# Children Affected by War: A Bioecological Investigation into their Psychosocial and Educational Needs

**By**

**Janice L. Stewart**

A thesis submitted to The Faculty of Graduate Studies

of The University of Manitoba

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Manitoba

Department of Educational Administration, Foundations and Psychology

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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## Abstract

This thesis describes a qualitative research study that examined the experiences of high school refugee students in Manitoba who emigrated from countries affected by armed conflict. Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and focus group interviews. A total of 51 participants took part in this study and included: high school students, school staff members, parents, community members, educational policy makers, divisional consultants, members of various social agencies, and experts from the field of refugee education. The study employed a continuous process of analysis that included sorting the data using suitable codes and organizing the material into common themes.

The three phases of migration, delineated by Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Lowen and Frater-Mathieson (2004), was investigated using Bronfenbrenner's (1999) Bioecological Model combined with Portes and Zhou's (1993) Theory of Segmented Assimilation. Components of these three theories formed the overarching conceptual framework for the study.

The findings in this study confirmed that the pre-migration and trans-migration experiences of refugee children are unique, diverse, and not always fully understood by others. The post-migration phase is characterized by four prominent categories of challenges: (1) educational, (2) economic, (3) environmental, and, (4) psychosocial. The study revealed that the educational system played a pivotal role in the lives of the students; however, the students' adjustments were complicated by numerous barriers that impeded their progress. The isolation of the various systems resulted in a weakened ecological system that further complicated the level of support provided to

the students. Racism, discrimination, and ethnically-based conflict were overarching themes that contributed to the overall sense of mistrust and insecurity expressed by the students. The psychosocial needs and challenges for war-affected children living in Canada appear to be difficult to identify, complicated to understand, and even more troubling to address.

A key finding was the presence of a nanosystem – a smaller and more intimate network from the student's microsystem. The nanosystem connected the student to the various ecological systems and also assisted with his or her adjustment. The fragility of the macrosystem was revealed and the need for a proactive strategy for counteracting negative attitudes in Canada was found to be essential. It is argued that it is the collective responsibility of all citizens to ensure that refugee children are provided a more equitable and appropriate education, in a safe environment.

Purposeful steps should be taken by school leaders to facilitate pedagogical practices that make school more equitable and just. Recommendations for educators and policy makers and suggestions for further research were generated from this study.

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I would also like to thank Dr. Bruno Dyck, from the Faculty of Management at the University of Manitoba. His contributions as a committee member greatly improved the theoretical orientation of this study as well as the comprehensiveness of the research design.

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I extend my sincere thanks to the participants in this study. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the staff and students in The Winnipeg School Division. To the young men and women who shared their personal experiences, I owe deep gratitude. I hope that I have given a voice to the experiences of refugee children and that this study serves as a catalyst for change in educational communities throughout Canada.

Finally, special thanks are due to my family who supported me throughout the completion of this work. I thank my mother, Alice, who despite her ill health offered countless hours of assistance, support, and reassurance that motivated me to forge ahead. Her personal sacrifices are acknowledged, her strength is admired, and I am forever grateful. My husband, Ross, readily accepted the additional family responsibilities, patiently endured my frustrations, and proudly celebrated my accomplishments. I thank him for his incisive feedback, constructive criticism, and thoughtful gestures that supported my efforts and lifted my spirits. To my children, Jack and Hana, I hope that someday you understand why I needed to work when I should have been playing. You are the source of my energy and I am deeply grateful for your understanding and support. Without your help, I could not have succeeded.

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## PROLOGUE

Sokut's Story

*The following story was written by Sokut, who was a participant in this study. Edited by J. Stewart.*

They told us to run. If you hear the horses, run as fast as you can. You never know when the Junjaweeds will attack, and when they do, they will kill or capture everyone they find.

I was five. I was visiting my uncle. My family was in my home village which is a day's walk away. The soldiers came. I was holding my uncle's hand when the bullet hit him. He fell to the ground, I knew he was dead. I didn't know where to run. I hid in the bush. Women were attacked and raped in front of me. I saw my own sister. It is very hard to talk about. I try not to remember.

I ran with the other boys, they were running in all directions. For about 100 days we walked through the bush. No shoes, no clothes, no water or food. We ate dead animals. I had to drink my own urine. We had no choice, we would die. Sometimes there was fruit or bark from the trees that we ate. Some of the berries were poisonous and children would die. We knew to be careful, but it was hard to resist; we were so hungry. Someone said that there was food in Dimma, Ethiopia. We walked for two months. There were 20,000 boys and no parents. Most of the girls were captured, but some walked with us. Many of us were taken by insects or by sickness. We had to bury them. I worried that I would go too. I knew that I would never see my family again. Some of the children were too tired to walk—they sat down. They would die of starvation or the wild animals would get them. It was hard to keep going.

I was in Dimma camp for three years. We had to cook by ourselves and sleep by ourselves. We drank water from the river, but it was not clean. It made our stomachs hurt. The UN gave us maize, beans, and sometimes sugar, oil, and salt. We soaked the rice overnight before we cooked it. Kakuma was hot and dirty, but we had food.

In 1997, the Ethiopian government was overthrown and the rebels chased us with guns. They gave us one week to leave. We didn't move fast enough. They shot at us. Many children were killed; we were just young children. Coming to Ethiopia was hard, but going back to Sudan was worse. We had to cross the River Gilo. Many more died. I couldn't swim. I held onto the dead bodies in the water to cross. The crocodiles ate some children.

The Sudanese government didn't want us; they thought we would fight them. By the time we got to Sudan, 4,000 boys had died. The Red Cross said we must go to the Kenyan and Sudanese border. It took one month to get there. There was no grass, rivers, or trees—it was a desert. We had to walk at night. We started at 4:00pm. If we walked in the day, we were shot and killed. The UN dropped food, but sometimes the animals ate it.

I was in a camp at the Kenya-Sudanese border. We had to go to another camp when the Sudanese captured Keapore, which was two hours away. They would come and get us, so they moved us to Kakuma in 1998. I was about nine.

In Kakuma we were put into groups. There were 16,000 of us and we had to live in groups of five. A school was opened. For grades 1 to 4, we studied under the tree. When I reached grade 5, I studied in the school building. In August 2000, I was moved to Ifo Camp in Dadaab. People in my settlement were moved so that there would be more security.

Ifo Refugee Camp was a hard life for me. The UN told me to go back to Kakuma, but I refused. They told me that I would not get any more food rations if I stayed. I walked to Dadaab town and I cleaned clothes for money and I cut trees in the bush to sell. I was captured by child rebels, but I was not hurt. They didn't want me to take the trees. They said they would kill me if they caught me cutting more trees. I had to keep cutting trees or I would die. In 2001, I went back to Kakuma because the UN adjusted the rule to give everyone food rations.

I was rejected by the Canadian Embassy in 2001 because I was under 18. I spent over two more years in a refugee camp in Kenya. I was really 15, but I increased my age to 21. It was not my choice to come to Canada, it was the UN's choice to send me. I lived in Winnipeg with three other boys from Sudan. Two boys were 16 and one was 17. We lived like adults. I have never really been a child...I have had no childhood.

I have been in Canada since 2003. I enjoy being in high school; it is the best part about being in Canada. I came here to have a peaceful life, but my life is not peaceful. It is still hard and I hope that it will change someday. When I came here I thought life would be like heaven. That is what I thought life was like in North America. But it is not. I am still a refugee. It is not safe for me here. I have been threatened and beat up. Other kids attack us because we are African and they think we are gang members. I don't have money for food. There are the same problems for me in Canada that I had in Africa.

Some kids find the street life. They don't have food and they want what Canadian kids have, but they don't have any money. We need more support because sometimes we have to leave school to make money. School work is hard for us. It takes us longer to do the work and there is no one to help us. I want to educate myself and change my life so that it is better than before. I want to finish my high school. Unless I die, nothing will get in my way.

*A total of 40 million people have fled their homes because of armed conflict or human rights violations. It is estimated that 20 million of these displaced people are children (Machel, 2001).*

# 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This thesis describes a research study that examined the experiences of high school refugee students who emigrated from countries affected by armed conflict. This qualitative case study attempted to reveal the personal, social, and academic needs of refugee students in Manitoba as well as to articulate effective ways to assist with their adjustment to school. Many children from war-affected countries have been denied basic human entitlements, and their immigration to Canada represents hope for their futures. Evidence suggests that these students are further marginalized by an educational system that does not recognize their unique psychosocial needs and does not provide culturally sensitive support.

In September, 2005, Winnipeg hosted a conference on War-Affected Children that included representatives from the United Nations, World Vision, War-Child, Canadian Foreign Affairs as well as national and international scholars. The key recommendation from this conference was the need to educate teachers and school leaders on the issues of war-affected children and youth and to develop practical strategies for helping these students. Considering the increasing number of refugee children coming to Canada, it is timely to review existing literature, explore approaches for helping war-affected children, and suggest future directions for research, practice, and policy.

Children from countries affected by conflict represent a new segment of the population of students in Canadian schools. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the needs of these students are not being met, and this has exacerbated other societal

issues. Some disenfranchised youth in Winnipeg have joined culturally based gangs that rival other gangs within the city. Some youth have become involved in the justice system as a result of their criminal activity.

Although some students adjust quite well into Canadian schools, others do not. Little empirical evidence is available to examine the factors that contribute to the successful adjustment of these students into Canadian schools, and information on the effects of different types of interventions remains sparse. The context of the school environment is crucial to the pro-social development and the acculturation of the war-affected child (McBrien, 2004; Hamilton & Moore, 2004; Hek, 2005; Rutter, 2006; Rutter, 2003; Rutter & Jones, 1998). Having said this, little information is available on the most suitable educational context and the most appropriate support mechanisms for the student.

The trajectories of these youth hinge on our ability to provide the most appropriate educational program that meets their diverse learning needs. This generation of youth will be the parents and workers in the next decade and it is imperative that the present school system respond to their immediate needs. The school is arguably one of the most influential social systems – it has the ability to significantly affect our lives, both in how we think and how we conduct ourselves as individuals and as a collective society. As such, most would agree that theory and practice should support the type of system that liberates rather than marginalizes; few offer pragmatic ways to make this occur.

Canadians have a responsibility to protect these children, to support their families, and to provide an appropriate education that meets their unique learning

needs. All children are entitled to an education in Canada, and this study will examine the needs of these children and the educational interventions that will offer the best practices for providing this education. This study examined the following questions: (a) What are the experiences of war-affected children who immigrate to Manitoba? (b) What are the challenges that confront war-affected children who attend high school in Manitoba? (c) What systems, structures, or programs assist with the process of adjustment for the war-affected child? (d) To what extent do the various ecological systems interact with each other to influence the student's development? These questions will be more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 2.

## Background Information

Throughout history, children have been affected by war; however, the nature of war has changed dramatically. In today's conflicts, children assume the roles of casualties of war, soldiers of war and survivors of war. The size and scope of the refugee movement has been a defining feature of the last hundred years, yet the field of education has paid little attention to the issues of refugee children (Myers, 2001). Access to education is a human right, and educational leaders have the legal obligation and the moral responsibility to ensure that youth who have been victims of violence receive an appropriate education. The first step involves a greater understanding of today's conflict, how it affects children and their families and how these children are being served by our educational system upon immigrating to Canada.

In August 1996, the Secretary-General of the United Nations released a report entitled *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* written by Graca Machel.

In this ground-breaking report it was revealed that in any given year, over 300,000 children are exploited in armed conflicts as child soldiers and sex slaves. In the past 10 years, as a result of armed conflicts, about 2 million children have been killed, more than 6 million have been disabled, 1 million have been left orphaned, and about 12 million left homeless. It is estimated that there are presently 20 million children who have been uprooted from their homes. Many of these children are internally displaced within their country or they are refugees seeking asylum in another country (Machel, 2001). More than ten million children have been psychologically scarred by the trauma of abduction, detention, sexual assault and the brutal murder of family members (Canadian International Development Agency, 2005). Today's warfare often entails horrific levels of violence and brutality aimed specifically at children (Knudson, 2004). The United Nations claims that 10% of the casualties of the First World War were civilians and this percentage grew to 45 % in World War II. It is now estimated that in today's warfare, 90% of the casualties are civilians (UNICEF, 2004).

"War undermines the very foundation of children's lives, destroying their homes, splintering their communities and shattering their trust in adults" (Machel, 2001, p. 80). Neil Boothby and Christine Knudsen (2000) from the Children in Crisis department of Save the Children in Washington, DC, report that in many countries war is a way of life and entire generations of children have grown up surrounded by war. "Refugee children often have experienced the tragedy and trauma of war, including persecution, dangerous escapes, and prolonged stays in refugee camps. Some have witnessed killings, torture, and rape – including atrocities

against family members. Some have lost many members of their families and many have lost everything that was familiar to them" (Fantino & Colak, 2001, p. 590). Attempting to comprehend the extent of the psychological and emotional trauma that these children have endured is a complex task. Machel (2001) states, "War affects every aspect of a child's development - physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual" (p.80).

Children and adolescents, who have been exposed to war and are now attending schools in Canada, represent a particularly vulnerable group of students. Their experiences have been diverse and many have suffered from severe personal trauma, violence and loss. It is argued that the current system is not meeting the unique social and psychological needs of these students and they are not provided with an appropriate education. When students' needs are not being met by the system, they often leave it, either reluctantly, or voluntarily. This often results in the exacerbation of social issues and the further marginalization of the individual.

It is expected that the number of students coming to Canada from war-affected countries will increase significantly over the next decade and this will likely compound many of the current issues we already see in schools and in the community. School leaders and educators must learn about the issues related to war-affected children so that they are able to examine critically and challenge how they might best meet the needs of these students. This process requires working with these students, their families, and the communities in which they live to acquire cultural understandings, shared values, and pragmatic solutions for a more socially just school system. Educators must critically examine and reflect on current practice,

and then use this knowledge to transform future practice. The Canadian school system is in a unique position to provide educational interventions and psychosocial support to refugee children. Moreover, the educational system must become more prepared and knowledgeable about the experiences and needs of refugee students to more adequately address their learning needs.

Jill Rutter and Crispin Jones have done extensive work supporting refugee children in educational systems in the United Kingdom. A concentrated amount of research has been conducted with refugee students, particularly in the city of London, where many of the refugees have settled. Rutter and Jones (1998) found that refugee students were a "particularly vulnerable group of school students" (p.6). Refugee students often attended schools which were under-subscribed and usually had a greater proportion of other children who also made heavy demands on the teachers' time and skills. Whiteman (2005) conducted a qualitative analysis of teachers' views regarding the integration of refugee pupils into schools in Newcastle upon Tyne. This study uncovered an overwhelming need to improve access to interpreting services and revealed that more reliable information was needed regarding the backgrounds of their pupils. Involvement of support agencies seemed inconsistent, and training needs were identified by a number of schools.

MacKay and Tavares (2005) from Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth reviewed services and programs provided to newcomers of war-affected backgrounds who attended schools in Manitoba. To gather information and to promote informed dialogue, a survey of Manitoba teachers and school principals

from Grades 7 to Grade 12 was conducted, as well as a review of practices in other jurisdictions. Summarizing their findings MacKay and Tavares state:

> There is evidence from the survey, the literature, and experiences in other jurisdictions that a lack of appropriate and specialized programming for adolescent and young adult learners with EAL/ESL needs and from war-affected and interrupted schooling backgrounds exacerbates the socio-emotional and learning challenges that such learners experience in our school system. This lack of programming often leads to 'falling out' of our school system and limits the long term educational and life opportunities of these learners. The stress and frustration that such learners experience because of inappropriate programming tends to accentuate the challenges they face in integrating into a new society and educational system, thereby contributing to the development of a sense of hopelessness.

School personnel indicate that they had a negative perception of how well they met the needs of refugee learners; 80.7 % of the school personnel indicated that significant improvements should be made to meet the needs of these learners. Out of the school personnel that were surveyed, 53.8 % rated their current programming supports as "weak" or "somewhat weak." MacKay and Tavares (2005) also found that there were significant attrition rates at the Grade 11 and Grade 12 levels and they suggested that many learners fall out, drop out or are pushed out of the school system.

Although this report yields interesting information and suggests future direction for research, it lacks the input from the children and their families who are

marginalized by the system. Instead of imposing our narratives on these children and contributing further to their marginalization, we need to engage in dialogue with the children to learn more about their experiences and how we can help. Input from school personnel is essential, but so is the engagement of the children and the families that we are attempting to support. Work in social justice and education requires working with, not for the students. Children should be viewed as survivors, not victims. Instead of being overwhelmed by the complexity of the issues, researchers should engage in meaningful dialogue in an attempt to find solutions to the problems they encounter. This study was designed to investigate the experiences of war-affected children, and to closely examine the challenges and successes of these children as they adjust to school in Manitoba. The various ecological systems that interact and influence the war-affected child were also explored.

### *Psychosocial Issues*

Studies reveal that children and adult refugees suffer from a variety of mental health problems and psychiatric disorders as a result of their experiences. War trauma has been associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as reported in numerous studies (Ajdukovic & Ajdukovic, 1998; Barenbaum, Rushkin & Schwab-Stone, 2004; Fazel, Wheeler & Danesh, 2005; Fazel & Stein, 2006; Heptinstall, Sethna & Taylor, 2004; Hyman, Vu & Beiser, 2000; McCloskey & Southwick, 1996; Papageorgiou, Frangou-Garunovic, Iordanidou, Yule, Smith & Vostanis, 2000; Sourander, 1998; Sundelin-Wahlsten, Ahmad & von Knorring, 2001), although the prevalence rate ranges anywhere from 3% to 86%. Variations in prevalence rates are likely attributed to the differences in the participants studied as

well as the measures used in each study. Most measures for PTSD involve the use of a checklist, developed with a western perspective, to measure the complex effects of trauma and violence. Dialogue with the children, their families and the systems they interact with might yield rich qualitative data that may provide more insight into how children function both academically and socially after being exposed to war.

Fazel, Wheeler & Danesh (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of interview-based studies of the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder, major depression, psychotic illnesses, and generalized anxiety disorders in populations of refugees in western countries. Studies were conducted in seven countries including: Australia, Canada, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, the UK and USA. Their results suggested that about one in ten adult refugees in western countries has post-traumatic stress disorder, about one in 20 has major depression, and about one in 25 has a generalized anxiety disorder. They note that "these prevalence estimates are much lower than some frequently cited claims based on less reliable estimates" (p. 1312). Their study suggests that refugees resettled in western countries could be about "ten times more likely to have post-traumatic stress disorder than age-matched general populations in those countries" (p. 1309). The authors caution decision-makers on relying too heavily on the data from studies which could either exaggerate or underestimate the issues related to the mental health of the refugee population. An important consideration for educators is the evidence that does suggest the high occurrence of PTSD in the refugee population as this will have repercussions for children who attend school. Children may display poor concentration, maladaptive behaviour,

social problems, learning difficulties, emotional difficulties, physical symptoms, or withdrawal in response to distress (Richman, 1998).

According to the DSM IV, a compendium of Mental Health Disorders published by the American Psychological Association (1994), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is characterized by recurring and distressing recollections of an event, persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness, and persistent symptoms of increased arousal (e.g., difficulty sleeping, irritability, difficulty concentrating, hypervigilance). Research also suggests considerable comorbidity with depression, anxiety, or grief reactions (Ajdukovic & Ajdukovic, 1998; Barenbaum, Ruchkin & Schwab-Stone, 2004; McCloskey & Southwick, 1996; Yule, 2000) As Yule (2000) notes, there is considerable debate as to whether PTSD can legitimately be diagnosed in people from different cultures, although he suggests that it is a useful framework to examine how children respond to trauma. The reality for many children is that war is an everyday occurrence and there is no "post-trauma" because war has become a part of their daily lives. The challenge is to help children make sense of a world in which terror is part of an everyday reality (Berman, 2001).

Instead of pathologizing the children as recipients of trauma, we need to turn our attention to understanding how these children make sense of or construct their experiences. It is essential that researchers focus their inquiry on the experiences that these children have had and attempt to look beyond what is accepted as normative experiences for children. Although there are some characteristics that are typically found in children who have experienced trauma, every child will have had a unique

experience and they will construct individual meanings associated with those experiences (Bolea, Grant, Burgess, Plasa, 2003). Tolfree (1996) states, "there is *no simple cause-and-effect relationship* between certain types of event[*s*] and certain human responses (physical, psychological and social)" (p.15). Beyond providing basic needs to these children, we should also focus our attention on helping these children re-establish trust, build their self-worth, and develop a sense of hope for their future.

The experiences that these children have had must not be studied in isolation. Understanding the child within the context of his or her family and community is an integral part of understanding the issues related to children affected by war. Moreover, providing psychosocial support to children should not be a service provided only to individuals. The collaboration of educators, support workers, community members, family, and the students themselves, will be necessary if we are to develop intervention approaches that liberate children and empower them to reflect critically on their experiences and cope with what they have endured. Once more is understood about the experiences of these children, it is imperative to go back to the children to find out what support they need. The heterogeneousness of this group of individuals, both culturally and experientially, makes it very challenging to provide support programs and services to meet its needs.

Reports have revealed that the school system is not responding to the needs of these students and, as a result, they are not being provided an appropriate education (MacKay & Tavares, 2005). It is essential that school leaders learn about the issues related to war-affected children and that they are able to critically examine

and challenge the current system to more adequately respond to these unique issues. We need transformative leaders who have the knowledge of both the global context of conflict affecting children as well as the implications this poses for war-affected children who now reside and attend schools in Canada.

### *Refugees in Canada*

When the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was first established in the 1950s, it was estimated that there were 1.5 million refugees or displaced persons in the world. At the beginning of 2005, the UNHCR indicated that the number of people of concern to them was 19.2 million. "This number includes 9.2 million refugees (48%), 839,200 asylum seekers (4%), 1.5 million returned refugees (8%), 5.6 million internally displaced persons (29%) and 2 million others of concern (11%)" (UNHCR, 2005). From the 232,100 new refugees registered in 2004, "major exoduses occurred from Sudan (146,900), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (38,100), Somalia (19,100) and Iraq (12,000)" (UNHCR, 2005). All of these countries are in the midst of political turmoil and civilians are fleeing conflict and/or persecution. Rutter (2003) states, "The majority of the world's refugees have fled from war, escaping fighting aerial attacks and the deliberate terrorisation of civilian populations" (p. 2). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2006) continues to describe Canada as "an important country of asylum and resettlement."

The UNHCR (2005) indicates that, every day, nearly 5,000 children become refugees, with a vast number growing up and spending their entire lives in refugee camps. People in these camps are often referred to as internally displaced people (IDP). "One in every 230 persons in the world is a child or adolescent who has been

forced to flee his or her home" (UNHCR, 2005). Life in a refugee camp will vary, but as Rutter (2003) has outlined, refugee camps throughout the world have many similar circumstances. Camps are usually segregated from local people to prevent integration. Malnutrition, combined with inadequate sanitation and overcrowding, results in high mortality in camps. In addition, food, clean water, and shelter are not always available. Incidents of domestic violence and family conflict are prevalent. Refugees have limited access to schooling, training, employment and leisure activities and little control over decision making.

Rutter (2003) adds that life in the camp is very distressing for adults and children, and the mental health of the refugees deteriorates over time. Considering that some people have spent in excess of 10 years in refugee camps, a more permanent solution for these people is imperative. Most refugees have little idea about when they will be able to leave a camp (Rutter, 2003). Those who have arrived in a new country with the hope of peace and security, all too often face uncertainty and instability. Richman (1998) refers to refugee children as being in the midst of a whirlwind where they have been swept away from all that is familiar to a strange land.

The top three countries of resettlement of refugees in 2004 were: (1)United States, (2)Australia and (3)Canada. (See Table 1.1) The Canadian Government has a long-standing humanitarian position toward refugees. As Fantino and Colak (2001) note, "Since the end of World War II, Canada has resettled about 800,000 refugees from every region of the world, including Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and

**Table 1.1. Main Countries of Resettlement of Refugees in 2004**

| Resettlement Arrivals of Refugees, 2004 | |
|---|---|
| United States | 52,868 |
| Australia | 15,967 |
| Canada | 10,521 |
| Sweden | 1,801 |
| Norway | 842 |
| New Zeland | 825 |
| Finland | 735 |
| Denmark | 508 |
| Netherlands | 323 |
| United Kingdom | 150 |
| Ireland | 63 |
| Chile | 26 |
| Mexico | 11 |
| Jordan | 9 |
| Guatemala | 1 |
| El Salvador | 1 |
| **Total** | **84,651** |

(Used with permission from UNHCR, 2005)

Central and South America" (p. 588). At the current time, over 6,000 child refugees come to Canada each year. In a recent report from the Federal Government, it is expected that 300,000 new immigrants will be accepted to Canada each year for the next five years (Jimenez, 2005). Approximately 43% of these immigrants are in the family class which includes refugees and those people granted permanent residency on humanitarian grounds (Jimenez, 2005). Broadly defined, an immigrant is often referred to as someone who moves for economic reasons and the refugee is considered to be someone who flees for political reasons (McBrien, 2005). Table 1.2 outlines the country of birth and the age distribution of government assisted refugees and Table 1.3 outlines the country of birth and the age distribution of privately sponsored refugees in Manitoba in 2005.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2005) stated that "a total of 262,236 people immigrated to Canada in 2005, an 11% increase over the previous year" (¶1). Manitoba in particular experienced a substantial increase in the number of immigrants because of the provincial nominee program that was designed to increase immigration to provinces that would not generally attract people. The result "helped boost immigration to the province to over 8,000 immigrants in 2005, the highest recorded level in the most recent 15-year period" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005, ¶1).

These figures represent a new cluster of children who enter Canadian schools with very unique and challenging needs. As social workers and social service departments have recognized, we need a long-term strategy to meet the needs of this group of people and a "piecemeal" approach will no longer suffice (Okitikpi & Aymer, 2003).

### *The Demographic Shift: Why Canada Needs Immigrants*

On March 13, 2007 Statistics Canada released 2006 Census Data indicating that Canada's population grew from 2001 to 2006 at a rate of 5.4 percent to reach a total number of 31,612,897 people living in Canada. Previous growth from 1996 to 2001 was recorded at a rate of 4 percent. The population growth is largely attributable to the roughly 1.2 million international immigrants who have settled in Canada over the past five years. Since 2001, approximately 240,000 newcomers have settled in Canada each year. Canada's native-born increased by 400,000 in that same period. The fertility rate for Canadian women has been declining and in 1999

## Table 1.2. Manitoba Government Assisted Refugees

| Manitoba Government Assisted Refugees by Country of Birth and Age 2005 | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Country of Birth | 0 - 4 years old | 5 - 9 years old | 10 - 14 years old | 15 - 19 years old | 20 - 24 years old | 25 - 29 years old | 30 - 79 years | Total |
| Sudan | 9 | 15 | 14 | 22 | 14 | 10 | 11 | **95** |
| Afghanistan | | 6 | 17 | 7 | 9 | 10 | 33 | **83** |
| Ethiopia | | | 5 | | 5 | | 19 | **37** |
| Congo,Democratic Republic | | 6 | 6 | 9 | | | 8 | **36** |
| Liberia | | | 8 | 8 | 6 | | 5 | **32** |
| Burundi | | | | | | | 8 | **21** |
| Somalia | | | | | 6 | 7 | 5 | **19** |
| Colombia | | | | | | | 6 | **18** |
| Congo, People's Republic | | | | | | | 7 | **17** |
| Eritrea | | | | | | | 8 | **16** |
| ***Total Top Ten Countries** | **20** | **38** | **54** | **63** | **49** | **40** | **110** | **374** |
| **Total all Countries** | **53** | **59** | **63** | **72** | **58** | **48** | **139** | **492** |

Used with Permission from Citizenship and Immigration Canada

## Table 1.3. Manitoba Privately Sponsored Refugees

| Manitoba Privately Sponsored Refugees by Country of Birth and Age 2005 | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Country of Birth | 0 - 4 years old | 5 - 9 years old | 10 - 14 years old | 15 - 19 years old | 20 - 24 years old | 25 - 29 years old | 30 to 69 years | Total |
| Ethiopia | 3 | 13 | 7 | 15 | 32 | 59 | 96 | **225** |
| Sudan | 4 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 10 | 8 | 13 | **48** |
| Eritrea | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 26 | **41** |
| Sierra Leone | 0 | 3 | 2 | 10 | 4 | 3 | 7 | **29** |
| Colombia | 2 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 9 | **28** |
| Liberia | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 9 | **22** |
| Congo,Democratic Republic | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 6 | **21** |
| Afghanistan | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 9 | **15** |
| Somalia | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 2 | **12** |
| Kenya | 5 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | **9** |
| ***Total Top Ten Countries** | **17** | **37** | **19** | **45** | **68** | **87** | **177** | **450** |
| **Total** | **28** | **43** | **27** | **47** | **73** | **89** | **186** | **493** |

Used with Permission from Citizenship and Immigration Canada

the fertility rate in Canada hit a "record low of 1.52 children per women" (Statistics Canada, 2002, ¶1).

As the baby boomers age, Canada's population ages and the annual number of deaths is increasing. As the fertility rate remains at 1.5 children per woman, Canada is currently below the replacement rate of 2.1 births per woman. As Statistics Canada reports, "Immigration could become the only source for population growth by 2030, when the peak of the baby boomers born in the 1950s and early 60s reach the end of their lifespan" (Statistics Canada, 2007, ¶4).

The data in this report also suggest a trend toward urbanization in Canada, as 90 percent of Canada's population growth is concentrated in 33 metropolitan areas. Interestingly, the front page of the Globe and Mail on March 14, 2007 reported that this increased urbanization could lead to "more traffic congestion, higher pollution levels and overburdened public transit systems." Author Jill Mahoney reported that the face of the country would change as visible minorities would become the majority in major cities, which would mean that they would have more political clout. The author continued to explain that "social tensions could rise, with strains on schools and workplaces as newcomers struggle to adjust to a country that most believe does a poor job of helping them" (Mahoney, 2007, ¶7). The article does not begin with an entirely positive spin on the need for immigration; rather, it quite clearly points to the problems Canada will incur because of immigrants. While demographers such as David Foot from the University of Toronto and Rod Beaujot from the University of Western Ontario illustrate the essential need for immigration,

they also caution us on the potential backlash that could occur if we do not do a better job at integrating newcomers.

Canada needs immigrants. The fertility rate is below replacement rate and immigration is necessary to maintain current population levels. This is further exacerbated by the non-linear age distribution in the Canadian population, commonly referred to as the baby boomers. Young people are needed in the labour force to provide both professional and essential services. If the government is not motivated to bring immigrants and refugees to Canada for purely altruistic reasons, then maybe it is necessary to acknowledge its self interests and accept that the economic stability of Canada is dependent on immigration.

There are millions of displaced people in this world who are desperate to live in a democratic country where they are safe and free from persecution. Canada has a long history of immigration and compassion and it is time to respond to the needs of the world. This argument in no way implies that we do not continue to increase our responsibility to the needs of people who live in the developing countries, nor does it mean that immigration is a class-based process where we pick the most employable or the wealthiest and deplete the resources in country of origin. All classes of immigrants and refugee claimants need to be provided an equal opportunity for resettlement.

## Purpose of the Study

Literature related to refugees has typically focused on political, medical, social, and linguistic issues pertaining largely to adult populations. Less research has been conducted on the issues concerning refugee children and there is a paucity of

literature related to the unique issues of refugee children who have been affected by armed conflict. There is insufficient knowledge about the effects of conflict, the displacement of children, and the types of interventions that are needed to help children who have emigrated from countries affected by war. Because of the significant between-group differences between cultural groups and the diverse circumstances affecting refugees, it is difficult to determine commonalities and similarities between children's learning and development across the different contexts and settings in which they live (Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen, Frater-Mathieson, 2004). As such, general guiding principles for the development and assessment of instructional interventions for refugee children must be more clearly defined and educational policy should be developed to ensure that the needs of these children are addressed with the necessary support systems.

The purpose of this study was to identify the educational needs and challenges that war-affected children encounter while attending school in Manitoba. The various ecological systems that interact with one another to influence the personal, social, and academic development of the student were investigated. The pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration phases of the students' immigration to Canada were explored, with a particular focus on the post-migration phase. While examining the various ecological systems influencing the student, the study endeavoured to reveal how these ecological systems interact with one another to influence the individual's development. Factors that hinder and assist with the process of assimilation are identified as they are revealed in the data.

## Significance of the Study

This study contributes a greater understanding of the educational issues unique to youth from countries affected by war. The descriptive nature of this study elicits topics for further investigation and discussion about the current practices of educating these students in Canadian schools. Moreover, the exploratory nature of this study assists with improving our understanding of the various ecologies interacting and influencing the personal, social, and academic development of these students. Finally, the findings reveal how to best help these students adjust to a Canadian school. Practical strategies for assisting these students in educational systems are recommended and suggestions for helping students adjust to life in Canada emerge from the findings. The results from this study provide the empirical evidence to advocate for interventions in the classroom, the school building, within the school division, and in the community to better assist the refugee population in Canada.

## Overview of the Conceptual Framework

This study utilized Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model combined with the three phases of migration as outlined by Anderson et al. (2004). In addition, Portes and Zhou's (1993) theory of segmented assimilation, which considers the diversity of situations and patterns of assimilation into a new culture, provided the theoretical framework for examining the patterns of assimilation exhibited by the refugee youth. Combined, these three theories formed the overarching meta-framework for this study. The framework will be more fully explained in Chapter 2.

The pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration factors that influence the experiences and settlement of war-affected students were examined with the purpose of discovering both the factors that hinder, and facilitate, the students' transition to Canadian schools. Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1999) provided an appropriate schematic model in which to investigate the various ecological systems of war-affected children for the purpose of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the issues affecting their lives. Furthermore, the fundamental propositions put forth by Bronfenbrenner have been empirically tested to support his theoretical assertions. (Bronfenbrenner& Morris, 1999). Because of the vast array of experiences that characterize the lives of refugee children, and the significance of the pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration events and circumstances, the bioecological model provides a framework that will support the investigation of the individuals' experiences within his or her various and diverse ecosystems through the three points of time.

Anderson et al. (2004) reviewed literature related to educational interventions for refugee children using Bronfenbrenner's earlier concept of the Ecological Model and included the three phases including pre-migration, trans-migration and post-migration. Anderson et al. refer to their model as a "model of refugee adaptation and development" (p. 8). As they suggested, these points are all potential disruptions to the individual's development and to their ecological systems. Although the discussion by Anderson and her colleagues relates to the different ecological systems at various points in time, it does not include empirical evidence or research findings to fully conceptualize their assertions. Although the points in time are potential

disruptions in the ecological systems of the individual, the authors do not offer concrete examples to illustrate how and to what extent the ecology is affected. The connection to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory is largely descriptive in nature, and although it provides a common thread through their review of literature, it does not provide substantial insight into the ecological structures and the various factors that influence the child's development. As Bronfenbrenner (1999) noted, the "Ecological Model" model evolved into "The Bioecological Model" and it includes the four principal components of Process, Person, environment Contexts, and Time periods (PPCT) and their interactive relationships. This model is more fully explained in the discussion on Bronfenbrenner's theory in the following chapter.

Portes and Zhou (1993) identified three possible patterns of adaptation, namely, straight-line theory, upward mobility and ethnic solidarity, and downward spiral. The latter pattern is associated with cultural dissonance and conflict often resulting in the immigrant youth associating with "oppositional subcultures of marginalized peers" (Gibson, 2001, p. 21). As the literature review suggested, students whose needs are not being met by the school system, drop out of school or are pushed out of school. This pattern is referred to by Portes and Zhou as the downward spiral, which needs to be more fully investigated, and subsequently eliminated in this generation of refugees.

Portes and Zhou (1993), Portes and Rumbaut (2001) and Rumbaut and Portes (2001) make no distinction between the terms "refugee" and "immigrant," despite their reference to immigrants who have come from countries known to be affected by war. In addition, the concept of segmented assimilation was not studied in relation to

war-affected youth; instead it was used to examine second generation immigrants in America. Although their study was rigorous and comprehensive, the findings might vary when examined with participants who have specifically originated from countries affected by war. For example, many parents of war-affected children have been killed, and therefore, the situation of the first generation that immigrates is not relevant. Additional factors influencing assimilation may be revealed when specifically examining the ecological systems of war-affected youth. The basic structure purported by Portes and Zhou will be used as a starting point for the analysis of the factors that contribute to the three patterns of adaptation into Canadian school systems.

## Overview of the Methodology

The following discussion is an overview of the methodology that will be more fully developed in Chapter 3. This study is a qualitative case study using semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and focus group interviews. Using Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological framework, high school students were interviewed and their various ecological systems examined in an attempt to identify common trends and themes found in their various experiences. The purpose of using multiple sources of data collection is to gather insights from numerous informants, using a variety of sources, to construct the most comprehensive and thorough conceptualization of the lived experiences of the refugee students.

The student participants for this study were thirteen high school students who attended Walter Duncan School, an inner city school in Manitoba. Because the students spend in excess of six hours per day at school, the investigation of the

school as an ecological system was also relevant for the purpose of understanding the needs of these students. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the following 16 individuals from the school/home environment: 4 Teachers, 2 School Administrators, 2 Counsellors, 1 Resource Teacher, 2 Parents, 1 English as an Additional Language Teacher, 1 School Psychologist, 1 Community Liaison Worker, 1 Student representing a different culture, and 1 Work Program Coordinator.

Over 1,000 students, from diverse cultures and backgrounds, attended the school and there were over 100 students who had emigrated from countries affected by war. The students were purposefully selected and asked to volunteer to participate in the study. Each student was interviewed using a semi-structured interview format (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). To identify the participants, the researcher talked to the EAL teacher and asked her to identify six students who she considered to be adapting well to the school system, and six students who she considered to be having difficulty adapting to the school system. The purpose of using this sampling strategy was to attempt to balance the interviews between students who incur challenges and obstacles in school and those who were experiencing success in school.

To examine the role of the exosystem, two focus group discussions were conducted with participants from distant systems that could potentially indirectly influence the individual. In addition to the focus groups, three individual interviews were also conducted with participants who were unable to attend the focus group meetings. The participants in the first focus group included the following: the director of a counselling clinic, the executive director of a reception centre, a school counsellor from an elementary school in the surrounding area, an EAL teacher from

a middle years school in the school division, the EAL coordinator for the school division, and a representative from youth justice and coordinator of the immigrant street gang youth program. The participants in the second focus group included the following: the refugee counselling centre family counsellor, the refugee counselling clinic educational coordinator, a child welfare family service worker, a minister, and the divisional curriculum consultant. Individual interviews were conducted with two government consultants from education and with a divisional superintendent.

To gather general information regarding the psychosocial and educational needs of children affected by war, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts who work with war-affected children in the UK, Canada, and the United States. The purpose of interviewing these individuals was to acquire a more global context for the issues related to the psychosocial and educational needs of war-affected children and to examine the macrosystem. These interviews provided insight into what other school divisions and communities were doing to assist these students as well as valuable information on the ideologies or attitudes reflected in the three cultural systems. The experts were leading academic scholars in their respective countries. All of them had published articles in peer-reviewed journals or books that were directly related to either the psychosocial or the educational needs of refugee children while some had extensive practical experience working directly with refugee or asylum seekers in their host countries.

Other relevant documents were also collected, such as public documents related to school policy, photographs, newspaper articles, demographic reports, and educational resources.

This study employed a continuous process of sorting the data using suitable codes, and organizing the material into common themes and trends. The purpose of this study was not necessarily to prove or disprove theories, nor was it to generate new theory. The purpose of the analysis was to gain a more thorough understanding of the psychosocial and educational needs of the participants and to suggest recommendations that would better support the students' education. Although the process of analysis included expanding, discounting, or altering the stated theories, the overarching goal was to learn about the experiences of war-affected children and to understand how to best support their needs in Manitoba.

## Delimitations

This study confined itself to the interviewing and observing of the students and staff in one urban high school where there was a high student population of refugee students from the sub-Saharan African region, namely, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Liberia, and Sudan, as well as students from Afghanistan. So as not to risk losing meaning in translation through the use of an interpreter, the study was limited to participants who spoke English. The various people who interacted with these students were also limited to only 16 participants from the microsystem and 14 participants from the exosystem. Although the researcher made an attempt to sample participants from a variety of roles within the school and from a variety of backgrounds within the community, the number of participants was delimited and the scope of the study was confined to the selected number of participants.

Because this study was delimited to participants from only one high school, its findings can be only tentatively generalized beyond this population. The

purposeful sampling also decreases the generalizability of findings and the nature of the participants' responses to the various questions was delimited to their personal perspectives and opinions. Although the researcher assumed that the students were experts of their own experiences, their responses might not always be truthful. Moreover, issues related to trust between the researcher and the participants could also potentially limit the reliability of the data. Cultural differences between the student participants and the researcher could also contribute to mistrust. Because the researcher is Canadian, some participants in the study might have felt uneasy about recounting negative experiences they have had in Canada. In addition, they may not have wanted to share negative information about their countries of origin. Participants may also relate the role of the researcher to that of a teacher and this could have limited what they were willing to discuss. The participants were also limited to include only those students who were currently attending school.

The findings of this qualitative study could be subject to other interpretations that are inconsistent with the researcher's interpretations. The personal limitations and biases of the researcher could also influence the reliability of the data.

## Summary and Conclusion

In summary, the role of the school system should be to provide an appropriate education in a supportive environment. For the war-affected student, this process should involve an integrative and collaborative model to ensure that all of the bioecological factors and systems are considered. As the preliminary literature review revealed, there were structural, procedural, and educational voids in the system of supporting refugees in Canada. Without a careful examination of these

systems and factors, it is difficult to discern what educational interventions are needed, when they are needed, and in what context they should be provided.

The following section begins with the philosophical and theoretical foundation for the study. The fundamental principles put forth by critical theorists and the literature on social justice has informed the theoretical underpinnings of this study as well as the methods of inquiry. A subsequent discussion will follow, with regard to educational interventions for refugees and to theories of assimilation and immigration.

# 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature has been organized into two main sections: the philosophical foundation for the study and the theoretical framework for the study. The first section orients the reader to the philosophical positions and assumptions of the researcher. Originating from the fundamental principles put forth by critical theorists, the purpose of this study was to investigate how the Manitoba educational system responds to the needs of children who have been affected by war. The theoretical framework for the study originated from three distinct models. Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1999) provided the framework for the investigation into the psychosocial and educational needs of war-affected children. The Model of Refugee Adaptation and Development (Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen & Frater-Mathieson, 2004) was amalgamated with Bronfenbrenner's model to examine the points of potential disruption for refugee students and to also consider the typical points of major developmental changes in adolescence. The theory of Segmented Assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1993) provided the initial framework on which to understand the process by which refugee children adjust to or assimilate into the school culture.

## Philosophical Foundation of the Study

### *Critical Social Theory*

After the death of Karl Marx in 1883, it was evident that although flaws in capitalism were recognized, the proletarian revolution was not fully embraced. In 1917, Lenin led a revolt in Russia in conjunction with a small Communist Party. In

the wake of the Russian Revolution, in 1923, German intellectuals founded the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt. The Frankfurt scholars attempted to both respond to the critique of capitalism as well as to address the current social and political conditions. The Frankfurt School of critical theory emerged and has become one of the major instruments through which social reform, social theory and the message of socialism have been discussed. The first generation of critical theorists included Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, and Leo Lowenthal. The influence of the aforementioned theorists is widely recognized in educational systems throughout Europe, the United Kingdom and North America. Evidence of critical theory also emerged in the fields of economics, anthropology, sociology, history, political science, and psychology.

Stemming from Plato and from the modern Marxist and anti-colonialist thinkers were the contributions of Brazilian-born philosopher, Paulo Friere. In his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Paulo Friere criticizes the top down "banking model" of education. According to Friere, the banking concept of education considers the teacher as the authority of knowledge who deposits information upon those considered to know nothing. Friere asserts that the process of dialogue is what positions the needs, wants, and interests of marginalized people at the centre of their learning and what frees them from oppression. Liberating the oppressed requires "...the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (Friere, 1970, p.79). The fundamental goal of the dialogical process is to create a process of learning where the oppressed are positioned at the centre of the process. Friere states, "It is absolutely essential that the oppressed

participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as Subjects of the transformation" (p. 127).

Friere's arguments are particularly relevant to the assumptions underlying the design of this research project. Although Friere argues that the oppressed must be actively engaged in their own liberation, leadership or active facilitation of the process is still necessary. If researchers do not assume the role of facilitators of liberation, or worse, if they continue to promulgate the ideological characteristics of oppressors, little progress will be made towards social justice. Educational researchers must look for and expose the inequities they find in the school system; to do this, researchers must engage in dialogue with marginalized populations in an attempt to find strategies for the problems they discover.

*Critical Discourse in Educational Administration and Social Justice Leadership*

In 1974, Thomas Greenfield delivered a paper to the third International Intervisitational Programme which changed the field of educational administration. Greenfield renounced the view that organizations are distinct from the actions, feelings and purposes of people. Greenfield viewed organizations "as cultural artefacts dependent upon the specific meaning and intention of people within them" (Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993, p.4). His work ushered in a period of diverse epistemological standpoints and a plethora of topics, methods and issues related to educational studies (Greenfield & Ribbons, 1993). "In the 1970s and 1980s, faculties, schools, and departments of education in institutions around the world began to witness the emergence of more interpretivist accounts of phenomena in the social and organizational world" (Chapman, Sackney & Aspin, p. 91). The work of

Greenfield and those who subsequently worked within this view, embodied subjectivist views of knowing and understanding based on phenomenological or cultural views. Greenfield's counterpart is considered to be Richard Bates from Australia. (Donmoyer, 1999). Together, Bates and Greenfield fuelled debates about the knowledge base in educational administration and the practice of leadership that have continued for more than 30 years.

Richard Bates and Bill Foster both published noteworthy journal articles in 1980 that were particularly critical of school administration theory (Willower & Forsyth, 1999). Critical theory has contributed significantly to the conceptualization of leadership. Critical theorists view educational leaders as having a responsibility to develop organizations that nurture equity among stakeholders and autonomy amongst their members (Leithwood and Duke, 1999). Although the contributions of critical theory to the conceptualizing of leadership have been substantial, they have also been widely contested (Evers and Lakomski, 1991; Evers & Chapman, 1995; Griffiths, 1979).

The advancement of emancipatory interests is a fight for liberation. Moreover, it is a transformation of systems and people within the system to create a more just society. "Education becomes a radical project for economic, political, and cultural change in which relations of power are transformed" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993, p.24). More importantly, the purpose is to make a difference on the lives of students. Foster (1986) states:

> A critical theory of administration is necessary because a critical theory requires us to reflect on what we do and how what we do affects all who

> encounter us. A critical theory seeks the moral base of decisions and the effects of those particular decisions on the youngsters in our charge. It asks how our organization impedes the learning and progress of students. It asks how we, as individuals, can make a difference (p.70).

The fundamental principles put forth by critical theorists have informed much of the work related to social justice and the concept of Critical Social Theory. Theoharis (2007) refers to social justice leadership as those principals who make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other sources of marginalization central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision. Central to his argument is the notion that inclusive practices in schools are essential for systems to be socially just.

This qualitative study will be based on the philosophical assumptions of the emancipatory perspective (Creswell, 2003). The assumption is that this method of inquiry is intertwined with a political agenda, specifically, advocacy to help marginalized people. The concept of praxis (Friere, 1970) suggests that leaders move beyond theory to show how theory informs their actions and Critical Social Theory "calls educators to activism" (Brown, 2004, p. 86). This research assumes that the researcher will "proceed collaboratively so as to not further marginalize the participants as a result of the inquiry" (Creswell, 2003, p. 10). The underlying assumption in this study is that that the research will support change that liberates the children who are from war-affected countries. Moreover, changes that contribute to this liberation should occur in the participants (students, peers, teachers, community members) and the researcher. It is essential that educators learn about the issues

related to war-affected children and they are able to examine and challenge the current system to respond more adequately to the needs of these students.

Joseph Murphy, who is arguably one of the leading scholars in the field of educational administration, suggests (2002) that the future of educational administration lies in our ability to reculture the profession and focus on three anchors: social justice, democratic community and school improvement. Furman and Shields (2005) state, "Social justice and democratic community have become urgent concerns for educational scholars and practitioners" (p. 119). Scholarship and conversation on the topic of social justice have clearly become prominent in the field of educational administration. In the 2002 *Yearbook for the National Society for the Study of Education*, Murphy (2002) suggests that social justice be one of the three anchors on which to rebuild the entire profession. The *Journal of School Leadership* (Grogan, 2002) and *Educational Administration Quarterly* (Shields, 2004) both dedicated special issues exclusively to the topic of social justice. Some of this writing is in response to achievement gaps between white, middle and upper class students, children of colour, English language learners, and children from low-income homes (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Shields, 2004; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia & Nolly, 2004; Young & Laible, 2000). The accountability movement has documented the numerous unjust practices in our educational systems (Cambron-McCabe, 2006; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson & Koschoreck, 2001). That said, millions of students, every year, are not served well by our schools (Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002). Marshall and Oliva (2006) indicate that most of the students we are failing are from marginalized groups, for

example, children of colour, low-income students, students with disabilities, girls and women, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered students, and people from unfamiliar backgrounds or territories. Those who drop out of school generally become marginalized by their resulting limited opportunities (Marshall & Oliva, 2006).

Riehl and Firestone (2005) state, "An important function of research is to uncover and document what is happening from the perspective of those being ill served to publicize inequities in the existing system and advocate for the victims of the system" (p. 160). This research is firmly embedded in the scholarship of social justice that deliberately searches for a more equitable and just educational system for marginalized students. As Canadian school systems become increasingly more "multicultural," in relation to their population, they must also become more "multicultural" in their processes and interventions. School administrators must be at the forefront of change that transforms schools into more equitable and just places (Burns, 2003; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Theoharis, 2007).

## Theoretical Framework

### *Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model*

Urie Brofenbrenner's Bioecological Model is used as the theoretical framework for this research study. Urie Bronfenbrenner's seminal work in 1979, entitled *The Ecology of Human Development*, made significant contributions to the field of developmental psychology. The ecological model investigates the role of the environment in shaping human development through the life course (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). Bronfenbrenner believes that human development occurs in contexts or environments that are ever-changing. His theory purports that humans do

not develop in isolation; rather, they develop in relation to the various contexts or systems to which they belong throughout their life. According to Santrock (2001), Bronfenbrenner's theory bridges the gap between behavioural theories that focus on individuals in one setting, and anthropological theories that analyze larger settings.

In Bronfenbrenner's 1977 paper entitled *Lewinian Space and Ecological Substance,* he clearly acknowledges his debt to his mentor, Kurt Lewin. Lewin was a German psychologist, also associated with The Frankfurt School, who is often referred to as "the father of social psychology." Fleeing Germany in 1933, Lewin moved to London and subsequently America, where he continued his research on group dynamics and organizational development. Lewin's classic reminder is: "There is nothing so practical as a good theory" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 43).

One of Lewin's principle assertions is that behaviour evolves as a function of the interaction between the person and the environment, expressed symbolically as: $B = f(P,E)$ (Lewin, 1935 as cited in Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner further indicates that both elements of the equation, the person and the environment, should have equal emphasis. In his 1979 paper, Bronfenbrenner asserts that scholars focus too much on theory and research attributed to the person at the expense of focusing on the characteristics of the environment in which the person lives.

Two important distinctions of Bronfenbrenner's theory are that the person is both a producer and a product of development. Moreover, the individual and the environment are in a reciprocal relationship whereby the person is both influenced by the environment and also influences that environment. Secondly, the environment

is not a single entity; rather, it is the compilation of several multi-level environments and the interconnections between them. Bronfenbrenner (1979) states,

> The ecological environment is conceived as extending far beyond the immediate situation directly affecting the developing person – the objects to which he responds or the people with whom he interacts on a face-to-face basis. Regarded as of equal importance are connections between other persons present in the setting, the nature of these links, and their indirect influence on the developing person through their effects on those who deal with him at first hand (p. 7).

This fundamental principle will be examined in this study and the investigation will be focused on both the direct and the indirect interactions that children affected by war encounter in their immediate and more distant ecological systems. The reciprocal relationship between the child and the environment and the nature of these influences will also be explored.

Ecological Theory has evolved over the last three decades, partly in response to critics who called into question some of Bronfenbrenner's earlier claims. His theory was criticized because it did not focus enough attention on the biological and cognitive factors related to development. Bronfenbrenner acknowledged that his 1979 theoretical model was one-sided and relied too heavily on the influence of the environment at the expense of more attention to the role of the human organism in its development. Bronfenbrenner's most recent model makes a clear distinction between environment and process (Bronfenbrenner, 1999), and as such it is now called the Bioecological Model.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1999) note the bioecological model is a "more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment" (p. 996). Bronfenbrenner intentionally expands and differentiates the original conceptualizations in an effort to illustrate the practical application of his theory. Although the basic tenets of the theory remain unchanged, there is evidence that the model has become more complex and multifaceted through the years.

Bronfenbrenner and his colleagues continued to formulate his theory and to synthesize the features of the developing person into the ecological systems previously delineated. "Bronfenbrenner recognized that his theory would be incomplete until he included in it the levels of individual structure and function (biology, psychology, and behaviour) fused dynamically with the ecological systems he described" (Lerner, 2005, p. xiv). Bronfenbrenner anticipated that the model would continue to evolve. Although Bronfenbrenner passed away in the fall of 2005, researchers continue to conduct studies based on the theoretical underpinnings of the Bioecological Model and the Ecological Model.

Other well known developmental theories exist and are widely used in other research studies. For example, Kohlberg, Erickson, and Piaget delineated specific stages of development. Erik Erikson's 1968 theory, as cited in Santrock (2001), posits that development is comprised of eight stages ranging from trust versus mistrust (infancy) to integrity versus despair (late adulthood). Erikson theorizes that individuals pass through specific developmental stages, and with each stage they encounter an event that they must confront. This confrontation could result in both

positive and negative effects. The more effectively the individual deals with a confrontation, the healthier he or she will be. The individual learns how to deal with a confrontation, and then proceeds to the next phase of development, usually with new skills or strategies for solving problems or dealing with issues.

Based on the information gleaned from the literature review pertaining to the lived experiences of refugee children, a sequential or linear series of developmental stages did not appear to suit the purpose of this research. Instead, it was necessary to examine the individual not from within the perspective of rigidly defined developmental stages but, rather, as an individual who is part of a series of environments. Each individual's development is influenced by the interactions that he or she has within the various environments. Within this theoretical perspective, all of the experiences that could potentially affect or influence the child may be considered. A more comprehensive and holistic approach to understanding the student is possible using Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory.

One of the key criticisms of this theory is the lack of developmental stages, which for the purposes of this study, is seen as its most valued attribute. Uncertainty, turmoil, and crisis are ubiquitous in the lives of war-affected children. The investigation into their personal experiences and their educational needs requires a framework that is multi-dimensional and comprehensive so that it includes the many factors that could potentially impact the developmental stages of the child. Trauma, stress, and change disrupt the development of children, and a model to investigate these events must be flexible and adaptable enough to capture the appropriate data to meet the objectives of the study.

Anderson et al. (2004) adapted Bronfenbrenner's Ecological model to include three phases of migration: pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration. These three phases acknowledge the disruptions in the individual's life in addition to the other developmental or ecological changes (e.g., puberty, starting a new school year). Anderson et al. state, "The development of the refugee child is influenced by the ever-changing ecologies that surround and interact with the child, for the refugee child, the potential for major changes in the ecologies can occur due to pre-migration, trans-migration and post-migration factors" (p. 8). In addition to these phases of migration, there are also normal developmental changes that will be occurring simultaneously which will need to be considered in this study.

*The Ecology of Human Development*

Bronfenbrenner refers to the following as *Definition 1.* He states that this definition is the cornerstone of the theoretical structure of ecological theory.

> The ecology of human development is the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, *throughout the life course*, between an active, growing human being, and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1992, p. 188).

The aforementioned definition has remained unchanged since 1979, with the exception of the addition of the phrase identified by italics.

In the forward to Bronfenbrenner's most recent publication of a compendium of 19 critical papers related to the Bioecological Model, entitled *Making Human*

*Beings Human* (2005), Richard Lerner suggest that Urie Bronfenbrenner's ideas have "stood the test of time" and represent "fundamental concepts" found in developmental systems theories of human development. Lerner notes that Bronfenbrenner's "....singular role in this history has been to lead the way in specifying the necessary linkage between theory and application, between research and practice" (p. xii). Furthermore he states, "From the 1970s up to the present, this theory has evolved to provide fuller and more powerful understanding of the importance of the dynamic and multitiered ecology of human development" (p. xii).

*Defining Properties of the Bioecological Model*

The current conceptualization of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model is based on several defining propositions (Bronfenbrenner, 2001). Some of these defining properties date back to Bronfenbrenner's earlier writings, while others are relatively recent formulations. The following six propositions form the foundation for the Bioecological Model.

*Proposition 1.* Both subjective and objective elements contribute to development. Subjective or experiential features include emotions and motivations such as joy and sadness, love and hate, or desire and revulsion. Objective features are often referred to as how the environment is perceived or changed by individuals at different life stages such as infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and late-adulthood (Bronfenbrenner, 2001).

*Proposition 2.* Human development takes place through progressively more complex interactions between the individual and the persons, objects, and symbols in his or her immediate external environment. Bronfenbrenner (2001) refers to these

interactions as proximal processes. Examples of proximal processes might include learning a new skill, solving a problem, or acquiring new knowledge.

*Proposition 3*. Proximal processes which contribute to development include the "...joint function of the characteristics of the *developing person* (including *genetic inheritance*); of the *environment* – both immediate and more remote – in which the processes are taking place; of the nature of the *developmental outcomes* under consideration; and of the continuities occurring in the environment over *time*" (Bronfenbrenner, 2001, p. 7). This is referred to as a process-person-context-time model (PPCT) and includes the interactions with not only people, but also with objects and symbols. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1999) define development as "the stability and change in the biopsychological characteristics of human beings over the life course and across generations" (p. 995). This does not mean that development must represent the continuation of the individual's characteristics over a period of time, or that the changes are in the best interests of the individual.

*Proposition 4*. "In order to develop – intellectually, emotionally, socially, and morally – a child requires, for all of these, the same thing: participation in *progressively more complex activities*, on a regular basis over an extended period of time in the child's life, with one or more persons with whom the child develops a *strong, mutual emotional attachment, and who are committed to the child's well-being and development, preferably for life*" (Bronfenbrenner, 2001, p. 9).

*Proposition 5*. The emotional attachment with another individual leads to mutual ties and this further motivates the child's interest and engagement with the physical, social, and symbolic environment.

*Proposition 6.* The patterns of progressively more complex interaction with the parent and child depends on the availability and involvement of another adult. This adult may be another parent, or may be a third party, who assists and encourages the person who engages with the child. It is also helpful that this person is of the opposite sex from the person who is caring for the child because it offers more variety in the developmental tasks and activities of the child. Numerous sources of support are possible such as relatives, staff members of family support programs, friends, or neighbours. What appears to matter most is the support that this third person offers to the parent who engages most with the child, as opposed to the support this person provides to the child.

Bronfenbrenner (2001) offers three additional propositions that have received little scientific attention. First, Bronfenbrenner proposes that the psychological development of the parent is influenced by the development of his or her children. This reciprocal relationship is most pronounced when the child is living at home with his or her parents. Secondly, Bronfenbrenner proposes that attachment exhibits a reversal as time progresses. Children who were once the beneficiaries of their parents' commitment, become the providers. Lastly, Bronfenbrenner (2001) indicates that the assessment of developmental outcomes over an extended period of time is needed to reveal whether the processes being investigated are still valid, or whether alternative formulations should be considered to explain the observed phenomena.

These final propositions provided valuable insight for the design of this research study because they draw specific attention to the reciprocal development that occurs between the adult and the child. Most studies focus on the development

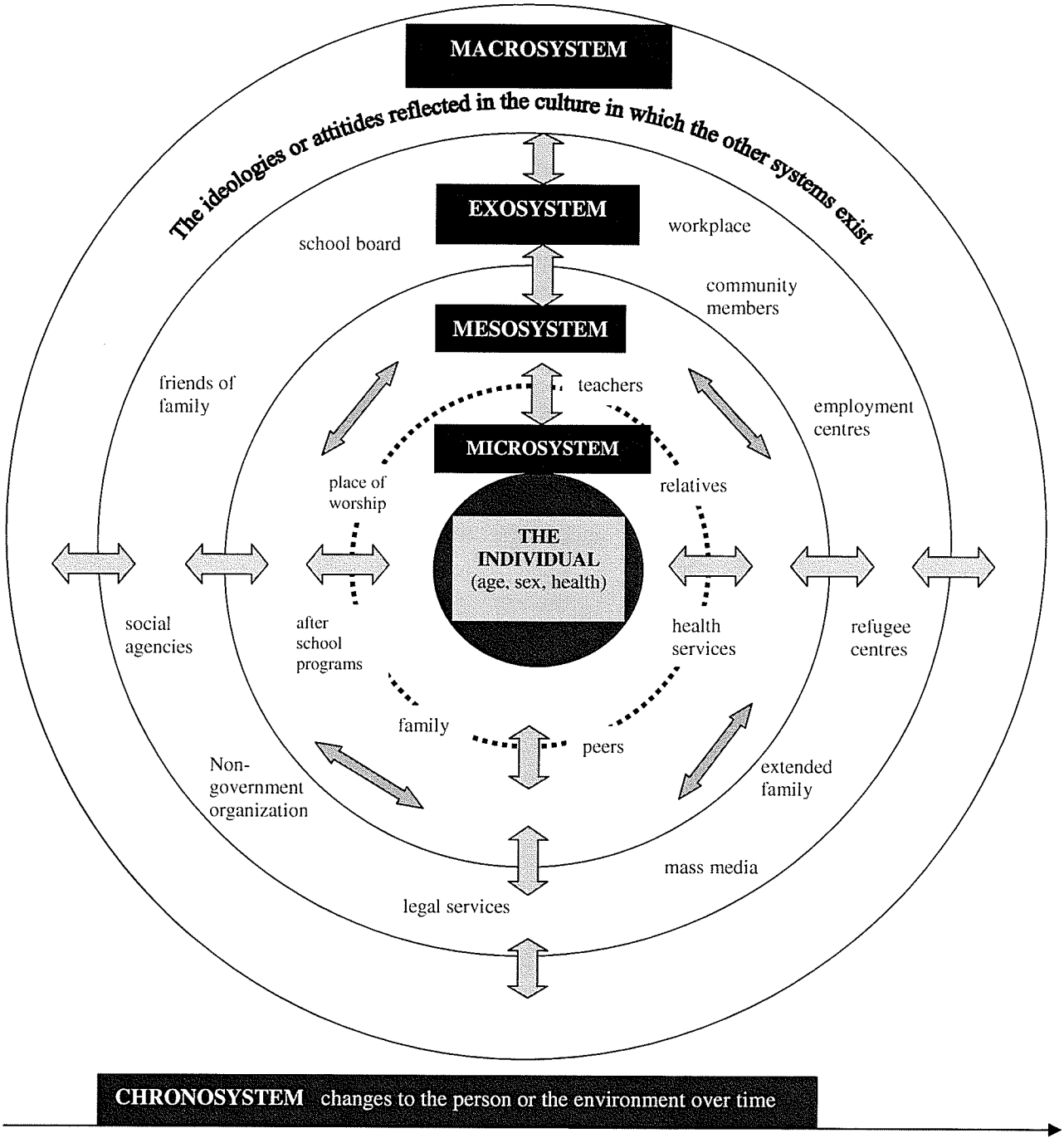
of the child as influenced by the adults in his or her environment; few consider the extent to which the child influences the adults in his or her environment.

