two student tutors which helped him learn to write English better. More field trips! Akash really like the trip to the law courts and wants to be a police officer. Approach students as they are often too shy, quote 341-344. Advice for newcomers: don't work too much, focus on your studies</p>
Minjoon	<p>Advice for Teachers: Approach students to talk and answer questions because they will be too shy to ask. Buddy program: connect a new EAL student with a well-established student (preferably one whom can speak both the newcomer language and English). Advice for students: It's a huge challenge to come to Canada and learn English but you have to accept this challenge. Even though it is hard, try to join activities to become part of the community. <b>The resiliency of newcomers is unbelievable.</b> Minjoon made a lot of friends from other cultures because this was more important to him than learning English. However, many of his Korean friends were isolated from the great school community because they</p>

	<p>stayed within their cultural group. Remarked that his friends were hesitant to ask questions in English and therefore struggled on English tests. Talked at length about students being isolated in their own cultural communities throughout the school. Quote (639-642) "If you cannot make any friends because of English, um, wait for one week or two weeks and if you can still not do it, I'm sure you can, but if you still can't do it after being here for two weeks. Come see me. I'll introduce you to new friends". Has Chinese speaking friends that got involved in the community and speak English very well.</p>
<p><b>Sub-Question #4: Identify the struggles and what was missing from your high school experience</b></p>	
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Response</b>
Diego	Student taking advantage of his poor English to say the "N" word.
Pan	More emphasis on public speaking in all subject areas. Learning the language and culture (understand the community). Mandarin speaking teacher
Ahmed	156: was popular at home but it was really hard to make friends. Really didn't like the ELA40S course and its lack of connection to speaking skills. Felt there was a lack of structure to the class. Too much writing. Tough to make friends for first two years, tough to understand English requests
Divya	Biology teacher focusing on memorizing rather than understanding for the test. "The Canadian students, they have their own groups .They don't really talk to the newcomers" (448-449). Quote #2-455-459
Sonia	Felt that she needed to work hard to get teachers to come to her to ask how she was doing sometimes. Biggest struggles were language and social inclusion. 439-

	<p>441. Rwandan teachers were different than Canadian teachers! (199) Didn't understand physics teacher, felt that the teacher went too fast. Slow down!</p>
<p>Amina</p>	<p>Volunteered in a child-care program which really helped her learn conversational English. Gained confidence public speaking about her immigration experience in high school and University. Her school did fundraisers for India, Aboriginal water and Africa but never for Afghanistan. She was a part of these efforts but dreamt about helping her people. <b>How do we empower newcomers to speak for the challenges in their home countries?</b> Had a teacher that she disclosed personal information to that went and told other teachers, she wasn't happy about that. Felt that Canadian students laughed at her when she did a presentation: 728-732. Compared lack of flexibility with her university professor when her Aunt passed away, wouldn't give notes or extend deadlines. Missing: after-school program to learn English. They were allowed to go to the library for 30min after school but that wasn't enough time. Quote: 874-876 (<b>peaceful Village!</b>). Liked lunchtime tutoring</p>
<p>Akash</p>	<p>Failed math. Had to find math words from the dictionary. Wasn't initially comfortable making friends. Worked 40hrs a week to help support his family, failed math course and was always tired at school. Sometimes felt forgotten in class, advised to put EAL students at the front of class.</p>
<p>Minjoon</p>	<p>519- In grade 10 drama class, students laughed at his broken English when reading a script and throughout the course; was a bad memory. Was crying after two weeks because he had only made Chinese friends whom spoke Chinese all the time and hadn't learned any English.</p>

Appendix D: ENREB Approval Certificate



Research Ethics and Compliance  
Office of the Vice-President (Research and International)

Human Ethics  
200-194 Dafer Road  
Winnipeg, MB  
Canada R3T 2N2  
Phone: 204-474-7122  
Fax: 204-369-7173

APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

April 10, 2014

**TO:** Troy Scott (Advisor J. Wiers)  
Principal Investigator

**FROM:** Lorna Guse, Chair  
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

**Re:** Protocol #E2014:054  
"The Importance of the Teacher-Student Relationship in Contributing to  
Adolescent EAL Newcomer Success in Secondary School"

Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics approval by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board, which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2). This approval is valid for one year only.

Any significant changes of the protocol, and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.

