

A Journey beyond the classroom:
A Narrative Inquiry into the Settlement Struggles of Adult ESL Students

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ABSTRACT

Canada is a mosaic of cultures comprised of peoples from all over the world. The government has made immigration more accessible by developing different programs through which people may apply in order to live in Canada. Some people apply through the family reunification program to come together with their family members, while others apply through the refugee program seeking asylum from war, or persecution. Refugees' journeys tend to be more complex than other groups, as they tend to be unprepared for many aspects of living in Canada. The first issue that many people need to deal with is learning the English language. Although there are a variety of classes available, many adult refugee students are unable to continue with their language classes and withdraw. This Narrative Inquiry explores the lived experiences of two adult refugee newcomer students who have been forced to withdraw from English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Through research conversations I document their journeys and hardships in two narrative accounts. I then read across these two accounts to find common threads in their settlement struggles as they tried to make Canada their new home while also connecting their struggles to experiences I have observed throughout my personal life and teaching career. These struggles include financial strains, high need for employment, childcare, isolation and mental health. These findings point to the importance of supporting refugee students in ways that will help them continue in their English language classes. I recommend for ESL teachers the need to develop lessons that provide settlement information, support services for issues of childcare and abuse, and practice in negotiating Canadian culture. Overall, I recommend tolerance, patience and support for all of their students by providing them with time to adapt to a new system, heal from their past and present situations and trust that they

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are in a safe environment. For English Language programs I recommend having support services readily available with professionals who have been trained in English as a Second Language and who are willing to work closely with teachers and students. In order to provide support services to adult refugee students, it is also necessary to include the different levels of government in order become part of the discussion on how to provide stronger supports through childcare, employment and information accessibility.

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Dedication

*My life journey would not have meaning if it was not for my daughter
Nicole Chantal. To you my sweet girl, I dedicate all of my
accomplishments. You have always been my motivation and inspiration.
To my parents Leonor and Ramon Castillo, your constant motivation and
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Narrative Beginnings

Mary's story. The new term had begun and things were going well. My class list had 15 students and I had room for one or two more. Three weeks later, I was given a new student from Africa who had been in Canada for a short time. I will call her Mary, as her original name was common around the world perhaps because of the biblical reference it carried with it, and I wanted to maintain the image of this student as close as possible to her identity. I had to find a way to integrate her and also get her caught up with the grammar structures that we had been working on. Mary sat quietly at the first desk by the door and like most new students she was very shy and did not participate. The days went by and Mary seemed to become withdrawn from class; she looked tired and seemed disengaged. Her body language cued indifference and boredom, so I often felt frustrated because she would not complete her class assignments, work with other students, or participate in class activities. The assessments and evaluations done in class reflected a much lower language proficiency level than that she had come in with, so I took a closer look at her file hoping to find a way to help her integrate into the class, and motivate her to put in more effort. Her information noted many years of education, and a teaching certificate from her country, yet I could not understand why simple and basic life skills and knowledge were absent. I secretly judged her, but decided

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to wait and observe a little longer to see how well her language developed before heading for the administrative office to move her to a lower level.

One morning, Mary came in with a blank look on her face and once class started, tears began to roll down her cheeks. I asked her to step outside so we could speak and find out if there was something I could do to help her, but she insisted that it was nothing and wanted to stay. At various moments during the morning she would cry silently trying to make sure to go unnoticed. Her sadness was overwhelming and I could barely look at her without tearing up myself. I could not leave her without trying to find out why she was so upset and encourage her to go to the school counselor. At lunch time I invited her for a walk to a nearby market for some fresh air. We made small talk until she felt a little more at ease, and was able to talk about what was troubling her. I held back the tears as she shared her problems. Mary had not eaten in a couple of days, but would not allow me to buy her lunch. I managed to buy her a cookie, and I was able to get a smile from her that in retrospect may have been more comforting for me than it was for her. Mary felt hopeless, lamented her decision to leave her country and wanted to return immediately. She did not have enough money, nor could she leave her new home, as she was relying on her uncle's family and church to sponsor her husband, so she had to make sure she pleased them even though they treated her poorly and humiliated her at every opportunity they had. After that day, we were able to strengthen our student teacher relationship. Mary would ask questions, she began speaking with other students, and began to feel a little more confident and engaged in her

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learning. She would often stay after class and I would help her fill out various job applications, until she was finally hired to work as a baker. Mary was unable to continue in the English language program, as her new position required shift work, and her personal obligations made it difficult for her to manage everything. (Memory reconstruction, March 2013)

By the time I met Mary, I had been teaching for three years in the EAL field, yet over the course of the month and a half that Mary attended my class, I came to a stronger awareness that newcomers and refugees have many struggles that affect their ability to succeed in their English classes. Mary was one of the first refugee students I worked with who opened the door for me into her world and allowed me to see beyond what I saw in the classroom. While initially feeling frustrated with her seeming lack of motivation to learn English and her very low level of language proficiency, I was slowly awakened to the complexity of her life in Canada. She would often be the first to arrive and we would spend a few minutes talking before class, or she would stay afterwards if she needed help with a grammar structure though I am positive she just needed someone to listen to her, as the question would quickly turn into a story. Through those conversations, I was able to find out many things about her background in her home country.

Mary was a young girl who grew up in an African country. She was the middle child of a family of six. Upon finishing high school, Mary wanted to follow in the footsteps of her mother and pursue a teaching career, but did not have the means to pay for the course, so she began to work in a bakery in order to save some money and pay for her tuition. Shortly after, she met her husband at church and got married two years later. The political situation in her country had never been perfect, but it was not one that greatly affected her life. When the opposition took over the government, the country became unstable and it became quite chaotic.

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While some people were able to escape, Mary and her husband were not. They had to live in constant fear of military men invading their home, or of being killed somewhere. Her brothers had recently left the province and her husband was fired from his job. One morning, she received news of her father's passing, urging Mary to escape.

The political unrest in Mary's country was not changing, so her uncle who lived in Winnipeg was able to sponsor her through their church and she was able to come to Canada in a span of a few months. Leaving her husband and family, she packed a few things and left with the hope that life would be much different. After Mary arrived in Canada, she was taken to an adult newcomer program where she learned some English basics and became oriented to what steps were needed to continue studying. She was hopeful that things would get better, and felt that her future looked promising as she was confident she would be able to bring her whole family to Canada within a few months.

Adapting to Canada was very difficult for Mary. The weather was different and the temperature was too frigid; she could barely breathe in minus two degree weather. I recall walking towards the school with her one morning and she could only mumble a few words. I would ask her questions and she would utter short words between shivers. I could tell she wanted to run inside, but walked beside me regardless of how cold she was. Her clothing was inadequate for Canadian winter weather, so she relied on the mercy of the people from her church for clothing and would wear oversized runners and a jacket that did not cover the full length of her arm. I never said much, but would often remind students that there were support services that would help them with food and proper clothing if needed, or to talk to me about their situation and we could guide them to get appropriate help. It had been difficult for me to speak to her about what I had observed, as it was early on in the semester and I wanted to be

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cautious about how it would make her feel. Mary did not understand much English, and could not communicate with anyone. Other students in the classroom would ask her questions and she would reply with a simple yes or no. Fortunately I got to know Mary to the point that I was able to identify the questions that she understood and those that she struggled with, so I would rephrase the question for her or use gestures to get the idea across. Towards the end of her time in the class, I saw other students approaching her, talking to her, and also saw a few occasions where students shared their food with her. I wondered if they had noticed she was not eating, or if she shared her stories with them as well. Nevertheless, I decided to keep my distance and not ask questions as I felt that this could disrupt that collegiality and sense of family that they had developed.

Mary shared stories with me about the struggles she was having at the home she was living in since she arrived in Canada. The conditions were far from optimal, as she lived with her uncle's family, and one other cousin who had immigrated to Canada as well. Her cousin was going through similar situations, but had immigrated with her husband. They would often laugh and mock Mary for her clothing, her inability to communicate and the struggles she faced daily. They would often deprive her of the long distance calls from her husband and tell him she was out with other men while she was left wondering if he was still alive. She would struggle to tell me her stories and could barely complete her sentences before she began to cry. Her emotional stability was greatly affected and I felt she could not cope well with the situation, but she refused help from the counselor.

Mary came to class every day, but was unable to make much progress. Most tasks that I assigned appeared to be too difficult and she could not complete them. If students had to do group work, she would sit quietly and recopy her notes two or three times until I approached her

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and directly encouraged her to participate or explained the task again. There were also days where she would complete her tasks well and did not need any extra help. I would constantly wonder whether the lessons were too difficult, or if she had too much on her mind and could not focus. Listening to Mary's life story and helping her through a few of her struggles had an emotional effect on me and I began to question my own perceptions. She would constantly be on my mind as I tried to find ways to help her through these difficult moments in her life although I knew that it was not required of me and that I was not trained or specialized in dealing with students' emotional stability.

That semester, three other students had to withdraw from my class. As with Mary, there were many aspects and factors that could have been influencing their learning and that I was unaware of. Some of the students wanted to continue their education and take college courses, but the goal for many others was to obtain employment. I often reflect on my student's needs and find myself questioning whether my role as a teacher is to focus on preparing them for employment and emphasize communication skills, or if I have to look at it through a more academic lens and work towards developing the skills that will help them succeed in post-secondary education. The experiences that Mary shared with me marked an important point in my life as it changed the way I viewed my students, my teaching practice, and my role as a teacher. It also brought back memories of my own immigration stories between Canada and Chile.

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My Immigration Story. I was born and raised in Canada, and have a Chilean background. My parents had been political refugees who came to Canada in the late 1970s. They always felt that Canada was just a momentary home until the political situation improved and they could return. In 1992, after living in Canada for 13 years, my parents decided to sell all of their belongings and move back to Chile. We were able to settle and adapt with a few difficulties, but eventually became accustomed to our new life there. Over the following 8 years my parents lost most of their savings, struggled financially and had serious health problems, so we decided to immigrate once again to Canada. For my parents, this meant abandoning their home again while for me and my younger brother, it meant returning home.

In 2001, my brother and I returned to Canada first. We brought with us the few belongings that we were able to pack in our luggage and approximately two hundred dollars to spend on our basic necessities until we could find employment. We knew that the choice of returning to Canada was going to be a process, and that there would be a few struggles, but were confident that it was the right decision for our family. We had to rely on the help of a relative who was struggling with personal issues, so we felt burdened that we could not contribute to the household until we found employment. We had to save money for our parents to immigrate to Canada, find housing that was affordable and convenient for the needs of two ailing parents and have enough to cover some of our basic living expenses. Furthermore, I was expecting a child and did not have the means to support a newborn. I had initially thought that our return to Canada would not be very difficult, but once I had been here for a few weeks I felt anxious and frightened because I was unsure of how we would get through everything. I was able to communicate well, never struggled to ask questions or to hold a conversation, and navigating the

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city was something that came with ease. While the transition to daily life was seamless, I struggled with the cultural differences and began to question my own identity. I had a difficult time understanding how and why things were done a certain way, found that there were too many rules that had to be followed, and felt that people would complain about trivial issues. My greatest concern was finding employment, so I applied for a few positions, but it was difficult to convince employers to hire me, as they said I did not have Canadian experience, nor did I have reliable references. Eventually, my brother and I were able to find jobs; he was hired in a furniture factory and worked overtime in order to pay for rent and our parent's plane tickets. I was able to work part-time at a downtown cafeteria during the evening shift, a position that was quite difficult for the employer to fill. The work became more strenuous as I approached my due date, but I did not complain or ask for help because I needed the income. I later learned through the nurse at the hospital that there were a few supports for low income parents-to-be, but I was unaware that it was an option, or that it was a question I should have asked.

My daughter was born in late August and my parents were able to fly into Winnipeg two weeks before I gave birth. Her father stayed in Chile, as we were not married and he did not qualify to enter Canada any other way. The situation was difficult, as I would be the only one who could support her, and the position I held at the cafeteria was not going to provide enough income, so I decided to return to school. I quickly realized that I was not academically prepared for university. I upgraded my English level that first semester and then entered the University of Manitoba in January 2002. It was difficult to find time to study, but between taking care of my baby daughter and also maintaining my part-time job at the cafeteria I would do what I called 'fast studying'. I would map out my notes in graphic organizers during nap time, or while my parents took care of her and then study them on the bus, during breaks and any

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little time I could find. There were many sleepless nights, as it was the best time to write essays and finish assignments. One year later, I obtained a position as a part-time Spanish teaching assistant and also worked part-time as a deli clerk; these two jobs provided the same amount of hours as my previous employment, yet paid much more. Fortunately I had my parents to help support my child and me, so working and studying was not as difficult as it was for other people who had no support. It took me five years to complete my Bachelor of Arts, and two more to complete my Bachelor of Education. It was difficult to manage so many things at once. I often felt guilty because I had to attend to so many responsibilities and could not spend more time being a mother, but found the motivation I needed in knowing that the harder I worked, the better life we would have.

I graduated with my Bachelor of Education in May 2009. I clearly remember trying to withhold my tears of joy and letting one accidentally escape. That moment meant more than just the ability to find employment in my chosen field. It meant the culmination of hard work, dedication and reaching a goal that seemed so far at one point; it meant providing a better life for my daughter and repaying the help and support back to my parents. It was the beginning of something new and for the first time in a very long time, I was happy. I knew that finding employment was going to be difficult at first, but I knew that just as I had experienced a few years prior when I returned to Canada, I needed to gain the Canadian experience and the references that employers want to hear from.

I looked back at the struggles I had settling back in Canada and tried to make connections with other immigration stories. I knew that each individual and family had different experiences, but I began to wonder if the struggles that newcomers face were all similar. I thought about my students' situations and tried to put myself in each one, but found it difficult

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because I did not consider myself a real newcomer, and I was not a refugee. Teaching refugee students and observing their struggles in the classroom were interesting, but I could not relate to their situations outside of the classroom. My thoughts kept leading me back to what I saw in my home as a child when my parents were refugee newcomers over thirty years ago. It became my way of linking the other side of the immigrant's story; the side that is lived outside of the classroom and that we as instructors rarely see. I began to look at the newcomer struggles from a more familiar and personal perspective.

My Parents' Immigration Story. My parents were forced to flee their country Chile because of the political unrest and persecution they faced. They applied for refugee asylum to many countries in 1978, and Canada was the first to respond a year after their application was submitted. They immigrated to the province of Manitoba with a few of their belongings, hoping that this would be the end of a dark, sad chapter in their lives. They knew that settling in a country completely different from theirs would be difficult because they did not speak the language and that they would face many challenges in the process of settling in Canada.

The struggles that my parents faced began immediately when they arrived at the airport on the exact date of their arrival. They had been told to wait for someone who would take them to their new home and give them further instructions as to what to do next. A lady arrived and took them to a taxi, spoke to the driver and left without saying a word. The driver took them to the parking lot of the Balmoral Hotel, where they were left with their luggage on the ground and millions of questions unanswered. They entered the hotel assuming that there would be someone there to help them understand what they had to do and where to go, but their inability to speak English made it very difficult. They spoke to the receptionist at the hotel who

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immediately yelled at them because they could not understand what she was asking them to do, and would say, “Sign here, you Indian son of a bitch.” The words became imbedded in their minds, as they believed it was very important since it was shouted at them many times. They did not understand what was being said, until a few days later, when they were finally able to ask someone who could translate it for them. This would not be the only occasion in which they felt discriminated against, as there were many situations in which the volume and tone of voice, as well as the body language carried a lot of meaning making them feel humiliated and helpless.

Most of the Chilean community was aware that arriving Chileans were not being given the proper treatment or information, so many took it upon them to continually ask the hotel if there were any new arrivals. My parents were contacted within the first few days by people in their cultural community who helped them to find the settlement services and employment in the factories where many of them were already working. Employers paid low wages that did not provide enough income to cover all of their basic living expenses, so my father was forced to take on a second job. Work was difficult, and it was worsened by the fact that they could not speak to other people, since the majority of the workers were immigrants who had very little English language. They were forced to do difficult and dangerous jobs; they were paid inadequate salaries, and were mistreated for not being able to speak the English language.

My parents struggled emotionally and after a few months of settling in Canada, it became difficult to cope with. Amongst the many hardships that they faced, they felt isolated and alone worrying about their own situation in Canada while also wondering if their families were alive back home. The year went by quickly for both, but on many occasions they asked themselves what they were doing in ‘this’ country. They questioned whether or not living in Canada was worth not being with their family, not being able to phone them and only knowing about them

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through the letters they would receive every couple of months. The absence of their friends and family, and the isolation were difficult to handle. It was in only highly-needed occasions like grocery shopping that they would leave their apartment building due to the very cold weather and the inadequate clothing. Had they not met a few other people from the same country, there was a chance that they would have returned to Chile.

The need to take English classes was a priority for my parents. They knew that the difficulties they had were partly because of the language barrier and that, by improving their language abilities, they would be able to apply for better employment, or go to college. During their first few months in Canada they were able to attend class for a few hours a week, but it became difficult. After completing their shifts, they would go to school, but the fatigue and perhaps inadequate nutrition made it difficult for them to focus on the lessons. Although it was difficult, they also enjoyed it because they felt that it was a way to socialize with other students, and felt part of a community. My parents would often state that they did not make huge strides in the English language, but they were able to laugh and forget about their struggles for a few hours. They both eventually had to withdraw from their language classes, but were able to return a couple of years later by taking on janitorial positions – much different than the nursing and construction jobs they had known in Chile – which could be done in the late evening or at night, allowing them to organize their time between taking turns caring for their children, working and studying.

