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# The Language Learning of Refugee Students in Canadian Public Elementary and Secondary Schools

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy

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THE LANGUAGE LEARNING OF REFUGEE STUDENTS IN CANADIAN PUBLIC  
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

(Spine title: The Language Learning of Refugee Students)  
(Thesis format: Monograph)

By

Hongfang Yu

Graduate Program in Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO  
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entitled:

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is accepted in partial fulfilment of the  
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Chair of the Thesis Examination Board

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigated the role that funds of knowledge play in refugee students' language acquisition and acculturation to the new school, and the support schools provided for their language learning.

This study explores theoretical frameworks related to student ecological environments, second language acquisition, and funds of knowledge that refugee students bring with them to the classroom. This qualitative research study presents a case study of four refugee students in both ESL classrooms and mainstream classrooms at an elementary school and a secondary school. Refugee students' English language learning was scrutinized through research techniques which include participant observation, interviews, and documents. Through the profiles of the four students, this study further highlights the lived experiences of students related to their English language learning. Major findings include: 1) the need to prepare teachers more fully, such as drawing on funds of knowledge and develop a deeper understanding of the challenges and needs that refugee students face; 2) the need to enhance communication and cooperation between systems around refugee students; 3) the need to provide both linguistic and social support. This study concludes with reflections on current ESL practices for refugee students and recommendations for teaching refugee students.

Keywords: refugee students, English learning, second language acquisition, elementary and secondary schools in Canada, funds of knowledge

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

*The first time I met Hassan was when the class was waiting for a classroom to be vacant. He was among a queue full of boys. Mrs. Lee took me to him, saying, "Hassan, this is Hong. Your ESL helper." He blushed and turned his back to me right away. Some other students around him laughed loudly, "Hassan need a helper! Hassan need a helper". Hassan waved his hand wildly and shouted, "I don't need a helper! I don't need a helper!" He reluctantly followed me to the office and refused to look at me and talk to me during our first session. (Field notes, 2009)*

*Interviewer: Why don't your classmates talk to you?*

*Kathy: They don't like me.*

*Interviewer: Why don't they like you? You know, you're a nice girl.*

*Kathy: My hair...*

*Interviewer: Do you feel bad?*

*Kathy: Yes. They don't like me.*

*Interviewer: You should think about areas where you are better than them. What are you better at than them?*

*Kathy: I run fast!*

*Interviewer: Yes, you see, you are good at a lot of things. You can also speak Albanian.*

*Kathy: No no, I **speak English**. (Emphasis added by researcher) (Field notes, 2009)*

*Interviewer: What funds of knowledge do refugee students bring to your math class?*

*Mr. Hill (Secondary school math teacher): Actually I haven't thought about this question much. I know the ELLs are from different countries. They speak different languages, so I encourage them to use their home languages in my class, because I think they'll feel comfortable, and it will help them understand the content better. So far I still like this idea. But other than that, I don't know. (Interview, 2009)*

### Background

Since the last century, many refugees have moved to Canada and settled here. Most of them who come to Canada in hopes of escaping wars, injustice, persecution, and beginning a new life, often encounter unexpected challenges, and what they have been through complicates their life and learning. These challenges include learning a new language, adapting to a new cultural environment, and studying at new schools. All of

these challenges can make refugees feel isolated or helpless if there is no appropriate and timely support available (Stewart, 2011).

Canada has been actively providing a helping hand to refugees for centuries. The history of Canada's help to refugees dates back to 1776 when 3,000 black loyalists "fled the oppression of the American Revolution and came to Canada" (CIC, 2012). From the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Canada accepted refugees from Scotland, Russia, Poland, and Italy. Ukrainians and people from Central and Eastern Europe came to Canada from the early 20<sup>th</sup> to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, followed by Middle Easterners, Chinese, Hungarians, and Kosovars. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, refugees are mostly Karen and Bhutanese. Today, "Each year, Canada provides asylum to more than 10,000 persecuted persons and welcomes another 12,000 refugees from abroad" (CIC, 2012). However, what needs to be recognized that Canada has her limited capacity for refugee population. Canada has offered a helping hand and at the same time, turned people away. Also, Canada has used head taxes to keep certain immigrant groups out of Canada.

The refugee population in Canada includes people of all ages. This study looks at only the refugee student population because of my own educational and research background and the widening gap between literature, research and school practice. There has been insufficient research on refugee students in Canada. This study examines refugee students' English learning experiences. Second language acquisition among ELL students is a very broad area ranging from pure linguistic research to social and cultural research. My research has more weight on the latter because I believe language learning is not just a linguistic process, but involves many other factors, such as learning environments, pedagogies, support from teachers and parents, etc. Just as L.S. Vygotsky's sociocultural

theory identifies, there are strong relationships between social interaction and children's cognitive development; that is, social interaction leads to continuous step-by-step changes in children's thought and behavior that can vary greatly from culture to culture (Woolfolk, 1998). Given this theory, second language learning involves not only learning grammatical rules especially since important goals of the learning include effective communication with native speakers. ELLs' social interactions, including interacting with peers, teachers, materials, and the school environment, all affect their language learning at playgrounds and formal classrooms. As Gass (1997) claims, languages cannot be learned in a vacuum:

Language and cognitive development are both embedded in context. That is, young children are learning about the world at the same time as they are learning language. If this is the case, one cannot hope to understand the development of grammatical knowledge unless one focuses on the way grammatical knowledge interacts with other aspects of the learning situation. (p.2)

Based on his claim, language learning needs to be connected to the outside world. He also points out that ELLs need to use the input they receive from listening and reading against their prior knowledge and examine how much they can internalize the new language elements in order to produce it in the form of speaking or writing. The spoken form of English occurs in the context of interaction between an ELL and the teacher, or English speaking peers in the school setting, while the written form communicates with the use of symbols or signs mainly.

ELL and ELD students in Ontario

In Ontario, English language learner (ELL) is the term used for both regular immigrant students and refugee students whose mother tongue is not English and who may require assistance in attaining proficiency in English (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). The provincial practical guide *Supporting English Language Learners (grades 1 to 8)*

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) recommends that the province and schools provide different types of programs for ELL students. One of the two main programs, the ESL (English as a Second Language) program, refers to the program provided for regular immigrant students while the ELD (English Language Development) program targets ELLs with little or no schooling experience. Because ELL and ELD students may have different needs, school administrators and teachers should plan, develop the program, and assess students accordingly (ibid). There is no specific program for refugee students; however, considering many refugee students come from war-torn countries, the ELD program may fit them better.

*The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001) outlines four stages of second-language acquisition and literacy development for ELD students. Because ELD students may have had limited access to formal education and have significant gaps in their education, the first stage is for them to begin to use standard Canadian English appropriately, for example, “read and comprehend simple written Canadian English” and “beginning to write, using simple structures” (p. 9). In the next stage, students are expected to demonstrate “growing confidence and use personally relevant English appropriately” (p. 10) in supported and familiar activities and contexts (e.g., school, community, and park). The third stage requires students to use English accurately and correctly in most contexts. This stage is recognized as the longest in the language-acquisition process. Students at this stage “use a more extensive vocabulary with greater accuracy...[and are] able to use reading and writing skills to explore concepts in greater depth, even though their (academic English) proficiency is still developing” (p. 10). At the last stage, ELD students demonstrate the skills needed to

perform grade-appropriate reading and writing tasks, which means they are able to cope with study as their peers do.

The differences between ESL and ELD students in the second-language acquisition and literacy development stages outlined by the *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8* (2001) lie in the goals and the use of the language. The goal for ESL students is to use “English with a proficiency approaching that of first-language speakers” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 9), while ELD students need to master enough academic English to handle school work. For ESL students, the last stage is the longest in the language-acquisition process, when students are becoming able to use reading and writing skills to explore concepts in great depth. ESL students are expected to use English independently in most contexts at stage 3 while ELD students are only expected to use English more accurately and correctly than at stage 2. Stage 3 for ESL students is a stage when they learn to participate more fully in class activities, and use newly acquired vocabulary to function in tasks like retelling, explaining, and comparing. They read independently and use writing for a variety of purposes. ESL students at the first stage are expected to use English for survival purposes and make connections between the words and the meanings, while ELD students begin to read and comprehend the new language. From the brief review, we can see that the stages for ESL and ELD students in language development are different, so it is necessary for teachers and schools to learn about the differences before providing education for ELLs.

#### Challenges facing refugee students

There are many challenges that refugee students face after they enter a school.

Refugee students may have missed important language development stage. According to

Brown, Mille and Mitchel (2006), when refugee students' schooling is interrupted, they actually are missing cognitive development in language learning and the language of classrooms which incorporates "particular ways of being and behaving, a great deal of prior knowledge, along with cultural expectations and understandings" (p.153). Refugee students' initial adjustment and resettlement in the new context are affected by several factors (Yau, 1995):

- Coping with a whole new language and culture;
- Post-traumatic stress and an on-going sense of fear;
- Precarious residency status and endurance of long bureaucratic processes;
- Disintegration of family units;
- Financial difficulties;
- Frequent relocations;
- Cultural disorientation. (p. 23)

Refugee children may have strong psychological and emotional needs (Rutter, 2001). They may have undergone many unpleasant events in their journey to the host country. These events may add up to loss, trauma, and change. Refugee children may have lost their parents, brothers and sisters, and extended family members, or they may have lost their home, and their toys. But perhaps the most serious loss is that they have lost their familiar surroundings. With regards to trauma, refugee children may have experienced or witnessed war, bombing, injury, torture, etc. Then they may experience major cultural and linguistic change in the new environment. Research has recognized that unpleasant life experiences compound the difficulties that refugee children have in acculturation and language learning process and create issues for their academic success (Collier, 1995;



Rutter & Jones, 1998; Fantino & Colak, 2001). Coelho (1998) reported that some refugee students became mentally withdrawn in class, took an aggressive attitude to peers, or found it hard to concentrate on class content. There are also studies showing if students have experienced wars, they require more support for their mental health (Pryor, 2001); however, their specific needs are often ignored at school (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999).

English language learning has been considered the biggest challenge for ELL students, and more importantly, it is very closely related to their school success. The provincial *Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) identifies that “[school boards must support ELLs to help them] develop the proficiency in English that is necessary for success in school” (p. 10). The provincial practical guide *Supporting English Language Learners (grades 1 to 8)* recognizes second language learning as an important means to ELL students’ academic achievements: “Their (ELLs’) academic achievement and social integration are far more important (than second language skills). Second-language learning, therefore, needs to be recast as a means to greater ends” (p. 10). For refugee students, they may lack not only English language before their arrival to Canada; they may also lack formal education such as first language literacy or the concept of school routines. Their difficulties in transferring first language acquisition skills to second language learning, the learning of mainstream subjects, and adjustment to a new educational system pose pressures on schools and teachers. The academic success of refugee students is not at all certain and may be compromised because of their background experiences. They often fall into the low-success group at school. They display high rates of low self-esteem, academic underachievement and an elevated

dropout rate (Baker, 2000; Baldwin, 2005; Gunderson, 2000; Watt & Roessingh, 2001). According to Watt & Roessingh (2001), in Canada, students who come with no prior English support have a 90% drop-out rate in high school. A 1991-92 Secondary School Student Survey in Canada shows that although refugee students were more or less at par with other immigrant or Canadian-born students academically, they occupy a higher at-risk rate (e.g. dropouts), especially for those who enrolled later in a school year (Yau, 1995).

#### The role of schools

Schools play an enormously important role in supporting ELL students' academic success. Successful education for ELLs, according to Coady et al (2003), means "the academic and social development of each student is supported in culturally and linguistically responsive ways" (p. 26). Gibson (1997) notes that school success must be measured in terms of the ability of students to move successfully between their multiple cultural worlds. Similarly, argued by Portes and Rumbaut (2001), it is in the interest of society and the individual ELL for schools to allow students to acquire new knowledge without ignoring, displacing, deprecating, or diminishing existing linguistic and cultural knowledge. Gibson contends that schools should provide more opportunities for ELL students to create multiple identities in the school setting. Student identities are constantly transformed through the experiences that students have in school and in their lives outside of school. She cross-examined several international cases of minority students' failure and success at school and found that "minority students do better in school when they feel strongly anchored in the identities of their families, communities,

and peers and when they feel supported in pursuing a strategy of selective or additive acculturation” (pp. 445-446).

### Purpose of the Study

This study emerged as the result of my 7 years of experience as an ESL teacher in China and 5 years’ research interest in the ESL area. While I was working in China, I had witnessed the challenges students encountered in their second language learning. They experienced more difficulties with oral interpersonal communication but fewer difficulties with academic English. After coming to Canada and teaching and researching ELL students, I found they presented a different case. They were more apt to master a high level of oral interpersonal English but a low level of academic English. I spent years researching these regular ELL students, in particular, students from China and South Korea about their English acquisition. I switched my research focus to refugee students after I worked as a volunteer helping ELL students with their English learning at a local elementary school’s ESL program. During my work, I observed a few refugee students who were experiencing enormous difficulties in their ESL classes. As grade 5 students, they did not understand simple math concepts and basic calculation rules. They had a hard time figuring out phonetic rules in English and often looked anxious when working with other ELL students. According to their teachers, there was no specific program targeting these students. Although their mainstream teachers worked diligently to help them keep up with their academic content, the effect was insignificant as the students at the same time were learning English and adjusting themselves to the new environment. So the mainstream teachers sent them to an ESL teacher every day seeking strong linguistic support for the students’ academic studies. After witnessing the struggles that

refugee students had, I felt the need to expand support efforts and create ways to help students at all levels such as parents, social workers, mainstream teachers, etc. I thus decided to look at refugee students in particular for my study.

According to McBrien (2005), there is not enough research on refugee students' education. From my review of the literature, the research on refugee students in the context of Canada is limited. There has been research on refugee students in metropolitan cities such as Toronto and Montreal, or a province as a whole (Yau, 1995; Feuerverger & Richards, 2007; Kanu, 2008) , but very little research has been done on small and medium-sized cities where government funding, refugee student populations, and implementation of ESL programs are much different from those of big cities. It also needs to be considered that the number of refugee students has been increasing (CIC, 2008). Based on these considerations, I decided to undertake a study that focused on refugee students in hopes of demonstrating the specific issues that refugee students face in their English language learning and the efficacy of the responses developed in schools. My hope was to help people understand more about the educational issues around refugee students and develop more programs and teaching strategies to meet the needs of this group of students.

#### Research Questions

This dissertation examined refugee students' English learning experiences which included school support available to refugee students as they enter Canadian schools. For this reason, the goal of this study was to discover how schools support refugee students' linguistic development in their new environment. One critical aspect of studying school support is to explore the knowledge and values these students bring with them, and the

role they play in refugee students' language learning. Although refugee students may lack academic experiences, they have rich life experiences. As the provincial guide *Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) states, " Their (ELLs with limited prior schooling) need for intensive literacy and language support programs is balanced by the cultural and linguistic capital that they bring with them" (p. 8). Also, "educators who value and build on that prior knowledge and experience help these students succeed in school" (p.8). The prior knowledge and experience develop into a more academic term "funds of knowledge", which is defined as "the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez., 2001, p. 133). The concept "funds of knowledge" is closely related to ELL students' language learning experience at school. It allows teachers and educators to come to know their students and the family of their students in new and distinctive ways. With this new knowledge, teachers develop an understanding of the cultural and cognitive resources that the students' households and communities have, so that they can provide such resources in classroom. In this way, teachers can provide culturally responsive and meaningful instruction that builds on students' prior knowledge and experiences. Moll, Amanti, Neff, and González (1992) found that teachers and schools often have insufficient knowledge of students' out-of-school lives, particularly those of English language learners (ELLs), so they are unable to build on the funds of knowledge of children's homes and communities. Every student participates in social practices in either the home settings or communities, so students learn all the time,

and to help students with their learning requires schools and teachers to realize the nature of learning and connect school learning to children's out-of-school learning.

Therefore, my study sought not only to explore the support schools and teachers provide for refugee students, but also, the funds of knowledge that refugee students bring with them to school. Because drawing on students' funds of knowledge can have a great impact on their language learning, the overarching research questions of the study are:

1. What role do refugee students' funds of knowledge play in support of their language acquisition and acculturation to the new school? 2. How do schools and teachers support refugee students' language learning to promote their success in school? Given the influx of refugee students in Canada (CIC, 2008), it is vital that these ELL students' needs are met with some degree of informed practice.

The sub-questions I explored are as follows:

1. How are learners' funds of knowledge utilized in classrooms?
2. What are the challenges in language learning that refugee students face?
3. What are teachers' considerations in instructional design and activities?
4. What are schools' considerations in providing educational programs for refugee ELLs?
5. What strategies do schools and teachers use to meet the needs of refugee students?

To grapple with the research questions, I have employed a case study methodology which uses the methods of interviews and class observations. I elaborate on the study design in the third chapter.

