



TEACHING AND LEARNING RESEARCH EXCHANGE

Using Digital Narratives
With Refugee and
Immigrant Youth to
Promote Literacy, Healing,
and Hope

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Project #200
August 2010

This research was partially funded through a grant from the McDowell Foundation. However, the points of view and opinions expressed in project documents are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

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Abstract

The focus of this participatory action research study was to explore the use of digital storytelling with immigrant and refugee youth. This research explored the experiences of immigrant and refugee youths moving to Canada with a specific focus on their educational experiences and needs. The study was facilitated in a secondary school, beginner level English as an additional language (EAL) classroom in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan over one, five-month semester.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

The report is organized into three chapters. Chapter One contains my personal background and positioning as a researcher, which guides my decisions regarding research and teaching. The purpose of the study is outlined in addition to the research questions, the significance of the study, and definitions of terms.

Chapter Two is a review of the literature, which is presented in four sections. The first section describes the factors that contribute to the accumulation of risk for immigrant and refugee youth and that create educational, emotional, and social challenges. The second section outlines challenges to teachers of immigrant and refugee youth who arrive with undeveloped first language education and experiences of forced migration. The third section explains the factors that ameliorate risk for immigrant and refugee youth, including characteristics of resilience and cultural understandings of healing. This section also describes the role of teachers and schools in assisting youths in adjusting to Canada. The fourth section is a more detailed review of the ways storytelling can be incorporated as a means for students to develop literacy skills, emotional wellbeing, and plans for social change.

Chapter Three contains two sections: methodology and research design. The first section is a review of my theoretical perspective underpinning the choice to implement participatory action research (PAR), my motivation to use research as a political statement, and the practical nature of PAR that makes it appropriate for a class of secondary students. The second section outlines the design of the research, including a description of the participants.

Chapter Four contains student stories and writing samples produced in the project. This includes paper-based planning sheets, digital stories, and journal entries.

1.2 RESEARCHER'S PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND POSITIONING

In 1999, I was fortunate to receive a full-time position with Saskatoon Public Schools. This was my first teaching position with refugee youth, and it changed the course of my life.

That year was spent with a group of youth who had been evacuated from their home country when threats of genocide became a reality. We began the year with 17 youth, but by June only six remained. Some families returned to their country of origin; some youth left school for employment; others simply stayed home. It was a challenging year for both the students and me. Some students had been relocated within five months of leaving their homes, which gave them little time to process their experiences. I was unprepared to work with youth who had various degrees of interrupted education in their first language. Despite previous training in counseling methods, I was completely ill-equipped to deal with the emotional needs of youth who had witnessed murder and experienced acts of intimidation and torture. Although I had worked with adult refugees and listened

to their accounts of war, hearing stories from youth took a great emotional toll on me. However, it was also a positive experience; I felt a deep bond with the students as we had crossed many bridges together.

Fortuitously, I gained a permanent contract and was able to stay with this group of students and to see them through to graduation. It was during this time that I began to develop questions about the effects of trauma on learning, on trust and attachment, and on a sense of belonging. I observed some students adjust to life in Canada with seeming ease while others lost hope and dropped out without graduating, and I began to question how I could meet the needs of youth with numerous educational and emotional challenges. Discussions with students and their families provided additional insight into not only the obstacles newcomers encounter, but also their strengths and resilience to cope with adversity. I pondered how I could help all students develop such attributes.

It also became clear that social issues must be considered. At a school level, youth spoke of feeling unwelcome in Canada, lamented the desire to make Canadian friends, and became frustrated by the paucity of empathy from teachers toward newcomers. Although some students managed to find work after leaving school without graduating, others became involved in illicit activity that resulted in incarceration and death. At a societal level, I struggled to find appropriate support services for youth and their families. Language barriers, misunderstandings about cultural differences, and a general lack of information about immigrants and refugees were the challenges we faced when dealing with community services.

Hearing students' opinions regarding school, emotional, and social issues led me to complete a Stirling McDowell project on building attachment in 2004. My admiration for the wisdom of youth was further enhanced at The Voice of Youth Conference organized by the Saskatoon Open Door Society in 2007. In both cases, I was inspired by the insight of youths regarding the need for program changes to better meet their literacy needs. The thoughtfulness of their statements and desire to make a positive change left me with a great yearning to further explore how youth can be involved in research. Their powerful reflections on Canadians' paucity of understanding regarding premigration experiences as well as the challenges connected to living in a new culture, learning a new language, and caring for family in Canada and abroad left me with a resolve to incorporate students' voices in a movement for societal awareness.

After attending the 2005 Moving Forward conference, hosted by International Women of Saskatoon, I became very aware that I needed more information about the effects of trauma on learning and on adjustment to a new country. Returning to the University of Saskatchewan in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies gave me the opportunity to explore this very complex issue from the vantage point of psychology, sociology, and education. I learned that an interdisciplinary approach to culture and human development is influencing research (Rogoff, 2003), yet I was left with many unanswered questions. In 2009, I attended the Summer Institute at McGill University's Department of Transcultural Psychology, and this experience added a critical component to my search for solutions. I came to understand how culture influences not only the understanding of traumatic events, but the healing process as well. I returned to the classroom with a new perspective.

In addition to being a teacher, I see myself as an ally of English as an additional language (EAL) learners. In my daily work with students, theories of anti-oppressive education are guiding principles. Being ever mindful of the colonizing effect of language teaching, I strive to follow the advice of hooks (2004) to interrogate my perspectives and to remain cognizant that I am within a culture of domination and in a position of power. In an attempt to be a culturally responsive teacher-researcher (Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and to move away from the “deficit model,” I use the students’ individual and cultural resources to build bridges between what they know and what they need to learn (Freire, 2001).

In my work with diverse students from a variety of backgrounds, I find it essential to acknowledge that culture constructs reality (de Levita, 2000; Kristal-Andersson, 2001; Marsella, Johnson, Watson, & Gryczynski, 2008). As a researcher taking a constructionist stance, I acknowledge that trauma is a reality that causes great suffering, yet the symptoms can have a very different meaning in other cultures. In my ongoing role as an ally, being aware of the cultural relativity of the concepts of trauma and wellbeing avoids taking only a Western perspective that silences culturally different ways of knowing regarding what is important (Bracken & Petty, 1998; Young, 1995). As a constructionist and a passionate scholar, I am not required to remain distanced from my student participants. Thus, I am comfortable disclosing that I am emotionally connected to what I am seeking to know and to understand (Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2000). A constructionist stance also allows me, as a researcher, to move beyond isolated psychological and societal influences because constructionists posit that “[e]xplanations are to be found neither in the individual psyche nor in social structures, but in the interactive processes that take place routinely between people” (Burr, 1995, p. 7). Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach to exploring refugee and immigrant needs is most appropriate.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research is to explore how digital storytelling can be used to help immigrant and refugee youth adjust to life in Canada.

1.4 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

How can digital storytelling be incorporated into an EAL class to promote literacy, to assist in healing the effects of forced migration, and to build hope?

1.5 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

My proposed research is in response to an information gap related to Saskatchewan immigrant and refugee youth and the paucity of innovative, experiential research that incorporates the voices of immigrant and refugee youth.

Information related to the needs of immigrant and refugee youth is lacking worldwide, and the gap in Saskatchewan is particularly pronounced. Internationally, Halcón et al. (2004) noted the existence of “few published research reports on the experience and needs of refugee adolescents and young

adults” (p. 18). In the United Kingdom and Australia, researchers appeal for specific studies focusing on the adjustment and integration needs of youth to prevent long term complications (Coventry, Guerra, MacKenzie, & Pinkney, 2003; Ingleby & Watters, 2002). American academics De Capua, Smathers, and Tang (2007) observed that “[s]tudies focusing on students with interrupted formal education are practically nonexistent” (p. 46). In Canada, partnerships between academics exist to address the needs of youth in Alberta and Manitoba (Hébert & Wilkinson, 2002; Hébert, Wilkinson, & Mehrunissa, 2008), but to the best of my knowledge, Saskatchewan’s, and specifically Saskatoon’s, immigrant and refugee youth have been largely overlooked. School-based programs for Saskatoon youth who have experienced premigration trauma have been limited to short-term programs initiated by International Women of Saskatoon and Family Service Saskatoon.

Researchers devoted to anti-oppressive education and social justice call for innovative studies that incorporate the voices of youth (Barnard, Morland, & Nagy, 1999; Fine, Torre, Burns, & Payne, 2007; Rudduck, 2007). This sentiment is echoed by researchers concerned with applied as well as theoretical studies involving education. As Anisef et al. (2005) wrote, “[m]ore research is needed not only to examine how newcomer youth fare in school, but also to register their views, feelings, and sentiments about their learning opportunities, in order to identify the reasons why visible-minority youth, in particular, often show poor academic performance or drop out of school” (p. 5). Similarly, Wilson (2008), in the area of trauma and recovery, observed that modern science has generated an impressive body of knowledge regarding the negative effects of trauma but lacks carefully developed cross-cultural studies of healing and adaptation. Montreal psychologists Rousseau and Guzder (2008) pointed out that “[d]espite many small-scale innovative projects, little is known, either in theory or in practice, about the types of activity that may work best for children from different cultural backgrounds” (p. 534).

As an educator working directly with Saskatoon immigrant and refugee youth, my goal is for the research findings of this project to contribute to the development of effective educational practice. I believe this addition to applied as well as theoretical knowledge is timely. With Canada’s ongoing commitment to accept refugees and Saskatchewan’s increasing immigrant population, this study will contribute to current and future educational programs. This study will therefore contribute to a body of knowledge, especially in Saskatchewan, that has not been fully explored.

1.6 DEFINITION OF THE TERMS

- Trauma is “the effects of external events impinging on the individual — events that are beyond the usual expectation of what life should be” (Apfel & Simon, 1996, p. 6).
- Forced migration is a general term that refers to the movements of refugees and internally displaced people (those displaced by conflicts within their country of origin) as well as people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine, or development projects (<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/hs/pubhealth/modules/forcedMigration/definitions.html>).
- A refugee is a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. (The 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Retrieved from <http://www.amnesty.ca/Refugee/who.php>)
- Resilience is a term referring to the factors that enable a person to cope with adversity. It is a generic concept that cannot easily be measured because it is dependent upon a person’s personal qualities, environment, and history. It is also a value statement because resilience is based on socially acceptable ways of coping (Barnard et al., 1999).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The following literature review is divided into four sections. The first section explores the educational, emotional, and social factors that contribute to the accumulation of risk for youth who have experienced interrupted education and forced migration. This includes the effects of undeveloped first language skills and trauma on learning and adjustment as well as the societal issues that create barriers to integration. Section two highlights the challenges experienced by educators of immigrant and refugee youth. The third section explores the factors that ameliorate risk for youth, including the role of teachers in the process of empowerment and change. The final section is a more detailed exploration of one method of supporting youth academically, emotionally, and socially: the use of narratives to build students' literacy and English skills, to encourage optimism and adjustment to a new country, and to enhance societal awareness regarding the needs of immigrant and refugee youth.