After many years, the efforts my parents made helped them continue on with their lives and settle in Canada successfully. While growing up, I came to know many of my parents' friends and participated in the community along with the children of many other Chilean refugees. As I became older, I noticed that not everyone had the same financial situation that

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we had, and many struggled much more than our family did. To this day there are still some Chilean refugees who arrived in the same period as my parents, but remain unable to speak English, and struggle in navigating the city as well as financially. The struggles that my parents' friends experienced and how it affected their lives over the years intrigued me. I also wondered if it was possible these struggles were still present amongst refugee newcomers even though there seem to be more supports available for them now at both the federal and provincial levels.

I cannot compare my journey with that of my parents or my students, but I can certainly share the feeling of urgency to move forward as fast as possible in order to help those we love. On many occasions I find myself wondering why Mary and many refugee students continue to struggle so much even though there are a considerable number of supports in place. Through this thesis, I hope to delve into the settlement struggles that newcomers face and explore their experiences, so that we can stimulate further dialogue and develop a deeper understanding of how they affect and influence ESL adult refugee students. The research puzzles that I want to explore and to understand more deeply are:

1. What might I learn by inquiring into the experiences of refugee adult newcomer students, such as Mary and my parents, who have withdrawn from their English language programs?
2. How might this inquiry deepen my understanding of how to teach and support this particular group of ESL students?
3. How might this inquiry expand the knowledge about the barriers that affect the integration of newcomers into the work force and society in Canada?

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My first hope is that by inquiring into the lived experiences of adult refugee ESL students, I will be able to broaden my perspectives and find ways to support them as an ESL instructor. Secondly, I hope this study will allow other educators to consider these experiences in order to facilitate learning and non-English speaking immigrant integration into Canadian society more smoothly. And thirdly, I hope this study will inform policy to develop better or alternative language programming that will support all adult ESL learners.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Each term, hundreds of newcomers and refugees attend English as a Second Language classes hoping to develop stronger language skills that will allow them to be successful in the work field or in an academic setting. However, not all students are successful and some are forced to withdraw from the program for ‘personal reasons’. Although the Canadian government has implemented support programs that would allow them to continue, the pressure and the struggles they experience exceed their ability to manage their personal lives and their language classes simultaneously. In this chapter, a brief historical timeline of the immigration policies that were implemented by the Canadian government will be reviewed in the hopes that it will provide perspective on how newcomers and refugees have been welcomed and supported. This will be followed by an overview of studies that delve into the dynamic of settlement, acculturation and integration, by looking at the struggles and barriers that affect students. Finally, I will look at the role the government has played in the educational support for newcomers at both the federal and the provincial levels and the support services that are currently in place for newcomers and refugees in order to understand the different processes that they must go through and what information is available for them.

Immigration Policies

“Canada is often referred to as *a land of immigrants* because, over the past 200 years, millions of newcomers have helped to build and defend our way of life” (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2009, p.12). The waves of immigration have brought in diverse ethnic groups at different points in time. The increase in population and need for labour provided a platform through which immigration was encouraged, yet some of the policies that were

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developed and implemented for each period were discriminatory and restrictive. According to Li (2003) immigration policies were “classified into four phases, each governed by a state policy that defined and welcomed a particular class of desirable immigrants and restricting the entry of those considered undesirable” (as cited in Guo, 2013, p. 24). The Canadian government would encourage immigration to fill labour shortages, yet established restrictions for different groups of immigrants. The first phase (1867 -1895) brought in immigrants of European and Chinese to complete the railroad. The second phase (1895 -1914) recruited Eastern and Southern Europeans for farming and domestic service, and excluded Asians and non-whites. The third phase (1915-1945) limited their recruitment to British, Northern and Central European. In 1960, the fourth policy phase changed to meet the labor shortage and immigrants were recruited based on skills and education (Guo, 2003, pg. 24-25).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the policies focused more on skill and language, as there were labor shortages in a variety of economic sectors. It was stated by Guo (2013) that “the Canadian government modified the point system to attract skilled immigrants needed at the time for the new post-industrial, knowledge-based economy” (p.26).

The shift in immigration policies from ethnic based to desirable skills based allowed an increase in the number of immigrants, causing a growth of population. During the period which the stories of Mary and my family took place; the Canadian population saw a considerable increase. According to Statistics Canada (2010) *Table for Population Growth: Canada, Provinces, and Territories*, in 1981, the immigrant population was 134.5 thousand of 24,665.4 thousand people (0.5%). The following decade would not bring much change, as the immigrant population was at 134.7 thousand of a total population of 27,854.9 (0.5%) in 1991. There was a considerable increase of immigrants by 200, a number that increased to 250.9 thousand people

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contributing to the total Canadian population of 30,824.4 (0.8%). Statistics Canada (2012) states that the population of permanent immigrants residing in Canada continued to grow, increasing from 247,247 in 2008, to 257,515 in 2012.

Immigration Programs

The Canadian government has made it more accessible for people to immigrate to Canada by creating different programs (categories) through which they can apply. Interested applicants can apply through the Express Entry, Provincial Nominees, Quebec-selected skilled workers, Investors, entrepreneurs and self-employed people, family sponsorship, live-in caregivers and refugees. (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2015) Funding and support for immigrants will vary depending on the program through which they apply. The Express Entry program is funded by the Federal government and accepts immigrants who are able to meet a set of conditions that prove they have a professional background and experience in that field, an advanced English language level, and have either a job offer or the financial means to support themselves. (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2015). Similarly, The Provincial Nominee program works under the same criterion as the Express Entry program, but is funded by the provincial government. Through this program, people apply directly to a province or territory, as long as they have “the skills, education and work experience to contribute to the economy of that province or territory, and must want to live there” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2015). However, the family sponsorship, self-employed, entrepreneurs, and live-in caregiver, and refugees have different application, funding, and support criterion for each.

The top three programs that allowed the greatest number of immigrants into Manitoba in 2014 were the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) the Family Class (FC) and Refugees. In 2014, 75.1% (12,187 newcomers) of the immigrant were accepted through the PNP program,

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followed by the FC with 11.3% (1,831 newcomers) and Refugees with 9.2% (1,495 newcomers) (Manitoba Labor and Immigration, 2014, p.8). Due to the current unrest in Syria, the Government of Canada has currently accepted to resettle a large number of refugees from that country. As of December 2015, 307 Syrian refugees have arrived out of 25,000 to be resettled in 2016 (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2015). According to Muñoz (2010) Office of the Manitoba Fairness Commissioner, ““Growing through immigration” is one of the cornerstones of the Province’s economic development plan. Since its introduction in 1998, the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) has been responsible for more than tripling the annual rate of immigration in Manitoba” (p. 23). The need for immigrants to fulfill the vacant employment positions has proven to be essential as the current population as Manitoba ages. With the implementation of the PNP, I have noticed a change in the classroom demographics, as students come in with a higher level of English and hope to quickly enter the workforce in their professional areas. Unfortunately, they become frustrated with the system because of the barriers they encounter. Some of the issues internationally educated professionals face are lack of information or misinformation, confusion about the various processes and the length of time that they will take, lack of knowledge about what they could have done before migrating in order to prepare for the assessment of their credentials and the difficulty they have obtaining their documents. Furthermore, they also encounter barriers with economic support, limited training opportunities and testing methods and format used in Canada (Muñoz, 2010, pp. 26 –29).

One of the most important components of successfully integrating and settling into society is the ability to find employment, and being financially stable. Anisef, Sweet & Adamuti-Tache (2008) carried out a longitudinal comparative study that provided an insight into the employment difference between immigrants based on their level of education and whether or

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not attending post-secondary education provides them with a higher chance of employment success. In order to answer the key questions, the study compared the participant's employment success based on level of education at six months, two years and four years upon arrival. The groups were divided into groups of newcomers who were recycling credentials and trying to upgrade their skills in their particular professions, the value-added group who tried to pursue a degree in the same field, the study-aneu group who tried to find a new career, and the non-participation group who did not have any prior education or training. Anisef et al. (2008) stated that "immigrants who are poorly positioned in the labour market are less likely to become socially integrated, feel as though they belong, and fully participate in the wider society" (p. 4). Through my teaching practice I have observed that this is a problem as it becomes a closed cycle difficult to break. Finding better employment positions is difficult if they do not have enough time to attend school, and if they do attend school, how are they to provide for their families while attending classes? In many cases, this can be very challenging. Anisef et al. (2008) states "the most disadvantaged in terms of employment are family-class immigrants and refugees, with the latter being particularly disadvantaged" (p. 19). The study found that as their level of education was limited; their ability to obtain an optimal employment position and fully integrate into society was reduced. The positions that they will enter will most likely be survival jobs where they generally work alone and are less likely to interact with others. It is also probably that due to their high needs, they will have more than one full-time position, making networking unlikely: "Some common indicators of integration include finding employment that is consistent with their qualifications, locating good schools for their children, securing adequate housing and health care, making new friends, and bonding with people in their community" (Anisef et al., 2008, p. 14). The research conducted by Anisef to find reasons for furthering

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their education was done only amongst the immigrants who were ages 25 and above. However, this limits the study greatly as there is a tendency to have teenagers working survival jobs in order to contribute to the household income. I recall some of the parents in my classes who stated that their eldest child would take on a full-time position and struggle in school, or have to drop out; post-secondary education was not an option for these families. It would be beneficial to find the percentage of refugee students under the age of 25 who are attending post-secondary educational facilities and how successful they perceive themselves to be.

Regardless of their perceptions, it was concluded that immigrants were overall at a greater disadvantage in all aspects, as “unemployment is typically higher, wages tend to be lower, and those who are employed very often work in jobs for which they are overqualified” (p. 24). In order for this trend to stop and allow newcomers to integrate into society with a positive and more altruistic approach, it is suggested that “providing immigrants with effective ESL classes, applied education, or broad transferable skills and internship opportunities will give immigrants the knowledge, English skills, and Canadian job experience they need” (Anisef et al., 2008, p. 28). Nonetheless, I believe that these suggestions would need further review and discussion, taking into consideration the time commitments and supports that would be in place for newcomers to complete their language training.

Canada has a high need for labour and as previously pointed out, has relied on immigrants to support the growing economy, seeking to cover “more than 77,000 workers in the next ten year” (Maganaka & Plaizier, 2015, 134). In Alberta, the Language Assessment, Referral and Counselling Centre (LARCC) provides assistance to newcomers and refugees by assessing their language, referring them to language or career programs, or information about employment opportunities, emphasizing and encouraging students to develop skills that will

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allow them to become employed (Maganaka & Plaizier, 2015, 135). The study found that women were the majority in seeking LARCC services and the highest age group to attend classes' falls between the ages of 25 and 34. According to the 2006 census used in this study, "27% of new Language and Vocational Assessment (LVA) clients entered Canada as skilled workers, and likewise 27% through the family class category; while 36% of Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) clients entered through the Government Assisted Refugee program" (p. 140). It was found that the majority of refugees fell into the lower CLB levels within the ranges of 3-5 in comparison to immigrants coming via other programs, in which the majority took language classes at higher levels. Furthermore, Maganaka & Plaizier (2015) state that "most clients reporting a future occupational goal indicate a choice for the practical nursing or health care aide field [due to] the common understanding of the growing needs of the aging Canadian population, and the availability and accessibility of related skills programs" (p.152). The goal is reasonably set within the needs of society and of newcomers, yet there is an economic component that may not allow students to reach this goal. While LINC classes are free of charge for newcomers and refugees, career courses and post- secondary education are not government funded and may be deemed too costly for students. According to Berger, Mote & Parking (2006) in Anisef, et al. (2008) "Post-secondary education costs comprise an important barrier to [immigrant] participation due to the recent increases in tuition and related costs" (p.25). Although there are ways to pay for these courses such as scholarships and student loans, it would be necessary to observe the economic needs of each particular case, and work closely with schools, educators and social assistance programs in order to provide a just and equal opportunity, without over privileging particular situations.

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I have observed that childcare is an important aspect that affects student attendance to English classes. Many immigrants and refugees have more than two children and struggle to find facilities that will accommodate their work schedule. In many cases, parents feel apprehensive about having unknown people care for their children and struggle to maintain their parenting roles especially in their approach to disciplining their children. Tribe (1999) in Deng & Marlowe (2013) discussed how “families from refugee backgrounds also experience cultural differences regarding communication approaches, individual versus collective identities, gender roles, and perspectives on respect and authority” (p. 419). Gender role within the family dynamic is dependent on the cultural background the family is from. Phillimore (2011) states that, “gender was a key variable impacting upon refugees’ acculturation experience. For [sic] some cultures, women were considered to be the bearer of family honour with responsibility for upholding cultural traditions” (p. 585). The experiences they have had can lead them into the fear of having their children rebel against their cultural values and home rules. Deng & Marlowe (2013) carried out a study looking into the parenting experiences of a group of Sudanese refugee parents in New Zealand. Amongst the main challenges that the parents had were adapting to a different parenting style because “the [new] culture affects family dynamics as their children go to school, socialize with children from different backgrounds, and begin learning diverse worldviews” (p.420). Secondly, there are cultures that tend to go through a process of gender adaptation in which the father is fundamental in the disciplining of the children and if absent; the male relatives would be given the right to take on the role (p. 421). Upon immigrating, the roles of parents changed, affecting them emotionally. Deng & Marlowe (2013) state that the parents were accustomed to having a considerable level of support, as “looking after children in South Sudan was a community task. They noted having little parental respite in

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New Zealand, as there were few child-friendly spaces available that did not require parents' guidance" (p.422).

Women play a strong role in many other cultures as well. Magro & Ghorayshi (2011) state that "there are many clashes between their multiple tasks as mother/wife/caregiver, what is expected of them and their desire to gain education and equal rights. Lack of childcare and gender inequality is [sic] cited as major impediments to their education" (p.18). The parents struggled to understand the disciplinary differences from their culture to the new one, and access information about the different support programs for parents and children because of their lack of language (p.423). Although parents had a positive outlook for the future of their children and were open to learning the new styles and culture, they felt apprehensive about not being able to instill many of their cultural values because "parents also did not want their children to forget their South Sudanese heritage, cultural values, and identity [...] As children develop familiarity with the dominant culture and embrace some of the values that are in opposition to their parents' traditional values, intergenerational tensions may occur" (Deng & Marlowe, 2013, p.426).

Many newcomers and refugees immigrate to Canada with young children, or will have children within the first few years of their arrival. The children are able to understand some of the parent's language, but will often struggle to develop a strong ability to speak or will lose their first language completely. Fillmore (2010) states that "Accelerated language loss is a common occurrence these days among immigrant families, with the younger members losing the ethnic language after a short time in school" (p.205). Parents who are unable to speak English and children who are unable to speak their ethnic language cause a breakdown in the communication and in the household relationships. In other situations, the loss of language may influence the dynamics of the family, and the interaction between parents and children affecting their cultural

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identities as the children tend to retreat and isolate themselves (Fillmore, 2010, p. 205). Many children find a sense of belonging amongst their classmates, and will develop a stronger connection with them. Consequently, children find support in their friends and decrease the contact with their family (Fillmore, 2010, p.203). This can be a concerning situation for many parents, as they feel they are unable to guide their children, and instill their cultural beliefs and values.

Newcomer and refugee students become highly stressed, as their family needs and personal expectations overshadow their English language learning. I recall conversations with past students who were frustrated because they had families to support in Canada and in other countries; they struggle financially, and they are also emotionally sensitive, affected by depression, or by past experiences they had to encounter in their home countries, as is the case of refugees. Phillimore (2011) completed a study of the psychological stress affecting newcomers going through the process of acculturation and integration in the United Kingdom. Although there had been government initiatives previously developed to support newcomers, refugees continued to struggle to integrate into society (p.577). The acculturation process in which newcomers are able to understand, accept and adapt to the new culture takes time and is different for everyone. There are a series of social and psychological factors that influence the acculturation process. Phillimore (2011) states that

The extent, speed and type of cultural changes necessary can all impact upon individuals' psychological well-being. Too much change, lack of support, pressure to adapt too quickly or inability to follow desired strategy can result in acculturation stress, and when major problems are experienced individuals can be susceptible to mental illness. (p.579)

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Although newcomers and refugees are susceptible to the stresses caused by the difficulties they encounter upon their arrival, they also carry with them experiences that will contribute and affect their mental states. “Refugees also shared common ground in that they had direct experience of living through war or surviving persecution. These experiences impacted on their ability to settle because they struggled to look forward and focus upon developing a new life, instead trying to find ways to process their experience and get through each day” (Phillimore, 2011, p.582).

Returning to my earlier story that began this thesis, I recall having a conversation with Mary when she asked me for help filling out a job application. Being hired would allow her to send money back to her siblings so they could buy food, and if possible, move out of the war affected area that they were living in. It would also cover her basic living expenses until her husband could arrive in Canada. Mary was no longer in danger, yet she lived in constant fear of losing her family and relatives, living the daily anxiety and knowing her family was living amidst war. Perhaps it is stories like this that prompted Phillimore (2011) to comment that

There is a prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) within refugee communities that are related to their pre-departure experiences. Others spoke of a range of symptom, including depression, anxiety, fearfulness and feeling suicidal, that are associated with PTSD (p. 587).

The constant fear and thoughts that students carry with them, in addition to the daily struggles they encounter when dealing with their settlement, acculturation and integration processes are therefore conditions affecting their ability to focus on their English classes. Gibbs (2008) notes that

Newcomers who are learning English as their second, third, or fourth language are often not only workers and professionals, but they are also

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parents, spouses, community members, politically engaged citizens, sometimes survivors of war and poverty—subjectivities that cannot be parked at the door of the classroom” (p. 330).

Newcomer Struggles

Most immigrants come with different expectations of life in Canada, but all go through a settlement process regardless of the reason they immigrate, and how well prepared they are. “Health, employment, laws and getting around Winnipeg are amongst some of the most important topics that newcomers need to know when they arrive” (Eidse, 2010). Canada has supported immigration by implementing many programs that provide linguistic, cultural and financial support. However, it seems that many immigrants continue to struggle in all of these areas.