Theoretical Framework

In view of the research questions, I have grounded my proposed research in Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, funds of knowledge, and second language acquisition theories (SLA). The assumption of the research is "knowledge is not a commodity in the head of an individual learner, but instead lies between people" (Hawkins, 2004, p.18). All of the three theories present different though compatible perspectives in understanding language development, which is directly related to school children's academic performance (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Meanwhile, they provide useful conceptual tools to help researchers understand the nature of second language support in terms of linguistic, social, and cultural development. My research posits a view of language, learning, and teaching that sees meanings and understandings constructed between people (i.e. ELLs, teachers, school, and social workers) engaged in specific social and cultural interactions within the school context.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1999) provided the foundation of my theoretical framework. This model examines the major points of developmental changes among children and investigates the role of the environment in shaping human development which occurs in contexts or environments that are changing. Within this model, there are five environmental systems, ranging from micro to macro, from a child's family, school to the broad culture of society. His model provides a lens for me to explore a refugee child's school environment in Canada. After a refugee child enters a school, the different layers of the environment are formed. The first layer includes the child's family, class teachers, peers and social workers because these are the people who the child interacts with on a daily basis. Beyond that, the child interacts with the school leader or program leader less frequently. Finally general

provincial policies and a school board have an impact. As the layers extend out more and more distant from the child, the impact of each layer seems to diminish. The various layers do not stand alone; instead, there is strong connectedness among them. Because of the interconnectedness of the model, to study an individual refugee student involves the study of the whole set of layers around the student so that the issue of how refugee students develop their English skills can be explored in depth.

Since this study focused on refugee students' English language support in Canadian schools, SLA theories (second language acquisition) are the most critical guidance for my study. There is a strong literature concerning ELL students and their English language learning. Krashen's SLA theories and Cummins' BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) & CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) and Interdependence Hypothesis informed my study. All of these theories have a focus on environmental impacts on language learning. Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) explains why ELL students with no prior foundation in English would feel tremendous challenges and become easily frustrated with second language learning. The English language expectations for ELL students may be very high and unattainable during the initial adjustment. His Affective Filter Hypothesis (1985, 1994) addresses the relationship between a student's affective filter and the learning effects. If a learner experiences low anxiety, high motivation, or high self-confidence (i.e. has a low affective filter), then the second language can be acquired more easily. Some refugee students may have had traumatic experiences, so they may feel insecure in a new environment. Their fears, worries, and concerns can have a direct influence on their language learning.



Cummins' BICS and CALP theory (1989) identifies the differences between everyday English for communication purposes and academic English for academic subjects. His theory points out that usually CALP takes longer than BICS for ELL students to learn. Since CALP takes place mainly in classrooms, the type of support that schools and teachers provide for refugee students in this aspect is an important issue. Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis addresses the relationship between an ELL's first and second languages. A well-developed first language can benefit the student a great deal in second language acquisition. As Coelho (2007) states, "Students who see their previously developed language skills acknowledged by their teachers and parents are also more likely to feel confident and to take the risks involved in learning in their new school environment" (p. 2). However, for some refugee students who have missed literacy development in their first language, learning a second language would be a very hard task to handle.

Including funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 2001) as part of my investigations provides a way to look at teachers' and schools' approach to English language teaching and any background knowledge about the students they may use in order to understand better where their refugee students are coming from. The concept of funds of knowledge is based on the idea that an individual can yield useful, powerful, and transferable knowledge through various experiences within the family or community (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). To transfer such knowledge from home settings to school learning environments is a dynamic process. ELL students can practice a language acquisition skill (e.g. home language) during which they make mistakes and experiment with their English learning. Learning does not have to occur in formal settings; instead, it does exist

in places such as playgrounds where children play and associate (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 2005). Individuals learn from participating in multiple spheres of activity from family to the social worlds. Hence, knowledge acquisition is not “single stranded” between the student and the academic teacher (Moll et al., 1992). The concept of funds of knowledge views households as places containing tremendous valuable cultural and cognitive resources, and teachers should realize the great potential of them for classroom instruction. Therefore, understanding the knowledge that is embedded in households can help schools and teachers in designing pedagogies that suit the situation of minority students and developing strategies that build up the social relations and cultural resources of the community. Cummins (2009) also suggests that activating ELLs’ prior knowledge and building on their background are important approaches in the classroom.

To sum up, a holistic view of the ecological model, SLA, and funds of knowledge as an integrated totality can be instrumental for the study of refugee students’ English learning. In the next section, I will present the overview of my dissertation.

#### Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of seven chapters. This first chapter provides an introduction that identifies the rationale for the research on refugee students and a brief discussion of the study purposes, research questions, and theoretical framework. The second chapter presents a review of the theoretical foundation of the study and related literature about refugee students’ English language learning in Canada. The third chapter describes the qualitative methodology used in the study. It explains why qualitative methodology and case study approach were adopted, and introduced data collection and analysis process. The fourth chapter presents each refugee student’s story to provide a

context for readers. The fifth chapter is a discussion of the major findings regarding the research question about the role of funds of knowledge that refugee student bring with them in their language learning and acculturation. The sixth chapter discusses the findings regarding the research question about school support for refugee students' language learning. The last chapter concludes the dissertation with findings and themes, limitations of this research study, and implications for future research.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter is divided into five sections. First, I discuss the situation of refugees worldwide. Second, I consider refugees in Canada with regard to policies and practices with a focus in Ontario. I also consider the refugees from the countries in my study. Third, I elaborate on the student bioecological model. Fourth, I discuss the concept of funds of knowledge and how it applied to my research. Last, I elaborate on those second language acquisition theories that are based on sociocultural perspectives. The review of literature provided a theoretical basis for my research and allowed me to explore the area of refugee students in depth.

### Refugees

Refugees are “indeed vastly diverse groups of people” (Bal, 2009, p.15). They have long histories, languages, ethnicities, and cultural practices. What makes them different is the fact that they may have to flee their home countries and go through sociocultural, linguistic, religious, political, and economic challenges in a new country. “Refugee” is a legal identity recognized by national and international laws and regulations.

A refugee, by definition, is someone who:

[has 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[her] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him-[her]self of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his[her] former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (UNHCR Convention and Protocol *Status of Refugees*, 2007, p.16)

According to the convention, refugees have legal rights to have access to education and legal obligations to the host country.

The UN (United Nations) and UNHCR (The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) have been making efforts to relocate refugees around the world since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The UN was established in 1945 and the UNHCR was established only four years later, signifying the importance of refugee issues worldwide since that time. Efforts of the UNHCR and the UN include making public intervention to help victims of extensive human right violations, epidemics, famine, and genocides in regions such as Chile, Cambodia, Bosnia, Sudan, and Rwanda. The UNHCR has won the Nobel Peace Prize twice (The Nobel Foundation, 2011).

UNHCR provides various types of aid to help refugees which include protection of stateless people, assistance with food, water, shelter, and education, and quick response to complex emergency situations (UNHCR, 2012). Since many countries are still in turmoil in the current world, there are a large number of people in need of aid. By the end of 2010, approximately 33.9 million people were striving to find a safe place in more than 151 countries (UNHCR, 2010). Among them, 10.55 million were legally recognized as refugees and 3.5 million were identified as stateless people. Moreover, there were 837,500 asylum seekers. According to UNHCR's global estimates, there were 3.05 million Afghan refugees, accounting for 29% of the global refugee population. Iraq was the second largest country of origin of refugees (1.7 million), followed by Somalia (770,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (477,000), and Myanmar (416,000). There were 15,500 unaccompanied or separate children on asylum application files of UNHCR by 2010, and they were mainly from Afghanistan and Somalia.

Most refugees choose developing countries as their host countries (8.5 million, 80%). Also, Asia hosts more than half of the global refugee population (54%) by the end of

2010, followed by Africa (23%), Europe (15%), North America (4%), Latin America and the Caribbean (4%), and Oceania (0.3%). Most refugees flee to neighboring countries to seek asylum, so they seldom make it across continents, which may explain why North America hosts only a small number of refugees. Taking the year 2006 as an example, Tanzania hosted more refugees than Canada, France, Australia, the United States, Germany, Spain and Japan combined. Canada hosted only 43,500 (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2012). There are several reasons that may contribute to their choice of going to neighboring countries. First, neighboring countries may use the same language which will make it easier for refugees to settle. Secondly, the neighbor countries may have the same religion as refugees' home countries. Thirdly, refugees flee their home countries involuntarily, so they prefer to stay closer to their homes in order to return when there is a chance. Fourthly, the procedures for going to other continents may be too complicated, and they may not have the opportunity, language, and finances to do so.

#### Refugees in Canada

Canada is known as a country of indigenous people, immigrants, and refugees. The composition of the Canadian population shows that all of the Canadian residents are either migrants or descendants of migrants except the Aboriginal people. The original migrants were mostly from the United Kingdom and Western Europe, and since the twentieth century, Canada has witnessed waves of migrants. Canada has a history of providing a safe haven to those fleeing oppression and war. In the late period of the last century, there was a rapid growth of refugees seeking asylum in Canada. The most significant increase occurred between the 1980s and 1990s. During that time, asylum applications increased from 1000 to 36,735. Since 1990, every year Canada witnessed an

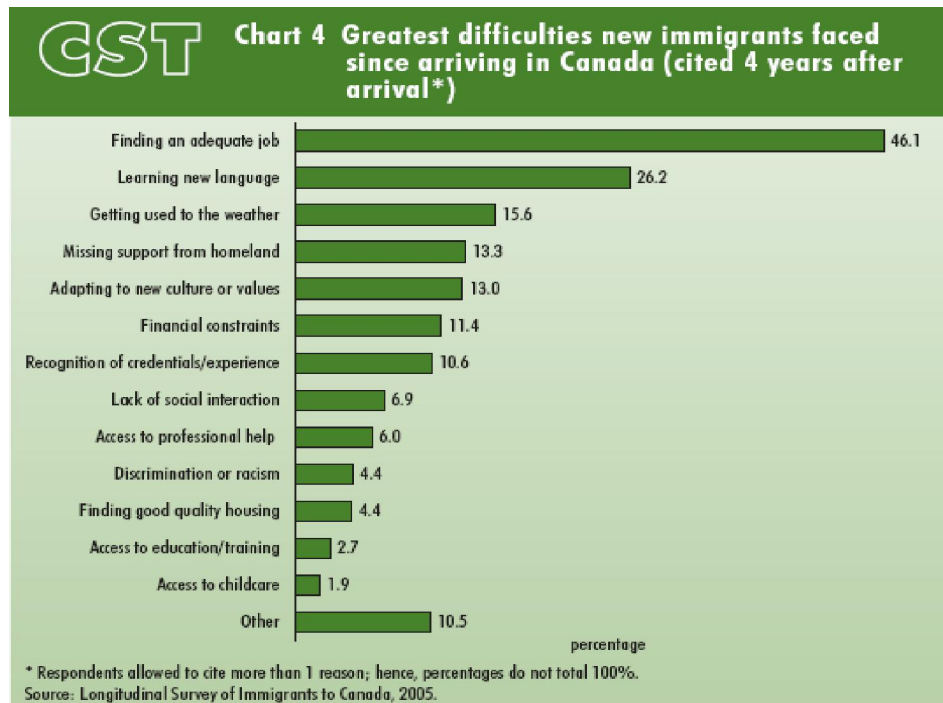
inflow of over 25,000 asylum seekers (Migration Policy Institute, 2008). In 2006, most asylum shelter applicants to Canada were from Afghanistan, Colombia, Ethiopia, Burma, Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, El Salvador, Iran, Eritrea, and Iraq (CIC, 2012).

There are two ways that Canada protects refugees: the domestic asylum system and the refugee and humanitarian programs (CIC, 2012). The domestic asylum system “offers protection to people in Canada who are afraid of returning to their home country” (para. 6); while the refugee and humanitarian resettlement program allows Canada to work closely with international partners such as the UNHCR, “to assist refugees worldwide and to help them resettle in Canada, when appropriate” (para. 9).

The acceptance rate of refugee claims has been around 40-50% since 2004 in Canada (At Work, 2008). In 2004, about 3 % of these individuals were granted permanent resident status on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that more than half of any refugee population worldwide are children including homeless and children separated from their parents (UNHCR, 1996). In 2004, 19.1 percent of 32,686 refugees were dependents of a refugee who joined the claimant in Canada after his/her refugee claim determination had been positively determined (Ray, 2005).

Demonstrated in Schellenberg and Maheux’s (2005) study, the biggest challenge for refugees in Canada is to find employment.

Figure 2.1 Challenges facing new immigrants (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2005, chart 4)



Second, language barriers are another challenge. Based on their study, around one in six reported language problems as their most serious difficulty. Considering 18% of immigrants in 2001 were either English or French speaking, the language problems could account for more than half of the immigrants.

#### Refugee experiences and their impacts on children

There are at least two ways that refugee experiences have been analyzed in the literature. One is to divide refugee experiences into three stages of migration and changing ecologies: pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration, which look at people's time spent in their country of origin (pre-migration), time spent fleeing or living in a refugee camp and travelling to Canada (trans-migration), and time spent in Canada (post-migration) (Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen, & Frater-Mathieson, 2004; Stewart, 2011). Another way is from a psychological perspective: pre-flight, flight, and resettlement (Gonsalves, 1992; Lustig et al., 2004). The pre-flight stage refers to the time



before refugees leave their home countries. During that time, refugees may have been exposed to social chaos, violence, and they may not be able to get medical treatment or have opportunities for formal schooling, and they may have experienced or witnessed combat, massacres, slavery, displacements, etc. (Mohlen, Parzer, Resch, & Brunner, 2005; Schauer et al., 2004). The flight stage is similar to trans-migration. Refugees are either on the run or live in temporary places such as refugee camps. They may have to deal with an unknown future, worries, anxiety, insecurities, etc. The refugees who settle down in their host countries will start the stage of resettlement. In this stage, they will deal with linguistic, social, economic, and political issues in the new country. They may have better social and economic and educational opportunities than in their home countries. Nonetheless, they must master the new language in order to survive in the society.

Although refugees' experiences have been categorized into three phases, it does not mean they are homogeneous. On the contrary, they are a highly heterogeneous, and their strengths and needs vary, such as among the adult groups, adolescent groups, teenager groups, and pupil groups. Refugees are from all over the world, so they have different religious backgrounds as well. Therefore, it is important to understand the similarities and differences among refugees. However, it is hard to identify and serve the needs and the diversities of refugee children and adolescents (Bal & Artiles, 2007; McBrien, 2005). This is the reason why McBrien (2005) called for more research in the area of refugee children because there is little current research. The provincial guide *Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) also expresses the same concern that “very little Canadian research exists about a small subgroup of English language learners (ELLs) with limited prior schooling, yet these

students are in Canadian classrooms and will continue to arrive on an ongoing basis”

(p.3). My research focuses mainly on refugee children’s post-migration stage in Canada.

In Ontario, the refugee population has increased in schools. Many children fled civil war, anarchy, and famine in their native country with their parents. They may even suffer family separation during flight (McBrien, 2005). They may also have experienced horrible things that happened to their families or lost their chances for an education. It is possible that many of them enter Canadian school system with little or no prior schooling or have large gaps in their formal education (The Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). Research (Cummins, 1984; Hyman, Beiser, & Vu, 2000; Wilkinson, 2002) has shown that migration experiences such as war trauma, loss, lack of English, and the unfamiliarity with the Canadian culture and schooling system will have a direct impact on both immigrant and refugee students’ adjustment experience. Regular immigrant students may have had a more stable and secure life in their home countries, so they are familiar with formal school education. On the other hand, refugee students may have experienced disrupted schooling or informal schooling in places such as a refugee camp (UNHCR, 2012). In this sense, refugee students may have a harder time getting used to the Canadian schooling system.

Every province in Canada is individually responsible for the education of refugee students, so they may have different practices for ESL education. Based on Ontario policy, “In elementary schools, English language learners will be placed with an age-appropriate group”, while “In secondary schools, placement in a grade or in specific subjects will depend upon the student’s prior education, background in specific subject areas, and aspirations” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, pp.20-21). Therefore, a 9-

year-old refugee student with no or some prior schooling experience will be placed in grade 3. A secondary school refugee student may have English in level 1, but other subjects at different levels. Some provinces and territories such as Newfoundland do not have transition schools, intensive English schools, or special literacy programs for children with no or limited English. However, provinces such as Ontario and Alberta do offer programs to enrich students' literacy skills in English. In Watt & Roessingh's (2001) longitudinal study of ESL drop-outs in high schools in Alberta, they found that although there were ESL programs provided at high schools, because of government budget cuts in 1993, ELL students' drop-out rate increased as a result of the diminished ESL support available. ELL students were pushed to integrate into mainstream classrooms when they were not ready. Their research showed that the average ESL students' drop-out rate was 73%, while for students who were English beginners, the rate was as high as 91% between 1993-1996. The research implies that not all ESL programs can provide the support that ELL students need. The quality and length of support matter, too.

Because my study took place in Ontario, here I will only address the Ontario education policies and practices. There are two programs offered for ELL students in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). One is the ESL program for ELL students who had no or insufficient English support before their arrival in Canada while the ELD program targets ELLs with little or no schooling experience. In many Ontario public elementary schools, ELL students are placed in age-appropriate classes with sheltered English support. Sheltered English is an approach to teaching ELLs (English Language Learners) which uses English as the medium for providing content area instruction, acting as a bridge from the ESL class to the academic mainstream. It is different from

what native speakers of English receive in the regular classroom where students are instructed in English only. Sheltered English classes provide content area instruction to ELLs while placing an emphasis on the development of their English language skills (Kester, 1990; Krashen, 1985; Parker, 1985). Based on their English proficiency level, ELLs are pulled out of regular classrooms to receive ESL education for a varied length of time at varied frequencies. It would be the case that newly arrived ELLs spend more time in an ESL class, while after they acquire some levels of proficiency, they spend less time accordingly.

