International Conversations
A Support Group for International Students

By
Helina Kwok Han Tsang

A Practicum Report

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Education

Department of Education Administration and Foundations
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba

March, 2002

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INTERNATIONAL CONVERSATIONS
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Helina Kwok Han Tsang

A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University

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MASTER OF EDUCATION

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Though perseverance is my major personal resource in completing this practicum, I do not think I would successfully have done so without tremendous external supports from the following sources.

First of all, I would like to thank my husband, Steve, who shared with me the motto "Nothing in the world can take the place of perseverance." His promise to stand by me kept me going throughout my practicum.

Second, I would like to thank both the international student participants and Canadian guest members in *International Conversations*. Without their participation and involvement, the group would not have been successful. Their "voices" and personal experiences are reflected in the results of the group, which serve as a valuable reference for future international students.

Third, I would also like to thank all staff members at the Student Counselling and Career Centre and International Centre for Students at the University of Manitoba for their advice and information, as well as their assistance in the areas of promotion and recruitment of group members.

Lastly, I would express my thanks to all my committee members, Maureen Robinson, Lisa Seymour, Marge Winters, Dr. Jon Young; their focus and commitment were very encouraging for me and their critical comments were well taken and incorporated in this paper. In particular, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my advisor, Maureen Robinson, for her tremendous intellectual, emotional and physical supports during my practicum. Her challenges of me were always encouraging.

ABSTRACT

This study addresses the adjustment issues of international students studying in Canadian universities. The study explored the relationship between personal and external resources of international students and external demands they experience. When the external demand is continually greater than both the personal and external resources that the international students possess, those challenges become their difficulties and problems. When those difficulties or problems persist, stress is created that affects the balance of their lives. Manifestation of stress will negatively affect the mental health of international students. In order to help international students weather these challenges more effectively, the author suggests that counsellors help international students work on expanding their personal resources, developing their external resources and lessening the external demands in order to bring a state of balance in their lives.

A support group was considered to be an effectively way to help address the above issues. The major purpose of the group was to help international students process their adjustment experiences and access their acquired strengths, in order to alleviate their adjustment stress and increase their confidence in their ability to cope. Results indicated that international students found the group was helpful in terms of feeling more in control of their experiences and more confident to cope. They also learned some new ways of coping from each other.

With the above 'weighty' supports and a lot of 'invisible' encouragement and help, I finally got my personal and external resources to be greater than the demands of my practicum report. What I am left with is the precious care and love from those people who have helped me in completing this practicum, and that will stay with me for life and become my eternal personal resource.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Even though this is my eighth year as an international student in Canada, I feel that I am still in the process of adaptation. There have been many positive and desirable experiences and, conversely, some experiences that were not so. I agree with Bochner's (1972; Furnham & Bochner, 1986) Culture Learning Model that the major task of an international student is not to adjust to a new culture but to learn its salient characteristics. It is these learned social skills that will help the international student live and study more effectively in the new culture.

Universities and colleges offer a range of activities to aid the transition of international students and the U of M is no different in this regard. I experienced many helpful educational programming activities, including orientations, cross-cultural workshops, social events, monthly newsletters and sessions on topics such as income tax, job search, immigration policies, and other relevant issues offered by the International Centre for Students (ICS) at the University of Manitoba. However, there was really no program offering continuing support to new international students focusing more on their psychological needs during the process of adaptation and adjustment.

Since I had experienced these challenges first hand, I felt that a program was needed to help ease the pains and frustrations that come with the settling-in process. In addition, those programs should also help students to access the acquired strengths and resources that they themselves might overlook. In this practicum, the focus of the study was the design of an on-going support program for international students that would focus more on drawing from the resources of the students themselves rather than a uni-

directional, didactic, giver and receiver model. Participants, it was hoped, would share both their desirable and less desirable experiences, and also share their ways of coping. By sharing and listening, they would help each other process their experiences and related feelings, and also generate new ways of coping.

1.1 Objectives

The objectives of this practicum were to:

1. Identify both the desirable and less desirable experiences international students face in their adaptation and adjustment to a new country.

2. Design and implement a on-going support group that would address their experiences and related feelings.

3. Assess the outcome of the group process

4. Recommend appropriate practices to be implemented for future international students.

1.2 Limitations of the study

There are limitations to this study and the results of the study may be biased. Although I am now a Canadian citizen, I am also a student who came from a foreign country to study in Canada. My experience of studying and living in Canada is not much different from that of other international students: I came to Canada by myself; my home culture is very different from the host culture; and English is my second language. Therefore, my perception of the situation of international students and their particular needs is subjective. Nevertheless, my background cannot be excluded from any

discussion of the efficacy of this program. It may have helped me understand the international students' experience at a deeper level and may have positively impacted their responses to the program I offered.

Also, the small sample of the population studied does not allow me to suggest that the findings were representative of the concerns of most international students at the University of Manitoba. However, those who joined the group appeared to represent a range of needs and diverse backgrounds; the composition of this group, therefore, could certainly represent some concerns of international students.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will include a general description of the situation of international students in Canada, particularly at the University of Manitoba, and a review of the literature on the cross-cultural adjustment issues of international students. As well, it will be a review of some authors' ideas or suggestions on counselling with international students. Finally, some special programs implemented by educational institutions to address international students' adjustment issues will be reviewed.

Since the general cultures in the United States of America and Canada are similar and most sources of literature related to international students are from American publications, I am making an assumption for the purpose of this study that the experiences and issues of the international students in Canada are similar to those in the United States of America.

2.2 The Situation of International Students in Canada

2.2.1 Definition of International Students

According to the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) (1997), "International students, also referred to as foreign students, are students who are neither Canadian citizens nor permanent residents of Canada (formerly called landed immigrants). International students require student authorizations issued by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, although a small number have special ministerial or diplomatic permits (p.vi).

The terms international students and foreign students will be used interchangeably in this study.

2.2.2 Globalization

As countries increase international trade, more governments are realizing the importance of education in providing international linkages (CBIE, 1997, Burbules & Torres, 2000). Therefore, interest in international education continues to grow around the world. There are two ways to achieve this: countries can increase their efforts to attract increased numbers of international students and can encourage their own students to study abroad (CBIE, 1997). The four major host countries for international students are Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America (Association of Universities and College of Canada, 2002a) (AUCC). The largest population of students studying abroad is Asians (Burbules & Torres, 2000)

2.2.3 International Education in Canada

As a result of the global initiatives and the recruitment efforts of Canadian post-secondary institutions, there is an increasing interest in promoting a global perspective in Canadian colleges and universities (Arthur, 1997, Tamburri, 1999). As international trade expands, Canadians will also interact with foreign partners in both domestic and overseas settings. Therefore, educators across Canada need to prepare domestic students for future work with people whose cultural backgrounds differ from their own (Arthur, 1997). Besides recruiting individual international students, some Canadian universities

are capitalizing on their experiences with student exchange programs and other international projects to bolster their overseas recruitment (Tamburri, 1999).

Karen McBride (2002, Introductory Session), AUCC's Director of International Relations, states the two major reasons Canadian universities are increasing their efforts to recruit international students are:

"1. Canadian universities are increasingly looking to internationalize their campuses and international students play an important role in this regard both in terms of bringing an international perspective and more diversity to the classroom.

2. International students bring significant economic benefit to Canadian universities and local communities and are important connections for Canada's longer-term trade and diplomatic relations."

Moreover, the motivation to recruit international students is also inextricably linked to shrinking government resources directed to Canadian universities. Recruiting international students is one of the possible ways to secure alternate sources of funding. (Arthur, 1997).

International student enrolment at Canadian universities reached a peak in 1991-92 at approximately 37,000. It dropped to a low of approximately 31,000 in 1995-96. Since then it has gradually increased, but has not yet reached the peak of 1991 (AUCCb, 2002).

In 1998-99, there were 35,556 international students in Canada at the university level, representing about 4 % of total university students (AUCCc, 2002). The areas of origin of international students, in descending order, are Asia (38%), Europe (24%),

Africa (16%), United States (11%), Latin America and the Caribbean (10%), and Australia and New Zealand (1%). The most popular programs of study for undergraduate international students are commerce, economics, computer science, and electrical engineering (AUCCd, 2000).

2.2.4 International Students at the University of Manitoba

According to the statistics from the University of Manitoba (2001), there were 658 international students at the University in 1989-99, representing 3.2 % of the student body. The eleven major sources of international students were, in descending order, Malaysia, China, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, India, United States, Japan, South Korea, Germany, Libya and Iran.

2.3 Cross-cultural Adjustment Issues

A review of the literature shows that there are a number of factors that are closely related to the initial adjustment and emotional well-being of international students. In a foreign culture, international students constantly face new changes and challenges in the initial adjustment period that create adjustment stress (Adler, 1975; Aubrey, 1991; Church, 1982). In the process of adjustment, they experience "culture shock" (Aubrey, 1991; Church, 1982;Weaver, 1993), which is a series of psychological and physical reactions to different stages of adjustment to a new culture.

However, students do not face these challenges in a vacuum. They bring themselves into the equation – their strengths, including their cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, personalities, knowledge, abilities, skills and their idiosyncrasies.

These personal factors, mediating all aspects of their adjustment, I will term *personal resources*. Some students will be innately equipped better to deal with the inherent challenges, and not all personal factors are favorable to adjusting to a new culture. I will term any social supports as *external resources*. These could serve as complements or boosters to the personal resources and help international students weather the new challenges. These supports may vary from inadequate to excellent. I am choosing to call the challenge posed by the new culture the *external demand*. In a best-case scenario, the personal and external resources will be equal to the external demand. However, when the external demand is continually greater than both the personal and external resources that the international students possess, those challenges become their difficulties or problems. When those difficulties or problems persist or cannot be resolved, stress is created, affecting the balance of their lives. Manifestations of stress will then negatively affect the mental health of international students.

2.3.1 Definition of Adjustment

Adjustment has been defined by Berry (1976) as the degree to which one feels congruent and in harmony with the environment. In the case of international students, adjustment is likely to involve cognitive, emotional and behavioral changes aimed at bringing about a better fit with the new external setting (Ying and Liese, 1994). Whether the students feel adjusted to their lives of studying and living in a new country is subject to their subjective personal rating and their subjective assessment of overall adjustment.

2.3.2 Concept of Culture Shock

According to Weaver (1993), the phrase "culture shock", coined by Cora DuBois in 1951, was first used by anthropologist Kalvero Oberg in 1960, to describe problems of acculturation and adjustment among Americans who were working on a health project in Brazil. Oberg viewed culture shock as "an occupational disease", in which people who work abroad become very anxious when losing all familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse in a new environment. However, the phrase culture shock is now commonly used to describe any physical or emotional discomfort experienced by those adjusting to a new environment. It is no longer seen as a disease, but as a series of normal reactions, in the process of adjustment and adaptation, to a new cultural or social environment.

The literature on culture shock defines three basic explanations: the loss of familiar cues, the breakdown of interpersonal communication, and an identity crisis. All three disorienting states occur in adjustment to any new environment. Because of cultural differences, these disorienting states are aggravated in a cross-cultural situation (Weaver, 1993).

Loss of cues: We are surrounded by thousands of physical and social cues which have been present since birth and therefore are taken for granted until they are absent. Behavioral or social cues refer to signs and signals, which provide order in interpersonal relations. They may be words, gestures, facial expressions, postures, and customs. Physical cues include objects we have become accustomed to in our home culture which are changed or missing in a new culture. These familiar cues make us feel comfortable and make life predictable. When they are absent, we begin to feel uncomfortable,

frustrated, or disoriented (Weaver, 1993). In the process of adjustment, we can learn new cues and norms through observation, participation, and explicit communication. However, learning by trial-and-error may also lead to adverse consequences and encounters that may inhibit subsequent interaction (Church, 1982).

Fortunately, most of us will finally adapt to new environments and, in the process, acquire new skills and ways of looking at the world. As Weaver (1993) points out, it is not just change that causes stress. Adaptation also produces stress. He also emphasizes that although pain is involved in the process, we also gain insights and personal growth.

The Breakdown of Communication: A breakdown in communication may happen when the sender and receiver come from different cultures. A message which is sent by the sender, with a specific meaning, may be perceived by the receiver as something completely different. The obvious source of breakdown involves different languages. However, nonverbal codes are probably even more significant in cross-cultural communication because these codes are learned implicitly and thus are generally unconscious.

A breakdown in communication is also a breakdown in interpersonal interaction and relationship, which is a source of stress. No matter if the communication is on a conscious or unconscious level, its breakdown causes frustration and anxiety (Weaver, 1993). Laing (1967) also stresses this inability to communicate on an "authentic level" with others as yet another source of stress.

Again, we take the ability to communicate for granted and seldom are aware that communication breakdown can cause a lot of pain in human interaction. People going

through culture shock are neither aware of what is causing them pain nor why they often behave in such irrational ways. They have a sense of hopelessness and helplessness. The situation is controlling them, and unless they understand the process of communication breakdown, they do not know how to deal with it, how to find alternative ways to behave or how to develop new coping strategies (Weaver, 1993)

Weaver (1993) states that this explanation is especially useful for helping visitors understand the underlying dynamics of culture shock. Furthermore, it suggests that culture shock is an inevitable but natural process of cross-cultural adjustment which can be overcome with conscious awareness of the process of communication breakdown and one's own reaction to it.

An Identity Crisis: In order to understand the effect our culture has on our behavior and personality, Weaver (1993) makes the analogy of culture as a computer program. Culture shapes our thinking and perception of the information of the world, and we then produce certain behaviors; it is like a computer program processing an input and then producing an output. When we enter another culture, the program which has worked so well since childhood is no longer adequate. This is because the ways in which we have been programmed by our culture to solve problems or to think no longer work effectively in another culture. The environment makes new demands upon us. Because we are overwhelmed by lots of stimuli and demands, we will temporarily be very confused and will not know what to pay attention to or how to solve problems as we normally do in our home culture. However, this transitional period is very associative or relational, and finally everything will flow together. This is the time when we begin to

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see new relationships and new ways of ordering our perceptual and intellectual world. Therefore, we are gradually expanding our cultural program, image system, and subjective knowledge structure. As with any other identity crisis, culture shock allows us to give up an inadequate perceptual and problem-solving system to allow another more expanded and adequate system to be born. The breakdown of communication becomes more of a breakthrough to new ways of interacting with others. Weaver (1993) describes it as a death-rebirth cycle.

As Weaver (1993) points out, there is pain and risk involved in the experience of culture shock. Some do not want to give up the culture they are familiar with, and some may never be able to adjust to a new culture. Only those who are able to tolerate the stress of giving up an inadequate problem-solving system or identity, experience the inevitable pain involved, and allow themselves to expand their system can gain great personal growth.

2.3.3 Stages of Culture Shock

Aubrey (1991) discusses the three stages of culture shock international students experience:

(1) *Honeymoon Stage:* The newly arrived student is happy to be in a new environment and finds everything and everyone great and exciting.

(2) *Disillusionment and Irritability Stage:* A period of increasing disillusionment and irritability will come after the honeymoon stage is gone; nothing feels right and the host culture is increasingly belittled. Perception of host nationals becomes more

negative; they are now seen as rude, self-centered and unavailable. They tend to withdraw from the mainstream and may seek out fellow nationals.

(3) *Partial Adjustment:* The third stage is one of partial adjustment to the new culture; some things are accepted, others rejected.

Aubrey (1991) states that stage two may re-occur, especially when earlier angry feelings have not been worked through.

2.3.4 Personal and External Resources of International Students

There are some internal and external resource factors which are positively related to international students' initial adjustment and emotional well-being:

(a) Demographic characteristics:

- *Nationality* - Church (1982) stated that studies that examine differences in the adjustment of visitors from different nationalities often make references to "*cultural distance*". Those who come from a culture similar to the host culture will adjust to the new environment more easily and quickly since there is a minimal loss of familiar signs and symbols in the new environment

- *Age* - Younger students are hypothesized to better adjust because of greater openness to interacting with the new environment. They are also more ready to learn new ways of living (Church, 1982; Ying & Liese, 1994) .

- *Socioeconomic backgrounds (SES)* - Students with SES backgrounds that are similar to those in the host country are hypothesized to experience an easier

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transition than students with SES backgrounds that are different (Ying & Liese, 1994).

(b) Psychological traits: Brislin (1981) states that psychological traits, rather than cross-cultural adjustment skills or cultural awareness, may be of primary importance in determining the success with which one adapts to another culture. Those traits include open-mindedness, flexibility, extroversion (Ying & Liese, 1994), and tolerance of change, ambiguity, and unpredictability (Weaver, 1993).

(c) Language ability: Language ability is a major resource for positive adjustment. Students who report superior English reading, speaking, writing and comprehension ability are better adjusted both academically and socially. However, it is also a subjective assessment. When international students have self-confidence and are able to successfully interact with the environment, their English language ability will be perceived as superior (Ying & Liese, 1994).

(d) Financial resources: Availability of greater financial resources provides a sense of security and is found to be positively related to adjustment in the host culture (Ying & Liese, 1994).

(e) Positive previous cross-cultural experiences: People who have positive previous cross-cultural experiences have less adjustment difficulties. For example, Americans and

Western Europeans, who have more cross-cultural experiences, are consistently found to report fewer adjustment difficulties (Church, 1982)

(f) Pre-arrival preparation and anticipation of a stressful event: Those who report feeling well prepared for their overseas studies will be better adjusted than those who are less well prepared (Ying & Liese, 1994). This is perhaps a result of acquiring accurate information about the host culture and academic setting, developing basic skills or resources for the new setting or establishing future support networks prior to departure. No matter how well they prepare physically, if they can anticipate moving to a new culture as a stressful event and prepare for it psychologically, then their negative reactions will be less serious (Weaver, 1993).

(g) *Social Support:* While all the above are personal resources, social support is an external resource. Ying & Liese (1994) have shown that social support plays an important role in successful adjustment for international students. Social support can be provided by the students' home countries and the host country. When international students first arrive in a foreign country, their need for help is the greatest but the social support available to them in the host country may not be readily accessible or adequate. Therefore, the continuation of old ties from their home countries is particularly important in the initial stages and can give them comfort and stability. As students form new relationships in their new environments, their support network will shift from their home countries to their new countries. The composition of their support network also makes a big difference to their adjustment. Ethnic social networks have been found to be

beneficial for psychological well-being because they provide a sense of security and facilitate the transition. However, a support network that consists exclusively of fellow nationals may limit their access to mainstream society and negatively affect their long-term adjustment. Friendship formation with host nationals can facilitate understanding of and entry into the mainstream culture and life, and serves as a mediating function to better adjustment (Ying & Liese, 1994).

2.3.5 Sources of Stress: Unfavourable Personal Factors and External Demands

As mentioned above, the personal realities of international students could impede their adjustment in a new culture. Though these may have little impact in their home countries, they become relatively unhelpful when attempting to meet the demands of the new culture. Those unfavourable factors could include greater "cultural distance" (Church, 1982), differences in SES background, low flexibility and tolerance to change and ambiguity, incompetence in English, limited financial resources, inaccurate information about the host country and no anticipation of change when moving to a new country (Ying & Liese, 1994).

While all students need to adapt to a new educational and social environment when they enter college or university, international students encounter additional stressors due to the external demands of a new culture and potentially unfavourable personal factors (Mori, 2000). Combining the ideas of Aubrey (1991), Mori (2000), Weaver (1993) and Ying & Liese (1994), there are five major areas of difficulties most international students have identified that constitute unique sources of stress for them.