Newcomers decide to immigrate for various reasons. Many of them look to Canada for employment opportunities, health care, maintaining family relationships or seeking safety and freedom. It is upon their arrival that newcomers begin to find themselves lost, as it becomes overwhelming, and in many cases disappointing. Much of the information that newcomers need in order to begin the settlement process is found on the government website where they begin to apply for immigration. However, many underestimate the complexity of the Canadian system in aspects of language proficiency, professional accreditation and experience, as well as social interaction. I recall having a student state that she took language classes as a hobby and did not need the language classes to find employment; she would be hired immediately and would not have to take any accreditation courses. She confidently stated that she knew how to speak three languages and had experience in all of the departments within her logistics field. When we looked into the description of her skills and qualifications to the specific Canadian employment

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standards according to the National Occupation Code of Canada (NOC) the criteria matched an entry-level position that did not fit her perceived professional role. According to the Government of Canada (n.d.) the NOC “provides a framework to organize over 40,000 job titles into 500 occupational group descriptions and is used to compile, analyze and communicate information about occupations, and to understand the jobs found throughout Canada’s labour market.” Furthermore, the languages she spoke were limited to those spoken in Europe and not commonly used in Canada, while her English proficiency level was fairly low and her French abilities were nonexistent. Professional immigrants may feel that they have the qualifications and experience that will allow them to find employment immediately, but overlook the processes needed to validate their professions.

Integrating and developing relationships is important in the settlement process and is one that teachers try to build immediately when classes begin. ‘What is in a name?’ is a common icebreaker activity that is used at the beginning of term to get students to meet and get to know each other. The purpose of this game is to have students explain what their names are and why they were named this way, giving them the opportunity to share personal, family and cultural history. The name that identifies people is a great way to begin conversations, but it can also be the cause of assumptions and controversy. Looking back throughout the years I have spent working with newcomer students and teachers from different parts of the world I was able to recall many instances in which a person’s name became an issue. I recall a situation in which I had just begun a new position and was hired along with an internationally-trained teacher with 25 years of experience in the educational field. The teacher had applied for many positions using his real name, but had been unsuccessful in finding employment, so he decided to change his first name to see if there would be a difference. I was skeptical about the situation, but was

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surprised to learn that the instructor had submitted two resumes one with his real name and one with his anglicized name, the same credentials and a cover letter. The instructor received two calls for different interviews for the anglicized name, but never received a call with his original name (L. Lopez, personal communication, October 20, 2011). I had also observed a much more disturbing situation during the beginning of a new term when an ESL instructor looked through a student file and made the assumption that the student was a terrorist for carrying a name that made reference to a religious war. I was appalled at the cultural insensitivity of this instructor who wanted to contact “someone” to have the student flagged as a dangerous individual with terrorist ties. When confronted as to her assumptions, the instructor expressed the need to inform the student of the negative connotation his name had, and the urgency to change it to an ‘English’ name.

The stigma that foreign names carry with them is often viewed negatively by some employers as well. Guo (2013) notes that “For some employers, an ethnic name implies immigrants’ inability to integrate into Canadian society [so if] immigrants use an anglicised name, it is assumed they are more likely to find employment” (p. 35). Nonetheless, names are not the main reason for which newcomers struggle to find employment. Shan (2009) claims that immigrants face many barriers in the areas of “education, occupational training, work experience, language proficiency and social capital” (p. 354). Furthermore, he states that the whole process of settlement is subject to a “credential and certificate regime (CCR)” (Shan, 2009, p. 354) which is

promoted aggressively by Canadian employers, educational institutions and professional organisations. Thus, once in Canada, immigrants are compelled to ‘Canadianise’ their education and training in order to regain a foothold in the labour market (Ng & Shan, 2009, p. 176).

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Newcomers become as competitive within their field as they can, proving they are worth investing in.

One of the priorities that newcomers have is learning the English language, so that they may become employable. I have observed students attend classes hoping to obtain the highest benchmark level possible, assuming that the benchmark will guarantee a job position, or entrance to a post-secondary program and that they will no longer have to attend language courses. Likewise, the priority for the Canadian government is to integrate newcomers into the workforce in order to support the various economic sectors that have grown and require more labour in order to continue the existing economic prosperity (Maganaka & Plaizier, 2015, p.134). Many students hope to integrate into the labor market as soon as possible, but realize that their low language abilities and qualifications are not up to the standard that Canadian employers expect. Therefore, many students decide to continue and further their education in the same occupational field while others decide to gravitate towards the health care field (Maganaka & Plaizier, 2015, p.152). Many of the students that attend my ESL classes state that they are highly interested in the health care aid courses because it is only a few months long, the wage allows them to become a little more financially stable and it has health benefits. However, they struggle to understand the complexity of moving from a language based program to a content based program and the educational expectations that they will have.

Many students have a difficult time understanding the educational paradigm of Canadian Society. Children are encouraged to look for answers and be genuinely inquisitive from their first classes in pre-elementary school, and the value of life-long learning is highly encouraged. These two ideas promote the need to constantly engage in educating oneself, making it very difficult for newcomers to succeed in school, especially if they come from educational systems

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that differ from the pedagogical framework that is followed in Canada. According to Ng & Shan (2010) the Canadian Government has adopted a neoliberal ideology that establishes lifelong learning as a means to develop and manipulate the learning process in order to keep up with an economic agenda (pp. 169-170). It is difficult for immigrants to grasp and follow this idea, often viewing it as a barrier that they must continuously overcome. This ideology, which is common and highly regarded as necessary amongst the pedagogical community and western society, has its roots in a framework that is devoted to maintaining a set standard based on lifelong learning within society, where the population at large become key players in a strategic economic game. According to Boshnier in Ng & Shan (2010)

Lifelong learning tends to render invisible any obligation to address social conditions. It is nested in an ideology of vocationalism. Learning is for acquiring skills alleged to enable the learner to work harder, faster and smarter and thus enables their employer to better compete in the global economy. (p. 368)

From this perspective, the hiring process is highly competitive, as the employee must have the ability to develop and maintain up-to-date knowledge and skills, making Canada one of the leaders in the global economy, in which case, “Most skilled immigrants end up in jobs far from commensurate with their previous educational backgrounds and work experience” (Ng & Shan, 2010, p. 173). Newcomers are expected to learn and understand the Canadian educational system, the formats used and educational expectations, as well as the thought processes and critical thinking skills that are valued, so that they may successfully continue taking courses and further their education in order to obtain and maintain employment. Finding and applying for employment is a priority for both newcomers and refugees, but it requires a considerable amount

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of language to develop and carryout. Through my teaching practice I have noticed that newcomers and refugees often rely on standard resume templates which have been printed off the internet, or which have been provided by settlement services to make this process easier, yet many students are not being hired. One of the requirements where I teach is that instructors include an employment preparation theme in which the lessons are geared towards helping students enter the Canadian workplace. Students are taught the vocabulary and basic grammar structures in their beginning stages, and then slowly progress in the complexity of the task as they develop the language needed. They are taught how to write a Canadian resume and to modify it in order to fit the job they are seeking. Although the newcomer or refugee is able to provide a clear description of their qualifications, they do not have the Canadian experience that employers require. Finding themselves caught in a catch 22, they are not being hired because they do not have Canadian experience, yet cannot obtain Canadian experience if they are not hired. The professional newcomers that have been in my classes are often frustrated because they are expected to take courses in order to validate their knowledge and to assure they comply with Canadian standards. This becomes a lengthy process and many students have been forced to take any job that will allow them to gain experience, setting them back in the process. It takes them many years to settle, and it does not provide enough income to cover their basic needs. According to Lewkowicz in Ng & Shan (2010) “Based on a 2006 labour force survey in Canada, [the results] show that the weekly wage of recent immigrants of core working age (between 25 and 54) who are in the country 5 to 10 years is just under 20% less than their Canadian counterparts” (p.173).

As newcomers try to integrate into society, they need time to acclimate to a new culture, system and language. One of their first steps is to enrol in English language classes. According

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to Xue (2007) “Acquiring education or training courses in Canada is [sic] associated with social integration and labour market success for many new immigrants” (p. 13). However, it is possible that there may be other circumstances in which settlement will take a longer time depending on the settlement struggles of a particular group or family and their cultural, economic and educational backgrounds. Xue (2007) states that

Through the first 4 years, quite a number of newcomers reported barriers in accessing education: 27% (or about 42,400)[...] among the immigration categories, refugees were most likely to report problems in accessing education (27%) while family class immigrants were least likely to report difficulties (14%) 4 years after arrival.” It was concluded that “During the initial four years the LSIC immigrants made economic and social assimilation [...] and as time went by, language barriers were cited less while financial constraints were more prevalent in all integration activities examined. (p. 24)

These issues may be attributed to inadequate education in home countries, or even lack thereof, resulting in prolonged financial struggles; my ESL classes frequently have a large disparity in literacy skills and previous academic experiences. Xu (2007) states that by assimilating and acquiring the basic communicative language, newcomers may be able to find employment that pays minimum wage, but is not sufficient to cover all of their basic expenses (p. 24). Although the study carried out by Xu is based on a four year longitudinal study, this problem continues to affect newcomers afterwards. Therefore, further research is needed in order to assess whether or not this can be attributed to the lack of language classes that would permit students to enter post-secondary courses. Although this study provides some insight into some of the barriers that newcomers face, not all factors are considered, as it is statistics based and lacks further insight into the true nature of each situation.

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Federal Support

The Federal government has encouraged and funded several immigration programs. In order to provide information for people who would like to apply to immigrate to Canada, the government has developed official government websites that provide information about all aspects of life. The Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) website provides a number of links to different settlement services, and includes an Essential Workbook for Professional Newcomers. The workbook provides geographical information about Canada, and guides the newcomer through different steps they need to take to help them settle, and provides a number of links to information about the processes newcomers must follow in order to access support services, find housing, employment and professional accreditation. However, newcomers may struggle after they arrive if they did not begin the process while in their countries. In order to help immigrants better prepare for their settlement in Canada while they are still in their country, CIC developed the Partners for Newcomer Success (CIIP) project. This project provides “free pre-departure orientation to all economic class candidates, provides information, planning and online support” According to the CIIP website (2013). “Immigration is vital to Canada’s population growth and economic prosperity. Yet, while demand for [the professional newcomer] skills grows, many highly competent newcomers to Canada remain underemployed” (para.1) which creates a set of barriers and struggles which affect the decisions newcomers make and the choices that take them down various roads.

Canada has welcomed immigrants for economic and humanitarian reasons. According to the CIC, “Each year, millions of people are forced to flee their homeland [sic] to escape persecution, war or severe human rights abuses and Canada provides protection to those who make refugee protection claims.” (Refugee Protection, 2015) There are currently two types of

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protection programs that support refugees. The first is the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program, for people seeking protection from outside Canada. Through this program, refugees apply outside of Canada, and are granted government-assistance in which the refugee can be classified as a conventional refugee, or Country of Asylum Class. Refugees may be provided with government supports, or they may be privately sponsored through the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program where the government matches sponsors with refugees identified by the United Nations. They may also be sponsored and supported by Groups of five Canadian Citizens or permanent residents, Community sponsors and Joint Assistance Sponsorship Programs are eligible to support a refugee while they settle. The second protection program through which a person can make a refugee claim is through the In-Canada Asylum Program. In this program individuals apply for refugee status have already landed in Canada and cannot return to their countries.

Refugees who arrived via the traditional program can take advantage of two federal assistance programs. The first, the Resettlement Assistance Program, is “provided by the Government of Canada to Conventional Refugees Abroad, and in some instances, to members of the country of Asylum Class who have been identified as refugees with special needs and who have been admitted to Canada as government-assisted refugees. The Resettlement Assistance Program help the refugee with economic assistance that covers basic needs, and income support for up to one year” (Financial Assistance Refugees, 2015) The second program that the Federal government has developed to support refugees is the Immigration Loans Program (ILP). Through this program, refugees who apply through the government-assisted and privately sponsored members of Conventional Refugees Abroad and Country of Asylum refugees are

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eligible to apply for a loan that covers the costs of medical examinations abroad; travel documents; and transportation to Canada.

Loans are approved to the applicant's needs and ability to repay. Assistance loans are also available to newcomers to cover expenses such as rental housing, telephone deposits and work tools. Interest is charged on ILP loans. The interest rate is set each January by the Department of Finance. (Financial Assistance Refugees, 2015)

Although these services have become available for refugees, I believe it may present a struggle for many of them, as funding is provided for only one year and then they must begin repayment on the loan. Once the refugee finds employment, it may only be in an entry-level position adequate to cover their families' basic needs and not provide enough to repay a loan.

Newcomer Settlement Services. In the late 1970s, the government created the *Canadian Job Strategies program (CJS)* which according to Guo (2013) “provided language training for adult immigrants and native Canadians who could not find employment because of their lack of proficiency in English or French [...] It provided a living allowance to trainees, but only heads of households were eligible” (p. 29). During the 1980s the *Settlement Language Training Program (SLTP)* was created which “provided up to 500 hours of basic language training to adults who were not destined for the labour market, primarily immigrant women (CEIC, 1986) [and it provided] daycare and transportation to participants” (Guo, 2013, p. 29). Although Canada did not see a significant increase in the number of immigrants that came into Canada during the 1990s, language programs were still under revision, and a new program called *Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC)* was created. According to Guo (2013)

LINC was to support the integration of immigrants: The objective of the LINC program is to provide basic language instruction to adult newcomers in

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one of Canada's official languages. LINC facilitates the social, cultural and economic integration of immigrants and refugees into Canada. Included in the LINC curriculum guidelines...is information that helps orient newcomers to the Canadian way of life (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2006, item 6: Description of the horizontal initiative). (p. 29)

In most Canadian provinces, language classes are geared towards developing a strong academic language proficiency level. The LINC program was established in the 1990s as an initiative that would focus on language acquisition through settlement topics allowing newcomers to integrate through education. According to the CIC (2001) in Guo (2013) "LINC was the central component of the Immigration Plan for 1991-1995 that introduced the federal integration strategy, which placed a new emphasis on not only helping immigrants learn Canadian values but also on helping other Canadians better understand the cultural differences of newcomers" (p. 29).

The LINC program was implemented and predominantly used in some Canadian provinces. Dempsey, Xue, and Kustec (2009) examined the proficiency outcome of particular groups of newcomers. The largest group to take advantage of this program were the skilled immigrants and their families, followed by family class and then refugees. Dempsey et al. (2009) state that in the LINC program "clients who have taken at least one course are counted as clients completed training" (p. 2). However, these findings are questionable, as they were only reported once per year, and did not consider the actual progress of the students, as withdrawals and length of time in the courses were not counted; a student withdrawing after three weeks was still considered to have completed a full semester.

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Most newcomers take the LINC program in between the first and second year upon immigrating to Canada. 72% of the attending population were females who had an educational level up to secondary or less (Dempsey et al., 2009, p. 9). However, it did not specify the actual level of education which is an important aspect in determining projecting the levels of success in their second language. Dempsey et al. (2009) state that refugees particularly needed the most hours of instruction due to their educational levels (p. 16). However, a refugee's level of education can vary. It is possible to find highly educated political refugees, as well as individuals considered to be low literacy refugees who, due to the unrest in their countries, have little education, or have never been able to attend school. The situations are quite varied and depend on each particular circumstance.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada undertook a study about the relationship between the immigrant factors and the Canadian Language Benchmark Assessment in listening and speaking (CLBA). It was reported by Derwing, Mulder and Abbott (2010) that “the students studying in LINC programs scored lower than those who studied in fee-based programs, who in turn scored lower than those in high school/college/university programs” (p. iii). The study showed that “there is a negative relationship between language training in Canada and CLNA scores” [and that] “those individuals who accessed language training most likely did so because they entered Canada with limited or no official language skills. This expectation is confirmed by the fact that Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) training, in particular, [is] designed for beginners and low proficiency learners” (Derwing et al., 2010, p.19). Therefore, it was difficult for those particular students to complete each level at a higher rate as it is unknown what barriers or struggles influenced their outcomes. According to Derwing et al. (2010) “it is well established that formal education is positively correlated with second language

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proficiency” (p. 20). Therefore, immigrants who come into Canada as part of the skilled labour group have a greater chance of progressing in their language skills at a much faster rate.

Nonetheless, the emotional, socio economic, and educational factors have not been addressed.

Provincial Support

The province of Manitoba has played an important role in funding the various services and programs that help immigrants. Initially, the Federal government did not provide financial support to Manitoba due to the low number of immigrants that entered (Hogue & Associates, 2015, p.5). As the immigrant population in the province increased, the Federal government began developing new support programs that would support newcomers and refugees. Hogue et al. (2015) states that “the federal [sic] government granted funding to existing organizations to help with the settlement of refugees (p.5). The Federal government allowed the provincial government to make some of their own decisions regarding language and settlement courses for newcomers. This autonomy led to the creation of many programs and services that supported newcomers and refugees. The funding for these different support services changed in April 2012 when the federal government decided to update their funding policy and take control of administrating the services. (Hogue et al., 2015, p.11). In 2013, the Province of Manitoba provided a total of 78 settlement services available for newcomers and of these, 59 provided language classes, 26 corresponded to small rural locations that provided general language classes, 24 offered general language programs available in Winnipeg, and 13 specific language training programs (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013). As of 2015, there are a total of 61 organizations that provide support services for newcomers and refugees (Hogue et al., 2015, p.8). Despite this multitude of services, not everyone is eligible to access all of them. According to Hogue et al. (2015) “Currently CIC eligibility only includes permanent residents

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and does not include refugee claimants, Temporary Foreign Workers or newcomers who have obtained Canadian Citizenship” (p.16).