*Environmental Systems*

Bronfenbrenner (1999) conceptualizes the ecological environment "as a set of nested systems ranging from the 'micro' to the 'macro'" (p. 11). Five environmental systems, ranging from the individual's family to the broader culture of society, provide a framework for the model. At the centre of the model are the individual and the specific characteristics that influence and shape the course of his or her development. See Figure 2.1. Bronfenbrenner refers to the five systems as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. These five systems were examined in relation to the refugee youths and their process of adjustment to Canadian society. Because of the interconnectedness of the model, it would be remiss to study the individual through only one system, specifically the school, in an effort to determine the educational interventions that would foster the psychosocial development of the refugee student. Not only did this model provide an organizational structure to the investigation, but it also provided insight into what systems needed to be involved, and what interventions needed to occur in order to provide both short-term and long-term assistance to these students.

In their recent chapter outlining a new agenda for research in educational leadership, Riehl and Firestone (2005) identify the need for conducting case studies that capture the comprehensive context of educational systems.

**Figure 2. 1. Bioecological Model**



They state, "As the focus of inquiry expands to include the thinking and actions of multiple actors, and as context becomes a more important object of study, it becomes necessary to capture a more complex slice of reality" (p. 164). Essentially, their assertion not only supports the method of data collection used in this study, but it also affirms the overarching comprehensive theoretical and conceptual framework for the research study. Driscoll and Goldring (2005) also discuss the importance of studying both schools and communities as contexts of learning. Moreover they assert, "Parents and community are central to supporting the development of human, social, and financial capital for schools and their students. Simultanelusly, newer perspectives suggest that schools could be and should be the engine for social change *in and of* communities" (p. 61). Although there are challenges involved in the process of investigating multiple contexts, research efforts that examine a broader and deeper context of education and its interrelated systems offer a more comprehensive design that can not be accomplished in single studies (Riehl & Firestone, 2005).

As the following discussion reveals, educational support will include the interactions of numerous systems that, to some degree, all influence the development of the individual. The following pages will define the five systems that comprise the Bioecological Model put forth by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1999) and will discuss the importance of examining these systems in the research study.

*Microsystem.* The microsystem represents the closest and most inner circle of relationships that the individual has with people, objects, or symbols in his or her immediate environment. "A microsystem is a pattern of activities, social roles, and

interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit, engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 1645). The microsystem is the immediate environment in which the individual lives and it includes the close interpersonal relations with the person's family, relatives, peers, teachers, or others who participate in the life of the developing person on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1999).

The Bioecological Model also emphasizes the interactions with objects and symbols as consequences of the microsystem. These processes vary considerably with the biopsychological characteristics of the person, the environmental contexts and the time periods in which development takes place. A central construct of the Bioecological Model is the assumption that there are biological factors and evolutionary process that both set limits and imperatives on the environmental conditions and personal experiences (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1999).

*Mesosystem.* The mesosystem refers to the linkages or connections between the various microsystems, or contexts. Examples might include the linkages between the school experiences and the family, or the family and the peer group. Bronfenbrenner (1979) states, "A mesosystem comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for the child, the relations among home, school, and neighbourhood peer group; for an adult, among family, work, and social life)" (p. 25). A mesosystem is formed whenever the individual moves into a new setting. The linkages or interconnections

may take on a variety of forms, both formal and informal. Experiences in one microsystem can have an effect on another microsystem. For example, if an individual has difficulty at home, he/she might also experience difficulty at school. Similarly, if a student experiences rejection by the community, he or she might also experience conflict with his or her peers.

*Exosystem.* The exosystem represents the events that occur in more distant systems that indirectly affect the experiences in the immediate context. Bronfenbrenner (1979) states, "An exosystem refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person" (p. 25). The exosystem might be comprised of friends of the family, community members, social agencies, or neighbours. What occurs in these more distant systems can indirectly influence the individual. For example, school board members have an integral role in determining the priorities for the school division, which indirectly affects the programs and services offered to children in the school. These programs could hinder or assist with the refugee child's development.

*Macrosystem.* The macrosystem represents the ideologies or attitudes reflected in the culture in which the other systems exist. This system includes the values, customs, and laws of the society. "The macrosystems refers to consistencies, in the form of content of lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, and exo-) that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26). In essence, the macrosystem refers to the homogeneity found within the same

culture, such as the roles and relations in the particular settings, the types and kinds of settings, and the organization and content of activities in the settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Although the various sub-cultures may differ slightly, there are commonalities that are found internally within the culture.

*Chronosystem.* The chronosystem refers to the changes in an environment that occur over the time that the individual lives. These developmental changes are triggered by life events or experiences which occur both internally, within the individual (e.g., puberty), or externally, in the environment (e.g., birth of a sibling) (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). "Whatever their origin, the critical feature of such events is that they alter the existing relation between person and environment, thus creating a dynamic that may instigate developmental change" (Bronfenbrenner, 1992, p. 201). The most notable of environmental changes for refugee children is most certainly the transition to a new country. The move to a new country will likely be accompanied by changes in the child's social class, family structure, and system of education. Long-term changes will also occur with the individual as he or she adjusts to a new culture. These changes could quite possibly occur throughout the rest of his or her life (e.g., career, marriage, changing family dynamics).

*Three Phases: Pre-migration, Trans-migration, Post-migration*

Because of the vast array of experiences that characterize the lives of refugee children, and the significance of the pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration events and circumstances, the Bioecological Model provided a framework that supported the investigation of the individual within his or her ecosystem. The pre-migration experience for some individuals might have included witnessing the

death of family members, sexual violence, torture, or other forms of trauma. Some individuals had formal education, while others had none. For some refugee students, their first experience with formal education in a school setting will occur in their host country. Although coming from countries affected by war, some individuals might not have had as much direct contact with violence as others. Some children may have been recruited into armed rebel groups and suffered extreme violence, while others may have witnessed violence against others. By not including the pre-migration phase in the research, an entirely different dimension to the study would have been omitted.

The trans-migration experiences also differ amongst refugees; this may range from the planned and organized relocation of an intact family sponsored by a government agency, to the abrupt relocation of an unaccompanied minor who must leave for personal safety. Trans-migration may range from days, months, or even years (Rutter, 2003, 2006; UNHCR, 2005). Both the trans-migration and the pre-migration phases include experiences that can potentially influence post-migration and, for this reason, it was imperative that they be considered in the design of this research study.

Post-migration experiences include the events or activities that occur upon the arrival of the refugee in Canada. Although the participants all attended, or recently attended the same high school, they all differed both in the ecologies with which they interacted and the experiences that they had within these various systems. Factors such as family support, language acquisition, cultural beliefs, personal health, and support from social services and transition agencies were unique to each

individual. This study identified common factors that both hindered and facilitated the process of adjustment to the Manitoba school system. This integrative and multi-dimensional framework provided a structure in which to identify common themes and trends found across the variety of experiences, as well as a method to examine the relationships and links between these themes.

The model supported the investigation of the individual and the examination of the factors that influenced his or her life as he or she moved from one country to another. Because the pre-migration experiences that children and youth have had prior to coming to Canada are so unique, and in many cases traumatic, understanding the individual from this perspective was paramount to the research. For most individuals, environmental changes occur gradually over time, but for the refugee, these changes are more sudden and occur at all levels of the individual's environments, ranging from micro to macro.

Changes for some refugee children, in particular war-affected children, occur in almost all aspects of their lives: family structure, schooling, community, friends, culture, and the overarching society in which they live. Bronfenbrenner's model provides a framework in which to examine all of the environments that affect the individual as well as how these environments are connected to, and influence, each other. The basic premise of the bioecological theory is that "development is a function of the forces emanating from multiple settings and from the relations between these settings" (Bronfenbrenner, 1999, p. 17). Combining this framework with the three phases of a refugee's migration to a host country (Anderson et al., 2004) provides the most comprehensive illustration of the unique experiences of

these students as well as insight into their psychosocial and educational needs. The knowledge derived from this investigation provides insight into how best to assist these students using an integrative systems approach at all three phases of migration.

The students' adjustment to the Manitoba school system is examined using the theory of Segmented Assimilation developed by Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou. A discussion of the tenets of this theory will be provided in the following section.

### *Segmented Assimilation*

The concept of Segmented Assimilation was first introduced by Portes and Zhou (1993) and then further expanded as a result of data that was colleted by Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) conducted by Portes and Zhou during the 1990s on both coasts of the United States. Over 5,200 youths from several different nationalities were followed throughout their high school years. Portes and Zhou discovered that there were many contingencies and too many variables to suggest a straightforward path to assimilation. Rumbaut and Portes (2001) state,

> Instead, the present second generation of children of immigrants is better defined as undergoing a process of segmented assimilation which outcomes vary across immigrant minorities and in which rapid integration and acceptance into the American mainstream represent just one possible alternative (p. 6).

Zhou (1997) asserts, "Segmented assimilation theory offers a theoretical framework for understanding the process by which the new second generation – the children of contemporary immigrants – becomes incorporated into the system of stratification in the host society and the different outcomes of this process" (p. 975).

Rumbaut and Portes (2001) identified four factors that contribute to the pattern of assimilation: (a) the situation of the first generation that immigrates; (b) the pace at which parents and children acculturate: (c) cultural and economic barriers confronted by immigrant youth; and (d) the available resources needed to confront the challenges and obstacles. The political situation surrounding the first generation and the receptiveness of the host county was found to be a major factor contributing to assimilation (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001). In addition, the size and structure of the pre-existing co-ethnic communities were also relevant (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Three social factors that newcomers experience that contribute to their vulnerability to downward assimilation are colour, location, and the absence of mobility ladders.

Three major challenges to educational achievement and career success of children of immigrants have been delineated by several authors: (1) the persistence of racial discrimination; (2) the bifurcation of the American labour market; and, (3) the consolidation of marginalized people in the inner city (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Portes et al., 2005). Together, these factors contribute to the educational achievement and ultimately the pattern of assimilation for the immigrant child.

The issue of discrimination was examined in this study, with specific questions posed to the participants about the extent of racism and discrimination they have experienced or witnessed within their various ecological systems. McBrien (2005) found that some Muslims become more obvious to the students in a host country when they wear religious attire, when they pray during the day, or when they fast for Ramadan. McBrien states, "As a result, this stigmatized part of their identity

is conspicuous and likely to bring rejection and discrimination from many members of the host culture. Rejection corresponds to a greater likelihood of school dropout" (p. 336).

The second social challenge for immigrant youth is the change in economic situation in the host country. Portes and Zhou (1993) refer to an economic hourglass, where a narrow bottleneck exists between the occupations requiring advanced training and the impoverished groups at the bottom who have little or no training and who have attained a low level of education. Many of the children of new immigrants aspire to achieve the same as their American peers, which means they must have the necessary resources to acquire advanced training and to cross the narrow bottleneck to the jobs which will lead to upward mobility and higher paying jobs. To summarize the concept of the hourglass labour market, Portes et al. (2005) state, "In this changed market, high demand exists at the low end for unskilled and menial service workers and at the high-end, for professionals and technicians, with diminishing opportunities in between" (p. 1007). This bifurcated labour market suggests that children of immigrants must receive advanced training and skills if they want to improve on their parents' educational attainment. The reality faced by many immigrants is the lack of resources in which to support advanced education and training.

The third challenge for children of immigrants is the area of the city in which they live and the nature of the ecological system in which they interact on a continuous basis. Portes and Zhou (1993) suggest that immigrants often settle in inner-city neighbourhoods where they are typically in close contact with native-born

minority individuals. This means they are often associated with the native poor, which exposes the children to the "adversarial subculture developed by marginalized native youth to cope with their own difficult situation" (Portes & Zhou, 1993, p. 83).

The in-depth examination of the participants' microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem examined the location of the ecological environments and investigated how the refugee participants were perceived by others in the environment as well as the extent to which they were affected by the subculture that Portes and Zhou (1993) alluded to in their study.

Particular factors must be discussed which outline how the participants in Portes and Zhou's study differ from the participants in this study. Portes and Zhou's data were derived exclusively from children who were second generation immigrants. In other words, their parents previously immigrated and most of this second generation was born in America or were brought to America at a very young age. This contrasts with the adolescent participants in this study, who have immigrated to Canada within the past four years. The entry of these students into Canada occurred in late childhood or early adolescence. In addition, some of the participants in this study arrived in Canada without their parents. Having originated from war-affected countries, many of these children no longer have parents, or in some cases their parents have sent them to Canada with the hope of providing their child a better life, free from violence. Some have arrived in Canada as unaccompanied minors, while others have arrived with members of their extended family or with another appointed guardian. While Portes and Zhou's theory examines the assimilation of the individual to the context of society in general, this

study focused more on the students' adjustment to a particular school environment. Another important distinction is that Portes and Zhou's study was conducted in America, which again could potentially differ in many respects from Canadian culture.

Another critical difference that must be mentioned is that there is a clear distinction between the term "immigrant" and the term "refugee." Many immigrants in Portes and Zhou's study wilfully chose America as a country of resettlement. Most came to America in search of a better way of life (Portes & Zhou, 2001). This contrasts with the situation of the refugee children in this study, of which many were forced to flee their countries without any choice as to where they were to be located. In addition, Portes and Zhou's study does not focus on psychosocial issues affecting the child as an additional factor that will challenge his or her adaptation into his or her host country.

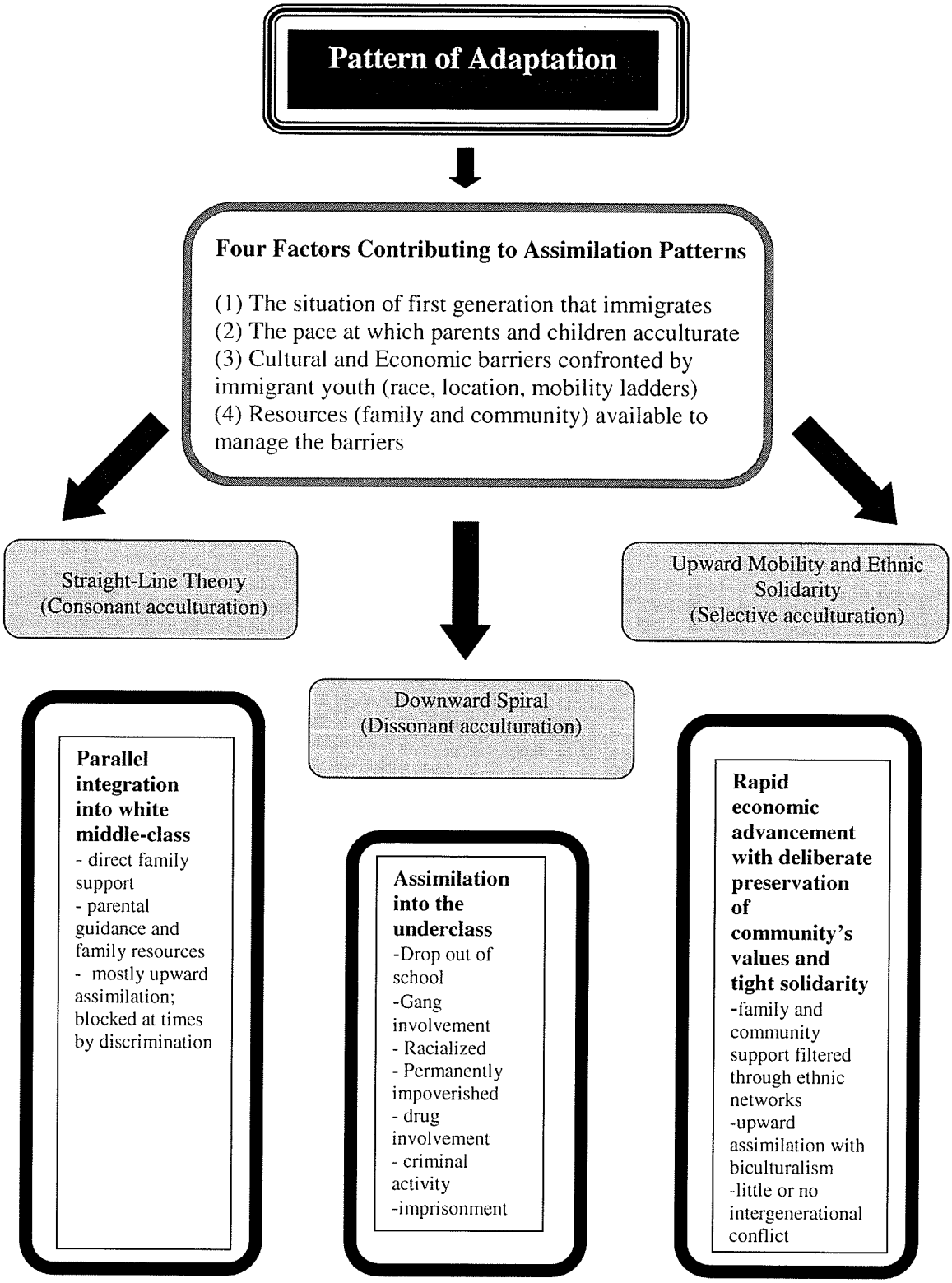
Having outlined the various factors that make this study different, there are also numerous factors, related to the theory of segmented assimilation, that render it a useful theory for examining the various factors contributing to the process of adaptation for refugee children. Using Portes and Zhou's (1993) conceptualizations of the three forms of assimilation and the factors that influence adaptation into American society, provides an initial framework for the purpose of analyzing the data. The theory of segmented assimilation is also supported by extensive empirical support from their longitudinal study as well as studies conducted by other researchers, who have confirmed many of their assertions (Gibson, 1998; Hirschman, 2001; McBrien, 2005; Nunez, 2004).

The theoretical framework proposed by Portes and Zhou (1993) includes three possible patterns of assimilation: straight-line theory, upward mobility, or downward spiral. See Figure 2.2

Straight-line theory refers to the pattern in which immigrants assimilate into the white middle-class majority (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997). This pattern is one of growing acculturation and paralleled integration into the white middle class. Examples used to illustrate this concept are the European immigrants who arrived in America post- World War II. Straight-line theory is also referred to as "consonant acculturation" (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001). The second path is that of upward mobility and ethnic solidarity which is associated with "rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community's values and tight solidarity" (Portes & Zhou, 1993, p. 82). This second path is referred to as "selective acculturation" (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001).

The last pattern of adaptation leads to "permanent poverty and assimilation into the underclass" (Portes & Zhou, 1993, p. 82).This unsuccessful pattern is associated with cultural dissonance. Children associated with this pattern of assimilation often acquire language skills much faster than their parents, join oppositional peer groups consisting of other marginalized peers, and they often reject the culture of their parents as they adopt more American values. Family conflicts increase as the values of the parents differ from those of their child. This pattern is also referred to as "dissonant acculturation" (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

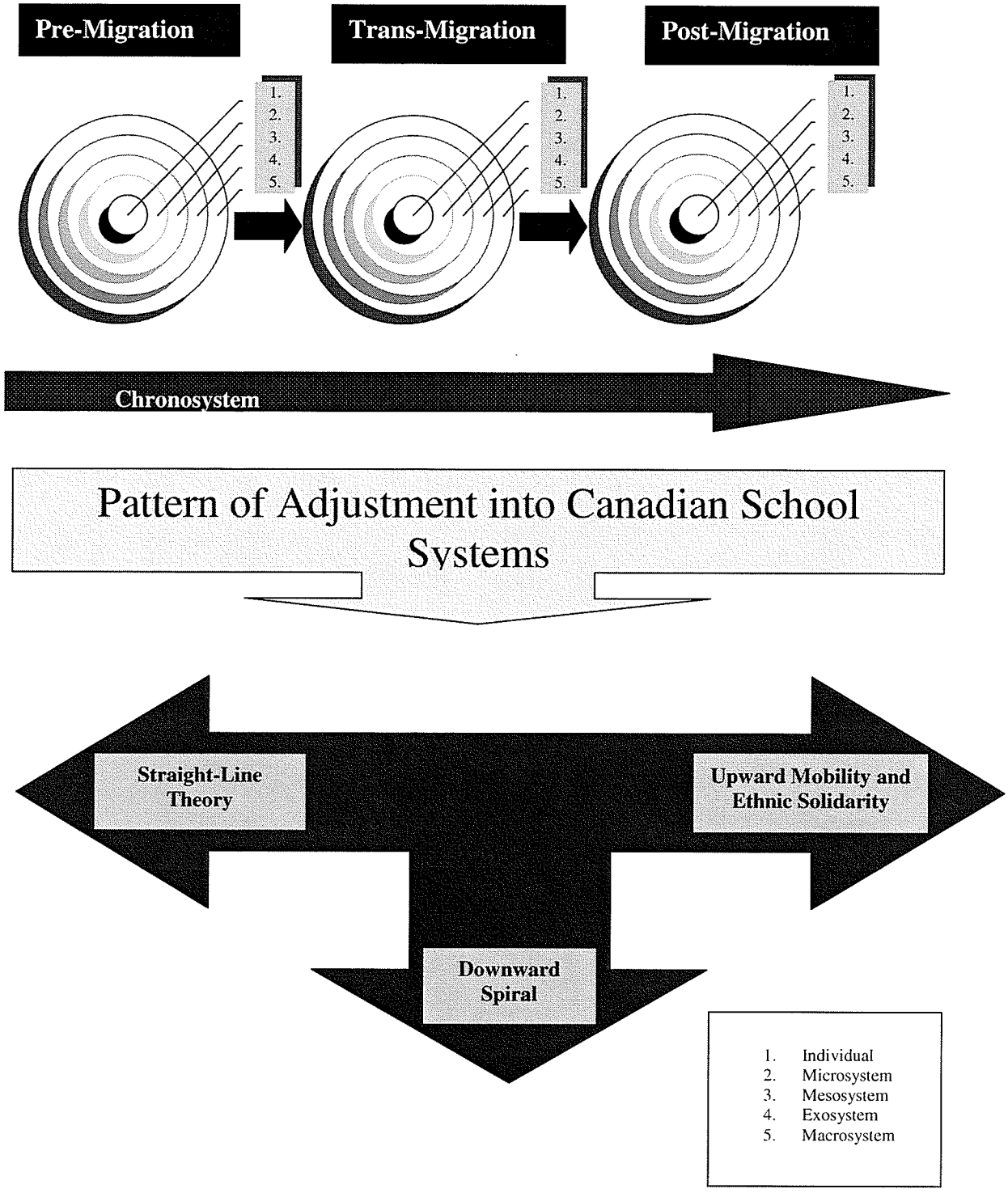
**Figure 2.2. Segmented Assimilation Model**



Knowing what leads to the pattern of a downward spiral of assimilation may assist with the development of programs, services or support networks that can prevent or limit this occurrence. While most refugees aspire to the lifestyles of the upper middle class (Portes, Fernandez-Kelly & Haller, 2005), it is clear that not everyone will achieve this outcome "...at the opposite end of society, there is a very unenviable scenario of youth gangs, drug-dictated lifestyles, premature childbearing, imprisonment, and early death" (Portes et al. 2005, p. 1004).

The overarching framework for this study included the tenets of Bioecological Theory as illustrated in Figure 2.1, combined with the three phases of migration, as outlined in the model of refugee adaptation and development by Anderson et al. (2004), as well as the Theory of Segmented Assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1993, 1997). See Figure 2. 3.

**Figure 2.3. Conceptual Framework**



## Research Questions

The research questions were informed by the recent report released by MacKay and Tavares (2005) from Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, who assert that there is a lack of programming for war-affected children which often leads to falling out of the school system which further marginalizes the student and accentuates the challenges they face when adapting to a new society and educational system. Consistent with the purpose of the research as well as the philosophical and theoretical frameworks, the following general and specific research questions were used to guide the investigation:

1. What are the pre-migration, trans-migration and post-migration experiences of war-affected children who immigrate to Manitoba?

2. What are the challenges and problems that confront war-affected children who attend a high school in Manitoba?

3. What systems, structures, or programs assist with the process of adjustment for a war-affected child who now attends school in Manitoba?
(a) Who are the people who support the children from war-affected countries and what do they do to help?
(b) What factors help students adjust to Canadian schools?

4. To what extent do the various ecological systems interact with each other to influence the refugee student's personal, social, and academic development?
(a) Who makes up the various ecological systems that influence the child's development?
(b) How is the student affected by the various ecological systems?
(c) How are the individuals in the ecological systems affected by the student?

The first general research question was developed by integrating Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model with the three points of potential disruption for refugee children, (pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration) as delineated by Anderson et al. (2004). The experiences that students have during

various stages of migration may provide insight into their present day experiences. For this reason, the various stages of migration were explored.

Research questions two and three were a direct result of reading the literature that reveals that school systems must recognize and respond to the unique psychosocial and educational needs of war-affected children. To do this, it is essential to first understand the challenges that these students encounter in Manitoba schools. Moreover, as a multitiered system, it is necessary to explore the systems, structures and programs that will contribute to the successful adaptation of war-affected children into the school systems of Manitoba.

Segmented Assimilation Theory (Portes, Fernandez-Kelly & Haller, 2005; Portes & Zhou 1993; Zhou, 1997) formed the basis for the second and third subsidiary research questions 3(a) and 3(c). Although Portes and Zhou (2001) have identified four factors that contribute to the three assimilation patterns, this study focused primarily on cultural and economic barriers and on family and community resources available to the refugee student.

Portes and Zhou's (2001) three patterns of assimilation were examined in relation to how the students adjusted to school in Manitoba. As the study progressed, it became clear that the concept of "assimilation" did not seem to fit the data being gathered. What became more evident was a process of adjustment that the student exhibited; moreover, the participants themselves used this language to describe what they were experiencing post-migration. Having said this, "patterns of adjustment" more appropriately described the phenomenon being examined at this particular time in the students' lives.

The fourth general research question and three subsidiary research questions provided the framework to examine the interconnectedness of the various ecological systems as well as the influence these systems have on the individual student. In addition, Bronfenbrenner (1999) asserts that the person and the environment are in a reciprocal relationship and as such, a question was developed to examine how the student influences his or her environment and how that environment also influences the individual's development.

## Definitions of Terms

In addition to the previously stated definitions embedded in the discussions related to the conceptual framework, the following terms related to this study are defined.

### *Acculturation*

The process of cultural change and adaptation that occurs when an individual comes into contact with a different culture.

### *Adjustment*

Adjustment is a life-long process whereby the individual changes his or her behaviour in order to create a more harmonious relationship with the environment. The term denotes a multi-dimensional and reciprocal process of change made by the individual who interacts with their physical and social environment. The environment must also adjust to meet the needs of the individual. Adjustment relates to a balance between an individual's needs and his or her level of satisfaction as well as the needs of the social environment.

*Assimilation*

Assimilation refers to the merging of cultural traits from a previously distinct cultural group to another culture which is usually more dominant. The process whereby a minority individual gradually adopts the customs and attitudes of another culture is referred to as cultural assimilation.

*Child*

For the purposes of this study the definition of "child" will be consistent with the definition adopted in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which states, "A child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier" (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989). The focus for this research study will centre on children who are at the high school level, ranging from the ages of 15 to 19. The participants in this study were affected by war when they were a "child"; however, at the time of the study, some were over 19. For the purposes of consistency, each adult fitting into this category will be referred to as a child.

*Immigrant*

An immigrant is a person who becomes a permanent resident of another country that is not his or her native land. A refugee may be considered an immigrant, but the term immigrant does not necessarily mean that the person is also a refugee. One can be an immigrant but not be considered a refugee.

*Psychosocial Effects of War*

Studies conducted in the field of child and adolescent psychology and psychiatry were particularly useful for reviewing the literature related to the psychological and social effects of war on children. The term 'psychosocial' notes

the relationship between both the psychological and the social effects that influence each other. Machel (2001) refers to the psychological effects as those that affect emotion, behaviour, thoughts, memory, learning ability, perceptions and understanding. Relationships altered by death, separation, estrangement and other losses, family and community breakdown, damage to social values and customary practices, and the destruction of social facilities and services are all considered to be social effects. The economic capacity of the family that has been affected by war is also considered to be a social effect.

*Refugee*

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is an international agency committed to the protection and assistance of the refugee population. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as:

> Someone with a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it (UNHCR, p.16).

The term "refugee" has evolved since it was first defined and it now encompasses children who have fled conflict and who are seeking asylum. Asylum

seekers are people who have crossed an international border for reasons of securing their personal safety.

### *War-affected Children*

With over 30 wars world-wide occurring at the present time (War Strategy, 2006), and the unique circumstances surrounding these conflicts, this study will limit the scope of the investigation to children originating from Afghanistan and the sub-Saharan African regions including: Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Liberia, and Sudan (See Appendix A for a geographical map of Africa). Although the historical, political, and economic factors of these various countries differ and generalizations can not be made amongst the cultural groups, the particular countries from Africa and Afghanistan share some commonalities, to be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 4.

## Summary and Conclusion

This chapter began with a discussion on the overarching philosophical orientation for the proposed study. Originating from the tenets of Critical Theory, an argument is developed that suggests we are obligated, as Canadian citizens, to ensure that all children receive an appropriate education, including those children who have begun life from a position of social disadvantage. The overarching framework for this study was developed by combining Bioecological Theory with three phases of migration as outlined in the Model of Refugee Adaptation and Development. Portes and Zhou's Theory of Segmented Assimilation posits three possible patterns of adaptation that will be investigated in relation to this study. Although the participants

in Portes and Zhou's theory differ from the participants in this study, there are also many similarities between the two. Moreover, the insights provided in relation to immigrant children and how they adjust to American society offer a starting point from which to examine the specific and unique needs of war-affected children and how they adapt to educational systems in Canada.

The following chapter will outline the method that was employed to establish the research questions. In addition, the process of gathering, managing, analyzing and reporting the data for this study will also be discussed. Specific ethical concerns, related to the type of research and the method of data collection, will also be presented.

# 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter will begin with a discussion of the characteristics of qualitative research, including specific characteristics that relate to this research study. The overall design of the research study will be discussed and will include the research questions, the data collection strategies as well as the procedures that were used for analyzing the data.

This study included the use of four primary data collection strategies: forty semi-structured interviews, two focus group interviews, document analysis, and follow-up telephone interviews. The following discussion focuses on the advantages and disadvantages of using each method of data collection. The purpose in doing this is to understand fully the limitations of each strategy and to understand how the way in which the data were collected might potentially influence the type of information collected and how this might have influenced the reported findings.

The assumptions of the researcher are noted and specific strategies that were used to manage the data are outlined. Ethical issues related to this study, and the potential risks to the participants are also examined.

## The Qualitative Perspective

A qualitative approach using a case-study design was implemented in this research study. Several constructs are used to describe qualitative research (e.g., Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 1998, 2003; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Wolcott, 2001). To begin, qualitative researchers are concerned with the meanings people attach to things in their lives. This study attempted to understand refugee children in

the various systems in which they belong. The various ecological systems interact with the individual and are reciprocally influenced by the individual; as such, the individuals who interact with the participants within the various ecological systems will provide valuable insight that must also be considered to understand fully the issues. The role of the researcher is to put aside his or her personal perspectives and views of the world in an attempt to understand the experiences through the lives of the participants.

Secondly, qualitative research is inductive. The design of this research was flexible and allowed for the reformulation of research questions to address the purposes of the study. Although the questions were not necessarily reformulated, they were refined as the study progressed. As the researcher spent more time in the settings with the participants, more questions emerged. Although the research was based on a theoretical framework, "...the goal of qualitative research is to make sure the theory fits the data and not vice versa" (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998, p. 8). As various themes evolved throughout the study, it became necessary to further investigate several issues to ensure that the phenomenon being discussed was as concise and accurate as possible.

In qualitative methodology, the researcher looks at settings and people holistically; people, settings, or groups are not reduced to variables, but are viewed as a whole. This study examined participants in relation to the various ecological systems that influenced their lives. The intent of this research was to understand the participants' lives through learning about their struggles and challenges, their successes, and their hopes for the future.

Next, qualitative researchers emphasize the meaningfulness of their research. By observing students in their ecological environments, it was possible to acquire firsthand data by listening to the participants and through observing their day-to-day activities. Throughout the data collection phase the researcher worked in a teacher preparation room. By doing this, she was able to talk informally with many of the participants in the microsystem and acquire valuable data that might not have been included during a more formal interview.

Finally, for the qualitative researcher, there is something to be learned in all settings and groups. Integral to this study was the investigation of the participants through various ecological systems. Because of the multi-dimensional and interactive nature of the ecological systems, insight about one system yielded important considerations for another. Brief and informal encounters with the students and the school staff also contributed valuable data for this study. As a supplementary activity to support the interviews, students were given the opportunity to take pictures of people and objects in their ecological systems. The pictures were discussed in a follow-up interview with the students who chose to partake in this activity. The aforementioned characteristics of qualitative research illustrate the overarching suitability of the chosen design to the stated purposes of the research.

This study was not intended to include a full and comprehensive examination of all of the various systems in the students' lives, as this would clearly extend beyond the scope of one research project. It was, however, intended to provide a snapshot in time of the various ecological systems that interact with the student and influence his or her development.

## Data Collection

Table 3.1 illustrates the research design which includes the four general research questions and several accompanying specific research questions. The data collection techniques that were used to answer each research question are listed in the third column of the table. Interview protocol forms are included in Appendix B, C, and D with the specific interview questions that answered each research question. Information for the purposes of developing a profile of the school was gathered from the interviews with the school administrators. See Appendix E. Interview protocols for the Focus Groups are included in Appendix F and interview protocols for the Expert Group is included in Appendix G. Listed with the data collection strategies are the corresponding forms (F1, F2, F3, F4) that were used to answer the research questions. The specific interview questions that relate to each research question and the corresponding data collection strategy are included in parentheses and italics, following the form. This process was used to ensure congruence between the four research questions, the data collection techniques and the specific interview questions.

Form one relates to the interviews that were conducted with the thirteen students from Walter Duncan School. Form two consists of the interview questions that were posed to sixteen participants from the microsystem. Two additional questions were added to the questions directed to the administrators in order to gather more specific demographic information about the school. Student participants were asked to identify people from their microsystem, who they thought would also be appropriate to interview for this study.

**Table 3.1. Research Design**

| | Children Affected by War: A Bioecological Investigation into their Psychosocial and Educational Needs and An Examination of their Patterns of Adjustment to a Manitoba School System | |
|---|---|---|
| | **The purpose of this study is to examine the psychosocial needs and the educational challenges that children affected by war encounter while attending a Manitoba school.** | |
| | GENERAL AND SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS | DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES |
| Research Question 1 | What are the pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration experiences of war-affected children who immigrate to Manitoba? | Student Interviews (N=13), F1- *(Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4)* Interview of Participants from the Microsystem (N=16) *(Q1)* Expert Interviews (N=8) F4, *(Q1)* |
| Research Question 2 | What are the challenges and problems that confront war-affected children who attend a high school in Manitoba? | Student Interviews (N=13), F1- *(Q5, Q9)* Interview of Participants from the Microsystem (N=16), F2, *(Q2)*, Focus Group Interview/ Exosystem (N=14), F3, *(Q1)*, Document Analysis, Expert Interviews (N=8), F4, *(Q1, Q7)* |
| Research Question 3 | What systems, structures, or programs assist with the process of adjustment for war-affected children who now attend school in Manitoba? (a) Who are the people who support the children from war-affected countries and what do they do to help? (b) What factors help students adjust to Canadian schools? | Student Interviews (N=13), F1- Q6, Q7, *Q8, Q9, Q10, Q11)*, Interview of Participants from the Microsystem (N=16).F2- *(Q3, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q10, Q11)* Focus Group Interview/Exosystem (N=14), F3, (Q2, Q6), Expert Interviews (N=8), F4 *(Q2, Q6)* Document Analysis. |
| Research Question 4 | To what extent do the various ecological systems interact with each other to influence the refugee student's personal, social, and academic development? (a) Who makes up the various ecological systems that influence the child's development? (b) How is the student affected by the various ecological systems? (c) How are the individuals in the ecological systems affected by the student? | Student Interviews (N=13), F1*(Q7, Q8)* Interview of Participants from the Microsystem (N=16), F2-*(Q4, Q5, Q6)*, Focus Group Interview/Exosystem (N=12), F3, *(Q3, Q4, Q5)*, Expert Interviews (N=8), F4 *(Q3, Q4, Q5)*. Document Analysis. |

Question number seven, in the student interview, provided the basis for providing this information. The two people identified by the students were the work program coordinator and one of the teachers. Form three includes the questions posed to the focus group participants and form four includes the questions posed to the expert group.

The research activities covered a six-month period of time from November, 2006 to April, 2007. This study employed multiple forms of data collection

including: individual face-to-face interviews, follow-up telephone interviews, document analysis, and focus group interviews. The following section will begin with a description of the process for recruiting the participants and acquiring consent to take part in the study. A profile of the school site will be provided and specific details on each collection strategy will be described as it related to the study.

### *Recruitment of Participants*

To identify the student participants, the researcher spoke to the school's English as an Additional Language (EAL) teacher and asked her to identify a total of 13 students who could be possible participants in the study. The researcher asked her to choose six students who she would consider to be adjusting well to the school system, and six students who she would consider to be having difficulty adjusting to school. One student had originally declined to participate and then later changed his mind. For this reason, an additional student was added to comply with his request. It was imperative that all the students had a basic understanding of conversational and written English so that an interview could be conducted. Only the names of the students were provided to the researcher, not the details of their individual circumstances, nor the category of classification (having/not having difficulty adjusting). The teacher was asked to keep the students' personal information to herself and not to divulge it to the researcher. The criteria for students to be considered "adjusting well" included: (1) regular school attendance; (2) no major school disciplinary/behavioural concerns; (3) some family or peer support; and (4) some level of academic progress. The criteria for students to be considered as "having difficulty adjusting" included any or all of the following: (1) infrequent

attendance at school, (2) little or no family support; (3) little or no progression in academic skills; and, (4) behavioural concerns (e.g., school suspensions). These characteristics reflect the characteristics of what Portes and Zhou (1993) refer to as 'downward spiral' or cultural dissonance. The purpose of using this sampling strategy was to attempt to balance the interviews between students who were adjusting well to school and those who were having difficulty adjusting.

The researcher asked the EAL teacher to introduce the individual students to the researcher so that she could both explain the nature of the study and indicate the time commitment to be expected from each participant. If the student were unwilling or unable to participate, then another student was asked to participate, until all of the student participants were selected.

The researcher also asked the EAL teacher for names of school staff members who would be potential interviewees. The researcher contacted school staff members by telephone or in person. The researcher explained the nature of the study as well as the time commitment to be expected. If the adult were unwilling or unable to participate, then the researcher asked another participant until 16 individuals, representing the microsystem, were selected. Originally the number of the microsystem participants was going to be limited to 14; however, as the study progressed, it became necessary to add two additional participants (the school psychologist and the community liaison worker) to understand more fully their roles in supporting the students and the school system.

Participants for the examination of the exosystem were purposefully selected based on their roles in the community. The researcher contacted these individuals (by

telephone or in person) specifically and they were asked to volunteer to participate in the focus group discussion. If they were unwilling or unable to participate, the researcher asked them to name another suitable participant who would appropriately represent a similar role from within the community. There were three participants who were identified as members of the exosystem and who agreed to be a part of the focus group, but for various reasons were unable to attend either of the meeting dates. For this reason, three additional individual interviews were conducted with these individuals at a later date. The interviews were approximately two hours in length and the questions used during the focus group were used in the interviews.

Participants who were considered to be experts in the field of working with war-affected children were contacted by telephone or email and arrangements were made to conduct an in-person semi-structured interview. After the initial in-person interviews, follow up interviews or discussions to clarify the data were conducted through e-mail or over the phone.

### *Informed Consent*

Informed consent was obtained in writing from every participant. If the student was under the age of 18, the parent or guardian also signed a letter of consent. The letters of consent are attached as Appendices H, I, J, and K. Members in the Focus Groups were also asked to sign a Promise of Confidentiality Form included in Appendix L. If the student was under the age of 18, the researcher contacted the student's parent/guardian by telephone to explain the nature of the study and the time commitment needed from each participant. If there were any language barriers, an interpreter from a local refugee assistance centre was asked to

interpret over the telephone or, if necessary, to accompany the researcher to the student's home to translate the conversations and to ensure that the parents and the student fully understood the research process before they agreed to participate. At the time of this study, the local refugee reception centre had staff to assist with this process, and these officials had a total of 40 languages that they were able to translate. The researcher made arrangements with the centre to have a staff member volunteer for this purpose. It was not necessary to utilize this service during this study; however, it remained in place should the need arise.

Parents were asked to sign a letter of consent to indicate that they permitted their child to participate in the study (See Appendix M). Only one student was under the age of 18 and needed parental permission.

Students who opted to take part in the optional photography activity were told that before they took a picture of someone they had to have their permission. The optional photography activity will be explained more thoroughly later in this chapter. The protocol for the photography activity is included in Appendix C. A copy of the consent to be photographed is included in Appendix N.

### *School Profile*

This case-study involved one secondary school in Manitoba where there was a large number (in excess of 100) of high school students who had originated from countries affected by armed conflict. The school was located in what is referred to as the inner city and it is located within the largest school division in the province.

The site was selected because of the large number of refugee students who attended the school and also because it was accessible to the researcher. In order to

gather specific demographic information about the school and to compose a more comprehensive profile for this study, the researcher interviewed both the principal, and the vice-principal. Specific questions were posed that addressed demographics and other information that helped to construct an understanding of the school setting.

After receiving ethics approval from The University of Manitoba Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (See Appendix O), the researcher applied to the school division's internal research review board in order to gain access to the school as a place of research. In addition to this request, the researcher contacted the divisional coordinator, who was responsible for issues related to war-affected children, to discuss the purpose of the proposed research and to indicate the reasons for choosing this particular school for this study. A research log was initiated during this process of identifying settings and gaining entry. The log included a record of all telephone conversations, email correspondence, and face-to-face communication. The log was kept for the duration of the study and also included personal notes, comments, and other anecdotal information that emerged throughout the study. The log was kept electronically and coded in a similar format as the transcripts.

### *Participant Interviews*

In total, there were 51 participants who took part in this study. There were 40 one-to-one interviews and two focus groups in which 11 people participated. Table 3.2 on the following page lists the various participants from the microsystem, Table 3.3 lists the participants from the exosystem, and Table 3.4 lists the experts who were interviewed from the England, the United States, and Canada. The dates for each interview or focus group are included.

**Table 3.2. Participant List from Microsystem**

| Name of Participant | Role | Date of Interview(s) |
|---|---|---|
| Bev | EAL Teacher | 15/01/07, 31/01/07,16/05/07 |
| Vivienne | Resource Teacher | 16/01/07 |
| Laurie | Counsellor | 01/02/07, 06/03/07 |
| Christine | Counsellor | 23/01/07 |
| Sandra | English Teacher * | 22/01/07, 30/01/07, 28/03/07 |
| Scott | English Teacher * | 22/01/07, 25/01/07 |
| Rassan | Chemistry Teacher | 22/01/07 |
| Joanne | Business Teacher | 01/02/07 |
| Donna | Principal | 19/01/07 |
| Paul | Vice-Principal | 24/01/07 |
| Manley | Parent | 17/01/07 |
| Parsa | Parent | 02/02/07 |
| Bill | Community Liaison | 19/01/07 |
| Teresa | Aboriginal Student | 07/02/07 |
| Taylor | Work Program Coordinator * | 30/01/07 |
| Margaret | School Psychologist | 05/02/07 |

* People identified by the student participants as a person who they spend time with and who provides them support.

The researcher explored the lived experiences of the student participants through the pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration phases using semi-structured interviews. Participants dialogued with the researcher in an attempt to explore the various ecological systems that affected their lives. Thirteen students from the school were interviewed on one or two occasions for approximately 60 minutes per meeting.

**Table 3.3. Participant List from Exosystem**

| **Name of Participant** | **Role** | Date of Interview(s) |
|---|---|---|
| Sam (focus group 1) | Director of a counselling clinic | 29/01/07 |
| Mike (focus group 1) | Executive Director of a reception centre for refugees | 29/01/07 |
| Karen (focus group 1) | School Counsellor from a different school in the division | 29/01/07 |
| Sara (focus group 1) | EAL Teacher at different school in the school division | 29/01/07 |
| Ingrid (focus group 1) | EAL Support Teacher from school division | 29/01/07 |
| Heather (focus group 1) | Representative from Justice and Youth Court and Gangs | 29/01/07 |
| Len (focus group 2) | Counsellor at a refugee counselling clinic | 01/02/07 |
| Marleen (focus group 2) | Education Coordinator at a refugee counselling clinic | 01/02/07 |
| Gloria (focus group 2) | Child Welfare Worker | 01/02/07 |
| Rob (focus group 2) | Minister in community | 01/02/07 |
| Tammy (focus group 2) | Divisional Curriculum Consultant | 01/02/07 |
| Will (interview) | Government Consultant for Education | 25/02/07, 27/02/07 |
| Larry (interview) | Superintendent | 30/02/07 |
| Debbie (interview)` | Government Consultant for Education | 27/02/07 |

**Table 3.4. Participant List from Expert Group**

| Name of Participant | Role | Date of Interview |
|---|---|---|
| Jill Rutter (UK) | Lecturer in Education at London Metropolitan University. Former teacher and Education Advisor at the Refugee Council from 1988-2001 | 28/11/06 |
| Jo Boyden (UK) | Senior Research Officer at the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford | 05/12/06 |
| Jason Hart (UK) | Research Officer at the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford | 04/12/06 |
| Rebecca Carter (UK) | Coordinator of Somaliland Program in Manchester, UK | 29/11/06 |
| Rebecca Jones (UK) | Education Coordinator for Save the Children, Manchester, UK | 29/11/06 |
| Lynn McBrien (USA) | Assistant Professor at Sarasota University, Florida specializing in Refugee Education | 25/02/07 |
| Tony Hoffman (USA) | Lecturer and Child Psychologist at Santa Cruz University, California specializing in Psychosocial Issues of Children from War Zones | 27/02/07 |
| Tim MacKay (Canada) | Coordinator of a Family Reception Centre in Manitoba, Canada | 03/03/07 |

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with individuals in the students' microsystem. The microsystem included four teachers, two administrators, two counsellors, one resource teacher, one English as an Alternative Language teacher, two parents, one community liaison worker, one student, one work program coordinator, and one school psychologist.

As the study progressed, it was deemed necessary to choose more participants to assist with the development of new insights. This was particularly important to understand more fully the various people who comprised both the microsystem and the exosystem. Initially the study was to be confined to 12 students and 12 participants from the microsystem and 10 focus group participants. As more

data were gathered, particularly from the students, it became evident that there were additional interviews that would need to be conducted to examine the perspectives of participants that had not been previously considered.

Glaser (1978) uses the term *theoretical sampling* to describe the process of collecting, coding, and analyzing data on a continuous basis and purposely selecting additional participants to gain more or new insight into a particular issue. Having said this, once the interviews began, it was deemed necessary to pursue additional participants, in order to yield the most substantive information for the benefit of this study. For example, the importance of religious faith to the students emerged and, thus, it was deemed necessary to interview a leader from the faith-based community in the surrounding area. In addition, the conflict between refugee students and Aboriginal students emerged as a prominent theme; as such, it was beneficial to investigate the issue based on the perspectives of an Aboriginal student to gather data from an alternative point of view. For this reason an individual interview with an Aboriginal student was added to the participants who also represented the microsystem. The other two participants that were added were identified (by students or school staff) as having a role in influencing the day-to-day lives of the students.

### *Focus Group Interviews*

A Focus Group is a "carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (Krueger, 1988, p.18). Focus groups are group discussions based on a particular issue or problem. Most groups are limited to twelve or less participants

and one lead facilitator. Questions are posed to the group by the facilitator, or generated by the group members.

To examine the role of the exosystem and to understand the issues from their perspectives, two focus group discussions of six and five participants respectively were conducted, as well as three individual interviews with participants who were unable to attend the focus group meetings. These participants were a purposive sample of individuals who worked only occasionally with war-affected children, but who might have influenced indirectly the lives of the students through policy development, school division priorities, or work in the organization of community events or programs. Refer to Table 3.3 for information on the participants from each focus group. Members for the focus group were contacted in person, or through the telephone, and they were asked to volunteer for this study. The three members who were unable to attend the focus group discussions and who were individually interviewed as members of the exosystem were two government consultants in the area of English as an Additional Language and Multiculturalism and a school superintendent.

### *Document Analysis and Photography*

Other relevant documents were also collected such as school policies that were in the public domain, school demographic information, divisionally-based aggregate data and mobility statistics, photographs, and newspaper articles. These artefacts were described and coded as external sources.

After the student interviews, participants had the opportunity to participate in an optional photography activity. A disposable camera was provided to each of the

eight students who opted to participate. The task for each student was to conduct a participant initiated photo essay to provide additional data on the student's post-migration experiences. This photo essay provided data about the various ecological systems in which the student interacted on a daily basis. In addition, the photos provided information on the students' peer group and family members. Pictures also included places that they frequented, objects that they liked, or symbols that provided personal meaning. The cameras were collected and the film was processed. A follow-up meeting was conducted, after a period of one month, with each student who chose to partake in this activity. Each student was given an opportunity to present his or her photo essay to the researcher and to discuss the relevance of the data collected. The additional interview was transcribed and coded as a supplementary interview. Eight students chose to participate in this activity.

Validity was enhanced through various strategies including triangulation of the data, and member-checking (Creswell, 2003). The methods used in this study were designed to provide data that were as accurate as possible to the participants' words and actions. As Taylor and Bogdan (1994) state, "By observing people in their everyday lives, listening to them talk about what is on their minds, and looking at the documents they produce, the qualitative researcher obtains firsthand knowledge of social life unfiltered through operational definitions or rating scales" (p. 9). The role of the researcher was to try to capture how the participants defined their experiences and constructed their reality (Taylor & Bogdan, 1994). As such, it was not the absolute truth that the researcher searched to reveal; rather, it was the perspectives of the participants that were attempted to uncover.

*Advantages and Disadvantages of Data Collection Strategies*

There are both advantages and disadvantages to all forms of data collection (Creswell, 2003). Setting up interviews consumed a lot of time and it proved to be difficult to arrange mutually convenient times and settings to meet the participants. It also became problematic to arrange a time to meet many of the students and parents, because of their work or school schedules. For the purposes discussed in this study, conducting interviews was necessary to investigate the past experiences of the participants (e.g., pre-migration and trans-migration). Furthermore, the researcher was interested in understanding the experiences of people from a broad range of settings, and conducting interviews across a cross-section of people was deemed to be the most efficient method to gather this data.

Data derived from interviewing is subject to both the researcher's prior experiences as well as the wording that the participant chooses to use. Although face-to-face, in-person interviewing is useful for the purposes of acquiring first hand information about a particular line of questioning, it is also subject to filtering through the views of the interviewees. As outlined by Taylor and Bogdan (1994), people say and do different things in different situations. Moreover, just because the person says something during an interview, it does not mean that he or she will say the same thing in a different situation. Having said this, many people find it difficult to articulate with words what they want to say. In some cases, it was necessary to probe with further questions to encourage the participants to elaborate on their response so the researcher was able to fully comprehend the message from the

participant. In many instances the researcher paraphrased sections of their responses back to them to ensure that she accurately understood their responses.

Photographs and other visual representations can provide rich and very descriptive data that is an excellent source for qualitative analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Commonly used in the social sciences, photography can be utilized in many different ways to capture data that might otherwise be omitted. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) state, "Pictures take the place of words or at least convey something that words cannot. Certainly, for the reader of a qualitative study, pictures give a sense of being there, seeing the setting and people firsthand" (p. 128). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggest that there are two categories of photographs: "those that others have taken and those that the researcher has a hand in producing" (p. 133). A third category includes those that the participant takes during the study for the purpose of providing data that might not be easily stated with words. Providing students with this option not only allows the opportunity for the researcher to gain insight into the ecological systems of the participants, but it also allows the participants to take the lead on the pictures they chose to take and how they present these to the researcher. The pictures that the students chose to take provided insight on the people, objects, and symbols that were most important to them. In addition, it was possible for the researcher to notice details that might not have been included during the interviews. Moreover, it was possible to examine the students' various ecological systems through their lens in the most unobtrusive manner.

Although photographs can be analyzed in the same manner as personal documents, they are subjective and this method has been controversial in the

research community. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) note that researchers may argue extreme positions either in favour or against using photographs for research; they suggest that what matters most is that the method has value and practical application for the particular study. Considering that it would be very time consuming to examine the ecological systems of all of the participants in this study, photographs offered a means to gather relevant data in an efficient and economical manner. The pictures also provided insight into some of the personal characteristics of the individual and information about the context and interactions within their ecological systems. The pictures that the participants did present to the researcher provided additional insight into what was relevant in the lives of each student.

Conducting a focus group interview also poses many advantages as well as disadvantages. Group settings often encourage interaction, collaboration and elaboration. The moderator is able to probe participants towards a particular line of inquiry. Focus groups are both cost-effective and time efficient because a larger number of individuals can be included during one interview time. The inclusion of several people in a focused discussion also provides the opportunity to understand issues from a systemic perspective. Group members are often able to gain valuable insight into how another system works or how others think, which often expands their own perspectives on an issue or problem. There is also the potential to develop community partnerships and shared solutions to the problems that are delineated during the discussion.

Some of the disadvantages of conducting a focus group include the potential for group dynamics to inhibit true and honest discussion or the potential for one

person to dominate or sabotage the discussion. Group members may have different goals for the session and the potential for argumentative discussion is also possible. Organizing people for a focus group is time consuming and often difficult to schedule. Conducting a focus group, and analyzing the data from a group discussion, requires particular organizational skills, specific knowledge about group dynamics, and facilitation skills.

Documents and other materials such as photographs or art objects may be difficult to access and interpret. Some documents, such as, school attendance records, may be protected information and unavailable to the researcher. Other documents such as journals or letters may not be accurate or authentic (Creswell, 2003). Having said this, documents do enable the researcher to access the source of information at a convenient time, in an unobtrusive manner. Creative and visually appealing materials also capture information that otherwise could be lost, if relying solely on interviews and observations.

There are advantages and disadvantages to all methods of data collection. It is virtually impossible to mitigate all possible limitations in a study. It was, however, essential that the researcher was aware of the limitations of each data source before embarking on a study. Knowledge of the various issues that could potentially affect the integrity of the data should be fully understood throughout the process of collecting, interpreting, and analyzing the data.

## Assumptions of the Researcher

The following four assumptions were made in relation to this study. First, the perspectives of the participants interviewed and discussed in the focus group are

trustworthy accounts of their understandings about war-affected children. Second, the methods of data collection, data management, and data analysis will provide trustworthy information and descriptions related to the purpose of this study. It is also assumed that accurate definitions of terms were adopted and used appropriately in the study. Lastly, it was assumed that the various theories, espoused by scholars in the field, which informed the theoretical framework for this study, were the result of reliable and trustworthy research.

## Risks to the Participants

Because of the nature of the research questions, and the potential for participants to discuss traumatic, stressful, or discouraging issues, particular sensitivity was exercised during the interviews. The researcher has attained a Master's degree in the area of School Counselling and Psychology and has over 15 years of experience counselling students in school settings. In addition, the researcher is the past-president of the Manitoba School Counsellors' Association. Although this background and experience did not negate the possibility of participants responding emotionally to the topic of discussion, the researcher was skilled and experienced to respond appropriately to these issues in an interview setting. The researcher respected the participant's confidentiality and she provided information to the student with regards to appropriate support services or counselling services. She did not enter into a counselling or therapeutic relationship with any of the participants.

The researcher anticipated that there might be the possibility of an emotional response from the students; however, she did not predict the resulting emotional response from the adults in the microsystem. It became apparent that it was

necessary to provide additional support and follow up assistance for many of the adults that were interviewed.

As was predicted, the situation did arise that two different students indicated they were personally at risk for harm or they might potentially harm another person. In both cases, the student was referred to the school counsellor for appropriate intervention and support.

Ethical considerations were also extended to the writing of the final research report. Data were not knowingly skewed, suppressed, falsified, or invented to suit the outcomes of the study, nor to satisfy external sources (e.g., school division personnel).

Every effort was taken to contribute positively to the well-being of the participants in this study and to not further contribute to their marginalization. May (1980) suggests that the search for knowledge may not match the practical realities in the qualitative researcher's methods. He asserts that the division between the powerful and the powerless is not clearly discerned. Moreover, he states, "no matter how subordinate a group may be, it usually feels superordinate to others in some respect" (p. 367). Furthermore, changes that benefit some can be disadvantageous to others. May's discussion outlines some considerations that must be accounted for while conducting qualitative research within a critical perspective. The role of the researcher and the knowledge brought to the study can be an important lever for improving the social situation for the participants. Although, from a critical perspective, knowledge can not considered "interest-free", it must not guide the research or skew the data in the name of social liberation. "The doctrine of advocacy

faces difficulties if the interest in emancipation displaces all lower interests" (May, 1980, p. 366).

## Data Management

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) suggest that a critical issue emerging from research studies is the manner in which data are managed. With such a large database of information, it was essential that the following strategies were implemented not only to organize the data, but to also provide the best possible platform to conduct careful and accurate analysis. All individual and focus group interviews were recorded digitally and later transcribed verbatim by the researcher. All of the transcriptions were completed within seven days of the interview. In many cases the interviews were transcribed immediately after the interview when it would be easier to recall the content of the discussion. The transcript was then imported into NVivo 7, a qualitative analysis program to be coded and then later analyzed. A hard copy of all field notes, correspondence, transcriptions, and interviews was stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. All documents were transcribed using an electronic word processing program and subsequently stored in an NVivo project file and a single directory on the researcher's computer. The files were accessible only with a password. A backup file was also kept of all documents using a portable storage drive that was protected by a password and only accessible by the researcher. All notes, transcripts, and digital files of the data will be destroyed after the period of five years following the completion of this study. Participants were made aware of these procedures in the letter of consent which they signed before the interviews commenced.

## Validating the Accuracy of Findings

Several steps were taken to check for the accuracy and credibility of the findings. The validity of the research is used to determine whether the findings are accurate from the perspective of the participants, the researcher, or the readers of the report (Creswell, 2003). Based on the eight strategies proposed by Creswell (2003), the following techniques were implemented in the study. The data sources were triangulated by examining the evidence from individual interviews, documents, photographs, and focus group interviews. The process referred to as member-checking was implemented to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings. Participants had the opportunity to veto any information related to their interview transcripts that they deemed to be inaccurately stated or incorrectly interpreted. Participants had the opportunity to remove, from the dissertation, any comments or observations made by the researcher that could potentially cause them harm.

## Data Analysis

Numerous qualitative researchers suggest that data collection and analysis occur in a continual and dynamic process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 1998, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Glaser, 1978; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Wolcott, 1994). Data analysis is a process of identifying themes and developing concepts and propositions. Researchers must continually theorize and make sense of their data throughout their study.

Wolcott (1994) makes a clear distinction between the terms "analysis" and "interpretation." Analysis is a narrower term based on agreed-upon processes and procedures for describing what is revealed in the data as they are experienced.

Interpretation is a much broader term referring to the researcher's personal efforts of making sense of the data. This activity is the subjective interpretation of the researcher which is influenced by her emotions, intuitions, and past experiences (Wolcott, 1994). "The basis of symbols and meanings upon which anthropologists derive patterns of cultural behaviour, for example, can be described and examined analytically, but discerning the patterns themselves is a matter of interpretation" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 33). For the purposes of this study, the researcher endeavoured to include a balance of both interpretation and analysis. This involved making choices about which data to report, what inferences to make, and what recommendations to advance.

### *Coding*

This study employed a continuous process of sorting the data using suitable codes, and organizing the material into common themes and trends. Using NVivo 7, all transcripts were imported and then digitally coded in a series of stages. The first stage of coding involved reading the transcripts line by line and then coding various phrases, words or chunks of text. The second stage entailed coding the source again and forming tree nodes, or branches of nodes, to more accurately reflect the content of the source. This process was repeated several times as new free nodes (non-hierarchical codes) and tree nodes (hierarchical codes) were discovered. All nodes or themes were defined within the project to ensure that the researcher would not incorrectly assume a different meaning while coding.

The process of coding and analyzing involved inductive and deductive reasoning, thinking, and theorizing. At various stages of coding, summative coding

reports were generated as a means to track the evolution or devolution of various nodes. All of these stages were documented in the researcher's log book. This process often involved collapsing some nodes or combining similar codes together. In some cases, the description of the code needed to expand, and in other cases the code title needed to change to more appropriately reflect the content of the references.

Relationships, links and annotations were delineated throughout the analysis to make sense of the data and to advance particular concepts for discussion. Memos were dated and linked to particular sections in the transcripts. Relationships were either classified as associative relationships or causal relationships. Links from the transcripts were assigned to each relationship for further analysis.

Although this study exhibits some elements of theory development, there is a much stronger emphasis on verifying social theory. The proponents of Bioecological Theory and The Theory of Segmented Assimilation formed the theoretical foundation for the study; however, the purpose of the analysis was not to prove or disprove the theories, nor was it to generate new theory. Rather, the purpose of the analysis was to gain a more thorough understanding of the psychosocial and educational needs of the participants and to suggest recommendations that would better support the students' education. At times this process included expanding, discounting, or altering the stated theories. Although similar to Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory approach, Taylor and Bogdan's approach is less concerned with developing a theory and more interested in "understanding the settings or people on their own terms" (p. 140).

Three distinct activities based on the work by Taylor and Bogdan (1998) were incorporated into the phases of analysis: (1) the continual process of identifying themes and trends in the data; (2) the coding of data and the refinement of the subject matter, and; (3) the interpretation of the data in the context it was collected.

The process of discovery refers to the insight and intuition of the researcher throughout the phase of data collection. To do this the researcher examined the data in different ways (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). This often entailed re-reading the literature or pursuing new concepts that had not been previously considered. Coding refers to the categorization of themes, ideas, concepts, interpretations, and propositions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). This process involved assigning a node or theme for each coding category and then systematically examining the data to determine what themes emerged. Tree nodes were then developed to represent the hierarchical structure of the various themes. For example, under the node entitled "microsystem" four additional themes were delineated: (1) community; (2) educational and schooling; (3) family related issues; and, (4) personal and professional changes. These four additional themes were further subdivided into one or two additional categories of themes. Nodes were then sorted into categories to be compared, analyzed and further refined. Relationships, links and annotations were delineated throughout the analysis to make sense of the data and to advance particular concepts for discussion and further investigation. Charts and figures were then developed to identify patterns found in the data.

The final process entailed looking at the data differently depending on the context in which it was collected. Findings were examined both in the manner in

which they were solicited, and with consideration for the perspective of the researcher who gathered and interpreted the data. This process of critical reflection was essential to both challenge the findings and interpretations and to understand how assumptions, beliefs and attitudes could have influenced the findings.

It is important to mention that the data were not put into a coding structure; rather, the nodes were developed throughout the process of coding and analyzing. New nodes were added, right up to the final transcript. The benefit of using NVivo was the ability to collapse nodes, rename nodes, and merge nodes while keeping the pre-existing links, relationships and memos that were attached to the original source. Moreover, the software enabled an organizational structure that assisted the researcher with reducing the data and then recalling sources and nodes throughout the analysis and interpretation stages.

Once the interviews had been transcribed and initially coded, the structure of all of the tree nodes was set. This involved re-reading all of the references within each node to determine whether it was accurately referenced. When it was not deemed to be suitable, or if an error had occurred in coding, the passage was uncoded at the existing node and then recoded into a new or existing code. All of the transcripts were checked and then recoded to ensure an error was not made at the first stage of coding. When this stage was complete, all of the nodes were arranged into a hierarchical structure that was deemed most appropriate for discussing the results. At this point, node summary reports and source reports were generated and an overall project summary was developed.