(a) Language barrier: Mori (2000) perceives that the language barrier is the most significant, prevalent problem for most international students with English as a second language. They are required to spend a relatively longer period of time in study than national students. Even international students from English-speaking countries may have difficulties with unintelligible accents or idiomatic language   Petersen (1991) also points out that because the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is not as accurate a measure of oral comprehension and communication skills as it is of reading skills, achieving the minimum TOEFL score for college admission by no means guarantees sufficient English competency for international students to succeed in U.S colleges and universities. The language barrier has direct negative implications for the academic performance of students and for the teaching performance of graduate teaching assistants. The students' inadequate language skills often negatively affect their ability to understand lectures, to take notes, to complete reading and writing assignments and examinations, and to orally express their opinions or ask questions in class (Cadieux & Wehrly, 1986).   As mentioned above, this breakdown in communication causes tremendous stress for international students (Weaver, 1993).

(b) Unfamiliarity with the North American education system: Academic achievement is the most important goal for most international students (Aubrey, 1991). Therefore, academic issues usually represent a significant source of stress. In North America and a few Western countries, active class participation is expected, especially at the graduate level, and classroom discussion plays a part in the final grade. This situation can be very confusing for some Asian, Middle Eastern and African students, who are used to having

one-way teaching and learning experiences in their home countries (Aubrey, 1991). Many international students are, therefore, highly unaccustomed to various components of the North American educational system such as independent library research, creative or even standard essays and term papers, frequent "pop" quizzes and exams, and active participation in informal class discussion (Thomas & Althen, 1989).

This different teaching process also affects international students as graduate teaching assistants. Even though they are experts in their field of study, they may not gain acceptance, trust and respect from North American students because of their non-American teaching methods and foreign accents (Pedersen, 1991).

(c) "Cultural distance": Bulthuis (1986) states that the concept of friendship between North American and non-Westerners is very different. North Americans are highly mobile and individually oriented, and perceive friendship as less permanent and lasting than do people from most other cultures (though this could arguably be a somewhat stereotypical distinction). International students may misperceive Americans' overly friendly and sociable characteristics as offers of serious friendship or romantic relationship. For instance, misunderstandings frequently arise when American's superficial pleasantries – "Come over sometime," "Let's get together soon," and "I'll call you" – are interpreted by international students as positive signs of sincere interest.

Besides misinterpretations of North Americans' concept of friendship, the North American concept of individual privacy is also foreign to international students because international students' notion of privacy is defined strictly within their extended families (Aubrey, 1999).

Over time, international students may be disappointed with their relationships with host nationals, and will turn back to their own national groups for warm, intimate, comforting relationships (Bulthuis, 1986). Whatever the reason, Pedersen (1991) perceives that in most cases, establishing a supportive network with their fellow nationals is indispensable for their well-being.

(d) Financial difficulty: The general assumption that most international students are wealthy is, in fact, mistaken; most lack sufficient funds (Cadieux & Wehrly, 1986). International students typically receive financial support from their local governments, their families and / or foreign sponsors (Arthur, 1997). If international students are not from wealthy families, the financial support they can get from their families is usually limited. Pedersen (1991) also notes that immediate and extended families may endure considerable financial hardship to send one of their children abroad. In such cases, students may experience additional pressures with respect to their sense of family obligation for success.

With immigration regulations strictly limiting employment outside of schools for international students holding Student Visa Authorization only and limited eligibility for federal financial aid, financial problems are more difficult to resolve than are those of host students (Mori, 2000). Some students may be forced to accelerate their academic progress in order to graduate as soon as possible (Cadieux & Wehrly, 1986).

(e) Interpersonal struggles with important decisions: While international students are adapting to their lives in the host country and making it their temporary home, they also

have their families, relatives, and friends in their home countries. When there is an illness or a death among their families or significant others at home, they have to make a decision between going home or dealing with the crisis themselves in the host country. Making a decision and management in this kind of crisis can produce a tremendous amount of stress (Mori, 2000).

However, the biggest decision international students have to make is about staying in the host country or going home after their graduation (Khoo et al., 1994). Even though their primary intention was to gain academic credentials, most international students go through long and difficult periods of indecision about going home or staying in the host country as they examine the advantages and disadvantages of either alternative (Thomas & Althen, 1989). Besides considering their future career plans, they are also concerned about whether they will fit back in their home culture because their ideas regarding self-concept and worldview have already changed after years of study in the host country. They experienced drastic changes in their social roles, positions and interpersonal relations when they first came to the host country, and then they have continued to change through the effect of the host countries' cultural values, beliefs, traditions and customs. When they re-enter their home countries, they will likely need to go through considerable professional and personal readjustments. Some researches found that the anticipation of "reverse culture shock" can be very threatening for them (Mori, 2000).

2.3.6 Manifestations of Stress

"Stress is defined as an individual's psychic and somatic reactions to demands that approach or exceed the limits of his coping resources." (Magnusson, 1982)

The adjustment stress in the foreign environment can manifest itself in the following psychological and physical symptoms:

(1) *Psychological Symptoms:* According to Mori (2000), international students experience a diverse array of psychological symptoms. They may be faced with their deep feelings of loss, disappointment, resentment, and sadness when they experience that their abilities are no longer the same as they were in their home countries. They may also develop a sense of inferiority when struggling with adjustment problems. Feelings of homesickness, isolation and loneliness are also very common for international students who have just come to a new environment. Moreover, they may be irritated and frustrated by the transitory nature of their status in the host country and also by uncertainty about their immediate future. In some severe cases, international students may have a profound sense of helplessness and hopelessness. When it is persistent, it may be a sign of depression. Furthermore, when international students experience events that violate their basic sense of morals, values, logic and beliefs about normality and civility, they may be feeling confused and disoriented (Winkelman, 1994). In addition, some students may feel guilty about living a "wealthier" lifestyle than that of people in their own country (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994).

(2) *Physical symptoms:* Since international students face the many challenges mentioned above, it is not uncommon for them to experience stress for quite a long period of time. Excessive stress induces such physiological conditions as dysfunctions in pituitary-adrenal activities, mass discharges of the sympathetic nervous system, impairment of immune systems, and heightened susceptibility to all illnesses (Winkelman, 1994). Physical tension, blushing, perspiration, and an increase in blood pressure, body temperature, and heart and pulse rates are typical defensive bodily reactions to self-perceived and actual threats to their well-being (Axelson, 1993). Excessive and continued exposure to stressful situations can also result in chronic somatic complaints, for some, that have no clear organic basis (Khoo et al., 1994). Therefore, it is not uncommon to find international students who are afflicted with persistent lack or loss of appetite and sleep, low stamina and energy levels, headaches and gastrointestinal problems (Thomas & Althen, 1989).

In addition, the constant demand for their conscious effort in processing various types of information, which they understood automatically and completely in their own culture, can easily cause mental exhaustion and burnout (Winkelman, 1994). Their work effectiveness may then be significantly impaired.

2.4 Underutilization of Mental Health Services

Despite the fact that international students tend to experience more problems than do students in general (Pedersen, 1991) and have an urgent need for psychological assistance, mental health services have been significantly underused by this population (Mori, 2000). Even when international students seek available services, they are far more

likely than American students to terminate therapeutic relationships prematurely (Pedersen, 1991). Several factors seem to inhibit the accessibility of existing psychotherapeutic practices to international students.

(a) *Critical cultural difference in basic beliefs about mental health problems:* In American culture (specifically, Euro-American), the psychological self is viewed as central because of the strong focus on individual autonomy. Consequently, mental health problems are viewed as internalizations of perceived personal inadequacies (Mori, 2000). Conversely, Asian, Hispanic, and Black cultures tend to emphasize group cooperation (Sue & Sue, 1990). These ethnic groups perceive problematic interpersonal relationships, a lack of trustworthiness, and deviations from socially sanctioned behavior as critical indicators of defective mental health. Therefore, international students from these ethnic groups consider their psychological problems to be caused by the above relationship problems, and they perceive that these problems are beyond their individual control. As Fernandez (1988) stated, conventional Western counselling approaches see clients as being in control whereas foreign students tend to have an external locus of control. Therefore, they do not view their problems as amenable to help from counselling (Mori, 2000).

Moreover, such cultures may regard the disclosure of personal problems to counsellors as highly disgraceful and a clear sign of immaturity and weakness (Mori, 2000). Flaskerud (1986) reported that in some cultures both the individuals and their families try to deny the existence of mental illness within the family in order to avoid 'losing face'. A sense of great shame for the whole family is generally attached to

psychological problems because the problems supposedly reflect hereditary flaws, inadequate child-rearing practices, or both.

(b) *Misuse of medical services:* In response to a strong need to evade the stigma and to retain family honor, some international students develop a tendency to "somatize" their psychological problems and express them through physiological disorders. This tendency happens more in Asians (Kuo & Kavanagh, 1994). Although North American students tend to experience stress as anxiety and / or depression (Aubrey, 1991), many international students do not distinguish emotional distress from physiological illnesses and may attribute their psychological difficulties to organic processes (Flaskerud, 1986; Mori, 2000). Therefore, international students' first contact for help with their "physical discomfort" is medical providers, instead of mental health workers, and they expect concrete advice or medication as the way of treatment (Aubrey, 1991).

(c) *Unfamiliarity with the basic concept of counselling:* Another reason international students do not seek help from mental health services is because "talking therapy" is practically unknown or nonexistent in their home cultures. Since the concept of counselling is foreign to them, some may also consider the services to be designed not for them but for the host students only. Also some international students may have a negative or an inappropriate expectation of counselling (Mori, 2000).

Mori (2000) stated that because a majority of counsellors are individuals from mainstream Euro-American culture, international students may be suspicious of the counsellors' motives for helping minority students in cross-cultural contexts. Some may

even consider the practice of counselling to be a form of mind control. Some also fear that they will be sent home as failures because of the necessity for formal counselling.

2.5 Ideas / Thoughts / Suggestions for Working with International Students

2.5.1 Issues for Counselors in Counselling International Students

In the past two decades, clinicians and researchers (Aubrey, 1991; Fernandez, 1988; Pedersen, 1991 & Thomas & Althen, 1989) have come up with a number of unique issues present in the counselling of people who are not from mainstream North American culture.

(a) Cultural Stereotyping: It is human nature to generalize about other groups of people with whom one has limited or superficial contact. Thomas & Althen (1989) identified that this applies to counsellors who deal with international students as well. Their training provides little exposure to multi-cultural counselling and, as a result, the problem of counsellor stereotyping arises. [However, increased attention has been paid to this area for the last decade (Personal communication with the training director).] Some negative stereotypes of international students are their poor command of English, their clannish nature, and their tendency to be manipulative. Some positive stereotypes are that international students are intelligent, motivated, courteous, polite and conscientious. Counsellor stereotyping is minimized when counsellors become more aware of their own biases and work to overcome them.

(b) Difficulty in identifying the source of problems: Cross-cultural factors make it more difficult to diagnose the problem (Aubrey, 1991; Pedersen, 1991: Thomas and Althen, 1989). International students' problems can be due to a combination of intercultural problems, inter-personal problems and intrapersonal problems. Therefore, it is more difficult for counsellors to diagnose problems when they are confused by the cultural differences. Moreover, counsellors may be overly cultural sensitive and attribute everything to cultural differences. Counsellors must therefore be balanced in their approach and achieve 'cultural competence' (to be explained later).

(c) *Countertransference:* While most clinical work involves countertransference, Aubrey (1991) identified that clinicians tend to be affected by international students' special characteristics. Most international students are more eager to adapt and they tend to defer to the perceived authority of the clinicians. These characteristics may evoke clinicians' compassion for them and cause them to see the students as "good" clients. However, clinicians may also see their somatic symptoms, psychological naïvety, neediness and demand for advice annoying. It is challenging for the therapist to maintain a state of complete clinical neutrality.

(d) Fundamental difference in concept of counselling / helping: As mentioned above, while Western counselling approaches see clients as being in control, most international students tend to have an external locus of control (Fernandez, 1988). While counsellors want to help clients understand their issues in order to help them solve their own problems, international students may expect counsellors to give them advice or

suggestions (Aubrey, 1991; Thomas & Althen, 1989). Moreover, according to Abu-Rasain (1994), Asians may not respond well to a reflective approach that focuses on feelings because they do not see it as helpful in solving their problems.

(e) Difficulties in developing a treatment relationship: Building a "holding environment" is very important to allow for meaningful work (Winnicott, 1960). However, in addition to the above, there are a number of other factors negatively affecting the building of a holding environment in a therapy session with international students. A clinician usually uses a "primarily verbal symbolic method' to work with clients while international students' conceptual framework is based on a "somatic mode of containment" (Aubrey, 1991). Moreover, according to Aubrey (1991), in non-Western countries people rarely focus on abstract concepts but think very concretely. It is also considered inappropriate to speak of personal matters with anyone outside the extended family (Aubrey, 1991; Pedersen, 1991). Expecting a student to initiate personal discussion in a clinical office may arouse feelings of shame, betrayal, or fear. In addition, expectations of therapists are different. They are seen as having absolute power and are expected to give advice or suggestions.

When a holding environment is not established quickly, foreign students may lose confidence and withdraw after the first session. They are then counted as drop-outs. Others may return but will not express themselves spontaneously. This is usually labeled as "behavioral resistance" when it may instead reflect lack of flexibility in creating a culturally more appropriate treatment environment (Aubrey, 1991).

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2.5.2 Developing Competencies for Counselling International Students

Consideration of cultural factors plays an important role in cross-cultural counselling. Therefore, a number of authors also point out the importance of the counsellor's awareness of their own cultural values as well as their clients'. According to Sue & Sue (1990), a culturally skilled counsellor is one who views cultural differences as something positive to be addressed. In order to respond to the needs and expectations of their clients from other cultures, they should also be flexible in their intervention approaches. Some basic counselling skills, such as the ability to listen, the ability to observe, the use of body language and the ability to ask effective questions, are needed (Khoo & Abu-Rasain, 1994), as are some special suggestions summarized as below:

(a) *Counsellors have to be aware of their own values and biases*: Counsellors need to explore their own values and be conscious of their own race and culture (Parker, 1998). They should also acknowledge and respect differences that exist between them and their foreign students. They should be aware of their attitudes towards minorities and work to change the negative ones. This is important, because counsellors who are insensitive to their values may impose them on their minority clients thus affecting their clients and the counselling process (Pedersen, 1991; Sue, Arredondo and McDavis, 1992).

(b) *Counsellors need to be aware of the culture and background of their clients:* Obviously, counsellors cannot be experts in every culture, but they should acquire minimum knowledge of their clients' cultures. Klineberg (1985) pointed out that

.... Cultural factors are important to counsellors, and they have the responsibility of learning all they can about the cultural background of their clients. It is too much to ask that they become specialists on all the cultures of the world; it should not be impossible for them, however, to become aware of the range of values and patterns of behaviour of which human societies and individuals are capable and to learn as much as they can about the particular ethnic groups that constitute their clientele. (p.34)

(c) *Counsellors need to acquire appropriate cross-cultural intervention strategies and adapt a range of helping responses to the needs of their clients.*

- *Integration of cultural background into counselling frame of reference:* Counsellors should take international students' worldview into consideration and accept their presenting symptoms as valid even when they do not fit the diagnostic statistics manual (Kleinman, 1988).

When circumstances arise, effective multicultural counsellors need to seek possible resources that can help them in their jobs, for example, referral to traditional helpers or professionals from the same culture as their clients (Khoo & Abu-Rasain, 1994). Pedersen (1991) also emphasized the importance of informal counselling as a helpful resource to be used with culturally different clients. Counsellors should respect indigenous help that can be given to the clients from their own community. Sometimes this might occur in a religious context acceptable to the client (Egan, 1990). Moreover, they should be aware of the support system outside the counselling process, because many studies have found that foreign students preferred a fellow

national to help them with personal problems (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Pedersen, 1991).

In *Rethinking Psychiatry,* Kleinman (1988) proposes an international vision of mental illness and mental health which challenges some basic tenets of American psychiatric training and practice. He points out that to modify one's culture's diagnostic categories and to apply it with clients from another culture will not work.

- *Cultural Learning:* Aubrey (1991) perceived that the best teachers for cultural learning are the international students. He stated that by having international students interpret their cultures, several functions could be accomplished, as follows:

  "We help them overcome their passive deference to us, the perceived experts on life in America; we enlist them as equal partners in the helping process, and we restore to them some of the self-esteem so often hurt in the painful process of adjustment."(p.31)

  In addition, Aubrey (1991) presented a model for learning key aspects of an unfamiliar culture by using the student as teacher, as follows:

  1. Begin by explaining what you need to know to better understand the student's problem.

  2. Begin with the area of immediate concern, usually an academic one, which is a safe topic with which to start.

  3. Focus on milestones in the life cycle, starting with the student's current stage of development, usually young adulthood.

4. Invite him or her to compare experiences here with normative behavior at home.

5. When appropriate, move into other relevant areas, such as family relationships, including important members of the extended family or clan, and friendships.

6. Listen for issues of loss and distinguish between normative and catastrophic crises.

7. Inquire if there is any forced uprooting due to political upheaval.

8. Pay close to attention to the student's affect before proceeding to the more sensitive topics of loneliness, relationships, belief systems, fate, marriage and sex. (p.31,32)

2.5.3 Treatment Modalities

(a) *Individual Therapy v.s. Group Therapy:* While individual therapy can help international students deal with many personal issues such as loss and adjustment difficulties, group therapy can also give students a sense of not feeling alone (Shulman, 1984). With support from the other group members, some cultural inhibitions may be able to be explored (Aubrey, 1991). When students are encouraged to explore their issues and related feelings in a group, they may be helped to more easily access their personal issues. If they are interested in further exploration, they can be referred for individual therapy (Aubrey, 1991).

(b) *Crisis Intervention and / or Brief Therapy v.s. Long-term Therapy:* Based on his experience at Columbia University, Aubrey (1991) found that most international students preferred brief therapy to long-term therapy. Therefore, clinicians should attend to practical problems in the international students' social and physical environment. Concrete interventions can be referral to other professionals or giving advice and suggestions. When the practical problems are addressed, it then becomes possible to explore their underlying psychological issues.

Brief crisis-oriented therapy, focused on a specific symptom or situation, may help some students accept longer-term treatments at a later time. If students can be actively engaged, allowed to terminate as they wish, and encouraged to return as needed, some will do so (Aubrey, 1991).

(c) *Teamwork approach:* Aubrey (1991) perceived that international students rarely come to a mental health service on their own, and that help-seeking focuses on academic issues or physical problems. They also tend to seek help from student advisors, admission officers, deans, administrative assistants, and primary care medical providers, but not from student counsellors. Therefore, he suggested that serving international students require close co-operation between staff members from all disciplines.

2.6 Provision of Programs for International Students by Educational Institutions

(a) *Preventive program / A proactive approach*: Aubrey (1991) stated that at Columbia University, the International Student Office took a proactive approach and provided an orientation program for international students preceding their registration. The issue of

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significant differences in educational systems was addressed during the program. Moreover, both students and faculty presented at the panel and highlighted the specific characteristics of the U.S. system. Strategies for coping with unfamiliar situations were offered, and peer advisors were assigned to help with problem issues. Furthermore, an optional six-session weekly group, which was called "International Conversations", was offered after the initial presentation. Aubrey (1991) pointed out that this self-selected group was popular among those who attended but it might have not reached those who needed it most.

(b) *Peer Program:* Colleges and universities in North America have tried to enhance international students' adjustment experiences through the implementation of peer programs, that is, the pairing of international and host students for significant interactions (Abe, Talbot, Geelhoed, 1998; Ilagan, 1997). Ilagan (1997) reviewed a thorough study of the Peer Program at the University of British Columbia and stated, "The program linked newly arrived international students with Canadians on a one-to-one basis shortly after the arrival of new students and for an extended period of time. In an assessment of the program, [it was] found that the program was successful in easing the transition of international students into a new culture. Specifically, the program was instrumental in providing: a) better social adjustment among international students, b) increased knowledge and appreciation of other cultures, c) increased social contact with people from the host culture, d) increased opportunities to speak a foreign language, e) increased international contacts and f) increased personal growth for both international students and host Canadians." (p.18)

Another similar peer program was conducted at a public, Midwestern university by Abe, Talbot and Geelhoed (1998). A particular design of this peer program was that both international students and host students played specific roles in the program. The role of the international students was to help host students increase their knowledge and appreciation of foreign cultures, customs and language. The role of the host students was to have ongoing interactions with the international students to help them become more familiar with the university and the residence hall community. Results suggest that the peer program participants showed significantly higher adjustment scores than the non-participants. The adjustment included four different areas: academic, social, personal-emotional and institutional attachment.