2.1 FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE ACCUMULATION OF RISK

From an extensive review of the literature, the predominant issues for youth who have experienced forced migration are undeveloped literacy skills and early school leaving (Phan, 2002; Pirbhai-Illich, 2005; Rousseau & Guzder, 2008; Watt & Roessingh, 2001); experiences of premigration trauma, which lead to difficulty trusting and making attachments (Nadeau & Measham, 2006; Pipher, 2002); struggles with identity (Suárez-Orozco, 2000; Yu, Ouellet, & Warmington, 2007); isolation and a small social network (Beiser, 1999; McColl, McKenzie, & Bhui, 2008); remaining unconnected to support services in the community (United Nations Association in Canada, 2007); and involvement with the justice system (Chettleburgh, 2007; Ngo & Schleifer, 2005).

2.1.1 EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES

The acquisition of English literacy skills is essential for the integration of newcomers to primarily English-speaking, western Canada. One aspect of integration is finding adequate employment, which is extremely difficult without secondary school English competency (Chettleburgh, 2007). Although immigrant and refugee youth are often responsible for providing financial support for their families, many do not gain literacy skills to allow them to move beyond survival existence employment (Pirbhai-Illich, 2005; Watt & Roessingh, 2001). Youth who arrive in their mid- to late teens with little or no first language education are considered at a high risk for academic failure (Phan, 2002).

Several factors may explain why youth do not remain in school. First, English as an additional/second language (EAL/ESL) classes do not meet the specific needs of youth who arrive with limited formal schooling. Veeman, Ward, and Walker (2006) remarked that typical literacy activities with workbooks and novels “are excellent preparation for higher education, but seldom transfer into real life literacy solutions” (p. 22). The second issue is the length of time available to study. “Research in the field of second language acquisition tells us that it takes from two to nine years to achieve academic norms in the second language that are consistent with the students’ age and level” (Helmer & Eddy, 1996, p. 77). Consequently, secondary students who arrive with high literacy needs are

unlikely to graduate by the mandatory high school exit age (Pirbhai-Illich, 2005). For students who do not graduate, the next learning option is government-funded language programs; however, availability is limited so “young immigrants, and especially refugees (of any age), often lack the requisite language skills to succeed” (Chettleburgh, 2007, p. 33). The third issue is the need for educational programs that take into account the detrimental effects of trauma on the capacity of youths to learn (Canadian Paediatric Society, 1999), as well as prevent struggles with adjustment being mistakenly diagnosed as learning disabilities (Collier, 2001; Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2002; Klinger, 2010; Levine & Kline, 2006). Children and youth with high emotional, educational, and family needs are placed in classrooms where teachers lack the training to offer the required support (Barnard et al., 1999; Pipher, 2002; Rousseau & Guzder, 2008). Rather than making adjustments to educational programs to support students, well-meaning adults attempt to protect those who are vulnerable and at-risk by creating policies of policing and surveillance (Gleason, Myers, Paris, & Strong-Boag, 2010).

2.1.2 EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES

Exposure of children to interpersonal violence disrupts the basic preconditions for their optimal development (Marans, Berkman, & Cohen, 1996), and people who have experienced forced migration have a high probability of being affected by violence in the countries of origin (White, 2007). Citing the United Nations Children’s Fund, Machel (2001) wrote that during warfare, “ferocious assaults are unleashed against children and their communities, resulting in some 20 million children currently uprooted from their homes, either as refugees or internally displaced persons” (p. 1). Forced migration has the potential to create traumatic experiences for immigrants as well as refugees. Disaggregating refugees from immigrants who choose to leave their country of origin is critical, but it is also necessary to consider that the majority of recent immigrants to Canada are coming from developing countries (Rousseau & Guzder, 2008; White, 2007); the choice to leave is shaped by persecution, poverty, and social insecurity and, therefore, migration is not completely voluntary.

It is also important to recognize that First Nations people of Canada suffered trauma through the forced migration and destruction of culture and homeland, followed by a period when children were forcibly taken to boarding schools (Johnson et al., 2008). A history of trauma, combined with biological, psychological, and social risk factors, continues to affect First Nations youth in the twenty-first century (Province of Manitoba, 2008). Colonization continues as the voices of young Aboriginal people and Aboriginal epistemologies are excluded from the contemporary discourse around mental health (Williams & Mumtaz, 2008).

Despite the differing circumstances that can create traumatic events, the outcomes have demonstrable similarities. Robben (2000) explained that whether the traumatic experience is on a personal level (experiencing the event), a secondary level (seeing a traumatic event), or tertiary (hearing about the event), the effects of unresolved grief are enduring and even intergenerational. Garbarino and Kostelny (1996) surmised that traumatic experiences distort the development of values, suppress higher-order thinking about human relations, and stimulate more primitive approaches. Although cultural interpretations, personal attributes, and social supports determine how each person responds to trauma (Kristal-Andersson, 2001; Seligman, 1995), the commonly recorded

responses to traumatic events are hyperarousal, intrusive thoughts, and numbing (Luhrman, 2000).

In a state of hyperarousal or hypervigilance, “the traumatized person startles easily, reacts irritably to small provocations, and sleeps poorly” (Herman, 1992, p. 35) because she or he is on guard for signs of danger even while asleep. Children and youth need to feel safe to gain new skills and knowledge (Kohn, 2006); students are unable to learn, to practice new skills, or to have fun when constantly anticipating danger (Barnard et al., 1999; Silver Springs, 2005).

The second common consequence of trauma is repetitive and intrusive thoughts (Herman, 1992). Hence, children who experience war and violence often have difficulty concentrating in school (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996). Younger children who are unable to remember or to articulate their experiences will show their fears through repetitive and aggressive play with peers. Arroyo and Eth (1996) concluded that such behaviour would likely invite disciplinary action by teachers and social ostracism by peers, which could hurt a child’s social development. Youth who try to regain a sense of control by becoming the perpetrator are further alienated in their educational institutions and society in general (Marans et al., 1996).

The third common characteristic of trauma is numbing or dissociation (Levine & Kline, 2006). Analogous to animals that freeze, a person who is completely powerless may go into a state of surrender and escape from the situation by altering her or his state of consciousness (Herman, 1992). This defence mechanism of repressing thoughts and feelings is used by many people who have experienced “unspeakable and unthinkable nightmares of social violence” (Gampel, 2000, p. 60). The temporary success of numbing as a coping strategy can lead to long-term, negative results. Garrod, Smulyan, Powers, and Kilkenny (2002) presented the case study of Phuoc; he shares his personal remedy of replacing “gut-wrenching feelings of guilt, sadness, and animosity with apathy and insensitivity,” which led him to feel like a machine unable to feel sympathy, sadness, and joy (p. 300). A traumatized person who cannot spontaneously dissociate might try to reproduce similar numbing effects by using alcohol or narcotics (Beiser, 1999). Schools are understandably intolerant of risk-taking, so youth who engage in such behaviours are further isolated.

Trauma and persecution also affect the capacity of youth to interact with others. Pipher (2002) surmised that trust is the first casualty of trauma. Even the most basic social interactions between parents and children can be affected because children can lose their sense of trust during times of vulnerability and fear (Levine & Kline, 2006). Children rely on adults for protection; when adults do not or cannot provide a sense of safety, children become distrustful and overly self-reliant (Watson, 2003). Mistrust becomes a survival strategy for people who experience political repression and violence (Straker, 1996), but feelings of insecurity remain long after the danger has passed (Hrubes, 1999). The feelings of mistrust and insecurity create a barrier to developing healthy relationships (Nadeau & Measham, 2006). Without trust, youth have difficulty self-identifying when asked either about personal needs or to openly express experiences of trauma (Feldman, Bensing, de Ruijter, & Boeije, 2007; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007).

Moving beyond the pain of the past and planning for the future is often a very difficult concept for youth who have experienced persecution and forced migration. People who have suffered trauma assume they will come to an early demise (Barnard et al., 1999; Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996; Herman, 1992). Deng (2006), one of the lost boys of Sudan, wrote, “I was not able to see very far into the future since I thought it was the end of my world” (p. 71). People who cannot think about the future become nostalgic and focus on the past (Beiser, 1999). The accumulation of stress after the traumatic event further reduces the ability to be hopeful (Dudley-Grant & Etheridge, 2008) and increases the child’s chance of succumbing (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996; Garrod et al., 2002). For older youth, dropping out of school can provide an initial sensation of energy and empowerment; however, with the realization that few options exist, feelings change to a sense of hopelessness and despair (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995).

Trauma is very difficult to quantify because of the cultural understanding of events, the continued functioning of people, and the delayed onset of symptoms. Investigations may show low numbers of people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) if the studies are done in the first few years after arrival; the challenges to mental health might appear years later (Beiser, 1999). The effects of trauma on children are particularly difficult to assess. Beiser, Armstrong, Ogilvie, Osman-Martinez, and Rummens (2005) reported rates of post-traumatic stress as high as 50% in refugee youth, yet they pondered why the rates are not 100% “assuming that all refugee children have been exposed to horror” (p. 23). This sentiment is shared by Green (2007), who stated that children can be indirectly affected by the torture of a significant family or community member and “any degree of involvement should be cause for concern” (p. 269). However, survivors often go untreated “because post-traumatic symptoms are so persistent and so wide-ranging, they may be mistaken for enduring characteristics of the victim’s personality” (Herman, 1992, p. 49). The absence of outward signs of trauma does not guarantee the absence of trauma; as Beiser (1999) explained, suppression of the past may be a good coping skill but “those who suppress eventually remember” (p. 140).

The theory of remembering was demonstrated when CBC Radio One presented Dina Babbitt’s emotional story of survival (Sheppard, 2008). Babbitt, a nineteen-year old at the time, and her mother were able to survive in Auschwitz because of Babbitt’s artistic proficiency. Ordered by Joseph Mengele to record in colour what could not be captured on film, Babbitt painted the pictures of Roma children before they were sent to the gas chambers. The artist recounted how she tried diligently to put those years behind her as she migrated first to Paris and then to California. Years later, as a happily married new mother, observation of an autopsy unsettled her seemingly balanced life. At home, Babbitt restrained herself by pressing her head against a cold window until the urge to replicate the autopsy on her own child had passed.

Babbitt’s experience demonstrates several theories. First, it supports Herman’s (1992) theory that traumatic events produce profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal and emotion. Second, it brings to light Suárez-Orozco’s (2000) position regarding the potential for recurring waves of symptoms over a long period of time. Third, it helps to dispel what Stien and Kendall (2004) called “the naive assumption” that children are immune to post-traumatic stress.

2.1.3 STRUGGLES WITH IDENTITY

The influence of forced migration and resettlement on the identities of youth is complex. Taking a constructionist approach, identity is understood as the meaning asserted from within groups and assigned from those outside the group in circumstances that result in identities being “built, rebuilt, and sometimes dismantled over time” (Cornell & Hartman, 2007). In addition, the social construction of race and ethnicity intersects with factors such as class, gender, and age in complex and dynamic productions of identity (James, 2001). Cultural expectations and norms have an immense influence on the development of identity. Consequently, immigrant and refugee youth are in a particularly tenuous position because they are often caught between the values of school culture and parents’ expectations (Rousseau et al., 2004). The work of Suárez-Orozco (2000) illustrated how the dissonance between the new culture and home culture can cause youth identity confusion. The author described how youth may reject their home culture while striving to become integrated into the dominant culture. This may cause youth to devalue their parents’ authority and even feel shame for less-adapted parents. Conversely, youth feeling discarded by school and by the economy may reject the dominant culture.