Newcomers who immigrate to Winnipeg, Manitoba must first attend *Manitoba Start*. This program provides settlement information that allows them to take the first steps towards integrating into society. It provides them with “information and referral to orientation and language services to help [newcomers] start a new life in Winnipeg – and register you for the employment program that meets [their] needs” (Manitoba Start, 2013). If there is a need for language classes, newcomers are referred to Winnipeg English Language Assessment and Referral Centre (WELARC) in order to be assessed and attend an educational facility. This office provides newcomers with The Canadian Language Benchmark Placement Test which determines the English proficiency level as well as their future goals and helps them make a decision about the appropriate referral to ESL classes (WELARC, 2013). Part-time, full-time, weekend and online courses have been implemented in order to accommodate to the different situations that students encounter. The full-time programs offer intensive English courses that require students to attend classes from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. daily, allowing the students to engage in the language learning consistently for approximately four to five months (WELARC, 2015). I have observed that full-time ESL programs are not suitable for all students. Some students work shifts, or have personal responsibilities that they need to attend to, and may not be able to commit to the requirements of the program. However, there are part-time programs that provide English language classes in the morning, afternoon, evening and on the weekend. In addition, there are programs that offer childcare while the parents are taking classes (WELARC, 2015). English online is another program alternative for many newcomers and refugees. This program allows students to use a self-directed approach allowing them to work at their own pace

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from a computer that has internet access, benefiting many who have life situations that do not allow them to follow a strict schedule, or those who would rather work alone. (English Online, 2015) Unfortunately, not all students benefit from this program as there are situations in which students do not have the technology needed, they do not know how to use it, or need a more personalized and directed learning approach.

The Immigrant Centre is an alternative settlement program that “provides orientations and information to help familiarize newcomers with Canadian life and culture” (Immigrant Centre, 2015). Through this service, newcomers are able to obtain information for areas of employment, education, as well as emotional information and support. For instance, there are services that provide housing, employment assistance, and spiritual and emotional support (IRCOM, 2015). Despite the provincial government’s effort to support immigrants, not everyone is eligible for the free language classes, as this service is only available for Manitoba residents who: “are permanent residents of Canada or Canadian citizen born outside Canada; a refugee claimants following the Immigrant Refugee Board Acceptance; Provincial Nominees (including spouses and adult children) who have received their letter of approval from the Province” (Manitoba Start, 2015).

Newcomers enrol in English language programs, yet many withdraw for personal reasons. After looking through the literature, I feel that there is a high need for research that focuses on the barriers that newcomers encounter within a Canadian context. While new governmental initiatives are being explored, there continue to be many factors that cannot be quantified, but that could be identified through a qualitative method in order to transcend what is apparent and understand the struggles that affect students forcing them to withdraw from their language classes. Therefore, looking into the settlement struggles that adult refugee students

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have will shed light on any underlying barriers they may have, and allow instructors to find ways to better support them in my language class and allow them to transition smoothly into Canadian society. Therefore, looking into the settlement struggles that adult refugee students have will shed light on any underlying barriers they may have, and allow instructors to find ways to better support them in a language class and allow them to transition smoothly into Canadian society.

Chapter 3: Methodology

“It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end” (Le Guin, 1969, p. 109). Without the journey, there is no story and the end becomes lost and forgotten. The stories I have shared with my students have become an important part of my teaching experiences as they have been the link that breaks through the language barrier and gives students hope. This connection I develop with them turns into trust, and then forms into relationships that have allowed me to understand and see the classroom through their eyes. I have come to recognize that if we are to truly understand the context, the issues, and the problems that students have within a system, it is necessary to view their stories not as a single piece of information, but as part of a mosaic of interrelated experiences. Therefore, we must experience the journey, not just the end result.

Arriving at Narrative Inquiry as a Research Methodology

I had always been driven by theory and statistics until I began reflecting on the experiences that I and the people who have surrounded me have had. While completing this thesis project, my goal was to find specific information that I could connect with quantitative facts and come up with the answer to my questions; however, my personal journey navigating through this thesis became much more complicated, as it did not reflect the stories or the information that I was getting from my students. I discovered that there was a considerable amount of literature about newcomers’ barriers related to health, the language barriers that affect the communication between client and physician, and that certain illnesses affect specific ethnic groups more than others. However, information related to the settlement struggles that affect

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Canadian newcomers and refugees was limited and did not focus on the reasons or factors that force ESL students to withdraw from their language classes. There were considerable discrepancies and I found myself struggling to make connections and fill in the gaps. I was curious to explore the experiences and settlement struggles refugees had, which did not allow them to continue in their language programs. I wanted to know how I could teach them and support them while in my classroom, and how to facilitate their learning and integration into society more efficiently. With each search the frustration would increase, and so I began developing my ideas and formulating my own questions. I was unsure of how to frame my research topic until I began recalling my own lived experiences as an adult immigrant and reliving those moments. I reflected on many of them and connected them to new stories. I saw similarities and noticed the transitions of my own personal perceptions and assumptions which had changed over time. It was at that moment that I came to the realization that I had reached my turning point. Narrative inquiry felt logical and appropriate for the questions that I had before and during the course of this inquiry.

Framing a Narrative Inquiry

Narrative Inquiry is a type of qualitative research methodology in which the researcher seeks to understand people's experiences. It is greatly influenced by John Dewey's conception of experience in which continuity; interaction and situation are three key features that work together. For Dewey, experience is not "some precognitive, precultural ground on which our conceptions of the world rest. Instead, it is a changing stream that is characterized by continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, social and material environment" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p.39). Therefore, Narrative Inquirers see experience as continuous interaction and negotiation between people and their environments, both physical and social.

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We understand that the ultimate goal of inquiry is “not to generate an exclusively faithful representation of a reality independent of the knower [...] but to generate a new relation between a human being and her environment – her life, community world” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p.39).

With this Deweyan theory of experience, Clandinin & Connelly (2000) developed Narrative Inquiry as a research methodology and created their own inquiry terms “personal and social (interaction); past, present, and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation)” (p.50) for their metaphorical three-dimensional framework. By working within these three dimensions of temporality, sociality and place a Narrative Inquirer is able to look into each story and experience the feelings and emotions the participant felt by travelling inward; experiencing the social conditions or environment by travelling outwards; through a space and time by travelling backward and forward. The temporality dimension of this Narrative Inquiry will look at how the experience of the two adult refugee students in this study unfold through their past in their country to the experiences that have shaped their present time and will ultimately lead to an experiential future (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, 40). It will look at all the aspects that make that experience and how they create new experiences. Looking at the continuity within the experiences of my participants’ will provide a broad picture reflective of their situations. According to Clandinin & Rosiek (2007) “what you see (and hear, feel, think, love, taste, despise, fear, etc.) is what you get. That is all we ultimately have in which to ground our understanding. And that is all we need” (p.41). The second dimension of sociality looks into participants’ social contexts in which they live their lives as these stories are the result of a confluence of social influences on a person’s inner life, social influences on their environment, and their unique personal history (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p.42). The third dimension of

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place examines the concrete place or a series of places that the participants' lived and told stories take place. In order to understand the reality of the participant's experiences it is necessary to look at each story with the understanding that there are many aspects that will influence a person's life. Clandinin & Rosiek (2007) state that

the focus of Narrative Inquiry is not only a valorizing of individuals' experience but also an exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narrative within which individuals' experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted – but in a way that begins and ends that inquiry in the storied lives of the people involved. (p.15)

Narrative Inquiry studies the participant's experience with a focused understanding that each experience is a set of socially constructed realities that are in constant negotiation and interpretation with the participant and with the researcher. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) Narrative Inquiry is

a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters the matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives, both individual and social (p.20).

The researcher is able to inquire further into an experience and clarify any situation throughout the conversation while also gaining insight into the various aspects of their lives that constitute that lived experience.

Working closely with adult refugee participants will allow me to explore all of the struggles that they face, while also considering their personal sociocultural beliefs and how those

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interact with the new beliefs found in Canada. As with the stories presented in the first chapter of this thesis, all narratives begin with a situation within an environment, where each individual has an identity, a cultural background and a story which shapes their decision of coming to Canada, and becoming part of other similar stories.

I believe that by working alongside my participants I will bring an insider perspective to the struggles of adult refugee students. I am able to make connections with these newcomer students because of my parent's and my own stories as newcomers. These shared experiences and the experiences that I have had working with my students allow me to understand how vulnerable newcomers are. I also recognize that my parent's stories might be different from my research participants' stories and that as a researcher; I must be open to what they tell me.

Temporality, Sociality and Place

The three dimensional framework for Narrative Inquiry was developed and distinguished into the commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place. These three dimensions provide a figurative space which "allows our inquiries to travel-inward, outward, backward, forward and situated within place" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 49). The common place of temporality provides a perspective of time where "every experience both takes up something from the present movement and carries it into future experiences. Events, people, and objects under study are in temporal transition and narrative inquirers describe them with a past, present, and a future" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 69). This allows both the researcher and the participants to travel back and forth to different moments of their past, their present, or their future.

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The second dimension of sociality works within a more communal paradigm that can be divided into personal emotions and social conditions. The social narratives that surround a participant will have an effect on the emotions that arise at the moment the experience takes place. According to Clandinin (2013) “The cultural, social, institutional, and familial narratives highlight the embeddedness of each individual’s experience in a particular context, as well as in particular times and places (p. 40). The participant goes through a recollection of their experiences as they travel through various locations, while also traveling inward to their emotions, in which case “people are always in interaction with their situations in any experience and share conditions of feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions of the person, whether inquirer or participant” (Clandinin, 2007, p. 69). According to Clandinin and Connelly, this interaction becomes somewhat of a paralleled relationship as “we [the researcher] become visible with our own lived and told stories. Sometimes, this means that our own unnamed, perhaps secret, stories come to light as do those of our participants” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 62). The participant-researcher relationship becomes a fundamental part of the research.

The third dimension is place which identifies the place or location of one or multiple experiences. Simply stated, “the key to this commonplace is recognizing that “all events take place some place”” (Connelly & Clandinin, as quoted in Clandinin, 2013, p. 41). The third dimension therefore provides a context and an environment through which the experience occurs and can provide contextual information that may provide further information about the participant.

The Narrative Inquiry Process with My Research Participants

Walking into the field. Gaining entry into the lives of students depends on the trust that they have in me. Through years of experience I have discovered that trust is not earned solely through friendliness, but also through discretion and the ability to be genuinely interested in students' lives. Once there has been a level of trust established between us, students are more inclined to share their stories in the hopes that I (or another) will listen without judgment, without aggravating any situation and while keeping all information confidential. I realized that I had been working through a narrative lens for many years, yet was unable to focus on the elements as part of the narrative paradigm. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) state that "Narrative inquirers settle in, live and work alongside participants, and come to experience not only what can be seen and talked about directly, but also the things not said and not done that shape the narrative structure of their observations and their talking" (p. 68). This awakening into the narrative lens allowed me to look at the students in my class and understand that their experiences went beyond both what they told me and what I could see. We were all in the midst of life while in the midst of each other; connected through situations and life experiences. According to Clandinin (2013) "When our lives come together in an inquiry relationship, we are in the midst. Their lives and ours are also shaped by attending to past, present, and future unfolding social, cultural, institutional, linguistic and familial narratives" (p. 43). I currently work in the midst with students who have entered Canada through various programs. I spend five hours a day, from Monday to Friday, for five months with the same group of students allowing me to establish a close relationship with many of them. During the time students are with me, I share stories, information and will sometimes bring in past students who will share

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their language learning experiences. I also provide extra help after school hours as needed, and provide time where they can stay and talk after class. This allows me to gain their trust, which in turn, allows them to share their experiences with me. I am able to see most of them progress in their language abilities, but I also see many unable to continue their studies into post-secondary education, often feeling frustrated that they are unable to reach the goals they had set out for themselves. Most of the students that I have seen withdraw are refugee students, which has made me take a special interest in this particular group. After working with many of them and listening to some of their stories and hardships that led them to find a new home, I felt that they were at a greater disadvantage compared to other newcomer groups. By researching their struggles, I will be able to find ways to provide the necessary support allowing them to continue with their language classes and making their integration a little easier.

Composing field texts. The participants in my study were recruited through personal contact from friends and relatives who were acquaintances of refugees. I was contacted by two refugee families who had been living in Canada for less than 10 years.

I decided to limit the research conversations to two meetings because I knew that the information I wanted them to share with me was very personal and sensitive. I was concerned with how the participants would feel and the emotional stress that it could cause. I wanted to ensure that they would not feel that I was being overly intrusive. I believed that during the first meeting they would provide me with most of the information, and that during the second meeting, when they saw their information and were given the option to modify or add information, they would provide me with a little more information, and answer any questions I had.

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The participants were asked to set a date, time and location at their convenience, in order to avoid any cancellation. I also suggested to the participants that they could bring with them any artifacts such as pictures, journals, or keepsakes that would help them recall their past experiences, however they chose not to do so. To my surprise, setting a time and scheduling a date was difficult with one of the participants, as it seemed that there would always be a situation that came up and we had to postpone at our meetings three times. Although I thought I would have to continue my search for a different participant, we were eventually able to meet.

The research conversations were held over two meetings for approximately 90 minutes each. During the first meeting, the participants picked their own pseudonyms that are currently used throughout this thesis. There was an initial awkwardness with each participant. I found that by making small talk, and talking about the acquaintance that gave them my contact information they each became much more comfortable and relaxed. It was an intimidating process for each of us, as I knew that the struggles and negative situations are sometimes difficult to share, and I was worried about triggering an emotion that caused the participant to omit or change information, or worse, withdraw from the study.

In order to capture the full experience of the participant and later reflect on their stories, I gathered information through field texts. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) state that field texts are “kinds of records, normally called data. [...] They are created, neither found nor discovered, by participants and researchers in order to represent aspects of the field experience” (p.92). The field texts that I used for this study were audio recorded conversations and a researcher journal. I decided to use audio recorded conversations, as they “create a space for the stories of both participants and researchers to be composed and heard” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 45). The objective

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was to focus on their life histories starting from their experiences prior to immigrating out of their home countries, the experiences they had upon arrival, their recent experiences at the present time, and their future prospects. My hope was that during our first meeting, I would carry out the research interviews and obtain a recollection of other lived experiences that would contribute to the overall body of information. Nonetheless, it was challenging because the participants did not engage well with these types of questions and felt limited to brief answers that did not provide much information despite being asked to further explain situations. I felt caught in a situation in which I was unsure of how to continue my research, as I had to abandon my structured questions and research interview for a less structured conversation. I was worried about the ethical repercussions that this would cause, but felt that the relationship between the participant and I had to change in order for me to obtain the information needed. According to Clandinin & Connelly (2000) “The way an interviewer acts, questions, and responds in an interview shapes the relationship and therefore the ways participants respond and give accounts of their experience” (p.110). The conversation and the sharing of stories allowed the participant to develop a level of trust, perhaps feel less intimidated about sharing their experiences, and each became more active in the conversation. There were occasions in which Angela and Rose would restate their ideas if they saw that I was a little unsure of what they were saying and were very open to questions and offering clarification when requested. Although the method through which I obtained my field text slightly changed, I was able to obtain answers to my target questions.

My field text was also composed of a researcher journal that became essential in the interview. I knew going in that the language barrier would present challenges, as people with a lower level of English may not be able to fully explain a situation in detail, so I made note of

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body language, questions or comments about information that I had not understood, and new questions that I had after reviewing the transcript. Angela and Rose became very comfortable towards the end of their first meetings, and I found that as soon as the recording stopped and we were preparing to leave, each would continue with some very interesting stories or comments. I wondered if they felt less intimidated once there was nothing recording, so I listened and made note of their information in the journal as soon as I was able to. In the researcher journal I was also able to capture emotions and body language, as well as personal comments and questions that would arise after our conversations and while I was transcribing the information. These two items allowed both the participant and I to be placed within the three dimensions, as I was able to return to my notes and the audio recorded conversation in order to organize the information. Furthermore, it allowed me to include my personal perceptions, emotions and connections to my personal stories, making connections and negotiating meanings by travelling within the three dimensions with the objective to gain valuable information about adult refugee students, who have immigrated to Canada with their children and have lived in this country for less than 10 years, have taken ESL classes, and have had to withdraw from the program.

Moving from field texts to research texts. Once the first interview was complete, I transcribed the recorded conversation verbatim, deciding not to correct the language in order to capture, as closely as possible, the experience along with the emotion that each participant portrayed. I reviewed the two transcripts over a few times in order to make sense of the information and try to place it on a continuum. I made an interim research text in which I wrote a mini biography of the participant's life, allowing me to organize the information in a timeline. I made note of what was unclear and then returned these to the participant with their information in order to inquire into each story a little more. During the second interview, the participants

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became a little more at ease with the conversations we had once we looked through their biographies. The participant and I read through their mini biographies together and they were able to clarify the information, as well as ensure that all the information was accurate. The first participant was very quiet and she became a little emotional while reading certain parts of her story. The second participant read through her story and clarified a few parts of her story a little more, but did not demonstrate any emotion. I felt I had made a connection with them that I had not expected, as they were each able to clarify some of the questions I had, and share a little more of their experiences with me.

Composing research texts. I sat for hours reviewing the information and analyzing each story independently. The inquiry process led me to take a closer look at both interviews in order to identify common themes and issues that both participants shared, with the story of Mary and my family, as well as with previous students I have taught. I looked through the various dimensions and worked within them to understand meanings, relationships, and experiences. This information was then connected to my own experiences as an instructor allowing the information to be viewed through different lenses. Clandinin (2013) explains that “only as we attend simultaneously to all three dimensions that we can come to understand in deeper and more complex ways the experiences relevant to our research puzzles” (p. 50). In order to analyze and understand the experience that the participant had, I had to negotiate meaning and work within the boundaries. In order to gain knowledge from the inquiry, it was necessary to make sense of the participants’ lives, the narratives of their lived experiences, as well as our own experiences. The negotiation of meaning allows the researcher to be constantly present within the work, as the goal is to find similarities and differences related as a set of experiences based on the three factors. Although repetitive within itself, Narrative Inquiry seeks to find new possibilities of

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how we might live our lives, and influence the participant's, the researcher's, and the reader's lives.