**Please note:**

- If you have funds pending human ethics approval, please mail/e-mail/fax (204-0325) a copy of this Approval (Identifying the related UM Project Number) to the Research Grants Officer in ORS in order to initiate fund setup. (How to find your UM Project Number: <http://umanitoba.ca/research/ors/mw-faq.html#pr6>)
- if you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval; otherwise the account will be locked.

The Research Quality Management Office may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba *Ethics of Research Involving Humans*.

The Research Ethics Board requests a final report for your study (available at: [http://umanitoba.ca/research/ors/ethics/human\\_ethics\\_REB\\_forms\\_guidelines.html](http://umanitoba.ca/research/ors/ethics/human_ethics_REB_forms_guidelines.html)) in order to be in compliance with Tri-Council Guidelines.

**Appendix E: Letter of Informed Consent**



UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA

**THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP IN ADOLESCENT EAL  
NEWCOMER SUCCESS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL**

Principal Investigator: Troy Scott: [scott3@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:scott3@myumanitoba.ca)

Research Supervisor: Dr. John Wiens, [John.Wiens@umanitoba.ca](mailto:John.Wiens@umanitoba.ca)

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you a basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

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I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I am currently doing my Master's thesis on the impact of teacher – student relationships on student success in secondary school.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe and learn from the educational experiences of English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners whom have immigrated to Winnipeg as teenagers and have now graduated from high school. I am contacting past students (whom are now adults) whom attended a previous high school that I worked at, with the goal of

interviewing eight individuals. I will ask questions about your school experiences as a newcomer adolescent EAL student in Winnipeg. Specifically, I will ask questions regarding your adjustment to school in Canada, how your teachers supported your learning, and for your advice on how to improve educational programming for future EAL students.

If you agree to take part, the interview will last approximately one hour in duration. I will ask you to participate at a time and place that works best for you. A drink (water, coffee, juice) will be offered during this interview and I will ask eleven open-ended questions about your educational experience. This interview will be recorded using a digital tape recorder and I will later type this information into field notes.

The benefit of participating in this study will be the opportunity to give advice and help educators learn from your personal story of coming to Canada as a teenager and adjusting to the Canadian education system. Reflecting on your past high school experiences may at some points lead to emotional discomfort when recounting the struggles and difficulties that you were faced with coming to a new country and school system. In the event that this occurs, you will be given an opportunity to take a break, move on to the next question, or suspend your participation.

Your interview data will be kept confidential through the use of false names (pseudonym) for yourself and the school you attended. An electronic database connecting your actual name to your pseudonym along with electronic interview transcripts and MP3 interview recordings will be kept in a password-protected online Dropbox that only I have access to. Signed consent forms and hard-copy transcripts will be stored in locked drawers in my office at my current workplace. My professors: Dr. John Wiens, Dr. Jerome Cranston, and Dr. Yi Li will have access to interview transcripts to assist me with my analysis.

The information from this transcript will be used for the results and conclusions section of my thesis. It may also be presented at academic and public events and/or published in journals.

There is a possibility that I will be using direct quotes from our interview. If this occurs I will do my best to delete information that may identify you or any other individuals but cannot guarantee that individuals will not be identified.

Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. If you choose to do this, please contact me and your data will be immediately destroyed.

Research results will be released via a written thesis that will be submitted to my professors, Dr. John Wiens, Dr. Jerome Cranston, and Dr. Yi Li for evaluation. I will also email you the analysis of our interview as written in the results section of my thesis for you to make comments and suggest revisions. You will have two weeks to respond. Upon completion of the study in October 2014, a brief 1-3 page summary of my results will be provided to you upon request. Request can be made at the end of this consent form. Confidential data will be kept until July 2015 in order to make revisions to my manuscript. This data will be destroyed (electronic data deleted and paper shredded) on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions that you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board(s) and a representative(s) of the University of Manitoba Research Quality Management/Assurance office may also require access to your research record for safety and quality assurance purposes.



This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC), Maggie Bowman, at (204) 474-7122 or by email at: Margaret.Bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Researcher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Check the box if you wish to receive a summary of the results of the study.

Yes

No

If you check "yes" above, please provide an email address where the results can be sent:

\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix F: Pembina Trails School Division Letter of Approval**



February 27, 2014

To Whom It May Concern,

Re: Troy Scott  
Master's Thesis Research

I am fully aware and supportive of the research to be undertaken by Troy Scott. I do not see any problems with the proposal and the subjects to be chosen to interview.

I wish Troy well in his research and will assist if required or desired.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Bruce  
Assistant Superintendent – Program