The task of building a new identity in the country of resettlement is further complicated by premigration trauma. Survivors of human rights violations report feelings of alienation and estrangement not only from others but also from self (Kirmayer, 2002). Without an understanding of the self, learners will have difficulty understanding the diversity of the world and thereby reduce engagement in learning activities (Freeman et al., 2002). A further cause for concern is that a fragmented sense of identity may leave youth susceptible to external events (Cote & Levine, 2002, as cited in Schwartz, Pantin, Prado, Sullivan, & Szapocznik, 2005).

2.1.4 SOCIAL CHALLENGES

Immigrants and refugees new to Canada have a small social network (McColl et al., 2008) that limits opportunities for integration and wellbeing. Without friends and acquaintances in the country of resettlement, opportunities for employment and the development of support systems are limited. Putnam’s (2000) definitions of bonding and bridging social capital are applicable to the plight of refugee and immigrant youth. While bonding social capital can be supplied by family and ethnic community, it tends to be exclusive by nature. Without moving beyond this realm, newcomers do not develop what Putnam called “weak ties,” which put people in touch with those who can provide employment and support. Remaining unconnected to community supports is one of the major barriers to immigrant and refugee wellbeing (United Nations Association in Canada, 2007).

In North America, there are great disparities in the use of mental health services by multicultural minorities compared to the dominant population (Norris & Alegría, 2008). “Most refugees, immigrants and their children do not seek psychological support before finding themselves in deep or acute crisis. Those who receive psychotherapy, mental-health care and other support seldom stay on to complete it” (Kristal-Andersson, 2001, p. 16). Newcomers who have experienced organized violence avoid mental health services because the services are not always culturally sensitive (Rousseau, Lacroix, Singh, Gauthier, & Benoit, 2005; White,

Tutt, Rude, & Mutwiri, 2001). Currently, counselling is largely based on a Western biomedical approach because Euro-Canadians have been the dominant culture. As Breton (1999) stated, “there are groups whose status in society is enhanced by policies that endorse their system of beliefs, lifestyle, and cultural traditions, while, by the same process, the status of others is diminished” (p. 297).

The debate regarding depression as a culturally relative and ethnocentric concept is ongoing. As Beiser (1999) clarified, “[c]ulture did not create the symptom pattern: it created its definition. Culture also affects packaging” (p. 70). Cultures determine how reality is codified in language and images (Marsella et al., 2008). Religious and cultural beliefs set standards for what is permissible to speak about and define the consequences for not following the standards (Green, 2007). Pipher (2002) explained that emotional pain in many cultures is commonly expressed somatically, and the Western mental health system that requires verbalization and self-disclosure “splits the personal and the professional, the sacred and profane, and the mind and the body” (p. 282).

Comparisons are often drawn between individual- and community-oriented cultures. Unlike Western values based on individualism, Levine (1997) wrote, “Shamanistic cultures view illness and trauma as a problem for the entire community, not just for the individual or individuals who manifest the symptoms” (p. 57). The difference between individual- and community-oriented cultures also influences where people seek help. While people with an individualistic orientation may prefer the emotional distance of Western-style counselling, community-oriented people may prefer to go to family first. “Cultural norms for seeking help may dictate efforts to seek assistance from other family members, elders, community leaders and indigenous or religious healers” (Arthur & Merali, 2004, p. 358). Many cultures do not accept directly disclosing trauma, but follow customs regarding the use of euphemistic speaking. Conversely, North American counselling methods, based on the work of Freud, encourage complete disclosure typically conducted with a neutral, emotionally-unattached professional (Watters, 2010).

Mental health and adjustment are greatly influenced by the absence of a sense of belonging. Suárez-Orozco (2000) explained how prejudice and discrimination, which she referred to as “social traumata,” can affect the mental and social adjustment of newcomers to the new country. Without a sense of belonging, youth feel like strangers and that society is not their society (Breton, 1999). Kazemipur (2004) believed that bonding social capital is needed on a national level to improve the inclusion of newcomers to Canada.

People look elsewhere for acceptance when they do not feel wanted or appreciated (Ujimoto, 1999). As Bruner (1996) warned, when family or school do not offer youth support, “there are alienated countercultures that can” (p. 41). Garbarino and Kostelny (1996) warned that children and youth who are not offered a framework to process their experiences are “likely to be drawn to groups and ideologies that legitimize and reward their rage, fear, and hateful cynicism” (p. 47). This can lead youth to “construct spaces of competence in the underground and alternative economies,” including gang activity (Suárez-Orozco, 2000, p. 219). Simply providing jobs is not enough to help marginalized people feel like valued members of society. Without a sense of belonging, former gang

members are drawn back to the groups that offer what mainstream society does not (Bascunán & Pearce, 2007).

The lure of gangs, which offer a sense of belonging, social activities, and employment opportunities, is described in the August 27, 2007 issue of *Maclean's*. MacDonald reported that the gang named Mad Cowz “began targeting and recruiting youth from Winnipeg’s refugee and immigrant community,” who MacDonald described as “displaced youth who have been exposed to a high degree of violence” (p. 20). In MacDonald’s interview with an incarcerated gang member, she learned that gangs recruit immigrants and refugees by watching for disillusioned youth and selling them dreams.

2.2 CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS OF IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE STUDENTS

Educators face a plethora of challenges when working with immigrant and refugee children and youth within the educational system. Teachers have limited preservice training to manage the immediate challenges of a culturally heterogeneous group of students with complicated and multidimensional educational, emotional, and familial needs (Barnard et al., 1999; Flaitz, 2006). On a broader level, teachers are negatively impacted due to few school and community supports (White, 2007) and the institutional maintenance of a colonial mentality (Giroux, 2005). The combination of high student needs and the paucity of resources makes self-care for teachers extremely important (Pipher, 2002).

2.2.1 TEACHING LANGUAGE, CONTENT, AND CULTURE

The diverse nature of the premigration experiences of refugee and immigrant youths presents a variety of concerns for teachers. Meeting the academic needs of youth with interrupted or no first language education creates considerable challenges when students must learn language and subject content simultaneously (Pirbhai-Illich, 2005). Teachers who have little experience with immigrant and refugee children “may have difficulty distinguishing between the adjusting child and the failing child” (Westermeyer & Wahmanholm, 1996, p. 100).

The tasks faced by teachers of marginalized students are far more complex than simply teaching language. Teachers are cultural brokers who help youth feel respected for their strengths while gaining the language and life skills they will need to be successful (Pipher, 2002). Most teachers are not trained therapists, yet they are faced with a delicate balance of when to talk about trauma and when to be silent (Rousseau et al., 2005). The loss of familiar language, social, and non-human environment that typically support fragile identities may cause students to regress to previous stages of development (Robben & Suárez-Orozco, 2000), thus causing additional provocations for teachers. Educators deal with youth who are overwhelmed with responsibility and tremendous pressure to be successful, and who resort to drugs, alcohol, or suicide as a solution (Williamson, 2006). Culturally different parents may be unaware of the challenges their children face during this time and thus may be unable to provide support (Garrod et al., 2002).

2.2.2 PAUCITY OF SUPPORT PLACES TEACHERS IN STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

Teachers searching for appropriate counselling for students will find that immigrants and refugees do not utilize formal mental health services (Norris & Alegría, 2008) and that the mental health system in Saskatchewan has not evolved to meet the needs of the emerging multicultural population (White, 2007). When newcomers do seek help, the cultural stigma associated with mental health and the paucity of appropriate services force them to turn to the people and institutions with which they feel most comfortable. White explained that newcomers seek help from the settlement agencies, where counselling is not the vocation of most of the staff and specific, grant-based programs to offer culturally-sensitive counselling for war-related trauma are short term. White noted the promise of the School^{Plus} model, in which support services are situated in schools, but lamented it is no longer discussed. Consequently, teachers become surrogate parents without a great deal of school and community support.

2.2.3 SOCIETAL CHALLENGES FOR ALLIES

Allies of the marginalized are affected by contradiction within society (Bishop, 1994). Despite the ubiquitous discussion regarding the value of diversity, immigrants and refugees are still pressured to accept a model of Anglo-conformity (Breton, 1999). White, middle class continues to be the norm against which all others are measured (Desai, 2001). Youth become disillusioned because they learn the value of equality yet are often the victims of individual and societal racism that devalues their culture of origin (Garrod et al., 2002). Academic assessment continues to focus on skills and knowledge obtained in a middle class, predominately European-based culture. Consequently, education has not become the great panacea that provides upward mobility for everyone, as John Porter had expected (Helmes-Hayes & Curtis, 1998).

Teachers with a social justice focus are opposed by coworkers who maintain a colonial mentality. As Balzer (2006) explained, without adequate anti-racist curricula in Saskatchewan to challenge existing theories, there persists an attitude among many teachers and Canadian-born students that equality means sameness, with everyone in Canada having an equal opportunity for success. Furthermore, the colonial history of Canada, which is justified in the current national narrative, silences the narratives of the Other: Aboriginals, refugees, and immigrants from countries other than the founding nations. Balzer concluded by stating “[t]he colonial narratives have imposed a consciousness conceived in a foreign place onto the educational and governmental structures of Canada” (p. 31). The results are demonstrated in the stances taken by many Canadian-born people, in what Bolaria and Li (1988) referred to as the “blaming-the-victim thesis, according to which members of the subordinate group are believed to be largely responsible for their misfortunes and the racial problems they cause, because of certain racially based ineptitudes” (p. 15). Taylor et al. (1995) theorized:

The primary danger of the ‘at-risk’ label is its tendency to shift attention away from the social conditions that place adolescents at risk and locate the risk within the adolescents themselves . . . thus reliev[ing] the larger society of responsibility for addressing the inequities of race, class, and gender that create conditions of risk. (p. 21)

White privilege continues to be a foreign concept to many teachers. Not all preservice teachers are given opportunities to challenge mainstream values and opinions. Valuing certain types of knowledge, while suppressing others, gives education students a “false claim of neutrality” without addressing ideological issues that affect teaching practices; millions of children remain illiterate or semiliterate because of their race, ethnicity, gender, or class (Macedo, 2001, p. xiii). Macedo pointed to the failure of educators to understand that their privileged position in the social order has created the conditions for youth who are at risk. He continued to explain that teachers must strive to empower their students rather than becoming paternalistic missionaries. Finally, Macedo emphasized that white teachers have a responsibility “to attack oppression at its very source, which is often white racist supremacy” (p. xxix).

2.2.4 COMPASSION FATIGUE AND DISILLUSIONMENT

Much of the advocacy work is taken up by EAL teachers who understandably become vulnerable to burnout, compassion fatigue, and disillusionment. Self-care is an important but often neglected issue for teachers working in such emotionally demanding situations. Teachers do not have the training to work with immigrant and refugee youth without putting their own health at risk (Rousseau & Guzder, 2008). As Pipher (2002) reflected, working with people who have survived atrocities, who faced seemingly insurmountable barriers in their new country, and who still struggle to support families starving in deplorable home country conditions shakes our notions of humanity and goodness. The work is uncomfortable and emotionally taxing.