Several studies (Abe, Talbot & Geelhoed, 1998; Ilagan, 1997; Zimmerman, 1995) suggest significant relationships between social interaction with host students and the adjustment of international students. Talking and interacting with host students was highly correlated with international students' perceptions of their adjustment to the host culture (Zimmerman, 1995).

(c) *Team Approach:* Ilagan (1997) organized a Buddy Program at the University of Manitoba that was similar to the above two peer programs. The particular methodology in this program was the use of a team and a participatory approach to the design, implementation and evaluation of the program. She had the international students, the buddies (host students), staff and community volunteers as the "stakeholders" of the program. Therefore, the program had representation from several parties.

2.7 Conclusion

The above literature review indicates a range of issues faced by international students and those who have contact with them. While it provides a basis for the work subsequently carried out by the author, some areas were felt to be contentious and will be dealt with in the conclusion of the paper.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The goal of this practicum project was to design and implement a support group for international students at the University of Manitoba. The group was called *"International Conversations" – A support group for international students.* The group's name of "International Conversations" was borrowed from that used by Columbia University (Aubrey, 1991). The group consisted of six sessions of two hours for each session. The group met once a week. The details of the planning, the design and the implementation process are as follows:

3.1 Objectives of the group:

- Help group members to process their experiences (physical, emotional and intellectual) in adjusting to a new culture.

- Alleviate group members' experience of adjustment stress.

- Help group members access their acquired strengths to cope with the challenges they face in the process of adjusting and adapting to a new culture, and also to learn new coping skills and strategies from each other.

- Increase group members' awareness of each other's' culture and the diversity of cultures in Canada, and to learn to appreciate this diversity.

- Help group members to increase their confidence in their ability to cope.

- Raise awareness of these issues, and make recommendations that could be implemented for future students.

3.2 Preparation

Besides taking the literature as reference, I utilized the following method to generate ideas to form a framework for the group:

(a) *Gather issues international student clients presented in my individual counselling sessions with them:* As I was doing my practicum placement at the Student Counselling Service and Career Centre at the University of Manitoba from September 2000 to May 2001, I took the opportunity to gather the issues three international student clients presented in my individual counselling sessions. This gave me some ideas about the issues international student clients might currently face at the university.

(b) *Conduct a focus group:* A two-hour focus group was conducted once, three months before the sharing support group. The purpose was to brainstorm ideas with international students who showed interest in the group. Their ideas were used as a basis for the design of the group.

(c) *Hold individual meetings with group members:* It was planned to meet with interested participants individually before the group began. The purpose of the meeting was three fold: to explain the aims of the group to potential members; to recruit subjects for my practicum; and to get to know them and their expectations of the group. In the individual meeting, they were also asked to fill out the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 3), Questionnaire 1(Appendix 4) and Questionnaire 2(Appendix 5).

(d) Conduct a qualitative interview with an ESL teacher, a staff member at International Centre for Students (ICS) and a counsellor at the Student Counselling and Career Centre (SCCC) at the University: I believe that programs should be planned with the involvement of individuals working to support international students' education and well-being in a foreign land. Therefore I planned to do a qualitative interview with an ESL teacher, a staff member at ICS and a counsellor at the SCCC at the University, believing that their input would help me design a group more suitable to the needs of international students.

3.3 Group Composition

(a) *International Students as group members*

The group was open to any undergraduate or graduate international students, any students taking ESL programs, or any students who perceived themselves to be international students (even if not so designated) at the University of Manitoba.

(b) *Canadians as guest members*

I invited Canadian guest members from diverse cultural backgrounds who shared one common characteristic; they had some level of connection with international students or immigrants. They were invited to the group by me. The purpose of having them in the group sessions was an expectation that they would share their perspectives as Canadians from diverse backgrounds.

3.4 Recruitment

I used four different ways of recruiting group members: putting an advertisement in the ICS weekly e-mail newsletter; promoting the group directly to the ESL teachers, student counsellors, and staff members at ICS and also giving them pamphlets to pass on to their students (Appendix 1); putting up posters on all major notice boards at the University (Appendix 1); and promoting the group directly to students around the ICS. Students who were interested to the group could register or could make enquiries to me through e-mail.

3.5 Role of the Group Leader

I was the organizer of the group project, and my major role in the group sessions was as a facilitator, encouraging members to take ownership of the group content. I prepared a tentative framework of the group process (Below and Appendix 2) and invited group members to contribute their ideas on it at the first group session.

3.6 Format of the Group

The group was intended to be a closed group meeting over six weeks. New members were accepted only as late as the second session. The rationale for having International Conversations as a closed group was that it was expected that members would feel secure and comfortable sharing their experiences after they got to know each other and would build up closer relationships over a period of time. It was thought that it would be too disruptive having people coming and going. However, the need for hearing

Canadians' perspectives in the topics of making friends and cultural diversity meant having Canadian guest members in session 4 and 5.

3.7 Framework of the group process

Session 1

- Introduction of facilitator and participants.

- Discussion of the purpose and the process of the group.

- Housekeeping and ground rules.

- Discussion topics:

    o How did you feel when you first came to Canada?

    o What were your experiences of settling in?

Session 2

- Review of last session.

- Discussion topics:

    o What were your original reasons for coming to Canada?

    o What were your expectations of life in Canada, on both a personal and academic level?

    o What are the positive experiences in your adjustment to Canada? What has been challenging?

- Sharing of games or activities from your home country.

Session 3

- Review of last session.

- Discussion topics:

    o Share something you think is important to you about your home country.

    o Share one difficult experience you had in your life before you came to Canada, and share how you dealt with it.

    o What are the difficulties you have now? How do you deal with them?

- Sharing of games or activities from your home country.

Session 4

- Review of last session.

- Mid-term evaluation of the group.

- Discussion topics:

    o Share your experience in making friends.

    o Who do you ask for help when you have difficulties? What are your support systems?

- Sharing of games or activities from your home country.

Session 5

- Review of last session.

- Discussion topics:

    o Which aspects of Canadian cultures (values, beliefs and practices) do you like?

      o   Which are you uncomfortable with? How do you deal with these?

- Sharing games or activities from your home country.

Session 6

- Review of last 5 sessions.

- Discussion topics:

      o   What has been your experience of the group?

      o   How are you going to continue your journey in Canada?

- Exchanging wishes for each other.

3.8 Symbolic tools used in the group

A paper *boat* was used in the group as a symbol representing that the group members shared similar experiences in the challenge of living and studying in a foreign country; we are *"all in the same boat"*. Members were invited to sign their names and put down any thoughts or feelings which came to mind when they attended the group session, on the boat.

Food was also used as a way to inspire group members to share their ideas and knowledge with each other. In the same way that they could easily share food and appreciate the gifts of others, they could easily share their ideas with each other.

3.9 Method of Evaluation

Group members' involvement and participation in the group session and their evaluation of the group (Appendix 6) were used as the major indicators for the success of the group. I observed and recorded their involvement and participation throughout the group sessions, and also asked them to fill out an evaluation form at the last group session. In addition, the results of the comparison between the pre-test and post-test of Self-efficacy Scale (Questionnaire 1) and Stress-Arousal Checklist (Questionnaire 2) were to be used as indicators of the change in the level of self-efficacy and stress-arousal of the members after the six group sessions. The pre-tests of both questionnaires were planned to be done in the individual meeting with each member, and the post-tests were to be done at the last group session.

Questionnaire 1 (Appendix 4) was used as a tool to measure group members' general levels of belief in their own competence. Sherer, Maddux, Mercadante, Prentice-Dunn, Jacobs & Rogers (1987), the authors of this Self-Efficacy Scale (SES), describe that:

> "The SES is a 23-item scale that measures general expectations of self-efficacy that are not tied to specific situations or behavior. The assumptions underlying this scale are that personal expectations of mastery are a major determinant of behavioral change, and that individual differences in past experiences and attributions of success lead to different levels of generalized self-efficacy expectation. Thus, this scale may be useful in tailoring the course of clinical intervention to the client's needs, and also as an index of progress since

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expectation of self-efficacy should change during the course of intervention."
(p.294)

In this study, I used the SES as an index of progress since I expected that international student participants would change in their general levels of belief in their own competence after the group intervention. I invited participants to do a pre-test before the group and a post-test after the group, and I did not check their results until after the completion of the group.

Questionnaire 2 (Appendix 5) was used as a tool to measure group members' stress and arousal. It was a modified version of Mackay and Cox's 'Stress-Arousal Checklist' (1987). The reason for modifying the original version was to make it simpler for international students. Some of the adjectives in the original version might have been too difficult for international students who had English as their second language. For example, explanations were added besides the original words of *vigorous* (strong, full of energy), *apprehensive* (uneasy, worried), *distressed* (uncomfortable, painful) and *alert* (watchful, full awake). The original words of *restful, energetic, drowsy, dejected, uptight, jittery, sluggish, pleasant, and activated* were omitted.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 Preparation

I implemented, as planned, the tasks for preparation of the group except that I was not able to meet with interested group members before the first group session because many registered late for the group. I was also not able to arrange an interview with a staff member at ICS and a student counsellor before the group started, but was able to interview an ESL teacher. Results were as follows:

(a) Issues that came up in my individual counselling with three international students during my practicum placement at the SCCC at the University of Manitoba (Sept 2000 – May 2001)

- Difficulty in interpersonal relationships with host nationals.

- Difficulty in romantic relationships with host nationals

- Difficulty in dealing with loss from a geographical distance – i.e. Client's father died in her home country. Because of financial constraints, client was not able to go back home and attend the funeral.

- Difficulty in dealing with unfinished family business while geographically apart.

- Feeling especially lonely and isolated when experiencing interpersonal difficulties with the few other fellow nationals at the University.

- Difficulty in working with host nationals – i.e. The nature of the client's work required high contact with supervisor and colleagues from the host country.

- Difficulty in expressing and asserting himself / herself because of language differences.

- Difficulty in adapting to a new identity – i.e. Client changed role from a professional to a student.

- Losing confidence in self because of language difficulty.

(b) Focus group: Suggestions generated by the focus group:

1. Invite Canadian students of different ages and different affiliations to the group; hope to understand their ideas, experiences and desires.

2. Share some customs of Canada

3. Talk about the issues at the university.

4. Have interested group members meet and exchange e-mail addresses with each other when they become group members.

5. Expressed a preference for a lunch hour meeting.

(c) Individual Meetings with group members: Individual meetings with each group member could not be done before the first group session because most participants either registered late for the group late or did not register but showed up in the group sessions. Therefore, the individual meeting was done after the first group session. Members were invited to sign up on the Individual Meeting Schedule Sheet in the first group session. Some members kept rescheduling their appointments but finally all individual meetings, except with one individual member, were completed before the fifth group session.

In the individual meeting, group members were asked to fill out the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 3), Questionnaire 1 (Appendix 4) and Questionnaire 2 (Appendix 5). I used the information from both the Participant Information Sheet and Questionnaire 2 as a starting point to get to know each group member. Most filled out the forms without any problems; a few asked for explanations of the meanings of some terms. Among the nine group members, one refused to fill out the forms without giving any reason but he was willing to share some of his personal information verbally. I respected his decision. One member did not fill out the forms because she never showed up for any individual appointment.

A summary of Participant Information Sheets is in Appendix 7, and a summary of the results of Questionnaires 1 and 2 is found in Appendix 8.

(d) Qualitative interview with an ESL teacher: While I was promoting this group to the ESL teachers, I asked them for an interview. One teacher contacted me and was willing to be interviewed.

The interview focused on the teacher's experiences working with international students and also his thoughts regarding the experiences of international students. This teacher had taught ESL programs for three semesters. He enjoyed helping students and found his teaching experience very rewarding. He valued the fact that the ESL program he was teaching covered a great deal of Canadian culture. He believed that the most important quality teachers should have was a genuine respect for the students. He perceived that ESL students were very sensitive to prejudice. He also perceived that a problem was created if people saw a person from one

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perspective only. Although ESL students had difficulty communicating in English, he said that they should not be treated as children because, as adults, they have knowledge and experience. Since he had cross-cultural experience, he was better able to understand and appreciate international students in their entirety. In addition, he felt that ESL teachers assumed a great deal of responsibility for ESL students, which should not be solely theirs. He perceived that ESL students needed a lot of emotional support and that some support services should have been provided for them. Furthermore, he found that the greatest difficulty in helping students was to help them learn to take responsibility for themselves; some students stayed up late and came to class late, or some did not do their homework.

This teacher was also aware that some of his students had insomnia for the first week in Canada because of adjustment stress. Coming to Canada might be the first time away from home for some students. He also noticed that some ESL students experienced a variety of negative feelings such as: loneliness; frustration with the new culture, especially the language; lack of respect from others; and feelings of stress from being in a new environment. In addition, his students shared with him that they had a better experience in homestay than in residence. Homestay is a program at the University of Manitoba that involves the international student living with a Canadian family. Most students found it boring to live in a campus residence. However, they tended not to join campus recreational activities.

4.2 Recruitment

Results showed that international students had a better response to the promotion of the group by direct personal contact than to the hard copy information (Appendix 7, Column 8).

Interestingly, more than half of the students who attended the group had not registered for the group by contacting me by e-mail or at my office phone number. They just showed up in the group session. This surprised me and made me wonder if I had presented the information clearly in the poster and pamphlet. When I asked them, they responded that they did not understand that they had to register before they came to the group. Some just told me that they were not sure if this was the kind of group they wanted to attend so they came to check it out.

4.3 Group Composition

(a) *International students as group members (Appendix 7):* Twenty international students initially attended the group. Some came to the group for one to three sessions and dropped out for different reasons or gave no reason. One left the country. One got a job. Four students found it hard to express themselves in English and dropped out. The other five left the group for unknown reasons. Only the ones who attended the group four times or more out of the seven sessions were classified as group members, making a total of nine. Nevertheless, all participants' sharing was documented in the session recordings (Appendix 9) regardless of whether they stayed in the group or not.

Eight out of the nine group members had been in Canada for a year or less. Most were in their twenties. Seven out of nine came from Asia; the other two were from

Africa and South America respectively. Only one had English as his mother tongue; the other eight had English as their second language. Two were undergraduates, two were graduate students, and the other five were taking ESL programs at university. About half had been students and the other half had been employed before coming to Canada. Two planned to stay in Canada; four planned to go back to their home country; two were not sure whether they would be staying or going back after they finished their educational programs. They all shared one common reason of coming to the group: they wanted to communicate with others. They wanted to meet people, make friends, practice their English and share their experiences or ideas with each other. One member particularly wanted to share her successful experience in Canada with other members and also to encourage them to keep practicing their English with Canadians. Clearly, the group expectation was to have the opportunity to communicate and connect with others.

(b) *Canadians as guest members:*   We had three Canadian guests who participated in session 4 and six Canadian guests who participated in session 5; one Canadian participated in both session 4 and 5. They represented a diversity of backgrounds: two were former immigrants, one from Poland and one from Sierra Leone; four students, one each from the Faculty of Arts and Science and two from the Faculty of Social Work; a professor from the Faculty of Religion at the University of Manitoba; and one volunteer who was helping international students with their English. They were also from diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds: one Polish, one African, two English, two German, one French and one Ukrainian.

4.4 Group Process

Group process followed the suggested framework. It was expected that the focus of the group was on *sharing* rather than *resolving* issues. The details of each group session plan and session recordings are in Appendix 8. The following is a summary of the focus of each group session:

<u>Session 1</u>

We spent time to get to know each other and also to clarify what the group was about. Participants were invited to contribute their ideas for the group process. Participants were also invited to share their initial feelings when they first came to Canada. The major themes in their sharing were related to their difficulties in the English language, their excitement about the cultural diversity in Canada, and their liking of summer warmth and dislike of winter cold in Winnipeg.

<u>Session 2</u>

I repeated the content of session 1 in session 2 as 7 out of 12 participants were new to the group. Moreover, I introduced the idea of " all in the same boat", and used a paper boat as a symbol to represent that the members in the group were "all in the same boat". Members were invited to put down their thoughts and feelings on the boat when they came to the group session. An additional theme that emerged when they discussed their initial feelings in Canada was related to their difficulties in living arrangements. One interesting phenomenon was that those who had come to the first session could express themselves more quickly and smoothly at this session because their self-confidence had increased since the first session.

Session 3

Participants were divided into three small groups to share their experiences of settling in; each group came up with a major theme. These focused on the experiences in their homestay, the challenge of communicating in English, and their loneliness and adjustment struggles. They tended to share their factual experiences but not much of their feelings in those experiences.

We also watched the first part of the video called *"Cold Water – Intercultural Adjustment and Values Conflict of Foreign Students and Scholars at an American University"*. That part dealt with the initial feelings of foreign students. Participants were stimulated by the video and processed more about their difficulties making Canadian friends.

Session 4

This session focused on the issues of making friends. We had three Canadian guest members in this session. Both international students and Canadian participants shared similar expectations of good qualities in friendships. Afterwards, we shared the ways we made friends in our home countries. Canadians perceived that they made friends in school or during social interactions. They made friends easily but these friendships might not be at a deep level. Some kept close contact with their extended families and some did not. People from the Middle East perceived that they enjoyed sharing whatever they had with their friends. Asians took a longer time to develop their relationships with other people before they called each other friends. However, when they considered themselves friends, their relationships were already quite close. They tended to treat their friends when they ate out. Africans perceived that they were very

straightforward and approached people with whom they thought they could make friends. Both Canadian and international participants made comments on the other's situation. Canadians perceived that international students, in coming to a new country, had to start over again to make friends. One Canadian guest member especially pointed out that it was more usual for international students to approach Canadians first than vice versa. Some also perceived that it took a long time for Asians to become friends with each other. Moreover, one thought that the high density of the population in some countries resulted in closer relationships. International students thought that it was easier for Canadians to make friends because they had more free time.

The first part of the session was very dynamic and exciting, and it took up a majority of the allotted time. In the second part of the session, we shared our experiences of making friends with the other group of people; that is, Canadians making friends with international students and international students making friends with Canadians. We had international students share how they tried to make friends with Canadians. They might ask Canadian friends for help as an activity in their "friendship". International students experienced Canadians' invitations as warm, but sometimes realized that Canadians might not mean it to the same extent. Sometimes the behaviour might just indicate politeness. This can also work in reverse. For example, one Canadian, who had been in China, felt that Asians sometimes accept invitations even though they might not intend to follow through. In Chinese culture, it would be rude to decline an invitation.

Session 5

This session focused on discussion of the diversity of culture in the world. We had six Canadian guest members in this session. In the warm-up activities, both

Canadian participants and international student participants were interested in the exercise that checked their knowledge about typical Canadians. Results showed that both Canadian and international participants did not know much about typical Canadians, and were correct only about half of the time. One interesting finding was that international students tended to think that typical Canadians felt optimistic about their economic future. In fact, Canadian participants thought that the average Canadian felt uncomfortable about the economic situation in Canada.

Results of the discussion of a few aspects of Canadian culture and that of the international students' home countries are as follows:

(a) Education system / Expected behavior in classroom / Amount and format of home work or assignment / Role and relationship of teacher and student / Relationship with authority:

- Asian students spend long hours in school while Canadian students spend less.