It is evident that refugee students present a challenge to the school system, and at the same time the school is a challenge for those who struggle to learn the academic content while learning a new language. Although they are often considered as immigrants, they can be different from regular immigrant students because “the circumstances they had gone through were rarely experienced by regular immigrants” (Yau, 1995, p. 21). As she puts it:

Former schooling for many refugee students was often interrupted or disrupted by the pre-migration situations in their homeland, and by the long and transitory nature of their migration journeys. Furthermore, the trauma many refugee students went through in their home countries and during their exodus had its impact on their emotional well-being even after settling in a new country. (p.21)

Refugee students may be marginalized because they are minors and suffer from their minority status, cultural differences, accents in their English, and their unfamiliarity with the dominant culture (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). Moore’s (1999) study of classroom interactions of bilingual students in the United Kingdom also showed that immigrant and refugee students were seemingly included in regular classrooms, but actually they were excluded and marginalized because of the culturally-biased school curricula and

pedagogy. According to Feuerverger and Richards (2007), refugee students may also develop a sense of “outsiderness”, and the issues of cultural difference and conflict resolution are important to mainstream schooling. Toronto is one of the most desirable destinations for refugees because of its multiculturalism. In every four immigrants to Canada, one settled in Toronto (Ibid).

Indeed, many immigrant and/or refugee students and their parents arrive in Toronto overwhelmed by forces of war, political oppression, and violence, by economic struggle and language barriers. They carry with them hidden but enduring scars that influence all aspects of their educational experiences. (p. 555)

The four research participants in the study were from Somalia, Albania, Colombia, and Mexico, so I here briefly introduce the situation in these four places and the reasons that caused people to flee those countries.

### *Somalia*

Approximately 33,725 Somalis are now living in Canada. About half of them reside in Toronto (Statistics Canada, 2012). Somali initial settlement in Canada dates back to 1977 when a war broke out between Somalia and Ethiopia over the disputed land of Ogden (Pagliacolo, 2012). In 1990, a destructive civil war began as a result of insurgent clans in Somalia trying to force the regime of Siad Barre out of power. In 1991, they succeeded in ousting Siad Barre from Somalia’s capital. However, this war caused 8,000 deaths, and thousands of people became refugees, which explains why Somalis are one of the top countries in the number of refugees coming to Canada. 80% of Somalis in Canada are refugees. Another noticeable fact is that most women from Somalia are illiterate “because in the Somalian lifestyle there was little need for women to be able to read” (ibid, para.7), which may have a far-reaching influence on their children, such as negligence of girl’s education in the family or the low status of girls in the family.

### *Albania*

It is estimated that 22,395 Albanians live in Canada, with around 51% residing in the Toronto area (Canada Census, 2006). Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Albanians began to immigrate to other countries such as Canada, the United States, and Turkey. The first group of Albanians arrived in Canada following the internal pre-war revolutionary upheavals. After World War II, many Albanian immigrants settled in either Montreal or Toronto. Some found jobs in Calgary and a few in small communities in Ontario (e.g., Peterborough) (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2010). After the ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia between ethnic Albanians and Serbian military and police forces, a lot of Albanians left Kosovo as refugees. In 1999, Canada provided a safe haven to 7,000 Kosovar Albanian refugees (Ibid).

### *Colombia*

Many people make refugee claims from Colombia because of violence and corruption in the country. Colombia gained independence from Spanish rule in 1819, and became a republic in 1886. Since then the country has been dominated by Liberal and Conservative Parties (Da, 2002). Colombia has experienced various forms of violence and human rights violations in its history. An internal conflict to overthrow the government has lasted for 40 years, and it escalated during the 1990s, funded by the drug trade. Even today, there are still various forms of violence going on in Colombia, accompanied by corruption among its high-ranking authorities, insurgencies, and drug cartels (Ibid).

The emigration between 1996-2003 in Colombia has been driven by both economic and political factors (Bérubé, 2005).

Poverty and inequality were also rising, with nearly two-thirds of the population living below the poverty line by 2001, while the top 20 percent of the population

earned 60 percent of the national income. In the last few years, there has been some moderate economic improvement, but the potential for economic migration remains high due to persisting "push" factors, such as precarious labor conditions, low wages, and job scarcity, even for the highly educated. (p.2)

Because of the deteriorated political situation, civilians have increasingly been turned into military targets by guerrillas, which made people flee because of the escalated insecurity concerns (Ibid).

### *Mexico*

People in Mexico face similar situations as in Colombia. The drug issues, gang violence, and corruption are the driving forces for people to flee the country (UNHCR, 2012).

### Bioecological Model

Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003) warn that when studying cultural variation in approaches to learning, researchers should avoid assuming that “regularities are static, and that general traits of individuals are attributable categorically to ethnic group membership”; rather, researchers should use a cultural historical approach to “help move beyond this assumption by focusing researchers’ and practitioners’ attention on variations in individuals’ and groups’ histories of engagement in cultural practices” (p. 19). They stress that the variations reside as “proclivities of people with certain histories of engagement with specific cultural activities” (p.19). Keeping their claim in mind, I chose Urie Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1999) as the umbrella for my theoretical framework based on the following considerations. Firstly, it recognizes that children develop within contexts of social relationships. The interactions with the social environments are reciprocal and changing instead of being static. Secondly, as stated in the previous chapter, language learning occurs not in a vacuum.

Rather, it is a social practice (Vygotsky, 1978). Social practices involve various social and cultural relationships that a child interacts with, which are necessary conditions for children to develop second language skills. Therefore, studying a child's language acquisition process is closely connected to the social and cultural learning activities he/she participates in. Thirdly, although the bioecological model was originally designed for psychological studies, with more and more application of it by researchers in other areas, it has successfully lent itself to much broader areas. In addition, I also used the funds of knowledge theory to study people's histories of engagement with cultural activities because funds of knowledge are historically and culturally accumulated knowledge in a household.

The student bioecological model analyzes the layers of environments that a child interacts with. The five layers range from the child's closest social relations such as family to the broader culture of society. These environments work together and influence and shape the child's language development. Bronfenbrenner's student bioecological model provides an organizational structure to the investigations into refugee students' English language learning. Moreover, it also provides an insight into the influence of the school environments surrounding refugee students and the positive or negative impacts on them. It provides the framework for me to explore the educational needs of refugee students and what may be effective ways to meet their needs.

Although Bronfenbrenner's theory was originally produced for the area of psychology, it has been used extensively in various fields including developmental psychology and ELL students' development. For instance, Padrón, Waxman and Rivera (2002) used his theory to study the issues concerning ELL student development and academic success in



the contexts of both the family and the surrounding ecological areas and examined how students are influenced by the dynamic components in the environment. Anderson et al. based their research (2004) of refugee adaptation and development on Urie Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model and examined the disruption for refugee students and developmental changes in adolescence. They utilized Bronfenbrenner's theory as a tool to analyze the interactions and reciprocal relationships amongst the systems around refugee children. They state, "The development of the refugee child is influenced by the ever-changing ecologies that surround and interact with the child, for the refugee child, the potential for major changes in the ecologies can occur due to pre-migration, trans-migration and post-migration factors" (p. 8). They further state:

Bronfenbrenner's theory provides a useful conceptual framework for considering the needs of refugee children as it allows us to consider the impact of personal and environmental factors on the development of refugee children. This is because at its core the theory conceptualizes development as the interactive lifelong process of adaptation by an individual to the changing environment (p. 4).

Lewthwaite (2011) led a group of researchers to carry out research on the utility of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory at the University of Manitoba. They implemented eight studies that applied the bioecological model in different education areas, such as individual learners, the school system, the local system, and the global system.

The bioecological model investigates the complexities of environment (i.e. the components of environment), and how the environment shapes a child's development through the life course (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). He believes a child does not develop in isolation. Rather, he/she develops in contexts or environments that are always changing. There is a reciprocal relationship between the child and the environment, which means, the child influences the environment and is influenced by the environment as well.

Moreover, there is not just one environment. Instead, it is compiled with multilevel layers

and there are interconnections between them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). His idea of the reciprocal relationship is also expressed below:

[H]uman development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. Such enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment are referred to as proximal processes. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1999, p. 996)

The “bioecological model” or “bioecological systems theory” makes distinctions between environment and process (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1999) note that the bioecological model addresses the “complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment” (p. 996). Lewthwaite (2011)

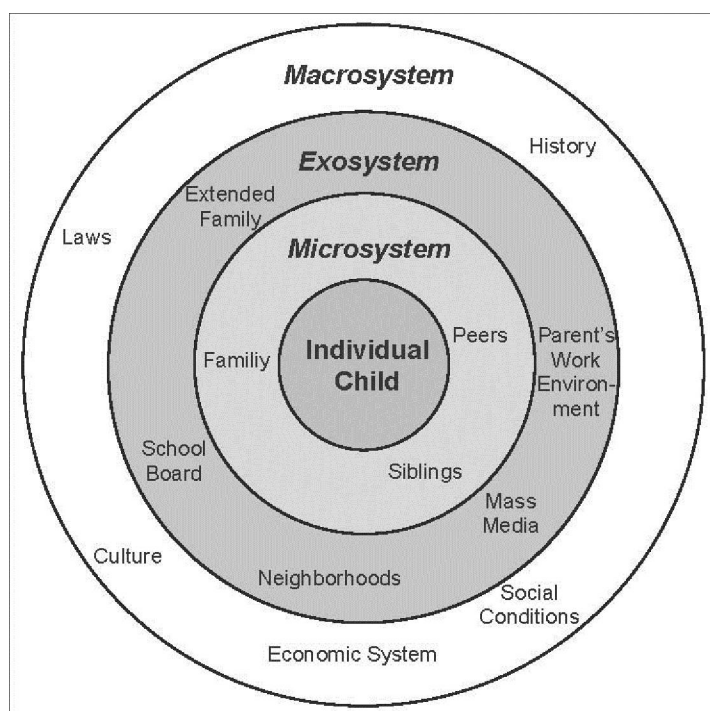
believes the new model

describes the nature of the processes within the environment that influence development. By so doing, Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological theory goes beyond providing a framework for identifying and conceptualizing the multi-system factors that influence development. It considers an individual’s topology—his or her setting and the way in which individual and external forces interplay to influence development. It, most importantly, attempts to underscore processes and the dynamics of these processes that might influence development. (p.1)

Regarding language learning, a child’s own biology acts as the primary environment, which assists with his/her language development. The child interacts with his/her own biology, the family or community environment, and other social communities, which work altogether during the child’s language development. According to Bronfenbrenner (1999), the layers in the environment may overlap with each other. A change in one layer may spread to other layers. Considering the layers of environment, to study a child’s language development, both his/her immediate environment and the larger environments should be looked at.

The bioecological model requires researchers to look at the different layers of the environment or the immediate and the more external environments that a child interacts with in his/her development. Therefore, the model should look similar to the one below in which three layers of the environment are illustrated:

Figure 2.2 Bioecological Model describing the environmental influences on a child (Niederer et al., 2009)



The five environment systems that Bronfenbrenner (1999) conceptualizes are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The mesosystem does not show itself in the above chart because it shows the connections between systems within the microsystem. It is not an exact layer as the rest four. In my study, I examined the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem with a focus on microsystem. The chronosystem was not included because students' immigration from a country to another was over during my research. All of the systems in my study were in relation to

the refugee elementary and secondary school students and their learning of English language during their adjustment to Canadian society. Here I will briefly introduce the five systems that comprise the bioecological model by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1999) and discuss how they relate to refugee students in my study.

1. **Microsystem.** This is the layer or circle closest to the child and contains the structures that the child has direct contact. Just as Berk (2000) states, the microsystem presents the relationships and interactions a child has with his/her immediate surroundings. Defined by Bronfenbrenner (1994) himself, it is “a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic feature that invite, permit, or inhibit, engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment” (p. 1645). This layer of relationships and interactions may include teachers, peers, family, and other school personnel because they participate in the life of the child on a fairly regular basis. In my study, the immediate surroundings include mainstream teachers, ESL teachers, social workers, as well as family members. These people are closest to refugee children as they interact with each other almost every day. Therefore, in my research design, I included them in my data collection.
2. **Mesosystem.** This layer presents the connections among the various microsystems, for example, the connections between a refugee child’s teachers and the parents. Bronfenbrenner (1979) states, “A mesosystem comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for the child, the relations among home, school, and neighbourhood peer group; for an

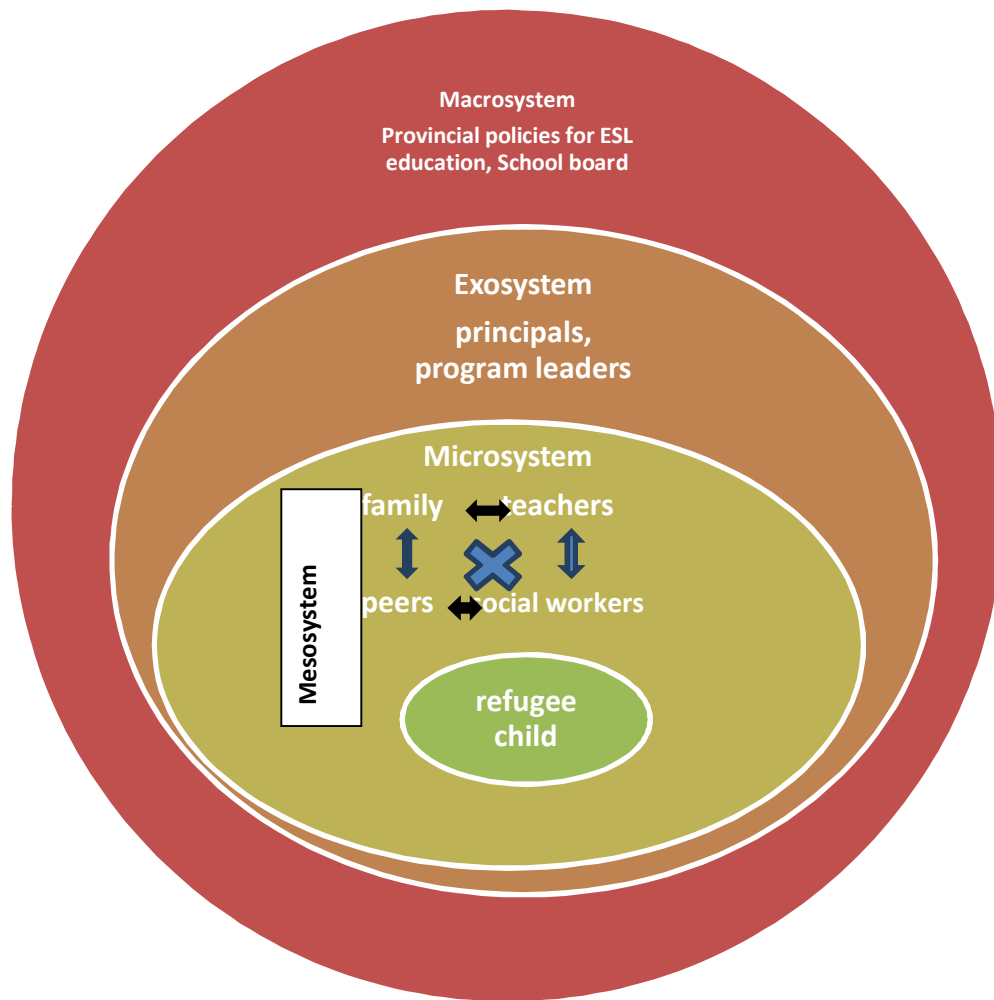
- adult, among family, work, and social life)” (p. 25). The microsystems around the refugee child do not just interact with the child only, and they also interact with other microsystems. Considering the refugee children in my study, the home language(s) and other world experiences such as fleeing, hunger, oppression, death of family members that they bring definitely affect other microsystems such as the Canadian teachers and peers. As Stewart (2011) points out, “A mesosystem is formed whenever the individual moves into a new setting” (p. 19). The new language learning experience in Canada and the previous life experiences will become entangled and some parts of each will be compromised and will integrate. This works not only for refugee children, but also for others as well.
3. Exosystem. This refers to the events that occur in more distant systems, and they have indirect effects on the individual. It is concerned with the connection between a social setting in which the individual does not have an active role and the individual's immediate context. For example, the refugee parents receive English support in their communities and have access to ESL resources at libraries. The child may not be involved in this kind of activities directly, and he/she can feel the influence of them and realize the importance of learning English. The exosystem may also be comprised of friends of the family, community, social agencies, or neighbors. In my research, I also included interview questions about parents’ perspectives on their living in Canada and their new and old experiences because these would impact their own ecological systems. They may develop positive or negative thinking about Canada, which would impact on the children’s attitude towards schooling experience in the new country. Children have very different feelings about what they have been

- through from adults, but they interact with the parents every day and they are young and receptive, so the family influences such as parents' thoughts, beliefs, cultures and values have bearing on children continuously. I also consider the principals or the leaders of ESL departments as key people in this layer. Most of the time they do not interact with refugee children directly. However, the philosophy behind their management and their insights and openness directly impact the school culture and teachers and staff, such as the extent to which ELL students are welcomed and supported.
4. **Macrosystem.** This layer is located in the outer circle in the child's environment. It is comprised of cultural values, customs, and laws (Berk, 2000). "In essence, the macrosystem refers to the homogeneity found within the same culture, such as the roles and relations in the particular settings, the types and kinds of settings, and the organization and content of activities in the settings" (Stewart, 2011, p. 20). In this layer, I look at the provincial policies and procedures and practices implemented in Ontario schools and the school board. They provide guidance for refugee children's ESL education.
  5. **Chronosystem.** It refers to the changes in an environment in the dimension of time as the child develops. Changes can be a family member's passing away or events (e.g. puberty) that cause a child's physiological changes as he/she grows up. Bronfenbrenner (1992) said, "Whatever their origin, the critical feature of such events is that they alter the existing relation between person and environment, thus creating a dynamic that may instigate developmental change" (p.201). In the cases of refugee children, the most important external change is that they migrate from country to

country. Each transition is a new experience. They experience changes in family structure, education system, languages, cultures, and religions, etc. The changes go on as the child adjusts to the new environment and may exert a far-reaching influence on his/her future.