2.3 FACTORS THAT AMELIORATE RISK FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE STUDENTS

Immigrants and refugees arrive with strengths and supports that promote resilience and wellbeing. Keeping in mind Norris and Alegría’s (2008) warning to generalize with caution, characteristics of resilient people are shared across cultures. Cultures have protective factors and ways of promoting wellbeing and healing (Weerackody & Fernando, 2009). Teachers and schools can also be major factors in building resilience and in creating opportunities for adjustment (Ingleby & Watters, 2002).

2.3.1 RESILIENCE

In order to avoid placing youth in a situation that requires unrealistic expectations, I acknowledge that “[c]hildren are no more and no less resilient than adults. Some are more resilient than others. The same child may be resilient to one event but react quite differently to another” (Capewell, 1999, p. 31). By examining the factors that increase the capacity of youth to be resilient, teachers and concerned adults can understand which factors cannot be created, which can be strengthened, and what can be learned. The protective factors can be categorized into personality features, family and external supports, and the child’s social and interpersonal skills (Morland, 1999).

The personality traits that buffer stressful situations include being hopeful and optimistic (Seligman, 1995), and having high self-esteem, a strong personality, and a positive outlook regarding the ability of people to take control and overcome difficult circumstances (McEwen, 2007). Children's ability to cope with the stress and crisis "is to a large extent contingent on the kind of support they receive, including the closeness of their relationships with parents and teachers, their primary caregivers" (Arafat & Musleh, 2006, p. 130). Resilience is increased by the family's ability to develop a sense of trust, problem-solving communication, and the family's shared ethnic identity (McCubbin, Ishikawa, & McCubbin, 2008). Religious beliefs and customs offer solace even under extreme pressure and help people show patience for themselves and others (Abi-Hashem, 2008). Interpersonal and social skills, including personal tools for learning and making relationships are protective factors when children find ways to solve problems, talk to others about concerns, and take appropriate action when angry or upset (Morland, 1999). Resilient people can change their coping strategies to fit the situation because protective factors are not fixed but dynamic, interpersonal, and interactive (Garrod et al., 2002).

Teachers and caregivers can increase youths' hopefulness and build resilience by recognizing adolescents as a resource (Barnard et al., 1999; Machel, 2001), providing opportunities to find positive outcomes in tragic events (Frankl, 1992; Pipher, 2002), and treating people holistically (Ngo & Schleifer, 2005; White, 2007). Early intervention can prevent psychological problems developing later in life (Morland, 1999). In return, the home, school, and community benefit; assisting marginalized children in gaining a sense of dignity and hope for the future is akin to building the infrastructure of a society (Yunus, 2007).

2.3.2 CULTURAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF HEALING

Culture is good medicine. People are more open to Western ways if traditional culture is recognized and included (DeGagné, 2007). Moreover, culture shapes the way people respond to interventions (Dettlaff, Thomas, Cohen, & Buehler, 2008; Kristal-Andersson, 2001; Watters, 2010). Traditional ways of healing found in the literature include maintaining a relationship with deceased ancestors (Bemak & Cheung, 2004; Wessells & Monteiro, 2004); taking a community approach to counselling (Nash, Wong, & Trlin, 2006); using special teas and combinations of food, or consulting a herbalist, to restore yin and yang (Tan, Ford-Jones, MacDonald, Mahoney, & Onyett, 1999); participation in drama and art (Hickling, 2007); as well as family council meetings, consultations with transnational family networks, and traditional storytelling (Nadeau & Measham, 2006).

2.3.3 TEACHERS AS ALLIES

As I explained above, many immigrant refugee youth arrive with culturally different epistemologies that influence the understanding of trauma. Because the Western style of counselling is unfamiliar, teachers become a trusted ally with whom youth share stories. Although teachers are not therapists, what we do can be healing (Pipher, 2002). The writings of Freire (2001) expressed the struggle of teachers who work with marginalized students:

The fact that I may not be a therapist or a social worker does not excuse me for ignoring the suffering or the disquiet that one of my students

may be going through. However, I cannot ethically or professionally pretend to be a therapist even if, on account of my humanity and my capacity for empathy and solidarity, that very humanity is in itself therapeutic. (p. 128)

Allies of marginalized people create situations of healing and hope by addressing issues of oppression and unearned privilege (Bishop, 1994). Teachers can create an atmosphere of trust and caring in which students share their stories, reflect on their current situation, and set goals for the future as part of the learning process (Silver Springs, 2005; Wilson, 2008). Teachers are influential in developing optimism in children and youth (Seligman, 1995).

Unlike counsellors of the Western world, teachers concerned about developing a milieu of wellbeing need not stay emotionally detached from students. In the training of mentors to assist refugees and immigrants in adjusting to life in the Netherlands, Logger and Enrum (2006) recommended the mentor not stay at a professional distance because “empowerment can only be based on reciprocal trust” (p. 65). The authors stated that even when understanding does not lead to agreement, the search to understand each other creates mutual trust. With children, building trust should be at the heart of teaching, and Watson (2003) encouraged teachers to spend non-stressful time with students, to make home visits, and to openly show caring, concern, and affection for youth.

Teachers and adult allies create successful programs where a ritual nature and atmosphere of respect for youth provide a safe space for the expression and validation of trauma (Rousseau et al., 2005). Constructing this consistent, respectful atmosphere requires the establishment of a structured process where listening to others is emphasized as akin to receiving a gift (Williams, Labonte, & O'Brien, 2003). Safety is particularly important to those who have suffered persecution, so organizers of narrative projects must establish participants' control over the decision to share their stories and the choice to remain anonymous to the public (Tabar, 2007). The sense of competence, control, and belonging can reduce feelings of marginalization in youth (Suárez-Orozco, 2000).

2.3.4 SCHOOLS AS PLACES OF WELLBEING

In lieu of individual counselling, preventative and curative measures in the form of discussion groups, recreational activities, and art programs based on constructivist epistemologies can create a healing atmosphere (Kristal-Andersson, 2001; Machel, 2001; McEwen, 2007). Schools are logical places for programming because they are the primary settlement agency for immigrant and refugee youth (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Wilkinson, 2002). Most importantly, youth develop a sense of safety in schools where students are respected and trusting relationships are built between students, teachers, and administration (Aronowitz, 2001).

Machel (2001) recommended school-based programs that help children and youth understand how their war-related experiences continue to affect their lives long after the fighting has stopped. Schools are often the most stable and consistent entity in the lives of newcomer children and youth. The familiar nature and networks of schools make school-based interventions preferable (Arroyo & Eth,

1996). Barnard et al. (1999) recommended an educational approach to building resilience by working with small groups of children and youth in a normal setting, listening uncritically and respectfully, incorporating narrative and storytelling methods, and including support from family and peers while minimizing support from professionals. Alternative recovery can take place if schools focus on the social processes and people's inner resources and use words such as "networking, empowerment, and activism rather than rehabilitation and cure" (Straker, 1996, p. 27). Kristal-Andersson (2001) concluded that community-based programs, which build on newcomers' individual strengths while focusing on the similarities between people, have the potential to prevent and to counteract discrimination, racism, and prejudice.

Many of the suggestions made by psychologists, researchers, and teachers in the previous section regarding schools as places of wellbeing are reflected in the terms of student engagement set out by Saskatoon Public Schools. The theory that underpins the school system's collegiate renewal is that students will be engaged when learning provides relevance, a sense of belonging, potency, and competence (Saskatoon Public Schools, 2008). This dovetails well with the perspective that cultural, social, and personal factors can become tools for children and youth to succeed or to be resilient (Carswell & Carswell, 2008). The terms of engagement also run parallel to the perspective that opportunities ameliorate risk (Garbarino, 2008; Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996), which thereby provides the overarching justification to explore opportunities for immigrant and refugee students with regard to literacy development, personal empowerment and agency, and building social capital. Narratives or storytelling are the common threads that run throughout these areas of development.

2.4 STORYTELLING FOR LEARNING AND CHANGE

Three thousand years of storytelling can be traced on six continents (Edwards & Sienkewicz, 1990). Across cultures, stories are used to teach powerful lessons and to shape human development. "Science, religion, proper behaviour, community tradition and history are taught and learned through narratives in many communities" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 292). Simply put, stories emphasize who we are and how we relate to one another as friends, family, and citizens (King, 2003). Due to the universal nature of storytelling, narratives provide a relevant method of encouraging literacy (Dyson, 1994). Furthermore, telling stories can help make meaning of past events as well as build community and a sense of belonging (Heath, 1994; Williams & Labonte, 2003). Therefore, telling and writing stories is relevant for refugee and immigrant youth in terms of literacy development, enhancing wellbeing by understanding the meaning of personal and collective experiences, empowerment, and moving toward the future.

2.4.1 EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

Because everyone has a story, narratives provide a relevant purpose for language learning. In fact, "many educators believe that personal storytelling can serve as an effective bridge into schooling and early literacy" (Miller & Mehler, 1994, p. 39). In an optimal literacy class, teachers consider the students' cultures and

experiences in addition to language development and motivation (Freeman et al., 2002; Klinger, 2010); writing stories brings culture into the classroom and makes learning engaging. Although stories of individual students' lives rarely receive attention in classrooms, these personal stories do more to shape everyday learning than the tales of faraway events, ancestors, and places (Heath, 1994). Learning becomes relevant by connecting these stories to history and to contemporary politics (Fine et al., 2007).

2.4.2 EMOTIONAL CHANGE

“We constantly tell stories about ourselves to others and ourselves, and the stories shape who we think we are” (Johnston, 2004, p. 30). Accordingly, narratives can help refugee and immigrant youth work through the challenge of establishing identity in a new country. Newcomers face the conundrum of incorporating enough of what is uniquely Canadian to get along in society without losing themselves in the process (Beiser, 1999); the most successful option is for youth to become bicultural. When youth become cultural brokers, they can mediate the conflicting aspects of the home and new cultures (Suárez-Orozco, 2000).

Narratives contribute to this protective effect in two ways: youth can explore identities and blend personal stories with those borrowed or shared with groups to which they belong (Rousseau et al., 2004). Shared identity is transmitted in cultural narratives and mythical stories of adversity, survival, healing, and self-transformation (Rousseau et al., 2005; Wilson, 2008). Williams, Labonte, and O'Brien (2003) wrote that one of the goals of storytelling is to strengthen connection to identities, cultures, and values. The authors described how a Maori cultural advisor helped Williams and the immigrant women in the study understand that storytelling can be about reconnecting with identities and retrieving a sense of wholeness after experiencing the loss of land, family, and identity when moving to another country.