- Canadian students are allowed to have more freedom in the classroom; e.g. they are allowed to eat and drink. While Canadian students are free to ask questions in class, Asian students have to ask permission from their teachers before they can speak up in class. While most Asian participants preferred Canadian culture in this respect, one comparatively older Chinese student disliked classroom discipline in Canada. The fact that Canadian students spoke so much in class was considered an interruption.

(b) Role and relationship in family/ dating and married couple/ parents and children

- Participants from Iran, Thailand, China and Sierra Leona stated that their people would choose their parents over their romantic relationship if conflict arose. However, Mexican and Canadian participants stated that the parents from their countries would not interfere or get involved in their children's loving relationships. They would accept their children's choices and live with them.

(c) Comfort zone / physical space or distance / eye contact / touch

Eye contact: Generally eye contact was perceived as more acceptable between same sex people for any culture.

Hugging / Shaking hands: Canadians, whether male or female, tend to shake hands when they meet for the first time. Female Canadians tend to hug each other more than males do when they become friends. Chinese tend to shake hands when they first meet. One young Chinese male participant expressed that he felt uncomfortable with hugging when he first came to Canada. He said that Chinese people in China rarely hug each other. After he had been in Canada for five months, he became more comfortable with hugging. Two Mexican participants and one African participant said that hugging was the norm in their cultures.

Going out with opposite sex: Male and female Canadians had different levels of acceptance if a man and a woman, who were not in a relationship, were spending time with each other. Males were more liberal; females were more conservative. International students did not have any comment on this.

Session 6

The focus of this session was to provide an opportunity for the group members to reflect on the experiences in session 4 and 5 at a more personal level, and to be aware of the process of their culture shock experience. Generally, international student participants found that it was easier for them to make friends in their home countries than in Canada. One felt discouraged to try to make friends with Canadians because of the language barrier. Another felt rejected. Two alternatives came up in the discussion. Besides talking with Canadians, they could do some physical activities with Canadians. They could also share their strengths, something they were good at, with Canadians. Each participant shared one of his or her strengths in the group.

After the reflection, we watched the second part of the video *"Cold Water"*. Again, participants were stimulated by the video. Two participants shared their unpleasant experiences with Canadians. One participant perceived that those experiences were related to the fundamental difference of individualism in Canadian culture and the collectivism in some other cultures.

Session 7

This session focused on evaluation of the group and discussion of the details of a farewell activity. After participants had filled out an evaluation form, we had an open discussion about the evaluation of the group. Generally, participants enjoyed the group sessions and found the group helpful for their adjustment. Some participants especially treasured the opportunity of hearing other international students' experiences and learning from each other. All participants liked the idea of having Canadian guest members in the group. They thought that the group had facilitated their making friends.

One participant wished that the group had been a closed group. The group had, in fact, been a closed group. However, participants' attendance fluctuated, and we had two different groups of Canadian guest members in sessions 4 and 5. This may have confused him. In addition, participants supported having Canadians in each group session and approved having both small and large group discussions. They voiced a hope that a similar group would be available to them in the future.

At the end of the session, it was decided that spending a weekend at a cottage in the Whiteshell would be the farewell activity for the group.

4.5 Evaluation

Most participants were very involved in the small and large group discussions. The average attendance of the nine group members was 74%. The group tone was significantly more dynamic in sessions 4 and 5 when Canadian guest members attended the group. Participants were comparatively more interested in comparing the similarities and differences of different cultures in these two sessions than the other sessions. As the group proceeded, group members became more relaxed and open in the discussions.

The details of the evaluation are in the recording of session 7.

Seven students filled out the two questionnaires. A summary of the results is in Appendix 8. Group members filled out the questionnaires once only in their individual meeting with me. They were not asked to do the post-tests since the pre-tests were finally completed before the fifth session. It would therefore have not been that significant to compare the pre and post-tests.

Results in Questionnaire 1 showed that the range of self-efficacy scores of the seven group members was from 66 to 95 out of 115. The average mean score was 85, which is 74% of 115.

Results in questionnaire 2 showed that the seven group members generally had medium to low stress levels and medium to high arousal levels. The average stress score was 3.9 out of 10 and the average arousal score was 4 out of 7. The details of each participant's scores are in Appendix 8.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 Objectives of the Group

The group achieved its six objectives to varying degrees:

(a) Help group members to process their experiences (physical, emotional and intellectual) in adjusting to a new culture: There were a lot of opportunities for members to share their experiences of coming to Canada, settling in, making friends and interacting with the new culture. They were encouraged to process their experiences in terms of the physical, emotional and intellectual aspects more fully. Some students had to be encouraged a few times before they were be able to share their experiences in this way. For example, one participant shared that she was very nervous when she first came to Canada. She stated that the father in the host family "made" her very nervous but she could not tell how it happened. She could only describe her reaction to the experience. When I asked her what the father really did or what she saw or experienced that made her nervous, she was finally able tell me that it was because he did not talk to her or talk much in the family. She did not know what to do with him or his behaviour.

In the design of the group, I used questionnaire 2 (Appendix 5) to help members access their feelings in my individual meetings with them. That questionnaire helped them access their feelings first, and then they opened up and shared themselves with me a lot. The questionnaire was very helpful. One Chinese male student told me that he would cry and be worried quite a lot if he heard that any of his family members were sick or not well. It is not very common for Chinese males to disclose this vulnerability. A few students shared that they would be quite tense when they communicated with

Canadians in English. I presume they were not tense with me because I also spoke English with a Chinese accent! Actually I noticed that as long as they were able to communicate they felt more relaxed. A few also shared that they felt pressured to do well in school and complete their programs on time. Otherwise they would waste their parents' or their own money. Conversely, some also felt very relaxed, calm and peaceful because they could enjoy the freedom of not having their families around and they could take charge of their lives. I found that having them access their feelings first through the questionnaire could help them open up. When they had become comfortable, I did not feel they had much trouble disclosing their personal feelings in a one-to-one situation.

I used a similar approach in the first group session. I asked how they felt when they first came to Canada. They responded with their feelings first and then explained their situation or their experiences to the group. Some avoided emotional content, referring to sensations as though they were feelings, such as 'feeling cold in Winnipeg'. Some were less superficial, sharing deeper feelings such as feeling shocked because they did not understand a word in English at the airport. (That member had learned English for quite a long time in his country, which confirms reports in the literature that some international students' oral communication ability is not at a functional level.) One felt surprised when she saw the population diversity at the airport in Canada: "People had different colours."

I think that getting the international students to assess their feelings first is a good strategy to help them to assess and express their experiences to the fullest. However, feelings and experiences could be contradictory because some feelings may be attached to the stigma of weakness. For example, a Chinese male disagreed that he was feeling

lonely or missed his family but he admitted that he would cry or would be worried when he heard that any of his family members were sick or not well. I also found that the content of members' sharing could be very free flowing and personal in the individual meeting yet was comparatively more intellectual and topic focused in the group discussion. In both settings, I found that they were very open, and it seemed that they were happy to finally have an opportunity to share their important experiences.

(b) Alleviate group members' experience of adjustment stress: This objective was achieved by having them share their experiences in the group and by the acknowledgement made by the facilitator of both their individual experiences and those shared with other group members. As Shulman (1984) stated, "Knowing that others share your feelings somehow makes them less frightening and easier to deal with. When as a group member one discovers one is not alone in feeling overwhelmed by a problem,....one is often better able to mobilize oneself to deal with the problem productively" (p.166). Also, acknowledging the members' personal experiences made them feel heard and understood. This can be one of the most powerful forces to enable them to accept their experiences as normal and thus alleviate their stress.

(c) *Help group members access their acquired strengths to cope with their challenges, learn new coping strategies from each other, and increase their confidence in coping:* Instead of giving suggestions or advice about how they dealt with their undesirable experiences or unpleasant feelings, I let group members hear other "experienced" international students' experiences. One member who had been in

Canada for two years, which was the longest of any of the members, shared that she was very confused when she first came to Canada because she did not understand English. However, she was told that her English would improve a lot over a year. She studied an ESL program for a year and participated in a lot of groups in Vancouver similar to this one. She kept practicing, and now her English had improved significantly. Her sharing was very encouraging for other international students. As Shulman (1984) stated, " There is not the same impact when a worker in individual work tries to reassure the client that the same feelings are shared by others. Hearing them articulated and experiencing the feelings in the group sessions makes a unique impression." (p.166) The member who had this opportunity to share her successful experience with others would feel empowered by acknowledging her personal growth and by being able to help others (Aleksiuk, 1996). The other members could learn a new way of coping; by practicing, their English could also be improved.

Another example illustrates how the group could help members alleviate their experience of adjustment stress, access their acquired skills and abilities to cope with their challenges, and increase their confidence in coping. Some members complained that they did not like the food at their homestay families. One member shared that he disliked pasta. Instead of telling his host family, he threw the pasta into the garbage secretly. There was nothing wrong with what he did but he did not get what he wanted. Another member then shared that she had moved out from her homestay family and shared an apartment with another international student she had just got to know. She said that she would rather practice her English and also learn about Canadian cultures from

other places. Members learned that there was more than one way of dealing with their problem situation. They also became aware of the acquired problem solving skills that had already helped them get to a more pleasant situation. By accumulating their knowledge, they increased their sense of personal power (Aleksiuk, 1996) and also increased their confidence in coping with more challenges.

(d) Increase group members' awareness of each other's culture and the diversity of cultures in Canada, and to learn to appreciate this diversity: When we shared our backgrounds, our experiences and our reactions to those experiences, we had already shared parts of our culture with each other. Moreover, we focused on culture especially in session 5 and discussed it more explicitly. The cultural aspects we touched on were related to school, relationships and physical distance / comfort zones. Basically, we shared the cultural behaviours we learned and practiced in our home countries. It came naturally and spontaneously that we tended to compare the similarities and differences of cultures, and we became excited by the discussion. It seemed that participants liked to share the salient differences in their individual cultures. However, our discussion tended to be more on an intellectual, rather than a personal, level. Therefore, no confrontation or conflict arose in session 5 even though there were so many differences. I think the discussion in all sessions, especially in session 5, did achieve the objective of increasing both group members' awareness of each others' cultures and their ability to appreciate this diversity.

At one point, I explored participants' preferences regarding one cultural aspect on a more personal level in the group. I asked what Asian participants preferred between

Canadian and Asian classroom behaviours as they were greatly different. While most Asian participants preferred Canadian to Asian classroom behaviours, one comparatively older Chinese student expressed a different point of view; she perceived that Canadian students interrupt the teacher's lecture too much and too often. It wasted time. Canadian guest members did not have a response to this comment. It would have been interesting if I, as a facilitator, had invited the Canadian guest members to give feedback on this point of view. Then the international students and Canadians could have had a real dialogue on this subject matter.

When I invited Canadian guest members to our group, it was intended to have guest members from a diversity of backgrounds, including cultural backgrounds. It turned out that we had guests from six different cultural backgrounds; two English, two German, one Polish, one African, one French, and one Ukrainian. Among these eight guest members, two had been immigrants in Canada, who had families from one to several generations in Canada. We also had group members from seven different countries. At the very beginning of session 5, we completed a round to introduce ourselves including our cultural backgrounds. International students could get a sense of the diversity of cultures in Canada, Canadian guest members could also get a sense of the diversity of international students. This awareness increased as the discussion continued. For example, Canadian guest members shared that some Canadians kept close contact with their extended family but some do not. In another example, one male Canadian participant said that it was acceptable for him to have eye contact with everyone while one female Canadian participant stated that she had more eye contact with females than males. When these opinions were shared explicitly, we were more aware of the

differences between and within cultures. Church (1982) states that besides learning new cues and norms through observation and participation, explicit communication is also necessary for learning to occur.

(e) Raise awareness of these issues, and make recommendations that could be implemented for future students: As I am writing up this practicum research and gathering together findings from the literature and my experiences in this support group for international students, I see the report itself can raise awareness of the issues of international students. In addition, when I was implementing this group, I am sure that the group attracted attention from all the people I contacted or consulted regarding this group. Furthermore, the participants, both international students and Canadian guest members became more aware of the issues discussed in the group. Recommendations will be outlined in Chapter 6.

5.2 Individual Meetings with Group Members

Although it was intended to meet with interested participants individually before the first group session, it did not happen. The major reason was that participants registered for the group from one to a few days before the first group session. Half of the participants in the first session did not have prior registration but just showed up in the first group session. Therefore, it was not possible to schedule the individual meeting before the first group session.

However, individual meetings did eventually occur for all but one participant. As I have mentioned above, I found that questionnaire 2 was very helpful in terms of helping

participants open up above themselves. When they explained their feelings, it surprised me that they shared so much with me at the time. They were very ready to share. It was very helpful for me to get to know them and their current situations.

Besides getting to know them, I also had an opportunity to explain the purpose of the group personally and to collect their suggestions at the same time. They tended to accept the framework of the group. Since international students may have a different background from students in general, it may be helpful to clarify each participant's concerns in an individual meeting.

In addition to the fact that some participants did not register before they came to the group, some did not give notice when they were not able to come to the individual meeting, and some forgot the meeting. It seems to me that some were confused during their initial adjustment period. Some were just irresponsible and did not take the group seriously. Sometimes I wondered if these behaviours were related to cultural or individual differences.

5.3 Recruitment

I was surprised that brochures, posters and e-mail messages were a relatively ineffective way to attract students, though they were helpful in combination with personal contact. However, I also found that it was very convenient to use an e-mail address as a point of contact with international students and with my group members later on.

Regarding the registration, I think it is necessary to have more specific step-by-step instructions in the promotional information. For example, a statement such as "If you are interested, please contact (the name of the facilitator), the group facilitator, for

registration before a certain date" should be included, instead of saying that "If you are interested, please contact the facilitator". International students may not have been in groups before. Therefore, it should not be assumed that international students know how to register, and data should be stated as clearly and explicitly as possible.

5.4 Group Composition

(a) International students: Among the twenty participants who initially attended the group, two thirds of them were taking ESL programs at the University. It seemed that there was a big need for this group of students to join a support group. Compared with the international students who are already in university programs, the students in ESL programs might have less opportunity to communicate with others. This group of students probably had a lower level of English competency and had a limited opportunity to interact with others, other than with other ESL students. Their interest in this group indicated that they needed support and connection with others, besides practice of their English, which could be one of the reasons they came to the group. It was a pity that four students from this category dropped out because of their self-perceived inability to communicate well in English.

Interestingly, it happened that these four drop-outs were all Asians. One Mexican student, whose English competency was also not very high, stayed in the group. Another interesting comparison was between a Korean participant and the same Mexican participant. Both of them had been in Canada for three weeks at the time they came to the first session, and were in the same ESL program. Although both had trouble expressing themselves in English in the first session and were at a similar level in spoken

English, the Mexican student was comparatively more expressive from the first session. In session 7, the last session, it was quite obvious that the Mexican student's spoken English improved faster than that of the Korean. The group witnessed the fact that international students whose mother tongue was one of the Romance languages could learn the English language faster than those whose mother tongue was not, assuming that they had the same learning opportunities in their ESL programs. Another reason to explain the above phenomenon could be related to cultural and /or individual differences. The Mexican student was already very expressive. She shared that being expressive was the norm in her culture, and she also seemed to be more ready to take risks compared with the Korean student. These personal characteristics helped her progress.

(b) *Canadian guest members:* Ideally, it would have been good to have recruited Canadian students in the same way I recruited international students. However, I was pessimistic and anticipated that not many Canadian students would be interested in coming. Therefore, I invited my friends and some people I got to know on different occasions to join some group sessions. The role they played in the group was being themselves as Canadians and sharing their views of Canadian culture. The reason for my pessimism will be further explained in the section of 5.7 dealing with my understanding of the dynamic between international students and Canadians.

All Canadian guest members were quite involved in the group discussions. Their openness and enthusiasm influenced the international student participants in a positive way, causing the discussion to become more dynamic.

5.5 Participant Information Sheet

The form helped me to get to know the group members. I explained to each member clearly the usage of the information and the confidentiality issue. Members were also reminded to write down only the information with which they felt comfortable. As the literature states, international students tend to defer to the perceived authority of the clinicians. Therefore, it is important to remind them of their personal rights. For example, one member did not want to disclose his age, which I respected that and eventually getting the range of his age. As far as I know age, for some Asians, is a sensitive question.

5.6 My Role as the Group Facilitator

As I had assumed, some international students were not accustomed to doing the talking in the initial stages of the group, so I was more directive, leading the group discussion. My role was focused more on encouraging group members to share their experiences, and acknowledging their individual experiences and strengths. Members felt acknowledged and found that their situations were not unique. They became more comfortable in the group and became more involved and active in their participation as the group proceeded. My role then focused more on facilitating their sharing and discussion and also on helping them generate shared resources and new coping strategies.

I think the change in role of the group leader as the group proceeds is very common for any group situation. However, it may take a longer time for international students to warm up in a group, especially those with English as a second language. Besides the fact that communicating in English may be difficult for some international

students, the situation itself may be very novel for most participants. In fact, only one of the five members who completed the final evaluation had been in a group similar to International Conversations. Moreover, it is a fact of human nature that talking about oneself in front of a group of strangers can be intimidating. Therefore, being patient and constantly summarizing what the group has done may help international students follow the group process and adjust to the group.

Another issue regarding my role as the group facilitator is related to my cultural background. Since I came from a culture different from the host culture and I was a former international student, international student participants might have related to me differently. For example, I was surprised that international student participants were so open to share their personal information and experiences with me in my individual meetings with them. Besides the fact that Questionnaire 2 was helpful, I noticed that they could relate to me as a peer or a "big sister" who had had similar experiences and would understand and accept their experiences better. However, it could have had nothing to do with my background. It may have simply been that when they felt accepted by me, they were willing to share themselves openly. The third possibility could be nothing related with me at all but they had a great need to share their challenging experiences and they finally found someone who was interested in hearing their stories. Therefore, their reactions in the group or to me could be related to my cultural background, my interpersonal relationship with them or their intra-personal factors.

Another aspect of my influence in the group was that I spoke English more simply and slowly than native English speakers, and since English is my second language, I spoke with a Chinese accent. Some international students might have found that my

English was easy for them to understand. However, some might have thought they could not learn English from me or practice English with me because I am not a native English speaker, and decided to drop out from the group after they had attended once or twice.

In order to avoid my subjective perception of the needs of international student participants, I invited participants to contribute their ideas to the agenda of the group sessions. I also constantly observed and checked with the participants about their needs in the group. For example, they did not show much interest in sharing their cultural games or activities in the group sessions, and therefore I decided to cancel this activity in the group.

Nevertheless, in retrospect, I think it may be helpful to have checked out with them how they perceived me as a group facilitator both in the beginning and the end of the group. I would more easily have become aware of both the biases and strengths I brought as the facilitator in the group.

5.7 Interesting Dynamics in Group Process

(a) Ready to share / A need to share: From the very first session, it was obvious that international participants were very ready to share. I had the impression that they actually had a strong need to process their experiences by sharing them with others, and this was not restricted to positive events. Most were also quite open to share their unpleasant experiences and feelings. It seemed the dynamic in this group was different from that stated in the literature which stressed that international students are very concerned about "losing face" (Flaskerud, 1986). It seems that when the environment is favourable, and the international students perceive that it is safe to share, they will be

ready to do so. A safe environment in this context means being accepted and feeling connected through having similar experiences to others.

(b) English language barrier: It was anticipated that most international student participants would have English as their second language and might have difficulty in understanding oral English and / or expressing themselves in English. It turned out that all participants except two from Africa had English as their second language. Some had more difficulty in expressing themselves in English than others. Some had trouble following the group process because of English difficulties and decided to leave the group. Some could follow but perceived that their English would be a barrier to their participation in the group and decided to drop out. However, others who also had trouble expressing themselves did not allow their English difficulty to be a barrier to their participation in the group. Self-perception of English competency, self-confidence and self-efficacy perhaps made a difference in their participation. Unfortunately, that is difficult to verify because some participants did not attend the individual meeting, so did not complete the instruments, and some other group members attended so sporadically they were not classified as group members.