For the purposes and scope of my research, the first three areas from the above are mainly used to provide the related environmental contexts to investigate refugee children's funds of knowledge and their English development in the new country. Based on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory and the social relationships around refugee students in Canada, I adapted his bioecological model to fit in this study. The adapted bioecological model that applies to my research looks like this:

Figure 2.3 Adapted Bioecological Model for Study



Based on this model and my research questions, two additional areas of literature were reviewed. One is school support of ELL/refugee children's English development, and the other is funds of knowledge in the situation of ELL/refugee children.

#### School support

According to ecological theory, one area of support critical for student development is the support and influence from the school. Schools play an enormously important role in supporting ELL students' academic success. The school acts as a primary contact between ELL students/refugee children and the host country. Refugee children's schooling experience involves more than learning the host country's dominant language



and completing every grade level. In fact, they learn to communicate between their home culture and host culture and form their identities through interactions with the new society. In this sense, the main task of the schooling in the host country is to integrate the refugee children into the new society, in other words, acculturation. Therefore, schools are very important for children and everyone such as school leaders, teachers, and social workers are critical in this task.

Successful education for ELLs, according to Coady et al (2003), means “the academic and social development of each student is supported in culturally and linguistically responsive ways” (p. 26). Gibson (1997) noted that school success must be measured “in terms of the plurality of cultural ‘outputs’ and the ability of students to move successfully between their multiple cultural worlds” (p.447). Similarly, argued by Portes and Rumbaut (2001), schools should allow students to acquire new knowledge without compromising their existing linguistic and cultural knowledge. Gibson (1997) also contends that schools should provide more opportunities for ELL students to create multiple identities in the school setting: “Student identities are constantly negotiated and transformed through the experiences that students have in school and in their lives outside of school” (p.446). Gibson cross-examined several international cases of minority students’ failure and success at school and found that “minority students do better in school when they feel strongly anchored in the identities of their families, communities, and peers and when they feel supported in pursuing a strategy of selective or additive acculturation” (pp.445-446). Feuerverger and Richards (2007) expressed their concerns that “Sometimes immigrant students [in Toronto] feel that their identities are rejected by both Canadian and home communities” and “sometimes their own prior lived experiences of conflict and

war create negative stereotypes about various ethnic groups and religions, which they bring into the Canadian classroom” (p.555-556). The prior lived experiences comprise a large part of refugee students’ funds of knowledge. Thus, how the funds of knowledge are utilized decides whether they are a negative or positive force in students’ new learning experience.

To help refugee students with their language learning, Ontario schools provide ESL/ELD programs. At the same time, the literature suggests that to provide effective language support, schools should also have strong leadership, a safe school environment, responsible teachers, effective use of instructional time, monitoring of student progress, and high levels of parental involvement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Stringfield & Herman, 1996; Hamilton, 2004). In practice, both school leaders and teachers can work together to provide appropriate academic supports, such as allocating teaching resources, bridging schools and families, and improving mutual understanding between new students and existing non-refugee students.

The inclusion of ELL students is the key in their language acquisition and acculturation. They need a safe environment where they feel included in the classroom and the school setting. It may lower their affective filter in language acquisition and improve the efficiency of language acquisition (Krashen, 1981). Inclusion is more than an instructional method among teachers. It is a school structure that promotes the integration of minority students into the mainstream as well as a school culture in which principal, teachers, and class peers offer help to accommodate refugees and provide a comfortable environment for them (Moore, 2003; McBrien, 2005). Inclusive education has been defined as a value-based practice that tries to turn all students into full members within

the local school community (Keyes, Hanley-Maxwell, & Capper, 1998). As Kennedy and Fisher (2001) indicate, the value of inclusive education lies in that all students should feel welcomed in the school, classroom, and larger community. A common practice in Ontario for ELL students is to pull them out of mainstream classrooms and give them intensive English language support in the ESL program provided by schools. This practice can help to ensure students with no prior knowledge of English receive intensive basic English training and facilitate their future academic study in the English dominated classrooms. However, some studies show this kind of pull-out approach can cause unwanted side effects. Because ELL students are pulled out of their mainstream classrooms, they seem to be a special group of students. Often they leave classrooms in front of the whole class. Kennedy and Fisher (2001) worry that the pull-out approach may worsen the discrimination at school and created among students and teachers low expectations for minority students or ELL students. Capper and Frattura (2000) analyzed several pull-out programs and pointed out some weaknesses with them. For example, what ELL students learn in the ESL program may be inconsistent with the mainstream class content. During the time while ELLs are receiving ESL instruction, they lose the time to learn the grade-appropriate academic content, so they need extra time to make up what they missed. Meanwhile, they may also lose their sense of belonging to their class because their time in class is disrupted. They may develop feelings of being inferior or students who need extra assistance. It takes extra work for mainstream teachers to collaborate with ESL teachers. In addition, because of ELL students' low English proficiency, they may be exempted from some provincial tests such as the Ontario provincial EQAO tests (Yu, 2006). According to Capper and Frattura (2000), this means

that it is hard to track these students by schools and teachers and provincial ministry of education, and it may also lead to teachers' low expectations for them. However, there is no cure at all. The ultimate goal of pull-out programs is to help ELLs improve their English in a short time with intensive assistance so that they can cope with the more difficult academic content in class; however, such programs cannot avoid causing possible discrimination and inequity in schools.

Schools should be safe places for refugee students. McBrien (2005) indicated that refugee students face many obstacles, among which, a major obstacle is social and individual rejection. For example, students may feel they are not welcomed or their identities are not recognized at school. They may be alienated because of their accents, origins, or social economic status. The rejection comes from stereotypes, prejudices, or discrimination. Therefore, according to Cushner (1998), school educators need to make efforts to work out ways to prevent bullying and an unwelcoming atmosphere, and at the same time, encourage mainstream students to develop an understanding toward refugee students and the language and culture they bring to the class. For example, in Olsen's (1997) ethnographic study, he found that most immigrant students cannot find a supportive environment at school, especially in learning English. They are often marginalized and teased because of their accents when they speak English. Although it takes a shorter time to develop oral proficiency in English than academic proficiency, still, gaining academic English skills is critical in their school success (Cummins, 2001).

Refugee students/ELL students' language learning is greatly influenced by their home languages, identities, and cultures (Cummins, 2000; Moore, 2004). In refugee student English education, respecting and recognizing cultural differences need to be stressed.

According to Ngo (2008), schools should make attempts to build connections between social and cultural contexts of students' lives and the work of classrooms and schools:

Understanding and connecting the social and cultural contexts of students' lives to the work of classrooms and schools is essential to effective teaching—teaching that engages immigrant students, accounts for the knowledge they have, and is relevant to their daily lives. (p.2)

Teachers should create opportunities in the classroom to tap into students' prior knowledge. As Freeman & Freeman (2002) state, "Effective teachers draw on these resources (students' languages, cultures, and background experiences) and build new concepts on this strong experiential base" (Cited in *Many Roots, Many Voices*, 2005, p. 17). Waugh (1994) suggests that principals and administrators play a critical part to ensure that teachers are receptive to teaching approaches that build on students' prior knowledge. Waugh and Godfrey (1995) suggest several ways for school principals and administrators to provide a variety of supportive and promoting activities. Firstly, principals need to emphasize the benefit of the new approaches and make full use of them. Secondly, they need to offer support to help teachers integrate the new approaches in their classroom and content. Thirdly, principals need to encourage discussions over teachers' feedback and concerns about the new approaches. Fourthly, teachers should be included as decision makers regarding how to best implement the new approaches. Finally, principals need to support publicly the new approaches and present their advantages.

Within the context of refugee education, teachers also play a vital role in helping refugee students to learn a new language in a new school environment. For example, teachers should have cultural sensitivity and model respect for all children. Research suggests that teaching methods are more successful if students' cultural experiences and

various educational experiences that students have been exposed to previously can be built into the learning process (Naidoo, 2008). In this sense, a teacher needs to act as a mediator between different cultures (i.e. dominant culture and minority cultures). As Chisholm (1994) notes, this way can facilitate the minority students' understanding, acculturation, and hence, allow them to thrive in academic studies. Frankel (2008) suggested the following practices that teachers can use with refugee students:

- Make pupils feel welcomed at their interview and induction;
- Pair them with a buddy;
- Pass critical information to relevant staff before the pupil starts school;
- Ensure parents are aware of financial support such as free school meals;
- Don't solely rely on translated letters to parents. Regular, personal contact is the key;
- Involve parents in extra-curricular activities to raise cultural understanding;
- Challenge popular myths by raising refugee issues in class and assemblies;
- Provide teacher training;
- Offer free after-school activities that will help pupils develop friendships, skills, self-esteem and a sense of belonging;
- Provide opportunities (including regular coffee mornings) for parents to develop informal support networks;
- Provide targeted support for refugee families facing transition. (p. 14-15)

Peers are very important in refugee students' language acquisition. Loewen (2004) suggests that pairing a new refugee student with an English-speaking peer can enable the refugee child to learn how the system works and practice English. Kirova's studies (2000;

2001) show that if children are unable to be accepted by their peers, they often feel socially isolated and lonely. In an elementary school in Ontario, refugee and ELL students are paired with students who speak the same home language but came earlier than them to Canada (Yu, 2006). These students who are earlier arrivals than new immigrant students can communicate with new ELLs better and make them feel not that lonely.

During refugee students' language acquisition and acculturation process, psychological support should be on site, too. Many refugee students have experienced stressful or horrible events. Helping them to learn to cope with these stresses is important. Refugee students may have post-traumatic stress or other related symptoms (Sutner, 2002). Bloom (2008) summarized the characteristics of refugee students.

- Refugee children may have difficulty concentrating in class or engaging with the teacher;
- A noise or movement can trigger memories of a traumatic event;
- They may find it hard to trust people because of past betrayal;
- They may behave inappropriately if, say, they have been sexually assaulted by asking other children to pull their pants down;
- They may draw violent images;
- They may be quick to anger. (p.36)

According to Frater-Mathieson (2004), there are many intervention methods to help heal their symptoms, for instance, music, writing, dance, drama, or other art forms from the child's cultural heritage. These methods can help them search for meaning in the events of their past and integrate them into their present in order to restore a sense of

identity and belonging. Naomi (2003) suggested that children work with their teachers and write about themselves, their origin, or draw pictures.

Parents play an important role in refugee students' language acquisition (McBrien, 2005). Ties need to be established between schools and refugee students' home communities and between parents and teachers. Researchers believe that refugee children can benefit from schools that promote good home-school links (Blackwell & Melzak, 2000; Hek & Sales, 2002; Warren & Dechasa, 2001). These links can help school educators to identify difficulties at home (e.g. financial difficulties, language difficulties, communication channels, etc.) that may impact a child's education (Rutter, 1994, 2001). Jeynes (2003) did a meta-analysis study of parent involvement of minority students, and her study showed parental involvement affects the academic achievement of the minority group. Cummins (1986, 1991) investigated some successful school practices for minority students. He found community participation plays an important role in students' education. He suggests that school educators should collaborate more with the minority communities and families and enhance the connections between schools and minority students' families. Hamilton (2004) lists three approaches to increase the level of parental involvement in schools. The first is parent education programs which focus on training parents to learn educational strategies to help their children in school life. The second is functional communities around the school which means generating mechanisms that encourage parents or members from the community into the activities of the school. The third is community control which means parents should have their voices heard in order to gain some control of schools at parent council. He believes that schools should help parents develop skills, especially second language skills "which will allow them to



participate more fully in their child's education experience, and to support the efforts of schools" (p. 86).

#### Funds of knowledge

The second important question my research investigated was related to the funds of knowledge refugee students bring to class. Funds of knowledge are utilized in my research as part of the theoretical framework to support a recurring idea in language and literacy literature that if refugee students' funds of knowledge can be tapped in the school context, their second language learning journey as well as their acculturation process will be smoother. The Ontario practical guide *Many Roots Many Voices* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005) suggests:

It is important for teachers to learn as much as possible about students' existing knowledge, skills, and interests, and to use this information as a foundation for teaching them English and other subjects. For example, you might have students present topics connected to their language, culture, and country of origin. (p. 17)

The guide also provides methods to connect different subject content to students' prior knowledge and experiences.

The concept of funds of knowledge that guided my research was mainly based on Moll, et al.'s (1992) study which researched Mexican-American households in the Southwestern United States. They used funds of knowledge as a way to recognize the intellectual resources that minority language groups possess (Marshall & Toohey, 2010). There were several early studies on Mexican-American households in the 1990s, for example, Moll & Greenburg (1992) and Velez-Ibanez & Greenburg (1992). They explored how these households worked together in the communities to survive.

Moll, et al. (1992) define funds of knowledge as "to refer to these historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for

household or individual well-being” (p.133). For Moll and Greenberg (1992), funds of knowledge are “the essential cultural practices and bodies of knowledge and information that households use to survive, to get ahead, or to thrive” (p. 321). They also state, “In particular we highlight the social sharing of knowledge as part of the households’ functioning, what we have labeled the exchange of ‘funds of knowledge’” (p.320). They argue that the utilization of the funds of knowledge in school contexts could provide ways for educators to build on what minority students already know. They cautioned that although minority families preserve various funds of knowledge, school educators may only use a very limited and biased lens to the use of the knowledge. Minority families depend a great deal on networks which include people from outside the homes, such as uncles. This kind of networks is also similar to the multiple layers of environments surrounding the minority student and the family in Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model (1999). The knowledge embedded in this kind of networks is “thick” and “multi-stranded” (Moll, et al., 1992, p. 133). Adults may take on the role of teachers to pass on knowledge to children. The “teachers” (e.g. the mother) in these home-based learning contexts know “the child as a ‘whole’ person, not merely as a ‘student’, taking into account or having knowledge about the multiple spheres of activity within which the child is enmeshed” (Ibid, p.133). However, a teacher in a typical school classroom only has a “thin” and “single stranded” relationship with the students because “the teacher ‘knows’ the students only from the performance within rather limited classroom contexts” (Ibid, p. 134). A teacher must deliver knowledge based on school curriculum and subject content which may narrow the scope of knowledge.

In 2005, González et al. rephrased the definition of funds of knowledge by clarifying the meanings that it delivers. They added new notions to the concept of funds of knowledge that knowledge is not static. Instead, it is changing, evolving, and reciprocal. For instance, when a household's heritage culture blends into a new culture, there is new knowledge of culture generated. As González (2005) points out, "Increasingly, the boundedness of cultures gave way to an idea of the interculturality and hybridity of cultural practices" (p. 37). Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) emphasized the importance of using teaching methods to build on students' funds of knowledge. They believe that by tapping into students' familiar knowledge with education acquired from home and previous experiences, teachers are able to engage them into active learning. For example, if a student comes from a family with a fishing background, he/she may be familiar with fishing equipment, sea or lake conditions, fishing skills, etc. If the teacher can tap into that part of knowledge, the student will demonstrate a greater interest and study actively. Therefore, they encouraged teachers to learn more about the background knowledge of their students, including their home literacy practices, and to use this information in curriculum development and class content delivery in order to foster students' school study. Meanwhile, they argued that teachers can encourage more language and discussion activities in class as these are effective vehicles to transmit information to students and can also help students develop critical thinking.

The application of funds of knowledge needs teachers' home visits because funds of knowledge need to be identified prior to making use of them (Gonzalez et al, 2005; Gonzalez & Moll, 2002; Moll et al., 1992). According to Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (2005), visiting homes is a useful tool for data collection as it allows them to

see the firsthand learning activities that children are involved in. Based on what they see, they are able to invite parents to participate in classroom learning activities and design curriculum activities that the students are familiar with. Ginsberg (2007) also advocated for home visits because they provide opportunities to encourage family involvement in the school. His study showed families and their cultures are integrated into the school along with community values, and these become importance experiences in students' lives. Home visits involve a set of ongoing interviews which can become in-depth with the growing mutual trust between teachers and the family. The interviews can extend to the family's migration stories, work histories, home values, and views of education. Gonzalez and Moll (2002) point out the importance of getting to know about minority families' work histories and social networks because they are essential in identifying the funds of knowledge that families possess: "Funds of knowledge are generated through the social and labor history of families and communicated to others through the activities that constitute household life, including through the formation of social networks that are central to any household's functioning" (p.634). In this study, although I did not explore the funds of knowledge of refugee students' families through home visits, I did conduct interviews with the parents and other family members to acquire an understanding of what knowledge the families possessed. My consideration is that based on my research questions, I hoped to learn about how schools and teachers as the microsystem knew about and dealt with refugee students' funds of knowledge, and how much teachers understood the importance of the knowledge and how they made use of it. I looked into the funds of knowledge from my daily observations of children at school as well as with interviews with the families; and I observed how teachers incorporated the refugee

students' funds of knowledge and how they understood the funds of knowledge that they brought to the classroom. My research took schools as the main research sites and refugee students as the center. Their performance in language acquisition and the classroom practices that schools and teachers offered were of the highest importance for my study.

Although home visits are the main data collection tool in Moll et al.'s (2005) study, it does not mean all the teachers must go to students' homes to identify and elicit funds of knowledge. There are other ways available to them, such as attending parent workshops, tracking students' progress, observing children's interactions with others, keeping family journals, and using picture books (Baskwill & Harkins, 2009; Compton-Lilly, 2006; Leland, Harste & Huber, 2005).