Narratives can move the teller forward in life through the process of understanding the behaviours of others, explaining past experiences, and creating the “what if” scenarios that help with decision making (Polkinghorne, 1988). The author summed up by saying:

Narrative is a form of “meaning making” . . . Narrative recognizes the meaningfulness of individual experiences by noting how they function as parts in a whole. . . . These productions display the meaningfulness of events for human existence. One's own actions, the actions of others, and chance natural happenings will appear as meaningful contributions, positive as well as negative, toward the fulfillment of a personal or social aim. (p. 36)

The need to make sense of the past and live for the future is passionately recounted in Frankl's (1992) narrative of his horrific experiences in Auschwitz and the tremendous struggle to re-establish his life in post-war Austria. As Frankl theorized, people's search for meaning is an instinctual drive and a primary motivation in life.

An essential factor in personal empowerment is developing a sense of hope. Beiser (1999) explained that pragmatic people focus on the present while optimistic people focus on the future. Therefore, empowerment is aided by critically examining the past yet focusing on the present and the future. Founding stories offer youth adaptive strategies to face challenges and to develop a sense of hope and agency (Johnston, 2004; Rousseau et al., 2004). Johnston wrote that the heart of a good narrative is a character who faces a problem and solves it by acting strategically. The author also explained that planning for learning puts youth in control because “planning is imagining a possible agentive narrative” (p. 33).

Logger and Enrum (2006) measured empowerment by determining if the participant has regained control over his/her own story or autobiography, which shows the participant’s skills and qualities to himself/herself and others. The authors recommended that empowerment should be practised within a framework that includes psychological, social, cultural, and economic aspects. Using Freire’s pedagogical theories, Logger and Enrum assisted refugees and immigrants to first understand the social, economic, and political situations that put people in a position of powerlessness, and second, to realize the beneficial combination of critical reflection and action. As Garrod et al. (2002) asserted, insight must be combined with action to maintain a sense of hope.

2.4.3 SOCIAL CHANGE

Narratives and storytelling activities can be used to assist immigrant and refugee youth to rebuild supportive, trusting relationships. Increasing social capital and attachment within schools has many benefits because making supportive friendships and taking part in community activities are important factors in healing trauma (Pipher, 2002). A greater sense of school belonging is associated with lower depression and higher self-efficacy in youth, regardless of the level of past exposure to adversities (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). For students with developing literacy needs, a supportive learning community is a powerful force to encourage the risk of learning to read and write (Freeman et al., 2002; Heller, 1994). Telling stories with adolescents involved in a drama therapy workshop was demonstrated to strengthen the ties between the participants, to help the students feel less lonely with the realization that others share similar stories, and to engage in group collaborative problem solving to create alternative endings for their narratives (Rousseau et al., 2005).

Narratives play a large role in empowerment through social change. One method of taking action is contributing to public discourse in an effort to raise awareness. Telling stories that have been silenced is an empowering act (Nafisi, 2010), and youth who have been silenced can have great insight into the need for bearing witness (Zunti, 2002). The narratives of refugee and immigrant youth have the potential to be used as a learning tool to assist Canadians to understand the plight of those who have experienced interrupted education and forced migration. The ultimate goal is to increase empathy by helping members of the dominant culture acknowledge cultural and social diversity while recognizing the individual attributes of newcomers (Tan et al., 1999).

Heath (1994) suggested that “this role of story as a way of explaining and of prompting others to new perceptions makes special sense for those who see

their experiences as somehow marginal, as lying outside the mainstream of their associates” (p. 215). Rather than teachers, researchers, or those without immigration or refugee experience advocating for change, including a variety of voices is important as is valuing the everyday as a source of agency and empowerment (Giroux, 2005). Gunderson (2000) concluded that researchers must include voices of the teenage diasporas because teachers need an understanding of the students’ cultures and experiences; without that knowledge, youth will continue to fail.

2.4.4 IT CAN BE DONE: EXAMPLES OF STORYTELLING FOR CHANGE

Storytelling as social activism has been used as a means of empowerment in many situations. Research with marginalized groups in Jamaica showed that engagement in activities such as oral traditions, storytelling, and the use of the circle results in change of perspective and sharing of authority (Hickling, 2007). In Chicago, an organization entitled Bridging Refugee Youth and Children’s Services posted the mission statement: “to foster inclusive communities through oral history, writing, and art programs that improve student learning, affirm identity, and enhance cross-cultural understanding” (http://www.brycs.org/youtharts/ya_arts_programs.htm). Williams et al. (2003) helped immigrant women in New Zealand raise awareness and advocate for better housing. In the Congo, a narrative project for women recommended the implementation of microfinancing for projects to protect young women from entering the sex trade; the women also told their stories of being HIV positive so that other women could avoid such a scenario (Pavlish, 2005). The success of the Congolese women’s project and the recognition of little research in this area prompted Pavlish to recommend that those “researching disenfranchised social groups can employ community-based, participatory methods to incorporate people’s stories and encourage participation in the process of social change” (p. 16).

A Canadian example of empowerment through storytelling to make social change is found in an online article entitled “Bringing BC’s Communities Together”. In this report of the positive involvement of immigrant and refugee youth with sports, the unnamed writer recounted how the youth were determined to continue the program and presented a heartfelt plea to school officials to maintain funding. Despite their reported nervousness, the youth told their stories of adversity leaving countries such as Haiti, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and the opportunities and incentive that sport produced. The stories brought the board members to tears, demonstrating the great power of hearing stories first-hand. This project enhanced the basketball community, empowered the youth to advocate for themselves, and brought social awareness regarding the difficulties of newcomers to Canada.

Chapter Three:

Methodology and Research Design

This chapter is divided into two main sections: methodology and research design. In section one, I extrapolate on my rationale for choosing participatory action research (PAR) for this study. This section is divided into three subsections: the personal, which is the theoretical perspective that guides my life; the political, which is the justification for research in the pursuit of social justice; and the pragmatic, which are reasons for conducting classroom research that are cogent to my life as a teacher. The second section is an outline of the research design beginning with a subsection describing the setting and participant selection. The second subsection on data collection is more detailed due to the use of various methods, including group discussions/focus groups, digital storytelling, and personal interviews. The final subsection justifies the process of data analysis, which reflects the theories of youth empowerment.

3.1 METHODOLOGY

3.1.1 MY PERSONAL THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Choosing a methodology reaches into the investigator's assumptions about reality and makes a statement regarding her/his theoretical perspective for the context (Crotty, 1998). As I am a constructionist/constructivist, I do not judge criteria on validity or reality. I am more concerned about how youth make meaning of social phenomena, namely the immigration experience, and what is useful for action (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The process of making meaning in a local context is more important to me than the ability to generalize the data because my research goal is to explore our educational problems, to promote wellbeing, and to build student confidence and capacity to make changes (Forrester & Ward, 1992; Hughes, 2003; Ship, 2001). I have chosen to develop a participatory action research study because the goals of education, empowerment, and taking action are equally as important as collecting data (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). This notion is supported by Fine et al. (2007), who advised that the methodology must match the epistemological and philosophical standpoint of the researcher to prevent the research becoming superficial and patronizing.

Participatory action research meets my need to openly state my subjectivity as I enter the research process. According to Giroux (2005), revealing my subjectivity is not only acceptable but encouraged because critical educators working with marginal groups must move analyses and pedagogical practices away from alleged objectivity. Rather than remaining neutral as required by scientific research, PAR supports and mobilizes people to bring about social justice, participation, and equity (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). My intention for revealing rather than avoiding my involvement is to enhance understanding by both participants and readers (Merrick, 1999). A second benefit to substituting the detached researcher model for the collaborative, flexible nature of PAR is the ability to establish trusting relationships with participants (Hughes, 2003; Johnson et al., 2008). I believe this is essential when working with youth who have lost a sense of trust due to forced migration and trauma.

3.1.2 RESEARCH AS A POLITICAL STATEMENT

Choosing a methodology is also a political statement. Taking a strong feminist stance, hooks (2004) reminded researchers to be ever mindful of colonialism and racism while seeking “to create ways to look at and talk about or study diverse cultures and peoples in ways that do not perpetuate exploitation and domination” (p. 153). It is with hooks’ advice that I embark on the research journey with a cognizance of white privilege. I am aware that despite the fact that race is based on classification of superficial, physical characteristics (Bolaria & Li, 1988) developed by British colonizers to justify their hegemony (Clement, 1998), the perpetuation of stereotypes sustains domination with the rationale that others are not deserving of equal rights and privileges (Desai, 2001). At a school level, there has been a failure to address issues of power, powerlessness, and “the norm of whiteness as an ethnic category that secures its dominance by appearing to be invisible” (Giroux, 2005, p. 89). Therefore, making social change cannot be left to policy reform and to government enactments, but must begin with awareness and by confronting personal ideologies, attitudes, and feelings (James, 2001).

Participatory action research is intended to avoid oppression through control of knowledge production and “the social power to determine what is useful knowledge” (Rahman, 1991, p. 14). Born out of a desire to involve the oppressed in advocacy of their social problems (Frideres, 1992), PAR is perfectly suited for classroom research because youth have traditionally been excluded from research (Taylor et al., 1995) and typically blamed for their failure (Mitra, 2007). Since 1990, studies using diverse methods to explore student experiences have expanded as appreciation of the capacity of youth for decision-making and reflection has increased (Beverley, 2000; Thiessen, 2007). Teacher-researchers concerned with voice “take on the serious and significant task of eliciting and presenting the experiences and views of groups on the margins, thereby helping them to move from silence and invisibility to influence and visibility” (Rudduck, 2007, p. 591). With the understanding that knowledge of society must always be from a position within it (Marsella et al., 2008; Smith, 2005), student voices must logically be the primary focus of research exploring the educational needs of immigrant and refugee youth.

Educators and researchers concerned about social justice search for alternative methodologies because schools have typically been places of colonization (McTaggart, 1992). Therefore, critical teacher-educators raise questions regarding the always-present, dominant self in the construction of the margins (Giroux, 2005). Unsettling the existing power structures and bringing about change can be initiated by choosing methodologies that empower participants (Balzer, 2006). Fine et al. (2007) suggested:

Repositioning youth as researchers rather than “the researched” shifts the practice of researching on youth to with youth, a position that stands in sharp contrast to the current neo-liberal constructions of youth as dangerous, disengaged, blind consumers, lacking connection, [and] apathetic. (p. 808)

PAR provides a foundation on which to bring about empowering change, and the process of change is paramount (Freire, 2001). Rather than taking a

paternalistic stance toward the marginalized of the world, solutions can be found by encouraging problem-solving, creativity, and independence (Yunus, 2007). Involving members of a community in identifying needs for wellbeing creates a sense of ownership and achievement (Weerackody & Fernando, 2009). Youth can develop the will and skills to make change when they are assisted by educators concerned with the affective and cognitive dimensions (Perkul & Levin, 2007). Being a strong proponent of PAR, Smyth (2007) posited that bringing marginalized students into discussions regarding school change can create climates that promote agency and a culture of independence, can develop an atmosphere of trust and inclusion, and can reduce school drop out.

Notwithstanding the benefits of PAR, I am cognizant that making a political statement through research has consequences. In the fight against oppression, contributing to social action requires taking risks because positivists and post-positivists see action as contamination (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Although PAR has gained credibility and popularity, student research is often seen as oppositional because of the open-ended form in a research milieu of carefully monitored studies (Kincheloe, 2007). However, I remain determined to pursue research that focuses on the opinions of youth and provides opportunities for students to make decisions about the process; in the pursuit of social justice, inaction is complicity (Thomas, 2001).