## Summary and Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methods that were employed in addressing the stated research questions. A discussion pertaining to how and why each research question was developed was also included. The methods used to address the research questions were provided and the advantages and disadvantages of using these methods were considered. Particular limitations and delimitations for the study were outlined and several assumptions that applied to the study were presented. Efforts to manage the data and to organize the information were outlined and strategies designed to enhance the accuracy of the findings were discussed. A particular focus on the ethical issues related to this study and the potential risks to the participants were also examined. Moreover, the overarching role assumed by the researcher in this study was considered throughout the chapter. The following four chapters present the results obtained with the aforementioned methods.

# 4. PRE-MIGRATION, TRANS-MIGRATION, and POST-MIGRATION EXPERIENCES

Chapters 4 through 7 report the findings in this study according to the four research questions. As was previously stated in the preceding chapter, qualitative research is not restricted to a standardized format. The researcher should craft a design that is capable of fully exploring the purposes delineated in the study. The study should evolve, findings should emerge, and theories should be advanced. As this research study progressed, so did the analysis, the interpretation, and the reformulation of theory. The multi-dimensional and interactive nature of the ecological systems provided insight about one system that yielded important considerations for another. Interpretation of the data occurred throughout the entire process of collecting, reducing, and analyzing the data. As such, the findings in one chapter provide the scaffolding on which to discuss the findings in the following chapter. Central to these findings are the personal interpretations and conclusions that were made by the researcher. To report the findings, particular concepts were advanced and certain assertions based on the most salient points that were discovered. For these reasons, there are interpretive comments as well as a summary and conclusion section for each of the following four chapters. To do this, the researcher has chosen to report the finding using first person narrative to more naturally discuss her personal interpretations.

This chapter will begin with a summary of the demographic composition of Walter Duncan School. Following this is a brief profile of each of the student

participants. The discussion will continue with a presentation of the findings related to the first research question, "What are the pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration experiences of war-affected children who immigrate to Manitoba?"

The research activities covered a six-month period of time from November, 2006 to April, 2007. The typed transcripts comprised 430 pages of single-spaced text that were transcribed and coded by the researcher throughout the phase of data collection. All interviews were transcribed within one to four days from the date they were conducted.

## School Profile

Walter Duncan School is located in the downtown area of a Manitoba city, located in close proximity to a major thoroughfare. Walter Duncan School is comprised of 1,025 students, ranging from grade 7 to grade 12. At the time of the last survey in 2006, 250 students were in grades 7 to 8 and 742 students were in grades 9 to12. There were 57 distinct cultures, as identified by students at the time of registration. The median family income is $29,270 and 53.2 % are below the low income cut off published by Statistics Canada. The low income cut off value varies according to family size and the size of the community. Those who are below the low income cut off are said to be in "straightened circumstances" which is popularly known as Canada's poverty line (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2002). The school demographic report also indicates that 61% of the students are from single-parent families and, from the aggregate of students at the high school level, 76.5 % of the students lived with either one or both parents. The remaining students lived with either extended family, friends, or alone. English as an additional

language (EAL) students made up 22.2% of the population and 18% of the students are landed immigrant children or refugee children. Based on the 2001 Census data, 28.4% was the estimated percentage of Aboriginal families who attended Walter Duncan School (School Division Demographic Report, 2005-2006*).

Larry, the school superintendent stated, "at the present time, we have the highest incidence of war-affected students in our division and the majority of these students attend Walter Duncan School." He also indicated that additional intensive academic programs were implemented at Walter Duncan School to address "the unique needs of the students attending the school." Larry further commented, "Because of the size of our school division, we have more capacity to provide specialized services than other smaller school divisions." Both the principal and the vice-principal stated that what made their school unique were the variety of cultures represented and the diversity of the programs that were offered. As indicated by the principal, Donna, the school has an advanced placement program, an infant lab for single mothers, a work experience and work transition program, a program for students who fall between the regular and the special education programs, an off-campus program where all of the students are on social assistance, a program to support students from the northern and more remote transitioning into a school setting. Walter Duncan School also has a divisionally-based English as an Additional Language (EAL) program, consisting of approximately 40 EAL students ranging from the beginner to the advanced level.

In the 2006/2007 academic year, the school was piloting one of the four-divisionally developed EAL centres for pre-beginner literacy immigrant and refugee

* Name of school division not indicated to protect confidentiality of participants

students. This program was developed to address the needs of students who have very little, or no, prior educational experience. The EAL teacher found that when these pre-beginner students were in a beginner level EAL program, they would be overwhelmed and unable to take part in much of the academic program. As the vice-principal indicated, the school has had to evolve to meet the changing demographic needs of its students. Paul states,

> We are a comprehensive school with various different areas of specialities....I think the way we are is because we have had to evolve to meet our needs....I don't know of another school that has this many EAL students in one building, with the various different levels to meet their needs.

The school division, where Walter Duncan School resides, has numerous publicly accessible policy documents related to harassment, racial/ethnic and homophobic incidents, hate crimes, emergency response plans, student conduct, suspension and expulsion, self-harm, and threatening behaviour towards others. All parents and guardians who have students in the school division are provided with a brochure outlining the roles and responsibilities that students, staff members, and parents/guardians have for creating safe and caring schools. In addition, over 15 years ago, the school division implemented a variety of initiatives to help establish safe and caring schools. For example, a resource book was developed that included information on a variety of topics such as: behaviour management; violence prevention programs; encouraging parent involvement in schools; and, developing crisis plans. Each year a list is provided of professional development activities offered to staff members in the school division on topics such as: non-violent crisis

intervention, restitution, bully-proofing, classroom management, personal safety, and violence prevention. That said, participation in these various professional development workshops are entirely voluntary and the teacher must have the principal's approval to be away from the school for this purpose. The number of days that teachers are allocated for professional development activities may range from one or two days to more than ten days.

Several participants indicated that there was a lack of connection between division-wide policy and school-wide practice. There was ample evidence to suggest that school-based initiatives to address racism, discrimination, bullying, and conflict resolution were needed at Walter Duncan School. Several participants also indicated that they had witnessed teachers and school administrators who had not acted in accordance with divisional policies. Having said this, no individuals stated that he or she had made a formal complaint against either a teacher or an administrator regarding the failure to comply with divisional policy.

## Student Profiles

A total of five female students and eight males were interviewed. It was necessary to approach several female students before five agreed to participate. Unlike the male participants, the females appeared apprehensive and some indicated that they worried that their parents would disapprove. For the purposes of compiling general demographic information on each student, responses to seven general questions were documented. In most cases the answers to these questions were provided during the interview and it was not necessary to pose a direct question to ascertain the specific information. This was purposely designed so as not to bombard

the student with a series of factual questions and to maintain a more conversational tone to the interview.

The following attributes are outlined on Table 4.1: name of student and date of interview, age, country of origin, current grade in school, who the student is currently living with, date of arrival to Canada, gender, and level of education prior to coming to Canada. All participants and references to settings in this study have been assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

**Table 4.1. Student Attributes**

| Name and Date of Interview | Age | Country of origin | Current grade in school | Currently living with | Date of arrival to Canada | Gender | Level of education prior to immigration |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1: Afem 16/01/07** | 19 | Sudan | 12 | friends | 12/11/2003 | male | some elementary |
| **2: Akot 19/01/07** | 19 | Sierra Leone | 12 | sister | 01/06/2005 | male | some middle school |
| **3: Anna 25/01/07** | 18 | Liberia | other | alone | 09/01/2005 | female | none |
| **4: Aran 22/01/07** | 18 | Sudan | 12 | mom and dad | 15/04/2005 | male | some high school |
| **5: Bango 19/01/07** | 19 | Sierra Leone | 11 | sister | 01/11/2003 | male | some middle school |
| **6: Banya 16/01/07** | 18 | Afghanistan | 12 | mom and siblings | 01/10/2004 | female | some middle school |
| **7: Helen 25/01/07** | 21+ | Rwanda | 12 | dad and siblings | 19/10/2004 | female | some high school |
| **8: Imran 18/01/07** | 19 | Sudan | 11 | alone | 04/11/2003 | male | some elementary |
| **9: James 17/01/07** | 19 | Sudan | 11 | friends | 12/11/2003 | male | some elementary |
| **10: Levia 17/01/07** | 18 | Liberia | 10 | mom and siblings | 01/10/2004 | female | some middle school |
| **11: Mahad 26/01/07** | 19 | Afghanistan | 12 | mom and siblings | 04/11/2003 | male | some high school |
| **12: Sokut 20/01/07** | 19 | Sudan | 12 | friends | 12/11/2003 | male | some elementary |
| **13: Ugot 23/01/07** | 18 | Sudan | other | mom and dad | 09/01/2006 | male | none |

A brief description of the participants will be provided to help contextualize the comments, quotes, and the discussion of the various themes that emerged from the data. The following profiles were compiled using the information provided by the students.

*Afem*

Afem is from Sudan and he came to Canada in November, 2003. He lived in Kakuma refugee camp and then moved to another camp called Ifo Camp in Northeastern Kenya. He indicated to me that his real age is 19, but his papers say he is 25. He currently lives with a friend in a housing complex. He works at a paper recycling plant from 4:00pm-12:00am Monday to Friday. On Saturdays he does his homework and on Sundays he goes to church and then cleans his apartment and finishes his homework.

*Akot*

Both of Akot's parents were killed in Sierra Leone. He came to Canada two years ago to live with an older sister. He is currently 18 and his paper age is 21. There are 13 people in his family; some are in Guinea and some are in Sierra Leone. Akot works a full time job at McDonald's and each month he sends $250-300 home to his brothers who are 13, 17, 18, 21 and 31. He calls them twice a month.

*Anna*

Anna is from Liberia. She lost her mom and travelled with another family to Ghana. Anna's back and face are severely deformed from a bullet wound. When she was a baby she was shot while her mother carried her. Her ability to walk is compromised. After living in a refugee camp in Ghana, Anna travelled to Canada

with a woman and her children. She lived with this family for about a year while in Canada and has subsequently moved out on her own. Anna has a child who is six months old who has recently been apprehended by a child welfare office.

*Aran*

Aran is from Sudan, but his family is originally from Eritrea. He came to Canada in April, 2005. Aran lives with his mother and father. When he lived in Sudan he attended a private Catholic school where the instruction is in Italian. He has assisted with translating for other students at Walter Duncan School. He is actively involved in sports and indicated that he plays every sport except lacrosse and ice-hockey, because they are too rough. In the summer he works for an environmental group and on weekends he likes to be at home or at his uncle's house.

*Bango*

Bango is from Sierra Leone and he is 19 years old. He is currently in grade 11. He lived in Freetown for eight years and when the rebels came down to the area to overthrow the government, he fled to Guinea. He lived in a refugee camp for about a year and then the government brought him to Canada. He has six brothers and sisters, but he does not know their ages. His father was killed and his mom lives in Sierra Leone. He currently lives with an older sister who recently got laid off from a factory job.

*Banya*

Banya is 18 years old and from Afghanistan. When she was 5 or 6 she moved to Pakistan because her father was killed in the war and she said it was not a good

situation for her mother to be alone with seven children in Afghanistan under the rule of the Taliban. She has five sisters and two brothers. Two of the sisters remained in Pakistan and the rest of the family came to Canada. She has been in Canada for three years and she will graduate at the end of the academic year. She currently works at a large supermarket and has recently passed her driver's test. Her mother has been very sick and Banya has had to assume many additional family responsibilities.

*Helen*

Helen is from Rwanda. She left when she was 17 and lived in Uganda for three years. Her mother was very sick for several years and subsequently died. The two youngest children in her family were kidnapped and poisoned and also died. The family came to Canada to have a better life in 2004. She helps to take care of the younger children in the family for her father, who is not able to work. There is one sibling who is 12, twins who are 10, and the youngest is 6. Helen works at a fitness centre for women and attends school full time. She sends money back to her family members in Africa. She hopes to graduate at the end of the academic year and then pursue a college degree in Business Administration.

*Imran*

Imran is from Sudan and he came to Canada in November, 2003. He grew up in Kenya in the Kakuma refugee camp. He was relocated to Dadaab camp for security reasons. He was 15 years old when he came to Canada. He came with the other Lost Boys from Sudan. His parents were killed and he indicated that he had some brothers and sisters. Imran has attended Walter Duncan School for two years. After being badly beaten up at the end of the last academic year, he moved to another

school in the same school district. He indicated that it was not safe for him to return to Walter Duncan.

*James*

James is one of the Lost Boys from Sudan. He left his parents when he was nine years old. He walked with the other boys to Ethiopia and they lived there for a couple of years. He has a younger brother who is living in Kenya. He has not talked to his parents since he left Africa, but he believes they are alive. James works a full-time job and sends money to his brother in Kenya to pay for his schooling. James has been in the Canada for three years. He currently lives with a friend in a government housing complex.

*Levia*

Levia is from Monrovia, Liberia and she has been in Canada for three years. She has been in school for two years. When the war stared in Liberia she moved to Ghana and then from Ghana she went to Kenya. She was in Ghana for about five years, where she attended school. She has three sisters and two brothers and both parents are alive. Levia's family was sponsored by a church to come to Canada. She is actively involved in her church and attends events at the church three or four times per week. She works at a local pizza restaurant to help support her family.

*Mahad*

Mahad is from Kabul, Afghanistan. He lived there for 4 years. His father was in the army and he was shot and killed. Mahad then lived in Pakistan for approximately 11 years. He was able to attend school there because the government waived the school fees because of his family's situation. The family came to Canada

in 2004. He plays cricket, soccer, track and field, cross-country, and badminton. He works 24 to 30 hours per week at the local McDonald's.

*Sokut*

Sokut was born in Sudan and his real age is 19. He is one of the Lost Boys of Sudan, as he was forced to flee Sudan and walk to Ethiopia. He returned to Sudan and then went to Kenya. He came to Canada in November, 2003 with two other boys his age. During the interview he told me that both of his parents were dead, but about a month following the interview, he called me to tell me that he had heard that his father was alive. Sokut has attended numerous conferences to talk about his experiences being a Lost Boy of Sudan. He has recently moved to another Canadian city after another boy from Sudan broke into his home and held a gun to his head. There were two other violent attacks by acquaintances of the first assailant after formal police reports were made and the first assailant was incarcerated. Sokut told me that he was no longer safe in the city and he has chosen to move to another major Canadian city. He continues to keep in touch with his friends and frequently returns to see his friends.

*Ugot*

Ugot is from Sudan but his parents are not Sudanese. His mother is Eritrean and his father is from Ethiopia. He lived with his family in a refugee camp in Sudan. Before coming to Canada he had never been to school. He is currently in the pre-beginner class of EAL students. He has been in Canada for one year.

While these aforementioned details are brief, the unique characteristics of the student participants will more fully evolve through their words and in the stories that

emerge during the interviews with various people in the microsystem. As the members of the microsystem were interviewed, I began to see connections to the students they were discussing and the examples that they provided. I recognized stories or I began to more fully understand the experience because more details were provided from the various people. Together, these various perspectives created a more holistic examination of their experiences. I was also able to observe how the various ecological systems, and the people within those systems, influenced and interacted with each other.

Table 4.2 that follows on the subsequent page is a comprehensive list of major themes encompassing all of the codes that were delineated from the transcripts and documents. Twelve main themes emerged as well as numerous branches of sub-themes. The number of sources where the theme emerged is listed in the first column and the number of references made to the particular theme is listed in the second column. This framework was used as an overarching structure to organize the themes, to answer the research questions, and to assist with the development of models and structures that represented the data.

To reduce the data illustrated in Table 4.2, two specific coding summary reports were generated using NVivo 7. First, a coding summary was developed for all themes derived from the student interviews. Second, a coding summary was developed for all themes that emerged in the interviews with participants from the microsystem. The purpose of separating the data in this matter was to determine themes that were both similar and dissimilar between the two groups and to delineate which themes were discussed more often in each interview. Because individuals

# Table 4.2. Summary of Themes

| Major Theme | Sources | References |
|---|---|---|
| **I. Challenges for Refugees** | | |
| A. adjustment to Canada | 17 | 30 |
| B. altercations with police | 5 | 9 |
| C. conflict | 1 | 1 |
| 1. different cultural group | 15 | 28 |
| 2. same cultural group | 5 | 10 |
| D. criminal activity | 17 | 35 |
| E. documentation (lack of) | 4 | 7 |
| F. expectations | 5 | 14 |
| G. financial difficulty | 21 | 37 |
| 1. sending money back home | 6 | 7 |
| H. gang | 20 | 40 |
| I. housing | 15 | 24 |
| J. information provided to newcomers | 2 | 3 |
| K. language and literacy | 15 | 24 |
| L. lying or making up a life story | 4 | 6 |
| M. moving on with life | 6 | 11 |
| N. navigating bureaucracy | 10 | 16 |
| O. need advocate | 7 | 12 |
| P. no support after coming to Canada | 13 | 31 |
| Q. safety | 12 | 23 |
| R. unique and diverse needs | 5 | 13 |
| **II. Ecological Systems** | 9 | 17 |
| A. interaction of systems | 22 | 59 |
| **III. Exosystem** | | |
| A. Agencies | 2 | 10 |
| B. Justice | 1 | 6 |
| C. Legislation and Legal System | 2 | 3 |
| D. Media | 5 | 11 |
| **IV. Macrosystem** | 2 | 4 |
| A. anti-refugee | 3 | 4 |
| B. cultural sensitivity | 6 | 11 |
| C. ideologies reflected in culture | 7 | 11 |
| D. our assumptions | 9 | 17 |
| E. recruitment and retention | 1 | 1 |
| F. values and norms of society | 5 | 8 |
| **V. Microsystem** | | |
| A. Community | | |
| 1. faith | 10 | 16 |
| 2'. friends | 11 | 14 |
| 3. importance of community | 15 | 29 |
| 4. involvement in sport | 7 | 10 |
| 5. no preventative work | 8 | 10 |
| 6. support from community | 11 | 16 |
| 7. treatment of refugees | 8 | 18 |
| B. Education and Schooling | | |
| 1. Experience Pre-Migration | 8 | 12 |
| 2. Organization and Administration | 2 | 4 |
| a. government direction | 6 | 15 |
| b. information to teachers | 8 | 16 |
| c. leadership issues | 9 | 31 |
| d. policy | 15 | 24 |
| e. school placement | 12 | 22 |
| f. transience | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Educational Problems and Issues | 1 | 1 |
| a. adjusting to school | 13 | 15 |
| b. age issues | 5 | 6 |
| c. assistance from teachers | 10 | 17 |
| d. bullying | 3 | 3 |
| e. family expectations | 4 | 6 |
| f. dispersal of immigrants | 2 | 5 |
| g. disrupted or no schooling | 17 | 32 |
| h. engaging with children | 2 | 2 |
| i. exclusion and retention | 13 | 28 |
| j. having to work | 17 | 32 |
| k. importance for education | 18 | 35 |
| l. lack of resources | 15 | 35 |
| i. strain on services | 7 | 17 |
| m. parenting assistance | 7 | 11 |

| Major Theme | Sources | References |
|---|---|---|
| **V. Microsystem (cont'd)** | | |
| B. Education and Schooling (cont'd) | | |
| 3. Educational Problems/Issues | | |
| n. preparation of teachers | 13 | 35 |
| i. empowering teachers | 1 | 1 |
| ii. teachers not appreciated | 1 | 1 |
| o. school is alone | 4 | 4 |
| p. student issues with teachers | 2 | 5 |
| q. teacher attitudes | 13 | 57 |
| r. trouble academically | 13 | 25 |
| C. Family Related Issues | 2 | 4 |
| 1. breakdown or separation of family | 23 | 49 |
| 2. family issues | 16 | 33 |
| a. emotional abuse | 3 | 7 |
| b. physical abuse | 4 | 7 |
| c. sexual abuse | 2 | 5 |
| 3. respect for parents | 5 | 8 |
| 4. shaming family | 2 | 3 |
| D. Personal and Professional Changes | | |
| 1. personal | 12 | 18 |
| a. overwhelmed and stressed | 3 | 10 |
| b. vicarious trauma | 2 | 4 |
| 2. professional | 11 | 22 |
| **VI. Personal Experiences** | | |
| A. appreciation | 4 | 6 |
| B. breakdown social net | 11 | 13 |
| C. culture adjustments | 9 | 13 |
| D. despair | 3 | 5 |
| E. disappointment | 5 | 8 |
| F. displacement | 6 | 10 |
| G. distrust | 11 | 14 |
| H. giving back to Canada | 4 | 4 |
| I. insecurity | 7 | 11 |
| J. isolation or lonliness | 11 | 20 |
| K. lack of food | 6 | 9 |
| L. loss | 24 | 32 |
| M. refugee Life | 17 | 40 |
| 1. persecution | 2 | 3 |
| 2. Trans migration | 11 | 16 |
| **VII. Problems identified Experts** | | |
| A. exploitive labour | 1 | 2 |
| B. immigration policy | 2 | 3 |
| C. not engaging or listening to children | 2 | 4 |
| D. sexual exploitation | 2 | 4 |
| E. trafficking | 1 | 4 |
| F. trauma discourse in literature | 4 | 10 |
| G. unaccompanied minors | 5 | 10 |
| **VIII. Programs and Structures** | 27 | 68 |
| A. Advice from Students | 13 | 18 |
| B. Mentoring | 5 | 9 |
| **IX. Psychosocial Issues** | 2 | 4 |
| A. needs for healing | 13 | 20 |
| B. not accessing or denying services | 4 | 10 |
| C. Psychosocial needs | 28 | 70 |
| 1. attempted suicide | 3 | 6 |
| 2. counselling | 14 | 29 |
| D. trauma | 23 | 52 |
| E. violence exposure | 23 | 39 |
| **X. Racism and Discrimination** | 30 | 77 |
| **XI. Resilience and Hope** | | |
| A. hope | 6 | 9 |
| B. human capacity | 2 | 3 |
| C. goals and aspirations | 20 | 28 |
| D. resilience | 10 | 18 |
| **XII. Roles in Society** | | |
| A. adult roles | 9 | 13 |
| 1. parents working | 3 | 5 |
| B. gender issues | 6 | 22 |
| C. sexism | 4 | 7 |

from the microsystem would presumably have the closest relationships with the students, the researcher chose to examine this group more closely.

Numerous variables could potentially affect the themes discussed and the amount of coverage of each theme that emerged in the interview. The length of time that a participant discussed a topic may not be indicative of the level of importance that the individual placed on a particular issue. The participant may have been distracted during the interview or they might have become emotional when discussing the topic and subsequently changed the topic. Some of the participants needed more probing while others quite readily discussed issues with limited influence from the researcher. The latter circumstance might have yielded more coverage of a particular theme. The study was not designed to have the participants rank issues; therefore, it is difficult to determine whether the participant placed more importance on one issue or another. The uniqueness of each interview, more specifically, the content and order of the questions posed to each group also differed. The researcher's style of interviewing and the sequence of questions might have varied and could also influence the results. Considering the aforementioned issues, the primary rubric for holistically analyzing the themes was the frequency in which they occurred in the collective interviews.

The following tables reveal the themes that each participant discussed in more detail during their interview. It provides a general indication of the most common themes discussed by both the students and the adults from the microsystem. The overarching purpose was to use the tables as an additional tool to assist with analysis and to look for anomalies or similarities between the two groups.

Using the first coding summary report, a list of the students was generated which included the number of references that were made to each theme and the percentage of coverage that this theme represented. For example, if the coverage for a theme was listed as 9.08%, it would mean that the theme related to 9.08% of the interview. To limit the scope of this comparison, the researcher chose to list only the top five percentages of coverage for each individual interview. There were some transcripts that included in excess of 100 themes. For this reason, only the five highest percentages were included in an effort to facilitate a more focused analysis. Each coding summary was manually examined to determine the top five themes (as determined by the percentage of coverage) in each interview. Where two interviews were conducted with the same participant, only the first interview was used for the purpose of this analysis.

Using the same criteria that the researcher delineated for the recruitment of participants for this study (see page 73), the 13 students were classified into either the category of "adjusting well" or "having difficulty adjusting." Although assigning a category was largely based on the opinion of the researcher, data from the interviews substantiated the researcher's decision as to whether she felt the student was adjusting well or not. The purpose was not to either prove or disprove the researcher's decision as to how well the student was adjusting; rather, it was to look for similarities, patterns, or differences between the two groups of students and between the students and the members of the microsystem.

Table 4.3 reveals the top five themes found in each of the students' transcripts. Table 4.4 is a summary of the themes that occurred more than once in

Table 4.3. For example, in the category of "considered to be adjusting well", the theme "gang" appeared in the top five themes for three of the students. As these two summary charts reveal, the theme of racism and discrimination was in the top five

**Table 4.3. Top Five Themes from the Student Transcripts Separated by Category of Perceived Level of Adjustment**

| Considered to be Adjusting Well | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Student** | **Code** | Coverage % |
| **Mahad *** | Programs and Structures Needed | 18.92 |
| | Respect for Parents | 12.2 |
| | Gang | 9.87 |
| | Importance of Education | 9.86 |
| | Insecurity | 7.93 |
| **Levia *** | Racism and Discrimination | 16.8 |
| | Faith | 9.93 |
| | Importance of Community | 9.93 |
| | Cultural Adjustments | 8.11 |
| | Importance of Education | 7.43 |
| **Aran *** | Gang | 12.61 |
| | Education Premigration | 10.75 |
| | Aspiration of Refugees | 10.03 |
| | Lack of Resources | 7.56 |
| | Violence Exposure | 7.37 |
| **Banya *** | Respect for Parents | 18.35 |
| | Psychosocial Needs Emerging in School | 11.84 |
| | Adjusting to School | 11.21 |
| | Gender Issues | 10.32 |
| | Breakdown or Separation of Family | 9.46 |
| **Helen *** | Refugee Life | 16.03 |
| | Breakdown of Social Network | 11.68 |
| | Trauma | 11.25 |
| | Psychosocial Needs Emerging in School | 10.99 |
| | Adult Roles | 10.07 |
| **Sokut *** | Importance of Education | 12.16 |
| | Gang | 11.26 |
| | Safety | 9.88 |
| | Importance of Community | 9.74 |
| | Racism and Discrimination | 9.64 |

| Considered to be Having Difficulty Adjusting | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Student** | **Code** | Coverage % |
| **Anna** | Breakdown or Separation of Family | 16.99 |
| | Psychosocial needs in School | 15.87 |
| | Emotional Abuse | 13.81 |
| | Financial Difficulty | 12.9 |
| | Violence Exposure | 5.73 |
| **James *** | Breakdown or Separation of Family | 29.41 |
| | Importance of Education | 25.91 |
| | Displacement | 12.01 |
| | Loss | 12.01 |
| | Violence Exposure | 11.89 |
| **Bango** | Violence Exposure | 18.73 |
| | Loss | 16.48 |
| | Trauma | 15.28 |
| | Distrust | 13.91 |
| | Insecurity | 13.91 |
| **Akot** | Student Issues with Teachers | 21.84 |
| | Having to Work and Go to School | 21.12 |
| | Financial Difficulty | 11.18 |
| | Racism and Discrimination | 8.48 |
| | Separation of Family | 5.74 |
| **Imran *** | Gang | 52.72 |
| | Safety | 25.74 |
| | Loss | 11.83 |
| | Breakdown or Separation of Family | 6.96 |
| | Lack of Food | 6.24 |
| **Afem** | Altercations with Police | 19.83 |
| | Racism and Discrimination | 17.82 |
| | Cultural Adjustments | 7.89 |
| | Refugee Life | 5.1 |
| | Lack of Documentation | 5.1 |
| **Ugot** | Education Premigration | 15.48 |
| | Trouble Academically | 8.51 |
| | Personal Goals and Aspirations | 8.01 |
| | Isolation or Loneliness | 5.28 |
| | Violence Exposure | 4.33 |

Note: Coverage refers to the percentage of the transcript that was allocated to the discussion of a particular theme.
Only the top five percentages for each individual were noted in the above table.
* Evidence of a Nanosystem (See Chapter 6)

**Table 4.4. Summary of Themes from the Student Interviews Occurring More than Once in Table 4.3.**

| Considered to Be Adjusting Well | | Considered to be Having Difficulty Adjusting | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Code | Number of Occurrences in Top Five | Code | Number of Occurrences in Top Five |
| **Gang** | 3 | **Breakdown or Separation of Family** | 4 |
| **Importance of Education** | 3 | **Violence Exposure** | 4 |
| **Racism and Discrimination** | 2 | **Financial Difficulty** | 3 |
| **Importance of Community** | 2 | **Loss** | 2 |
| **Psychosocial Needs** | 2 | **Racism and Discrimination** | 2 |
| **Respect for Parents** | 2 | **Refugee Life** | 2 |

for both groups of students. Although it is difficult to make generalizations based on the data in Table 4.3 and 4.4, it was clear which issues the students discussed in more detail. The researcher noted that the students in the "considered to be adjusting well" category tended to discuss issues related to protective factors. For example, students discussed the importance of both family and community and the respect they felt for their parents. Students in the other group more commonly discussed risk factors such as, breakdown or separation of family, violence exposure, financial difficulty, and loss.

Table 4.5 reveals the top five themes in the interviews with members of the microsystem. Table 4.6 compares the top ten themes found in all of the combined student transcripts with the top ten themes from the participants in the microsystem. As this summary table illustrates, four themes were common amongst the two groups: (1) breakdown or separation of family; (2) racism and discrimination, (3) gang issues; and, (4) psychosocial needs. While the members of the microsystem tended to discuss systemic problems, the students most often talked about personal issues and challenges. Considering that there were a total of 135 different themes from all of the interviews combined, the summary tables provide a more detailed examination of the most prominent themes discussed by the students and the participants in the microsystem.

The discussion of the findings in the following chapters will more thoroughly discuss the emergent themes; however, the tables were intended to provide the reader with a more focused illustration of the themes discussed by both the students and the

members of the microsystem and to note the commonalities and differences between the two groups.

## Table 4.5. Top Five Themes for Members of the Microsystem

| Members of the Microsystem | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Name** | **Code** | **Coverage %** | **Name** | **Code** | **Coverage %** |
| **Joanne** | Programs and Structures | 24.57 | **Margaret** | Psychosocial Needs | 55.6 |
| | Breakdown or Separation of Family | 11.77 | | Programs and Structures | 4.73 |
| | Professional Changes | 7.48 | | Counselling | 3.47 |
| | Having to Work and Go to School | 6.34 | | Trouble Academically | 2.03 |
| | Racism and Discrimination | 6.34 | | Interactions of Systems | 1.02 |
| **Rassan** | Assistance from Teachers | 16.92 | **Laurie** | Trauma | 17.81 |
| | Interactions of Systems | 14.97 | | Breakdown or Separation of Family | 17.55 |
| | Trans-migration | 12.67 | | Counselling | 17.53 |
| | Racism and Discrimination | 11.21 | | Gender Issues | 17.43 |
| | Violence Exposure | 10.94 | | Safety | 15.26 |
| **Christine** | Psychosocial Needs | 20.82 | **Teresa** | Racism and Discrimination | 66.1 |
| | Teacher Attitudes and Behaviours | 19.81 | | Conflict with Different Cultures | 47.13 |
| | Leadership Issues | 10.66 | | Advice | 32.86 |
| | Racism and Discrimination | 10.46 | | Gang | 8.36 |
| | Programs and Structures | 10.03 | | Involvement in Sport | 5.35 |
| **Manley** | Interactions of Systems | 27.02 | **Donna** | Interactions of Systems | 11.28 |
| | Parenting Assistance | 14.13 | | Trauma | 9.35 |
| | Exclusion and Retention | 9.2 | | Vicarious Trauma | 7.3 |
| | Gang | 7.62 | | Conflict with Different Cultures | 6.07 |
| | Violence Exposure | 7.57 | | Violence Exposure | 5.79 |
| **Parsa** | Importance of Education | 18.56 | **Vivienne** | Interactions of Systems | 11.54 |
| | Moving on with Life | 16.7 | | Breakdown or Separation of Family | 5.47 |
| | Refugee Life | 15.72 | | Disrupted or No Schooling | 4.91 |
| | Violence Exposure | 14.28 | | Personal Changes | 4.8 |
| | Hope | 11.62 | | Professional Changes | 4.8 |
| **Taylor** | Exclusion and Retention | 14.39 | **Scott** | Teacher Attitudes and Behaviours | 29.71 |
| | Conflict with Different Cultures | 11.7 | | Overwhelmed and Stressed | 11.36 |
| | Interactions of Systems | 11.16 | | Leadership Issues | 11.28 |
| | Trauma | 8.59 | | Government Direction | 9.83 |
| | Refugee Life | 8.42 | | Trouble Academically | 7.35 |
| **Bev** | Trouble Academically | 13.95 | **Bill** | Interactions of Systems | 31.65 |
| | Violence Exposure | 11.28 | | Support from Community | 18.28 |
| | Disrupted or No Schooling | 11.48 | | No Support after Coming to Canada | 15.38 |
| | Psychosocial Needs | 11.03 | | Importance of Community | 13.03 |
| | Needs for Healing | 8.78 | | Family Issues | 12.34 |
| **Sandra** | Leadership Issues | 18.98 | **Paul** | Interactions of Systems | 14.45 |
| | No Support after Coming to Canada | 17.64 | | Media | 12.45 |
| | Disappointment | 12.08 | | Conflict with Different Cultures | 12.22 |
| | Teacher Attitudes and Behaviours | 11.46 | | Criminal Activity | 12.22 |
| | Racism and Discrimination | 11.27 | | Gang | 12.22 |

Note: Coverage refers to the percentage of the transcript that was allocated to the discussion of a particular theme. Only the top five percentages for each individual were noted in the above table.

## Table 4.6. Comparison of Most Common Themes for All Students and The Participants in the Microsystem

| Top Ten Common Codes for Students and Participants from the Microsystem | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Students** | **Number of References** | **Microsystem** | **Number of References** |
| Breakdown or Separation of Family | 5 | Interactions of Systems | 8 |
| Violence Exposure | 5 | Racism and Discrimination | 5 |
| Racism and Discrimination | 4 | Conflict with Different Cultures | 4 |
| Importance of Education | 4 | Teacher Attitudes and Behaviours | 3 |
| Gang | 4 | Trauma | 3 |
| Financial Difficulty | 3 | Psychosocial Needs | 3 |
| Refugee Life | 3 | Gang | 3 |
| Psychosocial Needs | 3 | Leadership Issues | 3 |
| Loss | 3 | Programs and Structures | 3 |
| Importance of Community | 2 | Breakdown or Separation of Family | 3 |

## Pre-migration Experiences

The remaining section of this chapter is intended to discuss the findings related to the first research question, namely, "What are the pre-migration, trans-migration and post-migration experiences of war-affected children who immigrate to Manitoba?" I begin with evidence to support the diversity of the students' experiences, followed by several key themes that emerged when I investigated this question from the students' responses as well as from members of the various ecological systems. For the purpose of this discussion, the period of pre-migration will be referred to as the time that the student spent in his or her country of origin. Trans-migration is the time spent fleeing war (travelling within the same continent), or the time spent living in a refugee camp. Trans-migration also included the time spent travelling to Canada. Post-migration experiences are those that occur in Canada. The following discussion will discuss more of the short-term post-migration experiences and Chapter 5 will outline the long-term post-migration experiences.

All student interviews began with a question asking them about their experiences prior to coming to Canada. It became apparent that the experiences of these thirteen students could not possibly be generalized into a set of characteristics that would adequately describe the pre-migration or trans-migration experiences. Combined with the information obtained from the participants in the microsystem, the pre-migration and trans-migration phases were highly varied and ranged in almost every possible characteristic. It was also difficult to discern all of the details in the various stories and to sort out all of the events that occurred.

Many comments from the students with regard to their past experiences were somewhat rushed and some of them hesitated before providing an answer. However, later in the interview, more details were provided in terms of the experiences they had been through. The tentativeness at the beginning of the interview was most likely a result of the students and me both getting more comfortable in the interview. Although specific information was divulged, there were often subtle hints that led me to think that there was more information than what the participants shared. Anna asked me mid-way through the interview if I wanted to know about her circumstances because it would take more of my time. She then proceeded to disclose a very personal story, uninterrupted, for the next hour.

The following quote from Akot illustrates both the initial tentativeness in answering the question as well as the seemingly matter-of-fact statement that both of his parents were murdered. This was later discussed in more detail. The interview with Akot began with the researcher asking him to tell her about his experiences in Sierra Leone.

> It's kind of hard to... well, there is not enough food. And the shelter, the shelter is different like there is no place to sleep at all.
>
> I used to live with my uncle...I'm thankful that I am in Canada now.
>
> My parents are dead already. I didn't know them at all (pause).
>
> They made a mistake on my age. I am 18 right now, but I came with a different age. My age on paper is 21. I am 18.

At times, it was almost as if some of the students were asking permission to go into more detail before they proceeded to explain what their life was like in their

country of origin or in the refugee camp. I found that when I told them I knew very little about the area where they came from and that I needed help understanding what it was like for them, they felt more at ease talking about the circumstances during the war or their experiences living in a refugee camp.

The references to suffering, loss and pain were evident in all of the interviews with the students. What became interesting was the seemingly matter-of- fact manner in which many of the students told their stories or parts of their stories to me. Some of the students looked away when they talked about loss or witnessing violence, and some of their voices became quiet or they became emotional (watery eyes, cracking voices) while they were speaking, and I noticed that they often changed the topic quickly or simply stopped talking altogether. I sensed a distance between their current lives and their pre-migration experiences, yet, I also sensed an emotional connection. Although most of the students did not go into detail about their experiences, they did state numerous times how "dangerous," "scary," or "horrible" their situations were. Aran states,

> In my city beside my school, we saw them fighting. Like 19 people got shot. And they died. We saw the blood and everything. And we could hear the gunshots and they evacuated everything, like the shops, like the mall, and the supermarket, for three days. We were so scared because people were running beside our houses. They didn't come into our houses, but if you went outside you might get shot and get punished. So we stayed in our house for two days. That's a conflict that I have seen. I was so scared. And like, I know they are a

people, they call them rebels, and they have a big family and they use swords. Like machetes. So it was very, very dangerous.

Bango also talks about the rebels attacking his village. He recalls both the brutality of the violence as well as the indiscriminant abduction of youth to serve as child soldiers.

My house got burnt. Rebels, they don't pick anyone – they kill everyone. They kill kids. All years, middle age, old age. They don't pick, no. They chop kid's hands, eight-month old babies they chop their hands down. We do see kids like them, they chop hands down. Heartless people. And if you asked them what is the reason you're doing this fighting? And it's like nothing, they don't even know what they're fighting for. I don't understand. When they cut you, they will grab a few young youths. And after that they will train them to the force. They will start giving them things like drugs and things like that to help them adapt to that life. And you do things beyond your imagination. They do things beyond your thinking, as long as you are being drugged.

I know a lot who were captured. Now, they will tell you that it's just because of the drugs that make them do all this horrible things. And after everything is over, they appear to people for forgiveness. It is so hard.

I asked Helen to tell me a little bit about herself to start the interview. She begins with the following statement:

I'm coming from Rwanda. I was born there. I left that country when I was 17. Then I went to Uganda, which was my refugee country, and I lived there

for three years. It wasn't easy for me though because my mom was sick, and she passed away. And all the money we had we spent at the hospital. And I lived with my dad, and there was no security, and there was a kind of suffering, sickness. There was sickness, and no money for going to the hospital. We have a life and we had 10 kids in the house. And our family, two of them passed away. They were kidnapped and they poisoned them. Two of the children were kidnapped, and they took them away and poisoned them and then they passed away, and we buried them where my mom was laying down. And then we had to come to Canada. Our life is not easy. It's just been three years. People don't know because to get here, you are having a good life. If they see you looking fine and feeling a good life, they think that everything was fine in the past. And you don't have the chance to talk to them because they don't come and ask you. You don't have somebody to talk to and tell them your feelings. You can't get any help for your heart inside. Because nobody's talking to you. I feel that way.

Helen's comments toward the end of this quote imply that she believes that people think everything is fine with her and she has put the past behind her because she looks fine on the outside. What she points out is that people do not really know her feelings because she is not provided an opportunity to talk about herself. This statement proved to be a point of departure for my thinking about how the students' pre-migration experiences influence their post-migration lives. Do we simply think that these children or young adults are fine because they look fine on the outside? Is the fact that they are not talking openly about their past lives mean that they are no

longer affected by their experiences? Are the memories too painful to talk about? It could also be that the students would rather to keep their past to themselves. I questioned whether people were attempting to talk to these children about their experiences. I continued to ask myself these questions as I interviewed more students and participants from the microsystem and the exosystem. The importance of body language, tone, and how the students spoke was equally as important as the words they used.

It was also difficult at times to really understand how much the students remembered or what they were told about an event. I began to question whether the student simply wished that someone was alive, or whether the person really was alive. At the beginning of an interview, Anna stated that her mother was dead. Later in the interview she stated that she had talked with her on the phone. When I tried to clarify whether her mother was alive or not she explained the following situation,

> Yeah, she died, she was shot, but she made it and she came back to herself. They shot her, but it was on the other arm and she was just lying down. And my aunt told me that my mom died. I was with my mom when she was shot. I was upstairs in my room and I came down and she was lying on the floor. I thought she was sleeping, and I saw a lot of blood. And she wasn't breathing, my aunt said, "Just go." Everybody was just shooting and shooting and they said. "Run, just go and save your life." And we scattered, we went to different places. Now my aunt says that my mom is not dead and that I can talk with her on the phone.

Whether or not the student is factually true is irrelevant as the purpose of this study is not to uncover the actual facts; rather, it is to more fully understand the experiences of these students. It appears that the student has endured a memorable and frightening event and her recollection of the actual event is not altogether clear. There could be many factors that might affect her recollection of the events, such as her age, the events leading up to the event, or a defense mechanism that has helped her suppress a painful memory. When the same statement is examined within the context of the rest of the interview it provides insight into her overall mental status at the time of the interview. This will be discussed further when examining the effects of trauma and the debate surrounding trauma discourse.

Mike, the Executive Director of a reception centre for refugees, indicated that the people from the refugee community tell the families to solve their own problems and not to ask for help because it shows that you are weak. He suggests that this may be a reason why people do not reach out to agencies for help. This way of thinking may have also influenced the youth; as such, they may believe that it is inappropriate to talk about the past or to suggest that they may need help. Some of the teachers reported that students' stories often emerge in less obvious means, such as in an assignment, during a discussion, or in personal writing.

Sandra, an English teacher at Walter Duncan School, states that stories often come out in the student's writing. She asked her English students to write about a safe and an unsafe time in their lives. One of the girls wrote a paragraph and she said that an unsafe time was when she remembered running from village to village as she saw her friends' hands get chopped off and she saw people who were burned to death

in their homes. When students disclose these situations in an assignment, she will talk to them individually about what they have written and she will refer them for further assistance if needed.

*Personal stories: Hints and Glimpses*

What emerged from the pre-migration data is that there are only a select few individuals who really get to know the individual circumstances of the refugee students. Moreover, even these individuals get, at the very best, only bits and pieces of a total experience.

Paul, the vice-principal of Walter Duncan School refers to a sense of loss he feels as a result of not knowing the stories of his students. He also shares his concern for the students, who he knows have tremendous burdens to bear. He frequently refers to "hints and glimpses" of what he learns about the pre-migration experiences of his students.

> My sense was that for a lot of them it was quite a traumatic experience. But others, maybe not so much. But I think where I feel at a loss is that I don't know their stories. They don't talk a lot about what happened. For example, one student I know came from Sierra Leone....He smiled all the time. I asked him why he was always so cheerful? And he said, "Because I'm here, Mr. B." I did not know this until later that he was one of the few that survived in his family. He had survived because people had fallen over him when they died in the massacre. And he was underneath everybody in a mass grave. And then when people left, he was able to pick himself up and walk to the refugee camp. And I don't think you ever really will hear the full story until these

young men and women and people have had at least a generation to absorb and to distance themselves and to heal the wounds and give them perspectives. So there is tremendous pain there. So pre-migration really comes down to hints and glimpses of the pain and the tremendous suffering and flashes of anger as well. And sometimes depression in terms of the experiences that they have gone through.

Taylor, who is the coordinator of a work education program and also the student services coordinator, admits that it was not until he met the family after some time that the reality of his students' lives really hit him. He states,

> I had two girls who had a brother and their mother just had a baby and they were living by themselves in a very dilapidated house and they were having some difficulties. I went to visit the home and I noticed that the mother who had just had a baby—the father was murdered in front of the daughters' eyes but the mother was left for dead. She had a very large machete mark on her face. That was the realization for me, the machete mark. I've heard the stories about what life is like in the camps. And I knew what camps they had been in and how long they had been on the move and the risks they had, especially for the girls. The boys, for the most part, were secure in the camps and coming here. I don't know how they managed to get lucky enough to come here, to come to Canada.

Taylor also expresses his discontent with how little information he receives about the students,

About pre-migration there is generally very little or no information, unless you get it verbatim from the family. And whenever I take a new student into the school, I want to know where they were. I want to talk to the parents, I want to talk to the sending school and get a history of where they came from. And I want to deal with what their issues are. And I don't get any of that with the EAL kids. I have a friend who is an immigration lawyer, and a lot of families that are coming here are selected because they are at risk. Now, are they at risk for being murdered or for running away or for being recruited into the child soldiers? Why are they at risk? ....Maybe the reception centres of Canada have a better idea of what the issues were and what their lives were like before they came here, but we sure don't.

*Age Discrepancies*

In many cases, students have had to construct their own life stories to gain entry into the country. Many of the children have had to lie about their ages and the details of their lives to get legitimacy for their claim to come to Canada. Other students simply do not know their age because there is no one alive that can attest to when they were born. When they were in refugee camps they knew that they had to be 18 to come to Canada, so they increased their age. In a conversation with Imran, I asked him how old he was when he was in Kakuma refugee camp.

*How old were you when you were in Kakuma?*

I don't really know. Now I am 19.

When I came here, I used a different age to come here. Because when you are underage, they will not let you come to Canada. You have to increase

your age if you want to come here. I increased my age two to three years. I was 15 when I came to Canada.

Most of the students referred to two ages, "my real age" and "my age on paper." The age discrepancy was problematic because the school officials would place the students in an age-appropriate classroom based on their paper age as opposed to their developmental level. As Sokut states,

> The age that I came with said that I was too old to go to high school. And the teachers and the counsellors have to understand the position that I am in. I want to go to high school, but they said I was too old to go. Other students are in the same position; I am 25 on my papers. But that is not exactly the age that we are. I had to explain a lot to everybody to make them understand the position that I am in. They were really helpful, all of the people in my high school. Even if they're not high school age they have to be allowed to go to high school. So I was allowed to go to high school, and I started in grade 10.

Sokut also stated that when he first came to Canada, he was tested and the school said that he had to go to an adult education centre because of his age. He states,

> And they said I had to go to 900 Smith, by the hospital, but that was for old people and I'm not an old person. I went to my counsellor and I said this is not the level I am supposed to be in. It is an adult education centre and this is for old people and I cannot share with the older people. I want to go to high school.

In another conversation, a student indicates that most of the Sudanese young people came with a fake age. I asked what he meant by a fake age and he responds,

> Everybody is born in January. On January 1, everyone from Sudan has the same birthday.
>
> *Why is that?*
>
> Well they just give you a birthdate by the Canadian Embassy and for me, I was just given a date. So, actually, they had to increase my age so that I could come to Canada. I think I am 23.
>
> *And how old are you really?*
>
> 18.
>
> *So you came when you were 16?*
>
> Yes, and people don't believe we are not that age because the government issues the papers. Everybody works on what the government says on the papers. It is hard to change your age. Some people come with a different name. Some people just picked any name, and they didn't even know what they were doing. Whatever name came to them they just put it down.

What is clearly problematic about the three students mentioned in the preceding quotes is that these Sudanese boys indicated that they were 17, 16 and 15 when they traveled, unaccompanied, to Canada. They were then housed with one other 17 year-old boy, also from Sudan, in a house in what would be considered one of the poorest socioeconomic areas in the city. They were placed in a classroom that was clearly not suited to their "real age" or ability level. Had they not advocated so strongly on their own behalf to be in a high school setting, they would never have

had the opportunity to attend Walter Duncan School. Now these same students have had to advocate to remain in school because their paper age says they are 22 and are considered "mature students" and should be attending an adult education centre.

### *Documentation*

Several school staff members indicated that the information provided on some of the government forms appeared to be incorrect. The inaccuracies were often attributed to officials who misinterpreted the information provided to them by the individual, or the forms might have been filled out improperly by the individual. Christine, one of the counsellors at Walter Duncan School indicates that she has often had difficulties determining the correct name or age of her students. She notes,

> What has become apparent to me was that this whole process is done quite rapidly....When they come over, and later it was explained to me, the UN or whoever shows up to take this person that is already on the list to go to Canada. And if these people are not on site, what happens is they just pick whoever out of the crowd and they send them over. So sometimes somebody with the name of Lou or Aseta doesn't happen to be there on time, another set of girls or another set of families will be sent over. They come over without the family in many cases and their names are not consistent with their actual names. And it makes it very difficult because here's a grade 8 student according to the age, but they actually look like a 19-year-old or vice versa. And that's a problem because the school has to go with whatever their papers say. They may tell us that's not my real birthday or that's not my real age.

And I think they just pick them out of the crowd and say "You go, your name is such and such and this is your age."

Based on data obtained from participants in the exosystem and the microsystem, the challenge to acquire background information about the pre-migration experiences of the students was a difficult task. After the initial interviews with the students, I was able to more fully understand some of their pre-migration experiences; however, much of this information was quite sparse. The lack of information provided during the interview might be entirely attributed to the developmental stage of the students or it could have been limited because of language or cultural issues.

One of the student interview questions was intended to identify potential participants who were a part of the students' microsystem and who I had not previously considered interviewing. As it turned out, the two people most frequently mentioned were two teachers in the school, who I then arranged to interview. Based on the interviews with the participants in the microsystem, who had a much closer relationship with many of the students, I was able to acquire substantially more information regarding the students' experiences. I was also able to understand the overall response of the microsystem and the pivotal role that the school has in assisting refugee children.

## Trans-migration Experiences

### *Refugee Life: Displacement, Distrust and Danger*

Both the students and the participants in the microsystem commented about what life was like as a refugee. The four boys from Sudan referred to themselves as

"the Lost Boys." The term was adopted from the Peter Pan story and is widely used to describe the boys who walked on foot, without any adults, to flee the massacres of Sudan's civil war. When I interviewed James I told him that I did not know much about the Lost Boys and he readily offered to tell me the history. What I found particularly interesting was his closing statement, "Now you can go ahead with your questions." It was almost like he wanted this story out of the way, or to have it out in the open, before I proceeded with the interview. He states,

> The history of the Lost Boys is... At the time that the war started in 1983 there was, let me say, a disagreement between the rebels in Sudan in the South and the government in the North. They did not want to power share. That is the problem why they fight. Rebels, they fight the government. The people who are living in the south are Christians and the people in the north are Muslims. And people just fight between the Christians and the Muslims and they are all involved in the politics and they fight. The government attacks the people who were living in the south. They destroyed their house and killed their people and tortured people and everything they set fire. And they killed their kids. And the people who were against the government, the rebels they talked to the government of Ethiopia and they take the young men now. The Lost Boys, and the young boys. They took them away from parents and some of the Lost Boys, their parents have been killed, during the war and the young boys started to run away from their places and went to the neighboring countries. Ethiopia, it is one of the neighboring countries of Sudan in the East. So they walk to Ethiopia, and they stayed there for about

four years. And then the government of Ethiopia was overthrown by the new government. The new government don't want refugees living in a country. They shove them away. The Lost Boys…They run away from there and they move to Kenya, where other lost boys are living right now. This is where I was living. There are other people coming there who are from other countries neighboring countries where there are wars going on. There are several nations of refugees from seven countries living in one refugee camp. Kakuma, that's a refugee camp, where I was living and where Sokut was living before they moved to the other camp. At the time that we moved, there were about 35,000 Lost Boys. From 1983 to 1990s, and then from when they walk from Sudan to Ethiopia for about 10 days without enough food to eat on the way….And they walked again from Ethiopia to Kenya, and during that time many people died on the way. Some of the people died by hunger, some of the people were lost in the forest. Some of them were eaten by the wild animals, like the hyena. And the survivors of the lost boys, they arrived in 1992. There were about 10,000 from 35,000. And I was one of those people. Still, it is in my mind.

*(looking uncomfortable- looking down, visibly getting upset.)*

It's kind of difficult you know. But why that people have the life like me is that because what is going on or what the government is doing to us. We see that it is not good. We are supposed to finish our school. And the other kids now, they don't have a chance to go to school; there is no school. There is no school now where those children can go, and the Lost Boys; they are trying

> to be able to get what they want for their people like to be educated to be able to change the course of the government....That is why we want to do it, we made that decision even though it is hard decision to leave our parents, to come here by ourselves, to live without talking to our parents. And we hope that one day, one time, we will see our parents again. Okay, you can go ahead with your questions.

James' words depict several key themes found in many of the students' stories: the exposure they had to conflict, the fear they experienced, the treatment the children received from neighbouring countries and their subsequent relocation to another country, the lack of basic necessities, the lack of trust, and the loss of family and friends. What surfaced for all of these students was the importance and the priority they placed on receiving an education. This theme emerged in all of the students' interviews and was further reinforced by all of the members of the microsystem. The desire to get an education outweighed their other needs, including basic necessities and the reunification with their families.

The overriding importance of getting an education is brought forth in James' comments. James recounts,

> Sometimes there is other people that attacked the refugee camp, and they kill you in the night. People are scared for their security. There is insecurity in the camp. There are many people living in the refugee camp, and also what is sometimes called people fighting between other nations, other refugees with other refugees in the camp.

*So even in the camp, you have to worry that someone is going to kill you throughout the night.*

Yeah. It's not good or secure.

We have three or four in one room. In the camp. But the camp is better than back home because there is school to go.

The importance of education to the students will be discussed further in the following chapter, particularly as it relates to their educational experiences in Canada. Numerous references were made by various participants to what life was like in a refugee camp. The findings reinforced much of the information in the literature review: food was sparce, personal security was compromised, and the living conditions were "miserable."

Imran, who is also one of the Lost Boys from Sudan, explains what life was like for him when he lived in Kakuma refugee camp. All four of the boys commented about how they feared they would be killed when they slept, or that their food or other supplies would be stolen. Both James and Imran talked about how difficult it was for them to recount their stories. Imran states,

> The government gives us food and we keep it in our tent. The rebels can come to you anytime during the night. If they need food, and if you don't give them what they need, they will kill you. So we moved from Kakuma to Dadaab camp. We stayed there for some years. When we moved there, we didn't have our ration card so they would have to give you a ration card so that you can eat. You have to show it when you go to get the food. They would punch it for you when you went to get the food, but we did not have

that. So what we did is we just went to look for the other refugees like us in order to get the food. We did this until the UN was going to let us get a card. So we had to do this for a few months until the UN allowed us to get a ration card.

*How old were you when you were in Kakuma?*

I don't really know. Now I am 19. I was with another boy.

*So you were one of the Lost Boys? The two of you walked to another country?*

No, somebody carried me.

I still have actually a lot of memories, but sometimes to express some is hard. Sometimes it's hard to talk to close friends. Refugee life was like you know in Kakuma, it is hard. You know, the temperature is around 40° or something. And there is a lot of people. Kakuma was a really big mix of a lot of different people. The same in Dadaab too. There is a big mix of different people, different countries. My family is not here. They are in Sudan. I don't have any parents; I have brothers and sisters.

Bango explains that life in the camp is miserable and that he lived without hope. He recalls how little food there was and how the resources or food supplies would be temporarily cut off. He states, "Hope in the sense that, you know, like your day to day living, is just kind of... it is miserable. The expectation is that low; what are you expecting from the government or the NGOs. There is just not a lot."

Helen discusses the insecurity, poverty, and violence within the camp and the government's response to people leaving Rwanda.

> Yes, because there is a lot of kidnappings and poisons. The people came from my country to the refugee camp. And maybe right now the government is not happy, because people are leaving and who are you going to lure? Understand? So you feel kind of uncomfortable, and so you come and you kidnap some refugees. Sometimes you hear that people are killed before they come to Canada. And so when you are there, you never tell people when you are going to go to Canada. And you don't have to say that you are going to Canada, because you do not know who is your friend and who is your enemy. Because some people are kidnapped when it is their time to come here. And people say, where did those people go, and they say they kidnapped them. Sometimes they killed him, and sometimes they just torture them by beating them or not giving them any food.

As the literature review revealed and the interviews with the participants reinforced, life in a refugee camp was accompanied by feelings of insecurity, despair, fear, loneliness, and uncertainty about the future. Many of the students commented about being frequently displaced and about the loss of family members, as well as a breakdown of their social networks. Only two out of the thirteen students live with both parents; all other students had at least one parent who was killed during the various conflicts or who died from illness and a lack of medical care. Six of the students currently live alone or with another family member who is not their parent. As no formal schools existed in the camps, much of the schooling was conducted outdoors, usually under a tree or in a tent.

There was also the fear that the UN or the hosting country would take the people from the camps back to their country of origin if the fighting ceased. Rassan stated, "They would randomly pick people to send back to the border and there are cases where people are shot right at the border when they are handed back." This uncertainty about displacement and the fear of being returned also contributed to the distrust amongst the people in the camps, towards the agencies that were trying to assist them, and towards the governments from which they were fleeing.

### *Fleeing Persecution*

Complicating the range of experiences is strong evidence to support the fact that many of the students and their families were fleeing persecution from their homeland. Rebecca, from Save the Children, UK, states,

> They are desperately keen to be educated, but they are also not coming here just for the education. They are coming here because of the way they have been persecuted and often it is about child-specific forms of persecution, which are not accounted for in the Geneva Convention, which is what we use to assess whether or not someone is a refugee. There are real difficulties with their understanding of a child, and what has happened to the child and why they seek asylum and child-specific forms of persecution, child soldiers, traditional practices, like FGM (female genital mutilation), that can cause people to flee. I work with young people who have fled because of the threat of FGM. There are so many other reasons....In some cases it is persecution by your own family. I work with a young man who has physical disabilities

as a result of torture by his family. We see the scars on these people – the direct effect it has on them (personal communication, November 29, 3006).

Banya, who is from Afghanistan, indicates that young people lived with the fear of being captured and killed. She later discusses that she was intended to flee to America and the disappointment she had when her file was put aside after September 11th, 2001. Similar stories were told by other students who indicated that they waited in refugee camps for years hoping for their names to be called for relocation to another country. Banya explains,

> So the police were horrible. They were catching young people and killing them. That happened with my cousin. The police caught him three times and my aunt had to give them her gold so she could get him back. They didn't kill him, but they would have, if she didn't give it to them...My mom applied for America, and we were supposed to go. And then the airplanes came. We applied, and they said we would go to America. But after that (September, 11th) our file was just missing. And then we applied again, to Canada.

There are some students who have been in refugee camps in excess of ten years before coming to Canada. As Bill, a member of the Sudanese Community, indicates, some of the students, who were not part of this study, were born in refugee camps. This instability and movement is the result of continuing civil wars accompanied by horrific violence targeted towards children and civilians. The children have been affected by war and this elicits an entirely different dimension to the pre-migration and trans-migration experiences. With war comes violence and with violence there is loss.

*Loss and Loneliness*

Two of the most frequently occurring themes related to the personal experiences of the students were loneliness and loss. Twenty-four different participants cited thirty-two different references to loss. Loneliness was the second most commonly cited reference. Although many researchers would argue that qualitative data should not be quantitatively expressed (Miles and Huberman, 1994), the frequency of the occurrences of references related to loss and loneliness was certainly indicative of an important theme that was worthy of discussion.

For many of the students, this loss has been a family member, a close friend, a parent, or a schoolmate. There was loss of a way of life, the loss of a home, school, and social and family networks, as well as the loss of languages and customs. Children have lost their childhoods, and parents have lost their pride. Loss is ubiquitous to war and loneliness is quite often the result.

Donna, the principal of Walter Duncan School, expresses the extent and magnitude of some of the students' losses. She states,

> Some have come with...well, they've lost their families completely. They have witnessed torture, they have been tortured, they have witnessed their own family being killed. A couple of them have been forced to kill. Some of them have body scars. We have a little girl who has bullet wounds in her stomach and she has had many operations here.... They have seen babies thrown into the fires. You cannot even begin to comprehend what they have been through. They have had to flee for their lives, they have lost their possessions.

In some cases, the students witnessed the violent killing of their family members. Bev, the EAL teacher, indicates that some of the Afghani girls' fathers were teachers and they were shot in their home or shot at school in front of the children. She further explains that the loss of the father leaves the family at a more serious disadvantage in terms of negotiating for basic needs or for navigating the family through the process of seeking a refugee claim.

For some of the students, the losses they have endured or the uncertainty of whether their parents are alive or not has exacted a toll on their current lives in Canada. Laurie, the school counsellor, was called to a math room last year to assist a teacher, and she noticed a girl who was surrounded by other female students. She saw the girl was visibly upset and the other girls were trying to comfort her. When she asked what was wrong the girl indicated that she did not know how to do the math. Laurie empathically stated her own math frustrations and said "maybe we could figure it out together." She then proceeded to put her hand on the girl's back in an endearing manner, in what she referred to as acting like a "mom" as she does with her own children. Laurie remembers the girl's response,

> And she just collapsed. Just collapsed. And she was sobbing, sobbing, sobbing. So, I took her out and I said, "let's go for a walk"....Well, she tells me that she hasn't seen her mother in three years, because when she was leaving she ran into the bush. She described the scene, which to me was exactly the scene of this movie *The Constant Gardener* where they come in on a horse, and everybody scatters. Everybody scatters in the village, and they run off. She went with an auntie and her mom went with her sister. One

went one way and one went the other, and they never saw each other again. To this day, she still doesn't know whether her mother is alive. And this woman ended up being the auntie and I'm sure you've probably heard of this already. They just grab a child because it gets them on the plane. So they take two children with them and off they go. So they end up living with people that they didn't even know that are not their real parents. But they might become guardians of them. I could tell you about some older students that I have right now. They are really struggling with that because discipline is very difficult at home, because, this person is not my mom but on paper she is. But this one little girl, one kind word, just brought her to pieces. I'd say that war is affecting her. It is not that she can't do her math, I don't think so. The issue is that she can't even think straight, because she doesn't even know if her mom is alive or not. That is what is affecting her at school.

The extent of the losses of all that a family has worked for and the frustrations the family felt is expressed in the following quote by Bango. He explains,

> And you are trained to bring up your family. And the rebels come and they take away all that you have been trying to build up for yourself. Things that you have been building up for years. So it is kind of frustrating. So many people die of those frustrations after the war. Because when you think about who you are and at the time, you don't have anything and you have to go and beg for your living. Those things are all taken from your life. In just a minute, the rebels take away everything in your life. Just then, all of a sudden

> when you are attacked, they take everything down and take everything, all your richness. And then after the fighting the war is over, you can't help but be frustrated because you don't have anything in your hands. It's so frustrating. Your pride is gone.

Sokut discusses the loneliness he feels and his desire to be with a family. Despite his current feelings, he remains positive and hopeful that things will change:

> If I go now, my father may not notice me, because I have grown up. I was four years old when I left my parents. My village was attacked, and I was not with my parents. I was with my uncle and he was killed and I had to run on my own. It was extremely bad and I have no power, so that I can go to see them. Especially this year it was very hard, because I have no money to go. I have no papers, I have nothing. This is how life goes; after some years it will change.