Language learning is a dynamic process. During the process of learning a second language in classrooms and in home settings, refugee students are not just bystanders; instead, they are active participants although they often interact with adults such as teachers and parents. In Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg's (1992) study, they identified the relationships between adults and children in the Mexican-American households. They state:

Although adults may manifest specific proportions of a fund, the organization of learning is in the hands of the children themselves. Children are expected to ask questions during the performance of household tasks. Thus, the question-answer process is directed by the child rather than by the adult. Once children receive an answer, they may emulate adults by creating play situations for practicing learned behavior (p.326).

Children can play an active role in the process of language learning. The relationship between adults and children are reciprocal.

Moll et al. (1992) believed that children's learning is a complicated process which takes place in multiple contexts. For example, adults around a child can create multi-stranded and thick networks for children. If a child has an uncle who knows how to repair cars, then the child can be involved in car repairing. The same uncle may have several other roles, such as sport coach or occasional care provider. Moll et al. said: "these networks are flexible, adaptive, and active, and may involve multiple persons from outside the homes; in our terms, they are 'thick' and 'multi-stranded', meaning that one may have multiple relationships with the same person or with various persons" (p.133). Therefore, children can function in their communities with these adults, who are also a form of teachers. However, they found that at school the relationship between teachers and children do not follow this kind of pattern. Instead, the relationship tends to be more single-stranded and thin. In the classroom setting, there is often a one-way relationship between the teacher and students. They commented:

Thus, the 'teacher' in these home based contexts of learning will know the child as a 'whole' person, not merely as a 'student', taking into account or having knowledge about the multiple spheres of activity within which the child is enmeshed. In comparison, the typical teacher-student relationship seems 'thin' and 'single-stranded', as the teacher knows the students only from their performance within rather limited classroom contexts" (p.134).

In a typical classroom, teachers are the "givers of information" while students are the "receivers of information" (Strait & Wilke, 2007, p.59). This kind of relationship creates barriers for teachers to draw on students' previous knowledge and include it in the classroom. Velez-Ibanez and Greenburg (1992) state:

Public schools often ignore the strategic and cultural resources, which we have termed funds of knowledge, that households contain. We argue that these funds not only provide the basis for understanding the cultural systems from which U.S.-Mexican children emerge, but that they also are important and useful assets in the classroom (p.313).

At the same time, what needs to be recognized is that teachers have their own funds of knowledge, too. Delpit (2006) conducted a survey of teachers about how they understood the learning process and most teachers responded that they relied on external sources for information about learning, while minority teachers answered that they referenced their own learning when they designed learning activities for their students. Osborn (1996) also found that teachers' personal biographies, gender, ethnicity, and stage in the teacher's life circle lead to teachers' different values and beliefs about teaching. Considering teachers are largely white, middle-class, and from suburban or rural environments (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005), their values and beliefs shape their pedagogies for language teaching. Hence, it is very important to help them understand the sociocultural characteristics of the ELL population and the funds of knowledge they bring to classroom, and prepare them to conduct effective instructional practices for ELL student language learning.

Utilizing funds of knowledge within the classroom is considered to be important because teachers can use them to design language learning activities that students are able to get involved in. Cummins et al. (2005) argue that:

Prior knowledge, skills, beliefs, and concepts significantly influence what learners notice about their environment and how they organize and interpret their observations. Prior knowledge refers not just to information or skills previously acquired in a transmission-oriented instructional sequence but to the totality of the experiences that have shaped the learner's identity and cognitive functioning. This principle implies that in classrooms with students from linguistically diverse backgrounds, instruction must explicitly activate students' prior knowledge and build relevant background knowledge as necessary. (p.4)

Clark (2000) points out that a child's first language learning experience has a significant impact on the second language acquisition. She states:

Everything acquired in the first language (academic skills, literacy development, concept formation, subject knowledge, and learning strategies) will transfer to the

second language. As children are learning the second language, they are drawing on the background and experience they have available to them from their first language. (p.185)

For secondary school students, funds of knowledge can be drawn upon not only in ESL classrooms, but also subject classrooms. Basu and Barton (2007) studied urban minority youth in an after-school science program and looked at how these students were encouraged to capitalize on the fund of knowledge in science and what they were able to achieve when their funds of knowledge were tapped upon. By capitalizing on these students' funds of knowledge, they found students were more engaged in science education.

#### Second language acquisition theories

English learning is an important issue for refugee/ELL students. According to Genesee (1994), learning English is essential not only for students' acculturation into school and society, but also their academic success and well-being when they become adults. Building on students' prior knowledge can facilitate their language acquisition in school. Because my research focuses on refugee students' English learning, the following literature will inform my research analysis and discussion.

SLA (second language acquisition) theory has developed in three streams: behaviorism which accounts for both first and second language acquisition (e.g. children learn to speak a language under the stimulus of parents' encouragement and the frequency of the encouragement), nativist approach (Chomsky and his Universal grammar), and sociocultural approach (Adamson, 2005). Because this study considers learning a second language is a social practice which involves social interactions with people and environments, two influential theories in SLA were reviewed. They are



Stephen Krashen's set of hypotheses which analyzed SLA process with structural descriptions and Jim Cummins' notions which lift SLA to a more social level.

Stephen Krashen studied SLA with considerations of contextual factors, for example, comprehensible input and the affective filter hypothesis. His SLA theory includes five hypotheses: 1. the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis; 2. the Monitor hypothesis; 3. the Natural Order hypothesis; 4. the Input hypothesis; 5. the Affective Filter hypothesis.

#### *The Input Hypothesis*

The input hypothesis reflects Krashen's attempt to explain how the learner acquires a second language. This hypothesis suggests that the learner can learn the target language more effectively if he/she is presented with *comprehensible input* ( $i + 1$ ) that contains structures one level beyond his/her current stage of linguistic competence. For ELLs, when they begin their study in the new academic and linguistic setting, the input could be  $i+100$ . In that situation, they will easily be frustrated by linguistic challenges. As Krashen suggests, natural communicative input is the key for students to acquire a second language. Therefore, teachers need to take it into consideration in designing a syllabus to ensure that each ELL will receive "i+1" input appropriate for his/her current stage of linguistic competence.

#### *The Affective Filter Hypothesis*

Krashen argues that if a learner has low anxiety, high motivation, or high self-confidence, which will be reflected in a low affective filter, then the second language can be acquired more easily. This assists with allowing in more information and providing a fertile venue for learning. The comprehensible input described earlier can have a great effect when affective conditions are optimal, where the learner is intrinsically and highly

motivated and when anxiety is low. On the contrary, if a person has high anxiety, lower motivation, or a lower self-esteem, the affective filter will be higher and does not provide the learner with as many “subconscious language acquisition” opportunities as that of a person with a low affective filter (Krashen, 1994, p. 58). According to Krashen (1985), the higher the affective filter, the less comprehensible input is accepted by the learner. The affective filter suggests the need to create a less stressful learning environment where students are put at ease. Based on my Master’s research on high-achieving immigrant students (2006), both the teachers and the students mentioned the importance of a comfortable classroom. Another need suggested by the affective filter is to avoid correcting a student’s mistakes in front of a classroom full of people because this may in fact be counterproductive. In my previous research, students reported their reluctance to speak in public because their classmates would laugh at their accent and mistakes. The affective filter is closely tied in with environmental effects and students’ language acquisition.

These two aspects of Krashen’s theory provide the basic grounding for my study—how refugee students develop English proficiency and their interactions with the environment. However, for most ELLs, the more difficult part is learning in a subject-matter class where there is a high demand for English competency in reading and writing—“learning how to decode written text” (Cummins, 2007, p. 2). As ELLs progress through the grades, the complexity of academic language contains the difficulty of the concepts ELLs are required to understand, uncommon or technical vocabulary (many of which come from Latin and Greek sources), and increasingly sophisticated grammatical constructions. Academic language proficiency is considered to be a major contributing

factor to school achievement. To explore this issue, Jim Cummins's theory lends itself to the academic aspect of language learning.

According to Jim Cummins (2007), when new ELLs arrive, they construct their language knowledge and identity in the process of adaptation to an English dominant society. Citing Dewey, there is "the organic connection between education and personal experience" (Dewey, 1998, p.25), whereby experience acts as "a moving force" (p.38) in the construction of knowledge. For refugee ELLs, their experience in the culturally and linguistically different environment gives weight and influence to their construction of knowledge and who they are. How they see themselves and what language they finally master depends on the power the dominant society imposes on them during the interactions with the surrounding people and environment. Even if refugee ELLs receive the same instruction in regular classrooms, their interpretation of the content may vary from regular immigrant students' and native English speaking peers' due to the different life experiences.

#### *Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis*

First language plays an important role in second language acquisition. Toukoma and Skutnabb-Kangas (1977) first raised the basic idea of developmental interdependence relationship between L1 and L2:

The basis for the possible attainment of the threshold level of L2 competence seems to be the level attained in the mother tongue. If in an early stage of its development a minority child finds itself in a foreign-language learning environment without contemporaneously receiving the requisite support in its mother tongue, the development of its skill in the mother tongue will slow down or even cease, leaving the child without a basis for learning the second language well enough to attain the threshold level in it. (p.28)

Cummins (1981) further researched in the links between first language (L1) and second language (L2) (i.e. The Interdependence Hypothesis). He proposes that the level of L2 competence which a bilingual child attains is partially a function of the type of competence the child has developed in L1 at the time when intensive exposure to L2 begins. He holds that when a child's first language is not well developed, learning a second language will have a detrimental effect on the child's cognitive growth. He also argues that children's first language and second language are reciprocal and function together to contribute to academic success. Both Rossell and Baker (1996) acknowledge Cummins's Developmental Interdependence hypothesis by agreeing that "the development of skills in a second language is facilitated by skills already developed in the first language" (p. 27).

The *Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8* (2001) stresses the importance of students' first language maintenance, which is described as follows:

Research indicates that students benefit academically, socially, and emotionally when they are encouraged to develop and maintain proficiency in their first language while they are learning English. Language skills and conceptual knowledge are readily transferable from one language to another, provided there are no learning exceptionalities. The first language provides a foundation for developing proficiency in additional languages, serves as a basis for emotional development and provides a vital link with the student's family and cultural background. (p.7)

It is not exaggerating to say that this hypothesis promoted educators' awareness of first language greatly. Most empirical studies conducted later supported the hypothesis.

Verhoeven (1991) noted positive transfer from L1 literacy skills to later-acquired skills in the L2. Bossers (1991) reported evidence that there was direct transfer of L1 reading skills to L2 reading after the learner had acquired a certain amount of knowledge of the L2.

Based on this hypothesis, due to the lack of first language and literacy knowledge, refugee students may face great risk of not mastering a second language well unlike students who have some first language foundation. However, Cummins (1989) argues that the attainment of a second language is determined by social, educational, and language learning aptitude factors. Some students may attain a high level of linguistic competence, while others may attain a very low level of it. The contributing factors to this difference include the amount of time spent on L2 and the type of cognitive operations expressed through L2.

#### *Cognitive and Academic Language Proficiency*

Some ELLs are mistakenly considered ready for mainstream programs because of their high oral proficiency in English (Baker, 2000). Cummins (1981) notes there are actually two levels of second language development, each taking different length of time to develop. In his own terms, they are BICS and CALP.

Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) refers to the skills necessary to interact in everyday social settings. The development of BICS takes about two or three years. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) refers to the more complex cognitive and academic language proficiency needed to negotiate in academic settings. To develop cognitive and academic language proficiency takes about five to seven years in a second language. He illustrated the distinction between BICS and CALP with the assistance of an iceberg model (1989). Figure 2.4 shows the model.

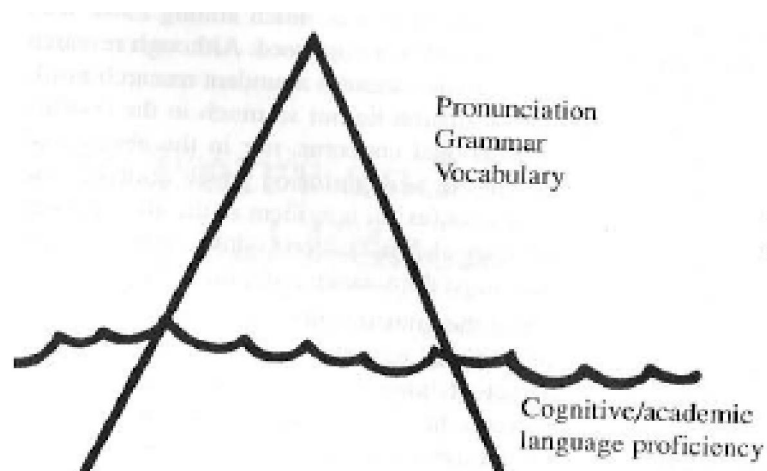


Figure 2.4 An Iceberg Model of BICS and CALP (Cummins, 1989)

Above the horizontal line is the small portion of the iceberg, representing BICS of the language. This includes the conversational language spoken and heard in everyday social settings. Also, it includes the mastery of pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. The part below the horizontal line is CALP. It is the proportion of language not spoken and heard in everyday social situations. It is the academic language associated with books and school, and with literature, math, history, and science. Academic language acquisition is not the understanding of content areas only. It includes high order thinking skills, such as comparing, classifying, synthesizing, evaluating, and inferring. Academic language tasks are context reduced. As a student gets older, the context of academic tasks becomes more and more reduced. The language also becomes more cognitively demanding. New ideas, concepts and language are presented to the students at the same time.

The linguistic processes going on in CALP are considerably more complex and abstract than in BICS. The complexity involved in CALP requires more time to master. As stated earlier, development of CALP in English takes ELLs five to seven years, while the development of English BICS usually takes less than 3 years, as the socially oriented

linguistic environment is always present to ELLs. However, CALP can only occur in a cognitively and academically oriented environment. It does not mean that CALP is independent of interpersonal communication. On the contrary, suggested by Cummins (1989), the quality of communication between adults and children at home and at school is a primary determinant of CALP development. My understanding of BICS and CALP is that the development of BICS and CALP is a parallel process instead of a linear process in the cases of all ELLs. When ELL students come to Canada, they are placed in the regular classrooms appropriate to their age and start BICS and CALP at the same time because they live in two types of environment: social and academic. When students have developed oral proficiency and understanding in English, they could better understand class content. Their CALP then rises.

BICS and CALP have critical implications to education practices. To help ELLs reach their academic potential, school programs for English language learners should include considerations of time and academic focus. The illustration of the distinction between BICS and CALP shows that CALP takes a longer time to develop. Although in Ontario ELLs can receive ESL support for four years, the ESL program is not long enough to provide ELLs with the additional ESL support they need to be successful in school academics and on standardized tests.

The Ontario practical guide for supporting English language learners *Many Roots Many Voices* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005) recommends the use of CALLA (The Cognitive/Academic Language Learning Approach) model in school that Chamot and O'Malley developed in 1994 based on CALP. It integrates content area instruction with language development and explicit instruction in learning strategies. Academic language

development, including all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), is embedded in daily lessons in the content subject. In the CALLA model, students are explicitly instructed in metacognitive strategies that will give them the skills to utilize prior knowledge, organize information, retain and apply knowledge in various contexts, and reflect upon their own involvement in the learning process. As Chamot et al (1997) stressed, “Academic success depends on students gaining access to and comprehending the language of books and school discourse” (p.vii). Therefore, it is important for both mainstream teachers and ESL teachers to equip themselves with knowledge of strategies for teaching ELLs, especially students who lack formal education.

#### Conclusion

This chapter reviewed some key literature in the area of refugees and their education in Canada which includes bioecological theory, school support, funds of knowledge, and second language acquisition theories. Each area offers guidance in how to understand and provide support to ELL students and their families. Although most of the research points to the benefits for students who receive continuous support at home, classroom and school, the community, there is still a huge need to further develop what support is more effective for refugee students, and there is insufficient literature on refugee students’ school education (McBrien, 2005).

In summary, this chapter looked at the situation of refugee students and their needs from several aspects. It reviewed the education policies of both Canada and Ontario, and how people from some different origins became refugees. Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological system theory included the main environments that influence students including their family, school, and community. Issues of school support and funds of



knowledge students bring to the classroom were addressed as important aspects of students. The second language acquisition theories analyzed the linguistic needs of ELLs. The research studies and findings in this literature review substantiate the need for support of refugee students in the Canadian public school contexts. The next chapter discusses the methodology of this study.

### Chapter 3 Methodology

This study is designed to understand how schools support refugee students' language learning and adaptation to schooling in Canada and the role of refugee students' funds of knowledge in language learning and how the funds of knowledge are recognized and utilized at school. This study identified the programs, services, and pedagogies which schools and classrooms used to serve the needs of refugee students in language learning, traced the thinking of school and teachers, and discussed how educators around refugee students reflected on their practices. In this study, I used qualitative case study methodology (Yin, 2003) to investigate refugee students' English language learning experiences in Canada which includes the current language teaching practices targeting refugee students, the utilization of funds of knowledge, and the students' responses to the current practices at two different school sites. I developed four cases in my research because this allowed me to compare data across all the cases instead of being confined to just one. The four cases are based on sixteen interviews with twenty people (parents showed up in couples), supported by participant observation, field notes, and document analysis. As Herriott and Firestone (1983) stated in Yin (2003), "The evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling [than studies with a single case], and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust" (p. 46). Multiple cases can make data rich and improve understanding of complexities. They can strengthen or broaden analytical logics (Yin, 1998). This methodology is used to explore recurring themes in complex situations; however, finding patterns and themes across cases should be given full attention (Munger & Psencik, 2002).