3.1.3 PRACTICAL, ACTION-ORIENTED RESEARCH

For teacher-researchers, action research is practical. Balzer (2006) wrote that research has been “conducted by academics for academics and was often critical of teachers, frequently inaccessible to teachers, and usually offered little that they could translate into classroom practice” (p. 103). There has been a slow change to create school-based research that is collaborative and places student voices at the centre rather than at the margins (MacPherson, 1994). The evolving nature of research has seen a growing number of studies conducted at the classroom level (Thiessen, 2007). This provides a pragmatic framework for teacher-researchers who believe it is erroneous to separate practice and theory, because teaching and research are intertwined, action-oriented, empowering, and built around the lived experiences of the students (Freire, 2001).

PAR is suitable for research in a secondary school classroom because the typical routine of the participants is changed very little. Curious, critical-thinking teachers research as part of their everyday classroom procedures, and they encourage students to do the same (Freire, 2001). PAR is an approach to inquiry and action that is “natural, human, and intrinsically sensible” (Kidd & Kral, 2005, p. 187). Classroom action research, a subset of PAR, is practical rather than idealistic (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000) because it addresses the needs and interests of the student participants. Most importantly, action research conducted in classrooms offers teachers a way to get to know student opinions and have in-depth conversations about school issues (Perkul & Levin, 2007).

PAR researcher Williamson (2006) renounced decontextualized inquiries in which “people under study” receive no benefit and find no value in the study. Although action research requires lengthy interactions, it facilitates participant-defined issues (Hughes, 2003; Weerackody & Fernando, 2009). Defenders of PAR believe that people without formal education can determine how data will be collected

and presented (Hutanuwatr et al., 1992). Youth are understood to be active agents who contribute, transform, and influence their situation and environment (Eyber & Ager, 2004). Rather than simply collaborating with students who are seen as sources of data, the students are engaged as valued members of the learning community who are capable of understanding and making decisions regarding learning priorities (Rudduck, 2007). Students also benefit from participating on an active and intellectually stimulating level, rather than being passive collaborators burned out by surveys and interviews (Lui, 2005).

“Student research is a powerful pedagogical and intellectual tool” (Kincheloe, 2007, p. 745) because students engaged in research activities have opportunities to use traditional skills that are highly valued. Besides learning reading, writing, and listening skills, students practice math, note-taking, and observing. Students are genuinely engaged in the process of research through sharing stories of everyday life, hopes, fears, joys, and sadness. As a teacher researcher, Kincheloe extolled the benefits of students working closely with a teacher to interpret social, cultural, and political influences that shape their lives. Kincheloe concluded that student research is a profoundly practical activity in which they develop identities, work for social justice, and become empowered in the exploration of issues such as power, race, class, and gender.

In Manitoba, Pekrul and Levin (2007) outlined the following philosophical and pragmatic arguments for using participatory action research with secondary students. Student participation is based on constructivist learning, which requires an active student role, because students produce school outcomes and so their involvement is critical. The framework for school improvement, which positions student learning and engagement at the centre, promotes a caring culture by incorporating the voices of students, teachers, parents, and community connections. The benefits of action research are enhancing student engagement as well as developing confidence and leadership skills in youth.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

PAR is used for this project because: a) the research addresses concerns expressed by EAL youth regarding the need for literacy programs and increasing the awareness of Canadians regarding the challenges faced by newcomer youth; b) the research naturally fits into the students’ typical learning experience; and c) the researcher need not be detached, so a sense of trust can be developed.

The positive aspects of using narratives to gather data in an ethnically diverse classroom are enhanced by the incorporation of technology. Therefore, the choices for students include media resources such as Photo Story 3 or Glogster, which are computer-based programs to tell stories with personal photos or those downloaded from sites that allow sharing; personal art work and drama recorded digitally; or the use of animation software such as Xtranormal and MARVIN. Digital storytelling provides a method that is beneficial to literacy development while generating a rich source of data for research. Technology has the ability to put traditional means of storytelling as well as art and drama in the public realm. The website www.whatkidscando.org presents numerous examples of student-driven action research. Two beliefs behind the project are: what happens in the

classroom should connect to the world, and youth have the capacity to create new knowledge.

Tettegah, Bailey, and Taylor (2007) posited that “the efficacy of vignettes reside in their ability to elicit discussion, engage diverse perspectives, foster problem-solving, promote decision-making, increase awareness of self and others, and initiate reflection” (p. 43). The process of creating digital narratives engages quiet students who do not fit the typical academic mold (Ohler, 2006). Similarly, Hathorn (2005) claimed that digital narratives not only teach media literacy but engage students of all ages because they are actively involved in constructing their own learning while presenting stories about their own lives and cultures. The author described DUSTY (Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth), which “aims to foster literacy through providing a technological setting for the inner city child to create narrations of self, which will lead to a more positive self image and negate negative, destructive behavior” (p. 34).

Although creating digital narratives could be considered a solitary process, building community within this environment is also possible. Ohler (2006) described how he guides his students through oral storytelling before beginning the process of story mapping and group discussion, which culminates in a digital representation. In our previous class work with digital storytelling, students acted as technical advisors, editors, and personal cheering sections. Oftentimes, the students who talked least in class became the keenest users of technology and guided others with less technical experience. Students with low levels of first language education enjoyed the success of creating beautiful and creative computer-based presentations that they proudly shared with the class.

Digital storytelling might alleviate concerns about the students’ stories being seen as truthful. This is a concern raised by youth who claim that Canadians do not believe newcomers’ stories of persecution and violence. Understandably, stories of genocide are probably beyond the imagination of a person with little knowledge of forced migration, and may be perceived as exaggerations. Listeners may also be concerned that what the student presents may not be his or her first-hand experience, thus invalidating the story as with the controversial testimonial of Rigoberta Menchú. Different cultures have different rules regarding story ownership, which may cause misunderstandings. Presenting the stories in a digital format may reduce any sense of suspicion on the part of the listener/reader as writers commonly expand on historical facts to present a point. As Dyson (1994) suggested, “[a]uthors not only play with the boundary between the real and the imagined, they also play with social and cultural lines influenced by age, status, sex, class, race, ethnicity, and on and on” (p. 168).

Heeding the advice of Reicher (2000), I will not try to summarize participants’ experiences, because my focus is discursive action, but instead will make the original narratives available. From a social constructionist standpoint, I have little interest in proclaiming the truth. This project was about our truth and what we learned together. The criteria for judging validity are not absolutist but “derived from community consensus regarding what is ‘real,’ what is useful, and what has meaning” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 167).

3.2.1 SETTING

The research was conducted in a Saskatchewan secondary school. Due to a strong economy, this city has seen a dramatic influx in immigrant population in the last four years. Although the population of the school has remained stable at approximately 1,300 students, enrolment in the English as an additional language class has dramatically increased. The current enrolment is approximately 80 students from 26 countries, which is almost three times the enrolment in 1999. In addition, the number of students from developing countries where they have experienced interrupted education or non-academic education in technical schools has increased. Consequently, students in these situations require additional EAL classroom support. Because some students attend EAL class two or three hours a day, basing enrolment on hours of attendance is more accurate than counting individual students.

The research was conducted over one semester (five months). The majority of the data collection took place in a beginner-level EAL class with 5 students attending consistently. Other students joined the discussion and writing groups when they were not doing homework. We also had the opportunity to test the materials from the Pharos workbook *Welcome to School* with higher-level students in a different tutorial/homework help class.

3.2.2 PARTICIPANTS

All the students in the beginner level class arrived as immigrants or refugees. Four of the five students had experienced interrupted education due to forced migration or the need to work to support the family. One student had experienced a high level of violence in the country of origin as well as the second country of resettlement. The students who dropped in had also experienced interrupted education due to numerous relocations. The second group of higher-level students arrived as immigrants, had attended school regularly in their home countries, and had not experienced war.

3.2.3 GATHERING DATA

Following the theoretical standpoint of participatory action research, decisions regarding methods of data collection were made in collaboration with the participants (Park, Brydon-Miller, & Hall, 1993) because data gathering in PAR is set in a natural environment of conversation, storytelling, and reflection.

Focus groups or group discussions were conducted in class. According to Mitra (2007), asking open-ended questions allows students to speak freely and creates a participant-centred approach. Students were frequently reminded that they could “pass” on a topic.

Our conversations began with topics developed to help immigrant and refugee youth settle in the Netherlands and Britain (<http://www.pharos.nl/supernavigatie/english>). I received written permission from Bram Tuk, senior advisor at Pharos, to edit the materials for use in Canada. The topics in this program focus on the youths’ personal lives, which make language learning relevant while providing opportunities to explore the challenges of settlement in a new country. The topics include: The meaning of my name, My school in my first country and My

school in Canada, Greeting people in my first country and in Canada, People who are important to me, and Friendships. Although the materials were designed as one-hour projects, we expanded the activities to assist students in developing the language they required to adequately express themselves. We involved students in identifying their personal language needs and in building their own word banks to make learning relevant (Gunderson, 2009). Although the discussion topics were predetermined, students ascertained the direction of the discussion.

3.2.4 SUMMARY

“Careful thought is needed to explore ways in which schools can be transformed to allow children from different cultural backgrounds to operate more effectively” (Edwards & Sienkewicz, 1990, p. 209). Involving youth who have experienced interrupted education and forced migration in participatory action research is an innovative way to explore students’ educational needs, to build on the strengths of youth, and to empower youth by adding their voices to public discourse regarding the challenges faced by newcomers. Collecting data through digital narratives offers the potential for refugee youth to engage in meaningful learning activities while exploring such issues as recreating identity and dealing with forced migration. Working with peers and adult allies provides opportunities to build trusting relationships and a sense of belonging in a new country. Involvement in action research can be empowering as youth contribute opinions and insights that are typically excluded. Increasing public awareness can decrease marginalization by removing the stereotype of youth being at risk and by replacing the term with a cognizance regarding the needs of young people who want to participate in society as independent citizens.

As Australian researchers Coventry et al. (2003) posited, there is a long-term economic benefit to assisting newcomer youth, but more importantly, there is a moral obligation to do so. I believe that a major factor of this moral obligation is reconceptualizing how Saskatchewan will offer educational programs to youth who arrive with interrupted first language education due to forced migration. If education is to become the institution to overcome inequalities as John Porter envisioned in the 1960s (Clement, 1998), the concept of equality in education must be reexamined. Rather than offering the same program irrespective of ethnicity, race, and national origin (Breton, 1999), programs must consider that women, the disabled, visible minorities, and Aboriginal peoples start from different and unequal positions and thus require different rather than the same treatment to have similar opportunities (Armstrong, 1998).