I think it is important for the facilitator to emphasize that the purpose of the group is for communication, and English language is just a tool for communication. Difficulty in English should not be allowed to be a barrier to communication. Creativity is an asset; participants should be encouraged to find other ways to communicate. In this group, I encouraged translation and collaboration. One of three Korean students in Sessions 1 and 2 had been in Canada for only three weeks and had trouble expressing herself in English.

I encouraged the three students to speak in Korean, and finally they worked out how to express the one's ideas in English. There were quite a few Chinese participants in the group, who all spoke Mandarin, and I was Chinese but spoke Cantonese. When they could not express themselves in English, even with a team effort, I would encourage them to write their ideas in the Chinese language on the white board or on a piece of paper. When I got the meaning, I would translate their ideas in English to the group. It took some time but it seemed nobody minded. I think the facilitator has to constantly emphasize the beauty of group effort that the purpose of the group is for communication, and that language should be a tool and not a barrier. That was the culture I was trying to create in the group, and it seemed to work.

Another issue created by the above situation is that the group facilitator has to assign a longer time for each activity and be flexible with the planned activities. Therefore the facilitator needs to be especially sensitive to the language issues among participants; the facilitator has to watch whether each group member can follow the group process and whether they need help to explain or express themselves.

(c) Needs of Participants: There were two international participants who shared with me explicitly that one of their major purposes in joining this group was to offer their support, learning experiences and insights to other international students. I imagine they felt empowered when they were able to share their successful experiences with others.

On the one hand, I see their motive as positive. However, on the other hand, if they thought that their participation in the group was solely to offer assistance and not in expectation of any benefit from the group, I suspect that they limited their learning

opportunity. There was actually one member who had this idea quite strongly. I accepted her in the group and I was expecting that she would find she benefited from the group in the end. However, she did not stay till the end and did not have an opportunity to fill out the evaluation form. She was active, involved and insightful in the group. One Canadian guest member and I also found that she was more interested to talk to Canadian guest members than the other international student participants. She stayed from session 2 till session 5, which was until the last session attended by Canadian guest members. She told me that she had just learned enough from the group. I respected that, believing that each participant has unique needs.

(d) Positive Changes /Experiences: There were many positive things that the international students appreciated about Canada. They particularly appreciated the beautiful scenery, especially in the summer time, and also the greater choices in the field of careers and greater freedom of speech. One participant especially appreciated that friends who were already in Canada met him, and therefore he did not feel so culturally shocked when he first came to Canada. I think his experience illustrates the point that social support makes a difference in adjustment.

One Thai participant asked to be placed in a Thai family and was successful. She felt very lucky, though actually she made an appropriate effort to get what she wanted; she asked and received. Her example illustrates that international students have to speak up more. Even though they may not be asked, they have to speak up for themselves, and can create their opportunities. In some respects, they can have control over what they

want by asking for it. However, whether the resources are out there or not is beyond their control.

(e) My understanding of the dynamics between international students and Canadians:

I notice that most Canadian students at the University of Manitoba lack awareness of their roles on their "internationalized campus". This was demonstrated when one Canadian participant, who was a science student, shared in the group that international students have to be more forward and approach Canadians first. Canadians are supposed to be the hosts in their country, and the hosts, I believe, should assume the role of receiving newcomers. However, I see that most Canadians do not take on this responsibility. Moreover, I think most have no interest in getting to know international students and their cultures. In addition, Canadians have a large number of choices among each other with whom to make friends. There is no need for them to make the effort to make friends with international students and I believe that it is always easier to make friends with people whose cultures are closer to one's own. International students are more eager to approach Canadians than vice versa. My understanding is that there are many needs or wants motivating international students to approach Canadians; international students want to interact or make friends with Canadians, and it is a way to make themselves feel accepted in the Canadian culture and in the mainstream. They also want to get to know Canadian customs; this was also one of the reasons some international students came to the group. Some international students may want to practice their English with native English speakers, who happen to be Canadians. With

this focus, most relationships between international students and Canadians run the risk of becoming potentially one-way relationships.

In sessions 4 and 5, I observed, and Canadian participants reported, that the international students were more eager to talk to the Canadian participants; they tended to face and respond to the Canadian participants more in the small group discussion.

When I asked the Canadian participants, after the group sessions, how the group was for them, they responded that they had enjoyed the discussion. I invited them to follow up by e-mail if they had further thoughts about the group in general or the discussions in particular, but did not receive further responses. It would be interesting to explore the impact of this kind of group on Canadian participants in future studies.

5.8 Questionnaire 1 and 2

Regarding Questionnaire 1, although it was unfortunate that the post-test was not completed in the way I had anticipated and therefore could not reflect the effect of the interventions in the group, I believe the scores of the Self-Efficacy Scale reflected members' general levels of beliefs in their own competence. The results of their scores matched my observations and my understanding of them in the group. Members #2, 4, 6 and 7 were comparatively more confident than the others.

Regarding Questionnaire 2, the average stress score was 3.9 out of 10 and the average arousal score was 4 out of 7. I think the results reflected the fact that members' arousal levels were generally higher than their stress levels. There was no specific correlation with any other factors such as age, gender or length of time in Canada. The

results seemed to be related to their personalities that I got to know from their participation in the group. However, there is no concrete evidence to support this.

5.9 Conclusion

All available sources of information previously mentioned gave me a very comprehensive understanding about the kinds of support needed by international students in their process of adjustment and adaptation. It became obvious that there is a gap between the support provided for and the support needed by international students at the University of Manitoba. The outcomes of this project show that there is a demand for a support group for international students. Most students who had shown interest to this group were newly arrived international students who had been in Canada less than one year. They were students in ESL, undergraduate or graduate programs. The common denominator was that they needed support in the early stages after their arrival in Canada and this help was sometimes hard to find.

CHAPTER 6

REFLECTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Reflections on the Literature Review

While I was doing the literature review, I found it provided comprehensive information on international students' issues. However, on reflection, I came up with the following concerns or reactions:

a) *Sources of information:*   More than half of the available literature on the issues of international students is from American sources. As Canadian universities are increasing their efforts to recruit international students and the number of international students is actually increasing, it is important to explore whether the issues of international students in Canada are similar to those in other countries, and also to explore what needs to done to respond to those issues.

b) *Background of authors:*   It seems that most authors are from the host countries. I am concerned about how much personal cross-cultural experience they have besides their experiences of interacting with foreigners including international students. In this case, it may be good to hear the international students' perspectives on the issues of international students, and have them more directly involved in the investigation rather than just being subjects.

c) *Motivation to recruit international students:*   Besides   internationalizing   their campuses, it seems to me that financial motivation is the major factor behind Canadian

universities' recruitment of international students. There is a saying in Chinese culture, "Sowing squash, you will have squash. Sowing beans, you will have beans". That means you will get what you intended to get. If money is indeed a primary objective, universities generally receive greater revenues from international students, though this varies between institutions. However, if another goal is internationalizing Canadian campuses and having both Canadian and international students benefit and enrich their learning experience in the exchange process, some more ground work needs to be done. Most documents from the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) talk about recruitment policies and practices, admission procedures, marketing and tuition fees. Seldom is the information related to support services for international students. If there are some, they are usually very brief, such as orientation programs. More comprehensive and continuing support services are needed for both international and Canadian students. Moreover, intercultural training programs for university personnel are needed. We cannot expect Canadians and international students to automatically work well with each other without facilitation. Consciousness-raising and education are necessary.

As international students bring significant economic benefit to both Canadian universities and local communities, they deserve to receive greater support to help them adjust to this new environment. The earlier they can get settled in the new environment, the sooner they are able to play their role in bringing a positive international perspective and positive diversity to the classroom.

Social support is the most important issue for international students in their initial adjustment period. If international students become well adjusted to their lives in the

new environment, the provincial government would save a lot of resources providing mental health services for the "problem" international students at a later time.

d) *"Invisible minority" groups; permanent residents and students who are taking ESL programs:* While many studies address the cross-cultural adjustment issues of international students, it seems that two other groups of students, who are basically *invisible,* are experiencing similar adjustment challenges to international students. These are the permanent residents (formerly called landed immigrants) and students who are taking ESL programs. Permanent residents have to stay in Canada for at least three years before they become citizens. ESL students come to Canada to take ESL programs for varying amounts of time.

According to Statistics Canada, in 1997-98 there were 32,905 international students and 50,612 permanent residents attending Canadian universities. The number of ESL students is not documented by Statistics Canada, CBIE, or AUCC. Therefore taking a conservative estimate, international students, permanent residents and ESL students represent at least 10 % of the total university population of 822,772 in 1997-98. My concern is that the resources for support services should be directed to these three groups of students, and not just to international students.

e) *Personal resources of international students:* The characteristics of international students can serve as assets or personal resources in their coping with cross-cultural adjustment. I found that most authors tend to focus more on the students' difficulties and not the acquired strengths, which are their cultural backgrounds, knowledge, abilities and

skills. It seems to me that they have not understood that one of the ways of helping is facilitating students' access to their acquired strengths which are not "foreign" to them.

Moreover, when international students are able to use their natural abilities or skills to cope with unfamiliar situations, it would be helpful if that could somehow be acknowledged. This would enable them to see themselves as capable, which in turn would lead to greater confidence in coping. For example, at a social activity for international students, a student from Singapore shared that when she wanted to get off a bus, she did not know how to tell the driver because the method in Singapore is to press a button. She observed and then found out that she had to pull a string. She learned by *observation*. Another example is of a Polish student who wanted to get to know other Polish students at the University of Manitoba. She put up an advertisement on the notice board at the International Centre for Students. Not long after, she got to know another Polish student and they became good friends. She solved her problem by *participation*. Besides *explicit communication*, the learning of new cues, norms or problem solving methods, adjustment can also be accomplished by *observation* or *participation*. *Explicit communication, observation and participation* are international students' acquired skills; acknowledging their successful accomplishments can reinforce their strengths and bolster them to face other more challenging experiences. If their success or accomplishment can be acknowledged by others, these students would learn to acknowledge themselves.

f) *Assessment of English language ability:* It is a well-known fact that the TOEFL score is not an accurate measure of international students' oral comprehension and communication skills, and written ability in the English language. Universities should

therefore either change their admission requirements or offer some programs to help international students improve their English to a functional level.

g) *Somatization of psychological problems is a natural human reaction:* As Winkelman (1994) and Khoo and Abu-Rasian (1994) state, excessive stress can induce dysfunctional physiological conditions in different bodily systems, which can result in chronic somatic complaints that have no clear organic basis. Therefore, somatization of psychological problems is a natural human reaction. It does not just happen to Asians but is true of any human being. To say that somatization of psychological problems happens more in Asians is a stereotyped distinction. It is common to hear people, whether they are Westerners or non-Westerners, complain of headaches or stomach aches when they are under excessive stress. Therefore, though researchers like to make distinctions, I believe it is untrue to imply that it is unique for international students or non-Westerners to tend to somatize their psychological problems and express them through physiological disorders.

However, while it is a natural human physiological reaction, its attribution may be more critical. Some people attribute their physiological difficulties to organic processes; some attribute those difficulties to emotional distress. While both attributions could happen to Westerners or Non-Westerners, there could be a gradation of differences between different ethnic groups, as well as within-group variations.

h) *Acceptance of mental health problems:* "Losing face" is originally a direct translation of a term in the Chinese language which is used to represent the loss of

reputation. As people used the term and passed it on, the meaning behind the term became distorted to imply that only the Chinese are concerned with "losing face". However, it is not only Chinese or Asians who are concerned about their reputations. Westerners are also very much concerned about their reputations. I agree that there is a stigma associated with mental health issues for Asians. However, this is also true of Westerners. I see that many Westerners also have trouble swallowing the stigma associated with being identified with mental health issues, whether personally or as a family member. There is no difference in meaning between "losing face" and negatively affecting the reputation. Again, saying that Asians or Chinese are more concerned with losing face is making a stereotyped distinction. It could also be that there is a gradation difference in terms of accepting mental health problems among different ethnic groups or among different individuals within groups, and these distinctions are not acknowledged.

i) *Proactive approach / Team approach /Continuing support program:* I am pleased to hear that some universities, such as Columbia University mentioned in Chapter 2, take a proactive approach to helping international students become familiar with the education system and social customs. I especially appreciate the fact that the university offers a six-session weekly group after the initial orientation program. This can provide students with some continuing support while they are experiencing the initial challenges. My own group attempted to do just that.

I also appreciate the team approach in Ilagan's Buddy Program, also mentioned in Chapter 2. The program involved international students, Canadian buddies, staff and

community volunteers in the design, implementation and evaluation of the program. As it was participatory, everyone involved could contribute.

6.2 Recommendations

I gained valuable experience organizing this group for international students. This, combined with information from the literature, has allowed me to generate the following ideas for working with international students.

6.2.1 Group organization

a) *Effective promotion:*   International students were more likely to respond favourably to an in-person referral or recommendation rather than written information (Appendix 7, column 8). The language and cultural barriers discussed earlier may impede their understanding of the purpose and format of the group and may also make it unlikely that they would approach a stranger (the group facilitator identified in the printed materials) to clarify any questions they might have. Though there is a place for posters, brochures and e-mails, and these are effective ways to reach a lot of people quickly, it may be more effective to promote a counselling group for international students in a more personal manner. Two ways come to mind. Group facilitator(s) could make brief presentations at classes, events and activities attended by international students, and be available to answer questions afterwards. The facilitator(s) could also advertise the group through staff who already play a significant role in the lives of these students and with whom they may feel more at ease. These significant others could include their ESL teachers, student advisors, counsellors in the Student Counselling and

Career Centre and medical personnel in the University Health Service. Though this would entail significant outreach efforts on the part of the facilitator(s), I believe it could be a very effective way to raise awareness of and legitimize the group in the eyes of students. The printed material could accompany the in-person information, to both reinforce the message and to act as a reminder.

b) *Pre-group screening interview:* Although I had planned to have individual meetings before the start of the group these were eventually scheduled as the group progressed. This was unfortunate. In addition to telling potential participants about the group, and getting to know them a little, I would have become aware of their expectations of the group and could also have dealt with some housekeeping issues. Checking the fit of participants' needs and expectations with the overall purpose of the group, confirming time commitments and reinforcing desirable group behaviours, such as punctuality, etc., are important issues to visit before a group begins and can reduce later problems. This of course is an ideal scenario; all of these issues were dealt with on an on-going basis as the group progressed. There are often difficulties in organizing pre-group meetings since students register late or not all, simply turning up for the first session. Insisting on pre-registration and pre-screening would also present problems as it might mean some students would miss the opportunity to attend. While the group process was not seriously undermined by the lack of a pre-group screening interview, it is nevertheless suggested as desirable.

c) *Method of evaluation:* Since the group was feeling rather than knowledge based, it is hard to measure the success of the group very scientifically. Even if I had used the two questionnaires, comparing the results between pre-tests and post-tests, I probably would not have obtained any more reliable results. This is because there were so many variables in the group members' lives that could affect their self-efficacy, and stress and arousal levels. Nevertheless, all respondents indicated that they would recommend this group to other international students so it would seem that they experienced something positive. Therefore, the level of students' participation and involvement in this kind of group and their final feedback of the group are possibly the most reliable evaluation measures of the group.

d) *Suggested format for a support group for international students:*

Based on my experience with this group, I have the following suggestions:

- A support group for international students should meet weekly.

- The group should consist of ten or twelve sessions of two hours each. I found that six sessions were insufficient. More sessions would allow increased time for participants to share and discuss a range of cross-cultural adjustment issues, and also help group members to develop a stronger relationship with each other. When their relationships are closer, they are more likely to support each other.

- The target population should be open to *international students*, which include international students and permanent residents in undergraduate and graduate programs and students taking any ESL programs, and also welcome *host students* who are interested in international students' issues. Having international students and

host students in the group can result in greater communication between the two, and thus more opportunities for them to express and challenge stereotypes that international students and host nationals have of one another. In addition, it may be good to find some ways to recruit host students who are not from the host city because they may share similar needs as international students, such as developing relationships in a new environment.

- Ideally, it would be good for the group to have two facilitators, with one originally from the host country and the other one being a permanent resident or a naturalized citizen. This arrangement hopefully would provide different perspectives, enrich the facilitation of the group and model to the participants how the two facilitators relate to each other.

- As the adult education literature states, adults can learn and produce more if they are involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of their learning programs. Martin (2000) stated that a therapist is an expert about a process, but clients are experts about their lives. In light of this, I recommend that international students should also be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of this support group. Counsellors should help international students contribute their knowledge and strengths to their support group, and tailor the group to their needs. If they are not just on the "receiving" end in the support program, they are already empowered.

- The major activities of this group are sharing and discussion. Doing some recreational or social activities together in addition can enable participants to get another perspective on each other which hopefully can help them to develop stronger relationships.

- It would also be good to have international student participants invite their significant others in the host country, such as their friends, volunteers, host families, teachers or peers from a buddy program, to join some of the group sessions or group activities.

- Since there is a Peer Advisor Program at the University of Manitoba, it might be good to include the Peer Advisors as Canadian guest members in the group. Peers are required to choose a placement and this group might become one of the options for them. It could be a place for the peer advisors to practice what they have learned from their program, and both international student participants and peer advisors would benefit.

- One of the needs identified in International Conversations is that international students need to be needed. They like to offer support and insights to other international students. Therefore, it may be empowering to involve group members in orientation programs for newly arrived international students.

- Furthermore, members who have graduated from this group could play a formal support role in the lives of other international students and also act as brokers to link them up to other informal support systems. This might take the form of a mentor program and expand current supports provided by host students. It might also be helpful for the mentors to be involved in a mentor support group so that they can continue learning how to become effective helpers for others. I see that one of the ways to empower international students is to help them to make practical use of their learning experiences.

6.2.2 Administrative Support

Some of the above suggestions need a fairly well supported infra-structure. Financial resources are often meager, and staff are already overworked. I believe there is a need for change in administrative policy in order to provide adequately support services for international students.

First of all, universities should consider international students, including those with permanent residence status and those taking ESL courses, as a minority group and have a written policy for this population. They should conduct needs assessment studies on their campuses in order to identify the needs and their expectations of the students and their utilization of general support services.

Secondly, as mentioned earlier, the TOEFL score is not an accurate measure of international students' oral and written ability in the English language. Universities should therefore use another method to measure international students' abilities in those areas or offer increased support programs to help them improve their English if they continue to use the TOEFL score as an admission requirement.

Thirdly, training programs have more recently been introducing and expanding multi-cultural components, and such training is now frequently required by the registering bodies. However, many counsellors, whose training predates this, have missed this opportunity. Therefore, administration should encourage and provide formal and specific intercultural training for counsellors as well as teaching personnel. Cultural differences between counsellors and international student clients, language barriers of international students, and difficulty in diagnosis of students' problems because of cross-cultural factors are barriers which may affect the effectiveness of teaching and

counselling for international students. Intercultural training will increase counsellors' awareness of those barriers and help them develop cultural competence, as mentioned in Chapter 2.

Fourthly, besides having intercultural training for counsellors, it is also necessary to provide intercultural communication workshops for both the international students and individuals who have significant contact with them. These individuals could be host students, teaching and administrative personnel, volunteers, host families or others who are interested in communicating with international students. While the workshop could help international students better understand their cross-cultural experiences, it could also increase the sensitivity of these host individuals to the needs and concerns of international students. Moreover, this kind of workshop could help both international students and host individuals anticipate problems or opportunities in their interactions with each other. Getting all offices and departments involved in helping international students can create a global ethos and perspective on campus.

Fifthly, as stated in the literature (Aubrey, 1991), a close teamwork among all staff, especially staff at the International Centre for students, counsellors, medical providers and student advisors, is needed to reduce international students' adjustment problems and prevent crises more effectively. Working collaboratively and referring when necessary provides a more cohesive support for students.