In this chapter, I outline methodology and methods I used in my study. I also discuss some methodological considerations such as bias, trust, power, and intervention issues.

## Methodology

I conducted a qualitative case study aimed at understanding refugee students' English language learning experience in the Canadian public school system. Data collection lasted from January 2009 to June 2009. A case study strategy, with its emphasis on the examination of a setting, is appropriate because its purpose is to understand people's actions and meaning brought by participants in a given context (Morrow & Smith, 2000). Miles & Huberman (1994) encouraged multi-site case approach as it may help researchers take account of the issue of uniqueness, deepen understanding of the phenomena under study, and make findings more predisposed to theory generation and generalization. So I conducted my study at two different schools of different levels, hoping this will enhance not only the validity of findings and the scope of constructs developed, but also contribute to the understandings established.

A case can be in different forms. A case, defined by Stake (1995), is:

Everything is a case. A child may be a case. A teacher may be a case. Nevertheless, her teaching lacks the specificity, the boundedness, to be called a case. An innovative program may be a case. All the schools in Sweden can be a case. However, a relationship among schools, the reasons for innovative teaching or the policies of school performance are less commonly considered a case. These topics are generalities, rather than specifics. The case is a specific, a complex, functioning thing (p.2).

“Boundedness”, or a “bounded system”, according to Merriam (1998), can be determined by asking “whether there is a limit to the number of people involved who could be interviewed or a finite amount of time [for observation]” (p.27). If the number of people who could be interviewed or observations that could be conducted has no end, then the phenomenon is not bounded enough to be a case. A case in my study refers to a student with a refugee background who was learning English in/through classroom activities and

social interactions during my research time span. In other words, it was a student participant who participated in a social activity as a bounded system grounded in the social and cultural resources of the ESL and mainstream classroom.

The strengths of qualitative study lie in its “interpretive”, “experiential”, “situational”, and “personalistic” natures, which allows researchers to interpret the meaning of human affairs from different views, get data without intervening or arranging settings, pursue the uniqueness of cases rather than commonality, and focus on holistic instead of elementalistic analytics (Stake, 2010, p.15). The criteria that establish rigor in qualitative methods include “persistent observation”, “peer debriefing”, “progressive subjectivity”, “member checks”, “triangulation”, “transferability”, “dependability”, “authenticity and fairness”, and “confirmability” (Patton, 2002, p. 552-588). Although Denzin & Lincoln (2005) and Creswell (1998) worry that the subjectivity exists in researchers’ interpretation of data and assertions in qualitative research, according to Stake (2010), being subjective should not be seen as “a failing, something to be eliminated, but as an essential element of understanding human activity” (p. 29).

### *Research Questions*

Seeking to understand refugee students’ English language learning experience in Canadian schools, the overall questions I addressed were, 1. What role do refugee students’ funds of knowledge play in support of their language acquisition and acculturation to the new school? 2. How do schools and teachers support refugee students’ language learning to promote their success in school? Guided by my research questions, I saw the need to get fully involved in the classrooms, becoming part of its community, to acquire rich, descriptive data. As Merriam (1985) pointed out, a case study results “in an

intensive, holistic description and analysis of the phenomenon or social unit being studied.” (p.206). To achieve this, extensive face-to-face interviews and classroom observations were conducted in my case studies, and they were both descriptive and exploratory.

In this thesis, all the participants and schools were given pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

### *Setting*

I conducted my research in a medium-sized city in Southwestern Ontario. It has a population of 350,000. The number of refugees in the city is unclear because of their great mobility, according to a local immigrant service agency (telephone inquiry, 2011). In an annual research project about people who need work assistance provided by Ontario Works organization in this city, refugees comprised 5% in 2007. The percentage has not changed much in the past four years.

## Citizenship and Immigration

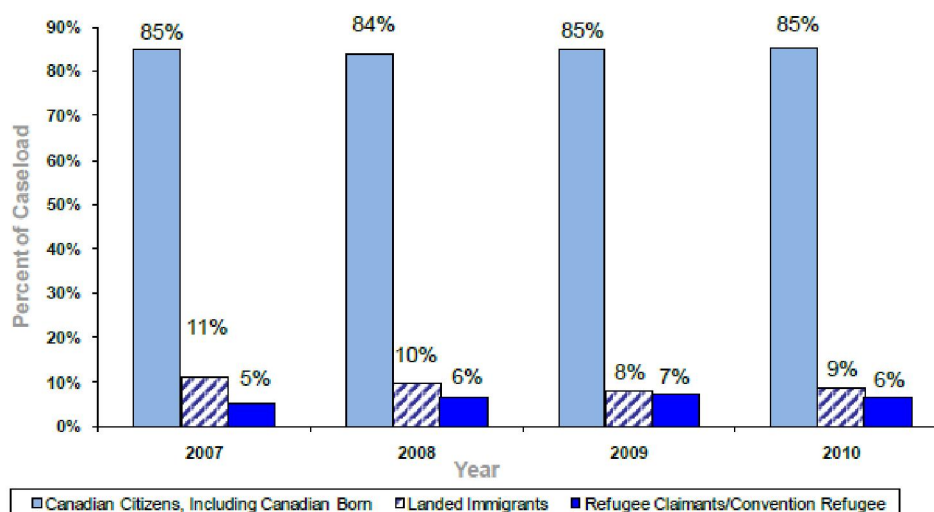


Figure 3.1 Citizenship and immigration chart (Ontario Works, 2010, p. 39)

Regarding the minority language interpretation service needed by people receiving Ontario Works assistance in the city where the study took place, “the average monthly number of requests has ranged from 181 in 2007 to 222 in 2010” (Ontario Works, 2010, p.44). The top ten interpreter requests are as follows:

## Immigrant Trends: Top Ten Interpreter Requests

2007	2008	2009	2010
181 requests per month	207 requests per month	183 requests per month	222 requests per month
SPANISH	SPANISH	SPANISH	SPANISH
ARABIC	ARABIC	ARABIC	ARABIC
PERSIAN	PERSIAN	PERSIAN	KAREN
FRENCH	FRENCH	KAREN	PERSIAN
VIETNAMESE	VIETNAMESE	VIETNAMESE	VIETNAMESE
ALBANIAN	OTHER	FRENCH	KHMER
KURDISH	ALBANIAN	ALBANIAN	AMHARIC
DARI	KURDISH	KURDISH	FRENCH
KHMER	KHMER	KHMER	ALBANIAN
SOMALI	RUSSIAN	SOMALI	KURDISH

Figure 3.2 Immigrant trends: Top 10 interpreter services (Ontario Works, 2010, p.45)

Although these statistics do not show the exact percentage of refugees in the city population, from the data of their percentage in the work force, it is clear the city may have more Spanish speaking immigrants and refugees than other minority groups.

A public elementary school, Wharton Elementary School, located in the north, and a secondary school, Monty Secondary School, located in the south of the city in Southwestern Ontario where the study took place were the settings of the study. Wharton

Elementary School had approximately 700 students, among whom 3 to 4 % were ELL students. Due to the small number of ELL students, there was no particular ESL class, but every ESL student must come to receive one-on-one English support from an ESL teacher every afternoon for 1-1.5 hours depending on the student's class work-load.

Monty Secondary School had approximately 830 students, of which 116 were in the ESL program. The population of the school was about 45% ESL/ELL students. New ELL students studied in the ESL program for 1-2 years, and at any time when they were ready, they would be transferred to mainstream classrooms. The ESL program was not different from mainstream programs in content delivery except that extra hours were assigned to English language arts classes. So I observed the students in their English classes and math classes under the ESL program. Both schools had a diverse student body including immigrant/refugee students from Colombia, Somalia, Vietnam, China, Korea, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Kosovo. However, due to the lack of a consistent tracking system of refugee students across the school board, it was unclear about the proportion of refugee students among the ELL population in each school.

In each school, an ESL program was provided to support students whose native language was not English and whose English proficiency was lower than the grade expectation. At the elementary school, one full-time ESL teacher was on site and one part time ESL teacher worked 9-10 hours a week. The secondary school had an ESL office where four full-time ESL teachers and two part time ESL teachers were hired. In both schools, a social worker was in place to give help to ELL students and their families by paying family visits and getting involved in the immigrant and refugee ESL community and in neighbourhood activities.

### *Participants*

Following ethical review and school board approval, contact was made with several elementary schools and secondary schools. As mentioned earlier, there were no records kept about ELL students' status (i.e. immigrant/refugee) at schools. After a few vain attempts to locate refugee students, I contacted the local school board directly for help to identify possible schools that had been accepting refugee students. The school board ESL coordinator Mr. Kent sent emails of inquiry to four school principals and asked them to contact me if there were any refugee students in their schools. Two schools out of those schools contacted me and were willing to be used as a research site. When I came to each school, I was introduced to the ESL teacher by the principal. Unfortunately, neither of them could find refugee students for my research. However, one of them recommended me to Wharton Elementary School where she had previously worked because she was sure there were refugee students in that school. She helped me make contact with Mrs. Lee, the ESL teacher, at Wharton. Mrs. Lee taught ESL full time at Wharton Elementary School. I explained my research to her, and she told me she had two refugee students. She had been working with these two students, and she knew they had a refugee background. One student's story was once published in a local newspaper and drew a lot of attention. In order to confirm the two students' status, she also asked the social worker Mr. Richardson for confirmation. Mr. Richardson had been working with these two students' families and communities, so he was very sure that they were refugee students. I left two copies of the parental consent form with Mrs. Lee so that when the two students' parents came to pick them up, she could give the form to them for them to read and sign. In order to help the parents understand better my research purpose, Mr. Richardson



volunteered to explain my study to the parents when he saw them. Mrs. Lee also explained my study to the two students. One week later, I received the signed consent form of the two students' parents from Mrs. Lee. While waiting for parents' consents, I obtained the permission from the principal of Wharton Elementary School that this school could be used as my research site for my study.

Under my professors and colleagues' recommendation, I successfully got in touch with Mr. Green, the ESL head teacher at Monty Secondary School because this school is well known for its cultural diversity. Mr. Green showed great enthusiasm for my research and welcomed me to do research at his school. He looked up ELL students' files and checked with several students and their parents and confirmed there were three refugee students in his class. I sent each student a copy of the consent form for his/her parents to read, and one student's parents declined to participate in my study. The other two students, Andy and Julia, after signing a consent form, became the student participants in my study.

The student participants were all in Canada as refugees. Their ages were between 11 and 16 during the time I conducted my research. They had lived in Canada for 1-3 years. Two of them were female (Julia and Kathy), and two were male (Hassan and Andy). Julia was from Mexico, Andy was from Colombia, Kathy was from Kosovo, and Hassan was from Somalia. Julia and Andy were in grade 11, while Kathy and Hassan were in grade 5. In order to obtain a holistic picture of their language learning experiences at school, I also included participants such as ESL teachers, mainstream classroom teachers, parents, social workers, principals, and school board coordinator whom I interviewed to gather

data for the case studies I was building. The following charts shows the participants involved in my study.

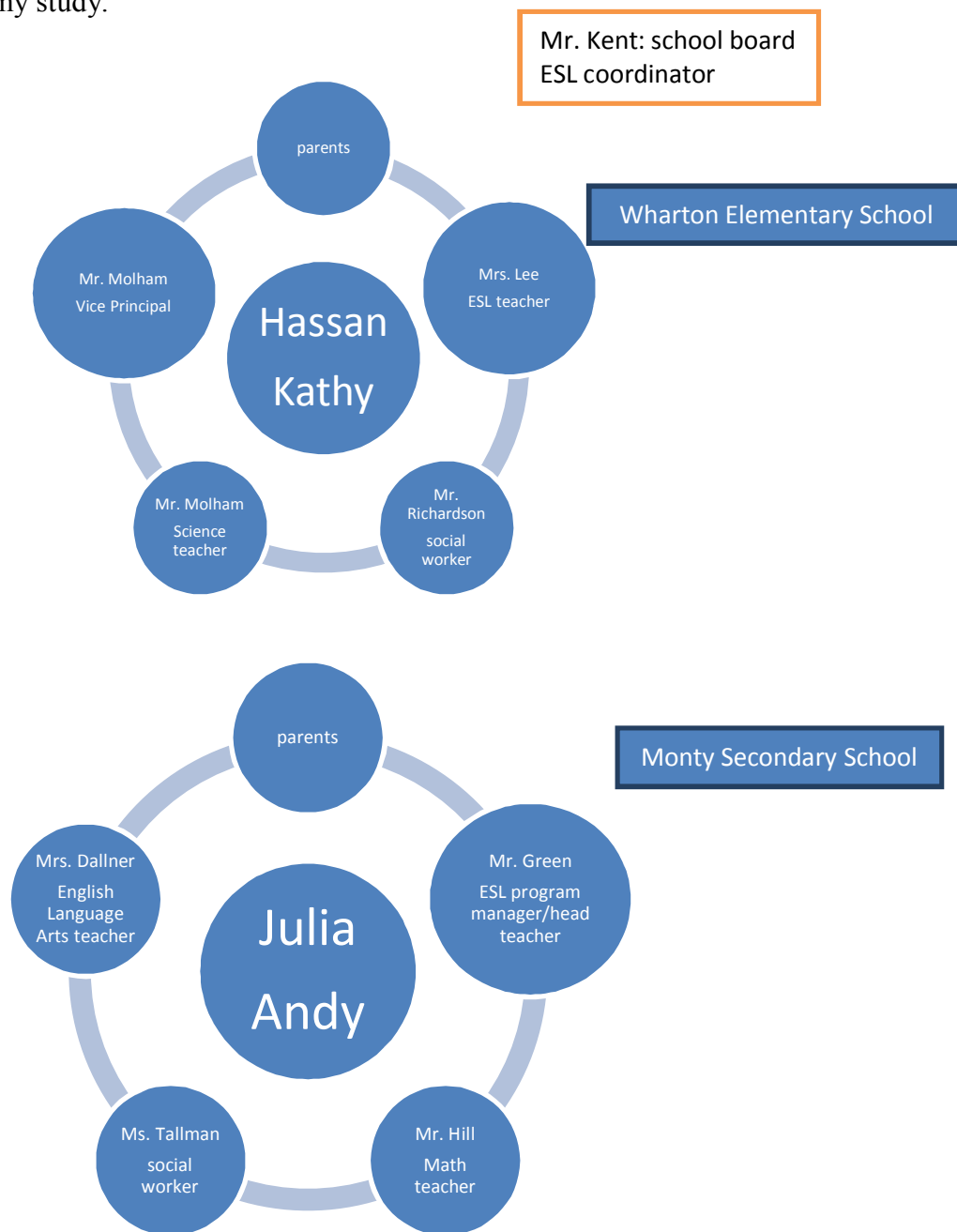


Figure 3.3 Research participant chart

*Defining terms*

Considering some terms may be interpreted differently in different contexts and cause confusion, I provide the definitions of ELL students and refugee students that I used in my research.

(1) ELL students

Defined in *Many Roots Many Voices* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005), English language learners (ELLs) are “students in English-language schools whose first language is other than English or is a variety of English that is significantly different from the variety used in Ontario’s schools, and who may initially require educational interventions to assist them in attaining English language proficiency” (p. 48). ELL students may be Canadian-born (raised in a home setting of a foreign language) or newly arrived from other countries. It is a terminology that has come into increasing use internationally among educators and researchers.

(2) Refugee students

A refugee student, in my study, refers to an individual who is outside his/her country and is unable to return to that country due to the possible reasons of race, religion, and nationality. To put it simply, a refugee student is the school-aged child of people who are claiming refugee status in Canada.

### Research Methods

Patton (2002) proposed three ways of collecting data in a qualitative study: 1) direct quotations from people about their feelings, knowledge, and experiences obtained through interviews; 2) detailed descriptions of people’s activities, behaviours, and actions recorded in observation; and 3) quotations, excerpts, and paragraphs from various types

of documents. In my case study, all of the three types of data collection—interview, observation, and documentary data, were used.

### 1. Participant observation

Observation is “the process of gathering open-ended, firsthand information by observing people and places at a research site” (Creswell, 2005, p.211). Observation has been commonly used in qualitative research to study various groups of people.

Participant observation is a special mode of observation where people “may assume a variety of roles within a case study situation and may actually participate in the events being studied” (Yin, 2003, p.94). This method is distinctive because the researcher approaches the research participants instead of having them come to the researcher. In other words, the researcher is not a passive observer. As Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, and Namey (2011) summarized, participant observation can be used to check against participants’ subjective reporting of what they believe and do, and it is “also useful for gaining an understanding of the physical, social, cultural, and economic contexts in which study participants live; the relationships among and between people, contexts, ideas, norms, and events; and people’s behaviors and activities” (p. 14). Within this method, observing and participating are integral to understanding the breadth and complexities of human activities. Keeping this in mind, I began my work with the goal of spending six months at two schools, from January to June in 2009.