Chapter Four: Student Projects

4.1 PHAROS/WELCOME TO SCHOOL WORKBOOK

A major concern while conducting this project was how to engage students by discussing their personal experiences without introducing topics that would upset or unsettle those who had experienced forced migration, violent conflict, and persecution. The creators of the Pharos workbook have provided guidelines for classroom teachers of secondary students. Concerned for the emotional wellbeing and resilience of refugee youth, psychologists in the Netherlands developed the Welcome to School Workbook with topics for discussion, writing and drawing activities, and a feedback form. The workbook was later translated for use in the United Kingdom. There is a teacher's manual with guidelines for use, timelines, and reflections of teachers who have used the program. There are also resources for elementary youth. The materials can be found at <http://www.pharos.nl/supernavigatie/english>

Since this English version includes graphics and vocabulary that relate to British culture, I approached the Pharos team to ask permission to “Canadianize” the workbook. I received a positive response to my request. This is the personal email I received.

From: Bram Tuk<b.tuk@pharos.nl>
Subject: RE: Welcome to school
To: kgeres@yahoo.com
Cc: “Ron Peek” <ronpeeknl@yahoo.com>
Received: Monday, November 16, 2009, 7:16 PM

Dear Koreen,

It's always nice to know that our school programs inspire teachers and other school staff in countries far away from the Netherlands. Because every year people from abroad seek contact, we have put most of our information in English on our website. <http://www.pharos.nl/supernavigatie/english>

If you scroll through these pages you will find more information. I suppose that this page is the most interesting for you. <http://www.pharos.nl/programma/pharos/7/227/>

In the UK in Manchester the EMA (Ethnic Minority Achievement) team did a great Job in modernising our materials. As you can see they still are using them. <http://www.mybriefing.boltontlc.org.uk/content/resources/resource.cfm?id=3283&key=&zz=20090504112241750&zs=n>

If you want to modify and/or use (part of) the programs I give permission, but we really like to be informed about your experiences and results and expect a short report of it. I also enclosed an article of Anders Hjern you can use for your PhD study. This article more or less forms the theoretical fundament under our programs.

I really hope you will be able to integrate (parts) of Welcome to school in your curriculum.

Kind regards
Bram Tuk

With the technological expertise of Myron Glova, a Canadian version that can be used as a word document was produced. Rather than printing pages, students can key in their responses and save the document. If you would like to access our Canadian version, please contact me at kgeres@yahoo.com. I will give you a password to Google Documents where you can find the first section of the workbook, the article by Anders Hjern, and a PowerPoint by Bram Tuk.

The first topic in the workbook was used to open a milieu of sharing as students explained the meanings of their names. This proved to be an engaging activity for all the students who eagerly explained who chose their names as well as the literal and symbolic meanings. The relevance of this topic was further demonstrated when a student, who had returned to the classroom to use the computer, came to sit by my desk at the end of the period. He wanted to tell me the meaning of his name. I was surprised because I had not noticed he was listening to our discussion. After telling me the beautiful story of his grandfather naming him, he told me he wanted to be called by that name rather than the English name someone had given him when he arrived in Canada. Although I had known this student for two years, I had not heard this story, and I had no idea that he did not like his English name.

The workbook topics also opened up conversation about traumatic experiences. This is an excerpt from one page of the Welcome to School Workbook completed by a student in our beginner class. Although the topic was culturally appropriate greetings, the student included experiences with soldiers. This leads me to conclude that students will write and speak about the issues that are important to them if they are given the permission and opportunity to do so.

GREETINGS BETWEEN TWO MEN:

- In Canada: pat on the shoulder, shake hands
- In my country: wave your hand
- In Canada If I go home and my friend say go play skates and my friend say shake my hand so hurt.
- In [second country] shake my hand. He shake my hand so hurt but I say can I try and he run away.
- In [country of origin] we can't shake hand but the...soldier coming my house and we hiding.

Another example of the appropriateness of the Welcome to School topics was brought to me by our volunteer tutor. She remarked that when she worked with one student he was easily distracted and had difficulty staying on task. When this student participated in the discussion about schools in the students' home countries, he was enthusiastic and motivated. He drew a picture of his school, the school yard, and equipment. The student eagerly explained each part of the picture and was able to stay on task for most of the class.

4.2 PHOTO STORY 3

Microsoft Photo Story 3 was the program with which we had the most success. Students can download their own photos or photos from the internet. They can also import their work from Paint. Several students wrote their names in Arabic or Urdu, took a photo of the paper and imported the photo into Photo Story 3. They added effects that made their writing look artistic and professional. Once the photos have been imported, the thumbnail slides can be easily dragged to change the order. Captions can be added, and the font can be changed as if it were a text document. Much like PowerPoint, artistic slide transitions can be added. Students can do narration of their text or hide the text. Blank slides can be inserted so titles, longer text, and credits do not interfere with photos. Download blank slides from (<http://www.windowsphotostory.com/Guides/TitleSlides/adding-a-title-only-slide.aspx>). Finally, music can be added. The program comes with some music, and students quickly discover how to download their favourite song from a flashdrive. Photo Story 3 is a free program that can be downloaded from <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/digitalphotography/photostory/default.mspx>

This simple program was easy to navigate for students with limited computer skills and English abilities. Planning the story was good practice for sequencing, categorizing, and creating the flow of content. Besides giving students the opportunities to personalize a story with photos they had taken, they could also add music from their countries of origin. The final product looked very professional, and students were very proud to present their work. Many students were reluctant to record their voices, but they seemed quite pleased when they completed such a difficult exercise. It was a meaningful task to practice pronunciation, and unlike audio tapes, Photo Story 3 saves audio in small chunks, so editing is simplified. Most importantly, the project opened up conversations between teachers and students. We talked about the reasons for choosing photos, the feelings created by different music, and most importantly, we could ask for more information about personal details students had included.

Ironically, the success of this program could also be its downfall. Since many teachers have learned how to use Photo Story 3, it has become a popular means of creating final presentations. There is a danger that it might become overused, thereby losing the motivational effect.

An issue that was brought to our attention is how to properly cite photos found on the internet. While teachers are diligent in teaching students how to cite text, many of us have taken a less stringent attitude toward citing visual material. There are many good sites that explain how visuals should be cited. This website entitled "How to Cite an Online Image" (http://www.ehow.com/how_4586049_cite-online-image.html) provides helpful information. Citing issues can be avoided by using personal photos and accessing internet sites such as Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com/>) where photos have been stored for public use. Windows Movie Maker is very similar to Photo Story 3, and it is included on newer computers.

4.3 COMMENTS REGARDING VOICETHREAD

VoiceThread is a password-protected, internet-based, interactive storytelling program. Students create stories using photos they import. They can then record a story, listen, and rerecord where necessary. The teacher can respond with written or verbal comments. Kristie Palmer, a language arts teacher, provided the following feedback after using VoiceThread in a Read to Succeed class for secondary students.

Kristie mentioned several positive aspects of using VoiceThread as a learning tool. First, it works well with students who are normally too shy or scared, or believe they don't have the ability to speak in front of the class. With VoiceThread, students have a voice. Second, by using such a program, teachers can develop a different perspective of their students. Kristie stated that when she heard the voice of a student who did not speak in class, "It was like a whole different kid." Third, the teacher can provide feedback in a way that is preferable to youth who struggle with literacy. In the final survey of the class, several students commented that they preferred verbal to written feedback. A positive aspect for educators is that teachers are able to access student work at home, track student accomplishments, and make comments. Being a part-time teacher, this was a benefit for Kristie. Finally, Kristie speculated that the VoiceThread project helped her students take baby-steps toward mastering research and computer technology. It lessened the stress of presentations, helped develop research and organizational skills, and provided a positive experience for students who had never completed a research project. For Kristie, it was an opportunity to give her students positive feedback, which she surmised her students had not frequently experienced.

There were also some challenges to using VoiceThread. When Kristie used the program two years ago, there were many difficulties getting the headset-microphones to work. Kristie stated that this was the biggest complaint and frustration of the students. This year, the librarian was a huge support to the class. She had experimented with the program, so she was able to offer guidance and troubleshoot. Kristie also commented that the librarian and literacy teacher were very helpful when working with students who were unfamiliar with computers. To get the students started and to minimize frustration, it was necessary to have one-on-one guidance. Although some students who were comfortable with computer technology were able to offer peer support, Kristie believed that the project would not have been so successful without the help of the librarian and literacy teacher. The greatest downfall of the program was that students could not keep their projects without paying a fee. Kristie explained that the school has a limited number of licenses, so some completed projects must be deleted to offer new students a license. The fee for archiving the projects was under \$10 per student, but this was beyond the means of some students.

Despite the many positive aspects of this project, Kristie cautioned teachers "not to get lost in the technology." If the technology is too challenging because of student comfort level or the reliability of a program, it may not be worthwhile. She advised educators to carefully reflect on the reason for using the technology and to determine if it is the most appropriate method.

4.4 STORYBIRD

Remember the game where one person starts a story and the next person continues to build a fictional tale with strange twists and turns. Storybird is the computer-based version of that game. The first storyteller chooses photos from a theme bank of artwork. He or she builds the story with text, and then emails it to a friend. The next person continues building the story, and sends it back.

We used this program a few times, and it was fun but time consuming. I think a better use of the program would be to stay in contact with students over the summer or lengthy absences. Find the program at <http://storybird.com>

4.5 MARVIN

Produced by Microsoft and designed to capture the attention of literacy learners in Australia, the MARVIN software offers many exciting scenarios for education. Using avatars (three-dimensional figures), learners tell stories that might be uncomfortable or even taboo to tell in person. The avatars can put into words what the storyteller presents in text. The range of avatars includes many culturally-different characters as well as animals and objects that Western society would deem to be inanimate. Any of these avatars are able to tell stories in a variety of languages and dialects (<http://www.marvin.com.au/school/>).

Our experiences with MARVIN were quite challenging. Typically, students are far ahead of me in their use of technology. Students have given me instructions on how to use PowerPoint, Movie Maker, and Prezi, but MARVIN was a little more confusing. We often had problems getting the speaking function to work, and several times students saved their work only to lose it. On many occasions, the program froze, so work was lost. There were very few students who were tenacious enough to keep trying. The Microsoft representative admits that the program is “buggy” and efforts are being made to correct these problems in the new Canadian version.

Despite these challenges, the students did produce some interesting scenarios. One story was written by a 17-year-old student from South-East Asia. The two characters she chose were created to represent Australian Aboriginal people. The male character was dressed in jeans and a sleeveless T-shirt. The female character had a long, loose skirt and a summer top. Both characters had dark complexions and bare feet. It appeared that the student chose characters that looked most like people from her country.

With the help of an educational assistant, the student constructed an interview between the two characters. The male character asked the questions, and the female answered. The student used her own English name for the female character and answered the questions using her own personal information. For example, she included her age, the size of her family, and where she worked for career/work education. Interestingly, she changed only one fact, and that was the answer to “Where are you from?” Rather than answering with the name of the student’s home country, the female character answered, “I’m from Canada.” This led me to wonder if the student was trying on an identity. Was she wondering

what it might feel like to say “I’m from Canada”? Knowing that identity formation is critical for teenagers and particularly challenging for youth who have been forced to migrate, it seemed logical that the student was exploring the feeling of being Canadian.

Since this student was not in our beginner class, we did not have the opportunity to go through the discussion process as we did with other students. However, in casual conversations, she has expressed a strong need to advocate for her displaced people. She often comments that when her English is better, she will help her country. Obviously, there is a strong tie to her homeland, and she wants to talk about the connection to the people who remain in refugee camps in a neighbouring country. However, she may be struggling with how she will become Canadian as well. As stated in the literature review, the ideal scenario is to assist youth in becoming bi-cultural.