Sokut also tells me that Christmas is a hard time for him and his friends. "We had to spend it in our apartments, but others with families, they spend it together with other families, because they are families, and they stay together." He suggests that young people who are alone should be integrated with other families instead of "putting us alone and suffering." Although there was a difference between the loneliness expressed from the students who were with family members as opposed to those who were alone, the theme was common to both circumstances. Many of the students who were with parents also talked about never seeing their parents because their parents worked two jobs or they worked evening shifts, or the students themselves were working to support the family.

*Working towards Relocation*

Most of the students have been to several countries prior to coming to Canada. When they fled the war in their home countries, most were relocated to refugee camps. In the camps they had to follow a process to register to be relocated to another country, usually the UK, Canada, or the United States. Individuals would go to an embassy to fill out application forms and they would have to go through a full medical check and a criminal records check. An interview would also be conducted by officials from the UN. This process could take years to complete. Bill, a community and school liaison worker, who was also a refugee from Sudan, explained that this time is a period of interruption and only a few are "lucky to go through the process and be successful to migrate to another country." Bill's statement is particularly important, because it infers that the students who do end up getting into Canada have been through an intensely demanding period of time that appeared to him to be driven more by happenstance than anything else. It also provides insight into the kind of person who might get through this process and how it might contribute to his or her overall personal agency. This notion is further supported by Jo Boyden, from The Refugee Studies Centre in Oxford, who suggests that we need to remember that the refugees who make it to the west are privileged. She states,

> They are the ones who already are very privileged because the ones who get to stay behind in the war zone or are IDP's (internally displaced people) are always the ones with fewer contacts and fewer resources. Less money and less of everything. People never ever consider that. It is so politically

> incorrect to say that, but to be a refugee is already a privilege by comparison to those who are left behind. And after a conflict, and when you get refugees returning back, there is profound resentment by those who never left. And there is good reason in their view, because there are people who are too poor, too sick, too old, or frail, or whatever it is, to leave. And those are the ones who really are really bereft of resources in many cases. To get to the UK or to Canada, you are the crème de la crème....Actually, when we receive these refugees, we think of them as being desperate, bereft. But they're not. They are really not, given what they have already managed to do. What it takes, the ingenuity the resources. And if you see them as desperate human beings, which to a certain level, they may be, and I'm not trying to detract from their suffering, but just to point out that it takes a hell of a lot to get to another country in the first place. You are not usually just brought out of a war zone. They have usually taken advantage of whatever opportunities that there are available and you have fought your way to get there (personal communication, December 5, 2006).

Boyden makes a central argument in the above excerpt. It is essential to keep in mind the tremendous and often life threatening experiences that many of the refugees have undergone just to get to a host country. The personal agency and human capacity demonstrated by the students and their families is noted by the aforementioned quotations. As the pre-migration information tells us, many of these individuals have overcome remarkable adversity, personal loss, and hardship. This, combined with the fact that some of these students have not had any family support,

illustrates just how resilient many of these young people are to be able to get through the pre-migration and trans-migration phases.

Many of the students' hopes for relocation were quickly exchanged with disappointments and rejections, accompanied by little explanation from the officials. Securing relocation in another country was a difficult and lengthy process that appeared on the surface to be more of a game of luck and chance than an officially governed procedure. The trans-migration experience was occasionally referred to as a period of uncertainty, lost hopes, and then disbelief about actually coming to Canada. It became obvious why one student noted that he never actually believed it would happen until he was on the plane.

*Relocating to Canada: Hope and Happiness*

Although the indiscriminate phases of the pre-migration and the trans-migration experiences have been noted, the following discussion will centre on the experiences the students had once they knew they were coming to Canada. For many of the students this period of time was distinctly different from the feelings and experiences described in the pre-migration phase. The latter phase of trans-migration for the students was a period of time in their lives that represented hope, happiness, and a chance to believe that the dreams they had always envisioned could now come true. It was an escape from poverty, a chance to go to school, and an opportunity to start a new life. Although this meant leaving people they loved and losing friends who had become their only family, it was felt to be worth the sacrifice.

Bango recalls,

> It was one of the fantastic things in my life, the thing that I can remember in my life, ever since I knew we got approved. It was so good when I boarded the plane to here. It was like, finally, I have a chance. This is the time for me to make life better, for my life to be better for myself. When I boarded the plane, I was not sure. Even though we had been approved, but I was not. I couldn't get that excited, unless I am aboard the plane. It was good and always really good because everybody knows that Canada is a free country.

Trans-migration experiences ranged from as little as one or two years to in excess of ten years. Fleeing war meant leaving home and living in a refugee camp or being relocated to a neighbouring country. Some of the neighbouring countries were not accepting of refugees and many of the governments in these countries prohibited refugees to work or to go to school. The separation or loss of both family members and friends was common. The latter phase of trans-migration represented a time with happiness and hope, yet also some tentativeness and fear. Coming to Canada was exciting, but it was coupled with numerous uncertainties and cultural adjustments that posed substantial challenges and significant barriers for the students.

## Post-Migration Experiences

### *First Impressions*

Many of the students recounted the difficulties that had when they first arrived in Canada with acclimatizing and learning enough English so that they could navigate their way through the city. Most of the students suggested that the initial phase of adjusting to a new place and figuring out the various systems were

enormous tasks. Some of them recounted their stories, laughing about some of their misunderstandings about Canadian culture and the environment.

Afem recalls his first few memories of arriving in Canada, smiling and laughing about the first time he saw snow. He also remembers the first housing placement he was in and the difficulties he had getting to school. The housing placement arises in almost all of the students' interviews, as many of the students have had to relocate in the city several times due to numerous factors, including personal safety, difficulties with landlords, or the unsuitability of the dwelling.

> When I come to Canada, it was new for me. The first thing you do is come to reception place, and it was the winter. So, I never met winter in my life. When I came, I thought at first it was sugar on the ground. I went to reception centre. I got a counsellor, who was an African who had been here for a while already. So she was giving me a lot of ideas how to go to school and how to adapt to life in Canada. Our first house was on Alberta Avenue. It was not good. It was too horrible. It was too dirty, and it was too far from school, and they said we need a place that's near to school so that we have time to come. And so we went to another one on Southside.

Even a subtle cultural difference, like greeting people on the street, was an adjustment. Aran states,

> And another one was the communications. In the culture I came from, it's like when you walk around, you just go around and say hi to everyone and say, how are you. It is kind of a regular thing to just walk around and say 'hi' to everyone you know. When I'm walking and I see people, even when

don't know them, I have to say "hi", it is kind of like a tradition in Sudan. And then when I was walking here, I was saying "hi" to everybody and they just looked at me and said "what?" And sometimes they don't even answer and then one friend told me you don't do that here, and then I'm, like, "okay."

Levia also recalls a time when the fire alarm went off in the temporary residence at the reception centre. When they heard the alarm they walked out in the winter in their bare feet, thinking that they were going to burn. She said that she started crying from being so cold.

For most of the students, post-migration meant a bombardment of absolutely totally different cultural practices, nutrition, housing, education, peer groups and even family dynamics. Essentially, there was a complete shift and a dramatic change in all of their ecological systems. The words of Aran and Afem are a reminder that even some of the seemingly smaller adjustments that the students made were also personally significant and should also be considered as important factors related to adjustment.

Most students made reference to the reception centre that provided initial support to them when they first arrived in Canada. Someone from the centre met them at the airport and made arrangements for housing and basic necessities. While this support was acknowledged, students reported that the centre did not provide continuing support. As Mike, the Executive Director of the centre indicated, the federal government is going to need to increase the amount of funding to provide services beyond primary settlement. With a staff of approximately 29 people and a

total of 1,469 cases from during the 2005-2006 fiscal year, much of the support that the centre provided was limited to initial settlement services.

When newcomer students first arrive at the receiving school, the typical process of registration is followed; the student fills out a registration form and presents his or her school record if it is available. The counsellor or teacher works with the student to develop a timetable that best fits his or her academic level. At Walter Duncan School, Bev, the EAL teacher sets up a time to meet with the students to help her determine the student's academic level. She often tests both their literacy and numeracy skills and she uses the results to place the student in the appropriate EAL classroom. The pre-beginner class is for students with little or no prior education experience. The student would spend all of their time in the literacy centre with other student at the same level. Students take Physical Education with other EAL students and other than this pre-beginner students are not integrated with other students in the school. Their classroom and locker area is in a separate section of the school, called the mezzanine which is away from the other general classrooms.

The other two levels of EAL classes are Intermediate and Advanced. Students in these levels would have had some prior education experience but their English skills would not be strong enough to be integrated with other classes in the regular stream in the school. The majority of the classes that students take are EAL classes which focus on academic writing, speaking skills, and skills for independent living. Students must achieve 28 credits to graduate from high school and most students take four or five classes per semester, each counting for one credit.

Bev indicated that she tells the students that they must have three or four levels of EAL English before they attempt the regular 20S level English. As she explains, not all students accept her advice.

> It is frustrating because I tell them you need these three English classes before you go into regular English. They do not want to do this. If they do not want to listen, I have to put them in and then they fail. Some fail over and over again. I try to encourage them that they need these classes to handle the regular high school courses, but they are in a hurry to move into the regular stream.

Typically, Bev develops a timetable for each student. As the student becomes more proficient with English, he or she is integrated into more courses in the regular stream. The student might begin with such courses as: typing, work education, or foods and nutrition. With three varying levels of EAL classes and numerous elective courses, most students who stay in school are able to acquire the necessary credits to graduate. Having said that, this typically takes a year or two longer than other students in a three year high school program. Noting the fairly sophisticated EAL program, I asked Bev what other schools do when these programs are not put into place, her reply was, "They just go right into the regular classes and they hope for the best. Most of those kids just fail or drop out."

### *Understanding the Experiences*

Len, who works in the counselling clinic for refugees, argues that families and children and all members of the refugee community go through phases, and each phase brings a new challenge. He indicated that there were different overlapping

phases which were quite overwhelming. He has seen families get quite distraught about not knowing where to start and how to handle some of the stressors. Len indicated that the stress could be both related to the past or the present or an immediate danger. To explain this cultural adjustment, he uses the analogy of being thrown into the middle of an ocean. The adjustment is often related to basic needs or to past trauma and he reinforces the urgency in dealing with these stressors immediately when people arrive in Canada. Rob, a minister in a local Sudanese church, states that he witnesses a pattern of soaring and crashing with new refugees in the community. He states, "...You have to work with that and it's wonderful when they soar and your heart breaks when they crash." Jill Rutter also noted, "Children go up and down and they crash" (personal communication, November 28, 2006). Sokut also stated, "things settle then they don't go my way...then they settle again, and then not go my way again...my life keeps going like that."

Rassan, who is also a former refugee, articulates the importance of the school system recognizing the previous experiences the students have had, and considering this when they receive new refugees into their school. Throughout the interview with Rassan, he argues that teachers must strive to first create a relationship with each student and then to proceed with assessment and more formal educational activities. Without this relationship, he argues, you have nothing. He recalls a situation with a new student toward the beginning of his teaching career in Canada.

> In 1999, I had a student walk into my classroom from Kosovo and he was a Muslim. I'm a Muslim. He walks into my classroom, and this kid witnessed his cousins' and uncles' execution back home, and he is only about 13 years

old. He walks into my classroom and he's a skinny little guy. Instead of the first thing of my giving him a piece of paper and saying this is what were going to do, I went and sat down with him and talked to him. So we got to know each other a little bit better. He got to know where I came from, what kind of background I had, and I got to know a little bit about him. He had very little English. It has been eight years now, and he still comes back to visit, because initially, I tried to build an understanding between us and the friendship of some sort with him that was long-lasting or relevant. And he actually became one of the very top students that graduated. This kid had been through some horrific experiences in his life at the age of 13 and younger. And for me to try and say "hey, this is what you do in Math, and these are what the outcomes are that you're going to do, and this is what I expect, from this period of time." It just does not work. My colleagues have tried it with no success. I find a lot of people like that always complain about management problems and not being able to get the kids to work. Without the relationship, they will not see much success.

The people in the ecological systems who appear to know more about the experiences of the students are those people who state that they have taken the time to foster and nurture a close interpersonal relationship with the students. Although the complete stories might take years to tell, the students have clearly selected individuals whom they trust and to whom they are willing to talk. Rassan's words illustrate not only the importance of the role of the people in the microsystem, but

also the relevance of the process of the initial process of reception that the school provides to the student.

### *Carrying on with Life*

After the initial excitement of coming to Canada, the realities of starting a new life were accompanied with some disappointment, frustration, and regret. Students indicated that they were frustrated with trying to keep up with the school work and they did not know if they were going to ever be able to achieve what they wanted. Some of the participants from the microsystem indicated that people have incorrectly assumed that bringing refugees to Canada will be all they need to give them a better life. During the student interviews, there were five different students who, at one point in time during their interview, hinted that they would be better off being back at home. Sokut illustrates this point with the following statement:

> I was in a refugee camp all my life. I still consider myself a refugee. There is nothing here. Maybe there are clothes, the food that I eat, the place that I sleep, but I'm still a refugee. I don't see anything changing. Why I say that because life in the camp is the same as life like here. The same food I eat. The only thing that changes is the school, because I go to school everyday, but life is the same. When I was living in the camp, it was better than here, because I worked by myself. I had a nice house, I built my own house. It was comfortable. It was my home.

Carrying on with life in Canada was accompanied by numerous continuing challenges that were often associated with moments of regret about having come to

Canada. These challenges will be more thoroughly discussed in the following chapter.

## Summary and Conclusion

All 13 students lived during intense periods of brutal civil war. Afghanistan had been at war since 1970 and Sudan, Liberia, and Sierra Leone had been at war since the late 1980s or early 1990s. Rwanda's genocide in 1994 resulted in an estimated 800,000 deaths. These various civil wars were often accompanied by government coups, strict regimes, genocide, and endemic poverty. Two of the students reported that they attended school regularly and the remaining eleven students indicated that their schooling had been disrupted because of the war and their forced migration.

There was evidence to support that students' pre-migration experiences included loss, starvation, abuse, persecution, danger, displacement, distrust and exposure to violence. Eight of the thirteen students indicated that one or both of their parents had been killed and three students were not sure if their parents or siblings were alive. Only two indicated that they currently had a mother and a father. Twelve of the thirteen students indicated that they were separated from family members when they had to flee their homes. Some have not heard from any family members since they left their homes. One student witnessed the violent sexual assault of her mother and her subsequent shooting.

All 13 students have witnessed high intensity violence where a family member, friend, or a community member was brutally murdered. One student indicated that he witnessed rebels chopping the arms off of children and adults as a

means to intimidate the community. One of the female participants indicated that girls were not safe and she lived in fear that the men would sexually assault her. The four "Lost Boys of Sudan" witnessed the starvation and subsequent death of countless children as they traveled from one country to another. Some of the students witnessed the destruction of their own homes and others fled their homes when rebels invaded their communities.

The initial conceptual framework used in this study depicted a distinct and sequential progression from pre-migration, trans-migration and post-migration phases, the evidence in this study suggests that the phases are much less defined than originally assumed. Several students made comments about the emotional connection they still had to friends and family who were still living in their former countries. War is only a phone call away. Family members are suspended in pre-migration or trans-migration phases that still very much influence the post-migration phases of the students in Canada. Students worry about whether their parents are alive or whether they would even recognize them if they were to go back home. Memories of violence and coping with loss continue to affect the students.

The reality of war and violence is still very close to the lives of the students. A complication that arose for people within the school system is that they are not fully aware of the pre-migration and trans-migration experiences of these students. Piecing together a composite of the experiences that an individual has had may take years to accomplish and school staff suggested that this compromised their ability to provide the most appropriate programs and services to these students. Experiences during pre-migration were also discussed positively. Students talked about going to

school, being with friends and family, and carrying on with daily tasks, despite the insecurity they felt.

The pre-migration experiences of the students culminated with a forced movement from home that was accompanied with varying levels of emotion pain. The students' ecological systems changed substantially. Students were unable to attend school, family members and friends were killed or separated, and communities were destroyed.

The trans-migration phase might have included living in a refugee camp for years waiting to be relocated or it could have been a relatively short period of a few weeks that included leaving home and relocating to Canada. The majority of the students encountered years of displacement from camp to camp with broken promises for relocation. The four boys from Sudan had lived in various refugee camps for approximately 10 years. Life in the refugee camps was reported as "difficult," unpleasant," "violent," and "unsafe." Camps were overcrowded, food was rationed, and neighbours could not be trusted. The students indicated that they waited and hoped that they would be chosen by the United Nations for relocation. The process of applying for relocation was complicated and students reported that they "felt like they won a lottery" when they were finally chosen to come to Canada.

The trans-migration phase was characterized as tending to basic survival needs and working towards relocation. Some students experienced several phases of relocation and they had to go through the process of resettlement numerous times. The experiences of the latter phase of trans-migration included leaving the country of

origin and traveling to Canada which was typically accompanied by hope and happiness about starting a new life.

As the following chapter illustrates, long-term post-migration challenges and obstacles are ubiquitous to the students' experiences; however, their capacity to adjust and overcome their challenges are recognized, which supports a trajectory that is hopeful and positive. It is absolutely imperative that, as a society, it is not assumed that because students have been relocated to Canada, they will be better off. For many of them, the challenges are enormous, their life is not as it was imagined, and they no longer have the social, cultural, or familial networks that would typically carry them through the difficult times of their lives.

What emerged from much of the data related to post-migration is that the students are generally happy to be in Canada and to be free from persecution, poverty, and conflict. Although many of the students miss people, places, and their former culture, most look forward to the future. Students seem to carry on as best as they can, despite numerous barriers, with their hopes and aspirations for a new life in Canada. Various comments also emerged from the students about how appreciative they were for Canada to accept them. They proceeded to discuss their problems and challenges with a disclaimer stating that they were so thankful they were here, but they still faced so many challenges. It was almost as if they were thanking a host for receiving a bad dinner.

During the interviews with members of the microsystem, several key individuals were identified by the students as being people they could trust in their school. It was through these participants that the students opened up and shared their

personal stories in numerous ways, both verbally and in written or electronic forms. It is from these interviews that I was able to see the connection that still exists between the pre-migration, trans-migration, and post migration phases and how the students' past experiences continue to affect their current lives. After reviewing and analyzing the recording of the interviews and the transcripts, the subtle hints from the students became more obvious and led me to uncover new information.

It is important to recognize the diversity of the experiences that students have had and to not simply assume that every refugee has had a similar experience. Jason Hart, from the Refugee Studies Centre in Oxford, suggests that an ideal system should be able to recognize the diversity of the children's experiences and proceed to deal with children on an individual basis. Furthermore, he states, "Instead of looking at these children as simply refugees or war-affected children, they are put together, understandably, in the category of refugee and asylum seeking children and children from war-affected countries. The danger of course is having a generic set of assumptions that may be appropriate for some, but totally inappropriate for others and very disempowering for others" (Jason Hart, personal communication, December 4, 2006). Integral to his argument is the importance of those who work with refugee or war-affected children, who must not only challenge their assumption about the past experiences of these children, but also their conceptualization of what it means to us to be a child.

In conclusion, despite the experiences many of the students have had, their resolve to get an education, to work to support themselves and their families, is what drives many of them forward despite their past. Whether the memories are

suppressed or forgotten, consciously remembered or problematic, all of the students exhibited perseverance to achieve their goals and aspirations. A positive focus on the future was evident in all of the interviews. The following chapter discusses in more detail the challenges and the problems that refugee students encounter during the post-migration phase.

# 5. CHALLENGES CONFRONTING NEWCOMERS

The following chapter will detail the findings that address the second research question, "What are the challenges and obstacles that confront war-affected children who attend a high school in Manitoba?" Because this question yielded a substantial amount of information, the chapter will be subdivided into four main sections. The first three sections will discuss the three general themes that occurred with such frequency in the interviews that they became a subsection of their own. The three branches were: racism and discrimination, psychosocial issues, and education-specific challenges. Each of these three branches was further divided into sub-themes. The fourth section details the stand-alone themes that emerged less frequently than the three general clusters of themes, but are worthy of mention and discussion. The relationships and patterns between the various themes will also be revealed.

As Table 4.2 in the previous chapter illustrates, the number of sources and references for each theme are delineated. That said, even the challenges that occurred less often in the interviews are worthy of mention. As Taylor and Bogdan (1998) suggest, sometimes the best insights come from a small amount of data and even a single incident is sufficient for the development of a conceptual category. Having said this, the process of coding the transcripts provided insight into what themes were becoming most prevalent across the variety of sources. Miles and Huberman (1994) noted there are good reasons to resort to numbers, namely, to see what is

uncovered in a large batch of data, to verify hunches, and to keep the researcher analytically honest. Using frequency counts was useful to observe the general direction and distribution of themes among the different sources. The method of analysis that I chose for this data allowed me to see what nodes or themes went together, which seemed to matter more, and what themes were mentioned most often. From this, I was able to make connections between the themes and to cluster these into an overarching category to organize the discussion of the findings.

## Racism and Discrimination

Before embarking on a discussion related to racism and discrimination, a more thorough understanding of the school culture is essential. As was stated in the preceding chapter, the students at Walter Duncan School represent a variety of cultures. This diversity is accompanied by ignorance and misunderstandings between the students as well as fear and conflict. Most of these factors appear to extend beyond the school system and into the community and the homes of the students.

Although the investigation into this topic was originally centred on student-to-student racism and discrimination, the evidence from the interviews extended this investigation to include racism and discrimination from the adults in the microsystem and the exosystem towards refugee children and adults. Numerous sources provided evidence to suggest that adults in the microsystem and exosystem complicated and perpetuated many of the prejudiced and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours.

*School Culture*

Data obtained from the teachers, the students, and the administrators reveal that there are three main cultural groups: aboriginal students, white students, and immigrant students. Participants referred to a main street that ran across the school community and marked the boundary between the north and the south. The street was referred to by the vice-principal as "the great divide." There is the group from the south side of the street, where there are typically more settled and stable working class families. The north side of the street is the inner city, where there are typically more Aboriginal families and newer immigrants to the city.

While most of the participants recognized and praised the diversity of cultures within the school, very few offered more than a state of coexistence that was felt between the cultures. Paul, the vice principal at Walter Duncan School notes,

> I think in some ways, we have progressed quite a lot in terms of bringing those students together and learning to work with each other and learn with each other, but much remains to be done in terms of the groups connecting on a more intentional and purposeful basis. Most of it right now is more on a surface basis where they're saying, you know, "how are you," and stuff like that. The groups have not melded to the point where you can find one group that consists of different types of students.

Paul further suggests that some students have to be organized to get them to be with each other. He referred to the basketball team as "Team UN" because it includes students from such a variety of cultural backgrounds. Although this diversity is viewed positively, it is referred to as merely a description and Paul

suggests that this needs to move beyond diversity to forming more interactive and meaningful relationships.

The conflict that seems to surface within the school and the community is largely between the Aboriginal students and the immigrant students. The white students appear to be completely exempt from the conflict. That said, the white students do not integrate with either the Aboriginal students or the refugee students. Sandra explains the division she has observed in the hallways,

> ...And the white kids are totally left out of it....If you look in the hallway, you'll see the white south end kids and they just sort of skirt all of them. And then you see the other groups, you know it's all about power, and so they take it out on somebody who is even less powerful than them. That's the only way they will have power.

Scott informed me that, in his class, there is an obvious division in where the students sit. He said you can physically see the division; there is a white section, an Aboriginal section, and a section where the immigrants sit. He commented further about the cultural divisions and the conflict he has witnessed between the Aboriginal students and African students.

> You could watch in the main common areas a geographical separation between largely African and Aboriginal groups. For whatever reason, there is tension between those two groups. And outside of the school, kids were getting jumped. A lot of kids also have trouble with the police.

When I asked Scott whether there was racism because of this division, his response was, "Oh yeah, by other students and by teachers and by administration."

The perceived school culture highlights the division between the main groups of students, as well as the opinions that some of the teachers have regarding the attitudes and behaviours of their colleagues towards the refugee students. The division recognized in the microsystem mirrors what is also observed in the exosystem or the larger community. While some of the conflict is played out in the school, a considerable amount of violence occurs in the community, which ultimately affects what happens in the school. Most of the teachers and the community members believe that the school has not done enough to encourage cultural understanding.

Christine, one of the school counsellors, indicates that there is a need for a whole school approach for dealing with racism and discrimination. She suggests that there needs to be a proactive plan for identifying and dealing with racist issues. She notes,

> I think there's always a little bit of racism with the kids themselves. It would be helpful if the school took on a goal of creating a school spirit to sort of deal with other underlying racism or discrimination issues, just to deal with things when they do come up, or just to deal with bullying, in general, just so teachers and students know how to deal with situations where there is bullying involved, whether it is racism or not.

Participants, on numerous occasions, identified the administration as needing to play a key role in creating a fair and accepting culture in the school. Some of the participants indicated that the perceived unfairness by the administrators towards certain ethnic groups contributed to the racial division in the school. The importance

of leadership and the notion of fairness were deemed to be prominent in much of the discussion on racism and discrimination. The perception of inequality heightens the likelihood of situations being considered racially motivated or discriminatory. As long as the perception is there, the students believe that they are being treated unfairly because of their race or culture. Whether it is true or not, the students' perceptions need to be addressed. Scott indicates that accusing people of racism is sometimes the only power that some of the students will have because they have learned that white people are scared of the word. He notes, "And they think that that's the only power that they have, is that I can make you feel like crap because you have power, and you can feel guilty for having power. It's scary because you can see them internalizing this." This statement provides valuable insight into what schools need to do in terms of liberating the students and attempting to combat racism and discrimination.

### *Racism in the Various Ecological Systems*

Whether the racism or discrimination is perceived or real, it has been noted as a prominent and recurring challenge within all of the ecological systems and from a variety of participants. Sandra's quote outlines just how pervasive the problem is:

> I definitely see kids that feel that they have no avenues. I've had students that have told me that they lived in a racist country before and now they have come to Canada, and they thought that Canada was going to be this total ideal place and then they realized that this place is just as bad to them. They thought that they would feel safe on the street and they wouldn't be persecuted for the color of their skin. And now they know that they're

> profiled by the police, they're profiled by the administration, by teachers and by other students who just see them as a nasty black man or a gang member. So they feel that the promised land that they worked so hard to get into is not what they wanted it to be.

Sandra's words not only illustrate how widespread the discrimination is from an ecological perspective, but also the disappointment that she thinks the students feel about being in Canada.

Ingrid, a divisional consultant, believes that racism is "highly existing" in many schools in the school division. She is concerned because, once she sees progress in one school, she recognizes another problem in another school. She also indicated that she has received phone calls at her divisional office, from parents who said that they do not want their child sitting beside a black student. The parents do not want their child to sit with another student who has come from another country.

When I asked Laurie, the school counsellor, if there was any racism or discrimination in the school, she responded by saying, "From the adults?" This statement was accompanied by a little laugh followed by the following quote,

> It's shameful, it's true. It's there. And it comes from a lack of understanding and ignorance and we don't address it. In our school, we have created all of these different pockets. We've created it and we are living with it. It's our own problem. So we have to own it and address it and deal with it. A lot of the resistance comes from the adults....I just don't think we do enough education with the adults. How can we educate the kids if we can't even educate ourselves? That's where we need to start. I think there should be

mandatory workshop on war-affected children for teachers in our school division if this is where the province is going.

Some of the discrimination appeared to be unrelated to any previous experience or relationship; rather, it appeared to be completely unprovoked and random. Taylor discussed an incident that he thought was a racially motivated gang initiation.

> There was another incident right across the street, where one of my students was there in his father's car—he was sitting in the car, right across from the Blackhawk restaurant. A friend was sitting beside him and his sister was sitting in the back of the car with one of her friends. They were waiting for a light and the window was partially down. An Aboriginal boy tapped on the window and the guy rolled down the window and said "What's the matter?" And the Aboriginal boy called them some kind of name. It was a gang initiation because there was no connection between the kids. He stabbed the guy in hand, there was blood everywhere and the kids took off. The parents registered their kids in another school district. That's what the families do, I mean a stabbing is pretty serious.
>
> *All of the kids in the car were immigrants?*
>
> Yes. And they were out to clobber an immigrant, and so we're sensitive to that inside of the building. A lot of the kids are in the same classes.

This episode illustrates the divisive line between the Aboriginal and the immigrant population. Moreover, it demonstrates how violent and serious the discrimination can be.

Many students indicate that they have had encounters with the police that they perceived to be related to racism or discrimination. Afem indicated that he had trouble with the police on numerous occasions. He attributed most of the dealings with the police as being racially motivated. I have left the following quote in its entirety to illustrate the consecutive episodes that were discussed when I asked him if there were any racism or discrimination.

> In the community nothing is really wrong except that...It's good, not like last year. It wasn't safe. The police, they stop people like us. When I was new to Canada, like two months, the police stopped us on our way home from reception centre. They asked us who we are and they asked to see our identification. We give them the ID. And they say "where you guys from?" and we say, "we're from Sudan." And they say, "where are you guys going?" And we say, "we are going to 7-11 to buy a phone card to call to Africa." And they say to us, "are you guys mad cow?" (gang) and we say "no." And they said, "we're looking for some people and you look like the people we're looking for." We thought we were in trouble.
>
> And anther time, they said I was driving without a license but I wasn't driving. They said, "why would you be driving tonight without a license?" And I said, "I wasn't driving." This makes us wonder why these things happen. The police are telling you that you have no rights. They can do whatever they want to do, but they shouldn't do this to a person. Pull them over and then they were telling me I was driving tonight without a license.

They stopped us again with a gun and they said, "put your hands up." Then we stopped and they checked me, and after I asked him, "What's the reason that you guys stopping us for no reason?" And they said, "because you're a black asshole." And I said, "why you say that?" He said, "whatever, go back to Africa, where you guys come from." What they did – that's racist. And you know, we have no power. This is a different country, they can do whatever they want us. And they're going to do it. So you just let them do whatever. And now, since then, the police haven't stopped us again. Although we go by them, they don't say anything.

*Do you consider this racism?*

Yes. Because he said I'm a black asshole. And that's why they pulled me over. You know, for Canada, I think there is no respect. You know, when people come to our country, we have respect. Because that guy told us to go back to our country. After what they did, I was thinking, "he was right, I should go back to my country." They just want me to go back to Africa. So I don't think that's very good and I was thinking maybe I should just go back to Sudan and die there.

Scott also discussed an incident that he heard from one of the refugee students:

I talked to one student who talked about being jumped on the street and his friend was hit with the bottle. And they were being called gang members so they called the police. The police were horrible to them. They immediately assumed that these guys were, in fact, gang members. They handcuffed

them, brought them to some room somewhere and interrogated them. And meanwhile they are bleeding and beaten. And they were the ones who called police. So they experienced being presumed guilty, and being assaulted. And I said, "why didn't you tell anybody at the school?" and they said "it was the police, what did the school have to do with that?" And most kids know that the school is just part of the community. And if you talk to another adult, they will help you. But these African boys don't have that experience, and they don't want to bother me with their issues. And furthermore, when I really pushed them he says, 'I don't think the school would really do anything anyway.' They have this feeling that this is their problem, and "just leave us to be."

The aforementioned examples illustrate some of the dealings the students have had with the police and the resulting opinions they have about racism and discrimination. As Scott identified, many of the students have not talked to people in the school community who could potentially offer some support. Many of the students consider these issues to be their own responsibility and it is not something they would discuss with the school staff. There was an obvious lack of trust between the majority of the students and the police that seemed to be the result of encounters they have had with police in the community.

In many of the interviews with students, they identified a clear distinction between the roles of the school staff in their home countries and the roles of their Canadian teachers. Most identified their former school teachers as being the ultimate authority figure and someone who should not be questioned. Many of their former

teachers used corporal punishment as a common form of discipline. Many students commented how little authority Canadian teachers have and how little respect Canadian children afford to their teachers. Most found it completely unbelievable that students could yell and swear at teachers and suffer no major consequence. Considering many of the pre-migration experiences that refugee children have had with school, it seems entirely plausible that these students would not even consider discussing their personal matters or problems with their current teachers. It appeared that, once again, there were only three or four teachers who knew about many of the details of the aforementioned situations.

Some of the racism and discrimination that students reported was related to how teachers responded to them in the classroom and how students interacted with them in the school. I asked Afem if he had ever experienced racism or discrimination in school and his response went as follows:

> Yes. Like, they are racist sometimes. Because if you ask them questions they don't answer sometimes. That's what I think. They answer questions for other kids. So if I go up to this teacher and ask him a question he just says to me, "shut up and sit down and shut your mouth." And they just say "sit down," and that is all they do. I think this school is not racist. Just some teachers are the racists. That's what I think. And like sometimes kids call me that N-word and I don't even want to say it. The N-word I'm not even going to say it and sometimes I just ignore them.

Levia recounts an altercation with some of the Aboriginal girls in school. She stated,

> At school, there are some kids that tried to get me on the way home. And they say, "you black kid." And they'd be racey. And if they call somebody black in color they are racist. And like they call me, this girl, she met me on the road and you know they are cheering and they want a fight and I told her that I didn't come to Canada for fighting. I didn't leave my country to fight here. I said, "if you want to fight you go to my country and join the war." They call me the "N word." They call me a nigger. All the time, they say that to black people in here. And it's racey. That's hurtful. These girls are Aboriginal and they are racist to me. Not the white people. The white people are nice to me, but not the Aboriginal, they are very racey. And they always like to fight people like with black people.

*An Aboriginal Student's Perspective: Toward a Solution*

As more students reported that there was conflict with the Aboriginal population, I decided that it would be beneficial to interview an Aboriginal student to get her perspective on the issue of discrimination. I asked Sandra to suggest the name of a student who might be willing to participate in the study. I was introduced to Teresa, who volunteered to participate in the study. I asked her the same question I posed to the refugee students: Is racism or discrimination a problem in the school? Her response was as follows.

> To me it seems like the Aboriginal students and the black students are trying to find out who is better, then they get mad at each other. Aboriginal people stick up for what they believe in, and same with those people. I kind of think Aboriginals are kind of racist and because they think that all black people are

in gangs, because that's what it used to be at the school. But no one is really in gangs. Right now. Last year there were a lot of fights.

*What's happening in the community?*

In the community they have their own areas.

*Can you tell me about that?*

Okay, black people are usually in central. So they stay in central and like Aboriginals are from Southway, so they stay on Southway. They don't go past each other unless they want to get in a fight.

*So if you're in the park and you're Aboriginal, what would happen to you?*

Nothing because I'm not a guy. The guys only fight.

But girls usually get involved with the other girls and everything but the guys want to know who is stronger and who you are down with and you have to know who you're with, if you want to be in an area. I used to hang around with Southsiders and I noticed that when I was with them, if a black guy was to cross, they would go fight them because they think that they are in a gang. They are kind of racist. But with those other people they think that all Aboriginal guys are Southsiders. They just think that because of the color of their skin they knew who they are with.

Well, you know we have a different program for people who come from another country. I don't think they should do that. I don't think they should put them in a separate group. I think they should put them in a classroom with regular students and have like a teacher there, that understands them to show them whatever. I think that's so we can get a better

understanding of them. So that we know who they are and stuff. Then he gets to know them because you have all different kinds of school programs here.

*Do you have refugee students in your classrooms?*

No.

*Where are they?*

They have like to have their own program so that the teachers can help them understand better, because they don't speak English that good. In one class I was in advanced keyboarding and they had to take me out so other students could get in there because they had lots of refugees and they couldn't understand typing so they didn't want us to be in there because we already knew how to type. So they transferred us to a different class.

Teresa's insights into the issue of racism and discrimination were helpful for three reasons: she clearly articulated what she saw in the school in terms of racism from both an Aboriginal and a refugee perspective; secondly, she outlined a clear distinction between the roles of both the males and females; and thirdly, she discussed the importance of integrating refugee students into the regular classrooms. Teresa continued to discuss what should happen in the school to encourage more integration. She suggested that at the beginning of the year there should be two days devoted to getting students together to get to know each other better. She also suggested that there be a club for refugees to come to meet people from the school so they could be introduced to other students. Although this may appear to be an overly simplistic solution, she has clearly presented her perspective on the issue, as well as

offered a suggestion for addressing the problem. Although the scope of this study had to be limited, it would have been beneficial to include more representation from Aboriginal students, considering what emerged in the findings.

It appears that much of the racism and discrimination was a result of two marginalized groups clearly not understanding each other. The divisive lines between the cultures were quite clear in both the school and in the community. Having said this, I did not observe much opportunity for students to integrate with one another in either the school or the community. The after school program was all African students, there was a "Black Student" Internship program, and there were several programs for Aboriginal students that were a part of the school, or part of a satellite program linked to the school. Based on my visits to the EAL classes, many of the immigrant and refugee children were brought together into the same classrooms, but their out-of-class relationships were with students of a similar culture and there was little integration with the white students or the Aboriginal students.

It was interesting to note that only three of the student participants indicated that there was no racism and two of these participants were boys who were heavily involved in sports. The other, Ugot, said that he did not insult others, and they did not insult him. He mentioned that he stayed to himself. Ugot is currently in the pre-beginner EAL class and does not attend classes with other students who are not EAL learners. Two of the girls, Banya and Anna indicated that racism occurs but not to them because they stick to themselves and they have respect for others. Both Banya and Anna are strong students who work part-time and intend to pursue secondary education. Although it would be premature to make a generalization based on such a

small sample, it did appear that the students who were more self-assured, articulate and connected with sports or after school work, were less likely to report that they were directly affected by racism.

### *Gender Discrimination*

Another theme that arose in the cluster related to discrimination was the topic of gender discrimination and how it relates to racism. Although this will be discussed more thoroughly in a subsequent section, this incident should be mentioned here as it relates to the overarching topic of discrimination that leads to conflict and violence. When I asked Taylor, the Student Services Department head, if he saw any racism or discrimination in the school, his response was as follows:

> Yeah, oh yeah, I got in the middle of a huge fight the other day of an Aboriginal boy and an Iraqi boy. And they were just killing each other and right in front of the tv cameras. I saw that the Aboriginal boy was talking to this Iraqi boy's sister, and they were in the same class, and he liked her. They were friends, but the Iraqi boy didn't like that. So they had some words and the next thing you know a bunch of guys are behind him and a bunch of guys are behind the other guy. And they started clobbering each other. So I got in there after about the eighth punch, and I got in the way and they were still throwing punches around me. They didn't hit me, but I slipped and fell and so they kept on punching, so I got up and stopped them again. Then I think they realized that this old guy is going to get hurt. So they took it outside...the Aboriginal boy was taking a beating, a huge beating, and he was ready to stop but the other guy wasn't. And it took a while for another

staff member to come. Anyway it was inside, outside, inside again, and finally another teacher came and held the Iraqi boy. And then the Iraqi boy's sister started punching the Iraqi boy (emotional). So I took them and we both talked down and tried to settle each other and tried to find out what was going on. I'm not sure what the hell that was. It was, "I don't want my sister fooling around with any Indians.

While Taylor told of this episode, it was obvious that it elicited an emotional response. He stopped midway and I could see that he was collecting his thoughts and he appeared troubled by what he witnessed with the students. A similar response was elicited by other teachers when racism was discussed.

## Psychosocial Challenges

### *Seeking Services*

One of the first issues to advance is the legitimate concern for the students' well-being and how difficult it is to provide assistance or support. As with many confidential and personal issues, it is not always obvious who is struggling with psychological issues. Many of these issues can not be empirically measured, like a test of English or computational skills. Although westernized checklists are often used to measure mental health issues, it was discussed earlier in this thesis that many cultural and linguistic factors could potentially skew the results found using these instruments. This is further complicated by the fact that many students do not readily seek assistance for mental health issues. It could be a source of embarrassment for the students, who may have been told to keep personal issues to themselves, or that seeking help may be perceived as a weakness. Also, they might not understand the

school-based systems of support. Many of these factors are included in the following excerpt from the focus group. Sara, an EAL teacher, states,

> I think also with the mental health thing, the cultural norms around secrecy and privacy and what to talk about and what not to talk about. I have had a range from a mother being open to many things, and I've had the opposite where parents are saying there's nothing happening, and the kid's sitting right next to me saying, "no that's not true. I saw this and this and this." So there is a lot of, I guess, there is a lot of stigma attached to mental health issues.

When referring to mental health issues, one of the teachers explains, "You suspect that there are mental health issues, but it's almost as though they are very private about revealing any of their needs." A very similar circumstance was noted by one of the school counsellors who found that many of the students would not accept food, although she knew that they were hungry. Christine comments,

> So there wasn't food in the house. But yet when we had food in the classroom, it was just like they had too much pride to take it. And I would go into the classroom and ask if anyone wanted to try a spread at home or does anybody want to try this and they still wouldn't do that. It's almost like they did not want to do this in front of their peers, and there was some sort of shame or something maybe. If you approach them individually and maybe put something in a bag and put it in her hand then they would take it and likely it would be used. But the majority say that they don't need it.

From a student's perspective, Imran indicates that kids do not have a chance to express what is inside, and he further suggests that there are cultural or personal issues that explain why students may not ask for help.

> And some kids, they have something and they don't have a chance to express it out. Some kids, they keep these things inside of them. You know what I am saying, in the culture too? In some cultures you don't have anything and there is nobody to help you, and sometimes you feel like maybe you will be embarrassed to have to ask somebody for something. So some people they keep these things inside. They don't ask for help. They need help, but they don't ask. So just ask people how they are doing and stuff like that.

Helen remembers exactly what happened during the 1994 Rwandan genocide and she states that she does not want to talk about this time because it brings back unpleasant feelings.

> I saw from the beginning to the end of the genocide. That's why anytime this guy who comes to talk about Rwanda, I don't want to go and I don't even want to talk about it. Because it gives me feelings to feel again, and all the people that were dying and seeing them dying on the ground. Then the whole river turned to blood. Because people were thrown in there after they were killed. And our water tap was blood. Because people were throwing them in the river and the lake and the blood comes out of our water tap.

The three aforementioned examples suggest that it would not be sufficient to assume that, just because students do not seek assistance, they are not struggling with issues. Although there could be many reasons for not accessing services, the

examples provided in the excerpts are a reminder to consider other factors that might influence how and when students seek help, and from whom.

When I discussed the issue of students not seeking assistance with Laurie and Taylor, two of the other counsellors, they suggested a slightly different angle to the psychosocial needs of students. Laurie states, "Well, the first thing that comes to my mind is gender issues for the girls. The girls really struggle fitting in socially, and conflicting with parental and family values or cultural values. That's a big piece for a lot of the counselling that I do." Taylor notes that, although students do not currently discuss issues of trauma with him personally, he explains that "the major challenges are to throw off the trauma that they have just been through, especially if they are older and when they have very little support, very little counselling support, if any."

Sandra, who was identified by the majority of the students as being a person to whom many of them could go to for help, asserts,

> We have just developed a course for teachers to address the EAL problem of war-affected families. And they have these reception centres, and we are one of the schools that house them, but they hire people who have no background in counselling kids through this, and what that might mean. And you're the first person that those kids see when they walk through the door. How should you present yourself in that situation? We don't provide training for that; we don't hire for that; we don't think about that. So they are thrown to the wolves. Absolutely. I really think it's common sense. That common sense is not always so common, is it?

Later in the interview Sandra expresses her concern for the fact that many of the students come to her and she does not feel like she can professionally deal with many of the issues.

> Christine (former counsellor) is the same way, and when she left, [maternity leave] I took on double the load. All the things that they would've gone to her about, they all come to me. And I'm not a guidance counsellor; I don't know what I'm supposed to say. When I go home I tell my husband that a student asked me the difference between what sex and rape is and he looks appalled and says "how dare they ask you that question? That's inappropriate." How many other people would say that same thing?

There are two major issues that are advanced by Sandra. First, she suggests that people are not trained to know what to look for in children, and secondly, when students do disclose personal information it is often to people who feel that they do not have the knowledge or the skills that are needed to respond appropriately.
A similar statement was made by Paul, the vice-principal.

> You need a month of administrator boot camp where you go through stuff like counseling and interviewing skills. When it comes to dangerous issues, we haven't really be taught how to deal with these circumstances. I am more and more convinced that you need a boot camp where you are taught the actual survival skills, in order to do the job well.

A recurring theme in many of the interviews, both with people in the microsystem and the exosystem, was the need for more training and knowledge on

how to better assist the students. This issue will be more thoroughly discussed in the following section discussing the preparation of teachers.

Larry, who is the superintendent in the school division and who formerly coordinated EAL services for the school division for numerous years, notes a puzzling absence in students accessing services.

> So they aren't presenting in the school, so there doesn't seem to be a large number of referrals for therapy or whatever the case may be, which is kind of puzzling to me because I would expect that there would be lots, particularly in light of the fact that the initial reception centre for most of the government-sponsored refugees is located within the boundaries of this school division....So where are these children with this trauma and needs for therapy and all those kinds of things? I still haven't seen it. So it's presenting a very interesting situation....None of that trauma that we were anticipating has really presented itself.

Larry's statement is certainly puzzling because of what the principal and the vice-principal and several teachers from Walter Duncan School had previously stated. It also contradicts what another consultant indicated during the focus group interview. Ingrid states,

> The biggest challenge that I've seen within the school systems, and I am in every classroom in every school, is the after effect, the psychological effects. After about two years, once the children are settled in a stable and more consistent environment, what we are really finding, based on teacher feedback and a lot of interviews, is that the parents are really seeing changes in their

child's behavior... It is really now that it's starting to surface, what they have been through or what they have experienced.

Paul, refers to the intensity and frequency of the numbers of students who bring these kinds of issues to the school. He says that he feels like he is doing "triage." He also says that if you talk to triage people, they wear out after a while. Ultimately, he suggests that the school should be doing integrated emotional and spiritual health care for the students. He also indicates that "we feel very much that we are alone" and "we work with what we have."

I began to question why there would be such disparity between the teachers, and administrators of the school versus the divisional representatives, who quite clearly worked with the same demographic group of people. I wondered if this information had not been channeled up to the divisional level. It was evident that the literacy and language needs of the refugee learners were a priority, given that the division had piloted four pre-beginner classrooms, so obviously some information was channeled up to the divisional office. Another statement that Larry made later in the interview hinted that there may be other factors influencing the exchange of information. He states, "Maybe we are not recognizing it, maybe we don't, maybe the counsellors and psychologists or clinicians or whatever do not have the tools to really identify that and then respond to it." Combining this information with the fact that some of the students do not seek or request services adds another dimension to the situation. Larry also suggests that it could be quite similar to other cases where there have been traumatic experiences and children do not actually disclose the information until years later.

Another key point that was discussed regarding a lack of information was that, in most cases, the information received from students was confidential; as such, we might never really know what students are discussing with a school staff member. Larry also asserts that much of school counselling is reactive and that there really was not a formal means to assess what personal issues the students may be experiencing. What became quite obvious was that consistent information was either not tracked or not passed on to the appropriate people. It was evident that this was a significant policy issue that needed to be addressed.

### *Psychosocial Issues that Emerged with the Students*

A dichotomy existed between those who thought students needed help to work through psychological issues, in particular trauma, and those who thought the students seemed to be doing quite well without any intervention. It became important to not only examine what was said by various participants, but to also consider the context in which this was said. The information that was divulged, the role that each of them played in the microsystem, and the personal relationship that the person had with the student seemed to influence where they each stood on the issue.

Several teachers and the two administrators both indicated that the psychological needs of the students were quite serious and more was needed to help students, both in the school and in the community. Three of the teachers, Sandra, Scott, and Rassan, argued that more attention was needed to address the psychosocial needs of the students. The two administrators also concurred that trauma is a serious issue for the students and it must be addressed. The EAL teacher and the resource teacher suggested that language and literacy acquisition were the primary challenge

for the students. Although the participants differed on the priority of each challenge, they all agreed that the challenge existed. Clearly, the purpose of this discussion is not to arrange the challenges in a hierarchical structure; rather, it is to bring forth legitimate concerns that pose challenges and obstacles for the students.

There were times, at the beginning phase of data collection, where I assumed that students were so resilient because they had lived through war, witnessed conflict, lost their parents, and yet still carried on with seemingly little effect. Although the students hinted at how difficult their lives were, it seemed that they had put the war behind them and then moved on with life in Canada. After I spoke with more students and with teachers who had a closer relationship with the students, I altered my thinking about what many of these students continue to experience.

I asked Anna, who is from Liberia, only one question throughout the entire one and a half hour interview. I asked her to tell me a little about herself. She talked about her trans-migration experience and the issues she had with the adult who accompanied her to Canada. Divulging serious issues of both physical and emotional abuse, she had just recently attempted to kill herself. At the time, fleeing the abuse, she lived alone with her young child. After the attempt, the child was subsequently removed from her home by Child Welfare.

I had no idea, before commencing the interview, what Anna was going to discuss with me. Following the interview, I followed ethical protocol and ensured that she was safe and that she had appropriate support. The following is a short excerpt of the interview, which is only intended to provide evidence for the extent to

which a student is struggling with mental health issues and to question our beliefs about how best to provide assistance to these students.

> I was having seizures from back home and from memories of being with my aunt. And I said I've never heard about anything like this kind of thing. And these weird things are happening to me. I'm seeing visions. Like the same people are in them. Bad people and witches; they are in my mind. And it was bothering me. And on Tuesday morning. I was just in the house…I don't know... I was so confused and people were just talking to me in my mind. And they said, "who do you think you are, what is going on here?" And I went into the kitchen and I just took a knife. I opened the drawer. I took a knife and another person said, take that knife and put that into yourself. I was on the floor. I was so lucky that my cousin came in. And all I was trying to do is to cut something and my eyes were just going on like this (rolling). And I cannot see, and I didn't even see my cousin come in. And my cousin took my knife from me. I was laying in the floor with the knife to my stomach….I told her I'm listening to voices, and I try to hurt myself. One voice tells me to kill myself and the other voice says not to. And I can't hear with both of them talking to me in both ears. And every time I go home, I can be so worried. It is so scary, to go home by myself living by myself with nobody around me to talk to. And I told her that every night, every night, I listen to the voices and I can be so scared to go to bed. Sometimes I just leave the lights on all night. Or I leave the music or the TV on really loud all night. And then I go to bed.

Anna's words certainly raise serious questions as to her current mental status. It is also quite obvious that she is quite frightened to be alone. Later in the interview, Anna divulged that the two people talking to her are deceased family members. Considering this information within a western medical model, one might question whether Anna was schizophrenic or delusional. Using a non-western model based on spirituality and cultural teachings, the reason that Anna hears the voices might possibly be a result of not providing the deceased a proper burial. In some cultures the souls of the dead haunt the living until they are properly laid to rest. Considering these two orientations, treatment might look completely different depending on who worked with Anna.

Anna was not willing to seek medical attention; in fact, she signed herself out of the hospital and refused care. She states, "And I told them, taking pills is not going to make this thing go away, and no one wants to believe me." She later indicates that prayer is the only thing she thought would help her. She explains,

> And I called the pastor and asked him to come and see if he could save me from the people. And he explained everything to me and I went to church, and he prayed for me. And he said he prayed for me and the thing is going to go away and he went and prayed for me. And he anointed me, and he came to my house and he prayed for me and the whole house. And the next day I went to bed very, very good and I woke up. I called him and I said, "oh pastor, thank you" and I said, "you really saved my life." And he said, "that's okay, no problem." And everything is okay, I can go to bed good; I am not scared anymore....Now I'm okay as free as you. I'm fine.

The overarching question that emerges from this interview is, are we willing to work with Anna within the latter paradigm or are we going to insist that she seeks medical treatment? The argument put forth in this thesis suggests that we must provide assistance that is both culturally and linguistically appropriate. In Anna's case, she was told that if she did not attend the treatment program, she would not get her baby back. This is a considerable stretch from being culturally sensitive. If we are not willing, as a society, to open ourselves to alternative, non-westernized models of support and care, we will continue to oppress and further marginalize this group of people.

The issues of self-harm and suicide were discussed by other participants and it was apparent how potentially serious many of the mental health issues could be for some students. Laurie, one of the school counsellors, commented on the severity of the mental health issues.

> The suicide attempts that I've seen have not been the kids that are from the African countries, they are the kids from the Middle East. And very much, the kids from Iraq and Syria. I have a lot of experience with those students. When I was at a different school, there was a lot. I worked with a student there that ended up coming here. Her older sister was killed and left under rocks north of the city. I'm not sure if you remember that situation....they were accusing the father and the older brother of murdering the girl. The girl had dishonored the family so she was killed. The younger sister was living with this and she made numerous suicide attempts. When she came here we had her put into psychiatric care for several weeks.

There were also several references to students whose symptoms manifested in less overt behaviour. James indicates that he woke up several times a night with memories of murders that he witnessed when he was ten. James does not live with parents, so the nights were a particularly lonely time.

> I just think people are crazy, because we are all the same blood, and you go and you kill your own sister and your own brother and that is strange. And I saw that thing when I was young. I was 10 years old, and it's still coming back in my mind. Sometimes it comes in my dreaming. But I have to get up three or four times in the night.

Helen comments that her source of help and support is a lady from her church. When I asked her about some of the challenges that students had in school, she replies, "I think those kids should have their own counsellor. The problems they have, just tell them, tell them things to comfort them, to feel this way, don't be scared of this. If you feel this way, you need someone to talk to. A counsellor helps."

Laurie also discussed her position as a counsellor and the ability she has to develop a relationship with students and to learn more about their lives. She explained that a male student came in to see her with his girlfriend who was pregnant. Before the student could tell her about the pregnancy, it was important to him to talk about his life in Sudan. Laurie explains,

> His dad was shot in front of him. And forever he wakes up. He still wakes up thinking he has the blood of his father on him. He still wakes up dreaming about that. What that was like, with his father's blood splashed all over him. He wakes up still to this day. They don't just forget, he could not. I mean, it

is a trust issue too; they need time to develop a relationship with you. So I am often getting things because I am in a very trusting place for them. So before they could tell me that she was pregnant, he had to tell me about his past so that I could understand what this means to him today. He is genuinely afraid that her brothers are going to kill him. Genuinely afraid.

Laurie also discusses the difficulty she has working with some of the teachers who seem to have "blinders on when it comes to this kind of thing." She suggests that these kinds of stories create blinders because of the time it takes to deal with issues and because of the workload that teachers have. She indicates that she could excuse it for many reasons, but she believes that there were some teachers that did not understand, or they chose not to try to understand, what some of the students were experiencing – which made her work exceptionally difficult. She used the following example of an experience she had with a teacher the previous week.

I had a teacher in here who was upset with me, extremely upset with me because I had called out a student who was doing a practice exam because her brother that just tried to hang himself in the school. And the teacher was upset with me because I called the student out, knowing full well why. Because she was just so focused on that exam, and that's all she could see. Absolutely, that is this building, just last week.

Although Laurie's position in the school is a support role to both students and teachers, she notes that it is particularly difficult to share information and to educate the adults about all of the issues related to teaching war-affected children. She states that for some people the issues are just too emotionally difficult to cope with, so it is

easier to just "put the blinders on and focus on teaching." Having said this, as was previously noted, there are trained professionals who have the best intentions, but for numerous reasons never come to know what a student might be living through each day as they sit in their class or walk beside them in the halls.

Debbie, a government consultant in the area of English as an Additional Language and a former EAL teacher for over 20 years, identifies how difficult it is to know just how fragile a student is and, secondly, how important the role of the teacher is to the students. She explains,

> I can't tell you how many students that would probably say. Students have come back to both of us and said, "I would have committed suicide if I hadn't known that you two would be really mad at me." And you don't realize it at the time, what you're doing for them. And you don't think that that makes a difference, and sometimes you don't know how fragile a student is any given day. And then they come back and tell you that. I think most kids will identify a certain person, I know I've been in other schools, and they will identify another teacher as being their lifeline.

Considering all of the barriers to acquiring information that were stated in the previous discussion, it is somewhat assuring to know that there are students who managed to find someone in their school or community who was their "lifeline." Whether it was a teacher, a counsellor, a clergy member, or an administrator, most of the students indicated that there was someone from their microsystem who they could talk to and find some level of support.

*Mental Health Issues with Parents*

In several of the interviews participants indicated that the mental health status of the parent had a large influence on the child. In some cases, the students were placed in the role of the caregiver to help look after their parent or to look after other children when the parent was not capable. Bev, the EAL teacher, comments that many of the students tell her that their mothers are sick. She notes, "A lot of the students come and say they are taking their mother to the doctor. Mothers seem to have all sorts of difficulties and I think it's the stress and the responsibility and very few of those mothers work." She believes that there is a lot of illness and stress and she notes that this often comes out after a time when the family is a little more settled.

During the interview with Banya, she indicated that her mother was sick. During only one interview that was just over an hour, Banya made reference to her mom thirty times and she talked about how sick her mom was at six different points of time. Banya and her siblings fled from Afghanistan to Pakistan and later immigrated to Canada, leaving two sisters who were 14 and 16 who lived with their husbands.

Banya mentions on one occasion that her mom cries all the time worrying about her daughters that she had to leave in Pakistan. Another time she states,

> My mom has a problem with blood pressure because of the war. My father died. She lost her brain. So when she heard some noise and problems, we applied for housing and we had to wait for two years.

Prior to the interview with Banya, I had already arranged to interview her mother as one of the parent participants. Banya insisted that her mother wanted to take part in the study. Her mother invited me to her home and she confirmed that she has medical and mental health issues because of her past experiences in Pakistan and Afghanistan. She states,

> My husband died, my children are still there. My house is finished and after I buy everything, it is finished. No heat, no house, everything was wrong with me. My heart and my brain were damaged. And there is no fighting in this country. Sixty-two people in my family died in the fighting and all of them were young. My heart is no good working and my head is no good working. And sometimes, I am sick in my chest. Everything comes back to my mind. I remember.

Banya made numerous endearing references to her mother during her interview. It seemed reasonable to assume that Banya and her mother were very close. Banya opted to take part in the optional photography activity, and all ten of the pictures she took were of her mother or of her baby cousin. Banya wants nothing more than to make her mother proud. Toward the end of the interview she says, "and my mom's wish is that me and my brothers – we just do our best and we have a good life. And so if my mom's dreams come true, then I am happy too." In reference to her mom she states, "So she is doing her best, because she spent her whole life for us. She is trying to give us a better life....When I get my pay check, I go, mom, this is yours. Do anything you want." Considering how close Banya is with her mother, it could be assumed that her mother's sickness has a great effect on Banya's life. She

does not have a father, and she is the oldest child of the three who are living in Canada.

During the interview with Banya's mother all of the children were present in the living room where we were talking. Ahearn (2000) refers to this as a cultural style based on collectivity that is particularly seen in Afghani families. "Afghans do not see themselves as individuals, but as part of a family. It would be rare for them to invite someone into their home and exclude others in the family from joining in" (p. 52). When Parsa was talking, Banya's tears welled up on two occasions and she states, "It is very hard." Integrating the literature with what occurred during the interview with Parsa clearly substantiated my hunch that the welfare of her mother certainly had an effect on Banya's mental health.

Some of the other participants who had parents also made reference to their sadness, sickness, or their personal stress. Mahad comments about his mother's sickness; Helen discusses how difficult life was for her father who was a single-parent looking after five children; and, Anna discusses the shouting, yelling, and physically abusive behaviour she received from her aunt.

The mental and physical health of the parent or caregiver seemed to have an effect on the student, either socially, mentally, or physically. Debbie, a government consultant in the area of English as an Additional Language, also suggests that many of the adults are trying to work through their own problems around learning English, finding where to live and to get settled, as well as their own grief and loss. She states that "many of the parents may not have the emotional energy to really be there for the kids."

To summarize, the psychosocial needs and challenges for war-affected children living in Canada appear to be difficult to identify, complicated to understand, and even more troubling to address. There is evidence to suggest that there are teachers and other school staff members who do not have the necessary skills to identify a student who is in need of help. There is also evidence to suggest that there are some people who choose not to acknowledge signs of distress visible in the students. Moreover, these findings also reveal that there are people in the ecological systems who do not necessarily respond in the most culturally sensitive or appropriate ways to students who have mental health issues.

The debate surrounding the trauma discourse is prevalent, but of little support to the student who wakes up in the middle of the night with disturbing thoughts and images. Providing a medical term to this experience is also of little help to the individual experiencing these events. What appears to be helpful is providing these students with a venue and a medium to express themselves, if and when it is needed. In addition, providing a safe place where the student is accepted without having to relive their past experiences may also be of assistance. The findings suggest that the limitations of the school staff must be recognized and the capacity of these individuals should be substantially increased so that they more appropriately recognize and respond to the psychosocial issues of the students who are war-affected.

## Educational Challenges

The school emerged as one of the most important systems for the student. Unfortunately, for many of these students, their insatiable appetite for education was

impeded by numerous personal, organizational, and systemic challenges. Although there was evidence to support the fact that there were a considerable number of students who dropped out or were pushed out of the school system, there were also many students who progressed quite well, both socially and academically. That said, the scope of this study included participants who are currently enrolled in school. There was already a division between those who would be considered doing well as opposed to those who would be considered not doing well. Had the study included students who had dropped out of the school system, the results might have looked quite different.

As was revealed in the data, the participants discussed several challenges and obstacles that the students faced when they attended school. To begin the discussion, I will first provide evidence to support the importance placed on education by the students. Secondly, I will discuss some of the more prominent educational challenges that emanated from the various discussions. Lastly, I will provide evidence to support the importance of providing a systemic response to address the challenges for the benefit of both the individual and the collective society.

### *Education as the First Priority*

Without exception, every student that I interviewed indicated that being educated was his or her first priority in life. They all referred to getting an education as their only hope for a better future. Many of them saw education as an agent of change. Sokut indicated that after he finished his education he would go back to Sudan to help people live peacefully. The importance of getting an education was clearly articulated in the following quote from Sokut:

> Although there are difficulties, it cannot stop me from going to school. Although I don't have anything to eat today, I cannot stop going to school. I have to go to school. I have to drink some water, and then go to school. I have to get my education. Unless I died, nothing will get in my way. For four or five months now, I have not had a dime in my pocket. Not even 10 dollars. I don't have it, but it doesn't stop me. I go to school even though I have no money. Now I live with a cousin who helps me get money for food, but I have to struggle to look for a job to help him, so that I can pay the rent, because he also has a mortgage and in this country, he cannot feed me and pay my rent and my school supplies.

Not only was education a priority for the students, but it was also indicated as being one of the best things about being in Canada. Access to what the students referred to as "free education" was frequently referred to during the interviews with the students.

Len, who is a counsellor at a refugee centre, confirmed the importance of education in the lives of the students.

> I agree with you the social component is so important. School is the area of socialization. It is everything for these children. It is their first encounter and so much that they identify with the culture and the environment is what they see in the school community. I am of the opinion that we need to invest some more into what happens in school and to support the school system and help the schools get more equipped and have more proactive programs to deal with the social issues, because once they leave the school, it is the first stage

of deterioration. They drop out of school. It's really hard to get them back. There'll be a very short period of time from the time they drop out of school until they end up in the justice system. So what happens in schools is an extremely important for society in general.

Considering the importance of education in the lives of the students, it seems reasonable to delineate what the challenges are for students and to provide focused programs, structures, and systems to help them overcome the challenges. As the following section reveals, there are times when the challenges appear to be too numerous and they pave the path out of school.

### *The Pathway out of School*

A pattern emerged when discussing school-based challenges. If students were not successful in school, many left the system and it was not long before they were involved in the justice system. Paul, the vice-principal noted,

> We have a difficult problem with retention. When students do not find success in our school, they are quickly drawn to the life on the street. For many of these kids, the challenges are numerous and life on the street is much easier. Unfortunately, it does not take long to be lured into the street life of selling drugs, committing crimes, and joining street gangs just as a means of survival.