The observation occurred at the student participants’ respective schools. I observed them in both their ESL classrooms and mainstream classrooms in order to obtain a more complete understanding of their learning experiences. At Wharton Elementary School, I went to observe the students three times a week. On two afternoons, I observed one

mainstream class for one teaching period and stayed until the ESL time when the two student participants came to the ESL office to work with Mrs. Lee for forty minutes. On the third afternoon during ESL time, I worked with the student participants for forty minutes as a participant observer. By working with them on a regular basis, I was able to obtain thick and detailed data without intruding on the participants' normal study. Mrs. Lee, the on-site full time ESL teacher, gave me instructions to follow and content to cover during the teaching period. At Monty Secondary School, I went to observe an ESL class and a mainstream class for one teaching period a day twice a week. Following the guidelines that Merriam (1998) provided, I observed the physical setting, such as what the ESL and the regular classrooms were like; I observed the participants and took notes of who were in the context, how many people there were and their roles; I observed the class activities and student participants' interactions with teachers, peers, and environment; I also observed the subtle factors, such as the student participants' reactions to teachers' commands, peers' request, and small talks between students; lastly, I took notes of my own behaviours, my role in the setting, and my presence and its possible influence to the setting.

## 2. Interviews

Interviews are one of the most important sources of case study information (Yin, 1994, 2003) because “they provide useful information...and permit participants to describe detailed personal information” (Creswell, 2005, p.215). It is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them, or when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate (Merriam, 1988). Interviews are used for “obtaining unique information or interpretation held by the person

interviewed,” “collecting a numerical aggregation of information from many persons”, and “finding out about ‘a thing’ that the researchers were unable to observe themselves” (Stake, 2010, p. 95). Since interviewees produce quotable materials, researchers should make sure the interview is “tailored to what is special about that person” (p. 95). To do this, Stake recommended asking open-ended questions, such as facts of a matter as well as their opinions about events. Merriam (1998) and Girden (1996) also noted that the most commonly used interview in qualitative studies is through the use of open-ended and semi-structured questions. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to “best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings” (Creswell, 2005, p.214). They also allow researchers “to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 1998, p. 74).

In my research, I conducted one-on-one interviews (semi-structured) with students, ESL teachers, mainstream classroom teachers, social workers, a school principal, an ESL program manager, and a school board ESL coordinator during the observation period at a time agreed on by both the interviewee and me. Due to the elementary school student participants’ English proficiency, I did not conduct formal interviews. Instead, I asked them interview questions every time I worked with them. The interviews took place mainly in the school setting except one interview with a social worker was conducted at a coffee place. Since one student participant’s parents could not speak English, the school arranged an interpreter to interpret the interview. All the interviews were audio taped, then transcribed and analyzed. Permissions were solicited from the interviewees for

verification regarding genuineness and truthfulness. Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of all participants and the schools.

### 3. Document collection

Creswell (2005) suggests documents as “a valuable source of information in qualitative research” (p.219). The advantage of reviewing documents is that “they provide the advantage of being in the language and words of the participants, who have usually given thoughtful attention to them” (p. 219). Documentary data can help researchers to “uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem” (Merriam, 1998, p.121).

Throughout the study, I collected several types of documents such as worksheets, curriculum, and students’ class work and homework. These documents were supplementary to the data from participant observations and interviews. Document collection as a part of data triangulation was also supportive to analyze the data as I came up with the themes that emerged.

### Data Analysis

In my research, there were several stages in data analysis: ongoing analysis, memoing, data entry, and triangulation. As Flick (1998) discusses, qualitative researchers should reflect on their work and explore the implications of their role in producing certain kinds of knowledge. This requires data analysis to be an ongoing and iterative process in qualitative research. Every time after my visit to schools, I took detailed notes of student participants’ activities and categorized them by individual student, classes, and teachers. I frequently compared new notes with previous ones to see if there was any discontinuation

in students' learning process so that I could carefully study and identify what may have caused it.

Throughout the entire process of analysis, I also engaged in memoing, which means I recorded reflective notes about what I learned from my data on a monthly basis. At this stage, I tried to be very aware of my own values, ideas and pre-judgments because my previous beliefs and stance might impede my pursuit of trustworthy research. I wrote myself critical memos when I had any ideas and insights. The memos are a valuable source for data analysis. According to Lather (1990), performing ongoing self-reflection can further the credibility of data.

At the data entry stage, I transcribed all the interviews and typed the text from interviews, observational notes, and memos into WORD documents. I safely stored the data on my personal computer.

The major stage in data analysis is data coding. I used triangulation (Yin, 2006; Stake, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and developed the data into category systems. Yin (2006) proposed that "in collecting case study data, the main idea is to 'triangulate' or establish converging lines of evidence to make your findings as robust as possible" (p.115). Cohen & Manion (1994) also suggest triangulation as a key data analysis tool. Originally, Denzin (1978) raised the notion of triangulation. In his explication of how to use triangulation as a research strategy, Denzin emphasizes three types of triangulation: (a) data triangulation including time, space, and person, (b) investigator triangulation, and (c) methodological triangulation (pp. 294-307). Data triangulation and methodological triangulation were used in my study. Investigator triangulation was excluded because I was the only investigator on site and I was not able to triangulate my data with anyone



else. Data triangulation refers to using several data sources, such as multiple participants. Denzin furthers data triangulation to include time and space as he believes that to obtain a better understanding of a social phenomenon requires careful examination under a variety of conditions. In my research, to study refugee student participants, I observed them for a time period of six months and in different settings (i.e. ESL classrooms and mainstream classrooms). Methodological triangulation is the use of multiple methods in the examination of a social phenomenon. In order to explore my research questions, I used different means of data collection including participant observations, interviews, and document collection. Besides the above two types of triangulation, I also used combined levels of triangulation (Yin, 2003), which refers to comparing different levels of analysis—individual, the group, organization, and society. I collected data from the school board, school administrators, teachers, and students, who provided data at different levels.

To develop the data into category systems, firstly, I carefully studied participants' responses to open-ended questions during the interview. Secondly, I categorized the responses into problems that are pertinent to my research questions. Thirdly, I counted the number of times that a code or a theme appeared in my data because this could help me clarify the words I would use for frequency in my report. Fourthly, I coded the data horizontally by looking at observational data and documental data. After that, I created hierarchical category systems by studying what codes were related vertically and what ideas or themes were more general than others. The next step is to corroborate and validate the results. Here I will discuss the methodological considerations in the corroborating and validating stage.

## Methodological Considerations

I followed credibility criteria that were proposed by Morrow (2005) and Lincoln & Guba (1985), and the qualities needed to construct a trustworthy qualitative study by Patton (2002) and Stake (2010). All of these criteria and qualities, to a great extent, overlap and supplement each other. I would like to discuss my considerations regarding these criteria and qualities: 1) subjectivity and reflexivity (Morrow, 2005); 2) thick description and persistent observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); 3) triangulation (e.g. data, method) (Stake, 2010).

### *Subjectivity and reflexivity*

Morrow (2005) recommended qualitative researchers to “ground our research not only in the substantive theory base leading to the questions guiding the research but also firmly in the paradigm that is most appropriate to that research as well as in more transcendent criteria for trustworthiness” (p.250). Subjectivity and reflexivity are indispensable qualities of most types of research paradigm. Subjectivity has long been claimed as a weakness of qualitative research. However, according to Morrow, all research is “subject to researcher bias” (Ibid, p.254). No matter qualitative or quantitative, both take the perspectives that researchers take in approaching subjectivity, and the perspectives are greatly influenced by the paradigms guiding the research. As a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge the subjectivity in my research. My educational background—a mixed eastern and western education, my personal experience as an immigrant from China to a developed country, and my view of the world formed by these two make my bias unavoidable in the data collection and data analysis. My subjectivity was managed in the following ways: “making implicit assumptions and biases overt” to

myself and reflexivity (Ibid, p. 254). As my research progressed, I recognized there were several factors that could interfere with data collection and data interpretation, such as my emotional involvement in the study (i.e. I came from China and I am an English language learner), my presuppositions formed the reading of literature (e.g. refugee students' mental health, dropouts, educational needs, etc.), and interaction with the research participants (e.g. some of them were easy going and liked to share what they thought, while some were not). In order to control my biases, I read extensively the literature about refugee students, which could expand my understanding of phenomena and help me adopt multiple ways to view and interpret phenomena. I also had a firm understanding of the issues that emerged in my study, and I was aware that I may report contradictory evidence, which Yin (1989) suggested are "positive in controlling bias" (p.63). I kept notes of my unacknowledged assumptions and constantly checked them against the literature and shared some of them with people who had similar experiences and different experiences from mine to develop more flexible perspectives of viewing and understanding issues.

Reflexivity is also very important in qualitative research. Reflexivity, explained by Nightingale & Cromby (1999),

requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgment of the impossibility of remaining 'outside of' one's subject matter while conducting research. Reflexivity then, urges us to explore the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research. (p. 228)

Rennie (2004) defined reflexivity as "self-awareness and agency within that awareness" (p.183). According to Morrow (2005), researchers need to do a lot of reflection if they want to deal with bias and assumptions that come from their own life experiences or

interactions with their research participants. I kept an ongoing record of my own experiences, reactions, thoughts, as well as any emerging awareness of biases and assumptions. I came back and studied my notes once in a while. My thinking over these notes has to some extent contributed to data analysis.

### *Thick Description and Persistent Observation*

Thick description is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a way of achieving a type of external validity (p. 359). Holloway (1997) also described thick description as the detailed description of field experiences where the researcher can make explicit the patterns of cultural and social relationships and puts them in context. Therefore, thick description must describe a phenomenon in sufficient detail. Lincoln and Guba (1985) further explained:

The description must specify everything that a reader may need to know in order to understand the findings (findings are *not* part of the thick description, although they must be interpreted in the terms of the factors thickly described). (emphasis in original, p. 125)

From the detailed description, readers can evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other things, settings, and people. During the observations of my research participants, I recorded a lot of observational data by taking notes. They contained almost everything I saw and felt at the moment. Because humans cannot recall every detail in a past scene, I tried to write down my observation in detail in order to capture the important information in my field notes if it could help me understand the context, the setting, and what has gone on. All of my field notes were descriptive. They were dated and gave information such as where and when an observation took place, and

who were being observed, and a brief description of the physical environment as well as any on-going activities. I also used a digital voice recorder to record conversations.

Observation is a data collection technique in which the researchers immerse themselves in the world of the participants (Yin, 2003). The immersion or prolonged engagement is “to render the inquirer open to the multiple influences—the mutual shapers and contextual factors—that impinge upon the phenomenon being studied”; however, “the purpose of persistent observation is to identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.304). As prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth to the study (Ibid). During the six months of engaging myself in data collection, I also gave attention to atypical phenomenon. I recorded my observations in as full details as I could. From the close observation of the atypical, I was able to label salient factors in my study and explore them in detail.

#### *Data, theory, and method triangulation*

Stake (2010) defined triangulation as a process of using various perspectives and maintaining replicable data collection procedures and conclusions. He states:

Qualitative researchers triangulate their evidence. That is, to get the meanings straight, to be more confident that the evidence is good, they develop various habits called “triangulation.” The simplest, probably, is to “look again and again, several times.”... Or, more important, look and listen from more than one vantage point. (p.123)

I addressed triangulation by using a combination of multiple data sources (i.e., participant observations, interviews, and documentary evidence). In addition, I constantly compared my data to theories that laid the foundation for my research and identified information

that effectively incorporates sociocultural theories and second language acquisition theories. Lastly, I employed these methodological procedures, ongoing analysis, memoing, data entry, and triangulation, for data analyses to analyze classroom activities and interactions.

#### Ethical considerations

In this section, I first address one important ethical consideration—the trustworthiness of my study as Morrow and Smith (2000) suggested. As I attempt to demonstrate throughout my research, there is a lack of significant research in educational research literature related to refugee children in schools in Canada (McBrein, 2005; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001, 2007). It needs to be recognized that Canada was second to the United States in the world for providing a shelter to refugees in 2008, and she “annually resettles 10,000 to 12,000, or one out of every 10 refugees resettled globally...” (CIC, 2010). Considering their population in Canada, refugee children should have made an impact on Canadian public education system. Field (2008) expresses his concerns over the current education-- “Many educators see linguistic and cultural diversity as problems to overcome rather than as resources to develop”, so “This remedial orientation influences school policies, programs and practices in ways that are detrimental to the achievement of ELLs” (p.25).

In consideration of potential risks or harm that the participants in my study might experience, I conducted this study in mutually acceptable educational settings such as classrooms and offices where participants’ normal educational practices took place. I intended to minimize the risks or harms to the participants, so my open-ended interviews excluded the elementary school aged participants and gave the option to adult participants

as to whether they would like to share their previous schooling experience with me. As mentioned above, I obtained information from the elementary students in casual conversations while I assisted them in their ESL assignments. As I stated earlier, once I obtained the approvals from University ethical board, I gave out the informed consent forms to the refugee students' parents. The teachers and I also explained my research to the parents in person to make sure they understood the research. The forms were also written in simple English for young participants to understand. In the consent forms, I provided as much information about the purpose of my study, the activities, and possible risks that they might be subject to. All in all, I tried my best to help all the participants in my study understand the procedures of the study and I was open to any questions from them. The participants were also informed that I would share the data I have collected and reports for them to check.

As Marshall & Batten (2003) point out, since there are differences between researcher and participant, care must be given to not interfere with the research process with one's own values, nor judge a participant's behavior from one's own cultural background. During my research, I was very aware of the differences related to mainstream culture and minority culture, language proficiency skills, and educational opportunities. Stake (2006) argues that "Too much emphasis on original research questions and contexts can distract researchers from recognizing new issues when they merge"; however, "too little emphasis on research questions can leave researchers unprepared for subtle evidence supporting the most important relationships" (p.13). To balance this, I maintained an openness to the situation under investigation throughout my research. I have been attentive to issues that are not expected or do not conform to existing accounts or theories.

I also tried to avoid the influence of my own values, ideas and pre-judgments on data collection and data analysis.

I acknowledged my responsibility to work with my participants and approach the participants with care and sensitivity. I have been involved in several research studies in university in which I have worked with teachers, ELL students, and families. I have also worked with elementary school refugee children from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These experiences helped me to better communicate with the participants in my study. I was aware that my presence might cause a power imbalance in the classrooms (Sleeter, 2001) in the sense that as an outside researcher I could be viewed as having power over my participants, especially the students when I interviewed them and asked for information. Therefore, throughout the study, I presented myself as a researcher and at the same time, a volunteer ESL teacher with the participants, so I developed trust and rapport through my engagement in the research sites. I approached my participants and the research site with great sensitivity and care and was mindful about my interview questions. I did my best to collect data while protecting my participants from possible risks, for example, keeping them away from remembering an unpleasant event (Erickson, 1986). I tried to bring about the true thoughts of my participants in my study. I hoped that the findings in my study would be beneficial and relevant to teachers and the refugee communities in Canada.

In the next chapter, I will present the profiles of the refugee participants and develop four cases for my study.



## Chapter 4 Profiles of Four Refugee Students

This chapter is organized into narrative sections introducing each refugee student's background and snapshots of their school life in either ESL classrooms or regular classrooms. The profiles aimed to capture the environments within the microsystem that refugee students in my study interacted with. Each section includes my observation notes, teachers' comments, and the student's words whenever possible to help readers get to know him/her. Four cases of both elementary- school-age and secondary-school-age refugee students who were studying in Canadian public schools during data collection are presented in this chapter. These cases portray each student's personality, engagement in class activities during the language learning process as well as their interactions with the microsystem, the people (e.g. teachers and peers) in the closest environment around them. These profiles begin with descriptions of the participants, their families, their immigration stories, followed by a brief overview of the context and an examination of their language learning experiences and a short summary with my reflective comments at the end. All the information in this chapter was drawn from audio-taped transcripts with the student participants and adult participants and the data includes field notes, reflection journals, and relevant documents. All the names are pseudonyms to protect all the participants' identity. Considering the purpose of this chapter is to give an account of these students and their Canadian school life, I will discuss these cases in greater depth based on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model in chapter 5, where I take an overall look at the cases, analyze the themes that emerge from the data presented in chapter 4, and discuss around the microsystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem.

## Kathy

### Personal and Family History

Kathy is an eleven-year-old girl. Among the girls in her class, she is quite tall. She has very big eyes and dark black hair. She has a curly pony tail, but sometimes her pony tail looked loose and uncombed. She usually wears a pink coat and a pair of white sneakers.

The first time I met Kathy was at the end of a day when her mom came to pick her up. Mrs. Lee, the school ESL teacher, was showing me around the school, and when she saw Kathy and her mom, she brought me to them and briefly introduced both of us. Kathy was shy at that time. She hid behind her mom's back and peeked at me. She didn't talk much. When we were done talking, she just followed her mom quietly all the way to the outside of the building. In her mom's arms, there was a much smaller girl who I took to be her little sister. That was my first impression of Kathy: a shy and quiet girl. However, later, my impression of her behaviour changed. When my formal observations started, I was surprised at Kathy's outgoing character. She laughed a lot, and she spoke in a loud voice. I could often hear her laughter or shouts from the hallway. She came from Bosnia under the help of a Canadian sponsor to Wharton elementary school in 2007 with her mother and father and three younger siblings. Her youngest sibling was in day care, the second one was in grade 1, and the third one was in grade 4, while Kathy was in grade 5. They were in the same school.

The whole family moved to Canada for a better life when Kathy was 9 years old. They originally lived in Albania, but due to constant conflicts caused by the breakdown of the former Yugoslavia, they were forced to move from place to place. They had seen a few of their friends who successfully fled to Canada under Canadian sponsorship, so they made

up their mind to find shelter in the peaceful country, too. After they moved their home to Bosnia, they began their refugee application. In order to survive, they lived with their friends' friend who worked on a farm. The whole family, therefore, worked at the same farm to support their living. Kathy, as their oldest child, helped them with farm work. Two and a half years later, their application was approved by the Canadian immigration bureau.