Ethical Considerations

The two interviews were conducted between January 2015 and March 2015; I interviewed each participant twice and each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. Before starting my research, I had to obtain approval from the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). Before starting my research conversations, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were aware of their right to not answer a specific question and also to withdraw. They signed a consent form and were assured that their real names would not be used, the transcripts and personal information is kept in a secure place, and their anonymity will be respected. All information collected digitally, transcripts, biographies and journal texts will be confidential and kept in a locked file in my home in order to avoid any connection to the name or information. All information will be destroyed 6 months after the final approval of this study.

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Chapter 4: Narrative Accounts of Two Participants

In the following chapter, I will share the stories of two newcomer families. The first story is about Angela, a single mother of five who immigrated to Canada and was faced with a series of economic, social and personal struggles. The second story is about Rose and her husband Dave who immigrated with their four children looking for better opportunities. Their experiences will allow us to look into the hardships that they have encountered and how they have adapted to their new situation in Canada.

A Narrative Account of Angela

One of my coworkers contacted a student whom she had taught a few years back and asked her if she would be willing to participate in the study that I was conducting, giving her my contact information. Angela contacted me in early January. We briefly spoke on the phone about what my research was about and she agreed to share her story with me. We set a date and time for the interview, but it seemed that we could not figure out where to meet, as transportation was an issue for her. I suggested that we could meet at her home if that was more convenient for her, but her hesitation made me very nervous, so I offered her a ride to wherever she felt comfortable speaking, which she accepted. The meeting date was approaching and Angela decided that the evening time we had agreed on was not suitable. She suggested that it would be more convenient to meet during the day, as I could pick her up downtown. I explained that I had to work and gave her a schedule of days we could meet, hoping that she would understand and not change her mind about participating. Fortunately we rescheduled a time, I picked her up and we drove to a coffee shop near her home. In a way I was relieved that I could pick her up, as I was fearful that she would not arrive at the coffee shop if she had to get there on her own.

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The drive was awkward, and it seemed that small talk was not much welcomed. The air felt dense and I wondered if she felt pressured to be in this situation by my colleague. Perhaps she was nervous or frightened at what I was going to ask her, or she was intimidated by being alone in a car with a stranger.

I began with my first opening question, “Angela, can you tell me a little about yourself?” She began with the common introductory speech that I hear every beginning of term, “Hello, my name is Angela and I come from South Sudan. I have been in Canada for 7 years.” She stared at me and I felt as though she seemed unsure of what I actually wanted to hear, so I asked her about her family and with each following question, I felt as though she was questioning my intentions. I asked her about her family and she stated that she was a single parent of 5 children. She would give me short answers that would not allow me to submerge myself into her experiences, making it very difficult to follow the set of questions that I had initially prepared, forcing me to be a little more inquisitive about her life. It was not until I shared a small similarity between her story and one of my relatives that she became more comfortable and began to share her experiences with a little more detail.

Escaping the war. Angela lived most of her life in South Sudan along with her eight siblings and her parents. She was able to attend school up until the age of 14, the moment at which she decided to get married and begin a family. After giving birth to her first child, she decided to return to school, as it was very important for her to continue with her education and graduate from high school, so that she could pursue a professional career. She qualified to enrol in a special program where she could take nursing courses and finish her grade 12 within that curriculum. Unfortunately, war broke out and it became dangerous for everyone in the city, as the local fires, bombings and kidnappings became a daily torment.

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you know you could be killed at that time for anything, so your heart can be melting when you think that every night you hear the bomb, the gun, you can see the light the fire of the gun at night from border like between border to Ethiopia and Sudan, so like you can't sleep and when morning come, you're like counting the hours if you're going to be safe or not" (Research conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 6)

I remembered a story I had heard from one of my aunts who had experienced a similar situation in her childhood. She would hear the gunfire, the sirens and helicopters in the middle of the night and could not sleep thinking about who had been killed and wondering if their house would be raided next. To this day she still feels the terror when she hears any noise that simulates those frightful nights. I shared this with Angela, and she just nodded and agreed that these things are not forgotten easily. It was at this moment that something changed in the dynamic of our conversation and the story began to flow with more detail. Angela and her husband decided to move with all their children to Egypt in hopes that they would be able to lead a safe and peaceful life. "We had to leave because it was unsecure life, so it was the first thing that make us to escape" (Research conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 2). The couple lived in Egypt for six years and although the bombings and the gun fire were absent from their daily lives, they had to deal with a different set of issues. The family struggled financially and lived in constant fear of being kidnapped by locals because they were Christian immigrants. "Anything can be happen to you. Nobody cares; nobody can see you, so if you don't work you can't get [...] killed and feeding your family and if you are sick and you don't have money you will die" (Research conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 4). I felt as though Angela was overgeneralizing, as my experience has been very different with the Muslim community. The

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students I have had were very kind hearted and accepting people who were against violent attacks. On many occasions they explained that the small extremist groups had created a dark shadow that stigmatized all Muslims as being hostile, aggressive and ultimately terrorists. I wondered if one or two negative experiences caused Angela to fear everyone, and what other factors may have influenced her perceptions of these people.

During their time in Egypt, Angela had three more children, forcing them to make the decision to leave once again in order to keep them safe. However, this decision was different as it would mean a longer distance and being further away from the rest of her family “it’s so difficult, but we have to leave... we have to” (Research conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 3).

Images of Canada. Angela’s husband made the decision to apply as a refugee to Canada and was granted entry in 2004. However, Angela was unable to travel with him due to her pregnancy, so she stayed with her children in Egypt for two more years while he found employment and a home for them to live in. He would then sponsor Angela and the children through the family sponsorship program. I could not understand why and how the whole family was not considered refugee since they were married. I asked Angela a few questions about why the Canadian Government would not allow her to travel as a refugee along with her husband, but she insisted that it was because she was pregnant. During our second visit I came back to this question by asking her if they were married at the time of application in hopes that she would provide a little more information, but the answer was very similar to the one provided during our first interview. I also tried to ask a few questions about the background of her husband, but she was hesitant to share any information with me about him, so I did not insist.

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Angela was hopeful that the application to sponsor family would be accepted quickly and so that the family could reunite. She would often find herself thinking about what Canada was like and imagined the tall skyscrapers full of interesting people who would overcrowd the downtown streets just like in the movies she would watch on television. She imagined a city full of employment and educational opportunities, and was excited at the idea of becoming part of it all. The image she had of Canada was much like many other immigrants who follow the golden dream of living in a society where reality is Hollywood-based, and New York seems to be the city prototype throughout all of North America. Many of my students often share how they had been shocked to find that Winnipeg was far from anything they had imagined or seen on television, and are humoured by how influenced they had been by television, or by stories they had heard from other people.

In 2006, Angela was finally able to immigrate to Canada with her children where she came face to face with a reality far from what she had imaged. She was shocked to find a very small city with people of various ethnicities. She would try to distinguish the “real Canadians” from the immigrants, but quickly learned that identifying people was impossible.

to be honest, when we see white people, Canadian, American, we are so happy, we say they are the best people and everything , but to be honest, we came we find a different culture here in Canada. It's not just Canadian, but they are from different, like they are Canadian, they are Asian and Europe and different culture and different language, it's kind of multicultural. The language is very different. We don't know who is the real Canadian and who is the immigrant, they all look the same (Research conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 4)

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Angela became disillusioned by the idea of living in such a small city with very little to see and do compared to her previous homes. I could not help but smile at the words she used in her story, and she sensed how amused I was, so we both broke out in giggles.

so when we came here, first day I'm like "ok...where is downtown?
it's like a village or something... [and I'm like], ok... wow!" Which
kind of place we are in?" (giggles) ...it kind of bring your self-esteem
down...yeah, like depression from nowhere sometime (Research
conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 4)

The moment felt surreal. I had made the connection that I was looking for and I felt at ease speaking with Angela. She was smiling and sharing this experience that caused her a few depressing moments, but she was able to overcome them and laugh at the situation.

The frigid Canadian winter became Angela's biggest challenge, as it became impossible for her to leave her home and she was isolated for months.

When I see people and smoke is coming from their mouth and they are talking, and I am like "those people are dead already!" (giggles) because when we used to watch a movie back home, those kind of movies, they show dead people like this and I thought, yeah, it's a big shock to me, but it take time (Research conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 5)

The weather became the main barrier the first year in Canada as it affected her ability to attend doctor's appointments and English classes. Angela tried to take the bus, but was unable to reach the bus stop because she lacked appropriate outerwear and she had difficulty breathing.

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I couldn't even go to a doctor appointment. I went out, when I try, but I said "no, if this sickness is going to kill me, let me stay home, I can't handle it! Because I remember the jacket I'm wearing is not enough warm and I don't know how to cover myself proper, the way I know like now (Research conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 5)

As Angela shared her story, thoughts of Mary flooded my mind and replaced Angela's image. I could see her running to the bus stop in her green jacket that was too small and did not cover the full length of her arms, as well as the white runners that she wore which were too big for her and inadequate for the cold temperature. Both stories were similar, yet different at the same time. Angela's situation changed once spring arrived.

When I came here, the way Canadian speak English is totally different from what I learn back home. Like we have British English, so it's really different. I can't understand it! It's just like singing, I can't understand it. I was like zero, so for me it zero, I can't understand nothing, so I decide some friends, like my neighbours, they came to me and like you have to study school. They give me kind of advice. (Research conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 8)

Angela took the advice of her friends and decided to begin her classes. She would send her three older children to school and then attend a part-time English language course at one of the downtown facilities that also provided day care for her two younger children. Angela felt that she needed a full-time program in order to progress a little faster in her language development and then pursue a career in the health care field, so she moved to a different school. Her

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progress improved quickly during the first few months, but the problems she faced in her personal life began to affect her ability to attend classes and to focus on the lessons.

A maze of problems. Angela tried very hard to learn the language and complete her assignments, but could not avoid thinking about the situations she was facing and that had developed all at once. During the time that Angela's husband had been alone in Canada he became an alcoholic. During the year that they had finally been reunited, he became extremely aggressive, would yell at her if she was in the home during the day, and would leave in the evenings to continue his drinking. The "shouting and noise at night, and he end up taking knives and saying I will kill you, so that is the issue, we are shocked this kind of behavior, it never happened back home, how come it happen now?" (Research conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 9). During this time, one of Rose's daughters began having seizures at school and Angela would often get phone calls telling her that her daughter was in the hospital, so she would have to leave in the middle of class. Her daughter had to go through a series of exams and appointments in order to find out what her medical situation was.

My daughter she just fell down, so when we took her in the ambulance and they did some assessment and she have a seizure and in the beginning it's so difficult and depression and it hit on me, so go to school and have family issues, every week, every month and ah... I can't finish, it's a lot (Research conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 8)

Angela's voice had slowed down and it was difficult for her to speak clearly. She would sometimes mumble a few words that I could not make out. I was shocked at the situation and understood why she was forced to withdraw, but was unprepared for the rest of the story. Angela's youngest son was diagnosed with a heart condition and had to undergo a very

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complicated surgery that required a lot of follow-up care, and the home situation was not adequate for the healthy recovery or stability of any of the children.

So he [her husband] just end up like “you have to leave my house, I’m the one working” at that time my son had a heart surgery. Yeah... at three weeks when he was born, so....and ah, I ah... I don’t... ah... I have no choice I have to leave the house [...] I remember we stay the whole day outside in the, they call recess place? Yeah, we stay there and you know some of the mosquito... and surgery of the heart (Research conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 10)

During the weekday, it would not be as difficult to keep the children away from the home, but there were days she would take her children including the youngest one who was recovering from his surgery to the school playground. Rose and her children would spend the day there and would return home when her husband was at work or at a friend’s house. She would feed the children, bathe them and take them to bed before he got home and would hide with her children in one of the bedrooms, the door to which she would block with furniture.

We’d come home, I would give them shower and when we go to room I have to lock the door with like computer table just in case he came in and he was drunk then I would be aware. If anything happen, I would be aware, so about 2 to 3 week we are living like that so, I just end up like I can’t take this (Research conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 10)

I was speechless as I sat and listened closely trying to come to terms with the whole story. It was overwhelming to hear about how these events unfolded. I could not image the desperation that Angela was feeling, knowing that she had fled from her previous life escaping war and death to come and live in peace, yet finding terror within her own home. The children were struggling with health issues, and Angela was missing the emotional support she needed from her partner to

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endure this hardship. Angela had to keep herself grounded and strong even though she was afraid, lonely and did not know what to do. Her children had health problems, she was unemployed, she did not have a strong control of the English language, and she was being emotionally abused daily. Angela did not consider looking for help in agencies or government support services, because she was fearful of them, having already heard of cases where the children were taken away due to the negative home situation. She did not want to lose the only thing that made her continue fighting for a better life. I found it difficult to understand why she would think that her particular situation would cause Child and Family Services to intervene without speaking to someone about it first, so I asked Angela if she had ever considered speaking to a teacher or a counselor at the school she attended. She recalled one of her instructors encouraging her to attend a session with the school counselor and although she did speak to someone, found that it was not helpful because, “I discover that when I talk about it, I get more depressed. Let me stand and accept the situations but see how we can overcome the situation. You can walk over it” (Research, conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 15). Furthermore, Angela felt that the counselor did not offer a direct solution stating that

nobody can give you the perfect advice that will fit you because when you have some issues like depression. There is a hole in your heart that nobody can fill it unless you accept what you are supposed to do right. Not to let you also be regret after that because many people they can took action and then after that they regret. They become more pain, so you begin to do many crazy thing and then you're done (Research conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 15).

I sensed that Angela did not speak about the real situation and perhaps omitted much of the information that should have been shared with the counselor. It was quite possible that she tried to decrease the severity of the situation by emphasizing her adaptation process and feeling

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depressed, instead of speaking about the true situation she was facing at home. She felt that talking to the counselor was time wasted, and that it would have been better spent working on her language abilities or trying to find employment. Furthermore, Angela felt that it was a personal problem that she did not want everyone to know. She felt that what she was going through was private and did not trust anyone enough to explain her situation. Angela kept falling deeper into her depression and struggled to get up every morning, but told me her strong Christian belief kept her going and gave her the strength to continue. Eventually, she was forced to withdraw from her course in order to attend to her family and find any possible solution that would help her family.

Angela finds a way out. Angela had not gone unnoticed with the struggles that she was facing. One of her friends became aware that there was something wrong and convinced her to take the necessary steps to stop the abuse. Angela's situation finally came to an end on a day that her husband became aggressive and removed her from the home.

He just end up like “you have to leave my house, I’m the one working” at that time my son had a heart surgery. Yeah, at three weeks when he was born, and ah, I ah... I don’t, ah.. I have no choice I have to leave the house, so one of my friend just ah.... call the police and the councilor, and a counselor, her councilor give me the number for the shelter because I ask her what shall I do? I didn’t know what to do. I have no one and no family, I have no language, I don’t know what to do. I call the police, then the police came. They give you warning, but when they give you warning they make another extra issues that we cannot... so the police come and they took me to shelter...yeah (Research conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 10)

Angela was finally able to develop the courage to ask for help and was immediately taken to a shelter where she would be safe and her children would be allowed to stay with her. Her

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situation improved immediately. The government support such as the child tax benefits allowed her to buy food, and the coverage for low income health benefits she received covered her medical expenses, ambulance fees and lawyer fees. In time she was able to move out of the shelter and was eligible for Manitoba housing where she lives to this day.

New beginnings. Angela has a positive outlook on her future in Canada. She knows that her personal progression will be slow, but her major concern and priority are her children, so she has decided to change her educational goals. Angela no longer would like to pursue a career in nursing, but would like to help newcomer women who are facing similar situations to hers. Her priority lies in the need to dedicate most of her time to the proper guidance and mentoring of her children, so that she does not lose them to street life, as she has observed happen with many other newcomers from her country.

I don't wanna lose my kids to any kind of case of life. I want them really ... to finish their school and to (muffled word) ... so if I took that, yes I will focus and I will make it, but I will lose them, which means that they will not gonna help themselves and not gonna help their country. Because the culture we grow up in, even the neighbor can take care of your child, but here nobody. You have your own privacy, older, and with your own family. If anything happen to you, only God can help. I can't say that nobody say "ok, this is challenge, let us help to look after kid or something like that, so which is mean, the freedom, is special for immigrant they can take too much, they don't take it proper the way God can help them not to mess up their future or their life. I can say like most immigrants, their children end up in prison, record many things so even many end up unfinished school, which is not good. Yeah... it's not helping the country, it's not helping the parents, it's not helping even the

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back home where they came from (Research conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 12)

Angela feels that Canadian society permits too much freedom to children and teenagers, making them vulnerable to negative situations and leaving parents without the ability to discipline accordingly, based on their own cultural beliefs. I had heard this comment many times in the classroom, as well as within my own cultural community. I reflected on this idea and often think that this is an ongoing topic even amongst Canadians, as our own parenting styles, values and beliefs are different. It raised a new question in my mind and I wondered how newcomers defined freedom compared to how Canadians define the concept. Perhaps the whole concept is embedded within each culture and we as teachers need to share more information about how Canadians view freedom. If freedom was a topic within my classroom and Angela was one of my students, it would be a difficult topic based on all the factors and perspectives that affect everyone. My thoughts went back to the many stories I have heard about newcomers who have had difficult moments with their children and I felt like I did not have a solution for this situation. I looked at Angela and could see her strength and positive attitude towards the future, and knew in my heart that she would try her best to avoid having her children lose their way. Although there were many struggles that Angela had to deal with, she felt that they had been a stepping stone to a good future.