The topic of identity formation is an area that requires further investigation and discussion with youth. It is a topic of great relevance to immigrant and refugee youth. In addition, multicultural minority youth who were born in Canada also initiated conversations on the topic of identity when they visited our class during lunch hour. These examples provide teacher-researchers with many more questions to explore with student participants.

4.6 ZUNE AS A PICTURE DICTIONARY

This project was inspired by Lee Gunderson’s recommendation to ask literacy learners what words they want to know. Gunderson explained how students choose words, the teacher writes each word on a small piece of paper, and the papers are kept in a cigar box. The theory is that the students will learn the words that are relevant to them, and they are rewarded as they see their “dictionary” grow. The concept is particularly helpful for youth who are not literate in their first language, so they are unable to look up words in a bilingual dictionary.

Microsoft’s MP3 player called Zune is my 21st century version of the cigar box. The first option is to have students produce Photo Story 3 tiles of each word they want to learn. This will allow for a picture, text, and audio. The teacher or a higher level student could record the audio section. The student could also repeat the word in his/her first language. Each tile can be saved separately using the word as a title. Another option would be to save a series of tiles under a heading such as “math vocabulary”. The tiles are then loaded on the Zune where they are automatically stored in alphabetical order. The menu of the Zune shows a thumbnail photo and the word. Students are then able to listen and learn while they are on the bus, at home doing the dishes, or wandering around the school.

The technology allows students to practice basic vocabulary in a way that does not draw attention to them. This is particularly helpful for students who are shy about their level of English. It also allows for frequent repetition. Students can also watch their “audio/visual dictionaries” grow. When the MP3 is full, word tiles that have been mastered could be stored on a common drive at school for review, as a teacher-developed project, or to share with other students.

The drawback of this project was the time it took to set up downloading capabilities at school. The first MP3 players were quite difficult to use because there were so many steps involved to load the files. The new versions are much more user friendly. The positive aspect is that one student became the computer expert and helped other students download. It was a great accomplishment for this student who arrived speaking very little. We have encouraged him to tell students how to use the technology rather than downloading for them, so he has more opportunities to speak.

We learned about a similar use of MP3s at the Celebrating Linguistic Diversity conference in Toronto. A participant in our workshop shared that she purchased small, inexpensive MP3s with a recording capability. Although these MP3s do not have the visual component, the teacher was able to record word lists for students.

For more information see the Microsoft website: <http://citizenship.microsoft.ca/articles/archive/2009/10/27/partners-in-learning.aspx>

4.7 REFLECTIONS FROM ANNA-MARIE MACKENZIE

I worked with my colleague, Koreen Geres, this past school year as she continued her project “Literacy, Healing, and Hope.” Based on her guidance, I assisted immigrant and refugee students as they shared some of their life experiences via various technologies. The students were able to learn more about available technologies, but more importantly, they were given the opportunity to share more about themselves in a safe environment.

One student, a young man from Vietnam, created a Photo Story about his country. He found images for and spoke about his culture, the significance of his name, and his hobbies in his home country. In the course of the conversations we had while he was putting this together, I learned more about him as a person, information which can help me as his teacher. He benefited by being able to clarify his identity, in some ways.

We worked with a student originally from Burma. He was nonverbal for a long time before he started to feel more comfortable and safe with us. It does take him a while to trust new people. We had a recurring guest in our class, an education professor from the University of Saskatchewan. We introduced the student to EtherPad, a now defunct website that allowed for real time interaction between multiple persons. The student and the professor, who were in the same room, started chatting via this technology. An advantage of EtherPad was that it allowed participants to edit earlier posts. The professor would respond to the student’s posts, modelling correct spelling, grammar, etc.; the student would often go back and correct his own work. Improved literacy was achieved. More importantly, the student felt comfortable sharing more about himself in this manner. He started by writing about his current life (sports he likes, where he lives, etc), but also revealed much about his feelings and his experiences. Through technology, the student was able to connect with someone in a way not possible by other means.

My time working with Koreen on this project has been excellent professional development for me. I have learned a lot from participating in Koreen's project. Now I am far more aware of the power of storytelling: giving students the opportunity to share their lived experiences in safe and creative ways. I have applied this awareness to my work with EAL students, as well as Canadian-born students. Giving students the permission and freedom to open up through writing and technology-related projects results in powerful connections and leads to healing and hope for the students.

4.8 A STUDENT JOURNAL ENTRY

A student who returned to her country of origin kept a journal as part of her English assignment. I have included two pages with her permission in order to demonstrate the emotional struggles faced by youth even though their families have chosen to emigrate.

8-4-2010

Today it's hot again. I wish to had a little rain. I remember the rainy days here. I grew up here so small to me, there is no place in [t]his homeland. Memories make me spill any attachment to this place. I can not stay because I have to go, the future and my life has changed and will changed each day.

20-4-1010

Time passed so fast, that new date was 1 month 11 day. I remember when my life there. Remember the joy and sorrow, the anger trumped. Today cloudy, making the sky gray as it want rain. The context is, what makes it taste my memory overflow, make my heart from feeling like a peaceful, settled magic again. I love the sky this, so this space, the smell of this...although I did go away or go anywhere, I still love my homeland!

4.9 STORY OF PAKISTANI AHMADIS

Just before the final exams of June 2010, two mosques in Pakistan were bombed. Many of the students in our program were greatly affected by the tragedy because of their shared religious affiliation. Some students were directly affected because they lost family members. Hearing the students' concerns and seeing the turmoil caused by such an event, we reminded the students that they could speak to a counselor if they wished. We also gave the option to have individual or group counselling. About ten girls chose to meet in our classroom with the school counselors to discuss their concerns. Some of the students were not officially part of our class, but they spent lunch hours and recreational times with us.

Later, several of the students commented that they wanted Canadians to know how this event had affected them. One student talked about writing an article for the newspaper. I offered this report as a forum, and one student responded with a writing piece. The following is the unedited work of a student who chose the pseudonym of Hania.

I'm a high school student and I'm writing this story because I want that people from other countries try to help out Ahmadi Muslims people in Pakistan.

First I will give some history about Ahmadis.

In 1976 Hazratkhalif-tul-third said after 30 years Ahmadis will spread out in the world during his Khlafat. In 1974 prime minister of Pakistan Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto said to the Pakistan's religious persons in power, jamate Ahmadiyya Pakistan is a non Muslims. In 1984 president of Pakistan wants to finish our basic rights and don't want us to go pray in mosque. In 1984 he put this ordinance on Ahmadis and ended our basic human rights.

On now he makes Muslims against Ahmadi Muslims. Our kalifa-tulmassih-fourth kalifa is blamed without any reason and people try to kill him. With his kind of plan our kalifa left the country and he moved to London.

In Pakistan president Zai-hi-haq tried to hurt Ahmadis and took away their rights. Many Ahmadis left the country as well and migrated to other countries. Mostly they moved to USA, Germany, UK and Canada. We came to Canada to live here for the same reason.

Our founder of Ahmadiyya community hazratmirza Ghulam Ahmad qadiyani informed us in 1889 our last prophet hazrat Muhammad rasuallah (peace, be, upon, him) said in his news from god that after 1400 years Muslims will spread out into 73 sects. They will fight with each other and try to kill each other. From this 72 sects known to be non-Muslims for regular Muslims.

Muhammad Rasuallah (peace, be, upon, him) said that the true Muslim will be the Ahmadi Muslims that are knows as. In 1974 this became true. About this hazratmirza Ghulam Ahmad qadiyanni told this in his books by getting all from god. He wrote down that all information for Ahmadis to remember that time.

Dr. Abdul Mannan Siddiqui was murdered at about 14:30 on September 8, 2008 in Mirpur Khas, Sindh, Pakistan. Dr. Abdul Mannan Siddiqui was 15th Ahmadi doctor killed in Pakistan for his faith.

On 28 may 2010 they attacked our two mosques in Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. They killed over 100 people at the same time in both mosques. Almost 130 people were injured with this attack in our mosques. We are always scared from these kinds of attacks in Pakistan just on Ahmadi Muslims.

In 22 July 2008 our family migrated from Pakistan to get safe. We thought our case was rejected and Canadian government reject our appeal as well and now we are going to try humanitarian to get our life's saved. Our going back to home is not safe for us.

Ahmadis have no freedom there to live, no rights, and they can't go pray in mosques. I don't want to go back home and die by their hands by getting killed from there hands just killed us here.

For more information visit this website www.alislam.org

4.10 REFLECTIONS FROM MY JOURNAL

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- Beginner students can be introduced to new software programs in a total physical response format. Students with few computer skills and beginner English have more success when working with an adult assistant.
- Students with higher level skills can work in pairs to create dialogues.
- Youth without computer skills become easily frustrated. Therefore, it is imperative that school equipment works well and the teacher can problem solve. Skills must be introduced in small, manageable segments, so students can reach mastery level before being introduced to new tasks.
- Although the Pharos lessons are designed to be completed in one to two hours, beginner students require more vocabulary to discuss the topics. Each lesson can be expanded to provide more practice.
- Refugee youth are often reluctant to share stories with classmates from more developed countries. Hearing the stories of a respected staff member who arrived in Canada as a refugee encourages the students to share.
- Our computer area does not offer enough privacy for youth to share very personal stories.
- A longer period of exploration is required to draw a strong conclusion. Because this introduction to digital storytelling has been positive, we will continue our project.

Appendix: Letter to Parents

Dear Parents,

I am writing to tell you about a project we are doing. **I am asking if you would like your student's work in the report for the Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation.**

I am doing a research study for our English as an additional language class (EAL) at Walter Murray Collegiate. I am trying to find out if high school students like to use story-telling to learn English. I am also wondering if telling stories can help newcomer youth adjust to life in Canada.

We are using story-telling because everyone tells stories. Also, I hope students will learn the words that are important to them.

The students have several choices of how they tell their stories. They can write and draw on paper. They can use the computer to make a cartoon. Also, they can write a story about photographs they have taken or found. Finally, students can make a movie. In all choices, students can use English and their first language. I will hire translators to help us.

The topics for discussion were made to help newcomer youth adjust to life in a new country. Some of the topics are:

1. The meaning of my name
2. My school in my first country. My school in Canada
3. Greeting people in my first country and in Canada
4. People who are important to me
5. Friendships

The students may share their thoughts and feelings or pass (not talk) if they wish.

At the end of each lesson, the students write about what they liked and what they did not like about this way of learning English. We will also have a sharing night for parents where students can show what they have created.

I will write about this project for the Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation. I will also write about this project for meetings and conferences. I will not say the names of the students or the name of the school. The students can give themselves different names for the report. The students can choose what stories I tell in my writing. I will not repeat any stories unless the student gives me permission.

This project has been approved by Principal Bruce Bradshaw and Dr. Scott Tunison and Saskatoon Public Schools.

You can call me for more information. My home number is 665-2421. My school number is 683-7850. My email is kgeres@yahoo.com.

Sincerely,
Koreen Geres

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