Finally, the recruitment office should provide accurate promotional information to the interested international students, and state a true picture of the necessary requirements for success in university and the support services available on campus. As stated in the

literature (Ying & Liese, 1994), better pre-arrival preparation and accurate anticipation of a new environment can facilitate adjustment.

6.2.3 Clinical approaches and techniques

International students experience a wide variety of newly acquired roles. The role of counsellors is to assist students to build and develop satisfying identities and social roles in a new environment. International students have not only to adjust to a new culture but also to learn its salient characteristics, such as new customs, in order to live with others more satisfactorily in a new environment.

One of the major changes international students experience is becoming "second language speakers" and they may experience difficulty in listening and expressing themselves at an authentic level. Therefore, counsellors should adjust their language level to that of the client in order to avoid a breakdown of communication. Doing so can also give students a sense of comfort and control. Moreover, it is important to give second language speakers sufficient time to process their experiences, their thoughts and feelings, and also to organize their ideas, as they require more time to process both their incoming and outgoing messages.

In the beginning of the counselling process, counsellors should allow clients to share their experiences and their understanding of their issues within the comfort of their ethnic or personal cultures. Western counselling approaches tend to help clients process their feelings and to encourage clients to take personal responsibility for their issues. However, in the beginning counselling stage, it may be more important for counsellors to

respect the clients' cultural perspective in order to build the trust and rapport necessary for contructive work in future interventions.

6.3 Conclusion

As this is close to the end of my eighth year in Canada, it is also close to the end of this practicum research report and also close to the end of my time in Canada, at least for the present. I think that I, in the role of an "experienced" international student, would not feel satisfied or complete without contributing the knowledge I gained from my cross-cultural experience to the helping profession.

I am glad to see that Canada is a nation of immigrants and a multicultural country. Besides the immense natural resources, there is also a wealth of human resources, and a multi-cultural population certainly makes a difference to Canada. Similarly, a multi-cultural student body in universities can also be a very rich resource to facilitate students' learning. However, while some of this potential has been utilized successfully by universities and colleges, I believe that much of this rich resource has been wasted.

Canadian universities are no different from other countries in their attempt to internationalize their campuses through the recruitment of international students. In order for these students to successfully carry out their roles, they have to first adapt and adjust to the new environment. If they are successful, everyone benefits.

In light of all of the ideas, thoughts and suggestions regarding working with international students given by clinicians and researchers, and programs provided for international students by educational institutions, I came up with the idea of developing a support group for international students. The major purpose was to help international

students process their adjustment experiences and access their acquired strengths, in order to alleviate their adjustment stress and increase their confidence in their ability to cope.

Their decision to attend the group indicated that they needed help, especially in the initial adjustment period. Their needs to process their experiences, and to communicate and connect with others were verified by their participation and involvement in the group. Results indicated that international students found the group was helpful in terms of feeling more in control of their experiences and more confident to cope. They also learned some new ways of coping from each other.

Although international students' personal resources may have worked well in their countries, those resources may not be enough for them to weather the new challenges in a new environment. Moreover, their personal resources cannot change overnight. Similarly the external demands are beyond their control. Therefore, expanding and increasing their personal resources and developing their external resources can facilitate adaptation.

In conclusion, I believe that consistent support is very important for international students. Their adjustment and adaptation to a new country is a continuing process. During this process, they have to face and cope with many challenges and difficulties, and at those times, they need a source of reliable support. A support group such as the one conducted for this practicum is one way to provide this. The group provided a place for international students to better process their adjustment experiences. As Weaver (1993) states, culture shock is an inevitable but natural process of cross-cultural adjustment, which can be overcome with conscious awareness of the process and one's own reactions to it. Moreover, a group approach can provide the opportunity for

international student participants to hear others' similar experiences and realize that their experiences are not unique. They can learn from others successful endeavors, share their own triumphs, and solve problems together. This process can help them validate their progress, and increase their feelings of self-efficacy so that they can make the best of the academic and human opportunities available to them.

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International Conversations

Date: May 18 – June 22, 2001 (Friday)
Time: 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm
Place: Student Counselling and Career Centre
474 University Centre
Sessions: 6 (Once a week)
Target: International Students

Content:

- Share your adjustment experiences in Canada.
- Learn new ways of coping
- Discuss how to make friends including Canadian friends.
- Share games or activities you learned in your home countries.

If you are interested, please contact
Helina Tsang
474-8592
helina_tsang@yahoo.com

International Conversations

Suggested process of the group:

Session 1
- Getting to know each other.
- What is the group about?
- How did you feel when you first came to Canada?
- What were your experiences of settling in?

Session 2
- Reasons for coming to Canada.
- What were your expectations of life in Canada, on both a personal and academic level?
- Share your adjustment experiences in Canada

Session 3
- Share one thing which is important to you about your home country.
- Share one difficult experience you had in Canada. How did you deal with it?

Session 4
- Discuss how to make friends including Canadian friends.
- How do Canadians make friends?

Session 5
- Explore Canadian cultures (values, beliefs and practices).

Session 6
- How are you going to continue your journey in Canada?
- Farewell celebration.

Attendance
It is important that you attend each of the 6 sessions. For the short duration of this group, you are asked that you make this a priority. If you are unable to attend, please let me know as soon as you can.

Confidentiality
- Participants are free to decide what and how much information they wish to share with the group. Respect each other's decision.
- It is natural to want to discuss the content of the group with your friends or family, but please be careful not to reveal the names or identity information of others in the group.

International Conversations

Participant Information Sheet*

Given Name: _____ Family Name: _____

Sex: _____ Age: _____ Home Country: _____

Phone no: _____ E-Mail: _____

Program at university: _____

Name of university: _____

Length of time in Canada: _____ No. of family members in Canada: ____

Language/ Dialects: 1)_____ 2)_____ 3)_____

What did you do in your home country before you came to Canada?

_____

What do you plan do after you finish school in Canada? Do you plan to go back to your home country or stay in Canada?

_____

How did you find out about this group?

_____

What are your reasons for coming to this group?

_____

What would you like from the group? Any ideas or suggestions?

_____

_____

_____

*Information will be kept with strict confidence. (i.e. Your name or identity information will not be disclosed.)

International Conversations
Questionnaire 1

This questionnaire is a series of statements about your personal attitudes and traits. Each statement represents a commonly held belief. Read each statement and decide to what extent it describes you. There are no right or wrong answers. You will probably agree with some of the statements and disagree with others. Please indicate your own personal feelings about each statement below by marking the letter that best describes your attitude or feeling. Please be very truthful and describe yourself as you really are, not as you would like to be.

A = Disagree strongly
B = Disagree moderately
C = Neither agree nor disagree
D = Agree moderately
E = Agree strongly

____ 1. I like to grow indoor plants.
____ 2. When I make plans, I am certain I can make them work.
____ 3. One of my problems is that I cannot get down to work when I should.
____ 4. If I can't do a job the first time, I keep trying until I can.
____ 5. Heredity plays the major role in determining one's personality.
____ 6. It is difficult for me to make new friends.
____ 7. When I set important goals for myself, I rarely achieve them.
____ 8. I give up on things before completing them.
____ 9. I like to cook.
____ 10. If I see someone I would like to meet, I go to that person.
____ 11. I avoid facing difficulties.
____ 12. If something looks too complicated, I will not even bother to try it.
____ 13. There is some good in everybody.
____ 14. If I meet someone interesting who is very hard to make friends with, I'll soon stop trying to make friends with that person.
____ 15. When I have something unpleasant to do, I stick to it until I finish it.
____ 16. When I decide to do something, I go right to work on it.
____ 17. I like science.
____ 18. When trying to learn something new, I soon give up if I am not initially successful.
____ 19. When I'm trying to become friends with someone who seems uninterested at first, I don't give up very easily.
____ 20. When unexpected problems occur, I don't handle them well.
____ 21. If I were an artist, I would like to draw children.
____ 22. I avoid trying to learn new things when they look too difficult for me.
____ 23. Failure just makes me try harder.
____ 24. I do not handle myself well in social gatherings.
____ 25. I very much like to ride horses.
____ 26. I feel insecure about my ability to do things.
____ 27. I am a self-reliant person.
____ 28. I have acquired my friends through my personal abilities at making friends.
____ 29. I give up easily.
____ 30. I do not seem capable of dealing with most problems that come up in my life.

International Conversations
Questionnaire 2

The words shown below describe different feelings and moods. Please use this list to describe your feelings at this moment.

-If the word definitely describes your feelings, circle the double plus (++).
-If the word more or less describes your feelings, circle the plus (+).
-If you cannot decide whether or not it describes how you feel, circle the question mark (?).
-If the word does not describe the way you feel, circle the minus (-).

Please be as honest and accurate as possible:

1. Tense	++	+	?	-
2. Nervous	++	+	?	-
3. Relaxed	++	+	?	-
4. Calm, peaceful	++	+	?	-
5. Active	++	+	?	-
6. Vigorous (strong, full of energy)	++	+	?	-
7. Apprehensive (uneasy, worried)	++	+	?	-
8. Tired	++	+	?	-
9. Sleepy	++	+	?	-
10. Bothered	++	+	?	-
11. Sad, gloomy	++	+	?	-
12. Distressed (uncomfortable, painful)	++	+	?	-
13. Idle, lazy	++	+	?	-
14. Lively, stimulated	++	+	?	-
15. Cheerful	++	+	?	-
16. Satisfied	++	+	?	-
17. Alert (watchful, full awake)	++	+	?	-

International Conversations
Evaluation

The following is completely confidential. Please do not sign your name. I want you answer as honestly as you can, because I do pay attention to your feedback in an effort to improve our services.

What was most helpful about the group?

Was there anything you disliked?

Do you have any comments/ thoughts about the group? Would you change anything? Any suggestions for improvement?

Would you recommend this group to other international students?

Have you attended a group before?

If yes, Name of group(s)_____

Overall, how would you rate your experience in this group?

1	2	3	4	5
awful	average	good	very good	excellent

** Thank You **

Appendix 7

Summary of Participant Information Sheets

No	Age	Sex - Male(M) Female(F)	Country of origin	Length Of time In Canada	Mother tongue - English(E) Non-English(N)	Program - Graduate(G) Undergraduate(U) ESL(E)	Source of information about the group	Before coming to Canada - Study(S) Work(W)	Future plan - Stay(S) Back home(B) Not sure(N)	Reason of coming to the group*	Expectations from this group*
1	21	M	Botswana	10 months	E	U	A counselor	S	B	Sharing ideas with others.	Support for fellow nationals.
2	18	M	China	5 months	N	ESL	ESL teacher	S	N	Communicate with other students.	I like to play and I hope there are many chance to go to play.
3	20-30	M	Taiwan	1 year	N	ESL	ESL teacher	W	N	Meet friends and practice my English.	Share experiences or ideas with each other.
4	28	M	Korea	2 months	N	ESL	A friend	W	B	I want to meet a lot of international students including Canadians and speak with them.	
5	21	M	Saudi Arabia	3 weeks	N	ESL	Poster	S	B	Meet with new people and see new ideas.	To be more informal.
6	23	F	China	2 years	N	U	The facilitator – We met at ICS	S & W	S	I am glad to meet different people who come from different places and share what we know, such as cultures, languages and interests.	It is a good opportunity to communicate with people in English.
7	27	F	Thailand	10 months	N	G	E-mail newsletter from ICS	W	B	I would like to share my experience in Canada.	I would like to hear others' experiences.
8	-	M	Iran	4 months	N	G	E-mail newsletter from ICS	S & W	S	** Refused to fill up the information sheet.	
9	-	F	Mexico	3 weeks	N	ESL	ESL teacher	S	-	** Never able to make to the individual interview.	

Remarks:
1.   * Direct quotation from the Participant Information Sheet.
2.   Student No. 8 was not willing to fill up the Participant Information Sheet.
3.   Student No. 9 was never able to come for the individual interview and did not fill in the Participant Information Sheet.

Summary of Results
of Questionnaires 1 and 2

No.	Self-Efficacy Highest: 115	Stress Highest: 10	Arousal Highest: 7
1	66	6	3
2	91	5	4
3	75	3	6
4	95	6	2
5	87	0	7
6	90	6	6
7	91	1	0
8	-	-	-
9	-	-	-
Average	85	3.9	4

Remarks:

Scoring of Questionnaire 1: Seven items (1,5,9,13,17,21,25) are filler items and are not scored. After items presented in a negative fashion (3,6,7,8,11,14,18,20,22,24,26,29,30) are reverse-scored, the scores for all items are summed. Before reverse-scoring, the answers are keyed as follows: A=1, B=2, C=3, D=4, E=5. The higher the score is, the higher the self-efficacy expectations are.

Scoring of Questionnaire 2: The respondent rates each adjective in terms of the intensity of his or her feelings about the adjective. For the positive adjectives, the double-plus and plus ratings are scored 1 and the question mark and minus ratings are scored 0. For the negative adjectives the question mark and minus ratings are 1 and the plus and double plus ratings are scored 0. The stress subscale consists of six negative adjectives (1,2,7,10,11,12) and four positive adjectives (3,4,15,16). The arousal subscale consists of four positive adjectives (5,6,14,17) and three negative adjectives (8,9,13). Scores are the sum of negative and positive adjectives. Stress scores range from 0 to 10; arousal scores range from 0 to 7. Higher scores reflect more stress and arousal.

Session Plan – Session 1

Objectives
- To give facilitator and participants the opportunity to get to know each other.
- To help participants to understand the purpose and the process of the group.
- To encourage participants to share their initial feelings and experiences in Canada.

Process
1. Introduce myself and explain my role in the group
   - Introduce my name, my background in Canada, my practicum at the Student Counselling and Career Centre, and my practicum research on group counseling with international students.
   - My role in the group is a facilitator. As a facilitator, my jobs are to organize this group including recruitment and planning for each group session, and to facilitate group members to share their experiences, feelings and coping strategies and to encourage group members to generate new ways of coping.
- Get to know each other
   - Get the group members to pair up.
   - Introduce themselves to their partners and prepare for their partner to share their information with the whole group.
   - Each pair introduces his/ her partner to the whole group. The partner can add more information as he/ she wishes.
2. Discuss the purpose and the process of the group
   - Explain the content and the process of the group (Handout 1 & 2).
   - Answer members' questions and invite suggestions.
3. Discuss ground rules and housekeeping business
   - Discuss the importance of *Attendance* and *Confidentiality*.
   - Let members know how to contact me outside the group sessions (i.e. Call me at the Student Counselling and Career Centre or send me e-mails.). It is expected that members inform me as soon as they can if they are not able to come for any session.
4. How did you feel when you first came to Canada?
   - Encourage group members to share their personal feelings when they first came to Canada.
5. How were your experiences of settling in?
   - Encourage group members to share their experiences of settling in.
6. Individual interview
   - Make appointments with each group member for an individual interview before the second group session. The major purpose of the interview is to explore the group members' concerns about the group and get them to do two pre-group questionnaires.

Session Recording – Session 1
Date: May 18, 2001 (Friday)
Time: 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm
Place: Group Room 1, Student Counselling and Career Centre
        474 University Centre
Present: 11 participants (5 female and 6 male)

Process

7. Introduce myself and my role of the group
    - As planned.

8. Get to know each other
    - The format was as planned.
    - Most members shared this information: their names, where they are originally from, how long they have been in Canada, what they have done before coming to Canada, what they are doing now and what programs they plan to do in future.
    - These 11 members are from 8 different countries including Korea, China, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Mexico and Botswana.
    - 5 members have been in Canada for less than 2 months and the other 6 members have been here from 10 months to 2 ½ years.
    - 2 members have worked as professionals many years in their home countries before they came to Canada: one was a military officer for 6 years and the other one was a medical doctor for 18 years. The other 9 members did not mention their previous work experience.
    - 6 members are doing ESL programs. The other 5 are taking university programs: 3 in undergraduate and 2 in graduate programs.
    - Among the 6 members who are doing ESL program, 4 plan to go into professional programs in university after finishing their ESL program, 1 plans to go back to his home country and 1 did not mention what he is going to do. The professional programs the 4 members plan to do are International Trade, Computer Science, Fine Art and Business Administration respectively.
    - One member shared that the reason she is doing Computer Science is because she perceives that her English is not adequate enough to do other programs that require more English.

9. Discuss the purpose and the process of the group
    - Distributed Handout 1 and 2. Discussed the purpose and the process of the group as planned. One member suggested that the group should do some activities together other than the group sessions. Another member supported the idea. The facilitator agreed to come back to this idea in the next few sessions and encouraged members to think about it. [The facilitator did not want to side track the focus of this group session.] The facilitator also encouraged members to look at Handout 2 more seriously and think about whether the suggested process of the group is acceptable.

10. Discuss ground rules and housekeeping business

- Discussed the importance of *Attendance* and *Confidentiality* (Handout 2) as planned.
- Let members know they can contact facilitator at 474-8592 at the Student Counselling and Career Centre on Wednesday and Friday, or by e-mail: helina_tsang@yahoo.com
- Obtained members consent for taping. Explained that the purpose of taping is to document the group discussion. The documentation of the group session is part of the information for my practicum research for my Master's in Counselling. [The facilitator chose audio taping for this first group session because audio-taping is perceived to be less threatening than video taping. When group members feel more at ease in the group, the facilitator will suggest video taping.]

11. <u>How did you feel when you first came to Canada?</u>
    Members who are from Asia shared as follows:
    - *I was full of confidence before I came here. When I first arrived in Vancouver Airport, I was shocked, culturally shocked, I did not even understand a word in English. People had different colours.*
    - *I felt very disappointed. I came in March and it was too cold. It still snowed.*
    - *I felt (found it) difficult to find a job of my profession.*
    - *I came in August and I felt Winnipeg was very beautiful. I felt that compared with China, there is a lot of opportunity here; people can take up jobs and that is based on their ability but not on their relationship with the people-in-charge. People also have greater freedom of speech.* [This member had trouble expressing her ideas in English and finally got one member to translate for her. The facilitator encouraged translation and helping each other.]
    - *There is only one culture in Korea. I was surprised about the diversity of the population in Canada. I also saw disabled people walking on the street, and I did not see this in Korea.* [This member wanted to express more but did not know how to say it in English. The facilitator encouraged her to tell the group more when she figures out how to say it.]
    - *I felt (found it) difficult and confused because I did not understand the English. I was told that my English would improve a lot in a year. I did one year in the ESL program and participated with a lot of groups similar to this one. I practiced and practiced, and now my English has improved a lot. From then on, I told anyone whom I know has difficulty in English not to worry. By practice their English will improve.* [The facilitator commented that this member's sharing was very encouraging.]

    Members from Middle East shared as follows:
    - *I took three flights to come to Winnipeg and I felt I was very far from my home country. Before I came, I told myself that I have to adapt, I have to speak English, I have to learn and get education, and I have to find my life. I felt life was very difficult at the beginning. I didn't like the rules in the residence on campus. Now I get used to it and I feel better.*
    - *I felt Winnipeg was a village. I stayed in Toronto for a year. I did not feel shocked (The member prior to this one shared that he was shocked, culturally*

shocked.) because I have friends in Toronto. [The facilitator commented that friend makes a difference.]

- *One came to the group for the last 15 minutes and did not have a chance to share his initial feelings in Canada.*

One member from Central America shared as follows:
- *I felt cold when I first came here. I came in late April this year. I feel it is much colder here than in my home country.*

One member from Africa shared as follows:
- *I like the weather here in summer. I came in September. But it is too cold here. The coldest temperature I experienced is –35C and the hottest temperature I experienced in my home country is +35C.*

<u>12. How were your experiences of settling in?</u>
- We did not have time to discuss this item and will talk about it in the next session.