I see the future is big for me, for my own self and or even for this country. Really, all these things you go through, it help to look others peoples that go through, some situations that they are not able to help themselves so it can be, I can helping in some office or some families. As I say, immigrants coming from different place and facing different challenge and they have different believing and including the culture and another thing but it really depend” (Research conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 10)

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Angela's children have adapted well to Canada and are doing well in school. They have begun to take part in various extracurricular activities and are eager to continue their education at a post-secondary level. Angela states that

They are doing good. Ah, my two little one they are in the same school. They are in Winnipeg, I don't know how to call it... the orchestra. They are playing violin and drum, so the government, like they sponsor them in that program and they are doing good. The other one, she is.... She want to be a doctor, so she's in Tec Voc because they have more skill about being a doctor, those thing there so she's doing good. All of them are doing good. And ah, the second one, she, we just discovered she has short limit of memory, but she does better (Research conversation transcript, 2014/01/14, p. 13)

Once the interview was complete, I felt I had been on a rollercoaster of emotions. I told her that she was a very strong woman and that she had a very inspiring story that would help many people. She smiled and stated that she owed everything to God, as He was who helped her through the days and nights, as well as gave her motivation to continue to be strong through her many hardships. I felt a sense of happiness and hope for Angela.

Three weeks after our first interview, Angela and I met for our second interview. I presented Angela with a biography of her life. She sat in silence as we reviewed her story. I noticed that she would sometimes take a few moments to think about particular moments or situations, but was unsure of whether she was reliving the experience or confirming the moment. Angela's story was tragic, yet she radiated strength and power when she spoke. She restated that she was very grateful of all the help that she had received from the government and now felt safe. Her children were doing well and her eldest daughter was now engaged. Her daughter and future son in law were both first year university students and were looking forward to a

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summer wedding. Furthermore, Angela had decided to volunteer her time as a mentor for other immigrant women through her church and was looking forward to completing an online course that would allow her to become a Christian minister. Angela's story was only one of many that go unnoticed in our classrooms and as with her, many women struggle with abuse, many fear for their children, and many have serious health issues. I understood why she was unable to continue and felt that perhaps moving forward slowly was a better option, than to try to achieve a goal in a short time and adding to the stress of settling in a new country.

A Narrative Account of Rose and Dave

A close friend of mine had a family from Africa recently move into the house beside his. He mentioned they were very friendly people who could possibly have a story to share. The neighbour was given my information, but they never called. One evening I was over at my friend's house. As we were walking into the yard, the neighbours were entering their home. He took the opportunity to do a quick introduction and remind them that I was the person who wanted to talk to them. They immediately invited me over, but I was unprepared and shocked at how eager they seemed. It was interesting to see how accepting and willing they were to sit with a stranger and share information about their lives. I wondered why they did not phone to contact me and thought about how difficult it must be for people to phone a stranger who would like to inquire into their personal lives. Perhaps they needed the personal introduction from my friend, or perhaps, they had simply forgotten about it. Although I was invited in to do the interview that evening, I chose to wait a few days and schedule an appointment so that I could also be ready with my questions and my recorder. Before I could even tell her that we could

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meet somewhere, she stated that I could go over to her home at any time and any day. She did not have a very difficult schedule to work around, so I was welcome anytime during the evening or the weekend. The day we had scheduled the meeting was on a Sunday at 1:00 p.m.

On the day of the interview, I was a few minutes late, nervous and worried that the participant would change her mind. When I knocked on the door, one of her children let me in. I was surprised to see that she had company over and they were just about to eat lunch. Although I was invited to stay, I decided to return in an hour while I spent some time chatting with my friend next door. An hour later, they were ready to do the interview, so we sat in the living room. Dave smiled, stood up and with some broken English explained that Rose would continue with the interview because she was good at speaking. I nodded and smiled back without really saying much more than a simple “sure, no problem!” I began with the same statements I had made to Angela, and asked her to share a little about herself. As expected, she stated “Hello, my name is Rose, I live on 1234 Forever Street. We came to, ah, for 2010” (Research conversation transcript, 2014/12/29, p. 1). The answers that Rose provided were very short, and at times it was difficult to understand due to her level of English. I found myself trying to decipher a few words, but was fortunate enough to understand the main idea and was able to clarify when needed.

Escaping the war. Rose and Dave are an Eritrean couple who immigrated to Canada in 2010 with their four children. Dave was from a modest family of farmers who learned how to cultivate the land from a very young age. His family did not have the means for him to continue with his education as they struggled economically, so they decided that he would move to the city and live with his uncle in hopes that he would find better employment opportunities. By the time Dave was in his mid-twenties he was able to open a small convenience store, allowing him

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to become independent and make enough to help his family. Rose on the other hand, lived in the city and was attending school regularly when she met Dave. She was unable to finish her education and completed up to grade 9 because the couple decided to get married and have their first child right away. The second child came within the same year. They decided to move to Ethiopia to expand their business. About a year later, war broke out between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the family was immediately deported back to their home country without being allowed to take anything with them. The instant loss of their business caused their financial situation to deteriorate considerably. Furthermore, they lived in constant fear for their lives because of the war that was occurring between the two countries. During the years that Dave owned his own business he had met a few merchants, so when he had to flee, they offered to help restart his business in Djibouti. Dave made the decision to immigrate and resettle while Rose and now three children waited in Eritrea. The family was able to reunite a few months later. Rose and Dave lived in Djibouti where they had an economically stable life, but were forced to make the decision to immigrate to Canada due to the lack of religious freedom and intimidation they felt while living in Djibouti. Their Christian religious beliefs became a liability and they felt pressured into many difficult situations because of it.

But when we moved to Djibouti, it's completely different because they ask you to be a Muslim and you have to cover your hair, like that... they don't force you, but if you cover your hair, they respect you, they see you like their family, like that [...] sometimes they are very difficult like from my country, like...if they are angry, they don't care, they might kill you, but if they pass a few minutes, they say they are very friendly also. They say "oh sorry, sorry" because they are yelling on you, they want kill you like that, but when someone say "no, no" like that, they forget easy also [...]

They force you to become a Muslim. otherwise they can take everything,

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they can do whatever they want. That's why we say let's find another place to live [...] (Research conversation transcript, 2014/12/29 p. 14)

I reflected on the family history and found it difficult to understand why they would immigrate to a country where their religion would not be accepted. I wondered if the motive for moving to that country was because they wanted to expand the business, or if there were other factors that did not allow them to live in Eritrea such as political persecution, lack of food and housing, or war. I was very curious about how Djibouti perceived Eritrean immigrants and questioned whether it was their faith that was being discriminated against, or their nationality.

Images of Canada. The lack of freedom encouraged Rose and Dave to seek a new place to immigrate and they looked towards Canada. Rose had heard many stories about Canada from Dave's aunt who lived in Winnipeg, Manitoba, so they began the application process. Rose knew that the weather was something to fear and that the winter months would feel eternal, but she was more concerned about how people would treat her family.

I didn't think... I have communication with another people, like Canada or other people like that, but when I came here, it was very opposite way because they are very friendly, nice and they try to help you (Research conversation transcript, 2014/12/29, p. 7).

I was unsure if her fear came from her previous experience in Djibouti, or that she worried because she did not have enough English to communicate with other Canadians. I momentarily thought that someone may have given her a biased account of what Canadian society was like and how people treated newcomers. Rose was worried that many things would change, but was hoping it would be minimal. One of the areas of concern was the type of food that they would eat, but they were fortunate to have their aunt to guide them and support them through the beginning stages of their settlement process.

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yeah, because we are lucky, we didn't have any problems like that because we have our aunt, she told us everything where to go, where to find our ethnic food. And also there are a lot of things now. It was very difficult a long years ago, but now there's everything, even we can find our national food, as opposed to. It's not difficult like it used to be. Because now everything is convenient; you can get it very close (Research conversation transcript, 2014/12/29, p. 7).

I related her worry about food to the many other immigrant students I have had over the years. Many would take great pride in cooking for their family, and it was one of the most important things that the wife would generally do for the home. Many women would cook after 10:00 p.m. while others would get up at 5:00 a.m. and make sure that they family had fresh food to take to work and school. I also recalled many students complain about the food here, and they compared flavors, smells and sizes of fruits and vegetables to those in their home countries. Many would feel sick because they could not find the food they were accustomed to and would be forced to follow a diet that initially made them sick.

A new land, a new life. Rose and Dave were given the opportunity to immigrate to Canada through their aunt who was able to sponsor them and support them for a few months. Rose knew that immigrating was going to be a struggle, but both she and Dave felt confident that they would have a better life in Canada. Rose and Dave arrived in Canada in 2010. The beginning settlement stages were very difficult as the couple could not find employment. "We are struggling to find a job, especially my husband. Because I was at home, I couldn't go to find a job. I want to take care of my children, but my husband have a very difficult time to find a job" (Research conversation transcript, 2014/12/29 p. 7). Dave found it particularly stressful as it was difficult to cope with the idea of being the head of the family and being unable to provide

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for his wife and children. After a year of living in Canada, Dave was able to find a part-time position working on the weekends as a janitor.

“It was very difficult because we were eating our food...our money and also, we also began our government support for our children. That is very helpful. I, I am, I support, I like be, I would like to, government to continue that thing because it is very helpful” (Research conversation transcript, 2014/12/29, p. 16).

Furthermore, they had to rely on some support from the aunt who sponsored them. After approximately two months, Rose and Dave were able to move into an apartment complex where they had to pay \$800 dollars a month in rent. They felt their money was quickly decreasing, so they applied to live in special housing supported by the Immigrant and Refugee Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM) a government service that provides immigrants with a place to live while they settle. Rose and the family were able to move in after 8 months. Although I was curious to know how much they had saved and brought into Canada, I decided not to ask because I considered it a private matter. Although I knew that there was a small possibility that Rose would tell me, yet changed my mind as it could have affected the trust I had already gained.

School is postponed. Dave worked part-time during the night, and also attended part-time English classes in the afternoon. After one year of working nights, he was finally offered a full-time evening position in the same company that he did not hesitate in accepting. He knew that taking on these two positions and attending school was going to be challenging, yet he forced himself to continue. Along with Rose, they decided that she would take her English classes in the morning, so she could be home in the afternoon with the children while he went to school and then work. They wanted to ensure that the children could have someone around them constantly. Dave would attend class, but was extremely fatigued and could not concentrate on

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the lessons, or participate actively in class, so “he stopped from September because he couldn’t. He was very tired he couldn’t have to study, to look after his book, so from September he stop” (Research conversation transcript, 2014/12/29, pg. 3). On many occasions I have had conversations with students about their work and school situation when I see them constantly fall asleep in the classroom. They are unable to focus, complete their assignments and lack the energy to participate in speaking activities. Even though I talk to them and suggest returning in a moment when their personal life does not interfere with the learning, they refuse and continue in the program until they see that they are falling behind the rest of the students and begin to compare their ability with the rest.

Rose was able to find a part-time position through one of the settlement support services as a daycare provider for the children of newcomer students after class. Her work schedule was from 3:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. from Monday to Friday. This schedule allowed her to contribute to the home income and did not interfere with her afternoon English classes. Although learning the language was very difficult for Rose, she also felt that it was difficult and frustrating because she felt that the opportunities she had for practicing the language were very limited. She wanted to practice at home with her children, but felt that it was more important to make sure she maintained her own language at home so the children would not lose it.

“And also when I came here I don’t have time to study, that’s why I couldn’t improve my English fast. I’ve been at school almost three years, but I couldn’t improve my English because when I came here I don’t want to speak English for them, I want to learn my language with them”

(Conversation research transcript, 2014/12/29, p. 10).

One of the difficulties I find that students have is finding the time to practice speaking with other people outside of the classroom, but find it difficult to find opportunities. Some will

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try to practice the language with their children, but others feel that maintaining their language in the home is fundamental in order to maintain their culture and to communicate with their relatives back home. Rose also felt that in order to learn a language it was necessary for newcomers to dedicate themselves completely to learning, but it was very difficult because of the responsibilities that they usually have during the time they are not in school. She stated that

“if you are studying hard, it’s not hard, it’s not difficult, but the problem is... as most immigrant, when they came home they don’t have time to study, to review their ah... because some of them they came from work and school and after they finish their school they have to go to work again” (Research conversation transcript, 2014/12/29, p. 11).

Rose needed to obtain a minimum benchmark level 6 in order to enter the health care aid program and find employment that offered her a good salary and benefits. Her time for attending classes was running out because her eldest two children would be graduating from high school soon, and they wanted to continue in post-secondary studies.

“It’s difficult for me because my daughter will graduate school because I need to support her, especially for first, for first year, so planning to take another job to help her and also because we bought a house it is difficult now. I need to have, help my husband” (Research conversation transcript, 2014/12/29, p. 3).

Their financial need would grow, so she needed to support her family by finding a full-time job. I met with Rose once again at the end of January and found out that at the end of her term in January 2015, she was unable to obtain the necessary requirements for her healthcare program. She withdrew from her English classes with benchmark level 5 and 6 knowing that she would not return in the near future.

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Rose enjoyed attending classes because she had made many friends and felt as if she was a child again. Some of the other students would have arguments, others would laugh, and even though many discontinued their classes on the way, they have still maintained some friendships. “We have telephone number each other also. And also even we don’t have, we meeting outside like shopping like that. When we saw, we are like “aaaahhh” like shouting like that and yelling and shouting” (research conversation interview, 2014/12/29, p. 13). The relationships that Rose made during her time in school are some of the first connections that newcomers make when they arrive in Canada. Although it is human nature for people to make friends within any social context, I find that there is a special bond that develops in these initial settlement stages because although they have a limited amount of English, the students are forced to communicate with each other and find common topics to converse about which are usually related to settlement, family, and culture. They share many first time experiences and are able to support each other whether it is through giving advice, information or simply sharing pleasant moments together. Perhaps they feel less vulnerable to the struggles that they encounter, when they are together as a group.

Life as newcomers. Rosa and Dave’s children have adapted very well to life in Canada. They decided to register in the French immersion program in order to make the school transition a little easier. They had learned French in Djibouti and assumed they would struggle less than with the English program. The initial idea was that the children would change into an English school the following year once things were settled, “but when they started the next year when we told them to change to English class school they said “no, we are good in here, don’t want to move”” (Research conversation transcript, 2014/12/29, p. 16). The children had adapted and were doing well not only in French, but had picked up on the English language as well. “They

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start speaking English right away because they are fast to catch everything. Now they can speak fluently [sic] English and French because that is their language” (Research conversation transcript, 2014/12/29, p. 16). I was curious to see and meet the children. I had only seen two of the four children, but was not given the opportunity to have a full conversation with them. It would have been interesting to ask the two eldest children what their perception of school was and what they thought was the most difficult part of being a newcomer. I wondered if the eldest two children would have a different perception from their parents and from the younger children.

Rose feels very positive about her life in Canada and is happy. She feels that her children will have a better future and it motivates her to continue working hard. The family has also joined their cultural association where everyone is given a space to gather and participate in various activities for the children. Rose states that “they have computer class and everything. They were living downtown; they used to go every day. Especially they have summer time, also for two months they have special programs for the children” (Research conversation transcript, 2014/12/29, p. 9). The older children enjoy volunteering there during the evening and on weekends. The community has been quite supportive with their settlement, but Rose feels that what has been most beneficial is the information that she has received by the school she attended. There are services that she did not know existed and questions she was unaware that she had to ask, as there were many situations that only exist in Canada. It worries her that many people from her community do not attend English classes because of the amount of work they must do, so they are unaware of the many supports that are available.

“it’s very difficult, but if you have chance to go to school, that is also very helpful because the teacher will tell you where to go and how to find things. Because some peoples they don’t have time to go to school because they have to support their children and some work, if they start

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work even after one day or two days, after one month if they got, they start work right away, but if you have chance to go to school you can learn a lot of things, of support, lots of things where to go, how to go. They support...the teachers” (Research conversation transcript, 2014/12/29, p. 17)

There are families in which the parents work two full-time jobs and are unable to continue their English classes. In turn, they may not be able to obtain higher paying jobs and will continue struggling financially. Furthermore, when the parents are absent from their homes, the children rely on the care of their older siblings or are left to care for themselves. Rose has observed this situation and feels that life in Canada is time consuming and there is very little time to spend together. Rose states,

“I couldn’t see my children sometime. They have sport or like that, and also my husband work at night. We are also go to...I am also go to work and school at daytime. We couldn’t see each other [...] only by telephone. It is very difficult.” (Research conversation transcript, 2014/12/29, p. 7)

It worries Rose that many young teenagers will find support in their friends and quickly learn that discipline in Canada is very different than in their countries. Therefore, they take advantage of the freedom, and disrespect the parents. Rose states that “when they [children] go to school, it was very difficult, they met bad people and they move from their family because they don’t know anything in here. They met new friend and they make them do bad things” (Research conversation transcript, 2014/12/29, p. 15). She compares how life is handled here to the life back in her country and feels that in Eritrea there is a greater sense of community. Everyone helps care for everyone, share food if needed, and will often ensure that children are not becoming involved with the wrong crowd. Neighbors will often guide the children and help them through difficult times if the parents are working or absent. I found myself wanting to

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make a statement about how in most Canadian households, both parents work and it is the minority of those who stay home. Furthermore, with all the different cultures and beliefs, I personally would be less likely to punish, mentor, or interfere in the parenting style that a family may choose, which made me think about how critical parents can be when it comes to raising children. Rose felt that despite not having a community of people around to support the upbringing of her children in the way that it was accustomed back home, the neighborhood they live in is very quiet, peaceful and friendly. She is very thankful for one particular neighbor who has been very welcoming and helpful.