There was also a direct link that was revealed between the need for money, illegal activity and joining gangs. Tim MacKay, who coordinates a family reception centre in the city, argues,

> The truth of the matter is that newcomers do not arrive, get off an airplane and go downtown and join a gang. That's not how it works. Typically, the pathway is: newcomers arrive, we put them in school and they leave in six months to a year and then they look for success elsewhere. Kids would rather be bad than stupid. So we set them up in a situation where they cannot succeed and they will find identity, success, and welcoming elsewhere. (personal communication, March 3, 2007)

Heather, who is a representative from Justice and Youth Court, provides evidence to not only support the pathway from school to criminal behaviour, but she also suggests that there is little to help students who are not successful in school.

> At noon today, I am picking up a woman whose son is now in Brinkston (maximum security prison) and she tells a very compelling story. She dragged her kids through…she is from Somalia. She dragged several kids around from camp to camp. And talking about not knowing where these kids come from, her son who is now 20, was actually in a pit, in a huge pit, full of dead bodies that were going to be burned. And her son was in there and she was watching them going to set them on fire. Because she thought her son was dead. And then she just saw his body twitch, and she pulled him out of this mass grave of about a thousand people. She pulled him out and he lived. And she said to me, I went through hell. My husband was murdered and my other children were murdered, and I dragged my kids all around and finally I got here to Canada with the hope of having a wonderful life.

> And if you thought my life was hell in Somalia, my life has been more hell since I've gotten here. My son has never been in school.... he didn't know his ABCs in his own language. He didn't know his ABCs when he came to Canada, and he was 12 years old and he was dumped into a grade 6 class. He learned English, very quickly, probably within three months he could speak pretty good English. But he couldn't read or write. He had no literacy whatsoever, he still doesn't. He immediately felt out of place. He didn't feel part of that group. They lived here in the Central area. And somehow he just couldn't cope. And within six months, he was out of school. He has never been back to school. I don't know from the school, whether they reached out to the mother or not. And he has been in the justice system ever since he was 12 years old.

Heather continued to recount her frustration in finding school placements for the children she works with. She has had to send some children back to Africa to keep them safe. She states,

> I could tell you right now, I was looking at the gang list for the two African street gangs. There are probably 150 names. I didn't count them, but there's about 150 and I am sure that none of them have gone through school; they have all fallen through the cracks. Our system has not worked well with them.

It is difficult to ascertain what it is that ultimately leads students away from school. For the most part, the school just does not seem to be a place where the student finds success. In both of the above quotations there was a similar reason for

the student leaving the school system – academic difficulty. A common challenge brought forth by teachers, parents, and students is the fact that students have had disrupted schooling or the absence of schooling. Two of the parents also suggested that students drop out of school because they do not get support from their parents. They also suggested that the school needs to engage with the parents to connect them to the school. Manley declared, "Some students drop out because of the failure of their parents. In order to make sure all of these things are addressed with the parents. The school has to talk with the parents."

### *Disrupted Schooling*

Consider the following statement made by Ugot, "I have never been to school until I came to Walter Duncan." Ugot is eighteen years old and his goal is to become either a teacher or a medical doctor. He has no previous educational experience and no language, literacy, or computational skills. The school system is presented with a unique problem. How best should children at the age of 16, 17 or 18 be schooled, when they have never been to school before? Furthermore, does the school have the adequate resources to deal with this issue?

Some of the students have had some schooling, although much of it has been disrupted by war, relocation, and the lack of financial resources needed to pay school fees. The disruption or absence of schooling is further complicated by the age of the student. What is the appropriate placement for the student who has little or no education? As Mike from the welcoming centre states, "We see it as a problem to just drop these kids because of their age to a level of school. It creates enormous problems." Although Mike admits that there are pre-beginner programs offered in

the school division, his staff has told him that there is too much bureaucracy for getting into the program and it needs to be a lot more flexible. The coordinator in charge of the newly designed centres also suggests that numbers of students in the pre-beginner classes are very low and she had anticipated that more students would have been enrolled in these centres. Students who have basic conversational English skills also struggle because they do not generally have the academic skills to engage in the course work.

### *Working and Going to School*

Marleen, who is the educational coordinator of a refugee counselling centre states, "We tend to put every obstacle we can in front of these kids who are working and going to school every day. We put every obstacle in front of these children who are just trying to get an education." Most of the refugee students work; however, many of them work full-time jobs while attending school. More than half of the students that I interviewed left school at 3:30 and then worked until 11:30 or 12:00. Bill comments about how many students have to work and the difficulties this poses for them when they try to attend school.

> Some of the students who are now 17 and 18, they have to go to work because the have to support themselves and their family. And this is a challenge, really. I've been through some refugee life, but not like the ones that these young people are going through.... I see that most of them actually work after school and in this case they don't really have time to do their homework. They may be tired the following day, and it would be hard for them to wake up and go to school. But I don't think there is any free

> money to provide to them. I don't know how that can be solved really. I really don't know. Maybe the government knows better. Sometimes it's hard really for you to bring other people to a new place. It is really appreciated to bring them, but what difference does it mean when there is no adequate support to help them resettle in a new country? It's like taking people from a plane and then just dumping them down there and just letting them fend for themselves. It's just really frustrating.

Paul also notes a similar pattern in one of the students he teaches,

> I know he works up to eight hours a day doing maintenance and security. He starts at 4 and finishes at 12 and by the time he gets home, it might be one or two, and he has four, five, six hours of sleep and then he gets up and goes to school. And he does this five or six days a week.

Rassan was so concerned about one of his students that he went to the student's place of work to complain about the shift the student was given. The student's shift started at 7 pm and went until 4 in the morning. Rassan went to the place of work and asked if they were aware what the student did during the day. The employer acknowledged that he knew the student attended school. Rassan explained, "They gave the schedule and it was impossible for the kid to come to class. And he has a family to support, an older mother to support and a younger sister to support. The kid felt he had no choice. That is a shame." Rassan argues that it is imperative for the community to understand the student's circumstance. He indicates that if the student and the employer do not understand each other, then it is the student who gets fired.

Afem clearly articulates the difficulties that he and some of the others have in terms of going to work, attending school, and completing homework.

> The government gave us some money to go to school for about a year. And after that, we went to social assistance, and that wasn't good and because you need to go to school. And you have to have attendance, and they said you have to go to work. And they know in Canada, when you go to school, you don't need to be disturbed. There was a lady...you had to bring your resume and your attendance with you to prove if you go to school or not. And she said you have to look for a job. So now I go to school and go to work, both of them. And I don't even get time to do my own work, because I go to start at 3:30 and I will go late because the school just finishes at 3:20. And so I go late like 4:00. And then I finish at 12. When I come home, I do my homework and it takes time. Sometimes you have a lot of homework especially like reading, and we try to learn the language, but we take a lot of time. And once you get home at midnight it takes sometimes until three in the morning to finish your work. And we get up at 7:30 and I don't think it's good for us.

To understand more about the students' circumstances and how they support each other, I have included the following exchange that I had with Afem.

> We live with ourselves. If you don't go to work, nobody will pay your rent. So you need to survive for yourself. Right now I am living with my friends. We go to work and go home at the same time. When you come home, one

person will cook, and then the next day the other one will cook. That's how we do it.

*Do you ever do any fun stuff?*

No.

*What other things do you do?*

On the weekends, we do our homework, and we don't get time to go nowhere. And we have friends over, and they asked us to this place that we say we don't have time, because we work five days a week to get money. Monday to Friday. On Saturday and Sunday we go to church Sunday and Saturday we do our homework. We don't have free time, we do everything, we cook everything.

Very similar conversations occurred with additional students. Although there were exceptions to the amount of support that the student had from family members, most of the students worked to pay for basic necessities or to support the family, either in Canada or in their countries of origin. As the teachers indicated, in some instances, students have dropped out of school because they need to work full time to help send younger family members to school. James dropped out of school because he was getting home at three in the morning and he said that he could not cope with all the work. He subsequently came back to school and he is hoping to graduate this year.

Akot works and lives with Afem and the two of them take turns cooking and cleaning. Both of them have indicated that the challenge of working full-time and going to school full-time has taken a toll on their school work and their social life. At

the end of the interview with Akot, I posed a question, "How could we make this situation better for you?" His response was, "Maybe the government could help. That way I could concentrate on my school. Maybe if I only worked two or three days..." The answer to this particular challenge has already been advanced by the students – it does not have to be an overly complicated solution. For years, the educational community has struggled trying to motivate learners who had no desire to be in school. We have expended time, resources, money, and talent trying to devise creative ways at keeping kids in school. This is clearly a group of students who have the drive and the will to attend school; we need to remove the financial burden and allow them to stay in school.

### *Perceived Attitudes of Teachers*

Some of the teachers openly discussed their dissatisfaction with how other teachers and the administrators treat the refugee students. Examples were provided by various participants to substantiate their claims that some teachers do not want refugee students in their classes. For example, a teacher in the focus group states, "And that's the issue that teachers are, instead of compassion and empathy it is, why are they even here? Why do they bother coming to this country if they don't know how to behave?" Some of the participants explained that teachers assume that refugee children are like every other immigrant and they should not be given preferential treatment. One of the more difficult comments to hear and one that has resonated with me throughout this study was a comment from one of the teachers at Walter Duncan School. At the end of our interview, he emotionally and with a defeatist tone states, "And the only thing we have going for us is that they don't

know that they're being treated like crap, because they're not physically under threat as much as they were. But they will figure it out." On the more positive side of this comment, it was clearly coming from a teacher who struggled with some of the attitudes and behaviours that he witnessed; that in itself shows that there are people who are concerned for the children in the school.

Laurie discussed an incident that occurred in one of the technical classes. She concludes that there are some teachers who refuse to have immigrant students in their classes.

> I'll give you an example. There is one girl, I can't remember where she was from in Africa, but she was a new immigrant at the time. And so she walked into the classroom and she was visibly one of those students who are new to the school. She said that she kept trying to get the teacher's attention asking him how to work a machine. Apparently, the teacher kept putting her off and putting her off and she waited almost half the class doing nothing. So she decided to try it by herself and she broke the darn thing. A piece of glass in it got broken and it was two hundred dollars to fix it. He went completely nuts on her. Anyway, the poor girl came down to my office crying saying, "I will pay for it, I will pay for it. I don't know how, but I will pay for it and I don't want to go back into that class." And now the teacher uses that as an excuse not to bring any more ESL students into his class because they don't understand and they are a safety issue for themselves and other students. A big challenge for kids is feeling unwelcome...I think it's just feeling

unwelcome in a school that's just unable to program for these kids, so I think that's tough for them.

Some of the participants in the microsystem also commented on what might best be referred to as an indifference to the refugee students. For example, the participants indicated that there were teachers who taught the way they taught despite who was in their classroom. The teachers did what they felt they could do and unfortunately it was too bad for those who could not keep up with the expectations.

Sandra emphatically states her discontent with how some teachers treat the refugee students and she comments on how she believes this affects the students.

> Every time I hear them bragging about how many immigrants we have in this province, I just think how many of them are just going to fall through the cracks, just to fill some quota or some number. There's a huge divide between those who see it and those who get it. Like there are people who just don't get it. Unfortunately, these are the ones who are teaching these kids that make them feel like they're absolute crap.
>
> And you hear them saying to kids, "What are you stupid?" All of those little things that we do as human beings that we don't necessarily mean. But I see some of those teachers doing the same thing over and over again to the same students. And these kids know very little English, but they certainly know what stupid means.

Sandra's comments are particularly unsettling because she was the teacher who has the most contact, on an informal basis, with many of the refugee students.

She was named most frequently by the student participants as someone who they felt safe talking to, should a problem arise. Each time I visited the school, there were always students informally talking and joking with her. When I needed to find a student to talk to, I went to her room and she knew exactly where he or she would be. She was with the students before and after school and she ate lunch in her room all the days I was there. Although I was cautious not to assume that Sandra's comments represented the majority, I did hear other comments, from school staff, students, and members of the exosystem that reinforced much of what she said. The fortunate part of this challenge concerning teachers' attitudes was that there were only a few people named as being particularly problematic and difficult for the students. Moreover, it was clearly stated that the cause of these attitudes and behaviours is usually the result of ignorance and a lack of knowledge about the students and their circumstances, rather than the result of malice or contempt.

One of the teachers also discusses her anger about a situation that she was brought into by an administrator concerning an African student who wanted to change classes so that he could be in her class. The teacher feels that the treatment from the administrator would not have occurred if the student were not an immigrant. She clearly indicates that she thinks the administrator could "get away" with her behaviour because the student did not have a parent or guardian who would come back to the school to hold the administrator accountable for her words.

> I distinctly remember sitting in the cafeteria and I remember an administrator coming into the cafeteria towards me, red-faced and I thought, "Oh my god, what have I done?" She was with one of the African students and she says to

the student (yelling), "You sit down there, you tell Mrs. R., what is going on, you tell her what happened in the office. And she will tell you what the difference is between those classes." And I'm thinking, "what is she was talking about?" Then I realized it was because the boy did not want to be in the other class. He wanted to be in my class. So I had to say they are exactly the same because I'm right in front of my administrator. And he is trying to explain how all he wanted was to be in this class where he felt comfortable, where the teacher understood him and he was afraid to go to another class because he had friends who were uncomfortable in a class. They felt that they weren't good enough to be in the other class. So he's trying to explain to her that was all he wanted and "I went to you because you are the boss of the school. You're the only person that I thought I could talk to, to change this on my timetable." And she stood up and she said, "I am not your servant." And I was thinking in my head, "please Lord, don't let her say I'm not your slave." And she walked out. And I was thinking, there is no way on this earth that she would ever have said that to a student who was not an immigrant. There's no way she would have said that to a well-off white person. I am not your servant, because that family would be down here saying "don't talk to my child like that." And I see that time and time again, families with power and privilege and support get to decide what classes their kids will get into, and the ones who have nothing – they have nobody to defend them, they are stuck in classes where they don't belong and no one does anything about it. ....And then who suffers because of that? We watch students suffer semester

after semester, feeling totally helpless. To watch them walk out of a classroom crying, because they're told that it is a waste of their time to be there, based on what? Their second day in class? What do you know about what they can and cannot do? .... And he wrote in his essay, "I am just so disappointed about all the things that I hoped for are not going to happen. And I'll never be able to change anything." And you know what? He's right.

It was obvious that the teacher was quite distressed about how some of the students were treated by the administrator and by some of the teachers who might not be as sensitive as they should be in terms of the social and emotional needs of some students. The students that I interviewed knew very well who the teachers were that they could go to if they had a problem or who would be more sympathetic to their needs. As with any high school setting, teachers will have a reputation, whether it is true or not, that precedes them and often influences how they are perceived by the students. That said, once there are actions or words to reinforce this opinion, it becomes quite difficult to reverse.

It was noted that teachers must be willing to adapt and modify their curriculum to meet the changing demographics of the Canadian classroom. Rassan clearly articulates the need for teachers to respond to the changing needs of the children.

Our classroom right now is not the classroom of the 1980s or the 70s or 60s, where you had a majority of white kids in your classroom. There were very few immigrants. You would have a curriculum and you could say this is what we're going to accomplish by the end. We have to do a lot of modifications,

and that doesn't mean to bring the level down or to water the curriculum down. Modification means find a different way to teach the material to different people. And that is the challenge for a lot of people. Very simple. I have a colleague who has a test that was done in the 1990s and he puts it in front of these kids, assuming that the language is okay and the comprehension will be okay. And kids fail. Why? Because they don't understand the language that was used. So you have to make modifications, you have to know what your demographics are and make modifications if you want success for students. But if the point for me was to get the curriculum covered no matter what consequence, it will happen, but what will be the price? Kids will pay for it. That's the bottom line. I worked with teachers and different departments and this worked ten years ago but, look at class now, fifty percent of your kids are EAL students. Make the adjustment. I had to go through this. I am not just speaking because I have read an article. I went through it. I have the experience, and that's what kids want.

Additional knowledge and resources were identified as key challenges that would be needed to meet the needs of the refugee students. The teachers' willingness to change their teaching style for the betterment of the students also figured prominently in the data. The frustration that I sensed from many of the statements made by school staff was that some teachers were not willing to take the time to make adjustments to better fit the needs of their students, and this seriously hampered the students' academic success.

*Academic Literacy, Aspirations and Ability*

Several participants suggest that the career aspirations and the future goals that the students have are unrealistic given their current academic level. As one of the counsellors indicates, many of the students want to be doctors, engineers or lawyers, but their reading skills and math skills are at a grade 1-3 level and they are 17 or 18 years of age and in grade 11. Even after being in school for a year or two they struggle with basic skills, yet many of the students want to take the highest level of math or English so that they could pursue university entrance requirements. One of the other counsellors said that she has an ethical issue putting students in high level courses and then seeing them fail in excess of three times.

The EAL teacher indicates that once students learn enough English to carry on a conversation, they think that they are able to jump into the regular stream of specialized university preparation courses. It appears that there are two different issues related to language and literacy challenges. First, there is the need to develop basic conversational skills that the students need to navigate their way through the systems to satisfy their basic needs. Second, there is the academic literacy necessary to take courses in school and to pursue a more advanced academic program. For example, students would have to learn basic English to shop at a grocery store, take a bus, or to go to a meeting with their reception counsellor. Once the students reached a certain level of basic conversational English, the teachers indicate that they thought they had mastered the language and they could take any course they wanted in school. The business teacher states, "They just want to get that Canadian dream, you know, they come here and they think they can be all of these things, but..."

Essentially, many of the teachers suggest that the students have an unrealistic outlook for their future, given their current academic level.

The challenge for educators is that the academic level of the students is, in most cases, a long way away from where they need to be in order to fulfill their dreams. The students' understanding of the level of academic literacy necessary to complete the courses is incongruent with what the staff members think students need to realistically pass the course. In addition, some of the teachers clearly indicated that the cognitive ability of the student was compromised, particularly when they had years of disrupted schooling. This left what one teacher referred to as "serious gaps in their learning and functioning and this complicated their ability to transfer learning skills to a new environment."

The purpose of suggesting that students take alternative courses better suited to their ability is not to limit their choices by encouraging them to choose a different career path. Moreover, most of the teachers suggested that they would like students to achieve some success at one level before progressing to a more difficult level. That said, the students need to have a much better idea of what it will take to achieve their goals. A second observation about this issue is the fact that the school staff has indicated that most of the students aspire to the same grouping of occupations: a doctor, a lawyer, a dentist, or an engineer. That in itself suggests that these students are in dire need of learning more about high and low prestige jobs, expected earnings, and the future job outlook for Canada. Many students were motivated to become employed and financially secure within the next four to five years so that they could support themselves and their family members. The latter was mentioned

when the students discussed their future plans, in addition to their wish to sponsor more family members to come to Canada.

There is much empirical evidence in the domain of career counselling that supports the influential role that parents have on the career choices that their children make (Bregman & Killen, 1999; Middleton, Loughead, 1993; Sebald, 1989; Trusty, Watts, Crawford, 1996). Considering the fact that students in the west make most of their career choices based on what their parents do, or what friends of their parents do, it is not surprising that these students would choose the occupations they did. The people that refugee children would come in contact with, who would represent the west and the wealth that accompanies this perception of the west, would likely be those from the list of careers that the students aspired towards. Many of the student participants did not live with parents and, in many cases, if they did have parents, they were unable to work because of the conflict. The interactions that the students had with foreign workers may have influenced their career choices. It is quite possible that, if students received a more comprehensive career development program, they might have different aspirations that were better suited to their interests. Although this is only speculation, there could potentially be some work that is needed in the area of career awareness and realistic goal setting.

### *Preparation of Teachers*

The school system is in a unique position because virtually every refugee child who comes to Canada will be enrolled in school. For many families, outside of the initial contact with the welcoming centre, the school will be their first point of contact for any form of support agency. As the discussion in the following chapter

illustrates, the school has been identified as the most important ecological system for the refugee family. This is particularly because of the fact that all of the children and their families will have some form of contact with the school, albeit for varying lengths of time. The challenge that has been identified is that the school does not have adequate resources and the personnel does not have the training to identify or respond to all of the issues. This will become particularly concerning if the anticipated number of newcomers immigrate to the province. Although some of these issues are happening at a micro level, with the numbers of immigrants to Canada expected to increase over the next five years, the issues are likely to be exacerbated to a macro level. Most of the participants indicated that the school was not ready for the onslaught of newcomers.

Donna, the principal of Walter Duncan School, notes that there is very limited time for professional development (PD). Although the school was granted additional time to train the staff to deal with a substantial increase of refugees in a short time, Donna believes that this was a one-time occurrence that she would likely not receive again in the future.

> I think we need more PD time and then that is restricted. I know in one week we got 19 kids and that is almost a whole classroom in one week. These kids showed up from Iraq. And then the other superintendent, I phoned him and I was almost hysterical, because these girls after a few weeks were showing anger and fighting and pulling hair, all kinds of strange things and it turned out that one of the families had arrived and the father had been killed after they got here. He [the superintendent] gave us permission to use two half

days to talk about what was going on and we talked to an Iraqi psychiatrist. And this person came and talked to our staff. But that's because the superintendent granted us that day, but usually we're not allowed. And actually, I don't think I would've gotten that from my own superintendent. I guess they are afraid that we will abuse it.

Rassan adamantly argues the dire need for classroom level support because of the multiple roles that are expected of a teacher.

> Put yourself in the students' shoes and you travel back in time. You put yourself in a refugee camp and go into their country and live and learn their language and their life. You do that. In a perfect world I would say you've got to find the right person to deal with these people. You just can't put them in a classroom and assume that this poor teacher is going to do the job of a teacher, the job of a disciplinarian, the job of a parent and a counselor and a community leader. Provide them support. I don't expect you to go into a classroom and be successful with all these kids without any support. Without support, we are nothing. Find the support.

Scott informed me that the only preparation in the school for the influx of African and Middle Eastern students was to know that they were coming. He states, "That was it. We didn't receive any inservicing, we didn't receive any background apart from a few words at a staff meeting." While there was clearly a need to better prepare the school staff for teaching refugee children, time was not allocated at either staff meetings or professional development days for this purpose. One of the teachers indicated that improving literacy skills for all learners was the focus of their

professional development activities over the past few years. Although the school principal indicated that the topic was of immediate concern, additional days were not provided by the school division administration for additional training of the staff.

As the Director of the reception centre, Mike states that he had a workbook of resources available for teachers to use, but they were sitting on the shelf gathering dust. He indicates that his staff has also developed an Ambassador program to assist refugee students when they arrive in a new school and this was also not being utilized. He then concludes,

> We are not out there to market ourselves. Hey, if the school division doesn't recognize the resources that they have, it's not my job. It's their problem. If they are not using us, the same way they're not using the Ambassador program that we spent a whole lot of time developing and it just sits there. If they're not using this stuff that is available, there's a brick wall between the regular kids and the irregular kids. You know, we deal with the irregular kids. And if they're not interested, what are we supposed to do about it? If they have the resources and they do want to take advantage of it, Okay.

There was quite clearly a lack of communication between the school division and the personnel who had developed the programs. Mike banged his hand repeatedly on the table throughout this portion of the interview. A few of the members of the focus group collected Mike's contact information after the meeting so that they could inquire further about the resources. It was clear that the program and the workbook were of interest, but it was also evident that there was a previous

lack of communication about what resources were available and how they could be distributed to schools.

### *Parental Assistance*

One of the teachers pointed out that, if the children do not know the English language, then it is likely that the parents do not either. Many references were made as to the importance of the school connecting with the parents or caregivers and the need for parents to be more responsible for their child's schooling. One of the parents that I interviewed suggests,

> A successful child in education needs supervision between the school and the home. And if they are just left to go to school, that child is not going to, because a child is a child. And they don't know what is wrong. Those parents, they have to monitor from time to time and check the kids and check what they did today. And most of the times, I don't think, especially immigrant parents, they don't even look into their kids' work, because they think education is the responsibility of the school. The school is alone because they don't have, may I say, knowledge.

It was suggested that more work was needed to improve the communication between the school and the home. This communication is particularly difficult when the parents do not speak the language and the school uses the student as a translator. This creates a unequal power structure that complicates the roles between the child and the parents.

Bill is the Sudanese community liaison representative and he suggests that more resources need to be provided to the parents on the weekend because many of

them work during the day. He suggests that if the school had programs on the weekend that were designed for parents, for example, on the topic of discipline, it would be easier for parents to attend. Bill also indicates that there are some parents who are working two jobs and it is not feasible for them to miss work time.

### *Educational Organizational and Policy Issues*

The overall organization of the education system and the policies, or lack of policies, pertaining to the education of refugee children were noted as challenges at the government, the divisional, and the school levels. A thorough investigation of the organizational and policy issues concerning this topic would extend far beyond the scope of this study. For the purpose of this discussion, I will highlight some of the challenges that were noted as these related to providing an appropriate education for refugee children. I will discuss the perspectives of the government representatives as well as that of the school and divisional staff.

Debbie, a government consultant in the area of EAL, states, "There are a lot of times when they [the teachers] are held back just by policies that have not kept up with the changes." Will, also a government consultant in the area of EAL, informed me that up until quite recently there had been no real planning mechanism or divisional direction for refugee youth in the school divisions, including those divisions with the greatest number of refugee students. He indicated that most of the schools were locally responsible for developing policy, which was usually dependent on the "whims of the principals to give it any support." In some cases, there were no additional resources for EAL learners. Will suggests that the province is moving

toward a more consistent approach that he hopes is based on research and good practice.

Will noted that he knows of a school division that has received an additional $400,000 because of the number of EAL learners. He questioned what was done with the resources, because there was no additional support staff and no additional EAL consultants put in place.

In some cases the schools have established programming and progressive approaches that were said to be appropriate, but once there was a change in the administrator the programs were not sustainable. Will notes, "And then there's the change in the school administrator. The person doesn't come in with that knowledge, or believes there's a different set of priorities. So everything that was built up over time can be totally destroyed." If the priorities have not been articulated and included in the principal's mandate or the school plan, then it is left up to the individual principal to determine if it is important and worthy of attention. Historically, the EAL programs have been informal, inconsistent and unsustainable after a major change in leadership.

In many school divisions, EAL programming was not a priority and schools had a "sink or swim" situation where the students showed up, were placed in an age-appropriate classroom, and teachers were encouraged to support them as much as possible. Some school divisions who had a larger number of EAL students might put in an EAL support teacher to help in the classroom. An interesting comparison was brought forth in the focus group by Karen, who stated that, "we don't just put kids in a French Immersion program, we actually have a program designed for them where

teachers are knowledgeable about second-language methodology. She elaborated saying, "We don't just dump them into the regular classroom and say, 'you learn that way', this is how they learn." Karen refers to this as a double standard.

Will and Debbie both indicate that a big challenge is to come up with "standard practice and formal policies and protocols that draw on good research and practice and to get schools to implement that." As was revealed in the focus group and by the interviews with the school administrators and divisional consultants, there was also a disparity between the written policy and its implementation.

Ingrid, an EAL support teacher for the school division, states, "It seems that some of the policy of the school divisions that I'm representing... it's not getting to the individual schools. It seems that different things are being done in different schools, and they're not following the policy." She indicated that schools are either "ignoring the number of students that are EAL learners" or they are "deferring to other kids who, are just regular learners and they've grown up in an English-speaking home." It appeared that whether or not there was an EAL program was dependent on whether the individual principal thought it was a priority for the school. Ingrid states, "It's really catch-as-you-can as to whether one administrator thinks it is important to have an EAL program and to support it properly or whether they'll just be immersed." Ingrid provided the following example to explain,

> Last year, when I began the job and was visiting, one principal told me, "They are just in the regular classroom. They don't have any supports. They will learn English".... And even if we are talking just about immigrant

children, and not just refugees, I already knew that there was a brick wall to my ever coming back there, until the administration changed.

In one leader's defense, Paul states, "Policies are more paper-based than they are action-based. And so that action bogs us down even more." Considering the demographics of the school and the issues that Paul raised in his interview, policies might need to be more aligned with the realities of the school environment. That said, articulating clear and realistic policies that have been developed cooperatively might lead to more successful implementation. From the period of 2004 to 2006 there were some divisional discussion groups that talked about how to facilitate change in terms of programming EAL learners. One of the results of these discussion groups was the 2006 literacy centres.

At the provincial level, Will indicates that the government has started work on an EAL program framework and he notes that they are moving to a more provincial approach in terms of expectations for programming. Will also states that they are trying to "build capacity for programming," as well as trying to "implement more accountability measures, particularly for EAL."

Despite some of the forward movement from the department in terms of a framework, course development, and more accountability, it does not necessarily mean that this change will occur quickly or in the way that it was intended. As Will illustrates, there are also schools that set policy on something that is not pedagogically sound. He talked about an example in one school division, where there are two high schools with EAL programs. In one school the beginning learners are not allowed to be in Physical Education or in Home Economics because of safety

concerns. That school argues that the students do not understand enough English to follow directions and this could be a safety concern. The students in this school are not permitted to attend these option courses until they move into the intermediate level classroom. This could take in excess of a year or longer. To link to an earlier argument, this is another example where students are not given the opportunity to interact with other children in the school, thus exacerbating the already difficult process of socializing to a new ecological system. This situation is completely different from another high school in that same division that says beginning learners will be in the beginner class but they will also be in Art, Physical Education, Home Economics, Sports and Music, because even if the students do not speak or understand higher level English, they may be good at one of these other subjects.

These are examples of two schools in the same school division. Because there is no standard or coordination between the schools, there is no consistency across the division. In addition, when the staffing changes, there is also no retention of knowledge and, in many cases, teachers need to reinvent the programs. Will notes, "There needs to be a retention of knowledge so that when a school's teachers change, someone can come in and continue on with the program without struggling and relearning things that should be available within that school." Will also suggests that school divisions need to document best practice, decide what support materials they need and then determine what programming should look like. Because there has not been consistency and coordination in terms of policy, it often means that schools are going to be more reactive than proactive. As Tim MacKay illustrates,

> Rather than having a proactive response, we wait until these kids melt down and then we try to put in supports. The overwhelming ideology around inclusion says that if we just put kids in the regular classroom, they will be speaking English by Halloween. We hear that over and over. That is a myth that you just have to absolutely get rid of. Some people think the more time you spend in an immersion environment, the more you will learn. We'll try this one, "the more time you spend in a math class, the more math you will learn." It's ridiculous (personal communication, March 3, 2007).

Essentially, what participants noted was the overwhelming desire for a more formal approach that was proactive in nature, collaboratively developed, consistent, and sustainable.

Because the number of refugee students is projected to increase substantially in the province, there is a great need for school divisions to formalize policy regarding EAL learners. The following excerpt from Will articulates the cumulative effect of the numbers of refugee students:

> Refugee students into the school system are probably about 700 plus or minus every year. That's still a large number, and of course, most of them are living in the city. Over a five-year period of 3,500 students and potential workers entering the workforce. And that's important. And if you take all of the learners, all of the immigrant learners, roughly 40 to 45% are between the ages of zero and nineteen years of age. So we have 10,000 immigrants, roughly. Roughly 4,200 are going to be in the school system. Now this doesn't even include the Canadian born students of immigrant parents. You

take that number, if you're immigrants and 80% of them are non-English, non-French. Out of those 42 or 4,500 every year, almost 80% of them are non-English, non French-speaking. So we are talking about 3,700, maybe 4,000, every year over five years. That's 20,000 learners. Multiply that over a decade.

Another challenge regarding policy emerged during the first focus group meeting. Mike indicated that the last time he talked to the school division it received $974 per EAL student. He suggests that you can not provide services that are required with this amount of funding. He notes, "I mean, it's great to increase the numbers, but how are you going to educate these kids? How are you to keep them out of gangs?"

Although this discussion has focused primarily on the policy issue at the provincial level, I questioned why none of the participants suggested that it must also be examined federally. Immigration is under the federal jurisdiction, and education is a provincial issue. It appears that, if we are truly going to collaborate on solving many of the organizational and policy issues, it might be more useful to look at the issues from a broader perspective. What responsibility does Immigration Canada have for ensuring that the refugee children who are brought to Canada are given an appropriate education? Using an ecological framework, and a multi-tiered, federal, provincial and local approach for investigating and solving many of these challenges might be more advantageous.

Several educational challenges have been discussed in the preceding section. Although evidence suggested some students become overwhelmed by the challenges

and subsequently leave the school system, most forge ahead despite the adversity. Challenges related to difficulties with the course work, perceived teacher attitudes, and limited support from home made it more difficult for students to be successful. In addition, the lack of policies related to refugee education limited the availability and consistency of programs and services provided to these students.

## Environmental Challenges

The three far-reaching categories of challenges, namely, racism and discrimination, psychosocial issues, and educational challenges, illustrate the numerous and often insurmountable barriers and obstacles for many of the students who have come from countries of conflict. Moreover, there are numerous other challenges that were also mentioned that did not necessarily originate in the school system, but did complicate other interactions with the ecological systems. Although I have categorized the various challenges, and put them into a format to ease the discussion, I do not suggest that these challenges occur in isolation. As the discussion continues, it should become increasingly more obvious how interrelated the issues are, and how complicated many of the problems can be. The seven most frequently mentioned challenges will be discussed as they were revealed in the data.

### *Gang-Related Issues*

There is a commonly held perception amongst the students: African students think all the Aboriginal students are in an Aboriginal gang, and the Aboriginal students think all of the African students are in an African gang. While these

assumptions are not factual, it does not lessen the fear and resentment and the accompanying violence that occurs as a result of these beliefs.

Although there are some youth in the community who have formed gangs, there was no evidence to support that actual gang members attended Walter Duncan School. The youth who were in the gangs were said to have left the school when their criminal behaviour became more serious. In fact, it appeared that the result of a failed school experience is what led many students to gang activity. Heather, from Youth Justice states,

> I am hearing this story a lot from our gang members' families. The school system is where somehow it all falls apart. At that front end is: I'm not blaming the school system; I am just saying that that is what the parents perceive is happening is that the school piece is falling apart.

There appeared to be three main reasons why the participants believed students became involved in gang activity: (1) easy money; (2) lack of success in school; and, (3) no family support. There was no mention of females being involved in gangs; rather, the problem appeared to be only with males.

As was outlined in the previous section, most of the students must work and most of them work full-time and go to school full-time. The draw to gang activity was said to offer students "easy and quick access to money" that would take months to accrue in a traditional work setting. Aran told me that the reason kids join gangs is because "They have nobody. So they end up in gangs, because they can see the easy money and everything. It's easy money, but there are a lot of problems." Aran also

mentioned that he had a friend who had joined a gang and he commented on what he thinks lured his friend to the gang life.

> Because there's no chance of them getting out. I told him so many times, but they didn't listen. Because they're alone in everything. They just join a gang and they don't have any support for the government helping them. They got culture differences when they come here and they have to work. And the way we see it on TV in Sudan they think being in a gang is a cool thing. They're carrying guns and when we see them in movies; it affects a lot of people there. So when they come here, they think it's that easy. If you're in a gang you get a lot of money and they think they can just tell them they don't want to be in the gang anymore, but it's not that easy. It's not.

Mike explains that some of the kids innocently become involved in entry level gang activity. Someone might approach them in the central area and ask the youth to take a bag from one place to another and they will give them $20. As he points out, twenty dollars is a lot of money to some of these kids, so they are easily drawn into activity that quickly escalates to being more serious. Manley, a parent, suggests that "they don't go to school anymore because they know they will make money quickly being in a gang."

As was discussed in the previous section, there are numerous challenges for refugee students who are trying to pursue an education. Bill, who is a community liaison worker, reinforced how these challenges might overwhelm the student to such a degree that gang activity looks like an easier way to achieve his means.

> Some of them drop out of high school, and they become involved in counterproductive activities. And I think this is because of the challenges they face in school and sometimes their friends or the people in society. They tell them there are easy ways of getting money that they don't need to go to school, to sit in a classroom. And that brings us back to the original point that when students finish their classes they have to go to work, is like you're going from one difficult time to another time. I can't say that as a reason for sure about why they go to counterproductive activities, but probably it is the difficulties that lead them to these activities.

Whether it was a lack of success in school that led to gang activity or whether the lure of money was what made the student leave school, it was obvious that these two themes were closely aligned. Bill also suggests that people misunderstand the issue and they think that the government has let in these criminal people to Canada. An argument he made was that we need to remember that, before these people could come to Canada, they had to have a very clean criminal record and medical checkup. Although he states that he is not blaming Canada, he suggests that it is a community problem that is not just affecting the immigrant population. In his opinion, we should focus on making one or two schools better for all students and then extend this to the whole community.

The third reason that led students towards gang activity was a lack of support. Donna states that she has seen a few cases when you think that students are "shining stars, and they just turn around because of the lack of support that they have." In some cases the families and parents have very little understanding of the youth

justice system. Heather mentioned that she needs to help parents understand the concept of court orders and the role of Child Welfare, and her office was in the process of hiring two additional staff members to perform this role.

Laurie, a Counsellor from Walter Duncan School blamed the school system for not providing a young student and his family the support he needed. Her statement also illustrates the severity of the violence that is linked to gang activity.

> I worked with a boy from Eritrea, who was killed, who was 14 years old, and he was killed for running drugs. He was shot in the stomach and died on the street. He was my student and he was a really great kid. He was charming but, he had no sense of belonging. We didn't give it to him....We've failed him. We failed him by not understanding his needs, by not providing support for him and his family.

Whether the impetus for gang involvement is financially motivated, the result of a failed school experience, or because of a lack of support, there was a clearly identified problem in the community that has led to fear, insecurity, and violence. Culturally-based groups of students have organized themselves into gangs and now there are youth who think the only chance they have to protect themselves is to be in a gang. Heather mentioned that there were approximately 150 youth on the gang registry in the city. Because of the high incidence of African youth becoming involved in two particular city gangs, Youth Justice is developing an outreach program with Citizenship and Immigration Canada to work with youth and their families. The result of this gang activity has been a concentration of inner city

violence and drug-related activities that has affected many of the students in the school community.

Afem, Imran and Sokut were attacked in their home by a youth who they identified as a gang member. Sokut recounts the events:

> I don't know if I can really say they are a gang, but they are a group of people who don't cooperate with people. And I cannot identify them, but I believe, if somebody has a gun, then it's a gang.
>
> *A gun?*
>
> Yes, somebody came to my apartment and attacked us. Like three o'clock in the morning. That's why I moved because it was not an easy thing, because they came with a gun.
>
> *And they threatened you with a gun?*
>
> Yes, and he was arrested, because I called the police, and I don't know why he was released. You'd think that if you do that you would not be released because I want to live in Manitoba. I like Manitoba, I have a lot of great people that I like.

Sokut discussed this incident in complete detail during the interview and the same incident was also discussed by Afem and Imran in full detail. The details will not be disclosed in this discussion to protect the confidentiality of the participants and to avoid potentially contributing to the continuing problems.

Sokut was subsequently attacked and beaten up by people who were associated with the attacker. The attacker was released from custody and Sokut was attacked after school by five youth. He also received threats over his cell phone.

Sokut comments, "So I think it is better for me to leave, because I do not want to die in Canada." He later indicated that he blamed the police and he thinks these people "need to be put in their place. Not arrested, but counselled so they can be good to society and live in a peaceful community." Sokut has subsequently moved, by himself, to another province so that he could be safe.

Imran was attacked at school by someone he identified as a gang member. The youth threatened him with a knife following a basketball game. As this boy came in front of Imran, another boy hit him over the head with a glass bottle. When he turned around, he was struck in the face and three of his teeth were knocked out. Imran was taken to the hospital and he subsequently enrolled himself at a different school. Imran indicated that there were associates of this person who still attended Walter Duncan School and he felt that he was no longer safe.

Two other student participants also indicated that they had been "attacked by gang members" with a weapon or bear spray, just for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The reason they gave me for the attack was because the members of the Aboriginal gang accused them of being in an African gang; they indicated that they had no prior dealings with these youth. Larry indicates that, from his perspective as a superintendent, the youth are involved in a different kind of violence. He noted that it was different from other kinds of violent gang activities that he states is a "whole different level or intensity of violence that we haven't had experience with."

The participants representing the microsystem also discussed several "gang-related" violent attacks that they heard about through the students. One of the teachers indicates that it is so hard for some of the African boys not to be noticed

because they are so "dark and tall" and they really "stick out on the street." She also mentions that these students are often coming home late from work and it is difficult for them to pass certain areas because of the "gang turf" issues.

Numerous members of the microsystem commented about housing issues and how this ties into the gang problem. Because most of the refugees are forced to settle in areas of inexpensive and subsidized housing, they are right in the middle of gang territory. Mike notes,

> And where do you put them? You put them on blank and blank street, in the downtown core, where there are neighbourhoods with bad influences....Because of all these things you describe, lack of literacy, being out of school, and then you drop them into that gang banger area, it becomes very high risk.

In summary, the level of violence that has been noted by the participants in this study is undeniable. Students have been killed, threatened, and physically hurt because of gang-related violence. Although some people question if it is truly a "gang-related incident" or if it is merely indiscriminate violence from a group of disgruntled youth, from the perspective of the students, it is gang related and they are frightened. One student has left the province and one student has left the school because they were scared they would be killed. It is quite clear that the students are fearful of their safety and it is obvious that they are not receiving a great deal of support. If the ecological systems do not provide the support that is necessary to both keep students in school and to deal with the threat of gang behaviour, there is not likely to be an end to the violence. As Paul eloquently notes,

> [I]f you don't provide them with the hope that they need and the access to the kind of opportunities and training and education that allows them to be productive members of society and to live a life of dignity, then that critical mass will turn on you. So, the city has to be aware of that.

Although there is hope that some youth can ultimately leave the gang life, there is more evidence to suggest that it is easier to keep them out of it in the first place.

### *Economic Challenges*

The former discussion links the issue of having financial difficulty to the need to access money in whatever way possible. The Federal Government provides a subsidy for one year, and after this time, the family or student is expected to cover all of their expenses. A dire need for a longer term commitment from the government was noted by numerous participants. After one year of support, students are expected to work. The students who were without a family indicated that they needed to prove that they were looking for a job and they had to prove that they were in a full-time regular high school program so that they could continue to receive subsidized housing. Mike insists that the government needs to stop "harassing kids to go and get a job." He argues, "You are condemning these kids to beginning level jobs for the rest of their lives and also the potential for a life of crime."

The biggest financial challenge for both the unaccompanied youths and the families was paying back the government debt that they owed for their transportation to Canada. About a month after arriving into Canada, all refugees receive a bill in the mail, accompanied by a letter, indicating that they must repay the Government of

Canada for their airfare from their country of origin. The cost per person is roughly $2,500. Multiply this number by five children and it will be quite obvious that families will have a substantial debt to pay. Considering the wages that many of the income earners make, this does put many of the refugees at an unfair disadvantage. For youth, paying back this amount of money was inconceivable.

> Right now I have to pay $2,500, and where can I get that? Now I have to pay the government the interest, every month three dollars more. So it's going to be $3,000, $4,000, $5,000, until I find a job that can pay that. So these are the conditions I say that sometimes it's better to go back to Sudan.

Sokut later discusses how difficult it was for him to deal with financial issues, but he remained focused on going to school.

> I have to struggle now to look for a job to help him my uncle so that I can pay the rent, because he also has a mortgage. In this country, he cannot feed me and pay my rent and my school supplies. I have to look for a job. I have to pay for rent, food, a bus pass. What I have to do is work on food so that I can go to school. I believe God will see all of my problems, and he will see it one day.

The students that I interviewed were not lavishly buying up brand name sports attire or loading up their iPods with the latest hip-hop selections; they were visiting food banks, rationing supplies, and furnishing their homes with discarded items from the school staff. Vivienne mentioned that none of the students in her class had appropriate winter wear, so she had family members knit scarves and hats to give to the students. Karen, one of the counsellors in the focus group, noted that

when she visited one of the student's apartments all he had was a mattress and a few dishes. She had the school staff donate enough furniture so that he could have a comfortable living space.

The majority of the students I interviewed sent money home to family members. Len, a counsellor at the refugee counselling centre, indicated that some of his clients rationed food or went without eating so they could send money back home. "They might eat one day, but not the next, because they need to send money back." Some of the students commented about the enormous sense of responsibility that they have because people back home depend on them to make money and send it to them so that they can survive. Bango states,

> I look at it, like life is kind of harder here compared to back home. You know, because back home, no one will depend on me. No one will look up to me, and at night, no one is expecting anything from me. But now that I am here going to school, I'm going to live on the small things that I am earning from work. I have to pay bills, and then from that I send some back home. Just for giving them to survive. I send money to my mom. I have to work.

There are also some students who were sent by their families to be the supporter and to send home money. This situation is clearly articulated in the following statement by Akot. His responsibility to provide for other family members was evident.

> Sometimes, it's hard. Because I work like five days a week. I have to send money for my family, for my brothers and uncles. But that's okay.

I have responsibilities, because I have to send money to my brothers. There is nothing back home. So ever since I came here, I have to send the money. Every month, I send him $200, $250, $300. Because $200 in my country is like $800. I always call them about twice a month. I want them to come here, but I don't know how to do that. Because back home, it's too tough. It is hard to work. There is not enough food. There are not enough jobs.

Because they're my brothers, I have to help them. And I'm thankful that I'm in Canada. Someday I'll go back to visit them. Because my mom is dead. My dad is dead. So there's no point to go back to Sierra Leone. I'll just go and visit. Because my brothers and sisters are there. If I don't send money they don't eat. And they don't work back home. I'm like... (pause)... their hope. Because every time I call them, they tell me I am their hope.

Despite many of these challenges, many of the students and their families have proven to be extremely resourceful. Marleen states that she has clients who will go without eating so that they can send money back home. Many of the families will ration and go to food banks. Following this comment she adds,

... they are extremely resourceful, but the stakes are higher for them, because often, I have had clients that tell me that people back home will either live or die based on their sending them this money. The cost there is life or death. And what impresses me is their resourcefulness. I think we tend to forget how resourceful these people are. In some ways we minimize these incredible skills and resources they bring, and let's see what we can do. You know, sometimes just modifying it, so they can be successful.

Helen's statement illustrates her personal resourcefulness and hope for the future. Although it took a little longer to finish high school, she will graduate this year and she is pursuing post-secondary studies. Helen states that in her country it is horrible if you do not remember the people that you have left behind.

> And another thing is when we finished government assistance, I was saying, 'oh my god, how am I going to deal with studying and working and going to school?' This was hard for me. In Africa, you don't do that. You go to school. And if you decide not to go to school then you go to work. And now I have to save money for my people in Africa. I have to pay the government, and how I didn't think I could do it, but I said yes, I am going to do it. I am going to put my heart in this and try this experience. I have to try it. And I did (smiling).

As the previous statements reveal, most of the students feel that they have a responsibility to help others in their country of origin. In some cases, the student was sent by the family as the person who would provide for the others. While some of the students have been resourceful and have been able to fulfill this responsibility, others have been overburdened by the difficulties and challenges that they encounter while trying to stay in school and to also work. Most of the students envisioned that they would live affluent lives after coming to Canada. Many were not prepared for the realities of making a living in a consumer-driven society. Sokut indicated that it is hard for some kids to see the others who have the nice clothes and who can afford to eat at restaurants, because if they can not have this, "it makes them want to be a street kid and to sell drugs to get money to have these things."

*Criminal Activity*

The general theme of criminal activity included drug use, violence, drug trafficking, and theft. For the most part, references to criminal activity were usually provided within the context of discussing the community where most of the refugees live. Mike states,

> This integration into the existing violent system... in the school where drug dealing, prostitution, theft and violence are prevalent. If you settle a single mother of six in and you give her a three bedroom house on Blockside Avenue and the kids are going to Billings School, where everything is a problem, it's not necessarily a reflection of the kids. It is them incorporating and adding what they had to the existing problems of the school and the community...What you see is the mixture of all of the toxic ingredients. Not to stigmatize or to label but that is the reality. The reality is, a lot of these refugee kids are settled in areas of violence.

Because housing is less expensive, the reception centre settles most of the refugees within the inner city, where the perception is that there is substantial poverty, gang activity, and criminal activity. Mike also stated that there is a lack of short-term affordable housing and the Aboriginal communities are having the same problem as the low income people because the city has not built any additional social housing for several years.

Again, similar to the gang-related challenges, there was a noted relationship between references to financial challenges, leaving school, and criminal activity.

Participants suggested that illegal activities were a lure for the students who were financially at risk. As Paul states,

> Pretty soon, you have to start making your own wages and paying your own way. And there is that inducement to try to take a shortcut the illegal way. Maybe it's to get involved in gangs or drugs or the temptation to go on welfare or working under the table and all those things.

Similar to the gang-related challenges, participants indicate that they feel insecure living in the area and they are fearful of the people in the community and where their property is damaged or their personal objects are stolen. The importance of keeping students in school and of drawing them back to school if they have left figured prominently in the discussion concerning challenges. Most of the participants indicated that criminal activity was something that might have started while the student was attending school, but certainly intensified shortly after the student left the school system.

Heather states that one of her main concerns is that once students leave the school system, there is a two-year window until the students come to her attention in the youth justice system. She comments,

> My question to begin with is, unfortunately we don't see these kids until about two years down the road, so they may leave school at 12 or 13, and they float around and they get into a little bit of trouble. But they don't really come to us until about 14 or 15. So I'm wondering, we don't really know them until typically they are two years out of the school system.

The first three general challenges emerged throughout the interviews as interrelated and connected issues. It appeared that the lack of financial resources served as a draw towards gang-related issues and other criminal activity. Coupled with the influences from the community, in particular the proximity to drugs and violence, participants indicated that that these counterproductive activities were the most difficult challenges for refugee students to deal with in Canada.

### *No Support in Canada and the Need for an Advocate*

Students indicated that they felt alone and they were unsure of how to access services in Canada. With the exception of the school, the only source of support that the students mentioned in the interviews was the reception centre. This agency was an initial support when they first arrived in Canada, but none of the students were currently involved with the centre. It was because of this perceived lack of support that students and adults noted that refugees who settle in Canada need to have an advocate. They need someone to help them understand how all of the agencies work, they need direction on who to go to for help and how they could access support if necessary.

Support that was mentioned that could be directed toward the parents included: legal rights concerning housing; how to purchase and finance a home; how the school system works; the parents' role in assisting their child and engaging with the school; how to discipline children; signs to look for when you think your child is in danger or involved in criminal activity; and how to access medical services.

Support that was needed for the students included the following: how to dress for the weather; how to access medical services and interpret the information; how to

budget; how to shop; how to prepare nutritional food; how to look after personal hygiene issues and protect yourself against diseases and infections; how to use public transportation and banking facilities; and information on who can help you in the community when you have a problem at school, home, or your workplace.

Participants indicated that they did not have support after coming to Canada. Many of them stated that they thought the government brought them here and then forgot about them. After discussing all of his problems in Canada and all of his attempts to contact government officials and local leaders who he though might help him, Sokut concludes, "I feel like they let me down." Vivienne, who works with the newest refugees in the school states, "Are they lost in the system? Probably." Vivienne suggests that, because of this lack of support, many of the students now question whether Canada is really where they want to be. She argues,

> And then they think, I would I have been better off living in my own country as a refugee. I do not know what is going to happen to those students who are on welfare now, when it ends. Do they realize it is ending soon? Will they quit school and try to find a job, because it's going to be a low-paying job. They can't speak English very well. They don't know how to bank, they don't know how to shop, they don't know how to budget.

A relationship between the lack of support for the students and the lack of interaction with the school and the various ecological systems emerged throughout the data. The result was that the school provided most, if not all, of the support to the student. There were two students who also indicated that their church provided support but, for the most part, the majority of support that the students received was

from or directly arranged by certain members of the school staff. Scott states, "Right now, I feel like we're really on our own. The only thing that makes me feel better about that is that I know that the kids feel like they are on their own. So they appreciate any help that they get from us. But it's not fair to them or to us." Vivienne also outlines the difficulty that students have because the various systems do not interact with each other, which further isolates the students. She explains,

> I think the systems work in isolation of each other. I think if there were more interactions amongst and between the different systems then the student would more readily pick up what needs to be done and how to survive. The student is isolated. They don't know how to make a doctor's appointment, they don't know how to shop. Until we work together, the kids are going to be on the outside looking in and feeling lost.

Because Walter Duncan School is a site of a pilot program for the students who are not literate in any language, additional support is provided by a program such as Vivienne's. The program is for grade 10 to12 students and Vivienne states, "But the 7s and 8s, there is nothing for them. They just get put in the regular stream." There are individual schools and some school divisions who have locally developed programs and services to support some of these aforementioned issues, although there is no overarching program or mechanism of support for refugee students.

The need for students, particularly those who are unaccompanied minors, to have an advocate or a mentor was also prominent in the data. Christine states,

> I think that's really important and not every student is going to have the luxury of having somebody who is like their Canadian mom or Canadian

> dad. You need to have somebody who can help them manoeuver in these various systems and right now they don't know where to go, and they're locked in a system that doesn't work for them. You need somebody who is an advocate for them, you need somebody who's going to help them with all of these things that are done outside of school so that they can be totally integrated.

As the data revealed, it seemed like the school staff was extending well beyond their roles as advocates and it appeared that the school as an ecological system was stretched beyond its means. Using the ecological model, it was the mesosystem, or the interactions between those people in the microsystem, that was defunct, which further exacerbated many of the challenges for the students. Moreover, it seemed that the direction for change needed to be set at a divisional or provincial level. Although people in the school outlined the importance of needing an advocate for these students, they also suggested that it should be a defined role and responsibility given to a staff member, as opposed to an adjunct responsibility imposed on specific teachers.

### *Adjustment to, and Navigation through, the Systems*

The overall adjustment to a new way of life was stated as a challenge for all refugees. This meant adjusting to the climate, to a way of life, to cultures, traditions, food, and language. For many refugees, it also meant adjusting to a new family structure. Bill also suggested that because of these adjustment issues, many families break down. He has seen many families separate because of high levels of stress, which often lead to disputes and conflict between family members.

Learning how all of the social systems work—the tax system, Child Services, work environments and education—all requires effort for the refugees who must make adjustments to carry on with their daily lives. Along with these adjustments, the refugees must learn how to navigate through all of the systems. Many of the adults in the microsystem and the exosystem indicated that refugees are bombarded with so much information when they first arrive that it is virtually impossible to keep everything straight and to remember everything. Most of this information is also delivered in the first couple of months after arriving in Canada, when families are still trying to tend to their basic needs.

Sokut indicates that after he was attacked he went to numerous people he thought could help him find a new place to live, with very limited success. Sokut explains,

> We try hard to talk to the government and Manitoba Housing, and they said no. They will not help young people. When I talked to them on the phone they said, come to our office to talk to them and then when they see we are youth, they say they can't help us....But because everything has a system, you have to just do it the way they say.

Sokut mentioned that the only person who helped was his local MLA, who came over and put a peep hole up on the boys' outside door so that they would be able to see who was at the door. The boys were relocated to a housing complex almost one year after their request. Sokut discusses his frustration about trying to get people in the systems to listen to him.

I call different people in a church where Sudanese people pray because their pastor is from Sudan and I wanted to talk to him about it. I asked him if he could talk to the government, because you will have more strength than me because I'm a young person. They might think I'm a drug dealer or a troublemaker, but if he talks to people, people can understand who he is. He is a good judge and maybe he could help us move from Brookside. Because they won't listen to us because of our youth. So this is how our life was going.

Paul mentioned that many of the Lost Boys have had to use political means to get what they want or need. He notes,

I'm sure you've heard of the Lost Boys. I have friends who work at Income Assistance, and based on what I know from the wider community as well, the other nickname for them as well is that they are called the "Golden boys." They were brought here by someone higher up, by a group of people who sponsored them and sometimes, no... a lot of times, if they don't get what they want, they use political ways to get what they want. And I think that's part of the survival process, just what they had to do in order to survive. So in terms of educators, I think we need to be wise of our students because if you continue to buy into it, you can become enablers, in terms of giving them what they want and basically allowing them to set the tone and the agenda. When in fact, they are young men and young women, and they are just learning about life, and they are exploring and pushing the boundaries.

Learning to adjust to a new system and figuring out how to get what you need from the system appeared to be an immensely difficult task for not only the students, but also those people who were trying to assist the students. The use of political means to get what was needed became an additional strategy that the students used to satisfy their needs. What also became obvious was that they were frequently used by political actors. The students were asked to come to "tell their story" at conferences and to be interviewed for news stories and there was very little or no remuneration or follow up debriefing for them afterwards. In a six-month period, Sokut spoke at five different conferences or meetings across Canada, and he was interviewed for two different news stories and he spoke once on national radio. Although the youth tried to use political means to navigate their way through the system, they were also used politically in return.

### *Language and Literacy*

A major obstacle for non-English speaking refugees is to learn the language so that they can function in society. There was a clear distinction made between oral English and academic literacy. It seemed that once the students learned enough English to carry on a conversation, they thought they had mastered the language and they would be able to succeed in advanced level courses. The findings suggest that there are two levels of challenges that the students encountered related to communication. First, they needed to acquire basic communication skills to navigate their way through the various systems. Second, they needed academic language and literacy skills to advance their level of education.

Based on the information from the literature review, I assumed that the challenge of learning a new language and acquiring literacy skills would figure much more prominently in the data. It was referenced within the top ten most frequently cited references; however, I thought that it would be the most difficult challenge for the students to overcome. My assumption had been based on the priority given to language acquisition by the government and the school division. Most, if not all, of the programs designed to support refugee children are intensive language and literacy programs.

There were individuals, for example, Donna, Will, Bev and Vivienne, who did state that language was a "massive problem" and that it was a major challenge for the students; however, only three students even made mention of language skills. The most important fact to consider is that the students I interviewed had been in Canada for over a year or more, and they may have already progressed so far in their language skills that they no longer considered it as a challenge. Had I interviewed students who arrived more recently in Canada, they may have indicated that language was a more significant challenge. It could also mean that the social and ecological challenges figured more prominently in the students' lives. Literacy and language issues are certainly a challenge; however, based on the data from this study there are equal, if not greater challenges for students in terms of socialization and feeling welcome in a new country.

As the EAL teachers explained, many of the students did not have adequate written English or English comprehension skills to be successful in some of the academic classes. The problem many of the teachers encountered was convincing the

students that they needed the academic literacy skills to understand and complete the work in the courses. Many of the students took the high level courses only to be disappointed that they were not successful and they needed to take the courses again. Many of the students had to repeat courses until their language skills improved enough to complete the course work. Bev states,

> I explain to them that they need to take four basic English courses in EAL before they are ready to take regular courses. But not all of them listen. I tell them hat need to have at least 80% or higher in these classes to be able to handle the regular courses just to get a decent mark around 60%. They don't listen and then they fail the courses, over and over. I can not insist that they not go into the regular classes. If they don't listen, they go in and learn the hard way. What makes it worse is when teachers feel sorry for them and just give them a pass. This doesn't help anyone.

Scott also notes,

> I have kids in my grade 10 Geography class taking it for the third time, this is just ridiculous. How can they stand doing the same thing over and over. What tends to happen is they just end up getting bored or frustrated and then just give up."

Banya indicated that she knew three languages. She struggled the first couple of years after coming to Canada, and now she says it is better. "I only know a bit of English so is very hard for me at the beginning. It was a big challenge. I know how to write everything but not really. For some people it is very hard, they don't even

know how to write ABC." Afem also stated that he should have graduated but because of the language it has been very difficult.

Bill discusses the importance of the EAL programs, as well as the need to support the teachers who provide these programs.

> I think the schools are really trying to do their best to support the EAL problem. Because imagine if you bring these newcomers without any English, just put them in the mainstream class. They will never perform better. But they are helping them with the EAL program, and it gives them the foundation and the entry into the system. They don't just come here and, bang, there they go. And teachers are not made aware of the students in the classrooms and they might think the students are dumb. They don't know anything and they don't treat them right. I think this is some of the things that teachers need to be made aware of. And I think the government needs to provide more support to teachers or volunteers who are willing to come to the schools to support these newcomers with their language.

Learning English is also a major challenge for the parents, and many of the parents also attend EAL classes. As Rumbaut and Portes (2001) stated, "...immigrant adolescents experience much faster linguistic adaptation than their parents..." (p. 219). Because the child develops language skills at a much faster pace than the parent, it complicates the parent-child power relationship, especially when the child is used as a translator for the parent. As Parsa outlined in the following excerpt, her limited English meant that she could not attend parent-teacher conferences to find out how her children were doing in school.

> Hard for me was the language. It is very hard to learn a new language, and I didn't understand the culture in Canada. My counsellor had to teach me and another person got a house for me, downtown. And another counselor talked to the Walter Duncan School and my children go to Walter Duncan School. This was a hard job for me because I didn't understand English. I know a little bit now. And sometimes I can go to my children's school and I can talk with my children's teachers. I like it because I didn't understand before. It is hard for me. I didn't know the English so I didn't know how my children were doing in school and I just had to look at my children's report cards and they explained it to me. I've only been to school for my children twice. The school could give translation.

Learning either English or French and having the academic literacy skills is paramount to being able to work and be educated in Canada. Having said this, the data in this study revealed that there was so much more beyond just reading and writing that needed to be done to support these students. Although programs and services have been noted as being beneficial, there are many blank spots that clearly need to be addressed. Sandra states that it is all of the things beyond the reading that students need more help with. She believes that the challenge is both to help students adjust to Canadian customs and to provide more knowledge on basic life skills.

> The education system – absolutely something needs to be done. We can put all the supports in place to make them learn how to read but to read is not going to be their problem. It is everything else around the reading. They don't have sex ed., they don't know about personal hygiene....There has to be

more supports in place, we just have to. There is tons of money going into literacy, but how much is going into teaching them about, you know, how to respect women or how to get along with people who are culturally different. Those are the big issues that I see.

Language and literacy issues were a challenge for both the students and their parents. The language was a barrier for parents to become more involved with their child's education. Acquiring the basic communication skills needed to function in society was one challenge and acquiring the academic literacy skills needed to be educated in Canada was another challenge. While these two challenges were mentioned, other challenges related to education and living in Manitoba were mentioned more frequently by both the students and the participants representing the microsystem and the exosystem.

### *Housing*

As was mentioned earlier in the discussion, the location of where most of the families settle is typically in an impoverished area, in what people refer to as the inner city. A glimpse of how various participants perceive this area of the city was discussed in the previous section. Although the location of housing was a major challenge, so were the accommodations and the living conditions. There are also issues surrounding the transient nature of being in subsidized housing and how difficult it is to maintain continuity in the students' education when they do move. Afem remembers his first house. He states,

It was not good. It was too horrible, it was too dirty. And it was too far from school, and they said we need a place that's near to school so that we have

time to come. And so we went to another one on Brookside. And we went to look at it and we liked it and we moved into there. We stayed there since he came to Canada, until we just started moving.

Parsa and her family relocated to a second home in a housing complex. She discusses the problems she had in her first apartment and the effort she made to try to get a different home.

My neighbor was from Somalia, and I didn't really talk with her. The people every day they go to work and when the evening time comes, they just make food to eat and sleep. The dishes were very dirty and there was stuff, stuff, stuff. They no clean. There were cockroaches.

The neighbour moved, to another place. And every day now that cockroaches came to my house. So many things I used to finish cockroaches and nothing worked. There was more and more and more it made me very sick. My children were sick. And after we had food, in one minute there was a cockroach. In my oil, my sugar, my flour, in everything. That was my bad life. We had to buy all new furniture when we came here because everywhere there was a cockroach.

I had to go to Manitoba Housing and I said, "please, help me. My children and I are sick." And it was right next door to a fireplace and every night toot-toot-toot-toot. Because of the fire and all the noise I have high blood pressure. For my heart like this, now it is good. Thank God. I applied for a house when I first came to Canada in 2003. It took three years to get a

house. They told us when our number came, they would call us, but because of the cockroach problem and the alarms, they said okay.