Session Plan – Session 2

Objectives
- To give participants the opportunity to get to know each other more and feel comfortable sharing their experiences and feelings.
- To enable participants to realize that they are not alone in their adjustment experiences and their related feelings.
- To help participants to become to get in touch with their feelings.

Special Materials
- A world map.
- A big paper boat.
- A time schedule sheet for individual meeting.
- A cake.

Process

1. Welcome new group members
   - Pass Handout 1 & 2 to new group members. Encourage them to contact the facilitator for more information about the first group session.
   - Get members consent for taping, and pass a consent form to each group member. Again, explain the purpose of the taping is for documentation of the group discussion. The documentation of the group sessions is part of the information for my practicum research of my Master's in Counselling. At the end of the group, the tape will be erased.

2. Get to know each other
   - Ask group members to share 1) their names, 2) which country they are from and 3) How they feel today

3. Review last session
   - Members who came for the first sessions are asked to divide into three groups. New members are equally assigned to the three groups. Each group will take turns to give one word that is related to each of the following information of the last group session to the whole group:
     - What countries are group members from?
     - What do group members do in Canada?
     - How did group members feel when they first came to Canada?
   - The group that provides most words will win the game.
   - The facilitator will link up and summarize information group members provide in the game.

4. Housekeeping
   - The group is open for new members till the second group session. International students with special circumstances may be considered. For example, one participant from Nigeria, Africa showed interest to the group several weeks ago and is arriving Winnipeg tomorrow. We will let her in.
   - Check with group members if the group time schedule from 1:00 to 2:30 pm is good for the majority. Time flexibility is possible.

- Share a world map with the group.
- Explain the function of the paper boat: Members are encouraged to put their names, the names of their home countries or any feelings or thoughts that come to mind when they come to the group. The boat is used as a symbol of the group.
- Recall one group member's suggestion of doing some activities together. Ask for further suggestions.
- Prepare games or activities from your home country: Invite two members to prepare games or activities for the next session. Each game or activity should be completed in 20 minutes. These two members should let facilitator know the game or activity two days before the next session.
- Remind group members to make an appointment with the facilitator for an individual meeting for about 30 to 60 minutes next week. The purpose of the individual meeting is to get to know more about what each individual's needs and wants from the group and also to ask them to complete a questionnaire. Pass a time schedule sheet to the group and ask group members to choose a time slot suitable for them.
- Suggest group members take turns to prepare food /snack for the group. Invite two members to prepare food for the next session.
- Encourage group members to come to 'the boat' five or ten minutes earlier so that the boat can launch at 1:00 pm sharp.

4. <u>What were your experiences of settling in?</u>
   - Each of the three groups shares their experiences of settling in within their small group.
   - Each small group presents the content of their sharing to the whole group.
   - Facilitator will link up and summarize all their sharing.

5. <u>What were your reasons for coming to Canada? And what were your expectations of life in Canada, on both a personal and academic level?</u>
   - Members are encouraged to share the above information with the whole group and to respond to each other.

Session Recording – Session 2

Date: May 25, 2001 (Friday)
Time: 1:15 pm – 2:30 pm [Most members came after 1:00 pm.]
Place: Group Room1, Student Counselling and Career Centre
        474 University Centre
Present: 12 participants (5 female and 7 male)   (5 old and 7 new members; among the 7 new members, 6 from Asia and 1 from South America)

Process
1. Welcome new group members
   - As planned.
2. Get to know each other
   - The facilitator introduced herself to the group and explained her role as the facilitator in the group.
   - Got the group members to pair up. They introduced themselves to their partners and then their partners introduced them to the whole group.
   - Most members shared this information: their names, where they are originally from, how long they have been in Canada, what they have done before coming to Canada, what they are doing now and what programs they plan to do in future.
   - One member said the reason he chose Winnipeg is that Winnipeg is located in the centre of Canada. It was convenient for him to travel and study at the same time. He already traveled to the West last July and plans to travel to the North (i.e. Churchill) this July.
   - One member worked 12 hours a day, six days a week for the past year before he came to Canada. He wanted to take a break from work. As English is very important in his home country (i.e. Korea), he studies English.
   - 6 out of 7 new members are doing ESL programs. One of the common reasons for coming to this group is to practice their spoken English. The other member is doing his post-doctorate program in Electrical Engineering.
   - One old member left and his reason for leaving earlier was making a long distance call to his family. [The facilitator will follow up this.]
3. Consent for taping
   - Explained the purpose of taping and got their consent.
4. Housekeeping
   - The facilitator shared with the group members that three members gave notice that they were not able to come and the other three members did not give any notice and did not come. The facilitator emphasized the importance of attendance and encouraged members to give notice if they are not able to come.
   - Group members agreed that the group starts at 1:00 pm. The facilitator explained that the group is very big and it will take time to take turns to share and discussed. The facilitator, therefore, asked whether the group members are open to have the group session till 3:00 pm and they agreed.
   - Shared a world map with the group.
   - Asked group members the meaning of "in the same boat". Feedbacks were as follows: in a similar situation, oversea experience, in the same class and traveling

together. The facilitator agreed with all and further explained that "in the same boat" is usually used to describe people in a similar situation and that they experience similar challenges or difficulties. [The facilitator has not explained the functions of the paper boat.]

- Recalled one group member's suggestion of doing some activities together and asked for further suggestions. The same member suggested that the group could go to the park together. There was no feedback from the group. The facilitator supported the idea, and helped group members recall some of the members' ideas of the beauty of summer in Winnipeg, and encouraged members to do some outdoor activities in the summer.
- Explained the purpose of individual meeting and passed a sign-up time sheet.

5. How did you feel when you first came to Canada?

- The facilitator invited the old members to recall what they shared last session and shared their experiences and feelings with the new group members again. They shared more quickly and smoothly this time. The facilitator commented on this and gave the reason that they were more experience in sharing and expressing themselves.
- Members who are from Asia shared as follows:
  - *I was quite nervous when I first came to Canada. The host father in the host family made me more nervous.* [She could not explain further how he made her nervous.] *The host parents argued a lot. They also argued loud when I already went to bed. I moved to another home stay family the next month. I like the new place.* [The facilitator emphasized her experience and also encouraged her to report to ICS.]
  - *I came in February and I felt very cold here. I did not like the food and the life at the home stay family. Two months later, I moved to my own apartment and I feel better now.*
  - *I was very nervous and I could not sleep because this was my first trip out of the country. I was very disappointed at the Vancouver Airport because I did not understand the English on the phone and I could not phone home.*
  - *I like the advanced technology in Canada....   I like the diversity of populations in Winnipeg.......* [The facilitator commented that Winnipeg is a city with the most diverse population in Canada.] *I miss my wife very much.*
- One member from South America shared as follows:
  - *I was very happy to come to Canada. I visited Quebec in 1995. I like Canada very much. It is beautiful here.*

6. Share of food/ snack

Shared a homemade cake with the group. Invited two group members to share food/ snack next time. Emphasized that it is not compulsory and it does not have to be expensive.

Session Plan – Session 3
[Most of the contents of session 3 are the same as the plan for session 2 since 7 new members came and 6 old members did not come for different reasons.]

Objectives
- To give participants the opportunity to get to know each other more and feel more comfortable to share their experiences and feelings.
- To enable participants to realize that they are not alone in their adjustment experiences and their related feelings.
- To help participants become to get in touch with their feelings.

Special Materials
- A world map.
- A big paper boat.
- A time schedule sheet for individual meeting.
- Snack/ Drink sign-up Sheet

Process
1. <u>Summarize the process of the group for the last two weeks</u>
   - Talk about the group experience of having almost two different groups for the first and second sessions. Invite members to share how they feel about the group to the group.
   - Summarize the information the facilitator received from the individual meeting. Share the facilitator's appreciation of getting to know the members, and encourage members to share more about their ideas, thoughts and feelings with the whole group when they feel comfortable.
   - Re-introduce the function of the paper boat: Members are encouraged to put their names, the names of their home countries or any feelings or thoughts come to mind when they come to the group. The boat is used as a symbol of the group).
2. <u>Get to know each other's name</u>
   - Icebreaker: getting to know each other. The facilitator explains the process: The facilitator states her name and asks the member next to her to repeat her name before the member introduce his/her name to the group. *For example: "Hello everyone. My name is Helina." The next member will say, "Hello Helina. My name is Mary." And then the next one will say, "Hello Helina and Mary. My name is Peter."* The same pattern continue until all members have said hello and introduced themselves to the whole group.
   - [Optional] Introduce the second game: Throw a cushion to a member when one member is saying hello. *For example: "Hello Mary. I am Peter." While Mary is throwing a cushion to John, Mary will say, "Hello John. I am Mary."*
3. <u>Housekeeping</u>
   - Inform the group that the participant who planned to join the group is not able to come because he is not in Winnipeg yet due to a flight change.
   - Discuss the meeting time and place based on the information members share in the individual meeting.

- Recall one group member's suggestion of going to a park together. Follow up on this suggestion; ask group members if they would like to meet at King's park for one group session and have lunch together.
- Prepare games or activities from your home country: Ask for two members to prepare games or activities for the next session. Each game or activity should be completed in 20 minutes. These two members should let the facilitator know the game or activity two days before the next session.
- Remind those group members who have not had an individual meeting with the facilitator to stay behind after the session, and make an appointment with the facilitator for an individual meeting for 30 to 60 minutes next week. The purpose of the individual meeting is to get to know each individual's needs and wants from the group more and also to ask them to fill out a questionnaire. Pass a time schedule sheet to the group and ask group member to choose a suitable time slot.

4. <u>What were your experiences of settling in?</u>
- Each of the three groups shares their experiences of settling in within their small group.
- Each small group presents the content of their sharing to the whole group.
- Facilitator will link up and summarize all their sharing.

6. <u>How did you decide to come to Canada? And what were your expectations of life in Canada, on both a personal and academic level?</u>
- Members are encouraged to share the above information with the whole group and to respond to each other.

7. <u>Watch a video</u>
- The video is called *Cold Water – Intercultural Adjustment and Values Conflict of Foreign Students and Scholars at an American University.*
- Watch the video for the first 10 minutes if time allows. The first ten minutes of the video are about the initial adjustment experience of foreign students at an American university.
- Invite members to share their reflections on the video.

8. <u>Share food/ snack prepared by two members.</u>
- Appreciate the two members' contribution.
- Encourage members to take turns to share. Circulate a sign-up sheet – two members prepare food at a time.

Session Recording – Session 3

Date: June 1, 2001 (Friday)
Time: 1:10 pm – 2:35 pm
Place: Group Room 1, Student Counselling and Career Centre
        474 University Centre
Present: 9 participants (4 female and 5 male) (8 continuing and 1 new members)

   Process
1. Get to know each other
   - We completed the first game as planned.
   - Welcomed a new group member who had contacted the facilitator a few weeks ago but was not able to come for the first two sessions. This member is from China and is doing ESL at U of M.

2. Summarize the process of the group for the last two weeks
   - As planned.

3. Housekeeping
   - As planned.
   - Since one group member has class from 2:30 pm, we decide to finish the group at 2:30 pm, and that member will leave at 2:20 pm.

4. What were your experiences of settling in?
   - The format was as planned.
   - The first group focused more on the issues of one member regarding homestay and her sharing was as follows:
     o Had a good experience in homestay for 2 months and then moved to an apartment.
     o Because this member is Thai, she requested that ICS placed her with a Thai family, and she got it. (The homestay mother is Thai and the father is Canadian.) She felt very lucky. She said that she got to know everything she needed from that family.
     o Felt very excited in the first 1½ month. Felt time went by very quickly. Felt hard (found life hard) after that because she had to face the difficulty of learning English.
   - The second group focused more on the theme of challenge in communicating in English and two people shared as follows:
     o Met the host family at the airport. He could say "you" and "I" only. Both the father and the mother of the host family shared a lot about Canada to him, he did not understand much.
     o The homestay family put up a sign of this member's name at the airport. That was how this member started his life in a homestay family. He experienced similar difficulties as the previous member.
   - The third group focused more on loneliness and shared as follows:

  o One member stayed in a homestay family. The food did not satisfy her appetite and she felt hungry. She also felt lonely at night. She went to a English speaking church and met Canadian, but did not understand English much and found it hard to express herself.

  o Another student did not like the food served by the homestay family. The family always made pasta which he did not like. He would throw it to the garbage when the family did not see it.

- *Members in their small group tended to talk about their factual experience of settling in Canada. Therefore when they shared the other member's experience, they could not tell how the other member felt during his/ her experience. The facilitator asked for the feelings of their experiences and helped them understand themselves and each other at a deeper level.*

5. <u>Watch a video</u>
- The format was as planned.
- The group had the following feedback:

  o Felt related to the video especially about feeling excited during the first few months and finding time go by quickly.

  o Was excited in the first two weeks. [The facilitator commented that that was a honeymoon period.] After the two weeks, she felt scared because she did not know the language (English) well, especially for listening.

  o One member also brought up that it is hard to make friends with Canadians and she asked if any one in the group has Canadian friends. One member responded that he has one Canadian friend. This member visited his Canadian friend once a week and his friend teaches him English. When this member wanted to buy a big bag of rice, he asked his Canadian friend for a ride. [The facilitator responded that his Canadian friend was very helpful for him. *Actually I wanted to challenge him: (1) what he does for his Canadian friend in return; (2) Isthis Canadian friend really a friend to him, but I said nothing.* I told the members that we would discuss this topic in the next session.]

6. <u>Share food/ snack prepared by one member</u>
- As planned.
- Forgot to circulate the sign-up sheet.

Session Plan – Session 4

Objectives
- To help participants (International students and Canadian guest members) to better understand what friends are and the qualities good friends have.
- To give international students and Canadian guest members the opportunity to share their ideas and ways of making friends, and also have international students share their experiences of making friends with Canadians and to have Canadians share their experiences of making friends with international students.

Process
1. Introduction
   - Welcome guest members (Canadian students).
   - Explain the purpose of having Canadian students as guest members for this group session: International students and Canadian students can exchange their ideas of how to make friends. Emphasize the importance of being sincere and open in their sharing.
   - Each participant introduces their name, their host country and what they are doing to the whole group.

2. Reminders
   - Emphasize the importance of punctuality. From now on, group session will start on time, at 1:00 pm.
   - Emphasize the importance of responsibility. If any participants are not able to come or will be late, they are expected to contact the facilitator before the appointment time. Participants can contact the facilitator either by calling the Student Counselling and Career Centre or sending an email to the facilitator, and leaving a message.
   - Members who have not met with the facilitator are asked to sign up for an individual meeting after this group session.
   - Explain the function of the boat: Participants can put down their names, home countries, and any of their thoughts or feelings when they come to the group.

3. Good qualities of a friend
   - International student participants are divided into groups of three or four. Canadian students are equally distributed among the groups.
   - Participants are asked to think about five good qualities of one of their close friends and write them down on a piece of paper. They then share this good qualities within their small group.
   - Each small group is asked to summarize the good qualities they have found among their close friends and prepare to present their findings to the large group.

4. I am good at.....
   - Participants are asked to pair up.
   - Each pair shares with each other one thing he / she is good at.
   - Each participant introduces what their partner is good at to the large group.

5. What is a friend?
   - Participants are asked to brainstorm their ideas of what a friend is.

6. How to make friends?

- Participants are divided into small groups of three or four. Canadian students are equally distributed among the groups.
- Each small group discusses the following two questions:
  - How do you make friends in your host country?
  - What are your experiences (positive or negative) of making friends with international students (for Canadian students) or Canadian students (for international students)?
- Each small group presents the summary of their sharing to the large group.

7. <u>Introduction of the next group session</u>

- Members are asked to think about what aspects or areas of Canadian culture they would like to discuss about in the next session.
- Members are asked to write down their ideas on paper, and give the paper to the facilitator.

Session Recording – Session 4

Date: June 8, 2001 (Friday)
Time: 1:00 – 2:45 pm
Place: Group Room 1, Student Counselling and Career Centre
    474 University Centre
Present: 10 international students and 3 Canadian guest members

Note: This session started at 1:00pm sharp. Two students were late; one was about 5 minutes and the other was 15 minutes late. With the stimulation of Canadian students, the group was more dynamic and interactive. We had a very good discussion. In the small group discussion, Canadian students became informal group leaders; that means international students tended to talk more to Canadian students. These could be because: 1) Canadian students spoke and listened more easily in English language; 2) International students wanted to practice their English with Canadian students; 3) International students are more interested in Canadian culture/ customs.

Process
1. Introduction
   - As planned.

2. Housekeeping
   - As planned.
   - Explained the function of the boat and encouraged group members to put down their names, names of their home countries and any of their thoughts or feelings when they come to the group. Most international students put down their names and names of their host country only.

3. Good qualities of friends
   - It went as planned.
   - Summary of the good qualities from the three different groups are as follows:

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Easy going	Supportive	Same hobbies
Generous	Sharing emotions	Willing to spend time for us.
Trustworthy	Peaceful	
Dependable	Active	Can talk about personal things; have quality time together.
Honest	Lovely	
Fussy (detail)	Good listener	
Cute	Energetic	
Humorous	Compassionate	
Caring	Understanding	
Helpful		
Respectful		

In restrospect, I could have processed the participants' responses more.

4. I am good at..........
   - It went as planned.
   - Responses were as follows:
     - She is a fun person.
     - He is open for discussion and likes to share ideas.
     - She is good at listening.
     - He is kind-hearted.
     - He is friendly.
     - She loves music and dance, and personal relationship.
     - He is helpful and humanistic.
     - He likes to make jokes and share with friends.
     - She likes to share information.
     - He is respectful and can maintain good relationship.
     - He is energetic and active.
     - He is good at overcoming difficulties.
     - She likes making friends from different cultural background and learning different cultures.

5. What is a friend?
   - The responses were as follows:
     - Someone you can share experiences with.
     - Someone you like and you can trust.
     - Someone you can talk to and pour out your heart.
     [I could have asked if someone who does not meet these criteria be your friend. I could then have illustrated the idea that there are many kinds of relationship.]
     - We can be friends with any humans, animals, nature, the world and ourselves.
     - A friend in need is a friend indeed.

6. How to make friends?
   - The format was done as planned except each small group did not present the summary of their ideas to the large group. Instead of each small group making a summary, the large group shared together.
   - Two questions were discussed. The discussion is as follows:

(A).   How do you make friends in your host country?

A member from Saudi Arabia: *We eat together. We share food with our friends. Even though we don't have money, we have sandwich and we would share half of it with our friend.*

A Canadian: *We also like to eat together with our friends.*

A Canadian: *We make friends in school. I found that there are some similarities; no matter which country people are from, they make friends during social interactions. The difference is that when people come to a new country, they have to start over again.*

An African: *We make friends when we play together.*

An African: *We make friends easily. When I see somebody I think I can make friends with, then I would go.*

A Canadian: *It takes a long time for Asians to make friends. However, Canadians give name to people as friends easily.*

An African: *The more time we spend together, the more friendship we can develop.*

An Iranian: *It is not difficult in making friends. It depends on individual personality.*

A Thai: *We make friends when we go to school. We have to introduce ourselves all over again when coming to a new country.*

A Canadian: *We make friends from elementary and high school to university. We would keep the same friends.*

> A Canadian: *I found that international students have to be more forward; they have to approach Canadians first.*

> A Chinese from China: *We spend a long time together before we become friends.*

A Chinese from Taiwan: *I agree.*

A Chinese from China: *It is easier for Canadian students to make friends because they have a lot of free time. Students in China don't have that much time because they study all the time.*

A Thai: *It is easy to make friends with Canadians in a surface level. However, it is not easy in a deeper level because they do not trust each other. For Thai, when they consider each other friends, they can do, share and talk with each other for anything. However, Canadians concern their own benefit more.*

A Canadian: *I agree. Canadians make friends easily but not in a deeper level. Canadians are very individualistic. They tell their friends what time their friends can call them and they do not like to be interrupted.*

A Korean: *We make friends almost the same way as Canadians. However, our manner is different. We never pay for ourselves only. Canadians like to go dutch.*

A Chinese from China: *We treat each other no matter we are close or distanced friends.*

The facilitator: *Let's get back to the Thai. She said that it is hard to go into a deeper level of relationship with Canadians. Is it hard for you because of different cultures? [I am not sure what she meant.]*

A Thai: *Asian countries are communist countries. We are close, but sometimes it could be annoying.*

A Canadian: *I wonder if it is related to population. [I thinks she meant density.] A Canadian friend of mine just came back from Europe said there is so much room in Canada compared with the space in Europe. In Canada, we have to depend on ourselves and do not depend on others because people live so far from each other. I wonder if people do not have much boundary and they live so close together.*

The facilitator: *Are you saying that physical distance makes people more distanced emotionally? [The facilitator moved her chair closer to that Canadian, and asked if that made her feel closer together. And then the facilitator asked the participant to move their chair one step closer.]** I could have processed more on this part and found out if physical distance really makes any difference.