“We are lucky we have nice neighbour. In our friends, they didn’t say hi to each other, even they don’t see each other because they have their own lives [...]My children, even us when we talk to family, they are very surprised and they say to us “really” and we say “yeah, we are borrow everything. When we came the first day, we are borrow everything, they are help us like that” and they say “oh, you are very lucky” because until we came here, we didn’t have any problem because neighbours, because I don’t know, our luck. We are very luck” (Research conversation transcript, 2012/12/29, p. 15).

I could not help but wonder if the situation that Rose was describing was because of where she lived. Were her friends living in a location surrounded by other immigrant families who did not have the means to garner all of the necessities that a home would have, or was the situation contrary to what I was thinking and the neighbours were immigrants themselves and had the same idea of developing communal relationships? I thought about my own situation with my neighbours and although they are not as open as how Rose describes, I did recall a few situations in which the neighbours were very friendly and helpful. I reflected on the situation and wondered

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if such perception came from the experiences she had in the past where she did not feel safe in her own home and now she feels accepted and welcomed as part of society.

The future looks bright. Rose hopes to find a way to complete the Health Care Aide course soon, so that Dave does not have to continue working as a janitor for much longer. “That’s why I am hoping that now if I get it, because I don’t want to continue like my husband as a cleaner because it doesn’t have any benefit. That’s why I want to find the, the health care, I heard they have benefit. That very good for the family also” (Conversation research transcript, 2014/12/29, p. 19). Rose hopes that all her children will continue in post-secondary studies regardless of their career choices and believes it is very important for their future. “Yeah, yeah they have to study. That’s the most important things. Because now at this time if you don’t have any education that’s very difficult to live” (Research conversation transcript, 2014/12/29). Her eldest daughter is unsure of what she will study after she graduates in June 2015, and her son would like to pursue a career in the medical field once he graduates in 2016. The two youngest are not old enough to know what they would like to study, as they are only 14 and 9.

What the future holds is unknown and will depend on the choices that each member of the family makes. Rose and Dave hope that the children are able to have a good life and are able to obtain an education so that they will have a good future. As for themselves, they would like to sponsor some of their other family members who still live in Eritrea, but find it very difficult because of the amount of money that sponsors need to have in order to apply and to demonstrate that they have the means to support their relatives. “We are living from penny to penny. We can’t save to bring another person. It’s very difficult now” (Research conversation interview, 2014/12/29, p. 18).

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Family is very important for Rose, so she hopes that one day she and Dave will be able to travel back to their country and spend time with their people, but feels that her home is in Canada. “If my children finish their graduate their did everything well...yeah...we decided to live and then we come back. We can see our children because now, Winnipeg, especially Winnipeg is our home now because we are plan to move, we can come back here. Because we can move forever, until we have life. This is our home now” (Research conversation interview, 2014/12/29, p. 13). I thought about how most immigrants view their experiences in Canada and wondered if there was a difference between what a refugee feels and what an newcomer who has immigrated through a different stream may feel. Many have the hope that they will one day return to their home country and take with them enough money and experience that will allow them to be financially stable. However, many also know that they will never leave Canada and are very happy with the achievements and successes they have had here.

During the second interview, Rose and I went over her biography. She was very happy to see her story written down and expressed how excited she was that her story was going to be told. My intention was to go over the first interview which would only take about half an hour. However, the conversation led us to sharing stories of flowers and gardening. We both agreed that the winter was too long and that people had to make the most of the summer. My visit was a little longer than I expected, but was able to meet all of her children and briefly spoke with the youngest child about how he was doing in school. “Good, I like recess” is what he stated, as we all giggled. I looked at Rose and I felt that she was happy even though they still have many struggles. They owned their home, had friendly supportive people around them, and her children were all in school, doing well and learning both French and English aside from their

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mother tongue. Most importantly, the family was free to practice their religion and could walk down the street safe without fear.

Angela as well as Rosa and Dave have had struggles that have not allowed them to continue in English language classes. Although each story is different, they both share similar situations. Both of these experiences will allow us to look into the struggles that they have had to encounter and how they have adapted to their new situations in Canada.

Chapter 5: Exploring Newcomer Refugee Students' Settlement Struggles

“Refugees flee their home countries or country where they normally live if they fear persecution because of race, religion, political opinion, nationality, or because they are members of particular groups. In most cases, they need protection from situations where they will be tortured and face cruel punishment, and ultimately are at risk of losing their lives.” (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2015)

Angela, Rose and Dave immigrated to Canada as refugees seeking safety, freedom and better opportunities for their family. Although each story is different, they share a few commonalities in their reasons for immigrating to Canada and experiences upon arriving in terms of employment, education, and parenting styles.

The stories shared by the participants in this study allowed me to glimpse briefly into their lives and to imagine what it was like to live through the experiences that they brought with them. This has widened the lens through which I view refugee students, and deepened my understanding of the struggles that they have upon arriving in Canada. In this chapter, I will discuss the narrative threads that have emerged from the two participants' stories in relation to other studies and the literature. I will also look into the experiences that differ for the participants to find what circumstances led them in different directions, and caused them to have different experiences. To conclude, I will address the inquiry questions about the barriers that refugee newcomers face when settling into Canada affecting their integration into the workforce and society; what considerations I as an ESL instructor should take and introduce into the classroom in order to support refugee students, and what can be done to facilitate their learning and integration into society more smoothly.

Resonant Narrative Threads

Life Circumstances before Canada

Angela and Rose came from neighboring countries in Africa, which allowed them to share many cultural similarities. They were both brought up in modest homes with very strong religious beliefs; they attended school, but were unable to complete their grade 12 education. They both married young and had their first child within the year. Although they shared these experiences, their life circumstances would take them down two different paths that eventually led them to Canada.

Both families were forced to immigrate to neighbouring countries for different reasons. Angela and her family were forced to leave due to the war that began between Sudan and Ethiopia whereas Rosa and Dave left Eritrea looking for economic stability, but were later affected by the war that broke out between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Their decision to immigrate would prove to be a negative experience, as they encountered persecution for their religious beliefs, and feared returning to their home countries because of the war. The political unrest, fear and insecurity that are brought forth with war have a vast negative effect on the population at large. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2015) state that “There are an estimated 16.7 million refugees in the world today. Countries with resettlement programs resettle about 100,000 refugees from abroad each year.” Canada has opened its doors to many refugees throughout history, and also developed programs that support these families upon their arrival. Each family was able to seek asylum and applied to immigrate through the refugee program. Angela’s husband had been given refugee status, but was unable to come in with his family. He

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later sponsored them through the private refugee sponsor program, allowing their reunification two years later. Rose and her husband Dave were sponsored refugees through their aunt who had been living in Canada for a few years, and were able to immigrate as a family. The pathways and life experiences each family went through before coming to Canada was difficult, yet they had high hopes that they would settle in Canada permanently and have a bright and prosperous future.

Settling in Canada

Employment opportunities. One of the first tasks I give my students during their first week of class is to set goals for the term. Most of them state that their goal is to find employment in order to support their families and to develop enough language in order to obtain a job. Angela, Rose and Dave, Mary and my parents all had to begin a new life in Canada and with it, came many costs which go far beyond the scope of merely paying for food and housing. They may need to furnish their homes, pay for transportation, pay for their children's school fees, and buy adequate clothing for the season or for the workplace. Some need to pay their refugee loans if they came in through the government sponsorship program. Many of my students have also said they need to save money to sponsor their family members a process that can take years. Others feel a moral obligation to send money to their families back home. Like many other immigrants, Rose and Dave's first priority was to find employment in order to support their family. Unfortunately it was difficult for them to be hired because of the language barrier, their lack of Canadian experience and their lack of appropriate credentials. Magro & Ghorayshi (2011) confirm that "the low-paid jobs that the overwhelming majority of participants do have, do not give them the opportunity to develop their literacy skills" (p.9). Newcomers support their education by working in low-paid, flexible, part-time jobs. In many instances, they

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will apply for whatever employment position is available, as long as they are able to provide the service with minimum communication. The lack of credentials and skills can also influence whether or not the person will be hired. Rose and Dave had not completed high school and did not have any post-secondary education. Dave had extensive experience working as an entrepreneur, but did not have the means to initiate his own business and continue in this field in Canada, which forced him to work in a low-paying job without benefits. Dave could not find employment as he did not have the language needed to work in an area related to his business field; he had not completed high school, and did not have professional credentials. Anisef's (2010) study found that "compared to other immigrant groups, refugees are at a greater disadvantage in employment status, and they held lower levels of occupation" (p. 26). Many students who were forced to withdraw from my classes usually found positions that required shift work, or others that were during the night shift either cleaning or building security. Maganaka and Plazier's (2015) study confirms that "most newcomers are employed in sales, cleaning, labour, or entry level work" (p.144). Dave had never held a janitorial position, but needed to find employment. He found that the advantage of taking the night shift was that he would be able to accommodate the schedule with his wife in order to care for their children. He would also be able to attend classes during the afternoon. He maintained his janitorial position for many years, and was able to obtain a second job within the same occupation. Dave withdrew from his English language program, and has been unable to improve the quality of his employment. Rose was able to maintain her position within her community, but felt stressed and was trying to improve her English language quickly, so that she could obtain better employment with a higher wage and benefits. Her goal was to help alleviate Dave's workload, contribute to the household needs and support her children through their studies. Angela found

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it difficult to find employment because of her low language proficiency. She had not completed her nursing career and she did not have the necessary qualifications or credentials to work in the professional area that she had wanted to. Similarly, Mary and my parents did not have the Canadian credentials or references that would have allowed them to work in a setting that was similar to their experiences or interests in their home countries. In all these cases, they did not aspire to obtain positions within their field as they knew they did not match the requirements. However, they were willing to work in any other position where communication was not primary.

Educational struggles. Angela, Rose and Dave, all experienced difficult employment and financial strains at their beginning stages of settlement. They knew that improving their English language would lead to more opportunities for better employment. Maganaka and Plaizier (2015) stated that most newcomers are “looking to improve their English, followed by a need for skills training, upgrading, information and employment, or different employment” (p. 152). Rose, Angela and Dave were able to enrol in English language classes in different programs that offered services accommodating their schedules, so that they could attend to their children and go to work. Managing education and employment can be daunting, but many newcomers make the necessary effort in order to improve and will “support their education by working low-paid, flexible, part-time jobs with unfavourable working conditions” (Magro & Ghorayshi, 2011, p. 9). In my experience, students attempt to hold one or two jobs while also attending classes, but on many occasions I have seen them fall asleep during class, or lose focus on the lesson because they are too tired. However, they still attend class; make an attempt to learn and participate as much as possible. The disadvantage is that it becomes difficult due to the stress and fatigue that is eventually accumulated and the students feel forced to withdraw.

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The position that Dave held allowed him to work during the evening and at night, while his wife Rose was able to work part-time during the afternoon and attend classes during the morning.

The situation was difficult and they were able to accommodate their schedules for a short period of time. However, Rose felt burdened by the stress of not contributing enough to the household income. She felt pressured because she was not improving her English proficiency as fast as she intended. Rose needed to make the decision about whether or not she would continue studying, or if she would withdraw and look for full-time employment based on the result of her benchmark report. Maganaka and Plazier's study (2015) provides statistical information that confirms that language and employment are priorities of newcomers and refugees, as he states that "most clients served are looking to improve their English, followed by a need for skills training, upgrading, information, and employment, or different employment" (p.152). The progression in their language will allow them to understand the many aspects of employment such as job preparation and the workplace culture and expectations. Studies show that the differences stem from "non-traditional source countries that are more socially, economically, culturally, and linguistically distinct relative to Canada" (Anisef, 2010, p.1). The Canadian government has settlement programs that offer a variety of supports for newcomers and refugees geared towards employment preparation. Shan (2009) explains that "training and education is used as a necessary social mechanism to manage, and to a great extent appease the increasingly diverse immigrants' labour that does not find an easy reception in the Canadian labour market" (p. 363). I have observed that one of the main challenges that students generally have is their inability to understand job postings, match the required skills to their abilities, apply to positions correctly and (ultimately) get through the job interview. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to weave employment topics into language lessons, so that students can develop a deeper

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understanding of what employers are looking for, and they are better prepared to answer behavioural questions that are based on cultural norms.

In Manitoba there are currently programs that offer full-time, part-time morning, evening and afternoon classes, as well as programs that offer childcare, and specialized EAL classes. All three adults were able to take part-time classes during different times of the day. Angela was able to take classes that also provided childcare for her two younger children. As she improved her English, she felt that she needed full-time classes in order to make faster progress, and pursue a career as a health care aide. In Rose and Dave's case, one attended in the morning and the other in the afternoon, in order to manage and care for their children. They were unable to complete their courses and were forced to withdraw because of the financial and childcare difficulties that they were having. Although most newcomers make the effort to further develop their language skills as soon as possible, it becomes difficult to manage their course expectations with their personal responsibilities. These barriers are clearly described by Dempsey, et al. (2009) in their study stating that "language constitutes the most serious barrier newcomers face to furthering their education or training and is among the most serious barriers to finding employment" (p.v). Angela, Rose and Dave all attended classes regularly, and tried to complete their assignments on time, but it became difficult. They struggled with the demands of the program as they felt they were unable to focus on the lesson and review or complete their homework, making it very difficult to continue with their language classes.

Angela and Rose needed to obtain a CLB 6 in order to enter the health care aid course that was offered in one of the career colleges in the city. They believed that finding employment in that field was the best option, as the course was only a few months long, and it

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did not require a very high benchmark. Newcomers are highly inclined to enter the health care field, since it has become known that the job market in this area has widened with the needs of an aging Canadian society (Maganaka & Plaizier, 2015, p.152). This employment position would allow Angela and Rose to support their children as they enter their post-secondary studies. It would increase the household income, and they would at least have dental, and health benefits.

The situation that Angela faced was different from any other student that I have come across. The abuse, the lack of support, and her children's health made it challenging for her to concentrate. Although Angela forced herself to attend class, she found it difficult to focus on the lessons, stating that school was,

“so difficult and depression and it hit on me, so go to school and have family issues, every week, every month and ah... I can't finish, it's a lot. It's like “bang” was many things in your head at the same time... and the child is sick, and I'm trying to get in to fit, that I can be able to stand behalf of my kids, so it's a big challenge, but I try to handle everything” (Research conversation transcript, p.8, 2015/14/01)

Although Angela struggled with many issues, she continued to attend classes in hope that she would improve her English in order to further her education. Rose was unemployed, but could not review or practice her language skills outside of the classroom. She felt that it was necessary to dedicate her evenings to her family by making sure she spent time with them and prepared everything for the next day.

Angela and Rose enjoyed attending classes, as they developed new friendships and connected with other newcomer students. Rose felt that it was like being in high school again, and she felt like part of a group that shared similar goals. Angela struggled a little more with her English classes, but found moments when she knew that she was making progress. As she

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moved forward, she would encourage other students to work hard, while also finding encouragement from her classmates to continue moving forward. I find that students spend a considerable amount of time together and are able to develop a sense of belonging that is very important for them. “Learners attend classes in order to learn more English, but may have other reasons for attending class such as to relax, have fun, meet people, keep their minds active, keep on learning, make up for what they missed at school, do well in a job, escape, develop themselves, etc.” (Brown, 2000, as quoted in Gornely, et al. 2007, p. 10). I have observed that the community that is built within the classroom has an immense effect on the outlook that students have. They make friends and are able to share their experiences, celebrate new holidays, share a meal, encourage and listen to each other, and they laugh and occasionally cry together. Working with newcomer students has given me the opportunity to learn about many different cultures and to listen to the different experiences that they have had. Students often willingly share their stories, but others choose to share only with people they develop a close friendship with in the class. I observe them daily and have come to understand that the communication between students in the classroom is also part of a healing process for many of them. If instructors provide opportunities to develop a strong sense of community, they will be better supporting all newcomer students in their settlement process.

Parental involvement and childcare. There are various cultural and social differences between Canada and other countries. One of the aspects that many parents have difficulty adapting to are the parenting styles and expectations. Angela and Rose both expressed that in their countries, the neighbours and the community take on a more participative role in the children’s life if the parents were unable to attend to them and were absent. In many countries, the upbringing of the children is a collective responsibility where relatives and neighbors support

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the parents (Deng & Marlowe, 2013, p. 422). Parenting has been difficult for both families in my study, as they did not have any relatives to help them with childcare while they attended English classes. Secondly, the participants could not rely on their neighbors or friends as they all worked at full-time jobs and were constantly busy; therefore the need to find ways to manage childcare, employment, and their classes was essential. This confirms the findings of Magro & Ghorayshi (2011) that “women, in particular, find it difficult to fulfill their academic goals while at the same time being in charge of mothering and other domestic activities” (p. 9). My research explores the difficulty that Angela and Rose faced during the beginning stages of settlement as they had to manage many aspects of their lives. One of the reasons why Angela found it difficult to attend classes was that she could not find childcare for her two youngest children, and she did not have the financial means to pay for private care. Furthermore, she was the sole care provider for her children, as her husband was unsupportive. The childcare experience was different for Rose and Dave. During their beginning stages of settlement, they decided that Rose would stay home with the children while Dave worked and attended English classes. Once he found employment, they were able to coordinate their schedules so that Dave would attend classes during the day while Rose took care of the children in the morning. Dave would return home and Rose would attend part-time classes during the afternoon and return in time to take care of the children. Rose felt that she needed to dedicate her evenings to her children, so she would not complete any assignments, review lessons, or practice her English speaking skills in the evenings. Gornely et al. (2007) confirms the situation that both families had, stating that “Students have a difficulty balancing LINC classes with family obligations, and this is especially true for female LINC students with children and elderly parents at home. Many LINC students are concerned about finding employment. Others are attempting to balance their present jobs

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with their LINC classes” (p. 20). The situation was not ideal for either family, but they felt that they were working towards improving their language proficiency levels in order to find better employment in the future while also making sure that there was a parent available at all times and that their children were cared for.