Parsa and her family were delighted with their new home, and she indicated that her health had improved. The lack of cleanliness of the subsidized housing was mentioned in numerous interviews. Several students commented that they were disgusted when they initially saw their home placement.

Christine, the counsellor at Walter Duncan School, said that she was reluctant to refer students or their families back to the reception centre because she knows that they are overwhelmed and that no on would be able to assist them. She notes,

> And I have had to go out to find housing for these kids, or I have taken them to the food bank to find food. Or I sit down and help them move from one place to another or to get furniture for their apartments, or I have spoken to a landlord. And I'm unsure if these things are part of my job or not. I just do them because I know these kids need it, and otherwise they are not to be at school the next day and they will be able to concentrate or focus on what they're doing.

For the most part, housing challenges related to the location and to the living conditions of the home. Personal safety was compromised on numerous occasions, and most of the students stated that they did not feel safe where they lived. Other complications arose when students were unaccompanied minors and they were not able to advocate for themselves when their home placement was unsuitable.

## Summary and Conclusion

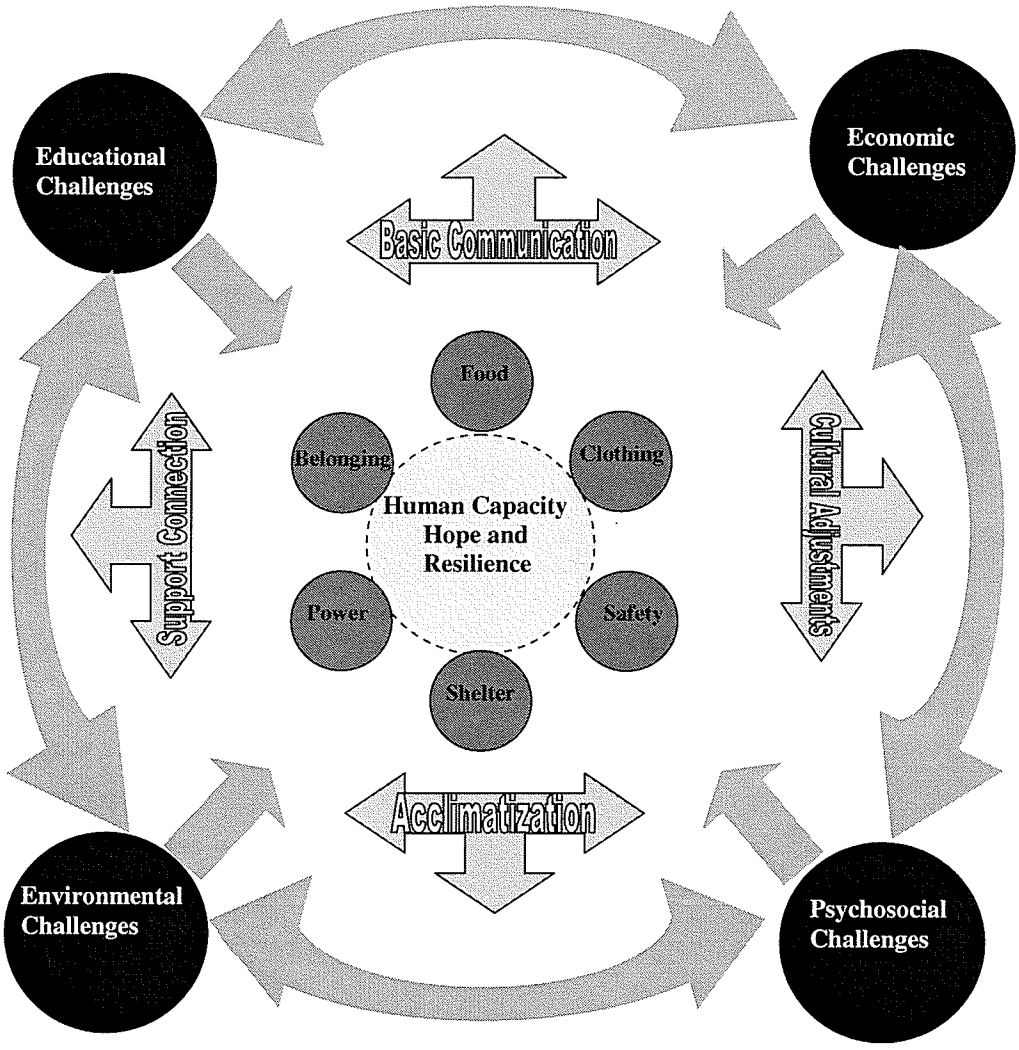
Refugee children must cope with numerous challenges and obstacles when they come to Canada. For many, this adjustment is, at times, an overwhelming experience coupled with regret and uncertainty. At other times the challenges are mediated by a powerful source of personal agency and with a drive propelled by hope. The challenges are multi-dimensional, occurring at all levels of the ecological systems. Within each ecological system there are layers of bureaucracy, procedures, norms and rules that are imposed by Canadian society, and refugees must adjust so that they are able to function as members of this society. The findings in this study revealed common themes and trends that were expressed by various participants. These themes assisted in clustering and organizing the challenges to discuss each category and to reveal how all of these challenges collectively affect the individual. Without suggesting that one cluster is more important than another, simply because it was discussed more frequently, I have chosen to summarize the clusters of challenges into four main conceptual categories. (See Figure 5.1)

In reviewing the challenges presented in this chapter, the following four clusters of challenges were delineated: (1) Educational Challenges, (2) Economic Challenges, (3) Environmental Challenges, and (4) Psychosocial Challenges. These four categories encapsulated the four categories presented in the discussion with some slight modification. Because the issue of racism and discrimination was largely a problem in all facets of the ecological systems, it would be clustered accordingly in the environmental challenges category; however, it was presented independently for the purposes of organizing the discussion. Economic challenges

include issues related to having to work while simultaneously attending school, and issues related to poverty. Each individual challenge discussed in the preceding discussion need not neatly fit into one category; rather, it is more important to understand conceptually what the main challenges are for the students so as to more closely examine how to address these issues as an interconnected set of ecological systems.

Combining the findings from Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, I have developed a model to represent the major adjustment challenges for refugee children who come to Canada. Referring to Figure 5.1, the centre of the model represents the individual. Human capacity, hope, and resilience represent the core characteristics of the individual that mediate the effects of the various challenges. As will be revealed in the following chapters, individuals possess certain protective factors that emerge as a means of coping with and working through the various challenges. The dashed line surrounding the centre circle was chosen to suggest that the process of building human capacity is not static; rather it is a continual and progressive developmental process. Six basic and essential needs have emerged from the data. Because the study included three phases of migration, namely, pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration, it was evident that first and foremost, the individuals' challenge was to struggle to satisfy their basic needs. This struggle was particularly evident upon arrival into Canada, although it was also a focus in post-migration, where students were continuing to look after their basic needs.

**Figure 5.1. Adjustment Challenges for Refugee Children in Canada**




I have also delineated four intermediary categories that represent challenges that occur as a precursor to the four general topics. The four intermediary challenges are: (1) basic communication, (2) cultural adjustments, (3) acclimatization, and (4) support connection. These four will be briefly explained below.

There appeared to be two distinct phases of English language learning. The first challenge was to learn basic conversational skills to navigate through the various systems and to attend to basic needs such as buying food, getting around the city, and talking to English-speaking teachers or students. The next phase was

academic literacy, which relates to the level of oral and written English and comprehension skills to complete academic courses.

Cultural adjustments would refer to changes that the individual makes when coming into contact with another culture. Individuals will maintain varying levels of their former culture. The process is not static, and the process of acculturation varies depending on the development of the individual. Some students may elect to reject some of their traditional culture, only to later adopt these cultures back into their life. The individual may continue to wear traditional clothing or practice cultural rituals, or may decline to wear typical Canadian dress representing a "kind of student" in a school. Scott informed me that some of the students elected to choose "the gangster look", while others chose "the jock look" or the "prep look." Some students will keep more of their former culture and some will choose to reject their former culture completely.

Acclimatization refers to the environmental challenges that the students must overcome. This is particularly prominent when children arrive from African climates to the Canadian climate in the middle of winter. The environmental shock is a physical challenge for the students, especially when they are ill-equipped with clothing and strategies for keeping warm. Vivienne explained that she had to set up a clothing drive to get warm clothes, and she needed to instruct her students on how to function in a cold climate. For example, she had to explain that students must know when the bus will come so that they would not be standing out on the street in -45C weather.

The final intermediary challenge was for the family or individual to find someone who would provide the essential link to the ecological systems. This support person might be a reception centre counsellor, a friend from the community, or a teacher who would help the newcomer find his or her way around the city and through the various systems. This personal support person was instrumental in assisting the individual or the family members upon first entering Manitoba.

As the findings in chapter five discussed, the four main categories of challenges form the cornerstone of the model and include: educational challenges, economic challenges, psychosocial challenges and environmental challenges. Clearly, the students are not passive victims; they are active agents who negotiate, compromise, and forge ahead despite adversity. Although it was recognized that not all students will encounter the same level of success and all of them will face challenges in a different way, in most cases, the outlook was positive. A great deal of time is spent developing new and creative programs and services to help certain groups of students be more successful. It might be more beneficial to look at what we are doing as a society and remove the barriers and challenges we impose on the students so that they have a chance at success. Combating racism, providing financial support to students so that we keep them in school, or developing culturally and linguistically sensitive programs might be a better use of intellectual energy and a good place to begin. From a societal point of view, the importance of schooling is paramount. The most compelling fact is that school is where these students most want to be. What remains frustrating is that there is a multitude of challenges that continue to complicate the chances of students being successful. That

said, there were numerous suggestions and possibilities that were discussed throughout many of the interviews that indicated viable solutions to many of the problems.

It is of utmost importance to understand and to be realistic about exactly what refugees need to make their transition to Canada successful. Evidence does support the fact that not all students are successful, and many have forfeited their hopes and dreams for a life of crime (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001). That said, it is imperative that as a society we collectively, regardless of race, culture, religion, age or gender, address these issues and strengthen all levels of the ecological systems if we hope to address the challenges facing this generation of refugee children.

The following chapter will examine the findings that relate to the systems, structures, people and programs that assist with the process of adjustment for refugee students.

# 6. SYSTEMS, STRUCTURES, AND PROGRAMS THAT ASSIST WITH ADJUSTMENT

The following chapter will discuss the findings related to the third research question, "What systems, structures, or programs assist with the process of adjustment for war-affected children who now attend school in Canada?" Related to this question is the following subsidiary research questions, (a) Who are the people who support the children from war-affected countries and what do they do to help? (b) What factors help students adjust to Canadian schools? I will examine the roles that were assumed by the people who support the children and what they did to assist the students. I will also discuss some of the suggestions that participants indicated would better help students adjust to life in Canada. The contents of Chapter 5 also included relevant data that assisted with answering the aforementioned research questions.

I will draw on the work from the previous chapters and use Figure 5.1 as a foundation for organizing this discussion. The four main categories of challenges that were delineated in Chapter 5 will be used to provide examples of the systems, structures and programs that could better assist children. To begin, I will discuss the findings related to the people who are currently assisting children in schools. Following this, I will outline some of the proposed ideas for addressing the challenges. I will then discuss some of the more recent initiatives implemented within the province to address the learning needs of refugee students.

## Role of the School System in the Lives of Students

Based on what I observed from a systemic perspective, the school was the most prominent ecological system in terms of providing support to the students. The school was the point of contact with various other ecological systems and, apart from the family unit, the people within the school system had the most interaction with the student. Within Walter Duncan School, the students and other staff members identified particular individuals who were the most influential in terms of providing support and helping children adjust to the school environment. Three key functions were typically performed by these influential members of the system. First, these people got to know the students personally and they formed a meaningful relationship with the students. Second, they helped the student connect with other ecological systems and support mechanisms, and last, they advocated on behalf of the student to ensure he or she was treated fairly both within the school and in the community. The three attributes will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

Specific individuals were clearly identified as being a support to the refugee students. For the most part, these teachers had taken the time to get to know the students on a personal level and they understood their individual circumstances. The various students often identified the same teachers as being supportive. The students indicated that they liked to "hang" in the teacher's room at lunch or when they had a spare and the teacher did not have a class. Rassan is a practicing Muslim, so he set up a space for Muslim students to come in to pray during the school day. Although the teachers had an informal relationship with the students, this relationship was still

clearly defined as being "teacher and student" as opposed to "friend to friend." There were limits set to the relationships and both sides respected each other's role.

In eleven separate interviews, participants referred to acting as if they were being a parent to the students. The participants indicated that they helped the students access basic needs such as food, clothing, and housing. They helped them feel like they belonged in a system where they could feel safe. More importantly, they respected the students and treated them fairly. These teachers advocated for the students when they saw instances of inequality and injustice and they went so far as to put their own selves at risk, physically or professionally, to protect a student. I witnessed and experienced events and interactions at Walter Duncan School that were evidence of the personal willingness and the professional commitment of staff members who were dedicated to improving the outcomes for all students, particularly those who they believed were marginalized. Although I have brought forth several concerning issues raised by staff members with regard to issues that contradict the values of these supportive teachers, it is imperative to realize that these are recognized as deficits, but that the focus of attention should be on mediating the challenges for students and creating a system that is more supportive.

These supportive teachers, mentioned above, also functioned as a link to the other ecological systems. They read and interpreted personal health care reports for the students or their parents, they called refugee counselling centres to access psychosocial assistance, they helped students apply for citizenship, they helped find housing or furnishings, and they contacted employers in the community to advocate on behalf of their students.

Teachers advocated for students both inside the school and in the community. Teachers called landlords to get students into new housing placements, they went to the students' workplaces to persuade the employers to schedule more appropriate shifts, or they spoke up about the unfair treatment by other staff members towards students. In a few cases, teachers put themselves in physical danger to stop students from fighting or to keep a dangerous student with a weapon away from other students.

These lists are by no means exhaustive. The roles that these various teachers assumed were extensive and far beyond merely "teaching students." Most of them said that they felt an obligation to help the students, because they said, "If I don't do it, who will?" I asked Rassan, "In a perfect world, what we could do to better support the children who have been affected by war?" His response was "In an ideal world, there would be harmony between myself and my students. There'll be understanding between myself and my students about where they have come from. Education and academics is a secondary thing for them." In essence, these teachers purposely and intentionally endeavoured to get to know their students at a more intimate and personal level. In addition, they assumed roles and responsibilities beyond what was expected of a teacher.

Vivienne, for example, stated that when students are new to her room she will arrange to have a speech and language technician come in to test the students. She also makes sure that all of her students hear and see properly and she knows a place where students can get free glasses. She indicates, "Over my 30 years I have amassed a long list of people that I can call to contact them for various things when

kids are in need of help. Thirty years is a long time to network, right?" She then stated that they need to set up a depository for clothing so that people could bring in their old clothing,

> ...because these kids are wearing threadbare clothing and you can die in this weather. It's -45 with a wind chill today. Even my dog doesn't want to go out today and he is a Siberian Husky. So we need to get people in the community. This is a community issue. We have a room over there, just clean out that room over there and ask people to start bringing in old clothing. But you know it takes someone to organize this. It's all well and good to say, we should do this, but it really takes a person to do it. So someone has to take the initiative, and I guess, well, that's me, because they are my kids. We have to make sure that they are well clothed and well cared for.

Vivienne's sense of humour and the responsibility she has to her students is exhibited by both her words and her actions. Spending time in her classroom, interviewing her, and listening to how she talks and jokes with the students made it obvious why many of the students indicated that they felt accepted and safe in her room.

### *Nanosystem*

Within the microsystem there appeared to exist numerous other smaller and more intimate systems that provided support. For example, the African boys come every lunch to Sandra's room to just hang around and to get help on work or to meet each other and decide what they would do that evening. Rassan set up a quiet and

safe place to pray so that the Muslim students could go to his room at lunch or after school. He also helped these students with their science work and he coached many of the same students on his soccer team. Vivienne was in her classroom every morning by 7:00 am to prepare for the day and to meet her students with a cup of hot chocolate. She brought her retired teacher friends in to her class to volunteer and help some of the weaker students. Her pre-beginner class formed another small hub of support within the microsystem. Bill, who was the Sudanese community liaison worker, organized an after school program with a local university to run a tutoring, mentoring and recreational program for other students. It seemed that different students gravitated to different people, and different clusters of systems or networks within the school system were formed. I began to see that it was these small clusters of smaller and more intimate systems that provided the most support to the students.

I have elected to call these smaller systems "nanosystems," as they represent something smaller within the "microsystem" that provides this immediate circle of support to the student. This circle of support originated, or was created, by one of the people who connected with the students on a personal level. My assumption is that the circle of support naturally developed as trust was established and support was provided to the students. Extending Bronfenbrenner's model to include intimate "nanosystems" of support within the microsystem more clearly depicts what I witnessed in this closer examination of the ecological systems.

Some students did indicate that systems outside of the school were also a source of support and assistance. For example, Levia stated that her church was one of the most influential systems in her life. Fatya, who was her sponsor, is the person

Levia goes to when she is sad or upset. Helen states, "I go to this lady, Tina, whenever I feel uncomfortable." Tina was also her sponsor from her church. The church is part of the microsystem for each of these women, but it is the active role of one person who is a part of this system, that provides the immediate support to these two individuals.

*Defining the Nanosystem*

Reverting to the earlier definition of the microsystem provided in Chapter 2, we accept that a microsystem is the closest, most inner circle of relationships that the individual has with people, objects or symbols in his or her immediate environment. It is the immediate environment in which the individual lives. How the nanosystem differs from the microsystem is the nature of the connection between the people. While the microsystem was observed to be more contextual, the nanosystem was more relational. Although the microsystem involves close relationships, the extent of this closeness is what differentiates the nanosystem from the microsystem. Everyone could be considered to exist within a microsystem, but only some connect to a nanosystem. A nanosystem may consist of the student and one other person or it may be comprised of several individuals.

The nanosystem is a close, interpersonal relationship or network that is integral to connecting the individual to the microsystem. The nanosystem is constructed by a significant person from the student's inner most microsystem. It could be a parent, a teacher, a coach, or a best friend. The nanosystem is a network, a connection, and a close relationship. It may exist for only a short period of time in the person's development, or it may be a life-long connection.

Consider, for example, the student who is disengaged from school. There are teachers who interact with this student on a daily basis. He or she might work after school, and then come home to a mother and four siblings. The people who interact with the student, his mother, siblings, coworkers, employer, teachers, and peers, would all be people with whom, to some degree, the student has formed a relationship. However, the student really does not have anyone that he or she could talk to if something has gone wrong at home or school. The mother might be busy with the other children, or she could possibly be having her own difficulties with adjusting to a new culture. Although the student knows of people, he or she really does not trust the person, or does not know the person well enough to approach for help.

Conversely, there is another student who has the same demographic background, but every day at lunch this student meets with Rassan and two other students who share a similar passion for chemistry. Rassan is teaching these three students advanced chemistry work, and all three students hope to enter a science competition.

The latter student is part of a nanosystem, and the first student is not. The first student interacts and has relationships with people in the microsystem, but the nature of these relationships is not powerful enough to solidly connect the student with people in his or her microsystem. When adversity or problems arise for the student who is part of a nanosystem, the student is able to use the strength of this system and the skills of the people in the nanosystem to cope with or confront the problem.

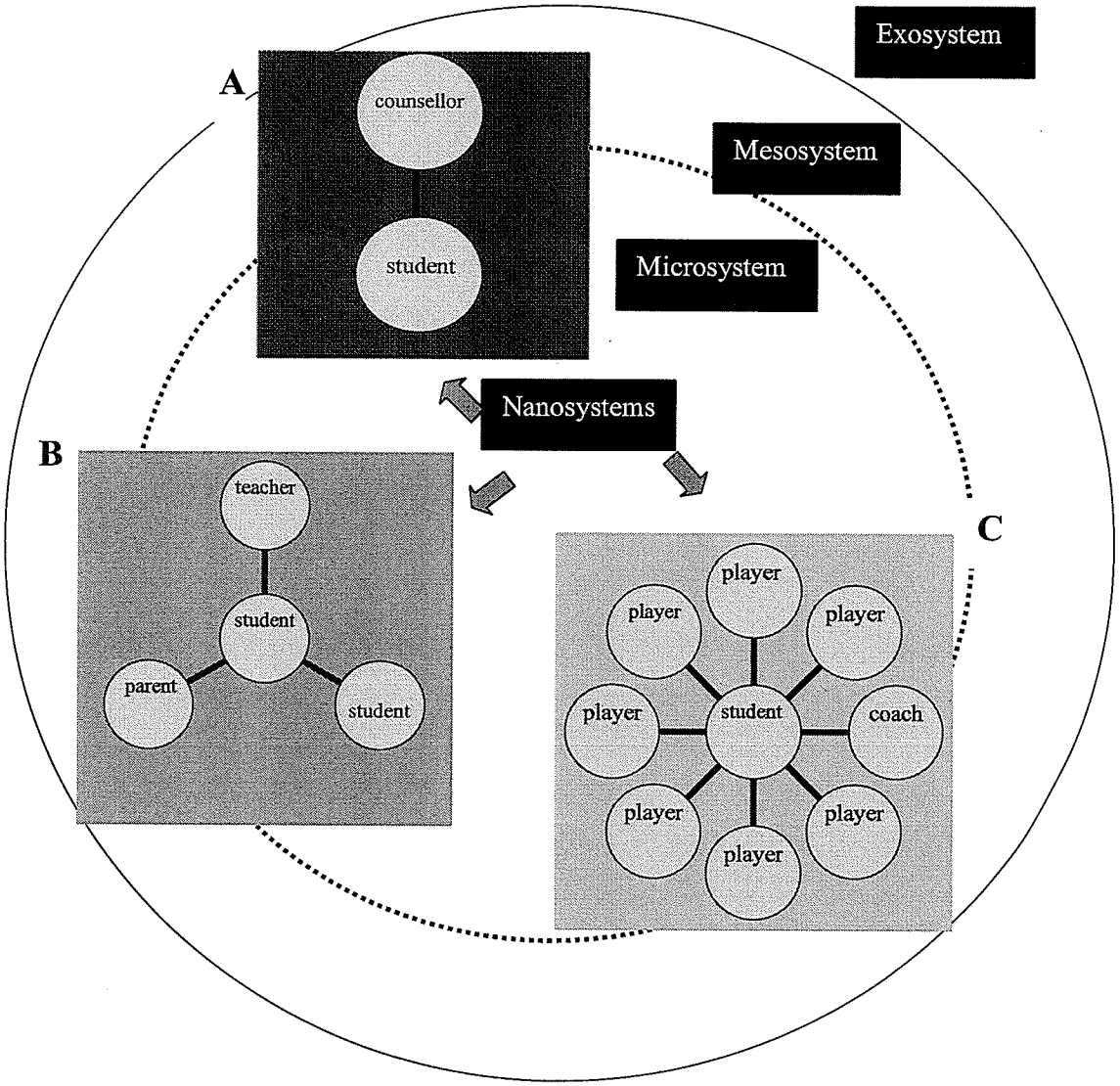
Figure 6.1 reflects more clearly what I have observed in the microsystem. Smaller, more intimate "nanosystems" existed and provided the support to the students. Integral to this concept is the importance of just one person who chooses to initiate and facilitate the growth of this nanosystem within the microsystem.

Referring to Figure 6.1, I have provided three different examples of what might constitute a nanosystem. While the students in this study only referred to one intimate nanosystem, it is possible to be a part of more than one. For each of the examples I have illustrated, I considered students from this study and I attempted to depict what their nanosystem might look like.

In example A, the student has connected with only one person, a counsellor. Imran indicated that the one person he could go to for help was his school counsellor. This person assisted with helping Imran relocate to another school, she has advocated for Imran to keep him in classes, and she mobilized the efforts of staff to help him set up and furnish his apartment.

In example B, the nanosystem is comprised of two students, a parent and a teacher. I considered Banya and how close she was with her mother, as well as the connection she had with her EAL teacher. Banya also has a close friend at school who is a more recent refugee to Canada, and Banya has been instrumental in helping this girl learn to read. For this reason, the nanosystem that Banya is a part of is comprised of a teacher, Banya, another student and Banya's mother. The other student's nanosystem might only include Banya.

**Figure 6.1. The Microsystem, Mesosystem and Nanosystems**




Human Capacity, Hope and Resilience are generated by the individual and his or her interactions with the people in the nanosystem(s) and the microsystem.

Example C is used to depict a larger but still very intimate nanosystem. I considered the importance of Aran's involvement in sport and I realized that his interest and skill level in sport connected him to the school and to people within the school.

I also considered some of the students who did not appear to be connected to the school or to a system outside of school. Akot, for example, stated that he was lonely and, when prompted, he stated that there was nobody that he could go to if he had a problem. Akot has had several altercations with people who have physically attacked him on the street. He indicated that he was shot at by an Aboriginal gang member and that he did not feel safe in the city. Akot also stated that the police, teachers, and other kids have been racist towards him. He lives with an older sister and both of his parents are deceased. Based on the limited time that Akot and I spent together, I was not able to see the same level of connectedness that I saw with the other students. I was unable to position Akot in any kind of nanosystem. Although he had relationships with people in the school and at work, these relationships appeared to be more contextual and superficial. When I asked Akot if there was anyone at the school who has helped him, his response was, "No." Akot also states that he has a hard time in school and that life is hard, he does not do anything for fun, sometimes the teachers are mean and he often feels bad, especially when he thinks about home. Based on the information provided by Akot, my opinion is that Akot is in dire need of connecting with one of the adults in the school. He has clearly delineated numerous challenges and, based on what I learned from the other students, these challenges can be mitigated by the power of a nanosystem. Out of the 13 students, 9

are considered to be part of a nanosystem. See Table 6.1 below and Table 4.3 on page 112.

**Table 6.1. Evidence of A Nanosystem**

| Student | Evidence of a Nanosystem |
|---|---|
| Afem | Close peer group from Sudan and a teacher |
| Akot | *Did not appear to be a part of a nanosystem* |
| Anna | *Did not appear to be a part of a nanosystem* |
| Aran | Involvement in Sport |
| Bango | *Did not appear to be part of a nanosystem* |
| Banya | Mother, a close friend, and the EAL teacher |
| Helen | A lady from church and friends from church |
| Imran | Close peer group from Sudan and a teacher |
| James | One close friend |
| Levia | Youth group at church |
| Mahad | Involvement in Sport |
| Sokut | Was part of a close peer group before he moved |
| Ugot | *Did not appear to be a part of a nanosystem* |

The students who were not part of a nanosystem reported that they did not have friends and all of them made reference to feeling alone. Ugot states, "I stay to myself, I go to school, I go back home, and I watch television. I can go shopping, and that is what I do…The programs at school are too big for me, I feel lost." Anna made several references throughout the interview to feeling "alone" and "scared." Bango left school last year because he was having difficulty with his courses. This year, he has taken less courses and he indicated that he has not passed two of the courses. He states, "I really only have time to do my school work, I don't really have time to talk to anyone. I don't like that much friends…I don't like holding friends. I don't like hanging out, that is just the way I am."

My hypothesis is that the nanosystem helps students adjust to school. It appeared that the nanosystem provided the student with a connection to the people in the school and these people helped to link the student to the other systems. Bronfenbrenner's notion of proximal processes suggests that human development take place in progressively more complex interactions with the human being and his or her environment. Essentially, the nanosystem is the resulting network that is created by these complex interactions. That said, Bronfenbrenner's theory examines the broad context of human development in ever-changing multi-level environments throughout time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1999). This study was limited to the specific and dynamic interactions at a given point in time with individuals who had unique prior experiences. The pre-migration and trans-migration experiences of war-affected children and their numerous challenges post-migration, might necessitate the development of a nanosystem more so than children who have encountered less turmoil and more stability in their ecological systems.

In a 1967 paper, Bronfenbrenner discussed the importance of engaging children and adults in common activities. This notion was later to be formally referred to as "proximal processes" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Bronfenbrenner (1967) referred to a study conducted by James Coleman in 1966 who conducted a study on the attitudes, behaviours, and school-achievement of more than 600,000 children in Grades 1-12 in 4,000 schools in the United States. Bronfenbrenner (1967) states,

> the expected finding was that home background was the most important element in determining how well the child did at school, more important than any aspect of the school that the child attended. This generalization, while

> especially true for northern whites, applied to a lesser degree to southern whites and northern African Americans, for whom the characteristics of the school were more important than those of the home. The child apparently drew sustenance from wherever it was most available (p. 203).

Furthermore, in this same paper, Bronfenbrenner referred to a study conducted in 1959 by John Kinch on the impact of the peer group on the child's attitude and behaviour Bronfenbrenner noted that the study conducted by Kinch revealed that there was a turning point at seventh grade. "Before that, the majority looked mainly to their parents as models, companions, and guides to behaviour; thereafter, the children's peers had equal or greater influence" (p. 203). These findings support the notion of the nanosystem and confirm the importance of other individuals, outside of the family, who also influence the development of the individual.

## Programs and Structures

Moving beyond the integral role of the people in the microsystem who create the nanosystem of immediate interpersonal support to the students, there were specific programs and structures that were discussed that assist, or could assist, with the adjustment of refugee children to the school system or the adjustment of the school system to better suit the needs of the refugee student.

Webb and Davies (2003) indicate that if we are unable to provide culturally sensitive assistance to refugee families, we are essentially replacing one form of adversity with another. Papageorgiou et al. (2000) state, "The cultural, religious, language and climate similarities or barriers with the receiving country or community are important factors to consider" (p. 88). Adjusting to the social system

of a new country is very difficult, especially when children do not have the emotional support from home. Moreover, it must also be acknowledged that many refugees come to a host country as unaccompanied minors who may need specialized emotional support and information on legal assistance because they are children alone in a foreign country (Sadoway, 2001).

A coordinated program for transitioning students into Canadian schools would likely ameliorate many of the difficulties that refugee children experience. The first few months that refugees settle in a new country are considered to be critical to the post-migration experience. Putting a transition program in place could serve to centralize many of the services and link refugees to community programs.

### *Assessment of the Student*

One of the most notable concerns was the process used to assess the students and the subsequent placement of the student into an appropriate educational program. Marleen, who works as a full-time educational coordinator for a refugee counselling clinic, indicates that it may take years to gather all of the necessary information needed to make an informed assessment. Not only is there a trust issue, but there is also a cultural lens which greatly affects the way in which we interpret the actions and words of others. She states,

> And the other thing in terms of what you said about assessment, a good assessment is critical, but you're not going to get it on the first meeting. I have gotten to know families over six months and finally, I am hearing now about other children that are still missing that are still back there. We learn about all these other kinds of trauma so.... that trust in the relationship

is...You can put them through, I don't care how many psychological tests you want, you can do all kinds of questions you want, but you're never going to get it in the first meeting. The key to getting to know that family and to getting what they need is building up a relationship and assessment but reassessment every couple of months.

At the present time, the school division and the school rely heavily on the information that the student or parent elects to include on the registration form or the intake assessment in order to plan for an appropriate educational placement for the student. It is also standard practice for the EAL teacher to conduct a reading inventory and math assessment during the first week that the student enrolls in school. Based on these data and the previous school experience, the teacher attempts to place the student in an appropriate program. This process is complicated by the fact that most of the forms that the student or their guardian must fill out are not in their first language. Moreover, some information is also obtained from person-to-person conversation, where there may be both cultural and linguistic barriers. The accuracy of this information is compromised and it may be quite difficult to ascertain what the best placement is for the student based on this preliminary screening and intake interview. Some of the participants also questioned the appropriateness of testing children so soon after enrolling in a new school experience when virtually everything in their ecological systems has changed. That said, once the testing is done, the school may not have the ability to provide specialized education or appropriate programming to meet the unique needs of the student.

After interviewing the school psychologist, I learned that her job had been exclusively for testing students to determine if they would qualify for a special education setting. The EAL teacher at Walter Duncan School had referred seven students to her for the purpose of conducting an IQ test. She used two instruments, the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) and the Test of Non-Verbal Intelligence (TONI). Only the non-verbal component of the WISC was used. She had the students come to her office in the school guidance area, where she talked to them for a bit and then used the instruments to assess their IQ. She indicated that if they seemed apprehensive or scared she would not continue with the test. The following is an excerpt from the interview:

> The kids that I have tested appeared to be relaxed and healthy, but I really don't know how they're feeling....I see the kids for such a brief period of time and do my assessment and then they're gone. I really don't or won't see them again until maybe we do a testing a year or two down the road.

She might also interview the parents and look at progress reports from previous schooling experiences to gather as much information as possible to complete her assessment. If the students received a test result below the number of 70, they would qualify for special education classes. I then asked Margaret the following question,

> *What if you make a mistake and put them in the wrong classroom?*
>
> I don't have a good answer. No.

The concern that arises is whether a fair and accurate test can be conducted using these instruments, considering the cultural and linguistic barriers and the fact

that, for most students, the testing environment would likely be highly intimidating. Additionally, most parents of refugee children do not speak English and many of them they believe that it is culturally inappropriate to question the school staff or to interfere with school-related business.

The results of this test could determine the educational placement of this student for the majority, if not all, of his or her schooling. Margaret stated that, if a teacher indicated that the student needed to be retested, she would conduct an additional assessment at a later date. I asked Margaret if anyone counselled the students prior to the test or if anyone attempted to construct a more thorough investigation into their past experiences. She stated that they did not do this and then suggests, "Maybe there should be when they first come to figure out what the psychological issues are, if there are any." She then indicates that there is a stigma in many countries about getting help.

The assessment of students at Walter Duncan School are conducted by an EAL teacher who has over 25 years of experience. After assessing the student, he or she is placed in one of four levels of EAL support programs: pre-literacy, beginner, intermediate or advanced. Having said this, as the data reveal and as the participants suggest, a wide range of programs and services is needed to support refugee students, which many EAL programs do not necessarily provide. Reading and mathematical assessments do not typically provide insight into what the students' personal lives have been like and what they have been exposed to pre-migration or trans-migration. Walter Duncan School has initiated many useful and beneficial programs; however,

as many of the participants stated, the scope of the programs and the overall response to refugee students falls short in satisfying all of the recognized needs and issues.

The challenges delineated in the previous chapter form the basis upon which I will discuss the suggestions. For this section only, I have chosen to separate the students' suggestions from those of the adults. Because of the unique nature of the question, I have isolated the students' answers from the teachers' to ensure that the information they suggested is brought forward. In addition, most of the adult responses were related to programs and structures, whereas the students' responses dealt particularly with interpersonal and social issues.

At the end of each interview, I asked each student the same question, "If you could tell the principal or the teachers one thing that we need to do to better help the students who have come from war-affected countries, what would you say?" The following is a list of the seven major themes that emerged in the responses to this question.

### *Advice from Students*

#### *Don't Let Students Be Rude*

One of the most surprising and unexpected replies from two of the students was that they would tell the teachers to stop letting the Canadian kids talk to them so rudely. Anna commented, "Sometimes, I say 'wow,' what makes the children so rude here?'" Mahad informed me that this was his first experience when he "got into a class and I saw kids swearing at the teachers." Mahad suggested that teachers might need to instil some fear into the students to let them know they are the bosses. Using Anna's word, she says "don't put up with that." Anna and Mahad both came

from schools in Africa where the teachers would hit the students if they misbehaved in class. They also indicated that if their parents found out, "they would get mad at you and smack you too." Mahad indicated that if you are too nice, the students will take advantage of it. Instead, he suggested that teachers should be "a strict person and a nice person at the same time."

*Be Like a Family*

Aran indicated that many people that come to Canada do not have a family that provides support. His advice is to help these people join the community. "Like, be a family, be his family, because he has none, and then he will think the gang is his family." James' advice to the principal is to "take care of those kids and help them learn." He indicated that for kids like him, who do not have a mother or a father, it is hard for them to know what the right behaviour is for school. He states,

> They need to have the principal tell them what is the right thing to do and what you are not supposed to do. Some kids do not know what is the right thing to do. That is, most of the refugee children. When they get here, everything looks different. So when they move here, and they just come to school, they don't know....Talk to the kids not to do it again, but for the kids who don't have parents, you need to take care of those kids.

*Improve Communication*

Bango's advice is to help those people who have a different background. He notes, "So when you have a meeting or something, they have people who translate for you. Kids that don't understand what you're saying need help and I think that it is an important thing...so communication." He elaborates further that, if we improve

communication, there would be less chance of misunderstanding each other and the students would be less likely to think that the teacher was saying something racist.

Banya also indicated that people must learn the language "as fast as they can for their education and for their life." She said the language is what they need to learn how to live in the community with people and to share things with them. She concluded by saying, "just do as much as you can for the kids to help the new people, not for me, but for other people, because they need help for their families."

*Support with School Work*

Afem suggests that teachers give students more support to do their school work. He indicates that students are not the same and that some kids need more time to complete work. His advice was as follows:

> That's a good question, you know, because when you are new to the school, you need to be treated good. You don't know anybody, you're new to the school. You are like a blind person...What makes it worse is when you give them too much work and they don't understand anything. You aren't going to have anybody when you get home and you are going to be thinking how to do this assignment. Because in Africa, in the camp we could ask an older student and they would help you and explain everything so that you understand. But here, we don't know anybody and you give a lot of work and then more tomorrow. You know, teachers think that we are all the same level, but we're not. We are different. We need to keep going to high school.

*Listen, Respect and Show that You Care*

Helen indicated that she would encourage teachers to talk to students and to respect everybody and to listen to everyone's ideas. She indicated that some people may not know how to express or say what they think and they might be intimidated to say something because they will be embarrassed in class. Her advice was to help students feel comfortable speaking in class. After she spoke to me the following conversation took place between us:

> Do you get my accent when I am talking?
>
> *Yes.*
>
> Really?
>
> *Yes, I totally understand what you are saying.*
>
> Because when I talk, they say, "come again, repeat it." And I can't because what if I say the wrong stuff. And he comes close to me and he says, "I don't get what you say at all." And so I just say, "forget it."

Although it is difficult to explain the tone of Helen's statement, when she was speaking for the teacher, she was appearing to be frustrated to show that the teacher would be losing patience by not understanding what she was saying. Overall, I sensed that she felt intimidated about speaking in class and, although she had something to say, because of her accent she hesitated because she worried about the teacher not understanding her and embarrassing her in class.

Imran's advice was for teachers to show that they support students, because sometimes they do not have anyone else that supports them. He indicated that some kids keep everything inside them and they do not have a chance to express

themselves because they do not have anyone to help them. Imran stated that some people won't ask for help, so his advice to teachers is to "ask kids how they are doing and stuff like that."

Levia's advice was, "I would tell them to make it easy, to be nice to the students. For the teacher to be nice to the students and the students to be nice to the teachers. There are some teachers that get on the students' nerves." Levia indicated that it is also helpful to be nice like Mrs. B (Bev) who gives her cans of milk, tins of food for her family, and bus tickets.

*Improve Opportunities for Sport*

Mahad is an accomplished athlete, and his link to school is his love for sport. Mahad suggests that the school give opportunities for students to get loans and bursaries to play more sports with the school. Mahad has a friend who is over 18, so he is not allowed to play on a school team. Students in Manitoba must be under the age of 19 as of August 31$^{st}$ if they wish to play on a school team (Manitoba High School Athletics Association, 2005). Mahad suggests, "I think we should open that up and it would be an excuse to keep people in school." Mahad, Aran, Imran, Sokut, and Akot all indicated that playing sports was personally important.

*Don't Give Up*

Sokut explains that, if students do not have the desire to come to school, it is their choice and the result is that they will not improve themselves. He further notes that these students need to be told about the benefits of school and that they need to learn that they must improve themselves. He explains that there are some people who have problems and they need teachers to keep trying to teach them, despite their

problems. He concludes by stating, "Sometimes teachers are not the same, like, not even in Canada. There are nice teachers and there are bad teachers. But sometimes, there are big problems with kids, too. I would tell them not to give up and we need you."

The seven simple, yet powerful suggestions from the students provide useful advice for any new or experienced teacher, whether or not he or she teaches refugee children. For the most part, the seven segments of advice provide further evidence to support how essential the role of the teacher is to the students. Most of the advice is centred on how to be a more supportive and understanding person who accepts the fact that students are diverse people who need to feel like they belong to a system. Essentially, this is what appeared to be what most of the students in this study wanted. Naturally, students would not typically discuss new and innovative curricula that would better help students, nor would they usually discuss multi-agency networking ideas to encourage partnerships across the systems. These suggestions would more likely come from adults who work in the various systems. Having said this, I did not find it surprising that the responses from the students were more personally-based, and the responses from the adults more systems-based.

### *Suggestions from the Adults*

Although I stated a similar question with different words to the adult participants, I essentially asked the adults the same question that I asked the students. I asked the members of the microsystem and exosystem the following, "In a perfect world, what could we do to better assist students who have come from war-affected countries?" The responses have been categorized according to the four categories of

challenges that were delineated in the preceding chapter: educational challenges, economic challenges, ecological and systemic challenges, and psychosocial challenges. Most of the ideas will cut across multiple categories; however, to keep the suggestions organized, I have elected to cluster them to the most appropriate category and to separate the tables into two parts. See Table 6.2 and Table 6.3. Additional recommendations and more specific suggestions will be provided in the closing chapter.

**Table 6.2. Initiatives to Address Educational and Environmental Challenges**

| Educational Challenges | Environmental Challenges |
|---|---|
| Provide opportunities for mentoring. | Implement more community and school partnerships. |
| Provide academic and vocational tutoring. | Provide more liaison workers. |
| Coordinate a re-entry program to help bring students back to school after they have dropped out. | Designate specific teachers as case managers who provide link to the ecological systems. |
| Teach Pre-service courses in EAL strategies for all teachers and on refugee issues. | Designate a person who is able to advocate for the student. |
| Coordinate provincial and divisional policy development. | Implement multi-agency partnering on projects (justice and education, and non-government agencies, immigration). |
| Conduct leadership seminars on teaching in multi-ethnic cities and on utilizing community sources and resources. | Coordinate a sustained and intensive anti-racism and discrimination campaign in the school, community, private sector, and public services. |
| Acknowledge foreign-based professional programs. | Provide information for newcomers in video format in several languages. |
| Set up a school-based resource site that links to agencies. | Develop parent modules for helping children through school and for identifying signs of trouble. |
| Teach basic skills and social development. | Provide more student-to-student assistance. |
| Offer scholarships and bursaries to encourage involvement in sport. | Create and implement a culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment process. |
| Teach career development and awareness programs for all students. | |
| Train immigrant and refugee students to be mediators and peer counsellors. | |
| Provide training and education for refugee parents on issues related to discipline, personal safety, and adolescent development. | |

**Table 6.3. Initiatives to Address Economic and Psychosocial Challenges**

| Economic Challenges | Psychosocial Challenges |
|---|---|
| Build in an incentive program for staying in school, so students do not have to work full-time. | Provide more preventative programming. |
| Prepare students for independent living. | Provide group support programs to assist with the integration of the person with the community. |
| Provide more information on work skills and employee rights. | Implement initial screening and ongoing screening to identify psychosocial challenges |
| Provide volunteer placement programs for refugee students who transition into job placements. | Provide arts-based activities (film, play, theatre, videography, dance) in school and the community. |
| Teach EAL programs for parents outside of school hours. | Train clinical staff on issues related to refugees. |
| Utilize technology-based communication and support. | Implement language and literacy programs that include trained professionals who know how to recognize and respond to psychosocial issues. |
| Remove the government loan for the cost of airfare from country of origin. | Implement language and literacy programs that include trained professionals who know how to recognize and respond to psychosocial issues. |
| | Train all students in conflict prevention. |
| | Provide integrated emotional, spiritual, and health care. |

Many of the aforementioned suggestions offered by the adult participants centred on the development and implementation of programs and services and the refinement of communication between the systems. In contrast, most of the students indicated that they just wanted people to be more supportive, respectful and understanding to one another. Reverting to the previously stated philosophical position and assumptions of the researcher, the active engagement of the oppressed in their own process of liberation is essential. Students in this study suggested that we begin with how we personally relate to and support them in the systems in which they belong. While the suggestions above contain an agenda for reform that may change the lives of participants and the systems in which they belong, I suggest that

the hope for change remains with the power and the drive of those who work and interact directly with the students. Nothing has become more obvious to me during this study than the fact that more needs to be done to assist and support the people who are doing the day-to-day work with the students. This is not to suggest that there is not a role for centralized planning, policy development, and improved programs and services; rather, we must extend the capacity of the systems by empowering those who work in it. It is essential that school leaders encourage and support the involvement of parents and community members in the school in an effort to create a more interconnected and sustainable network of support for refugee students. Moreover, school leaders must work collaboratively with all staff in order to articulate a clear plan for addressing the needs of refugee students. Manley, a parent, believes that some students "drop out because of the failure of their parents." He further suggests that it is imperative that the school talks to the parents to address the issues and challenges that students are encountering.

Although this study was not designed to assess the strengths or inadequacies of the school leaders, there was evidence from several participants that supported the need for stronger and more supportive leaders. Participants indicated that they wanted a "clear vision" or a "strategic plan" for addressing the needs of refugee students. Several participants also suggested that the school leaders should "set a better example by being fair and equitable in their dealings with both staff and students." Although participants expressed numerous deficiencies in school leadership, others clearly indicated that the school leaders "had their hands tied" because of the lack of support from the provincial government, the limited divisional

support, and the inadequate resources provided to the school. That said, although the participants indicated that the school leaders needed to make numerous improvements, the issues were far too complex to conclude that a "lack of leadership" was the primary problem.

Rassan also discusses the importance of the broader community and its role for supporting students. "Provide for them and they will succeed, whether academics or sports." He suggests that, if the community could support students by just providing them with a pair of runners to help them be on a team, that would help the students immensely. "That's how you build community, that's how you build a safer community. We have to be able to support these kids in their work, in their sports and in their lives."

### *Projects in the Province*

As a follow-up to the *Building Hope* report by MacKay and Tavares in October 2005, Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth indicated that "promising pathways" were underway in the province to address the needs of EAL learners. To begin, the province is providing financial support to schools, adult learning centres and adult language training programs for the purpose of providing support for students who have EAL needs and disrupted schooling backgrounds. This Intensive Newcomer Support Grant was introduced in 2006-2007 and the government has provided funding to 10 school divisions. Projects include, but are not limited to, the following: academic support programs; improving communication with parents and the community; providing a reception and assessment protocol; teacher awareness sessions; hiring EAL specialists; literacy and numeracy support; home support;

increasing teacher collaboration and classroom strategies to help EAL learners; and division-wide planning and policy development.

These projects are certainly a start in terms of addressing some of the needs of refugee learners; however, there are several "blank spots" that must also be addressed. All school divisions indicated that their projects would include a language and literacy focus and, in most cases, this was referred to as "intensive literacy and academic support." Not one school division indicated that it would provide psychosocial support programming in any form whatsoever. One school division did mention that it would increase social work allocation to respond to the needs of the "parents and family as they arrive in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder." Inferring that people will arrive to Canada with a diagnosable mental illness is not accurate and is also a potentially damaging assumption to make.

In addition to the paucity of projects aimed at helping students overcome the psychosocial challenges, there were no programs to address the numerous economic challenges that students endure, and there was only slight mention of programs to encourage interaction with the various ecological systems. There was also an obvious omission of the necessary engagement of the school staff with the newcomer students to determine what support was needed. Most, if not all, of the suggestions appeared to be pre-determined strategies that the school division set for the students. The inclusion of a participatory action research project would have been a welcome addition to this list of divisional initiatives.

The projects that are funded by the Intensive Newcomer Support Grant are beneficial on numerous accounts; however, the focus is clearly on addressing only a

small portion of the issues. Moreover, the projects include very little mention of what the school divisions will do in terms of addressing systemic issues such as racism and discrimination. The problems are not one dimensional; they must be examined from various perspectives. This thesis argues that an ecological model is a more advantageous if we hope to address the numerous challenges facing refugee students. To do this, it is imperative that we have ongoing and active engagement with the students so that we advance in the appropriate direction.

## Summary and Conclusion

The findings in this chapter reveal numerous programs and structures that participants indicated would assist refugee students with adjusting to school in Manitoba. These suggestions were clustered around the four main categories of challenges delineated in the previous chapter: educational challenges, economic challenges, psychological challenges, and environmental challenges.

Central to the process of adjustment was the role of one key person who formed a closer personal relationship with the student. This person provided an essential link from the student to the microsystem and to the other ecological systems. The ecological model supports the assertion that, to adequately support and assist students with their adjustment to Canadian schools, the programs and services must be multi-dimensional and intersect the various ecological systems. The challenges that the children affected by war encounter extend over numerous systems, and so should the programs or services that are designed to assist them with adjusting to Canada. The school system is uniquely positioned to provide the necessary bridge to the other ecological systems; however, as the following chapter

illustrates, it is the responsibility of all of the ecological systems and environments to ensure that this is possible and sustainable.

The following chapter will take a closer look at the ecological systems that interact with each other to influence the refugee student's personal, social, and academic development. Some of the individual characteristics of the individual child who is affected by war will be discussed and the child's interactions with the systems will be investigated. A closer and more revealing examination of the role reversal between the members of the ecological systems and the students will be discussed. In particular, the influence that the student has on certain members of the ecological systems will demonstrate an immediate need to improve the capacity of the system and the people in it.

# 7. INTERACTION OF ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS TO INFLUENCE DEVELOPMENT

The following chapter will discuss the findings related to the fourth research question, "To what extent do the various ecological systems interact with each other to influence the refugee student's personal, social, and academic development?" Related to this question were the following subsidiary research questions: (1) what are the various ecological systems that influence the student? (2) how is the student affected by the various ecological systems? (3) how are the individuals in the ecological systems affected by the student? The discussion will be organized according to the various ecological systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem.

At different times, ecological systems will vary depending on the developmental stage of the student. For example, one of the students was directly involved with a child welfare service. At this particular time in her life the people in this system and the agency as a whole played a key role in her daily life. Over time, this involvement may lessen, particularly if she is able to overcome some of her medical issues. As children develop and become more independent, the role of family members may also figure less prominently in their daily lives. The following discussion is intended to provide a summary of the various systems that interact with and influence the development of the student.

## Microsystem

As discussed in the previous chapter, the school played a pivotal role in the students' lives. Sports and after school programs which were closely aligned with the school were also influential systems that connected the students to a peer group and contributed to their personal well-being. Considering the time that they spend in school, and their motivation to acquire knowledge to improve their lives, it is not surprising that the school was an essential aspect of their lives. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) also acknowledged the importance of the school to the lives of children and adolescents and stated that "schools play a critical role in their development, shaping what they learn as well as their motivation and aspirations to learn" (p. 203).

In addition to the school, other systems within the microsystem were also key determinants in the child's development. These systems included the family, the community, and the peer group. The photography activity revealed findings that illustrated the roles of these other systems. With the exception of Banya, whose ten pictures were all of her family, the other seven participants took only pictures of their friends at school, their workplace, places within the school, and the outside of their apartment complex. None of the other participants took pictures of family members. Sandra was the only teacher whose picture was taken.

The family and the community will be discussed in more detail because of the numerous times they were both referenced in the interviews and because of the way in which they influenced the child. Furthermore, the overall way in which these

systems interact reveals pertinent information to this study that is worthy of discussion.

## *Family*

### *Family Separation*

Although the nurturing and supporting roles of family members were brought forth, participants discussed the challenges concerning families to a much greater extent. Several recurring themes emerged when the topic of families was discussed: separation, role changes, stress and breakdown, family violence and abuse. Separation of the family members and family breakdown were two of the most prevalent issues. Bill discusses the issues related to separation:

> There are a lot of cases where parents are separated from their children. I know there are parents who have left their children back in Egypt for instance, because the children are older than 18. Sometimes the children are in a separate country, in a different country than the parents are, so when the parents applied for resettlement, the child is somewhere else. The child's name may be in the file but the child is not physically there. When it comes time for the parents to travel, they may need to leave that child there. Hopefully they will sponsor that child in the future, but in most cases it takes too long and the child has to be left with the relatives or friends in the hope that the child will join the parents later on. Sometimes the parents leave very young children. I know a family that has left behind two young children. It is very difficult.

Some students have come to Canada on their own, leaving their family behind. Some have lost all their family in the war. Some may have traveled to

Canada with other children from the same refugee camp, and these children are now living as a family. Paul illustrates the support that he has observed through this reconstituted family:

> And there is a support factor that is built in to the community and many of the boys I know. There are not too many females and they tend to be groupings of people. You know, four of them in a two-bedroom apartment and when one gets a job he pulls another one in and then another one. They have learned to rely on each other if they have lost their parents and their family.

Ten out of the thirteen students that I interviewed reported losing members of their immediate family (mom, dad, sister or brother) from either death or displacement. Only two students had both a mother and a father. Many of the students reported coming over with a parent, but leaving siblings behind. Some students indicated that they hope some day to sponsor their family to come to Canada, although none of them knew how they would go about sponsoring someone.

Understanding the dynamics of the family was complicated, as it was often difficult to discern who made up the student's family. The familial ties and the bonds of friendship appeared to intersect and it was often difficult to differentiate between the two terms. Moreover, most families had undergone restructuring and, as was previously discussed, there were some individuals who formed a family for the purposes of immigrating to Canada.

*Role Changes*

As a result of the family separation there was often a marked change in the roles of people in the family. Joanne reported that the separation, in particular the absence of the father, results in the older sibling taking on the role of the parent. With this change is a tremendous amount of pressure and responsibility to succeed and to provide for the family. Joanne states, "They go from being an infant to an adult, and there seems to be nothing in between." Bev also indicates that she worked with a boy who graduated last year who worked the night shift as a tow truck driver to support his siblings while he went to school. He now works at a local pizza shop. Bev states,

> This is the case of an Afghani mother who didn't work and she had an older son and four younger ones, and many other older ones are in Iran. So he has to give up his goals to support the family by working these long shift hours. Now his little brother who is in grade seven has been suspended several times for acting up. And this guy has given up his life for these younger ones and the youngest one is just throwing it all away. The older one is doing really well and his sister is doing really well. The younger one is in a lot of trouble.

Paul also discusses an incident with a young Afghani boy who, after the death of his father, had to assume the role of the key income earner for the family:

> One boy, he lost his dad; there was an accident about five years ago with a bunch of Afghani men who had gone to Calgary and they were coming back on the Trans Canada and crashed and they all died. One of them was the father of one of my students. Two of his sons were attending our school.

There were three sons and two daughters. So overnight, Jihad became the man of the house and you could see the weight and the responsibility falling on him. He wasn't the lucky-go- lucky kid anymore. He felt a level of responsibility. We put him in a pre-employment program. He couldn't read, he couldn't write well beyond basic literacy level. We put them in workplace. We put him in a factory that makes anti-freeze and he is still there now.

Both of these examples illustrate the role that is afforded to the oldest son in the family. In both cases, the eldest assumed, to some degree, the role of the absent parent. In the following example, the eldest daughter assumed a parenting role.

Helen states that her role was "like a mom." I asked her to explain what kinds of things she did and her response was as follows: "I have to teach them how to behave themselves and I have to teach them about things about going outside and keeping safe. I have to give them the advices on how to behave yourself."

It appeared that one child in the family emerged in more of a "parenting like" role when one parent was gone. I also witnessed an example of what Portes and Rumbaut (2001) described as a role reversal due to social and economic isolation of parents. Banya, for example, is teaching her mother to drive, she translates for her mother, and she helps her mother with her homework. The difference, however, is that Portes and Rumbaut suggest that this role reversal leads to "generational conflicts or Irvin Child's 'rebel' reaction of embarrassment and resentment of dissonant acculturation" which they suggest gives children a measure of psychological leverage over their parents (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, pp.192-193). Although Banya was deeply enmeshed with her mother's life, I saw more pity and

guilt expressed by Banya as opposed to embarrassment and resentment. As Portes and Rumbaut (2001) indicate, second generation children of immigrants believe that they are the sole reason for the immigration of the parents. This in turn results in guilt on behalf of the child, which then gives the parents a degree of psychological leverage. On numerous occasions, Banya commented on how difficult life was for her mother and how she had given up her whole life for her children. I sensed Banya felt a tremendous amount of guilt, but instead of this guilt causing dissonance, I observed more consonance. It seemed that the family unit was more cohesive and this guilt or pity that the children felt motivated them to work harder.

One significant difference between Portes and Rumbaut's study and this study is that the students in this study are first generation immigrants, and more importantly, they are refugees who have fled war zones. As has been previously discussed, the life of a refugee is accompanied by layers of complicating factors and challenges related to settlement. All of these issues are additional variables that could alter the findings. That said, Portes and Rumbaut's findings are similar and related to many of the findings in this study, and I assume that their findings will be even more relevant as this generation of newcomers has children.

*Stress and Breakdown*

In addition to the change in roles and the separation of family members, issues related to family stress and family conflict also emerged. In some cases, the conflicts resulted in family breakdown.

Christine indicates that she worked with a "made-up family" and there was a lot of conflict in the home. She believes that it was because the three people really

did not have the same level of commitment to one another. She stated that "these three people that were not really jelled as a family....There wasn't that same level of respect or a response or support that you can get with family." Anna also comments that the lady who accompanied her to Canada also changed after their arrival into the country.

> On the day before we came she was very, very nice to me and she treated me like her own daughter. And they treated her just like my mom. And then she came here and she changed. And I said what? And I said, what is going on in this house that she has changed? And every five minutes she had to be shouting, yelling, beating the children. You know hitting the children with her hands. Not feeding us very well.

Bill, who works with numerous Sudanese families, describes what he called a "disconnect" between the teenage children and the parents, and he indicates that he thinks many of the parents are losing control. He also states that other factors complicate the family relationships, such as parents having to work two jobs and not having time to spend with their children. Bill talks about a friend who works two jobs. He leaves the home at 2:30 pm to start a shift at 3:00. He works until 11:30 pm and then goes to another job until 5:00 am. He sleeps for two hours and then his wife wakes him up at 7:00 am to take his youngest child to daycare and then he comes back by 8:00 am to sleep for two hours. He then wakes up and goes to work. He repeats this cycle five days a week.

Bill also indicated that some of these parents have a university education but their credentials are not recognized in Canada. He indicated that it can be very

frustrating because many of the parents must work more than one job to make enough money to support their large families. Bill offers the following solution:

> We need to just bridge that gap, and at least try to get them a good start, because I know these people, with any opportunity, would be able to do well. Let's remember that these new people are new Canadians, and they are going to live in Canada. If they don't succeed here then it will be a loss to all of us in Canada, not them alone, the parents, the children, and Canada as well.

Bill's statement eloquently outlines just how intertwined the systems are and how what occurs at the individual level of the family can have a ripple effect and consequences throughout all of the other systems. Ultimately, this issue affects everyone, even at the macro level. Combating some of these issues at the individual level could have dramatic effects on the family unit, the prosperity of the upcoming generation, and the overall macrosystem in which all other systems exist. As the following discussion reveals, if we do not deal with these issues, other social and personal problems are likely to worsen. Bill argues,

> Because of the limited income and personal earnings, there are family problems. There are family problems between husbands and wives. In most cases this results in divorce or separation, and at the end of the day it's the children who suffer. ...There are family disputes, a lot of them. The funny thing is that when most of these families are in the refugee camps and during the hard times they stick together (laughing). But when they come here, where it is comparatively easy, you don't have to go to a long distance to fetch water, the husband doesn't have to go to the bush to get firewood or

whatever. And yes there are odd jobs here, but at least it is decent compared to what you face in the refugee camp. And if they could just communicate well here they would be able to do very well in Canada. They would be able to live a happy life, and they would be able to take care of their children.

Some of the stress results in medical complications. A couple of the teachers stated that they help students fill out forms and they often see confidential health information about the student or their parents. In one instance, Sandra stated that she was given a parent's health file to help them figure out what specialist to see. Teachers indicated that they see a lot of stress-related illness, as well as anxiety and depression, reported in both the students' and the parents' health files.

*Family Violence and Abuse*

In several interviews, issues related to physical and sexual abuse were discussed. These issues usually surfaced when discussing methods of discipline. Physical abuse was also discussed in relation to gender inequality, where the husband or older brother was the aggressor. Marleen, who works with some of the men, indicated that if men would get some "counselling or information, they would never be in the position that they are in now being prosecuted for domestic issues." She indicated that this dialogue is critical and that it is important to teach both responsibilities and rights together.

Sandra and Laurie both discussed their difficulties in talking to the males who believe that it is alright to hit your sister if she is doing something disrespectful, such as talking to a boy in the hallway. Sandra stated, "There are people who are coming to our country, to our schools, who believe that it is okay to kill your sister if

she dishonours the family." Another participant stated, "I have a student who is 18 years old, and his mother beats him with an electrical cord because she has that right, because the father is gone and she takes the place of the father and so she can do that." Participants indicated that in many of students' families, physical abuse is acceptable. Laurie states, "It's just the way they raise their family. Honour killings are an acceptable way to deal with girls who disrespect the family." She further suggests that gender issues are a priority and must be addressed in the school. Laurie states, "The girls really struggle fitting in socially, and conflicting with parental and family values or cultural values. That's a big piece for a lot of the counseling that I do." Laurie indicates that the boys do not treat women as equals, and she sees this both in their treatment of the other students and of the female staff members. It was also discussed that the girls are at risk of being sexually abused because they do not have a voice.

Rob indicates that the church is a place where many of the women go because it is the only place where their husbands will allow their wives to go. He states, "A lot of times, women are not allowed to go out, unless it's a religious gathering. So at our centre, we have a disproportionate number of women. This is about the only place where they can go for support."

Issues related to gender inequality and gender discrimination were discussed by numerous participants. Some of the teachers explained that it is difficult to know how to best assist the girls when they are being discriminated against. On the one hand they want to respect the beliefs and values of another culture, but on the other

hand the teachers also want to empower these young girls to be assertive and to not be further marginalized by their family and their peers.

### *Community*

The role of community was discussed as having both positive and negative influences. Manley and Bill discussed how the community members have formed a support network that responds to issues brought forth by the area residents. The group meets regularly to discuss issues related to education and parenting. Manley indicated that the group members formed an association and they are able to "give advice among ourselves and for society issues. If there is a problem in the community, we can call ourselves and we can discuss and give what we think." Manley and Bill both commented on the fact that parents need help identifying when something is going wrong with their children. "They don't know the signs of kids that are doing drugs." Furthermore, Manley commented that, when Canadian children are not doing well, most of the parents know about agencies that could help them, whereas immigrants need to "be reminded." Manley indicated that immigrant parents relied on the church in their country of origin, so many are not used to the kinds of services that are available in Canada. Both Bill and Manley indicated that the community parent groups were "ethnically-based"; for example, their group was made up of Somalian parents.

#### *Conceptualization of a Community*

The conceptualization of a community changed for many newcomers to Canada. In many of their former countries, the community was a village with "tons of children running around" and where the adults took responsibility for children

who were not necessarily their own. Marleen stated that she has had to educate parents to not leave their children unattended on the assumption that their neighbours will take care of them. Furthermore, she stated "one loss that I hear a lot of them talk about is that sense of community. They miss that huge sense of community."

Despite the loss, there is evidence in the findings to indicate that the community is a source of support to varying degrees depending on the individual. The Sudanese community, led by Bill, initiated a mentoring program funded by a community initiative and supported by students at a local university. Last year, the community members got together to develop the program that currently runs out of Walter Duncan School. Although the program had a slow start during the year this study was undertaken, there were approximately 40 students involved in the program the previous academic year. Some of the student participants in this study mentioned that the after school program was important to them because the university students provided tutoring help and the recreational activities were fun. The parent group is hoping to extend the program to other schools in the area.