An African: *We get to know the people from our extended family more and we become friends.*

A Canadian: *We met people from school more and then become friends. We keep opening up.*

The facilitator: *Are you friends from your extended family?*
Another African: *Yes.*
One of the three Canadian guest members said that she keeps close contact with her extended family because of her Mennonite family background. The other two Canadians do not keep close contact with their extend family.
A Canadian: *Some don't see keeping contact with extended family as a priority.*

(B)   What are your experiences of making friends with Canadians as international students or making friends with international students as Canadians?

A Chinese from China: *I have two Canadian friends; I am not sure if they are really friends. I have difficulty in English language in class. I find a female student to help me with English in a class. I want to make sure if I can understand the English in class. I meet with this Canadian student before and after class. We talk to each other. We like to share information.* [The facilitator asked her experience of making friend with this Canadian student.] *She is helpful. My experience is positive. The girl is interested in Asian culture. The second one is my buddy I got to know from ICS. I talk with her once a week. We talk about hobbies. We go out together sometimes.* [The facilitator asked her the reasons for making Canadian friends.] *I really want to make friends with Canadians and I want to get along with Canadian culture. I am not sure about their lifestyle. They gave me phone numbers and I am not sure if I could call them.* [The facilitator asked how she could find out.] *I don't call them until they call me first.*

A Canadian guest member spoke for a member from Saudi Arabia first: *We had the same problem here, but we could not come up with any solution yet.*
A member from Saudi Arabia: *When Canadians told me to call them or come over for supper. I am not sure if they are serious about it.*
A Chinese from China: *Canadians are just being polite.*
A Canadian: *If the invitation has a certain date and time, it is more certain.*
A Chinese from China: *A friend of my homestay mother's told me, "See you later." I waited and waited, and he never came back. Some Canadians said, "Come over." But I am not sure if they really mean it or not. A Canadian finally told me that it is just being polite.*
A Canadian: *I have been to China. Chinese are being polite too. When they accept an invitation and respond, "I come." But they don't show up.* [Two Chinese agreed with it.
The facilitator commented: When Canadians make an invitation, they may not mean it. When Chinese receive an invitation, they may not mean it too. We have to understand the others' cultures more. We will talk about Canadian culture more next session. If you have any ideas of aspects or areas of Canadian culture you would like to discuss in the group, send me an e-mal.

Session Plan – Session 5

Objectives
- To enable participants (International students and Canadian guest members) to better understand the diversity of culture in the world.
- To increase international students' awareness between the differences of cultures in Canada and their home countries.

Process
1. Introduction
   - Welcome Canadian guest members.
   - Explain the purpose of having Canadians as guest members for this group session: International students and Canadians can explore some aspects of Canadian cultures together. "Culture is what makes one country look special and different from other countries." For Canadians, Canadian culture may not be seen that special until they are told that it is different from other countries by foreigners. International students may feel excited or uneasy or ambivalent because some things (values, beliefs and practices) are different from those in their home countries. Therefore it is good to identify and to be aware of the differences, and then international students can make a conscious choice about them.
   - Emphasize the importance of being sincere and open in their sharing.
   - Participants introduce themselves to the group by name, country of origin, what they are doing and how long they have been in Canada to the whole group.

2. Housekeeping
   - This is the fifth session of International Conversations. There will be two more sessions. We will be talking about the challenges of adjusting to life in Canada and discussing some new ways of coping next session.
   - How would you like to celebrate the end of the group? Ask participants to think about it, and we will discuss it more next time.
   - Encourage members to put down their names, names of their home countries, and their thoughts and feelings on the boat when they come to the group.

3. How much do you know about the people of Canada?
   - Participants are divided into three groups. Canadians are equally distributed among the groups.
   - Each group is asked to work on the following exercise (Berish & Thibaudeau, 1997) (Handout 3) together:

   What do you think is typical of people in Canada? Only international students work on this exercise together. Canadian guest members are expected to observe their discussion and to explain the statements when needed.

Predict whether the following statements are true(T) or false(F).

The average Canadian adult:
1. woman is 160 cm (5 feet 3 inches) tall   (T)
2. man is 180cm (5 feet 9 inches) tall   (F) 170cm, or 5'7"
3. has a 30 percent chance of remaining single   (T)
4. woman marries at 23 years of age   (F) 25 years old
5. man marries at 28 years of age   (F) 27 years old
6. has two children   (T)
7. shares housework equally with his or her spouse   (F) woman spends 3 hours, man spends 1 hour
8. spends a third of his or her income on housing   (T)
9. sleep 7 hours per night   (F) 8 hours
10. drives about 1 hour to get to work   (F) half an hour
11. has a one-in-four chance of being a crime victim   (T)
12. has a high-school education   (T)
13. participates in recycling programs at home or work   (T)
14. lives on a farm or in the country   (F) more likely a city
15. participates in competitive sports   (F) exercise or physical fitness
16. is confident about his or her economic future   (F) feel pessimistic
17. is an immigrant or first-generation Canadian   (T)
18. feels patriotic about Canada   (F) proud of country, but not patriotic
19. votes in local and federal elections   (T)
20. tries to eat healthy food   (T)

4. Discuss a few aspects of culture in Canada and your host country
   - Participants are divided into three small groups according to their interests. Canadian guest members are equally distributed among the small groups.
   - Each small group will discuss two of the following aspects of culture (Handout 4) in each group member's home country. Each group can decide how extensively it would like to discuss each item in the handout. The discussion can include comparisons of particular cultural aspects across the various countries. Each group is expected to present the summary of their discussion to the large group.

4. Culture Shock
   [If the above discussion is long, this part will be done in the next session.]
   - Watch a video called *Cold Water – Intercultural Adjustment and Values Conflict of Foreign Students and Scholars at an American University.*
   - Watch the part about the three stages of culture shock.
   - Invite participants to share their thoughts about the video.

Session Recording – Session 5

Date: June 15, 2001 (Friday)
Time: 1:05 – 3:00 pm
Place: Group Room 1, Student Counselling and Career Centre
      474 University Centre
Present: 9 international students (4 female and 5 male)
      6 Canadian guest members (3 female and 3 male)

Process
1. Introduction
   - As planned.

2. How much do you know about the people of Canada?
   - Since all Canadian guest members were interested in participating in this warm-up activity, they were included in the discussion with international students.
   - Generally, participants found this activity interesting. However, one Canadian guest member questioned the validity of the answers of the statements. The facilitator quoted the source of the statements, and responded that it was good to question and explore about the validity of the answers.
   - (A) Incorrect prediction of the statements made by all groups are as follows:
   The average Canadian adult:
   1. woman is 160 cm (5 feet 3 inches) tall
   2. woman marries at 23 years of age
   3. man marries at 28 years of age
   4. has a one-in-four chance of being a crime victim
   5. is confident about his or her economic future
   6. is an immigrant or first-generation Canadian
   7. feels patriotic about Canada
   (B)Correct prediction of the statements made by all groups are as follows:
   1. has two children
   2. shares housework equal with his or her spouse
   3. drives about 1 hour to get to work
   4. has a high-school education
   5. participates in recycling programs at home or work
   6. lives on a farm or in the country
   7. votes in local and federal elections
   8. tries to eat healthy food

   - Interesting findings:
   International students tended to think that Canadians feel confident about their economic future. However, Canadian guest members thought that the average Canadian feels uncomfortable about the economic situation in Canada.

3. Discuss a few aspects of culture in Canada and your host country
   - Participants were divided into three small groups as planned.

- Interesting findings of six topics from small group and large group discussion are as follows:

(A) Education system / Expected behavior in classroom / Amount and format of home work or assignment / Role and relationship of teacher and student / Relationship with authority

- Asian students spend long hours in school while Canadian students spend less.
- Asian students are expected to be very obedient to the teachers. Students greet the teacher before class starts. Students are not allowed to interrupt the teacher's lecture, and they can ask questions only when the teacher gives permission. Canadian students are allowed to eat and drink in class. They can ask questions and express their ideas any time they like. When the facilitator asked the Asian participants which classroom culture regarding classroom behavior they preferred, most Asian participants preferred Canadian culture in this respect. However, one comparatively older Chinese student thought that Canadian students interrupt the teacher's lecture too much or too often. This Chinese student also thought that the students' ideas or questions may not be valuable for the whole class. She disliked the fact that they took the time away from the teacher's lecture.

(B) Role and relationship in family, dating and married couple, and parents and children. [For example, what activities do people do in dating relationship?]
- Participants from Iran, Thailand, China and Sierra Leone stated that their people would choose their parents over their romantic relationship if conflict arose. However, Mexican and Canadian participants stated that the parents from their countries would not interfere or get involved in their children's loving relationships. They would accept their children's choice and live with it.
- One woman from Mainland China stated that people would choose their "lover" over their family before marriage, but they choose family over lover after marriage. [Ideas need to be confirmed.]

(C) Comfort zone / physical space or distance / eye contact / touch
    Eye contact:
- A male Canadian guest member stated that it is okay for him to have eye contact with everyone. A female Canadian guest member in the same small group stated that she has more eye contact with females than with males.
- A Chinese male international student perceived that a Chinese female would not have much eye contact with a male and she would look down instead. A Chinese male would have eye contact with any one except a female about his age and he would look down instead.
    Hugging / Shaking hands:
- No matter whether male or female, Canadians tend to shake hands when they meet for the first time. Female Canadians tend to hug each other more than males do when they become friends. When female and male friends meet, hugging occurs when it is initiated by the female.

- Chinese tend to shake hands when they first meet.   One Chinese member expressed that he did not feel comfortable with hugging when he first came. Now he is more comfortable with it.
- Two Mexicans stated that Latin culture is every expressive. People are very expressive physically and emotionally.
- One African member stated that physical contact is the norm in his culture.

Going out with opposite sex
- One male Canadian guest member stated that it is okay with him if a guy and a girl are spending time together even though they are not in a relationship. The other female Canadian guest member stated that she does not like it.

[Each small group did not have much time to discuss about the second part of exercise.]
(D) Language
- One Mexican participant stated that Spanish is every expressive, and has many words to describe feelings.

(E) Individualism and Collectivism
- Participants from Thailand, Iran and Mexico stated that their cultures are more collective.
- Canadians perceived that their culture is very individualistic.

(F) Time
- Canadian culture emphasizes punctuality more than Asian and African cultures.

Observation:
- *The language barrier did not stop two Mexican participants from sharing their ideas freely. However, the language barrier seemed to have a more negatively effect on Asians participants.*
- Some international students focused on Canadian speakers more when communicating in small group discussions.

Session Plan – Session 6

Objectives
- To enable participants to process their experiences in sessions 4 and 5 at a more personal level.
- To educate participants about the process of their culture shock experience.

Process
1. Introduction
   - Discuss the agenda of this session with participants and ask for ideas and suggestions.
   - Invite members to give ideas on how to celebrate the last group session.

2. Review Session 4
   - Share the summary of session 4 with the group.
   - Invite members for reflections on the summary.
   - Share with group members my thoughts on the session.
   - Discuss what kind of friends or support systems they need at this moment.

3. Review Session 5
   - Share the summary of session 5 with the group.
   - Invite members for reflections on the summary.
   - Discuss the difficulties/ challenges the participants experience as they live in a different culture at this moment.
     - Brainstorm some difficulties / challenges.
     - Pick one or two difficulties the participants find the most challenging.
     - Discuss ways of coping.

4. Cultural Shock
   - Watch a video called *Cold Water – Intercultural Adjustment and Values Conflict of Foreign Students and Scholars at an American University.*
   - Watch the part about the three stages of culture shock.
   - Invite participants to share their reflections on the video.

Session Recording – Session 6

Date: June 22, 2001 (Friday)
Time: 1:00 – 3:00 pm
Place: Group Room 1, Student Counselling and Career Centre
      474 University Centre
   Present: 3 international students

Process
1. Introduction
   - Shared what we are doing in the near future.
     - *When I finish my summer course in early August, I am going back to China for visit for 20 days. This will be the first time I am back and I am very excited about it. I miss the food there.*
     - *I feel I am wasting my time to learn English only here. I am thinking to go to a high school here and take a subject or two. Or I may just go back to Korea. I got a job in Korea already.*
     - *I will continue to my research.*
   - Discussed the agenda for today: One member suggested free talking; one was concerned about what culture shock is and he also wanted to talk more on individualism and collectivism.

2. Review Session 4
   - As planned.
   - Discussion was as follows:
     - *I found it easy to make friends here but it is difficult to make close friends.*
     - *I have good friends in my home country. As I will not stay here long, I don't expect to make any close friends here. I just want to have someone whom I can practice my English with.*
     - *People want to be friends with the people who share similarities with them. Now my host family (an old lady and her husband) is my close friend. I don't have time to make other friends and I am too busy.* [This participant has mentioned to the facilitator that he does want to make some more friends.]

   - The facilitator asked, "What kind of friends are you looking for?"
     - *I would like my friends to share ideas with me. They tell me the truth; they point out the mistakes I make and they tell me the good things I do, so that I can improve myself.*
     - *I have already given up making friends here. I am not able to communicate well in English. No one would like to communicate with someone who cannot communicate well when they first meet. The conversation will finish in a short time.* [The facilitator pointed out that he was communicating with us in English very well.]
     - *I agree. But some people may be interested in us or our cultures, and they may be willing to take their time to communicate with us.*

- o *Sometimes when we make friends, we do not have to talk with them but do some exercise or sports together.*
- o *I went to a BBQ for international students. But I found out most were immigrants who have been here long and they spoke English too fast. I could not catch it.* [The facilitator invited others to give feedback to this participant and we concluded that it takes times to practice and we have to talk to someone who can adjust to our level of English.]
- We then talked about what kinds of sports we like to do. We also shared what we could offer to our friends. The one who said he had difficulty communicating with others in English said that he knows Tae Kwon-Do and he is teaching one Canadian this sport. He said he also knows squash and bowling. Another member said she likes to share her information. The third one said he is good at sharing ideas.

3. Review Session 5
   - o We ran out of time and did not have a chance to discuss this session.

4. Culture Shock
   - o We watched the video twice and the members did not understand the English. The facilitator explained the video and wrote down some key terms and words on the whiteboard while we watched the video for the second time.
   - o The facilitator also linked up some ideas from the video with some experiences the members had shared in the group and tried to help members understand the ideas from the video.
   - o When the facilitator asked if the members had any unhappy experiences in their lives, one member shared that he felt invisible in a social gathering which was at his host lady's daughter's place. He felt "embarrassed" because no one talked to him, greeted him or asked him questions. He found that those people, especially the host, were impolite. He said that it would not be like that in his culture (Korean).
   - o The facilitator shared an experience when she had a problem with her computer. When she phoned her Canadian close friend, her friend would sympathized or empathized with her feelings but did not do much other than that. When she phoned her Chinese friend, her friend did not know how to fix the problem with her computer and did not sympathize or empathize with the facilitator much but this Chinese person called her other friends for help. One member who was interested in discussing "Individualism and Collectivism" brought up the point again. He perceived that Canadians are individualistic and they are not used to asking their friends for help or offering their friends help. When they have problems, they may pay for professionals to fix their problems. He thought that people are fixed to this ideology as they learn it when they are young. This member thinks that if people are individualistic, they would not change to be collective.

5. Brainstorm how we would celebrate the end of the group
   - o Members suggested outdoor activities or having a picnic..

o   Finally, we decided to go to a cottage in the Whiteshell for a day or two, and the
    following options were discussed:

Date: July 1 (Sat), July 7 (Sat) or July 8 (Sun)
Cost: Transportation (around $10 to $20 – depending if we need to rent vehicles)
Food: Members are willing to prepare together.
Activities: Fishing / Frisbee / Canoeing

We will finalize the details in the next session.

Session Plan – Session 7
Objectives
1. To encourage participants to talk freely about the evaluation of this group.
2. To give participants the opportunity to discuss the details of a farewell activity.

Process
- Ask participants to fill out an evaluation form.
- Get participants to share their comments or opinions of the group to the whole group.
- Discuss the details of a farewell activity.

Session Recording – Session 7

Date: June 29, 2001 (Friday)
Time: 1:00 – 3:00 pm
Place: Group Room 1, Student Counselling and Career Centre
        University Centre
Present: 5 international students came on time and discussed the evaluation of the group. Another 4 came late and joined the discussion of the farewell activity.

Process
1. Each of the five international students filled out an evaluation form.
2. The facilitator encouraged participants to share their comments and opinions of the group. All participants liked the idea of having Canadian guest members in the group. They also liked each topic of the group sessions. They thought that the group could help them make friends. One participant wished that the group had been a closed group; that means the group had not accepted new members after the first group session. This participant was frustrated about the membership and the attendance. As new members joined the group at different sessions and the participants had to reintroduce each other all over again, this participant considered it wasted time for the group.
   - [Actually, the group was a closed group. It was open until the second session only. Participants felt it was not a closed group because the attendance fluctuated. Some of the participants appeared to take turns showing up in the group. The second reason was that different guest members joined for two of the group sessions. The third reason was that one group member and one guest member brought one friend to the group respectively.]

3. Summary of evaluation from 5 participants [The average attendance rate of these five participant was 74%; these five participants attended the group for four to six sessions.]
- Most helpful:
   - *I got to know a lot of people.*
   - *I got to know a lot of people from different countries.*

- o *I am more confident in speaking English.*
- o *I realized that other international students had similar problems as mine when they first came to Canada. So I seem to know how to overcome those kinds of problems.*
- o *I became more familiar with the similarities and differences of different cultures.*
- o *I enjoyed sharing ideas with others.*
- o *I understood Canadian cultures more and learned a lot from other people's experiences.*

- Dislike:
  - o *Some members missed the group meeting so often or came late. It wasted a lot of time introducing each other.*
  - o Four respondents disliked nothing about the group.
- Comments / Suggestions
  - o *Do more sessions outdoor, and it will be a lot of fun.*
  - o *It was a good opportunity to know other people and different cultures.*
  - o *I love to share information with other group members.*
  - o *I would like to have Canadian students in each group session.*
  - o *This kind of group is very helpful and useful for international students, especially like me. I would like to join this kind of group more often.*
  - o *It was good and useful to have Canadian guest members in our group.*
  - o *I like having small group discussion and share the summary of the discussion to the large group.*
  - o *I would like to see similar groups organized for us in the future.*
  - o *I hope that the membership will be controlled next time; no new members come every time.*
  - o All will recommend this group to other international students.

- Have you attended a group before?
  - o *One has attended a group before and the other four have not.*

- Overall comment on a scale of 5
  - o *The average is 4.2.*

4. A Farewell activity
   - We decided to go to a cottage at the Whiteshell for a weekend. The name of the activity is called "Overnight Getaway at the Whiteshell".
   - We discussed the time, the cost and the distribution of work for the activity.