The parenting views on how to raise and discipline children was a difference that each family struggled with. Angela felt that Canada permits too much freedom for children and teenagers allowing them to take advantage of the disciplinary differences between their home culture and Canada. Angela and Rose felt that their presence in the lives of their children was imperative, as they feared that their absence or lack of supervision for an extended period of time would result in their children becoming involved in negative situations. The parenting views, beliefs and fears are similar to those presented in Deng and Marlowe’s (2013) study of parenting practices. They confirm that many parents struggle with the cultural change and fear that their children will lose their cultural identities. Furthermore, the parents felt they were unable to discipline them in the way they were accustomed to, and that society would negatively influence the decisions that their children make (p.426). Angela and Rose had observed many instances in which the children became involved in negative situations because of their newfound freedom. While having this conversation with my participants I was able to recall a few situations in which some of my previous students would share stories about how some of their children had lost respect for them, and how they would try to become the main authority in the household. However, it may be possible that the struggles that many families were having were based on the premise that there was a language barrier between the parents and their children. “Accelerated language loss is a common occurrence these days among immigrant families, with the younger members losing the ethnic language after a short time in school” (Fillmore, 2000, p.205).

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Consequently, the inability to communicate clearly changes the family dynamic and may deteriorate the family relationship within the home. Family members may become isolated and remove themselves from difficult situations, relationships become deteriorated and tension builds for the children and their parents (Fillmore, 2000, p.205). Parenting becomes a difficult situation, as many children feel that the parenting styles and roles are affected by the situation the family may be facing as newcomers. Magro and Ghorayshi's study (2011) states that "the roles as parents and spouses are undergoing changes and in some cases, the families face fragmentation. Some parents describe losing their authority; in other situations, men and women are renegotiating gender relations of power" (p.10).

Finding a balance between parental and personal needs became an issue for both families. Rose and Angela both stated that their personal language and educational progression would be slower, but they are comforted by the idea that they are positively supporting their children. Although Angela withdrew from her language classes, she continues to care for them and is reluctant to take on the full-time responsibility of working and attending school. Rose also withdrew from her language classes, as she was unable to reach the CLB 6 that she needed to pursue a career in the health care field, and decided to look for full-time employment during the time that her children are in school. Nonetheless, they are both open to the possibility of one day resuming their language classes.

Newcomer Differences

Mental health. The feelings and emotions that newcomers have when settling in a new country are difficult to describe. Many of my students avoid talking about their feelings because they are afraid that they will get ridiculed, or that it is not in their position or status to speak

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about their situation. Refugees may have a harder time, as they also struggle with the stress of their past experiences. Both Angela and Rose entered Canada as privately sponsored refugees, yet their experiences were different from people in other situations. Rose and Dave lived in fear of being persecuted for their religious beliefs, but did not recall or express major traumatic moments. Once they immigrated to Canada, they were supported by their aunt who lived in Winnipeg and was able to provide them with a home, food and settlement information.

Angela's situation was different from Rose and Dave's. One of the experiences that Angela and I shared during our conversation was the trauma that people feel when they see or hear noise similar to a past traumatic experience. She mentioned that hearing gun shots or similar sounds would automatically make her afraid, and I told her how the sound of helicopters would affect my aunt in the same way. Phillimore (2011) discusses this situation in great detail, explaining that there are cases in which the student has gone through war and persecution, and will have post-traumatic stress disorder, grieve friends and relatives, and will continually look for relatives who are missing (p.582, 583). The situation was not positive for Angela, as she had a different experience before and after immigrating. She recalled her time living in Egypt and shared a few moments in which she felt fear and was worried about living through the night. She had to deal with this every day, as she was alone with her children for two years before reuniting with her husband in Canada. After she immigrated, her past experiences continued to affect her. According to Phillimore (2011) "the stress encountered both prior to and during acculturation had made them more susceptible to stress or mental illness [...] and suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" (p.588). During the two years that he had spent in Canada on his own, Angela's husband had begun to struggle with addictions. His behaviour became erratic and was abusive towards his family after they arrived. Although the information I was able to

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obtain from Angela about her husband was minimal, I could only speculate on the possibilities and factors that affected his change in behaviour. In the two years that the family was separated, there may have been many changes for everyone. Both Angela and her children had to become accustomed to being alone and they learned to support themselves. The children not only went through a developmental change, they may have also experienced situations that affected them emotionally as they also had to deal with the separation of their family within a hostile environment. Marlow (2010) in Choummanivong, et.al (2014) suggests that the process of reunification may well result in reunified families experiencing significant adjustment and adaptation difficulties that require extensive and ongoing psychosocial support. In addition, the stress of prolonged separation can detrimentally affect the physical and mental health and well-being of those involved (p.98).

Angela was reluctant to share very much information about her husband, making it difficult to inquire into his experiences. What caused or influenced the change in personality that Angela's husband had are unknown, but based on the information that was provided, one could speculate that the persecution, fear and trauma that he underwent prior to immigrating to Canada; perhaps the feeling of guilt of leaving his wife and children in a war ridden country; and the culture shock, feeling of isolation and many other settlement struggles that he encountered all at once, may have contributed to his mental state.

Isolation and support. The situations that Angela faced from the moment she arrived caused her to become isolated. During her first winter in Canada, she was unable to leave her home due to the cold weather. Medical appointments and classes were impossible to attend and she was unable to integrate into a classroom setting in order to learn the language. Angela was unable to develop friendships, or feel accepted into a social group. Phillimore (2011) states that

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“those who were unable to speak English were unable to even contemplate building relationships with local people and experienced high levels of isolation” (p.584).

The health issues her children were facing and the abuse Angela had to endure on a daily basis was kept a secret. She was reluctant to seek help or information, as she feared that her children would be taken away because of the negative situation that she was in. Because of this fear, Angela did not have the psychological and social support that would have been available for her through government agencies. She did not have a cultural community group that provided any support, and her friendships were limited. However, she was able to channel her problems and find support through religion. She did not have a faith group that spoke her language, but attended an English speaking church and began developing the language necessary to communicate and understand within her religious faith. Angela slowly learned the language and this allowed her to become part of a community.

Rose and Dave had a different settlement and acculturation experience. They were supported by their aunt, had a good understanding of what the settlement process was and they were able to integrate into different areas of society immediately. They began their language classes, joined their cultural community program that provided extra support, information, and programs for the whole family, and found employment. Phillimore (2011) states that

“Refugees who had friends or relatives living close to them [...] were able to maintain their cultural traditions through shared meals and conversations. Those without these connections described their feelings of isolation and of being unable to interact with local people or their peers. In addition, those refugees who had been able to gain work were better able to acculturate than those who were unemployed. Having a job

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impacted upon their self-esteem and enabled them to meet other people.”
(p.586)

Rose, Dave and the children found the support needed to acculturate smoothly into society, and feel welcomed. Rose and Dave were able to sell their business and bring with them some money, which allowed them to buy some food, clothing and then place a small down payment for a home. Angela was able to overcome the barriers that she faced while she was with her husband. One of the last comments that Angela made as we were leaving our second interview was how she is now able to speak about the situation a little more and has found that her experiences allow her to encourage and support other refugee.

Both families hope to continue their education in the future and are happy to be living in Canada. They are grateful for the opportunities that have been given to them, and although they have not been able to reach all of their goals, they are hopeful that in the future, they will be able to continue their language classes in order to continue their education and obtain a job.

Summary

All newcomers encounter settlement struggles that affect their initial stages in Manitoba. Many of the students I have spoken with have immigrated to Canada with different expectations of work, education and financial stability, but find out quickly that their goals are difficult to reach because of the barriers that will either slow the settlement process, or that will change their course of life completely. When looking and recalling all the stories that students have shared with me, it is difficult to pinpoint only a few aspects that affect the students because of the different experiences they bring with them. The three guiding questions that shaped my thesis were what experiences did adult refugee students have that led them to withdraw from their

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English language classes. Secondly, I wanted to deepen my understanding of how to teach and further support this particular group of students. Finally, I wanted to expand the knowledge about the barriers that affect the integration of newcomers into the workforce and their integration into Canadian society.

Listening to the two participants share their stories allowed me to discover the many factors that influence a person's ability to attend classes, or to make progress in their language skills. The main struggle they have is their financial strains and urgent need of employment to support their families. The newcomer will most likely find employment in survival jobs that pay minimum wage and not provide benefits. Many are forced to take on two full-time positions in order to support their family. Students will often try to work and study part-time, but stress and fatigue will affect their ability to concentrate, and make progress. However, the pace at which the student progresses in their language may not be the primary reason for which they attend classes. In many cases, the anguish the students feel is placated by the sense of community that is developed in the classroom. They feel supported and safe, so they are able to ask questions and are given important settlement information from their instructors. Managing childcare is another aspect that students struggle with. They either do not have friends or relatives in the city, or they hold full-time jobs and have busy schedules and are unable to help them. Furthermore, finding childcare can be difficult if they have more than one child, and can also be affected by the student's means of transportation. Many refugee parents are able to attend full-time classes when their children begin attending school and they do not have to care for them during the day. Large families with multiple children will find it difficult to pay for childcare although it is subsidized by the government and parents only pay a small portion of the total amount. Refugee newcomers worry greatly about being absent from the care and

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upbringing of their children. They feel that they can be easily persuaded and influenced by other beliefs and values, so they tend to challenge the household rules that the parents have instilled. They fear disciplining their children because they may leave making the situation worse, or that the children will be taken away from their care because of the way they were disciplined.

The settlement struggles for the two participants in this study had differing situations that led them to different experiences. Looking back at all of the stories presented in this study, there were many influencing factors that made their settlement process different. Some refugees struggle with mental health issues and are affected by their experiences they lived in war torn countries, or continue to be in constant fear of being persecuted. Many refugees feel isolated because they do not have the support system that they would have in their countries and struggle to make new friendships. The weather and lack of appropriate clothing isolates them from being able to carry out basic necessities such as attending medical appointments, or going to the store. All the struggles and factors presented in this study are merely a small glimpse into the lives of two adult refugee students. However, each individual situation is different and may be affected by other factors such as cultural group, religion, education, and age.

Working with newcomers and refugees can be difficult. Instructors are constantly working on developing lessons, developing rubrics and assessments, looking for resources and ensuring that they provide adequate feedback so that the student is able to progress as quickly and accurately as possible in their language skills. There have been many occasions in which I have put all my effort towards developing lessons, and have felt frustrated because the student did not attempt to complete it, or refused to participate in the activities presented. As I now stop to reflect on many moments, I wonder what factors were affecting these students that they were

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unable to carry out these tasks. While completing my thesis, I was also working in the midst and coming to many realizations of my own teaching practice. I began taking further interest in the lives of my students and began asking them to voluntarily share some of their experiences within the themes that I taught. The more opportunities I gave them to share about their culture, the more information I was able to get about their issues and struggles, as well as hopes and dreams. I have now developed lessons around childcare, and parenting styles that allow students to discover the information they need without being explicit and telling them what they want to know. Furthermore, I have developed a unit plan focused on job preparation and employability skills with the hope that the student will be able to integrate into the workplace and find different alternatives for employment while they are attending class. Lastly, although there is a strong sense of community in my classroom, I encourage students to help each other and find help for any kind of struggles that they may be facing and present them with different support services that are available. Students are also encouraged to do group activities outside of the classroom giving them the opportunity to use the language out in the community with their classmates. Through these small activities, they have developed strong friendships, and supported one another.

Expanding the information about the struggles that refugees have when settling in Canada would encourage more cooperation from the different communities and sectors. It would encourage cultural communities to find and develop support groups for people that identified with them. It would allow refugees and newcomers to develop friendships, access important settlement information, and maintain their cultural values. It would also allow stakeholders and the community to come together and develop strategic plans that would support refugee newcomers in a way that everyone could work together to make progress. From my experience

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working with immigrants, as well as reading the literature that has supported my findings, it is possible to conclude that although refugee students have goals and ambitions similar to everyone else, they are forced to withdraw in order to navigating through their settlement struggles. I believe that in order for these students to make the necessary progress needed to achieve their goals, they must be supported through different, more specific programs geared towards their needs.

Recommendations

Recommendations for instructors. There are many different programs in Manitoba that are customized for the needs of each individual person or family. The variety of course delivery allows students to take English language classes while also managing their personal responsibilities. In each case the dynamics and the demographics of the course will vary, leaving it up to the instructor to deliver their lessons in a productive way. Nonetheless, there are many cases in which students struggle, find it difficult to continue their classes and finally withdraw from the course. The information that is provided to students within the classes is very important, as it will guide and help them integrate into a society that is diverse in many ways. By taking these points into consideration, instructors would be able to develop their lessons in a way that would allow students to share their perspectives on various issues, understand and obtain information about spousal and child abuse, parenting styles and the support services for these particular situations.

I understand that we all have different perspectives on teaching and that there are many opinions on how to conduct ESL classes. However, I believe that it is important for instructors to understand and acknowledge that each student is coming in with a unique set of experiences

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that may not all be positive. I believe that time and patience is needed in order to develop a relationship with refugee students so that they can begin to trust. By developing this rapport, we will be allowing students to share small glimpses into their realities that will in turn allow us to guide them towards the appropriate support service. It is also necessary to take the time to acknowledge the fact that many of these students do not have the ability to make huge strides in their language, and that sometimes their time in the classroom is the safe space they need to build community and find peer support. For many, it is a place and time for healing and finding the motivation they need to continue on with their journey.

Program recommendations. Meeting all of the student's needs becomes difficult, as there are many factors that are not considered when developing Adult EAL programs. I believe that assisting refugees and newcomers in educational facilities is not an individual task. There needs to be a greater acknowledgment of the high need of support services in place with specialized professionals who have been certified and trained in the specialized areas. ESL programs need counselors who will deal with the emotional and psychological stresses that affect students; settlement advisors that provide information and guidance on topic related to aspects of their everyday lives; academic advisors that will provide students with different educational programs, and interpreter services that will facilitate communication between the student and the professional in order to ensure accurate information and alleviate the stress that this may bring. Lastly, counselors also need ESL training and have the ability to adapt their language to suit the needs of the students, as many students are unable to understand the information and recommendations that are being provided when an interpreter is unavailable. In order for the program to provide a solid supportive system, it is necessary for the lines of communication to be clear and simple, so that students can understand and explain what is being asked. By

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working as a team within a language facility, we will be supporting all students and helping them reach their goals.

Recommendations for government. Working closely with the participants in this study, as well as reflecting on my own past experiences as an ESL instructor, has allowed me to gain a further understanding of the struggles that refugees have when settling in Canada and that affect their ability to attend English language classes. I believe that by taking the settlement issues to higher levels of government and informing them about the true struggles of refugees, we will be opening up the opportunity to discuss how acknowledging and developing well-equipped programs will be contributing to their success. Some of the key factors that need to be addressed are more funding for programs that provide support services to allow refugee students to make a successful transition into Canadian society. Secondly, ESL facilities should work closely with stakeholders to create co-op and apprenticeship programs that will allow students to work while attending language classes. The third point is the need to develop subsidized childcare within the educational facilities where language classes are delivered. This would allow refugee parents to learn English while their children are taken care of and not have to begin their classes when all of their children are in school full-time. Learning the English language before their children reach school age would allow them to develop stronger communication and reduce the stress of dealing with their child's learning. Finally, newcomers have a difficult time learning the mechanics of living in Canadian society. Although the Canadian government has made an effort to provide a considerable amount of information online regarding the steps that should be followed to settle in Canada, the services available to them and how to access each one, refugee newcomers still encounter many difficulties. When looking into each site I found that the information provided is frequently in English and in French, but is

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not available in any other language, making it difficult for immigrants to obtain accurate information. Therefore, it is necessary to translate the online information about basic services providing settlement information, so that both newcomers and refugees are well informed. Furthermore, it is important to note that the use of technology is not always the best means of communication for many people. I have noticed that in the case of refugees who have a limited amount of education, they have little to no knowledge of what technology is and have never seen a computer before. Because of the amount of technology that is used in Canada, it is necessary to provide basic computer classes in their English language classes so that they are able to access information, search and apply for employment, as well as access their emails.

Final Thoughts

My hope is that people take a moment to reflect on their own lives, and the lives of the students in each classroom. Teaching newcomers is not only about the language, the skills and the ability to communicate; it is about working with other human beings and knowing that their journey may not have been as easy as we may think. It is developing an understanding that they carry experiences with them that many of us will never have and that they have felt emotions and fears that many of us will never understand. I encourage people to look at them through a new lens and see that a refugee's journey does not end when they arrived in Canada, and that they may be very far from their final destination.

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Research Ethics and Compliance Approval Certificate



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APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

December 22, 2014

TO: Laura Castillo (Advisor Yi Li)
Principal Investigator

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

Re: Protocol #E2014:124
"A Journey Beyond the Classroom: Settlement Struggles of Newcomer Students"

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

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

Please note:

- If you have funds pending human ethics approval, please mail/e-mail/fax (261-0325) a copy of this Approval (identifying the related UM Project Number) to the Research Grants Officer in ORS in order to initiate fund setup. (How to find your UM Project Number: <http://umanitoba.ca/research/ors/mrt-faq.html#pr0>)
- If you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval; otherwise the account will be locked.

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

The Research Ethics Board requests a final report for your study (available at: http://umanitoba.ca/research/orec/ethics/human_ethics_REB_forms_guidelines.html) in order to be in compliance with Tri-Council Guidelines.

umanitoba.ca/research