Beyond the programs and the continuing meetings, the community around Walter Duncan School is testament to the need for people to be with people from their own ethnic group. Small enclaves of Sudanese, Somalis, Afghanis, Iraqis, Cambodians, Ethiopians, and numerous other cultural groups and divisions between these cultural groups, live in close proximity to each other and they have developed support systems throughout the city. Similarly, ethnically-based peer groups have been established in the school. Some could argue it is because of the accessibility to inexpensive and government-subsidized housing that the people live in the same

area; however, within the inner-city, communities have clearly established robust ethnically-based circles of support. While the scope of this study is limited and not intended to provide a sociological and anthropological investigation into the composition and interaction of the community systems, it would be fascinating to examine the numerous culturally-based enclaves that have been erected throughout the city and in the surrounding rural areas.

Rob, who is a minister at a church that has an extensive community outreach facility, believes that the city is a relationship-based community, "Everybody knows it if you live here, you know, the way things happen is you talk to the person you know, and it happens. Most jobs don't happen through formal processes; we all work the relationships." That said, he articulates how difficult it is for newcomers to "dig into that system." This strong "web of relationships" is difficult to enter. Rob suggests that, in order to leverage relationships to make things happen, the newcomer must enter this web of relationships, which he notes is a difficult process. This might provide insight into the reason why newcomers create their own web of relationships. If it is too difficult to enter a cross-cultural system of support, it might be easier to create a more insular system of support. That said, considering the roles of both Bill and Manley, and their connection to the school, both have successfully connected an outside system (the parent group) to the school system. Each of these members has played an integral role in connecting the systems.

*Community Issues*

Community groups also have their own issues, and some are not always as supportive as one anticipates that they will be. Mike indicated that he has seen

negative influences coming from the community. "They tell people from their own communities; 'don't go to the Canadians for help, because it's an embarrassment to the community.' And that may be the reason why people pull out, because of the social pressure from people in their own community." There are also people in the community who are prejudiced and they tell people to stay away from certain ethnic groups. For example, Mike indicated that he has picked people up from the airport and they have told him that they would not live in a particular area because there were Aboriginal people living in the community. Reflecting on Parsa's comments, as a parent she was frightened to live where she was provided housing because of all of the negative comments she heard from her community members. She also was told that Aboriginal people were a threat and this stopped her from talking to her Aboriginal neighbours for nearly a year. Now she comments on how ridiculous these people were to say such things.

While working very closely with all of the new immigrants to the city, Mike reflects on some of the difficulties he encounters with community members, particularly when it comes to issues related to gender.

> Here are some real settling problems: you got power-trippers in the communities, you've got ego-freaks, you get religious, you get all these kinds of things. Then the power trippers and the ego-freaks take over, and this is one of the drawbacks and it becomes tricky. We will say "we are not getting involved in your politics." And you may have had this, you go to one community and they are in your office and then somebody comes right back and says "these people don't represent our community." And particularly

women and when you're dealing with the women's groups, the men will say "what the hell you talking to them for? They don't represent the community."

Despite some of the difficulties related to community groups, for the most part, the participants indicated that the community was a support when they first moved to the city. Some of the more intimate, ethnically-based community groups also provide ongoing support and assistance. As demonstrated by the initiation of a mentoring program, the Sudanese community has been instrumental in providing direct support to the students, as well as a link from the school to the community. This program is promising and has already had an impact on the students' academic and social skills. In Bill's opinion, with the school's support, the program has been successful and the intent is to expand it to provide more support to parents.

> We know it is going to be a long process, because it is not easy to improve the situation overnight, but we can do it little by little, and in the end we will make some sort of difference. I have seen some support from the school itself in supporting our program. They provide a space and they cooperate with us.... And they are very encouraging of our efforts.

Although it appeared that this program was functioning quite well last year, the after school program did not get underway until midway through this academic year. Securing funding, hiring staff, and arranging all of the organizational details impeded the start up of the program. There were three students who discussed being involved with the after school program last year; none had been involved this year.

*Faith Connection*

Faith emerged both as an overarching belief that guided the thinking and behaviours of students as well as a connection to a support network in the community. The students, reported varying degrees of involvement with either a church or a mosque. Levia, for example, attends bible study, a youth group and a women's group at her church. She is involved with the church three days a week. Students who are Muslim have a place in the school where they meet to pray throughout the school day. This was organized by Rassan. Other students might attend a place of worship less frequently, but it was still a system that they chose to mention in the interviews as being a place where they spent time in their community and where they received some support. Helen, for example, was sponsored to come to Canada by a church and she will occasionally contact her sponsor when she is having trouble.

Throughout some of the interviews, students made mention to God looking after them and protecting them in Canada. It appeared that their belief in God gave them the faith that things would work out, despite their challenges. Afem stated, "I think God brought me to Canada to protect my life so that nothing will happen to me. So that I can do my own thing." Similarly, Sokut also suggests that one day things will get better for him. "Four months now is over so I have to look for a job. I have to pay for rent, food, a bus pass. I have to do is work on food so that I can go to school. I believe God will see all of my problems, and he will see it one day." As was previously mentioned, Anna believed that prayer would help her get rid of the voices in her head.

Although the interview questions did not include a direct question regarding the students' involvement in organized worship or questions pertaining to their faith, 12 out of the 13 students made reference to attending church, or to a belief in God or a belief in Allah.

### *Peers*

The peer group has emerged throughout the previous chapters as an essential base of support for the students. The essential role of the peer group was also discussed in this section as it related to the family system. Some might question why the peer group figures so prominently in the following discussion. There are two main reasons that illustrate the importance of the peers. First, some of the students do not have family members and the peer group is their Canadian family. Second, it is widely accepted in the psychological community that the importance of belonging to a peer group is prominent during adolescence (Santrock, 2001).

While almost all of the students' relationships are with people who are culturally similar, there were some students who did indicate that they had friends from another culture. This was often exhibited in the sports teams.

### *Loyalty Lines*

The findings reveal that there were different lines of loyalty and divisive lines that created a different power base amongst the students. For example, Sandra indicates that the African kids will not speak Arabic because "they are ashamed to be associated with the airplanes." When referring to the students from different regions of Afghanistan, Sandra comments, "the Afghanis are openly hostile towards one another. They don't make any secret about the fact that they see others are worthless

to them. They can say that they can tell just by the way they look." One of the teachers stated that students could tell what religion someone was based on how they talked. They were also able to tell what area of Africa people were from based on physical features. These divisive lines and the hierarchical structure often led to conflict, both in the school and in the community. That said, there was ample evidence to suggest that the cohesiveness of the peer group and its role in supporting the students was essential and meaningful. Vivienne provides an example of these lines of loyalty:

> When we had our first snowfall of the year, one of our students, she had her baby and she had her baby in a baby carriage. One of my boys said he would walk with her to make sure she gets on the bus and to make sure it was safe. So they tell each other to be safe, and if one of them doesn't have bus tickets, they can ask for bus tickets. The other one will interpret and come and ask. So they are protective of each other, both within their own cultural group, and also in the classroom.

James indicates that he is supported by his friends, "people in school here, they help me. They tell me to keep working hard and you'll be able to get whatever you plan to do. My friends say those things." Five of the students made comments that they were too busy to hang out with their friends because they were always working or going to school.

The family, the community, the peer group, and the school figured most prominently in the day to day lives of the students. These systems in the students' immediate environment were the source of relationships that supported the students'

personal, social, and academic development. As was previously discussed using the concept of the nanosystem, the majority, but not all of the students, were connected to a close network of people. While there is some evidence that these systems are somewhat connected, there is more evidence to suggest that more problems are created because of the lack of connections. The following discussion will focus on the mesosystem and the various linkages or connections between the different contexts.

## Mesosystem

As was discussed previously, the experiences in one context can have an effect on the other microsystems. For example, the parent who must work excessively is therefore unable to help the child with school work or does not have the time to interact with the school system and provide educational support at home. Additionally, the peer group can support the students and satisfy their basic need to belong to the school system. This can be the motivating factor that keeps the child in school.

The findings in this study reveal that one of the major barriers to the child's development is the lack of a well-functioning mesosystem. I argue that the school was the dominant force in the child's microsystem, having substantial influence on the students' daily life and their future goals and aspirations. That said, there is considerable evidence to support the assertion that the school is functioning alone and there is very little connection to the other systems. Whether the school needs to reach out to the community more, or the community needs to help out the school, remains unanswered. What was certain was that the systems are not as effective as

they could be, because people are not working together. Moreover, those who are closest to the students and working diligently to support them are depleting their personal resources and becoming less effective. The following excerpts, from various participants representing the microsystem and the exosystem, best describe this lack of connection.

"All of us here are the lone voice in the wilderness." (Ingrid)

"There is a gap out there because there are skills in different professions and somehow there doesn't seem to be somebody who is pulling these things together." (Sara)

"I think the reason why the other agencies are not helping is because there is no connection between these agencies. If they could cooperate and coordinate with their work, it would probably be more helpful to the students and to their parents." (Mike)

"Who is doing these things, because when you're doing these programs you don't have time to connect to get the people in. You just don't have the time to go for lunch and go to coffee and whatever."(Sara)

"I think for the most part were just on our own. I think that there is a willingness and I've been involved with some meetings with various agencies and government departments. But everyone just kind of does their own thing. There's no collaboration" (Larry)

"And that's what we need for the local community to come together."(Manley)

Representing the microsystem, the participants also indicated that there is a lack of communication between the systems. Rassan articulates what he sees as an "unhealthy gap" between the systems.

> There is no real connection with the community and the school. You come and tell me what kind of demographics you work with. That is not helping me to understand why people are the way they are. You coming here once a week and handing out Band-Aids or whatever. It's not going to solve my problems. There is a big gap. A big unhealthy gap....The kids are alone. They feel alone, and they may not be alone, but they feel alone and then they come to class, here's a test next class. Here's a quiz next class. Here's a project. When are you going to take the time to understand the kid?

Taylor suggests that the school could play an integral role in connecting the students and their families to support places in the community. The school was referred to as "the gate keeper of all of these systems", and on numerous occasions was the essential link to the greater community. In addition, certain community members were referred to as a connection to the community. In fact, Taylor noted that, when he talks to some parents, he feels that he is talking to a much larger group of people in the community. He said that when parents come in to the school to discuss an issue, they are actually the spokesperson for an entire group from the community. That said, the deficiencies in the mesosystem are clearly delineated by the words of the various people representing the microsystem and the exosystem. From an ecological perspective, it is important to develop the formal linkages

between the systems by improving communication and developing shared initiatives to address the challenges facing students.

## Exosystem

As was previously mentioned, the members of the exosystem also played a role in supporting children and their families, but as the aforementioned statements indicate, there is clearly a lack of coordination between all of the systems. There was also a noticeable gap between what was happening at the school division level and the government level and what was implemented at the school level. This disconnect between the exosystem and the microsystem was more thoroughly discussed in the preceding section on policy and government direction.

From the teachers' perspective, they are not getting the support that they believe is needed. The teachers who are working directly with the students want practical strategies that they can immediately use to help the students. Based on the conversation with Rassan, I realized that, from his perspective, I was not exempt from the people in the exosystem who have come into the school to conduct research to produce, in his opinion, another meaningless document that does not improve the situation for his students. Rassan asserts,

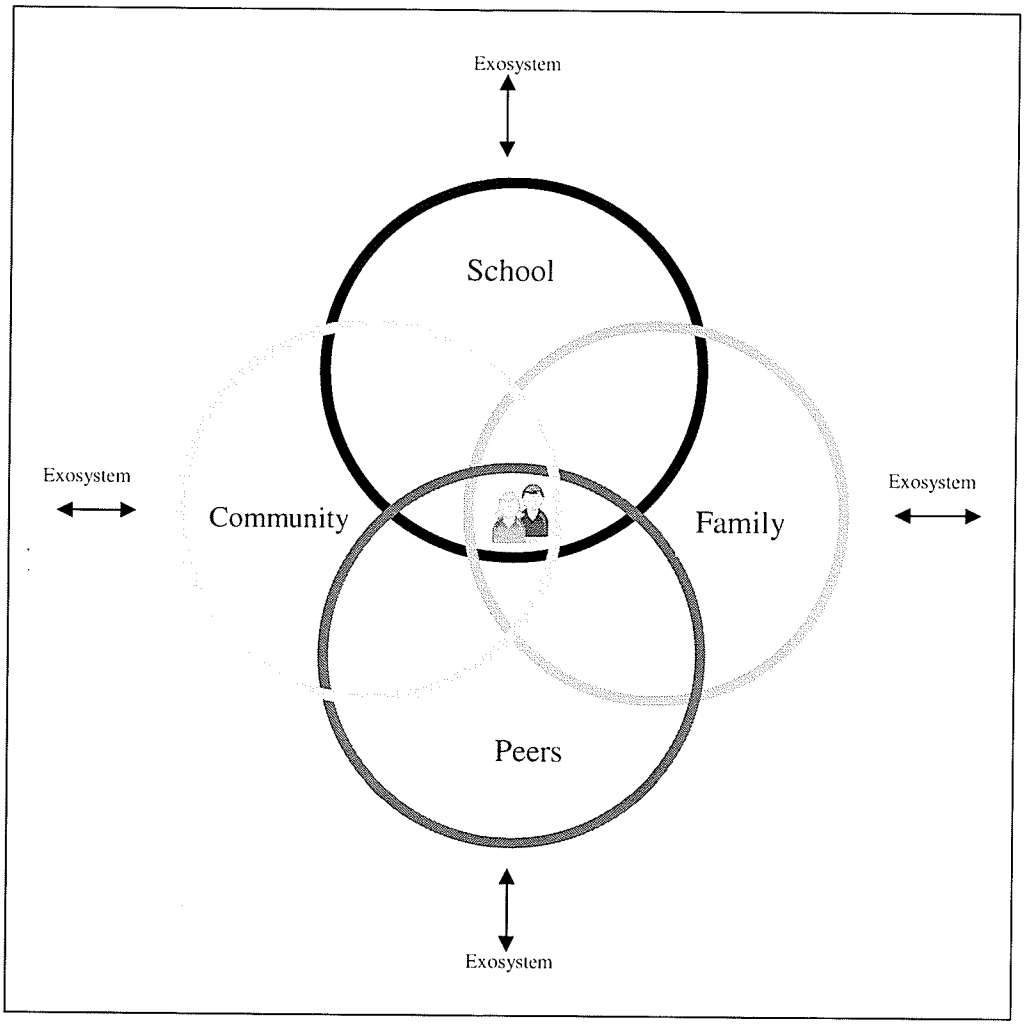
> We have had people from the Division doing presentations on ESL and they are good. They inundate you with facts and stats, but so what? Seventy-five percent of my students are EAL, I can count. And I can tell you how many kids we have in the school who are EAL students. You need to tell me how to deal with x situation, y situation, or, you give me concrete examples of how or when you did something that worked. And when you've done

something that hasn't worked. Maybe I can apply the same things in my classroom.

Take yourself for example, you come here and you do research; you do a paper, fine. What happens, three or four months from now? Everything is written on a paper. Looks nice, good, done with it. A lot of these agencies, they come here, and they tell us the facts. Now, I can Google any facts you want. That is not going to work. Until you sit down and you find out why this kid is crying at lunchtime. It is not going to work if there is no connection, that kid does not feel any connection. If you are my teacher, if I don't like you, no matter what, although there are exceptions, I am not going to do well in your course. And with these kids, you are not only the teacher. You are their uncle, their mother, their father and their brother that they don't have here. Now, how are you going to provide for them?

I sensed the frustration in Rassan's words, but I was also convinced of the absolute pivotal role of the people in the microsystem, in particular the people in the nanosystem, who have genuinely connected with the students. The connections with the students can best be developed with the support that is generated from the connections within the individual contexts and the connections between the various systems. Based on the findings in this study, the whole system is weakened by the isolation of the various systems. Figure 7.1 refers to the kind of mesosystem that participants referred would be the most advantageous; all of the systems are connected, with each microsystem assuming equal responsibility for assisting and supporting the child.

**Figure 7.1. A Well-Functioning Mesosystem**




Although the school might facilitate the coordination of the four systems, it is essential that the four groups are equal players who are committed to the dialogical process and the act of transformation. While there are promising connections that have occurred, a concerted effort is needed to build up more systemic power to better help all students. As the following section reveals, a weakened structure has numerous consequences.

## Macrosystem

Participants representing both the microsystem and the exosystem made comments that suggested more education is necessary to deal with negative perceptions and to prevent divisions that have the potential to bitterly divide and aggravate social, religious, and racial tensions within a country.

Marleen states,

> Absolutely, there's almost a lack of education everywhere. And these people think that these refugees come here and the government gives them a lot of money and a wonderful life. If they actually knew the money that they got, they would think otherwise. There are a lot of negative perceptions out there and these people are living on next to nothing. Where the education piece is lacking is telling people about the economic benefit of these people.

Everyone is going to have to work to make a difference in a child's life. Will states, "People say comments to me about newcomers. They're focusing on the bad stories that they see in the newspaper about refugee students and they extrapolate that to generalize about all newcomers. I don't think it takes much to get public opinion to go against newcomers." Furthermore, Taylor suggests that Canada is "probably doing a fairly good job compared to other countries."

Based on the findings in this study, I argue that it is imperative that Canadians are educated on issues related to accepting immigrants, basic human rights, and the responsibilities of citizens who live in a multi-ethnic city. Newcomers must also have education on their rights in Canada as well as their responsibilities for

living in a multi-ethnic city. There are non-negotiable issues, such as domestic violence and sexual abuse, that are not accepted in Canada and it is the responsibility of all citizens to understand the laws governing the country. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms sets forth basic fundamental rights, democratic rights, mobility rights, legal rights, equality rights, and minority language and educational rights. Legislation and policy must adhere to these inherently basic but pre-eminent rights of all people who live in Canada. Without a preventative strategy for dealing with issues concerning culture, ideologies, and attitudes, we leave the door open to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and potential conflict.

### The Impact on the Adults who work with War-Affected Students

As Bronfenbrenner (2001) indicated, much of the research thus far has focused on the development of children examined by the influences of the older generation. Little research has focused on the role reversal and the development of the adults as they are influenced by their children. Bronfenbrenner (2001) suggested that there was little empirical evidence to test this assertion. Although Bronfenbrenner was referring to the role reversal between parent and child, I extended this examination to include the reciprocal relationship between the student and the teacher or adult representative from the microsystem.

The basic premise of the Bioecological Theory is that development occurs through the interactions between multiple settings and from the relations between these settings. The findings in this study reveal that there are major and significant professional and personal changes observed in the adults who work with the children from war-affected countries. What was originally intended merely as an inquisitive

exploration into the reciprocal development between the adult and the student became a major finding that led to a more critical examination of the deficits in the systems of support for these students. These deficits further strengthened the importance of using an ecological model for designing programs, processes, and systems to support refugee children in Canada.

Most of the teachers had their own personal reasons for choosing to work more intensively with refugee students. Some teachers naturally evolved into their roles and others had more personal reasons that motivated them to be in their current position. Rassan and Christine were both immigrants to Canada and as Rassan states, "Myself being one, I can understand the kinds of experiences that they have had." Christine also states

> I was an immigrant student myself; my parents were poor immigrants as well. So I'm first generation, and I saw the struggles that my parents went through. So for me it's kind of close to home. So if I can be a resource for these people and a gentle touch or a warm heart...I would like to pass that on. My parents did encounter a lot of people who were very ignorant and not so nice and it did put up a lot of roadblocks and they did get treated unfairly. They did have a hard life and for me it's just broadening myself to do as much as I can.

Despite what brought these people to do the kind of work that they do, what was most meaningful is what the participants learned as a result of working with the students. For the most part, the outcomes of this reciprocal learning kept the adults

motivated to continue working and it provided encouragement that what they were doing was meaningful.

I asked the adult participants the following question, "How have you changed, both personally and professionally, as a result of working with children who are from war-affected countries?" The answer to this question was often accompanied by a strong emotional response from the participants. Weaving through most of the participants' answers were bursts of frustration, underlying anger, humility and a determination to effect change. Although it is difficult to convey this emotion with words, I have elected to include some of the non-verbal actions of the participants to suggest the tone of the speaker.

Participants indicated that their lives have changed dramatically since they started working with refugee students. Some indicated that their outlook on life has changed and their commitment to advocacy issues has been ignited. Some have come to realize the dramatic effect they can have on the life of a child. Renewed meanings, an overarching purpose to their work, and a focus on marginalized people in the world have been outcomes of the work that these people have undertaken. Sandra commented,

> My life has totally changed since I've met these kids. I am more interested in... (pause). It makes me more socially involved. It makes me join things like Amnesty International, to go into politics or do something in social service agencies and do something that never would've crossed my mind before, because I never knew about anything like this before. (crying) I had no idea, growing up as a high school student, about these kinds of things,

what these kids are going through. Its like, pfff, when I was in high school, it was like, "so how did your perm turn out?" That's all that was. It has been a totally life-changing experience. Sorry, it just upsets me.

My first experience was a child soldier from Liberia who had scars over his arms. And I remember one day he got stabbed because he got involved in a gang, of course. He didn't have any supports, he joined a gang and he got stabbed. And this was like blocks away on the street. And he came to our classroom, you know, as a safe place. And that was my first indication that, holy crow, I can actually help people like this.

Debbie, who is a government consultant for EAL learners stated that every time she starts a reading or writing on this topic, she sees the faces of students she knows. "And I am just sort of mentally saying, 'Camille, this is for you, Harlan, this is for you. This is what you needed and what you didn't get.'" She further explained that her work at the school level has convinced her of the need to make things happen at the whole system level.

Bev also referred to the role she played in helping ESL (former term for EAL) students and how this kept her from leaving the school. This also further confirms the need for the support system to have a sustainable program in place, one that is not dependent on the work of only one person. In addition, Bev discussed the human connection she feels to what is happening in the world.

I'm glad that I have chosen this for the last 20 years. People ask me why I haven't left and I say "I can't leave", because I would've left kids with nothing, because I was the only ESL person and you know what happens if

the ESL person leaves, the whole program leaves. So you sort of have a commitment to them so you have to keep staying for them. I don't feel that way quite so much anymore, because we have people like Sandra and Scott who are willing to take them in and give them that extra support.

My world view has changed. When I watch the news, and I think oh my God they've invaded Somalia. Just to think what that is going to do, what is going to happen to those people in Somalia. You just can't ignore what's happening in the real world because it's real, what the kids are telling you about, it changes the way you read the newspaper or the way you listen to the news. It changes your whole world.... I have a lot of respect for the kids who have just come through so much.

In an emotional statement, Vivienne explains how her students inspire her to come to work and how her relationships with the students have made her a better human being.

I have the reputation of being a very fair, but firm, person. And a very tough person so my demeanor tends to be a little tough, because 30 years is a long time to work in a profession where the kids, some of them, don't really care if they're here are not. These kids melt your heart (voice cracks). They really do, because they want to be here. It makes me all emotional (tearing). People just don't know the extent the teachers go to....But these kids make you want to be here. They want me to get up every morning and be here by seven o'clock. They make you want to find them other things to do. They make me want to find all the resources I can. My sensitivity to their plight has really

become way more empathetic. I'm a more empathetic human being. And a more humble human being. This is a rich country, and we have all of these privileges. So I am just trying to share, what was given to me. I try to give back and that's what I've taught these kids. Even though you may not have very much, it's always important to give back to your community.

Paul, an administrator at Walter Duncan School, responds to the question with the following quote and then he segues into a very emotional discussion about the effects that this work has had on himself and on his staff.

It's a privilege to work with the students and I know that I am stronger because of it. The road to service is traveled with integrity and with compassion and understanding. So my compassion in those areas has certainly increased. And that's what I need to do for the sake of our students; to do as much as I am able. And see each child for what they are, despite what is coming out of their mouth and what they are doing. But you can't do that unless you have the commitment to serving them and to serve them with care. And to demonstrate this in tangible ways.

What did the adults in this study report that they learned from the refugee students? Empathy, humility, compassion, courage, faith in the human spirit, patience, commitment, and responsibility. I can best describe these aforementioned characteristics in one general statement: they learned how to be better human beings. The new meanings that these adults constructed about the world and their acknowledgement of the privileges that they took for granted refocused many of

their priorities and some renewed their purpose in life and became even more committed and motivated to work with these students.

The people in the systems and the system as a whole is functioning independently, without the collective power of a fully functioning ecological system. This has weakened the ecological system and, as such, it has taken its toll on the people who are trying to help. While these people are still committed to what they are doing, it is very clear that, if the system does not provide more support, or if the other systems do not work more closely with the school to provide support, the consequences could be potentially detrimental to both staff and students. Specific people have clearly emerged as being influential and supportive members of the microsystem who function as an essential link to the school system for numerous students. Keeping these people in this position and supporting them in their efforts seems to be the most logical solution at this time. Skills such as those that have been exhibited by these individuals are not generally taught in a two-day professional development seminar. These skills and attitudes are inherent to the character and personality of an individual and they must be nurtured and supported so that they can continue to develop. Without this attention, these skills and attitudes can easily devolve to unsupportive, unhelpful, or even harmful actions, behaviours, and attitudes that will be much more difficult to change.

The present day school system must now contend with issues related to poverty, health, parenting, cultural diversity, and changes to the structure of families. All layers of issues have complicated the role of the teacher and the ability the system has to respond to the various needs of the people in it. As the following

excerpts reveal, issues related to teaching war-affected children have created another dimension of issues for the school. Those who elect to form a meaningful relationship with the students are trusted by these students and their role becomes increasingly more critical and personally more demanding.

As one of the administrators, Paul recognizes that there are some teachers who "go the extra mile" for students and, as he acknowledges, there is a cost to this.

> There is also a group of us who do have empathy for students, who are able and willing to see those glimpses of what is shown to us. They can see what the students have gone through and they are willing to go the extra mile for them to do what is needed. But then those of us who do that must understand that there is a price to pay.
>
> That person that I told you about earlier, the colleague who took the girl to the hospital because she was on suicide watch, the teacher went directly to her own doctor after that session with the student. One of the things that we identified is that administrators tend to do a lot of things in terms of counseling and all that stuff, but then what happens is, we end up not taking care of ourselves. So, then one day all of a sudden, that last little straw pushes us over.
>
> I think the key thing for me is increasing capacity. Across the board. Knowing that there's still so much to grow and capacity that needs to be built and maintained, because sometimes I feel like, this month actually, this year has been really bad. Vicarious trauma just keeps coming back. I cry. I'm crying more easily lately, and last week. I cried at city council. I cried in

front of my colleagues. And it's not because I'm weak, but your heart needs to be expressed in a safe place. But the hard task is for the heart to be married to the head. Totally. That's when the action comes in. Because otherwise, you can become permissive and sentimental (looking down). Yes, I think I need to take a retreat one of these days. I really need to get away for the weekend. Its too much.

Working with war-affected children brings individuals closer to the harrowing atrocities of violence and terrorism in the contemporary world. This knowledge is dealt with differently by each individual. Some will mentally barricade themselves within their classrooms or organizations and others will open their doors and invite students to join them in a reciprocal exchange of learning. Both of these responses could be from two people who both care deeply about the student, but have chosen a different way to deal with the information. It might also be the result of an individual who has run out of energy to care and who now finds it necessary to put up a wall of protection.

The macrosystem mirrors what is evidenced in the microsystem. There are some individuals who will lead very insular lives – they are busy with their own issues and what happens across the ocean has very little effect on their day-to-day living. Some will choose not to listen to certain newscasts, or read certain articles, because they are too disturbing. They may care deeply about the nearly 30 wars currently occurring worldwide, but it is not enough to mobilize their efforts to do something about it.

Some of the participants in this study heard graphically disturbing stories that they will never forget. Students trusted these adults enough to share personal information about themselves and about their life experiences. In their roles as adults and helpers, these individuals were often at a loss to respond. Feeling the need to make the situation better, as is often the role between an adult and a hurt or sad child, many of these adults felt that they were unable to fulfill their role effectively. Some were surprised by their reactions and others were disappointed by their behaviours. The struggle to deal with the information and to help others understand the issues became a major factor that contributed to frustration, anger, and disappointment. Bev recalls,

> When I was helping those boys with their presentation I started reading and reading, and it was getting harder and harder and I couldn't go to sleep at night. I thought, "God, 2,000 people a day going into that camp. And it's dusty and there's no food. I just can't take anymore." It was really hard. I can't watch The Killing Fields, because I had Cambodians at the time and the Cambodians said to me "we weren't worth the bullet." They would use a machete to kill everybody and the babies they would smash their heads against the wall. I'll never forget that.

Jo Boyden, who has worked extensively with children in war zones, discusses the difficulty in emotionally dealing with information that she hears from children.

> I learn all the time. You learn a lot of humility and you find it. I mean, that's the first thing, because you learned what they have managed to have dealt with, what they have coped with. It is extremely humbling, in terms of your

own. It makes you reflect on your own life. I think I manage things differently in terms of crisis. I have learned about the importance of being creative, of standing back and being relaxed, allowing others to do stuff at times. I've learned not to be judgmental about people because, when you have been confronted like I was 18 months ago by a 14-year-old girl who was told to slaughter a child in front of an audience of 200 or 300 people, including her own family members. I mean you learn, you actually have to deal with that stuff emotionally yourself. I've learned not to try and pretend and to be as honest as you can. When they tell you things that are difficult to deal with, I have to be honest about having a difficulty because you don't cover anything up well. It is extremely important to be honest as much as possible. I also learned that you can cope emotionally with an enormous amount of very challenging and difficult situations. And there'll always be a moment where you don't cope and almost always find that something breaks through the crust or your shell. And it's the sort of thing that you surround yourself with, and I can't ever predict when that's going to happen. And I can't ever predict which child it will be or how, but it has made me realize that I'm not that tough (personal communication, December 5, 2006).

Sandra's words illustrate how emotionally difficult it is to deal with the information she hears. More importantly, she discusses the lack of power she feels in trying to help make a difference for her students.

When my first group of grade 10s leave, because they are graduating this year, the ones I first started with. I don't even want to come back next year.

I don't want to go through that. (crying). They are very… I mean, they drive me crazy. It's emotionally draining. When I go home, I tell my husband. He's an accountant, he just doesn't get it. Who would? I would never give up, but I don't know how much longer I can do this. You can only… I can only hear so many times…. and feel totally powerless, but I can't do anything but just sit there and listen and say, "I am sorry that your teacher makes you feel like you are stupid." And not being able to do anything about it. I can only take that for so much longer. And although I don't want to be teaching in some monocultural school, I don't really know how to do that, I don't know how much longer I can do this with someone in administration, or someone in a position of power acknowledging that these people have cultural capital. This kid can bring so much to everything and people just don't see it. They just say, "Oh my God, not another immigrant and a stupid kid that does not know how to read or write a sentence." It blows my mind. I sit here and I think, "these are my colleagues, what am I supposed to do? What do I say? How do I react? Do I just smile and nod and walk out? Do I defend them?" But when its people in positions of power are saying these things to you, what do you do? I don't know. I can only see so many more kids getting involved in gangs and put into jail. Sometimes I think it would be just easier to work in a whitey school.

The frustration reported by the participants was often the result of being a part of a system that was not supportive. Energy was spent on defending their roles, convincing others in the system that they also needed to support the students, and

politically positioning themselves within the system so that they had power to help liberate the students. As one participant mentioned, there are times when individuals lose their capacity to care and they surprise themselves with their responses.

> And the sad thing is, when we reach that point where our ability to care is tapped out, we do damage to kids. They come in and they get bad experiences. And it doesn't take many of those bad experiences before they're out of school. And they are saying bad things about teachers and they have reasons for it. And they know it because I've been that guy.
>
> My first year here, one of the guys did end up in the ( name of African gang). It was my first year of teaching. He pushed me right beyond my limit. And then he pushed again. And I was in a classroom that had an outside exit. And I called him over to the door, and I grabbed him by the back of the head and I said to him, "you better hope that I never see you outside of this school" and I pushed him out the door. I have never in my life ever said that to another human being or meant it, and I meant it completely. And this is a 14-year-old boy, who comes from the worst situation. He has no dad, he never had a father. He has no money at home and I know damn well what he's in a situation that he's in. But my ability to care is tapped out. And I put the wall up.

The emotional expression from the participants throughout this portion of the interviews was intense. Their words were telling: "tired," "tapped out," "crying easily," "draining," "scary," "couldn't go to sleep, "burning out." Some of the participants made hints about leaving the school or choosing to become less involved

with the refugee students because it was getting "too difficult without the support." Some indicated that support was needed to the system as a whole, and some indicated that it was the leadership within the school that needed to create an internal structure that would be more supportive, and that focused on a vision that was collectively valued. As one participant noted,

> I've got a drawer in my desk and I have a list with the pros and cons; and the cons, I just keep adding to it and I try to decide whether I should really stay here or not. They cannot figure out what the goal of our school is. I would like to have an administration that is visionary and that is respectable, and is honorable and if those values were espoused in our office and they would permeate through the school....But I think we need an articulate, honest administrative structure that is visionary and that set the direction. But right now I feel like our main job is to take the kids that we get and do the best we can in whatever direction we can manage to go.

The current challenge for all of the ecological systems is to collectively respond to the needs of the people in it. This requires the collaborative and creative efforts of everyone, starting from the individual and extending to the macrosystem. The need for direction in the area of policy and practice is evident.

## Human Capacity, Hope, and Resilience

Weaving though various sections of this dissertation are some qualities that have typified the descriptions of the students. First, the students are capable and they demonstrated that they had the remarkable ability to adjust to a completely different country, culture, environment and set of ecological systems. Despite numerous

challenges, they were attending school and many of them were also working full-time and living independently or with only some of their family members. Secondly, the students were hopeful that their current situation would improve and what they had worked so hard to achieve would be accomplished. Finally, they have exhibited resilience and demonstrated that despite the situations they have endured and the adversity that they have encountered, they have persevered to make a better life for themselves. Paul, the vice-principal states,

> There is tremendous pain there.... It comes back to the word "resiliency" for them. In spite of what they have gone through, there is hope....I am encouraged by what I am seeing. I see hope, I see that our students do have hope. And despite what they have been through, it is a sense that there are better things to come. So part of our job now, our responsibility, is to help them realize their potential, to teach to them as what they could be, not as what they are right now. They are all hoping for a better future.

The concept of resiliency is eloquently described by Banya in the following passage:

> I don't think the other kids are ever going to forget the bad things and the bad memories. Especially if somebody has done something bad to you, they're never going to forget. It gives you experiences of life. They only have their own self. They just think, this is my life. That is why they make changes. It pushes them to make a better life. This is the life, there is happiness and sadness; it is like a relationship.

While the students' outlook is hopeful, the findings indicate that the people in the school and the community who work with the students are frustrated with how they see the system functioning and how some of the people in the system are treating the students. The school is a fundamental system in the lives of the students and, if this system is not just, and there are students who are marginalized by the actions of the oppressors, it must be transformed. The inequities of what children have lived through and the unjust systems to which they have belonged, provide the seeds for resentment, conflict, and violence. It is essential that people who recognize injustices collaborate together and work with the oppressed towards their own liberation.

Scott expresses his dissatisfaction with the school and what he perceives as an unjust system. Although he is proud of his students' accomplishments, he is frustrated and angered by what his students must endure to get an education. The following passage outlines the moral dilemma that Scott encounters. He knows that the students are marginalized and he wants to advocate for them and push them to stand for their rights. At the same time, he realizes that the students have risen above the adversity and they have focused on what they need, despite the treatment that they have received.

> Every year at grad, when I look at those students I can barely make it through, because they are just so proud and it's this rite of passage that has been so much harder for them than for anybody else and it really means something to them that it can't mean to anybody else. You know, that's what I think there's just so much injustice and there's so much crap in here. And

they never get a piece of recognition, and they have learned not to ever seek justice because you usually won't get it, you get punishment. So they've learned not to do that and that should not be rewarded. (raising voice) I should be telling them "no, you should stand on principle here because it matters. And we have this Constitution, and we have this protection of your rights. You shouldn't stand for it. Stand for your individuality." Schools are ostensibly democratic places and they should get experience with democracy here, first. Not fight their way through this place and then get to the real world. But they have this wisdom that comes from experience that says, "I know what people like that are like. Just let them be like that, I'd be dead if I worried about those people who are like that. Every soldier that I ran from, every fight that I got through."

So I see them graduate, and it's just such a good feeling. To see them face this world and to know that they're really going to kick ass. Like honestly, if you can get through this, not speaking English with teachers who think you're the biggest pain, with people calling you nigger when you're walking down the hallway, if you can get through this, hey, you are going to do just fine. But it shouldn't be that way. It's not the way it should be. That's why I'm really happy when people like you come around and you're looking at the big picture, it makes me think that there is some hope.

The predictability of the school routine, academic achievement, and the socialization of children is highly correlated with childhood resiliency (Arafat & Musleh, 2006; Boothby, Strang, & Wessells 2006; Bracken & Petty, 1998; Hamilton

& Moore, 2004; Rutter, 2001, 2003). While there are numerous risk factors, there are also protective factors found within the school environment. In a study conducted by Arafat and Musleh (2006) with Palestinian children from the West Bank and Gaza, 96 % of the children interviewed indicated that school was an essential aspect of their lives. The school system provided an academic forum, and a place to meet and socialize with similar-aged peers. The notion of resiliency is based on tenets of ecological theories, suggesting that children are influenced by the systems in which they live.

Rutter (2006) indicated that, while few studies have examined refugee children as a group in relation to the concept of resiliency, most texts have documented a list of protective factors that contribute to resiliency. Some of these factors include: a supportive network, age of trans-migration (not under 5 or an adolescent), having access to permanent housing, having a positive outlook and strong self-esteem, and having someone to go to when things go wrong.

The findings in this study support the notion of resiliency and the protective factors that contribute to resiliency. Chapter 5 thoroughly discussed the numerous challenges and risk factors that refugee students encounter. Furthermore, Chapters 6 and 7 suggested the necessary systems, structures, programs and services that are necessary to develop protective factors. The role of the school is to ensure that it creates a system that is a protective factor and not a risk factor in the lives of refugee children.

## Summary and Conclusion

Chapter 7 discussed the findings related to the fourth specific research question, "To what extent do the various ecological systems interact with each other to influence the refugee student's personal, social, and academic development?" The discussion began with an examination of the three other environments that comprised the microsystem, namely the family, the community and the peer group. Although the school emerged in this study as the dominant system in the microsystem, the findings reveal that more balanced and collaborative interactions between the school the community, the family, and the peer group are necessary to create a better functioning microsystem, exosystem, and mesosystem.

The importance of the macrosystem was revealed in the findings and particular attention was drawn to the importance of preventing negative attitudes toward refugees in the host culture.

The final section of this chapter discussed how the students have affected the people in the various ecological systems. The findings discussed what the participants have learned in this reciprocal developmental process of working with refugee students. A corollary to these relationships was the development of feelings associated with stress, fatigue and exhaustion. Consequently, the people who provided the close interpersonal support to the students were the ones who reported these feelings most intensely. Despite feelings of frustration, anger, and disappointment, the participants were motivated by the hope and resilience that they observed in their students to continue trying to improve the lives of the refugee children.

The final chapter concludes this dissertation with a summary of the study, an overview of the findings and a discussion on how this research contributes to the literature in this domain. Recommendations will be advanced for educators and policy makers, and suggestions for further research will be provided.

# 8. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 8 will begin with a brief overview of the study. Next, the findings will be discussed in relation to the current research on the topic. In addition, the major areas where this study has contributed to the literature will be presented. The final section will provide recommendations to educators and policy makers as well as suggestions for further research.

The four preceding chapters have concluded with an interpretation of the findings as well as a discussion on the key points revealed in the data. The purpose of this chapter will not be to repeat this information; rather the intent is to discuss the findings in relation to the overarching framework and the most salient points advanced by the data. The following discussion will outline the major findings for each of the four research questions and the relationship of the findings to previous work in the field of refugee education.

## Overview of the Study

As explained more fully in Chapter 3, this study was a case study that examined the experiences of high school refugee students who have emigrated from countries affected by armed conflict. The study implemented a qualitative perspective that attempted to understand the experiences from the perspectives of the student participants and from the participants in the various ecological systems. Three phases of migration, delineated by Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Lowen and Frater-Mathieson (2004) were investigated using Bronfenbrenner's (1999)

Bioecological Model, combined with Portes and Zhou's (1993) Theory of Segmented Assimilation. Components of these three theories formed the overarching conceptual framework for this study.This study included interviews with the children affected by war, as well as participants from the microsystem and the exosystem. An analysis of the interactions of the mesosystem and the influence of the macrosystem was also conducted.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the psychosocial needs and the educational challenges that children affected by war encounter while attending a Manitoba school, and to generate recommendations that foster their adjustment. Little information was available on the most appropriate support mechanisms for the student who has been affected by war. It is expected that the number of students coming to Canada from war-affected countries will increase significantly over the next decade, and the school and the community must be prepared to respond to the unique and diverse needs of these children. This study was designed to examine the experiences, challenges, successes and interactions that the students had while attending a high school in Manitoba.

## Data Collection

The research activities covered a six-month period of time from November, 2006 to April, 2007. This study employed multiple forms of data collection including: 40 individual face-to-face interviews, eight individual face-to-face secondary interviews with students, follow-up telephone interviews, document

analysis, photography, and two focus group interviews. A total of 51 participants took part in this study, representing students, teachers, school and divisional administrators, government consultants, community workers, and parents.

Other relevant documents were also collected, such as school policies that were in the public domain, school demographic information, divisionally-based aggregate data, and mobility statistics. These artefacts were described and coded as external sources.

I personally transcribed all of the interviews, verbatim, resulting in 430 pages of single-spaced text. After each transcript was completed it was loaded into NVivo 7 and coded. Transcripts were coded numerous times throughout this study as new nodes or themes were uncovered.

## Data Analysis

This study employed a continuous process of sorting the data using suitable codes, and organizing the material into common themes and trends. Using NVivo 7, all of the transcripts were imported and then digitally coded in a series of stages. The first stage of analysis involved reading the transcripts line by line and then coding various phrases, words or chunks of text. The second analysis entailed coding the source again and forming tree nodes, or branches of nodes to more accurately reflect the content of the source. This process was repeated several times as new free nodes (non-hierarchical codes) and tree nodes (hierarchical codes) were discovered. All of the nodes were defined within the project to ensure that the researcher would not incorrectly assume a different meaning for a node.

The processes of coding and analyzing involved inductive and deductive reasoning, thinking, and theorizing. At various stages of coding, summative coding reports were generated as a means to track the evolution or devolution of various nodes. All of these stages were documented in the researcher's log book. This process often involved collapsing some nodes or combining similar codes together. In some cases, the description of the code needed to expand, and in other cases the code title needed to change to more appropriately reflect the content of the references.

Relationships, links and annotations were delineated throughout the analysis to make sense of the data and to advance particular concepts for discussion. Memos were dated and linked to particular places in the transcripts. Relationships were either classified as an associative relationship or a causal relationship. Links from the transcripts were assigned to each relationship for further analysis.

When all of the nodes were set, the nodes were arranged into a hierarchical structure that was deemed to be the most appropriate for discussing the results. At this point, node summary reports and source reports were generated and an overall project summary was developed.

## Summary and Discussion of Findings

Numerous studies have investigated immigrants from anthropological and sociological perspective, but few have studied immigration from a psychological and educational perspective. Moreover, several leading researchers have not differentiated between the term "immigrant" and "refugee." The studies on refugees have been dominated by the field of psychology, where researchers have studied

trauma and the adaptation of the individual to traumatic experiences. Studies out of the United Kingdom (Rutter & Jones, 1998, Rutter, 2003; Rutter, 2006) have been instrumental in describing successful initiatives with refugee children in educational settings. Similarly, Hamilton and Moore (2004) from New Zealand provided both a theoretical base as well as suggestions for best practices for refugee education. A Canadian perspective on refugee education firmly grounded in research from an ecological perspective was required. As the literature supports, refugees are not a homogeneous group (Boyden & de Berry, 2004; Bracken & Petty, 1998; Rutter, 2006); as such, their experiences will vary depending on the systems, the country, or their lived experiences.

### *Research Question 1*

The following discussion relates to the major findings related to the first research question, "What are the pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration experiences of war-affected children who immigrate to Manitoba?" There was evidence to support that students' pre-migration experiences included loss, starvation, abuse, persecution, danger, displacement, and exposure to violence. Eight of the thirteen students indicated that one or both of their parents had been killed and three students were not sure if their parents or siblings were alive. Although students did discuss pre-migration experiences that were positive such as, going to school, playing with friends, and being with family, most of the discussions centered around the disruptions to their lives because of the conflict within their world.

All 13 students had witnessed high intensity violence where a family member, friend, or a community member had been brutally murdered. One student

indicated that he witnessed rebels chopping the arms off of children and adults as a means to intimidate the observers, to debilitate the victims, and to put a burden on the community. One of the female participants indicated that girls were not safe and she lived in fear that she would be sexually assaulted. Rebels killed the older generation as a strategy to manipulate the children and to enlist more followers. The four "Lost Boys of Sudan" witnessed the starvation and subsequent death of countless children as they traveled, unaccompanied, from Sudan to Ethiopia and later to Kenya. Although the pre-migration experiences were unique to each participant, characteristics related to living within war zones were consistent with much of the literature (Hamilton & Moore, 2004; Rutter, 2006).

Trans-migration might have included living in a refugee camp for years waiting to be relocated, or it could mean a relatively short period of a few weeks that included leaving home and relocating to Canada. The majority of the students encountered years of displacement from camp to camp coupled with broken promises for relocation. The four boys from Sudan had lived in various refugee camps for approximately 10 years. Trans-migration experiences included leaving home, losing belongings, and being separated from family. Life in the refugee camps was reported as "difficult," unpleasant," "violent," and "unsafe." Camps were overcrowded, food was rationed, and neighbours could not be trusted. The students indicated that they waited and hoped that they would be chosen by the United Nations for relocation.

The findings revealed that students are still very much connected to the ecological systems that they interacted with, both pre-migration and trans-migration.

Several students have the responsibility for supporting family members by sending money home and this influences their post-migration experiences in Canada. Students spend less time studying and completing school work because they must work to support themselves, as well as family members who depend on this money to live.

Findings related to the post-migration phase revealed two distinct phases: initial excitement, followed by challenges and adjustments. The phases are characterized in the literature as a process of segmented assimilation, (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001) as adaptation, (Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen & Frater-Mathieson, 2004; Richman, 1998; Sam, Vedder, Ward, Horenczyk, 2006) and as acculturation (Berry, 2001; Phinney, Berry, Vedder, Liebkind, 2006).

Historically, the term "acculturation" has been used to discuss the imposed acculturation of a minority population to that of a more progressive culture. For the purposes of this study, "adjustment" refers to the cultural changes that occur when an individual comes into contact with a different culture, as well as the reciprocal adjustment that is necessary in the host culture in order for the individual to attain harmony with his or her environment. Conceptually, adjustment suggests the reciprocal and multi-dimensional interaction with the physical and social environment and the life-long process of attaining equilibrium between the individual's needs and his or her level of satisfaction.

Based on the findings in this study, the theory of segmented assimilation purported by Portes and Zhou (1993) did not necessarily encapsulate what was

discovered in the data.The theory of segmented assimilation suggests that there are three paths to assimilation. That said, the students in this study could be considered to be at an intermediary stage of assimilation. Portes and Zhou's theory was based on a ten year study that examined the long-term effects of immigration. It is plausible that at a later point in time, the lives of these participants might more closely resemble one of the three outcomes of segmented assimilation. During the particular point in time that this study was conducted, the students' post-migration experiences most closely resembled an oscillating pattern of adjustment. This fluctuating model incorporates progressive movement of the individual who encounters challenges and obstacles, as well as successes and accomplishments, throughout all phases of migration.

Most people who work in the education system will be able to name students who have dropped out of school, become involved in criminal activity and then turned their lives around to be more productive members of society. Even the justice system has developed programs to turn the most hardened criminals around. A downward spiral denotes no movement upwards and no exit points on the way down. That said, perhaps the individuals who might have been considered part of the downward spiral were not part of the study, as they likely would not be attending school. Having said that, with the right resources and the best people working with the individuals who are having difficulties, one cannot guarantee that these people will not change for the better.

As most people who work with young offenders or students who choose a path leading to deviant behaviour or criminal activity can attest, there is almost

always a point of departure from this path. As was revealed in an interview with both a government representative and with Tim Mackay, approximately 17 years ago, a program was put in place with 14 Vietnamese youth who were engaged in criminal activity and who also had dropped out of school. With immediate attention to the problem and an intensive program of support, all of these students were put on another path. Tim Mackay explained,

> The issue with the Vietnamese kids and the gangs is almost identical to the problem that arose last summer. The Vietnamese children arrived on their own and they were 17 or 18 years of age. These kids were in a refugee camp in excess of 10 year and they had limited literacy in their own language. They had very limited school experiences and they were dropped into high schools. Within six months they were out and they were a problem. So the youth re-entry programs said, "we need to fix this." They got an anonymous donor from the Vietnamese community to grant a block of money. These kids were already involved in petty crime and other sort of criminal activity. In order to get back into the classroom, they were paid four dollars an hour to go to class for the year. It was the only way they could get them to stay, with an incentive. And the focus was specifically on literacy and numeracy and some group counselling around some of the behaviours that were happening. After five-year follow-up, all of those kids finished high school. Three went on to university. The remaining ten are employed. There's no question that works, and if we had a program in place like that at the beginning, it wouldn't cost a quarter of a million dollars (personal communication, March 3, 2007).

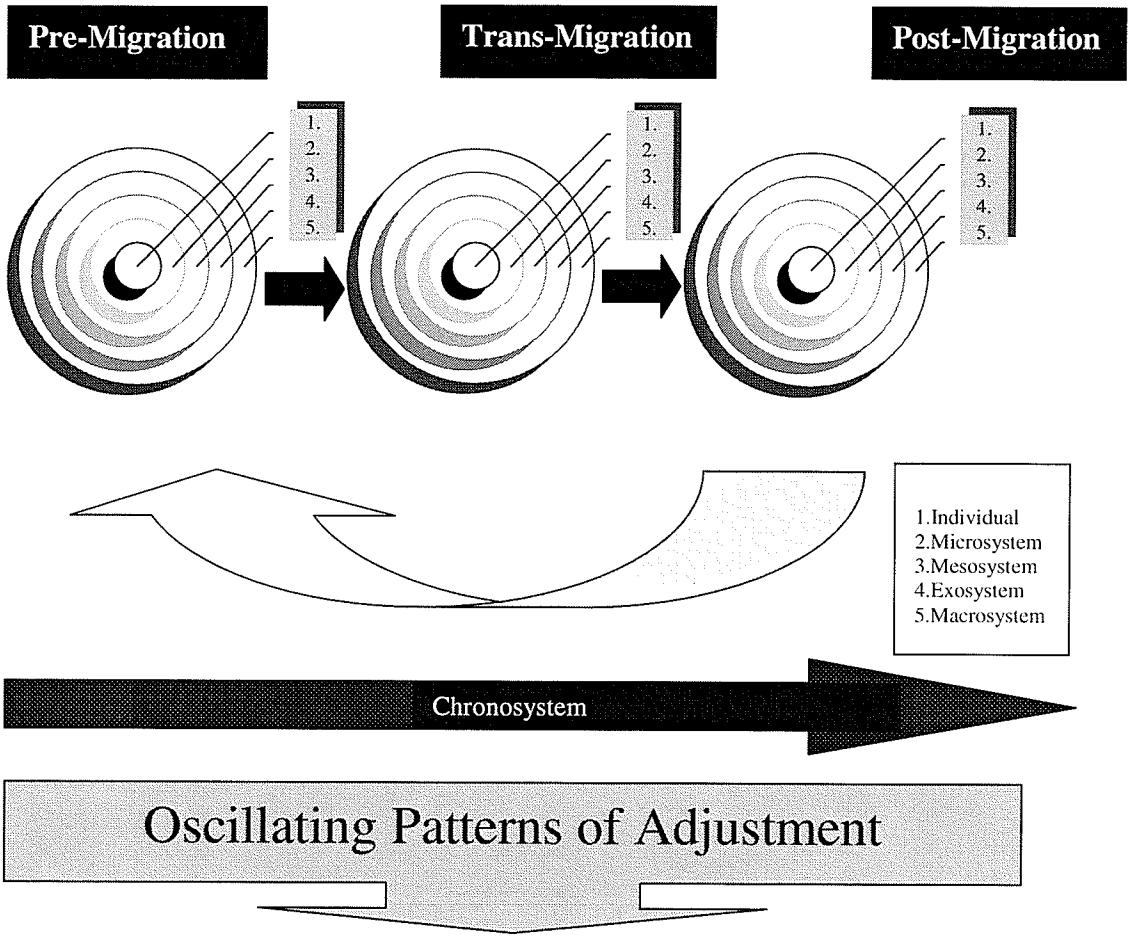
Although this was not a large scale longitudinal study, there was evidence to suggest that these thirteen students were turned around with an intensive educational and support program that essentially paid the students to attend school. Tim MacKay's argument is two-fold: first, put the supports in place to keep students in school, and second, when the school system is unsuccessful, provide an intensive and focused program to get students back to school. The school is one of the most influential ecological systems for students. If the students are not successful in this system, there is little opportunity for them to adjust to Canadian life and to become successful members of society. Although the challenges are numerous and there are many facets of the system that need improvement, the best chance that these students have is to get an education.

Figure 8.1 represents what was revealed in the findings. The reconstituted conceptual framework reflects two major changes. First, the connection from the pre-migration to post-migration demonstrates the potential for the individual to continue to be affected by many of the same factors that influenced his or her life during pre-migration. This is particularly influential because wars continue to rage in many of their former homelands and many of the individuals continue to worry about the safety of loved ones. Findings revealed that many of the students continue to financially support family members who depend on this support to survive. In sum, many of the same factors that affected these individuals during pre-migration continue to affect their development and adjustment. Despite being physically removed from war and violence, students continue to be emotionally connected to these experiences.

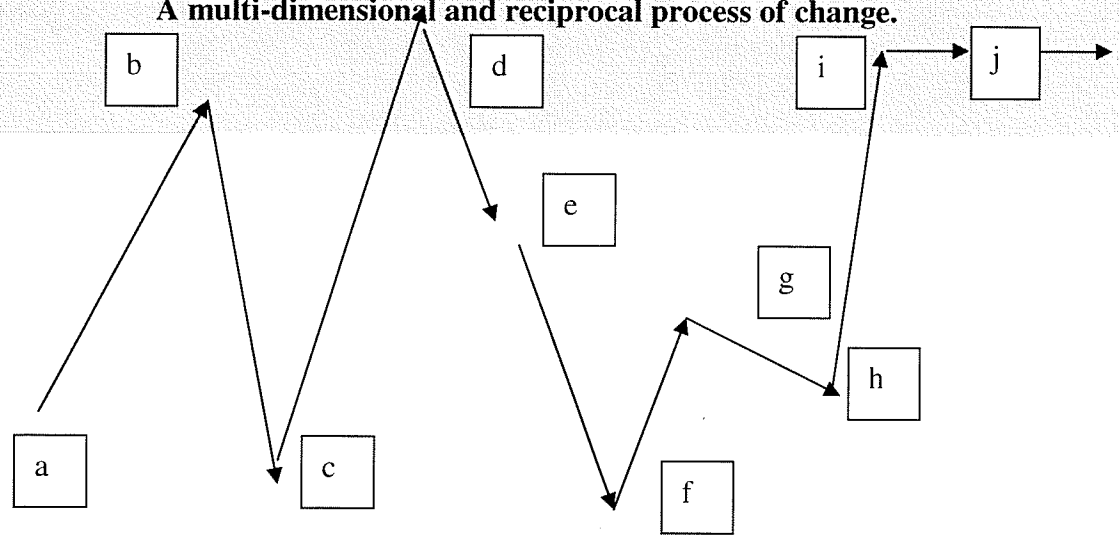
The second change to the conceptual framework more accurately reflects the oscillating patterns of adjustment that were found in the students at this point in time. Refugees encounter a plethora of challenges that appear to bring them down, or set them back. That said, they also experience remarkable achievements and successes that push them forward. This process was referred to by Len as "soaring and crashing", and it more accurately denotes the patterns of adjustment observed in this study. As Figure 8.1 illustrates, the example identifies various upward and downward points, labeled "a" through "j". There are times when the individual has attained harmony with his or her needs and has achieved a level of satisfaction. There are also times that the individual's needs are not being met and they are unsatisfied. Consider the following (letters "a" through "j" on the figure) which correspond to some of the experiences that Sokut discussed in his interview.

Sokut's experiences included the following: (a) arriving in Canada and not knowing any English; (b) acquiring basic conversational English; (c) being put in an age-appropriate classroom and not understanding how to do the work; (d) connecting with a teacher and a group of friends who are in a similar circumstance; (e) being mistaken for a gang member and getting beaten up; (f) someone breaking in to his home and threatening to kill him with a gun (g) connecting with a politician who advocates for a change in housing (h) failing three courses; (i) getting a mentor and a tutor to help after school; and (j) being hired at a local restaurant. Each experience in this example shows the varying levels of adjustment. While some experiences propelled the student forward and closer to adjustment, other experiences pulled the

**Figure 8.1. Reconstituted Conceptual Framework**




**Equilibrium: Harmony between the Individual and the Environment.**
**A multi-dimensional and reciprocal process of change.**



student down and further away from attaining harmony with his or her needs and wants. The purpose of this example is to show the varying levels of adjustment and how experiences, luck, good timing, or hard work can dramatically change the outcome for the individual. While there are some individuals who experience less success and far more challenges, there is always a point of departure for someone who is headed in a downward spiral.

### *Research Question 2*

The following discussion relates to the second research question, "What are the challenges or problems that confront war affected children who attend high school in Manitoba?" Four main clusters of challenges emerged: (1) educational, (2) economic, (3) environmental, and (4) psychosocial. Perceived racism and discrimination were most frequently discussed by the students and the members of the microsystem as a major challenge, both in the educational setting and in the various ecological systems. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) found that discrimination was the most significant barrier to adaptation for their population of immigrant students. Other studies have focused primarily on student-to-student discrimination; this study inadvertently included an examination of how the adults also contributed to racism and discrimination in all of the ecological systems.

McBrien (2004) conducted a study in the United States with 18 adolescent refugee girls and found that the majority of the girls perceived themselves to be targets of discrimination. The Muslim girls reported almost twice the incidents of discrimination as compared to non-Muslim girls. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) state, "A well-established sociological principle holds that the more similar new minorities

are in terms of physical appearance, class, background, language, and religion to a society's mainstream, the more favorable their reception and the more rapid their integration" (p.47). This might explain why participants in this study suggested that African and Afghani students had a more difficult time, because they "stood out on the street." One teacher said "the blacker they are the more of a target they will be." Several participants referred to Canada's European immigrants who had also come from countries where there was war and suggested that, because they looked "more like Canadians" and were from a more culturally similar background, they were accepted more readily into the culture. While substantiating this assertion is beyond the scope of this study, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) noted that in the US, "A racial gradient continues to exist....the darker a person's skin is, the greater is the social distance from dominant groups and the more difficult it is to make his or her personal qualifications count" (p.49).

One of the findings related to discrimination was the lack of integration of the newcomer students with the Canadian students. Many of the participants concurred that placing the refugee student immediately into a regular age-appropriate high school classroom would not meet the students' educational needs and would likely result in their quick exit from the system. That said, it is absolutely imperative that the importance of schooling in the lives of all children is recognized. Education is equally a process of gaining academic skills and social skills. If we hope to lessen the conflict that results from racially and culturally divisive lines, we must address social skills and teach children to get along and understand each other. Although placing students into a specialized program for intensive language skills may be what

some professionals think is most appropriate, doing so has repercussions on the school culture. Passionately denying that it is not segregation, but emphatically stating it is a "program within a program" does little to address the underlying issues of what is really happening in schools. The benefits of specialized programming can not be denied; however, problems are created in the system if this approach is adopted. Programs should not be culturally specific and only programs that get students together will overcome the fears and insecurities they have about people who are culturally different. A comprehensive and sustainable program addressing all levels of the ecological systems is needed to address prejudism, racism, and discrimination.

*Educational Challenges*

Education emerged as the most prominent system for the student participants. Although I assumed that the family would be the inner-most system of contact with the students, I questioned why the people in the school figured most prominently. Rutter (2006) used an ecological framework to discuss what she delineated as the inner microsystem and the outer microsystem. The family would represent the inner system and the school and the neighborhood would represent the outer system. The findings from this study support the notion that, for the majority of the students, the family system was far less prevalent in their lives. I attribute this finding to two main issues. First, many of the students are living in a reconstituted family. Their families are friends with whom they came to Canada and there are no guardians or caregivers for these individuals. Two of the student lived completely alone and they did not mention an extended family system of support. They came to Canada as

"unaccompanied minors"; As such, they came to rely on the school and the personnel at the school for various reasons. Secondly, all but two of the students lived with only one parent and many of these students had very limited time with their parents for various reasons. For example, parents worked one or two jobs and were not home with the children, the children worked full-time jobs and did not have time to spend with their parents, or because of the developmental age of the student, he or she was moving to a more independent stage of life.

Getting an education was the first priority for the students. Education represented a new start to life, where possibilities would be opened up and where their dreams could be fulfilled. The numerous systemic and personal challenges that the students incurred contributed to feelings of disappointment and uncertainty that appeared to motivate the students to work harder to stay in school. While there was ample evidence to support the fact that many students drop out of school or are pushed out of school, it became far more meaningful and useful to focus on what kept these students in school. The findings suggest that the students had low expectations for what they would get from an educational system. Most were happy to be safe from violence and war and to be living in a free and democratic country. Participants indicated that they believed students were willing to put up with the treatment they received from staff and students because they were just so happy to be safe. The following two quotes best illustrate this concept:

> Scott: When I look at them and I see all of the challenges that they have I would think that they would be railing against this place every day, saying "I'm being deprived, I'm being deprived!" But those are my expectations of

what I think the school should be able to do for these kids who are so needy of help.

Donna: They are euphoric at first a bit, but then they start getting into the science and the math and the languages and the curriculum, and it is so difficult. You are so far behind that it becomes such a struggle and your family is counting on you to be the breadwinner. You are the person who is going to make a living in this country. And the only thing you do is toss pizza and there is nothing wrong with tossing pizza, but that wasn't your dream. Your dream was to be the doctor. And it's coming to grips with that.... They mind it, but they don't see it as a problem. No one is shooting them.

Critical theorists suggest that liberation of a marginalized population begins with facilitating the process whereby the oppressed see how they have been oppressed, repressed, or marginalized. The findings suggest that the adults in the microsystem are well aware of the barriers and the challenges that these students face; however, the students have no common frame of reference on which to judge how much better things could be.

Challenges and problems related to education were revealed in four broad categories: (1) students had difficulty with the academics because of previous disrupted schooling and lower academic literacy levels; (2) students had a financial burden and had to work full-time and therefore could not focus on their schooling; (3) the school was not always a welcoming environment; and (4) the students were not supported because of systemic, organizational, and policy issues.

Using an ecological framework, this study revealed that, in order to create a productive learning environment and to address the challenges that students incur, all ecological systems must be involved in a collaborative multi-systemic approach to education.

*Economic Challenges*

The findings revealed that the lack of economic resources available to refugee students resulted in numerous challenges that directly affected their adjustment to Canada. Poverty restricted the refugees' movement within the city and confined them to government subsidized housing within the inner city. This community was perceived by the participants as having a higher incidence of criminal activity, gang activity, and violence. While some literature discusses the economic challenges that complicate the refugees' adjustment (Boothby et al., 2006; Hamilton & Moore, 2004, Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), this study revealed that criminal activity, gang activity, and non-completion rates of schooling were a corollary to economic challenges. While the students in this study were presently enrolled in school, they indicated that their peers had dropped out of school for the "easy money" offered by criminal activity, or for the necessity to work to support family.

There was a correlation between academic difficulty and having to work. Students indicated that they were required to work a full-time job to be able to provide their basic needs. Teachers indicated that having to work and go to school was a contraindication to the students' academic success. Portes and Rumbat (2001) found that social capital was important for all immigrants, but particularly important

for those who "had relatively poor parents with modest educational credentials" (p. 108). They found that the community networks compensated for the lack of economic resources. There was evidence in this study that supported Portes and Rumbaut's assertions. Students in this study assisted each other by helping each other get jobs, providing food, shelter, or clothing when one of their friends was without, and getting donations from the community or the school staff to help themselves or others.

*Psychosocial Challenges*

As the literature review revealed, there is a debate surrounding trauma discourse (Boothby et al., 2006, Boyden & de Berry, 2004; Bracken & Petty, 1998; Rutter, 2006, Summerfield, 1996). Unfortunately, this debate has overshadowed the legitimate concern for the need to address the psychosocial needs of war-affected children. The purpose of this research was not to victimize refugee children; rather it was to draw attention to some of the presenting psychosocial issues that have been observed and brought forward by some of the students and the adult participants.

As the evidence in Chapter 4 illustrated, many of these children have displayed personal strength and perseverance, despite adversity. Having said this, it is necessary to investigate the positive coping mechanisms and the structures that have proven to help students as future programs for refugees are developed.

Mental health issues must be recognized. A small percentage of students do present with serious psychosocial issues that need immediate intervention. The data collected from certain participants in this study provided evidence that there are some serious mental health concerns affecting many of the children. In fact, some

could realistically argue that, because it is so difficult to detect a mental health issue, many of the psychological effects of war on children have been underestimated. It is negligent on the part of the school and the community to deny students the programs and services that could potentially help them deal with many of these issues. Moreover, if the school staff and agency workers do not have the skills and expertise to identify these issues in the children they work with, it is equally as problematic. What is worse, however, is recognizing the problem and not doing anything to address it.

Although there is evidence to suggest that many of these children forge ahead despite these issues, there is also evidence to suggest that many of the students keep many of these issues inside and they continue to suffer from headaches, nightmares, a lack of concentration, sadness, and other medically related symptoms. It is essential to acknowledge what the students have lived through, and accept how these experiences currently affect their lives, politically, spiritually, biologically, emotionally, and personally. Using a strengths-based approach and a personal capacity-based model to examine how the students adjust to life in Canada would provide a better platform on which to design programs that are linguistically and culturally appropriate to meet the unique needs of the students. Focusing on the symptoms, problems, and vulnerabilities of children does little to increase understanding about how these children adjust to their post-migration lives. Recognizing and building on the personal strengths and skills of each child provides the kind of education that liberates children and fosters the development of healthy citizens.

*Environmental Challenges*

Unique to this study on children who had been affected by war was a research design that provided a broad cross-section of participants from numerous ecological systems. Moreover, the design contributed to a much broader contextual examination of the challenges that influenced the child's education and development. While teaching takes place within a building, education takes place in the ecological systems. As such, the investigation into the ecological systems must occur if we endeavour to reveal the challenges that compromise the students' education. Moreover, interventions to assist students must, therefore, be ecological.

The study revealed that students were isolated from the various systems of support in the community. A relationship between the lack of support for the students and a lack of interaction between the school and the various ecological systems was revealed. The result – everyone felt alone. The community environments functioned independently and the school functioned independently. The majority of the students relied on the school for support. However, most of the students were not aware of the support that the school could or would provide. Several recommendations were made for having a community mentor who would help the students and their families learn how to navigate the system and how to access services.

The findings clearly revealed conflict between the Aboriginal communities and the African communities. Tension between the two groups was fuelled with misunderstandings and ignorance, and it often resulted in conflict and violence. The findings revealed that there were clearly two disenfranchised groups, who were competing for territory and resources. This was exacerbated by the fact that both

groups were living in close proximity to each other in an impoverished area of the city that was already struggling to address the needs of the community members. Evidence from this study demonstrates that the conflict and violence have continued to erupt in the community to the point that lives have been lost. While this study focused on only the perspective of the newcomers to Canada, several participants clearly indicated that they do not feel safe in the city and live in fear that they will be mistaken for a gang member and arbitrarily attacked on the street.

While some of the tension between the African students and the Aboriginal students was racially driven, much of it was also the result of an overall weakened ecological system that could not provide resources to its members. Moreover, both groups struggled to access resources in an environment that was being depleted of its human and social capital. Selling drugs, prostitution, and other forms of criminal activity lured students who were financially at risk and who were unsuccessful in school. Gang involvement was a means of protection from other marginalized groups. The findings in this study suggest that keeping students in school is paramount and, to do this, the collaborative efforts of the various ecological systems are crucial. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) indicated that the most significant outcome for second generation immigrants depended upon whether or not they stayed in school. In revealing the deficiencies in the ecological model and the difficulties this posed to the students in this study, the findings further reinforce the necessity of strengthening the ecological systems, as well as improving the interactions that the school has with the various systems. In doing this, it is less likely that the school system or the individual will feel isolated.

*Research Question 3*

The following discussion relates to research question three: "What systems, structures, or programs assist with the process of adjustment for war-affected children who now attend school in Manitoba?" In addition, the following subsidiary question is also answered, "Who are the people who support the children from war-affected countries and what do they do to help?"

The systems, structures or programs that foster adjustment for the newcomer student are those that provide intensive and flexible programming that can adjust to meet the unique needs of each student. It is imperative that newcomer students are integrated into the school community and connected to people in the system who will provide assistance if the student encounters post-migration challenges. Programming must be flexible enough to address a wide-range of academic abilities and previous school experiences. Although language, literacy, and numeracy skills are paramount, so are socialization skills. Psychosocial support must also be provided in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner. Programs that foster positive interaction such as, tutoring, mentoring, and leadership development would be beneficial programs for newcomer students. Basic life skills and strategies for dealing with social and emotional issues such as, anger, depression, stress and anxiety would also be useful. Findings revealed that because of the multidimensional nature of the various challenges affecting children and their families, systems must interact more with each other and resources must be developed and shared amongst the various groups and organizations.

The people who support children from war-affected countries are those who take the time to personally connect with the student and who exhibit perseverance, patience and kindness. When these people are unsure of how to react or how to help, they are honest with students and they seek help from others so that they are better able to respond. The findings revealed the presence of an additional system that was much smaller than the microsystem. The nanosystem is a close interpersonal relationship or network that is integral to connecting the individual to the microsystem. The nanosystem is constructed by a significant person from the student's inner most microsystem. It could be a parent, a teacher, a coach, or a best friend. The nanosystem is a network, a connection, and a close relationship.

There was one person in particular who emerged in this study as being significant to the participants. Sandra developed a nanosystem within her room, where students felt safe, accepted and cared for. I could best describe her role as being similar to that of a parent. Students told her very confidential information about themselves and their families, and parents also indicated that she was a significant person in the lives of their son or daughter. She was also one of the people in the school who best knew about the pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration experiences of the students. That said, she was also one of the people who indicated that she did not know how much longer she would be able to continue what she was doing because the cost of caring was getting too high and she felt physically and emotionally exhausted.

The people who best support the children from war-affected countries are individuals from the microsystem who create a nanosystem that supports and cares

for the individual, who fosters their development and makes a marked difference in the outcomes of their lives. Students in this study offered several suggestions to teachers and the administrators to better assist children who have been affected by war. For the most part, these suggestions all contributed to improving the human capacity of those in the school system. This generation of refugees represents the future leaders, workers, and decision-makers of Canada. It is essential that their needs are acknowledged and their numerous challenges are addressed. Organizations and systems that nurture their development and autonomy must be fostered and individuals within these systems need to be supported. Specific changes must be made to address the systemic issues and challenges confronting refugee students and their families.

### *Research Question 4*

The following discussion relates to the fourth research question, "To what extent do the various ecological systems interact with and influence the refugee student's personal, social, and academic development?" In addition, the following subsidiary research questions will also be discussed (1) "How is the student affected by the various ecological systems?" (2) "How are the various ecological systems affected by the student?"

The findings revealed that the various systems were not interacting with each other, and this weakened the ecological system. The literature related to educational interventions for refugee children has discussed the importance of systems working together (Boothby et al., 2006; Hamilton & Moore, 2004; Rutter, 2006) but there is little empirical evidence to illustrate how the systems are currently functioning. This

study delineated how the school, the community, the family, and the peer group functioned in relative isolation from one another, and it provided evidence to substantiate the claim that the mesosystem, or the interactions between these systems, was deficient. Based on the findings from this study, a model of a well-functioning microsystem was developed. The mesosystem should not only represent the connections between the environments in the microsystem, it should also connect the microsystem to the exosystem.

Studies pertaining to refugees, immigrants and in the broad overarching domain of education infrequently address the effects that children have on the teacher. This reciprocal development, as Bronfenbrenner (2001) stated, suggests that learning and development go both ways. Findings support Bronfenbrenner's assertion and suggest that the teachers in this study have been greatly influenced by the lives of the refugee students. That said, the findings also revealed that working with children who are affected by war has physical and emotional consequences that are not always positive. This is further exacerbated with the failure of the system to adequately support those who are in a position to assist and facilitate change.

## Recommendations for Policy and Practice

This study was embedded within the field of educational administration and it was informed by the literature of critical theory and social justice. That said, the discussion will begin with recommendations to school leaders. The role of the school leader can greatly influence the overall culture of the school and can also be the driving force behind school reform (Fullan, 2001; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999). The findings discussed in Chapter 5 related to

educational challenges suggested that there is a need for stronger leadership and for school leaders to take action against issues related to injustice. Moreover, as was illustrated in Table 4.3 found in Chapter 4, participants from the microsystem most frequently discussed the need for the school to interact and work in partnership with other agencies and programs in the community. As both the literature and the findings in this study suggest, the role of the school leader is paramount to the process of guiding change and for creating a socially just system. The focus for the first set of recommendations directly targets what school leaders can do to improve the success of refugee students. Following this, recommendations will be offered for consideration by federal and provincial governments, local school divisions, and community agencies.

### *Recommendations for School Leaders*

School leaders have the ability to articulate a clear stand against war, violence and the abuse of human rights. Moreover, they are uniquely positioned within the school and the community to address issues of inequity, power and oppression. Training school leaders through administrator preparation programs, annual meetings, professional development seminars, conference proceedings, and journal articles are all means to create school leaders who are more committed to issues of social justice. School leaders can facilitate the transformation of the school culture, curriculum, and pedagogical practices to more appropriately meet the needs of refugee children.

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) developed six standards that were intended to improve the quality and integrity of school leaders

(Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996). Joseph Murphy, who was described previously in this thesis as a leading scholar in the field of educational administration, chaired the Consortium that was originally comprised of 24 member states. Presented in 1996, 40 states have now either adapted or adopted the ISLLC framework (Murphy, 2005a, 2005b). The most notable use of the standards is to form the basis of assessment and licensing of school leaders (Murphy, 2005a, 2005c). Several Canadian provinces and territories have also proposed standards for school leaders and have linked these to certification and training programs (Phillips, 2003). The province of Ontario, for example, has had a sophisticated program for principal certification for nearly fifty years (J. Stapleton, personal communication, June 11, 2007). Although some provinces have developed graduate training programs and certification for principals, a nationally recognized set of standards does not exist. For the purpose of this discussion, the ISLLC Standards provide the most comprehensive and solid platform on which to base the following recommendations and subsequent discussion.

Recognizing that the social fabric of society has changed, and will continue to change, the perspective of the Consortium was to "focus on the heart and soul of effective leadership" and the "creation of powerful learning environments" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996, p.8). While all six standards are relevant to the development of effective school leaders, the last three are of particular interest to this study and are stated as follows:

> *Standard 4*: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

> *Standard 5:* A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner
>
> *Standard 6:* A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

Standard 4 articulates the importance of creating and maintaining strong interactions within the various systems. The lack of interaction between the various systems and the school was the most frequently occurring theme discussed by members of the microsystem (See Table 4.3 on page 111.) Schools are an integral part of the larger community and as the findings revealed, the school is a fundamental system in the students' lives. That said, the school leader should facilitate the activities and processes that link the various systems that influence the child. It is advised that school leaders collaborate with parents and community groups by: (1) providing welcoming information (print, video, computer-based) in multiple languages represented in the community; (2) providing translation services to help parents and students who are not proficient in English; and (3) encouraging parents to attend school functions by eliminating barriers (language, work schedules, child care) that prohibit their involvement.

School leaders must also establish partnerships with refugee community groups and businesses to support the following: (1) mentoring and tutoring programs; (2) school-community liaison workers; and (3) increased opportunities for students to take part in sport and recreation activities. School leaders should also implement a school-based plan to encourage collaboration and to develop networks of support amongst the school staff in an effort to decrease feelings of isolation.

Before responding to the community's needs and interests, the school leader must first actively engage in dialogue with community members to learn about the prevailing issues. To assess the needs of the community, the following four recommendations are advanced: (1) school leaders should document specific demographic data pertaining to marginalized students and their achievement in school; (2) achievement data should be recorded throughout the year and there should be greater accountability for the achievement of all students; (3) school leaders should also collect data on the number of students accessing mental health services within the school community; and (4) school leaders should also engage in continuing conversations with the staff and students on issues related to social justice.

As Standard 5 states, the school leader must promote justice and equality. School administrators should exemplify the characteristics of ethical and moral behaviour and they should be the advocates for the children, their families, and the communities they serve. Evidence from this study suggested that it is essential for the school leader to set an example for the staff and the community by promoting equality, fairness, and respect. If the school leader does not exemplify these characteristics, the participants suggested that the overall tone and culture within the school will be adversely affected. When school leaders are committed to eradicating inequality and injustice, they will be able to recognize how the school system continues to marginalize and oppress certain groups of children. Moreover, they will be more apt to make changes to transform the system to better meet the needs of all students. Promoting justice requires reducing misunderstandings.

To promote the success of all students, school leaders should develop and implement pedagogical practices that strengthen the school culture. Theoharis' (2007) study found that schools that provided separate programs maintained the marginalization of particular students because students were provided inferior instruction. Over a span of four years, six out of the seven schools in his study eliminated segregated programs and all of these schools reported an increase in passing grades on local and state reading test achievement data for the English language learners. The findings in this study suggested that the school is the primary source of socialization and when ethnically-diverse students are not integrated, issues related to misunderstandings and misinterpretations between ethnic groups increase. Programs, such as sports or after-school drop-in clubs increase integration and contribute to greater cultural understanding and acceptance. Supporting these structures and programs will benefit all students, particularly those who have been marginalized. The practice of segregated English as an Additional Language programs should be reviewed to determine if this is the most appropriate educational environment for refugee children.

Promoting fairness equates to treating people equally. Although some would dispute this notion and suggest that it is impossible to treat people absolutely equally (Allison, 2005), it is a desirable goal and one that administrators should strive to achieve. School administrators should understand and utilize the legal system to protect the rights of all students and to serve as an advocate when the student's rights are not respected.

Standard 6 suggests that the administrator understands global issues that affect teaching and learning. School leaders should be knowledgeable about the issues concerning refugee children and they should use this knowledge to influence policy makers at the federal, provincial and school division levels. School leaders should also provide opportunities for staff to learn about the political, social, and cultural issues that influence students and the school community. School leaders must facilitate learning for all staff in the area of best practices for teaching English language learners. Issues related to teachers' attitudes and behaviours were one of the top ten most frequently occurring themes in the interviews with the school staff. The attitudes and behaviours that were discussed by the participants included: racism, discrimination, unfair treatment, exclusionary actions, and disrespectful comments. Most of the adult participants suggested that a lack of information about refugee students, combined with inadequate support for the staff, was what contributed to these counterproductive attitudes. That said, if these attitudes do exist and refugee students are treated in such a manner, then a comprehensive educational program is needed for all staff.

Findings in this study illustrated the need for school leaders to articulate a vision and direction for the school, to be a role model for moral and ethical behaviour and to respond to the diverse needs of the school community. Using the aforementioned standards as the overarching framework to improve the capacity of school administrators will promote the kind of leadership that is needed to respond to the changing needs of society. Implementing the stated recommendations will

promote the success of all students, including those who have come from countries of conflict.

*Recommendations for Federal and Provincial Government Departments*

The following recommendations are addressed to federal and provincial government departments. Findings revealed that one of the major barriers influencing student learning is financial difficulty. Current Federal Government funding for newcomers expires after a period of one year, which is an inadequate length of time to support all of the challenges associated with post-migration. Students who engage in full-time studies should be provided with financial support to keep them in school. The following two recommendations are advanced: (1) the financial commitment from the Federal Government must extend until the student completes secondary school; (2) the repayment of the government loan to pay for the airfare to come to Canada should be waived for all refugees.

Federal and Provincial Governments need to engage coherently in the discourse on social justice. The school system is not the only system that influences the lives of students. Changes that contribute to the liberation of marginalized individuals must occur in all levels of the ecological system. Underachieving or disengaged students are the responsibility of governments, communities, families, and schools. That said, policies, programs, structures, and systems to support refugee students must be derived from meaningful and collaborative discussions and planning at the federal, provincial, and local levels in concert with newcomers to Canada as well as refugee workers, refugee counsel, and refugee advocacy organizations.

Racism and discrimination was the most frequently referenced theme throughout all of the interviews. As Table 4.4 on page 111 revealed, students and members of the microsystem both most frequently discussed racism and discrimination as an overarching challenge for refugee students living in Canada. Citizenship and Immigration Canada should develop and implement an educational program for all citizens to promote the benefits of receiving newcomers. Anti-racism and sensitivity training should be taught to all government agencies (e.g., justice system, child welfare, education), as well as to the general public and the business sectors. It is imperative that the public opinion regarding the acceptance of refugees remains positive. Preventative and proactive programs must be in place to counteract any negative or anti-refugee discourse. Mediation and conflict resolution programs must be implemented in Manitoba schools to address the conflict between various cultures. In particular, the existing conflict between the Aboriginal students and the immigrant students requires immediate attention. In collaboration with Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth should establish a campaign to promote diversity and to combat racism and discrimination in all Manitoba schools.

The Provincial Government and Federal Government should provide funding to establish a locally-based Refugee Studies Centre to conduct research and to collect and disseminate information related to refugee issues. Similar to the Refugee Studies Centre in Oxford, this centre could be attached to a University and run under its existing structure of governance. The Refugee Studies Centre would conduct the following: (1) academic research related to refugee issues; (2) international advocacy

projects related to refugees; (3) education related to international development and global conflict; and (4) education and training for those who work with refugee children and their families. Because education and the roles of the people within the school community figured so prominently in the lives of the students, the centre would best be aligned with a faculty of education. Courses related to teaching children affected by war must be incorporated into the training programs for undergraduate and post-graduate teachers, counsellors, and administrators.

### *Recommendations for Local School Divisions*

The local school division should develop a team of experts who are knowledgeable on the issues related to the educational and psychosocial needs of refugee children. This team should consist of psychologists, trauma workers, counsellors, community liaison workers, resource teachers, school leaders, and other support agencies. This team of support people could be divisionally-based and be accessed by schools to assist children. Post-conflict and non-westernized models of psychosocial support must be available to all refugees. Evidence from this study clearly delineated issues related to the staff members feeling overwhelmed by the issues concerning refugee students. Moreover, staff members frequently indicated that they felt "unprepared" or "unable" to adequately meet the psychosocial needs of the students. Having a divisionally-based support team of people who are knowledgeable and skilled in the area of supporting refugee students is needed to both provide assistance to the students and to support the school staff.

There should be a designated staff member in each school to be the case manager or support person for refugee children. These people would work with the

transition support teams and other social agencies. Refugee support teachers would be based in each school where refugee students are enrolled. The percentage of time allocated for this position would vary depending on the number of refugee students in the school. The school division would need to ensure that staff is trained to assume these roles within the various schools.

It is recommended that school divisions consider offering courses outside of the typical school day or week to accommodate students and parents/caregivers who work. Weekend school programs or intensive newcomer support classes should be offered as an alternative to individuals who want to take additional courses or who need to upgrade. Findings in this study suggested that most students were desperate to improve their education. It is essential that school divisions accommodate the needs expressed by these students. The Federal Government should allocate funding to the Province so that alternative education programs are more accessible to newcomers.

School divisions must also provide psychosocial support to students and their families, particularly for issues related to loss, the separation of family members, violence exposure, gang awareness, and trauma. As the findings in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 revealed, these aforementioned challenges figured most prominently with participants in this study. Participants indicated that most of the educational programming for newcomers is focused on acquiring language and numeracy skills. It is recommended that school divisions make provisions for ensuring that local schools can offer appropriate psychosocial support to students. Support groups,

individual counselling, and classroom-based programs need to be implemented by qualified individuals who understand issues related to refugee students.

It is imperative that school divisions develop policy for the provision of English as an Additional Language programs. There must also be a serious commitment from local school divisions in the form of financial support and professional development to improve the outcomes for English language learners.

*Recommendations for Community Agencies*

A centralized reception centre for refugees must be able to provide long-term support to newcomers. As the findings revealed, the current reception centre is primarily for short-term relocation assistance and the current needs of the community can not be appropriately met because of limited resources. The existing reception centre relies on funding from the Federal Government, the Provincial Government, private foundations, individual donors and the faith community. Evidence from this study suggests that additional services are needed to mediate many of the continuing challenges for newcomers. Increasing services would necessitate the commitment of additional resources from the aforementioned funding sources.

The proposed centre would initially assist families and their children with settling into a school and the community and then it would also extend services to long-term post-migration assistance. A reception centre should include the following services: legal assistance, psychosocial counselling, family mediation, personal health and nutrition counselling, advocacy assistance, parenting classes, English language support for parents and children, preschool programs, technology education, career development courses, and information on the rights and

responsibilities of Canadians. Individuals within these aforementioned agencies would benefit from taking part in continuing discussions for the purpose of improving collaborative relationships and more interactive networks to support newcomers in Manitoba.

Findings revealed that many of the students felt disappointed that their lives in Canada were not what they had imagined. It is advised that the services of the agencies who sponsor refugees as well as the services in the aforementioned reception centre extend to include pre-migration and trans-migration education and counselling for refugees. All refugees should be knowledgeable about what to expect before they immigrate to Canada.

The recommendations derived from this study are not limited to those in the field of education. The issues revealed in this study extend beyond the educational setting to the broader sociological, political, and ideological foundations of the culture in which we live. Canada has made a commitment to the international community with the Responsibility to Protect Document (The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2001), that makes every state responsible for protecting the basic human rights of all of its citizens. "The responsibility to protect implies the responsibility not just to prevent and react but to follow through and rebuild" (The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2001, p. 39).

As a country, Canada needs to begin by taking a closer look at its responsibility to protect citizens within its own national boundaries. Canada's responsibility to protect must expand in scope to include its role to react, prevent and

to help rebuild the lives of refugee children and their families after they have immigrated to Canada. Coordinated support services are urgently needed to facilitate the positive transition of these children into Canadian society. Moreover, it is imperative that the people in the educational system acquire more knowledge about the experiences of refugee children to facilitate and foster a positive and productive learning environment for these students. Canada has agreed to welcome refugees into the country; as such, it is necessary to articulate what will be done to help these people be successful and productive members of society. This study revealed that many of these individuals are poised for achievement and success if the barriers that have been imposed are recognized and removed.

As Tavares and MacKay (2005) delineated, there was clearly a problem with how well Manitoba educators believed they were addressing the needs of newcomers. It is now imperative to articulate the issues and problems that were revealed in this study and to do something about them. The problems, challenges, and suggestions for change offered within this document must be disseminated to decision-makers and policy makers at the federal, provincial, and local level. Without key people understanding the problems and the effects that these problems pose to all of society, little progress will be made towards improvement. If helping refugee children is not done for purely altruistic reasons, then surely society can acknowledge that it is in its own best interest to provide these children an appropriate education and to keep them in school.

## Suggestions for Further Research

In addition to the common suggestion to replicate this study in a different context, the following recommendations for further studies are advanced:

1. From the beginning of this study, during the phase of accessing participants, the role of females became increasingly different from that of the males. It was much more difficult to find females to participate, as many of them declined to participate stating they would be in trouble with their parents. Numerous references to gender inequality were made throughout the study. Studies related to gender differences between newcomer youth and their subsequent adjustment to a host society would be intriguing and worthy of closer examination.

2. Many of the school-initiated programs do little more than offer English language programs for refugee students. Studies that implement English programs and psychosocial support programs need to be more thoroughly explored. Using the challenges model as outlined in Figure 5.1, research is needed to explore programs, structures, and systems designed to mediate the effects that these challenges have on refugee students.

3. Additional research is needed on the resilience and protective factors of newcomer youth. Although the resilience literature is robust, there is a paucity of literature related to the resilience factors pertaining to refugee children, and even less that investigates refugee children in the contexts in which they live (Witmer & Culver, 2001).

4. The nanosystem, as outlined on Figure 6.1, emerged as an integral network and relationship that is formed to support the student and to mediate many of the risk

factors in his or her life. An in-depth investigation into the qualities of these influential people who make up the nanosystem and a more thorough examination of how this system functions within the microsystem would be most beneficial.

5. Action research would provide a platform for educators of refugee children to build consensus on useful and practical strategies for working with refugee children and for developing partnerships with the various ecological systems. Participatory action research with the refugee children, their families, and the ecological systems could offer valuable insight into how best to facilitate the liberation of these people.

6. A multi-disciplinary longitudinal study on the adjustment of refugee children in Canada is needed. Researchers from sociology, psychology, education, demography, anthropology, public-policy, political science and theology could potentially provide the most comprehensive, multi-ecological perspective that could yield invaluable insights into how the ecological systems collectively contribute to the adjustment of refugees in Canada. This research could also assist with the development of sustainable collaborative networks to support newcomers in Canada.

## Summary and Conclusion

This study investigated and analyzed the psychosocial and educational needs of children who have been affected by war. Applying a qualitative research design and using a case study approach, the four research questions were explored using an ecological framework. An analysis of the data generated a greater understanding of the experiences and challenges that students have when they attend school in Manitoba. The findings were reported in Chapters 4 through 7 and they supported my original assertion that changes must occur if we hope to transform our schools

into safe, accepting, and empowering systems that support all children. The final chapter concluded the thesis and discussed the findings in relation to existing research and literature. A rationale supported the need for change, and recommendations for practice and policy development were offered.

With the commitment of individuals who are willing to address the plight of war-affected children with a sense of urgency and expediency, there is hope that these children will receive the basic entitlements and the appropriate education that they deserve.

Using Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (2001) as the theoretical framework for this study, confirmed that a multi-ecological and coordinated program to support refugee children would likely ameliorate many of the challenges that they experience. Instead of working with children as isolated individuals, there needs to be more culturally-appropriate and contextually-inclusive approaches that focus on children who are part of a much larger ecological system. The investigation also revealed the centrality of a key member from the microsystem who created a much smaller and more intimate network of support for the student that mediated many of their adjustment challenges. The emergence of a nanosystem was revealed when closely examining how the various systems functioned, how they interacted with each other, and how they supported the student. The addition of the nanosystem does not contradict the propositions set forth by Bronfenbrenner; rather, it illustrates the power of the proximal processes and the resulting networks that are created to support students who are in need.

As a country, Canada has a responsibility to protect refugee children and this includes the implementation of specific recommendations to help rebuild and reconstruct their lives post-migration. There should be a genuine and sincere commitment from the Canadian government, the Manitoba government, the local school divisions, and the school community that ensures children who have been affected by war will be protected and supported after they immigrate to Canada.

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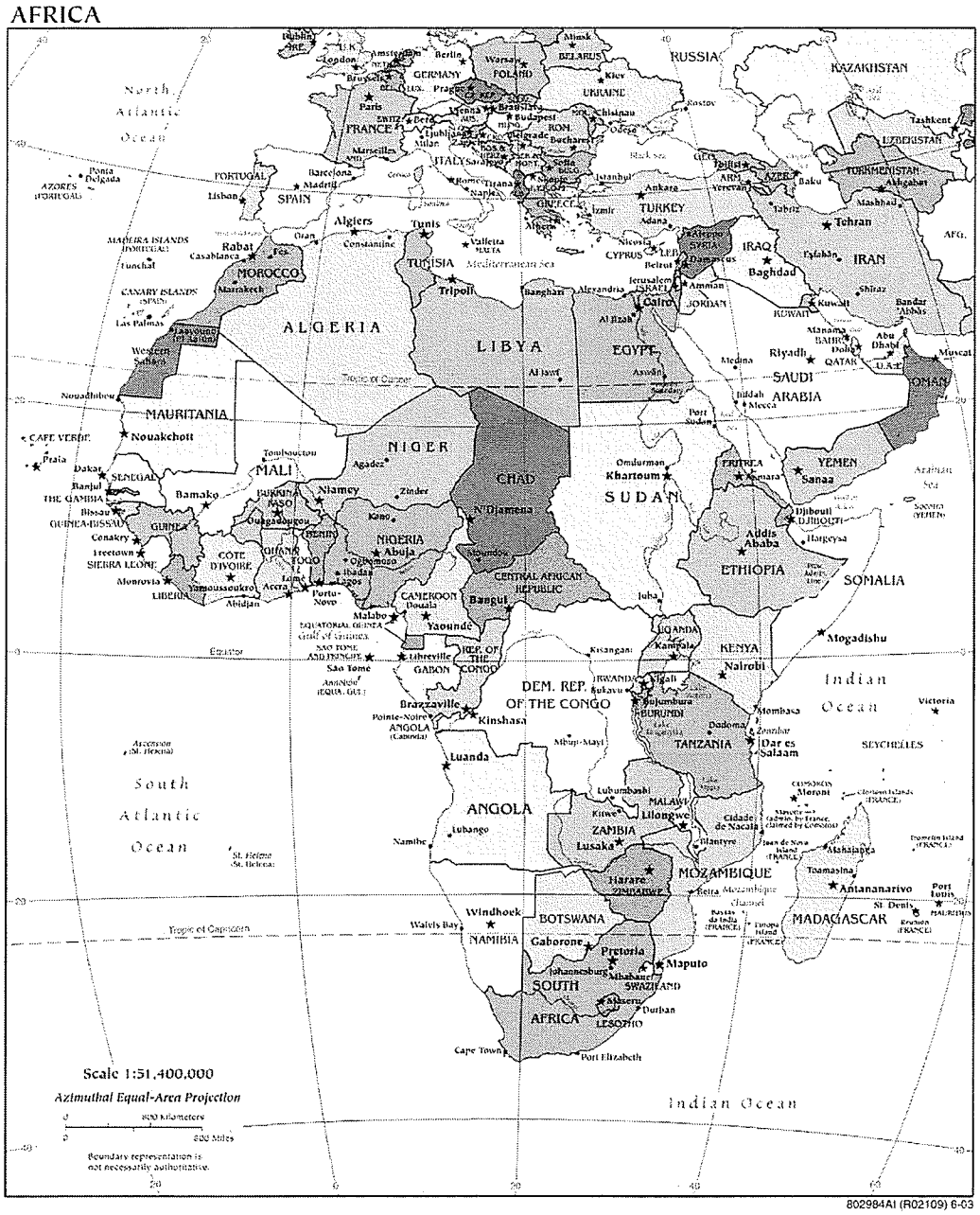
**Copyrighted Material for which Written Permission was Obtained**

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# Appendix A. Map of Africa




Source: Central Intelligence Agency. The World Factbook (2006).

## Appendix B. Form 1 (F1) Interview Questions for Student Participants

Individual interviews will follow the script and questions as closely as possible. Slight modifications in wording, may be necessary at the time of the interview, depending on how the participants respond to the individual questions.

Researcher (J. Stewart): I am a Ph.D. student at The University of Manitoba and I am conducting research on how schools can do a better job at helping students who have come from countries affected by war. I am particularly interested in talking to you to better understand the issues and to learn how we can help newcomers in Canadian schools. (*The wording of the purpose has changed to accommodate the comprehension level of a typical high school student.)*

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be interviewed for approximately 90 minutes, but not more than 2 hours. The interview will be tape recorded so that I can transcribe it and analyze it later. All of the tapes will be transcribed and then stored in a locked cabinet with all of the transcripts.

Whether you participate or not is entirely voluntary. You will have the right to withdraw (*drop out*) from the study at any time without penalty. I will keep your identity and comments confidential throughout and beyond this study. In the event that you tell me that you or someone you know is in personal danger or is physically threatened, by law, I must tell someone who can help me help you. In this case, it will not be possible to keep your name confidential.

When I have completed the transcription of this interview, I will provide you with a copy of the transcript for your review. You will have the opportunity to delete any comments that you do not want to remain a part of the study. You will have the right at any time to remove or alter any quotes or comments that you feel are misrepresented or inaccurate. At the completion of this study, I will send you a general summary of the findings, at your request. For the purpose of maintaining your anonymity, I will assign you a pseudonym (alternate name) for any written or oral summary, analysis, or interpretation of results. I also ask that you keep your own comments that you make during the interview confidential.

You can indicate that you understand the nature of the study and the conditions for participating by reading and signing the letter of consent that I will provide for you. Please read over the letter to make sure that you understand the nature of this study, and feel free to ask me any questions that you might have. When you are ready, you may sign the letters and we will begin the interview.

*When the participant has signed the letters, the researcher will proceed with the following comments:*

(J. Stewart): I will ask you several questions, and I would like you to say as much as you would like to help me understand your responses. If possible, please provide examples to help explain your responses.

(1) Tell me a little about who you are, what country you originated from, how long you have been in Manitoba, and where you now live.

(2) Describe for me what it was like for you in your home country, before you came to Canada?
   (a) Who were you close with?
   (b) Did you attend school and if so what was it like?
   (c) What level of education did you have, prior to coming to Canada?

(3) What reason did you have for moving to Canada? Describe what process you went through to come to Canada? What was this experience like?

(4) Help me understand what your experiences have been since you have arrived in Manitoba?

(5) What are some of the challenges or obstacles that you encounter in school, and what has been your most difficult problem to overcome?

(6) What are some of the positive experiences that you have had since coming to Canada?

(7) Who are some of the people you spend most of your time with at school and in the community? What support do they provide to you?

(8) What do you think are some of the factors that affect how well students from war-affected countries fit in to schools in Canada?

(9) Have you experienced any racism or discrimination in school or in the community?

(10) What goals do you have for your future? What do you need to do in order to fulfill these goals? Are there any difficulties that may interfere with you achieving your goals?

(11) If you could tell teachers or the principal one thing that would help other children from war-affected countries, what would this be?
Prompt: In your opinion, what do you think the school system or community could do to assist you, or other students who have come from war-affected countries?

(12) Those are all of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add, or is there additional information pertaining to this study that you think I should know?

## Appendix C. Protocol for Optional Photography Activity

Thank you for answering all of the questions. I appreciate your help with this study. As I mentioned earlier, I have an optional activity that I would like ask if you would consider doing for me. This activity includes collecting pictures to help me better understand your daily experiences and to help me understand who you are as an individual. The pictures you take will help me understand what is important to you as well as to provide me with insight into your personal perspectives. In other words, I would like you to take pictures that tell a story about who you are.

The camera will be another research tool that I would like to use to collect information about details that I might not get from an interview. The pictures will help me in much the same way that the tape recorder was used to tape the interview we just had. It will help to put together information that might otherwise be forgotten or go unnoticed. I thought this might be a better way of understanding your experiences without actually being there.

Each camera has enough film for over 500 pictures. The purpose of this activity is to teach me about the places you visit, the people you interact with, as well as the objects or symbols that are meaningful to you. If you take pictures of people (e.g., family, friends, teachers), it is important that you get permission to take their picture and that they understand how the pictures will be used in our discussion following the activity. First ask the person if they will allow you to take their picture and then ask them to read and sign the letter of consent if they agree to participate. If they do not agree to have their picture taken, please do not take it. You are legally entitled to take pictures of any public space or people in those public spaces without a letter of consent, although it is advisable to always ask someone for their permission, before taking their picture. All of the pictures you take will become my property and they will be destroyed after a period of three years after this study. The pictures will be used during a follow up discussion you and I will have after you have completed the activity. I will collect the camera from you when you are finished, and I will load the pictures onto my computer. I will then bring all of the pictures to our second interview meeting for you to discuss with me.

I will not include any pictures in the final report, we will simply use them for our discussion together. Unfortunately, I am only able to loan you one of these cameras, and I will have to collect them once the study is over. Would you like to take part in this activity?

*If the student wishes to take part in the photo collection, I will give them a camera and set a time and place for our next meeting. If they do not want to take part, I will thank them once again for talking with me.*

---

**Follow Up Interview to Discuss Photo Collection**

(1) Tell me about your collection of photos.

(2) What do these pictures say about you and your experiences?

## Appendix D. Form 2 (F2) Interview Questions for Adult Participants from the Microsystem

Individual interviews will follow the script and questions as closely as possible. Slight modifications in wording, may be necessary at the time of the interview depending on how the participants respond to the individual questions.

Researcher (J. Stewart): The purpose of this study is to examine the psychosocial needs and the educational challenges that children affected by war encounter while attending school in Manitoba and to generate recommendations for the school and community to assist the students. I am particularly interested in how Manitoba schools can more effectively meet the psychological, social, and academic needs of students who have come from war-affected countries.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be interviewed for approximately one hour, but not more than 90 minutes. The interview will be tape recorded so that I can transcribe it and analyze it at a later time.

Whether you participate or not is entirely voluntary. You will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I will keep your identity and comments confidential throughout and beyond this study. When I have completed the transcription of this interview, I will provide you with a copy of the transcript for your review. You will have the opportunity to delete any comments that you do not want to remain a part of the study. You will have the right at any time to remove or alter any quotes or comments that you feel are misrepresented or inaccurate. At the completion of this study, I will send you a general summary of the findings, at your request. For the purpose of maintaining your anonymity, I will assign you a pseudonym (alternate name) for any written or oral summary, analysis, or interpretation of results. I also ask that you keep your own comments that you make during the interview confidential.

You can indicate that you understand the nature of the study and the conditions for participating by reading and signing the letter of consent that I will provide for you. Please read over the letter to make sure that you understand the nature of this study, and feel free to ask me any questions that you might have. When you are ready, you may sign the letters and we will begin the interview.

*When the participant has signed the letters, the researcher will proceed with the following comments:*
(J. Stewart): I will ask you several questions, and I would like you to say as much as you would like to help me understand your responses. If possible, please provide examples to help explain your responses.

(1) What do you know about some of the experiences that war-affected children have had pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration?

(2) What do you believe are some of the challenges or obstacles that students from war-affected countries encounter in Manitoba schools?

(3) In your opinion, what do you think the school system or community

could do to better assist students who have come from war-affected countries?
Prompt: What systems, structure or programs are needed?
Prompt: Who are the people who should be involved?

(4) How do you think the various systems in the environment (e.g., health care, school board, community agencies) affect the personal, social and academic development of the war-affected student?

(5) To follow up on the previous question, how do these various systems interact with and influence the student? How could these interactions be improved to better support war-affected children?

(6) How have you personally and professionally changed as a result of working with children from war-affected countries? (question not posed to parents)

(7) How well do you think war-affected children adapt to Canadian school systems? What factors contribute to their adaptation?

(8) In your opinion, do you think Manitoba schools, in general, are doing a good job at helping war-affected children? What do you think schools are doing well? What needs to improve?

(9) What happens to war-affected children who do not adapt well to the school? Have some of these students voluntarily left school or have they been forced to leave school?

(10) Do you believe that racism or discrimination occurs in schools towards war-affected children?

(11) In a perfect world what would you do to best support the war-affected children in your school or community?

(12) Those are all of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add, or is there additional information pertaining to this study that you think I should know?

## Appendix E. Questions for Administrators Only.

The two interviews with the principal and vice-principal will include the addition of the following questions that will contribute to developing a profile of Walter Duncan School. I will begin with the following questions:

(1) How would you describe Walter Duncan School?

(2) Comment on the demographics of your school population and surrounding community.

(3) What makes your school unique from other high schools in this province?

## Appendix F. Form 3 (F3) Interview Questions for the Focus Groups (N=11)

The Focus Group interview will follow the script and questions as closely as possible. Slight modifications in wording may be necessary at the time of the interview depending on how the participants respond to the individual questions.

Researcher (J. Stewart): The purpose of this study is to examine the psychosocial needs and the educational challenges that children affected by war encounter while attending school in Manitoba and to generate recommendations for the school and community to assist the students. I am particularly interested in how Manitoba schools can more effectively meet the psychological, social, and academic needs of students who have come from war-affected countries.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be a part of this discussion group for approximately 90 minutes, but not longer than two hours. The discussion will be tape recorded so that I can transcribe it and analyze it later.

Whether you participate or not is entirely voluntary. You will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I will keep your identity and comments confidential throughout and beyond this study. When I have completed the transcription of this interview, I will provide you with a copy of the transcript for your review. You will have the opportunity to delete any comments that you do not want to remain a part of the study. You will have the right at any time to remove or alter any quotes or comments that you feel are misrepresented or inaccurate. At the completion of this study, I will send you a general summary of the findings, at your request. For the purpose of maintaining your anonymity, I will assign you a pseudonym (alternate name) for any written or oral summary, analysis, or interpretation of results. I also ask that you keep your own comments that you make during the interview confidential. Before we proceed with the group discussion, I would like all members to sign a promise of confidentiality to emphasize the importance of keeping information we discuss confined to the group only.

There are no right or wrong answers and you do not have to agree with everyone else in the room. It is expected that everyone will have different views and perspectives on the issues and it is important to learn about these views in this discussion.

You can indicate that you understand the nature of the study and the conditions for participating by reading and signing the letter of consent and the promise of confidentiality that I will provide for you. Please read over the letter to make sure that you understand the nature of this study, and feel free to ask me any questions that you might have. When you are ready, you may sign the letters and we will begin the discussion.

*When the participants have signed the letters, the researcher will proceed with the following comments:*

(J. Stewart): I will ask the group several general discussion questions. I will give each participant the opportunity to respond. You have the right to pass at any time, if you do not wish to respond. Because the intent is to discuss issues together, if you would like to respond to another person's comments, please indicate that you would like a turn to speak by signaling to me at any time. I will now proceed with the first question.

(1) What do you believe are some of the challenges or obstacles that students from war-affected countries encounter, when they attend Manitoba schools?

(2) In your opinion, what do you think the school system or community could do to better assist students who have come from war-affected countries?
Prompt: What systems, structures, or programs are needed to help war affected children be more successful in school?
Prompt: Who are the people who could best support students who are from war-affected countries?

(3) How do you think the various systems in the environment (e.g., health care, school board, community agencies) affect the personal, social and academic development of the war-affected student?

(4) To follow up on the previous question, how do these various systems interact with and influence the student? How could these interactions be improved to better support war-affected children?

(5) How have you personally and professionally changed as a result of working with children from war-affected countries?

(6) How well do you think students from war-affected countries adapt to Canadian school and society in general?

## Appendix G. Interview Questions for the Expert Group from the UK, Canada, and the United States

Researcher (J. Stewart): The purpose of this study is to examine the psychosocial needs and the educational challenges that children affected by war encounter while attending school in Manitoba and to generate recommendations for the school and community to assist the students. I am particularly interested in how Manitoba schools can more effectively meet the psychological, social, and academic needs of students who have come from war-affected countries. I am interested in talking with you because you are a noted expert in the field and because you have conducted extensive research in your country (UK, Canada, US) pertaining to the psychosocial and educational needs of war-affected children

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be interviewed for approximately 60 minutes, but not longer than 90 minutes. The interview will be tape recorded so that I can transcribe it and analyze it later. I will be identifying your name in the final report.

Whether you participate or not is entirely voluntary. You will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. When I have completed the transcription of this interview, I will provide you with a copy of the transcript for your review. You will have the opportunity to delete any comments that you do not want to remain a part of the study. You will have the right at any time to remove or alter any quotes or comments that you feel are misrepresented or inaccurate. At the completion of this study, I will send you a general summary of the findings, at your request.

You can indicate that you understand the nature of the study and the conditions for participating by reading and signing the letter of consent that I will provide for you. Please read over the letter to make sure that you understand the nature of this study, and feel free to ask me any questions that you might have. When you are ready, you may sign the letters and we will begin the discussion.

*When the participant has signed the letters, the researcher will proceed with the following comments:*
(J. Stewart): I will ask you several questions, and I would like you to say as much as you would like to help me understand your responses. If possible, please provide examples to help explain your responses.

(1) What do you believe are some of the challenges or obstacles that students from war-affected countries encounter, when they transition to a new school in a host country?

(2) In your opinion, what do you think the school system or community could do to better assist students who have come from war-affected countries?
Prompt: What systems, structures, or programs are needed to help war affected children be more successful in school?
Prompt: Who are the people who could best support students who are from war-affected countries?

(3) How do you think the various systems in the environment (e.g., health care, school board, community agencies) affect the personal, social and academic development of the war-affected student?

(4) To follow up on the previous question, how do these various systems interact with and influence the student? How could these interactions be improved to better support war-affected children?

(5) How have you personally and professionally changed as a result of working with children from war-affected countries?

(6) How well do you think students from war-affected countries adapt to school (in the UK/Candada/US) and society in general?

(7) Based on your experience, what is the most important issue that must be addressed if we are to more approporately address the psychosocial and the educational needs of children affected by war?

Prompt: What do we need (eg., resources, people, funding) to make this happen?

***NOTE: Prior to publication, telephone numbers were removed from the following letters of consent. Copies provided to the participants included the number.***

## Appendix H. Informed Consent Letter of Consent for Student Participants



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

*Research Project Title:* **Children Affected by War: A Bioecological Investigation into their Psychosocial and Educational Needs**

*Researcher:* **Janice Stewart**

*Sponsor:* The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), The Canadian Consortium on Human Security (CCHS) and The Human Security Program of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT)

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 the 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 the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

**Purpose of the Research:** The purpose of this study is to identify the personal and educational needs and challenges that war-affected children encounter while attending school in Manitoba.

**Procedure Involving Participants:** If you participate in the study, you will be interviewed by me (Jan Stewart) on two occasions, once for approximately 90 minutes, but not to exceed 2 hours and the second for approximately 60 minutes, but not to exceed 90 minutes. The time and place of the interviews will be arranged at your convenience. During the first interview, I will ask you questions pertaining to the following: your experiences coming to Canada and living in Manitoba, the challenges you have had as well as the successes you have encountered. I will also ask you to talk about how schools in Manitoba can better assist newcomer students who are from war-affected countries.

As an optional activity, I will also loan you a digital camera for the purpose of taking pictures so that you can help me understand the various systems that you interact with on a daily basis. If you choose to do this, I will have a second interview with you so that you can tell me about the pictures you have taken. This second interview will be after the pictures have been taken and developed. This second interview is entirely optional. If you wish, you can take part in only the first interview.

**Recording and Transcription:** I will tape record the interview and I will hire a transcriptionist to transcribe the information for later analysis. In my final report, I may choose to use direct quotations from you to support my findings or to illustrate a point. If you do not want to have the quotation in the final report, you will have the opportunity to remove it prior to the report being completed and submitted to the University.

**Confidentiality of Information**: Due to the fact that all of the student participants being interviewed will be connected to only one school in Manitoba, it will not be possible to remain completely anonymous. Because students and the school staff will be familiar with each other, it may be obvious to some readers of the final report which school or student is being discussed in the investigation. Nonetheless, I will make every effort to keep your involvement in this study confidential. I will assign you a pseudonym on all transcripts, field notes, or written reports and summaries of the study. I will also use a fictional name for the school and the school division you are referring to in the interview; although some of the information will be public knowledge and it may identify the school division you discuss. I will disguise any information that would uniquely identify you, if and when it occurs in the transcripts or field notes.

All of my notes and the tapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office at home. Any typed documents will be stored on my computer and a back up drive and both will be protected with a password. The tapes and notes will be destroyed in three years after the completion of the study. In the event that you tell me information that you, or someone you know, is in danger or is being hurt/abused, I must, by law tell someone who will help me ensure that you or the other person is safe. I will not be able to keep your name confidential, I will, however tell you who I will contact in order to help me assist you.

**Feedback About the Study:** Upon request, a final summary will be provide to you at the completion of the study.

**General Comments:** I will provide you a copy of this consent letter for your records. This letter is only one part of the process of informed consent, because it provides a basic idea of what the research is about and the details of your participation. If you would like further information regarding this letter or other details that are not mentioned, please feel free to ask.

Your signature at the bottom of this letter indicates that you understand to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research study, and that you agree to participate. In no way does the letter or your signature waive your legal rights, nor release me as the researcher from my legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, or to refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence, by simply contacting me at any stage of the study and by indicating that you no

longer wish to participate in the study. Following this request, all of the notes pertaining to you, and our taped interview will be destroyed. 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.

**Researcher's Contact Information: Jan Stewart:**

Email address: janstewart@mts.net

**Researcher's Supervisor:** **Dr. John Stapleton**

Email address: john_stapleton@umanitoba.ca

This research has been approved by the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

## Appendix I. Letter of Consent for Adult Participants (Interviews)



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

*Research Project Title:* **Children Affected by War: A Bioecological Investigation into their Psychosocial and Educational Needs**

*Researcher:* **Janice Stewart**

*Sponsor:* The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), The Canadian Consortium on Human Security (CCHS) and The Human Security Program of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT)

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 the 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 the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

**Purpose of the Research:** The purpose of this study is to identify the psychosocial and educational needs and challenges that war-affected children encounter while attending school in Manitoba.

**Procedure Involving Participants:** If you participate in the study, you will be interviewed by me (Jan Stewart) on one occasion for approximately 60 minutes, but not to exceed 90 minutes. The time and place of the interviews will be arranged at your convenience. During the first interview, I will ask you questions pertaining to the following: your experiences working with war-affected children, what you think the school or community should do to assist children from war-affected countries who live in Manitoba, the problems you think that war-affected children experience in schools and your opinions on how well these students adapt to Manitoba schools. I will also ask you to talk about how schools in Manitoba can better assist newcomer students who are from war-affected countries.

**Recording and Transcription:** I will tape record the interview and I will hire a transcriptionist to transcribe the information for later analysis. In my final report, I may choose to use direct quotations from you to support my findings or to illustrate a point.

**Confidentiality of Information:** Due to the fact that all of the participants being interviewed will be connected to only one school in Manitoba, it will not be possible to remain completely anonymous. Because students, the school staff, and some community members will be familiar with each other, it may be obvious to some readers of the final report which school, student or community organization is being discussed in the investigation. Nonetheless, I will make every effort to keep your involvement in this study confidential. I will assign you a pseudonym on all transcripts, field notes, or written reports and summaries of the study. I will also use a fictional name for the school and the school division you are referring to in the interview; although some of the information will be

public knowledge and it may identify the school or school division you discuss. I will disguise any information that would uniquely identify you, if and when it occurs in the transcripts or field notes.

All of my notes and the tapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office at home. Any typed documents will be stored on my computer and a back up drive, and both will be protected with a password. The tapes and notes will be destroyed in three years after the completion of the study.

**Feedback About the Study:** Upon request, a final summary will be provide to you at the completion of the study.

**General Comments:** I will provide you a copy of this consent letter for your records. This letter is only one part of the process of informed consent, because it provides a basic idea of what the research is about and the details of your participation. If you would like further information regarding this letter or other details that are not mentioned, please feel free to ask.

Your signature at the bottom of this letter indicates that you understand to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research study, and that you agree to participate. In no way does the letter or your signature waive your legal rights, nor release me as the researcher from my legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, or to refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence by simply contacting me at any stage of the study and by indicating that you no longer wish to participate in the study. Following this request, all of my notes and our taped interview will be destroyed. 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.

**Researcher's Contact Information: Jan Stewart:**

Email address: janstewart@mts.net

**Researcher's Supervisor:** **Dr. John Stapleton**

Email address: john_stapleton@umanitoba.ca

This research has been approved by the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

## Appendix J. Letter of Consent for Adult Participants (Focus Group)



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

*Research Project Title:* **Children Affected by War: A Bioecological Investigation into their Psychosocial and Educational Needs**

*Researcher:* **Janice Stewart**

*Sponsor:* The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), The Canadian Consortium on Human Security (CCHS) and The Human Security Program of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT)

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 the 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 the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

**Purpose of the Research:** The purpose of this study is to identify the psychosocial and educational needs and challenges that war-affected children encounter while attending school in Manitoba.

**Procedure Involving Participants:** If you participate in the study, you will participate in a group discussion facilitated by me (Jan Stewart) on one occasion for approximately 90 minutes, but not to exceed 2 hours. During the discussion, I will ask you questions pertaining to the following: your experiences working with war-affected children, what you think the school or community should do to assist children from war-affected countries who live in Manitoba, the problems you think that war-affected children experience in schools and your opinions on how well these students adapt to Manitoba schools. I will also ask you to talk about how schools in Manitoba can better assist newcomer students who are from war-affected countries.

**Recording and Transcription:** I will tape record the discussion and I will hire a transcriptionist to transcribe the information for later analysis. . In my final report, I may choose to use direct quotations from you to support my findings or to illustrate a point.

**Confidentiality of Information:** Due to the fact that many of the members in the focus group will be known to others in the city, it will not be possible to remain completely anonymous. Because students, the school staff, and some community members will be familiar with each other, it may be obvious to some readers of the final report which school, student or community organization is being discussed in the investigation. Nonetheless, I will make every effort to keep your involvement in this study confidential. I will assign you a pseudonym on all transcripts, field notes, or written reports and summaries of the study. I will also use a fictional name for the school and the school division you are referring to in the interview; although some of the information will be public knowledge and it may

identify the school, school division or community agency you discuss. I will disguise any information that would uniquely identify you, if and when it occurs in the transcripts or field notes. To protect the confidentiality of all of the participants, I would like to ask all members to sign a promise of confidentiality before we proceed.

All of my notes and the tapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office at home. Any typed documents will be stored on my computer and a back up drive, and both will be protected with a password. The tapes and notes will be destroyed in three years after the completion of the study.

**Feedback About the Study:** Upon request, a final summary will be provide to you at the completion of the study.

**General Comments:** I will provide you a copy of this consent letter for your records. This letter is only one part of the process of informed consent, because it provides a basic idea of what the research is about and the details of your participation. If you would like further information regarding this letter or other details that are not mentioned, please feel free to ask.

Your signature at the bottom of this letter indicates that you understand to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research study, and that you agree to participate. In no way does the letter or your signature waive your legal rights, nor release me as the researcher from my legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, or to refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence by simply contacting me at any stage of the study and by indicating that you no longer wish to participate in the study. Following this request, all of the notes pertaining to you will be destroyed. I will not be able to destroy the whole focus group discussion tape, however, I will omit all of your comments in the transcribed version of the group discussion notes. 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.

**Researcher's Contact Information:** **Jan Stewart:**

Email address: janstewart@mts.net

**Researcher's Supervisor:** **Dr. John Stapleton**

Email address: john_stapleton@umanitoba.ca

This research has been approved by the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

## Appendix K. Letter of Consent for Adult Participants (Expert Group)



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

*Research Project Title:* **Children Affected by War: A Bioecological Investigation into their Psychosocial and Educational Needs**

*Researcher:* **Janice Stewart**

*Sponsor:* The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), The Canadian Consortium on Human Security (CCHS) and The Human Security Program of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT)

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 the 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 the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

**Purpose of the Research:** The purpose of this study is to identify the psychosocial and educational needs and challenges that war-affected children encounter while attending school in Manitoba. Based on your experiences and your research in this area, I am particularly interested in learning about some of these issues from your perspective.

**Procedure Involving Participants:** If you participate in the study, you will participate in an interview conducted by me (Jan Stewart) on one occasion for approximately 60 minutes, but not to exceed 90 minutes. During the discussion, I will ask you questions pertaining to the following: your experiences working with war-affected children, what you think the school or community should do to assist children from war-affected countries, the problems you think that war-affected children experience in schools and your opinions on how well these students adapt to schools in your country. I will also ask you to talk about how schools can better assist newcomer students who are from war-affected countries.

**Recording and Transcription:** I will tape record the discussion and I will hire a transcriptionist to transcribe the information for later analysis. . In my final report, I may choose to use direct quotations from you to support my findings or to illustrate a point.

**Confidentiality of Information:** Due to the fact that you are being interviewed as a leading expert in the field, I would like to disclose your identity in this study. I will not disclose any information related to any third party individuals or groups. I will use a fictional name for any reference to a school or community that you may discuss; although some of the information will be public knowledge and it may identify the school, school division or community agency you discuss. All of my notes and the tapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office at home. Any typed documents will be stored on my computer and a back up drive, and both will be protected with a password. The tapes and notes will be destroyed in three years after the completion of the study.

**Feedback About the Study:** Upon request, a final summary will be provide to you at the completion of the study.

**General Comments:** I will provide you a copy of this consent letter for your records. This letter is only one part of the process of informed consent, because it provides a basic idea of what the research is about and the details of your participation. If you would like further information regarding this letter or other details that are not mentioned, please feel free to ask.

Your signature at the bottom of this letter indicates that you understand to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research study, and that you agree to participate. In no way does the letter or your signature waive your legal rights, nor release me as the researcher from my legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, or to refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence by simply contacting me at any stage of the study and by indicating that you no longer wish to participate in the study. Following this request, all of the notes pertaining to you will be destroyed. I will not be able to destroy the whole focus group discussion tape, however, I will omit all of your comments in the transcribed version of the group discussion notes. 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.

**Researcher's Contact Information:** **Jan Stewart:**

Email address: janstewart@mts.net

**Researcher's Supervisor:** **Dr. John Stapleton**

Email address: john_stapleton@umanitoba.ca

This research has been approved by the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

## Appendix L. Promise of Confidentiality

This form is intended to protect the confidentiality of what members of this discussion group say during the course of this study, *Children Affected by War: A Bioecological Investigation into their Psychosocial and Educational Need.* Please read the following statement and sign your name indicating that you agree to comply.

**I promise that I will not communicate or talk about the information discussed during the course of this focus group discussion with anyone outside of my fellow focus group members and the facilitator.**

**Date:** _____

**Name:** _____

**Signature:** _____

**Facilitator's Signature:** _____

## Appendix M. Letter of Consent from Parent/Guardian (<18)



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

*Research Project Title:* **Children Affected by War: A Bioecological Investigation into their Psychosocial and Educational Needs**

*Researcher:* **Janice Stewart**

*Sponsor:* The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), The Canadian Consortium on Human Security (CCHS) and The Human Security Program of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT)

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 the basic idea of what the research is about and the nature of the study in which I have asked your child to participate. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

**Purpose of the Research:** The purpose of this study is to identify the psychosocial and educational needs and challenges that war-affected children encounter while attending school in Manitoba.

**Procedure Involving Participants:** If your child participates in the study, he/she will be interviewed by me (Jan Stewart) on one occasion for approximately 60 minutes, but not to exceed 90 minutes. The time and place of the interviews will be arranged at his or her convenience. During the first interview, I will ask him/her questions pertaining to the following: their experiences coming to Canada and living in Manitoba, the challenges they have had as well as the successes they have encountered. I will also ask him/her about what they think schools in Manitoba could do to better assist newcomer students who are from war-affected countries. As an optional activity, I will also provide him/her with a digital camera for the purpose of taking pictures so that I can learn about the various systems that they interact with on a daily basis. If they choose to do this, I will have a second interview with them so that they can tell me about the pictures they have taken. This second interview will be after the pictures have been taken and developed. This second interview is entirely optional.

**Recording and Transcription:** I will tape record the interview and I will hire a transcriptionist to transcribe the information for later analysis. In my final report, I may choose to use direct quotations that the student has taken to support my findings or to illustrate a point.

**Confidentiality of Information:** Due to the fact that all of the participants being interviewed will be connected to only one school in Manitoba, it will not be possible to remain completely anonymous. Because students, the school staff, and some community members will be familiar with each other, it may be obvious to some readers of the final report which school, student or community organization is being discussed in the

investigation. Nonetheless, I will make every effort to keep the student's involvement in this study confidential. I will assign the student a pseudonym on all transcripts, field notes, or written reports and summaries of the study. I will also use a fictional name for the school and the school division your child refers to in the interview; although some of the information will be public knowledge and it may identify the school or school division discussed. I will disguise any information that would uniquely identify your child, if and when it occurs in the transcripts or field notes.

All of my notes and the tapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office at home. Any typed documents will be stored on my computer and a back up drive, and both will be protected with a password. The tapes and notes will be destroyed in three years after the completion of the study.

**Feedback About the Study:** Upon request, a final summary will be provide to you and your child at the completion of the study.

**General Comments:** I will provide you a copy of this consent letter for your records. This letter is only one part of the process of informed consent, because it provides a basic idea of what the research is about and the details of your child's participation. If you would like further information regarding this letter or other details that are not mentioned, please feel free to ask.

Your signature at the bottom of this letter indicates that you understand to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research study, and that you agree to allow your child to participate. In no way does the letter or your signature waive your legal rights, nor release me as the researcher from my legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw your child from the study at any time, without prejudice or consequence, by simply contacting me at any stage of the study and by indicating that you no longer wish your child to participate in the study. Following this request, all of the notes or taped interviews concerning your child will be destroyed. Your child's continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or for new information throughout the duration of the study.

**Researcher's Contact Information:** **Jan Stewart:**

Email address: janstewart@mts.net

**Researcher's Supervisor:** **Dr. John Stapleton**

Email address: john_stapleton@umanitoba.ca

This research has been approved by the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

## Appendix N. Letter of Consent to be Photographed

**I agree to have my picture taken by _____ (name of student).**

I am aware that this picture will be discussed by the above mentioned student as part of a research study conducted with Jan Stewart who is a doctoral student at The University of Manitoba. The name of the research study is, *Children Affected by War: A Bioecological Investigation into their Psychosocial and Educational Needs.*

The student participants in this study have been asked to take pictures of places, symbols, or people that will help the researcher better understand their daily experiences and interactions. The researcher is attempting to understand how the various people and systems in the city support children who have been affected by war. She is also trying to more fully understand the challenges that youth encounter when they are new to a city and school community.

I am fully aware that my identity may be discussed in an interview with the participant and the researcher. This picture will not be made public in any form, either paper or electronic.

Should you change your mind at any time, or you no longer agree to providing consent for your picture to be used, please contact Jan Stewart and the picture (and file storage) will be destroyed. The researcher will maintain ownership of the pictures and the electronic storage of the pictures. All of the pictures and the electronic storage of the picture files will be destroyed after a period of three years following the completion of the study. The pictures will not be used for any other purpose other than to assist with the discussion between the student and the researcher. The student will bring his or her pictures to a follow-up meeting with the researcher to discuss the nature of the pictures and help the researcher learn about the various experiences that the student has had. These pictures will be discussed only with the researcher then they will be locked in a file upon completion of the discussion.

**Researcher's Contact Information: Jan Stewart:**

Email address: janstewart@mts.net

This research has been approved by the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. **The signature below indicates that you have read this form and that you agree to have your picture taken and that you give permission for the researcher to publish the picture in the final report (electronic and paper format).**

**Your signature _____ Date _____**

## Appendix O. University of Manitoba Ethics Approval Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA | OFFICE OF RESEARCH SERVICES
Office of the Vice-President (Research)

CTC Building
208 - 194 Dafoe Road
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
Fax (204) 269-7173
www.umanitoba.ca/research

### APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

17 November 2006

**TO:** **Janice L. Stewart** (Advisor J. Stapleton)
Principal Investigator

**FROM:** **Stan Straw, Chair**
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

**Re:** **Protocol #E2006:094**
**"Children Affected by War: A Bioecological Investigation into their Psychosocial and Educational Needs"**

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. 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, the auditor requires that you submit a copy of this Approval Certificate to Kathryn Bartmanovich, Research Grants & Contract Services (fax 261-0325), including the Sponsor name, before your account can be opened.**

- **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.**