Kathy did not receive any school education in Albania because she had not reached school age at that time, but she did attend school in Bosnia for three years until she was 9 years old. Her mother commented her education there was "not good" (interview with Kathy's parents, 2009). She said Kathy had learned very little at the school in Bosnia, and most of the time, she just did farm work. Kathy was able to understand and speak Albanian before she moved to Bosnia. Although she had learned Bosnian for almost three years, she could barely speak it or understand it.

Interviewer: How well can she use Albanian and Bosnian? Like speaking, reading, and writing?

Kathy's mother: She cannot speak Bosnian. She can only speak English. (interpreter)

Interviewer: How is her Albanian?

Kathy's mother: Yes, she can understand me. (interpreter)

Interviewer: Do you want her to keep Albanian or Bosnian?

Kathy's mother: No, no...Her English is good, so speak English, English. (interpreter)

Kathy's mother was illiterate in Albanian, and her father was literate in Albanian, but he had to work every day, so he could not offer any help with Kathy's home language. Besides, since Kathy was studying English at school, both of the parents felt English was the only language Kathy should learn.

In the Bosnian school which was located close to the farm, Kathy studied only two subjects: Bosnian (speaking, reading, and writing) and math at a very basic level. When I asked her about how she felt about her school life in Bosnia, she was enthusiastic and said, “It was fun! We had very few classes... We played in fields.” (field note, 2009). She did not like farm work at all: “I don’t like it. A lot of work, hard work.”

In Canada, the whole family was living near the school in a town house provided by the government at a very low cost, around 100 Canadian dollars per month. They also received \$1,500 every month from the government to support their daily life. The mother was working as a part time cleaner. Every day she was ready on call for any cleaning job. However, it was hard for her to get work, and the family was desperate for any source of income. The father did not complain about their current life. He worked part time, but he did not tell me what job it was. He felt the government had helped them a lot, and it should be their responsibility to find work and support themselves.

Kathy currently communicated with her parents mainly in Albanian, but it seemed that she was losing her home language gradually considering the fact that her siblings were also studying in an English dominant environment, and her parents did not encourage her to keep using Albanian. Kathy preferred to speak English rather than Albanian because her friends speak English only, and she could “have more freedom”. She did not want her parents to get involved in her school work, but her mother was very concerned about her study.

Interviewer: You’ve made great progress today. You should tell your mom! She must be very proud.

Kathy: No...I don’t like to talk about study at home.

Interviewer: Why not?

Kathy: She just wants me to study, study, every day.

Interviewer: You don't like to study?

Kathy: No. I'm smart. I can do it.

Interviewer: Do you report to your parents your tests, assignments...?

Kathy: No, no, no.

Interviewer: How about some home assignments that require your parents' signatures?

Kathy: I just tell them to sign. They don't understand English, you know! (Laugh)

(Field notes, March, 2009)

Kathy's mother hoped that Kathy could achieve high marks at school. When my interview with her and Kathy's father was over, she anxiously spoke to the interpreter and asked her to translate. It turned out that she wanted me to be Kathy's tutor. She explained that she did not see Kathy studying every day and was worried about her school performance. According to her, Kathy's report cards were not good, so she wanted someone like me with advanced education to teach her. Unfortunately, I had to turn it down due to my busy schedule.

### Kathy's school experience

During my research, Kathy was in grade 5. She attended not only the regular mainstream classes, but also the ESL class around three times a week, each time being thirty to forty-five minutes. She took the ESL class either individually or with her classmate Hassan. What Mrs. Lee did with her included providing language support, such as guiding Kathy to read, introducing more vocabulary, directing her to write simple sentences, and helping her with her class assignments from different subjects, usually upon the request of a subject teacher. After I joined her as a researcher and volunteer, I mainly took care of Kathy's class assignments of science and English subjects, and gave assistance to Mrs. Lee or performed teaching alone. Both Mrs. Lee and Mr. Molham, the

vice principal and Kathy's science teacher, were impressed with the progress that Kathy had made during the one and a half years' school learning.

You know, she's not the type of girl, uh, who gets things really fast, like a click. She is hard working. She works hard, and she is learning. When she came to our school, she barely knew any English, but now, as you can see, she can read and write, although not very proficiently...at least she is able to cope with her class work." (Mrs. Lee, interview, April 9, 2009).

Mr. Molham, was more concerned about Kathy, especially her efforts to make friends, which had not gone very smoothly. From what I have observed, Kathy wanted to make friends. She greeted many other students she met. However, sometimes she seemed quite intimidating and some girl classmates who are smaller than she is avoid her (Field notes, 2009). She doesn't have many close friends, and she tried very hard to be accepted by the groups of girls. Mr. Molham showed his concern:

You know, whereas Kathy, I think, and I think I said this earlier, last year had a, had a bigger challenge I think making friends because she was a little more abrasive and sometimes said the wrong things to students or if someone said something to her she took it the wrong way and would snap back, and so really didn't rub off very warmly on some of the kids, and you know, that was again another challenge for her, because now, you know, now she's going through, not bullying issues but I think trying to, you know, trying to overcome those social issues of kids that maybe were giving her a tough time because they felt she was giving them a tough time. (Interview, 2009)

When I worked with her, Kathy often complained to me about some of her classmates, such as one girl who misunderstood her, or another girl who promised something but failed to fulfill it. I also noticed some of her classmates ignoring or isolating her. One of the following snapshots is from a break time and the other is from a science class in a lab.

*Snapshot 1:* The whole class lined up for the change of classroom. They all lined up before the classroom. Kathy happily ran to Lisa and whispered something to her. It was like a secret from her facial expressions. Lisa listened carefully and laughed with Kathy. She immediately turned around and called upon 4 other girls and whispered to them. The small group burst into laughter. Kathy was laughing

with them again (outside the circle), but none of them talked to her. (Field note, 2009).

*Snapshot 2:* To draw the body's circulation system was very hard for Kathy. She got more and more impatient. She got off her seat and went to see several other girls' computer screens. Some of them stopped their work to chat with her but nothing related to the task, while the others just ignored her and didn't reply to her questions. After a while, she came back looking frustrated and murmured something to herself. She sat on the chair with her hand holding her chin, still not knowing how she could complete the task. (Reflection journal, a short summary of what I saw in the morning, 2009).

From Mr. Molham's comment, Kathy had experienced a hard time getting to know how to make friends. Her "diplomatic" policy depended on the way she was treated by others. If she was treated in a friendly way, she would be friendly to the person, and vice versa if classmates were unfriendly toward her. But she got irritated easily. A tiny matter could ruin the friendship she spent a long time to build. According to Mr. Molham, she was improving her relationships with other students because at least she was treating her classmates in a milder way.

And she wasn't like that though when she first came, but that's something that's developed over time and you know, again the support of her friend as well right, she's a very bubbly personality so her friends really you know, accepted her as well and I think again, sometimes that's a challenge for some of those students, is just you know, gaining friends and it's tough being in a new country, but it's even tougher if you don't have friends to help you out, ...and I see them playing outside all the time, whereas last year that was a little tougher for Kathy, ... I think this year in her class she has 3-4 girls that she plays with regularly and hangs out with... (Interview with Mr. Molham, 2009).

Unfortunately, I did not see she had any regular playmates during the six months of my research. Instead, she was quite alone most of the time. Although she greeted many other students, when it came to girls' talk or class activity cooperation, she was by herself.

Mr. Molham also reported that Kathy's participation in class was sporadic. She was more active in math class than all the other subjects. According to him, she was stronger in math than language. Because my observation did not include her math class, I was

only able to observe her in her science and ESL classes. From my observation, in science classes, she seems to be lost. What happens often was when some students answered “yes” or gave a specific answer, Kathy just picked it up and said the same. I noticed in one class, she put up her hand three times, but the teacher picked another student to answer the question. I was not totally sure if she has got the answer or she simply wanted to make herself look the same.

According to Mrs. Lee, she was “a hard working student, but unwilling to go further. For example, she is happy with a C, that’s exactly what she wants. She accepts it and feels happy. It’s, I feel, disappointing she doesn’t want to move on, you know, to get a better mark.” (Interview with Mrs. Lee, 2009). When I came to her the first time as an ESL helper, she did not show any dislike. The first task for her was to write a short response paragraph to a story that her mainstream class English teacher shared in the morning about seeing a small racoon digging a hole in her back yard. She was given a picture dictionary as a tool. She wrote very slowly on her paper, “This morning Mrs. Jones told me a...”. She stopped and looked at me, “spell racoon?” I was unprepared for the question and hesitated at whether to give her the answer directly or not. Mrs. Lee answered in a low voice, “Kathy, you can find the word in your picture dictionary.” Kathy nodded and thumbed through the book beside her casually. As soon as Mrs. Lee left office, Kathy turned to me to ask for help. She was very weak at spelling. I showed her how to find words in her dictionary, and she became very uneasy and impatient. She wrote every letter by pressing very hard on the paper, and sometimes her pencil tip broke. Then it took her some time to find her favourite pencil from the pen holder on the desk. During a 30-minute session, she finished only two lines. When Mrs. Lee came back, she



told Kathy to put the unfinished paragraph in her folder and come back the next day to finish it. I discerned from the data that she was not very enthusiastic about academic tasks. Whenever Mrs. Lee was not around, she either asked me for direct answers or chatted with me about topics not related to her task at all. Her topics were mostly about her friends and something that happened in class that made her happy or unhappy. She could not explain clearly who the people in her stories were, so every time I had to ask her to give me more information about those people. Then after I came back home, I tried to piece together what she said and restore the story she shared with me.

Kathy told me her favourite class was PE (Physical Education). I was invited by her once to the gym to see her playing. She was a very active girl in the gym. She threw the ball, passed the ball, and tossed the ball, very skilfully. The teacher took the class on a basketball game. Kathy ran forward and backward very fast. She was very strong and had excellent PE skills. When the other team had the ball, she became very anxious. She kept yelling at her team members to run quickly and fight hard. She broke the rules so often that the teacher had to remind her, “Kathy, you are not supposed to step on the line!” “Kathy, it’s not yours!” She almost had a fight with a girl, too. She stared angrily at the girl for a moment, and then she hit her palms hard, and let her go. I was not very clear about what happened exactly, but from Kathy’s expression, she looked furious. After the gym class, Kathy walked to the bench where I was sitting and sat. I asked her about what happened, she wiped the sweat on her forehead, stared vaguely at the front, and murmured in a low voice, “Amy is not good, not good.”

### Summary

The observational notes and interviews with Kathy's teachers and parents present some details of the background of Kathy as well as how she learned English at school and how she got on with her classmates. There may be several negative factors affecting her language learning. The first is she did not receive strong support of her home language from her parents due to her parents' insufficient knowledge in Albanian (lack of literacy). Her parents wanted her to learn English well only. The second is her social interactions with peers may make her feel uncomfortable in school. The feelings of isolation may impede her BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) development as oral language is mostly picked up in daily conversations. The third is the content in mainstream science classroom may present an  $i+100$  challenge to her based on Krashen's input hypothesis. Although she was trying to catch up in the mainstream classroom and receiving support at ESL teacher's office, catching up to her English speaking peers in academic English skills was not an easy task and requires much hard work and learning strategies. From my work with her, I found she was not equipped with some important learning strategies, such as looking up words in a dictionary, time management, and independent learning. However, despite these negative factors, Kathy was still making a lot of academic efforts and actively participating in class activities.

Hassan

#### Personal and family history

Hassan is a slim and tall boy. His hair is short and curly, and his eyes are very bright. He often wears a grey jacket. The colors of his clothes were always dark, such as dark green, brown, blue, and grey. He tended to look downwards in class, though occasionally he glanced up for a second to show he understood. His voice is low and a little coarse. He

did not like to speak in class. He looked cold and aloof most of the time except when he was with his close friends; he laughed and talked. Whenever he turned his head from his friends, his expression quickly froze and became distant.

Hassan's arrival in Canada was full of obstacles. He was born in Somalia and is the third child in a mother-headed household, with three younger brothers who were born in Canada. Before he was born, his mother had filed a refugee claim to Canada. When her application was approved, Hassan was just one year old. When she was about to take her three children to Canada, Hassan's mother was told that she could not take Hassan because his name was not on the application. Eager to flee from the war-torn country, the mother left him with a friend in a refugee camp when he was one year and a half. She thought she could reunite with him after a couple of months; however, contrary to her expectations, it took from 1999 to 2008.

Hassan grew up in a refugee camp in Somalia. His mother did not describe what it was like in a refugee camp. However, after searching the internet, I found the following information. Refugee camps are a form of assistance under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa - and the mandate of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and they are mainly provided for "Internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have not crossed an international frontier, but have, for whatever reason, also fled their homes" (International Committee of Red Cross, 2011). Refugee camps are supposed to meet basic needs of humans, such as food, living, water, and hygiene. According to a BBC news report, Somalia camps are "unfit for humans" because of being overcrowded and insecure (BBC, September 3, 2009). The number of

settlers is triple the capacity of the camps, and too many people who grab for food and water make the delivery of aid very difficult.

Growing up in such a place, Hassan received very little education. According to his mother, there was a school for children, but he learned only Somali and nothing else (Interview with Hassan's mother, 2009). Hassan had acquired Somali and developed literacy in it, but he did not have a chance to learn subjects such as math and science. What his mother wanted the most for him was to survive. Under the mother's private sponsor's help, she hired a lawyer to help her bring Hassan to Canada. The case was taken, but it required complicated assessments to prove Hassan was her biological son.

Canada implements strict protocols to process cases of unaccompanied minors. In view of the seriousness of international trafficking of children, if there is no effective assessment on the relationship between a child under 18 years old and an accompanying adult, it will be very difficult to identify the purpose of the child's coming to a new country. According to the Canadian Council for Refugees, if a minor wants to be reunited with family members through Canada's immigration process, the parents simply need to satisfy an immigration officer of such an existing family relationship by providing official documents, and this step is easy for people "who come from countries which regularly issue high quality documents, but much more difficult for people from countries where the authorities don't produce documents considered trustworthy by the Canadian government" (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2004, p.12). The difficulties facing Hassan's family were, firstly, Somalia is a place that issues untrustworthy documents; secondly, they could not gather all the required documents because most of them had been destroyed during the war; thirdly, they could not speak English, which made it

impossible for them to communicate well with the Canadian immigration agency; fourthly, Hassan's mother delivered him at home, which means there was no official birth certificate for him.

The last resort then for the family was to go through DNA testing. However, "DNA testing is expensive, time-consuming and intrusive" (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2004, p.12). In addition, DNA testing may create further delays. As stated earlier, Citizenship and Immigration Canada believes delays in family reunification are necessary to protect the best interest of the child. A CIC spokesperson once said, "we also have a responsibility to ensure the relationships are genuine. We definitely don't want to be participating in the trafficking of children, so we have to be extremely careful." (Marina Jiménez, Globe and Mail, October 16, 2004.) The story finally had a happy ending. It took Hassan's mother nine years to go through all the procedures needed to get her son to her side. The DNA testing showed Hassan was her son. In the spring of 2008, Hassan got off the airplane in Toronto Pearson airport and finally reunited with his family. His story was published in a local newspaper, and he also was in the public spotlight and received a lot of attention from the general public.

Hassan's home language was Somali. His mother could speak and understand Somali, but she was unable to read and write because "she has never been back to Somalia" (Interview with Hassan's mother, 2009). [Note: Hassan's older sister acted as the interpreter during the interview with the mother.] Now his mother was actively studying English in LINC classes. She said, "I spent the last two days with the baby. From 2008, 9 to 2, I attend ESL." During the interview with her, she could answer some of my

questions using broken English, and I could understand her well. When confusion arose, her daughter helped to clarify what her mother meant.

### Hassan's School Experience

Hassan was put in grade 4 when he started schooling at Wharton elementary school, and he and Kathy shared the same class. During my interview, he was also in grade 5. He spent less time in ESL classes than Kathy because his English level was higher. He attended regular mainstream classes every day and ESL class twice a week, each time being thirty to forty-five minutes.

Hassan's home language was Somali, and he could still read and write Somali. He felt English was very hard to learn. At home, he spoke Somali to his mother, but English with his sister and brothers because his younger brothers were born in Canada. His sister reported:

He can read and write it (Somali)...English is difficult. When he talks, he cannot say the word. He was, "Ah! What's the word? What's the word?" He would keep saying it in Somali, but because I don't know it (Somali) well, so he would go to mommy to ask her to translate. Well, he is improving.

All of Hassan's siblings spoke English at home, so he was effectively immersed in an English environment at home. His sister said he enjoyed speaking English and felt comfortable using English. When asked if Somali would be replaced by English in the family, the mother laughed, "That's the reason why I'm studying English so hard now." (Translated by her daughter).

I did not have a successful experience communicating with Hassan. When I visited him at school, he did not look at me, talk to me, or answer my questions. His friends were all male. He never talked to girl classmates unless he had to, when, for example, a girl asked

him a question face to face or a teacher requested that the class work in pairs and he had a girl partner.

The first time I met Hassan was when the class was waiting for a classroom to be vacant. He was among a queue full of boys. He was chatting with two other boys, and then Mrs. Lee took me to him, saying, “Hassan, this is Hong. Your ESL helper.” His face suddenly turned red, and he turned his back to me right away. Some other students around him heard what the teacher said, and laughed loud, “Hassan need a helper! Hassan need a helper”. Hassan waved his hand wildly and shouted, “I don’t need a helper! I don’t need a helper!” He looked very angry, but under the request of the teacher, he had to follow me. He did not speak or look at me all the way to the ESL office. Sitting by a desk, he took out his exercise book and started to write on it. I tried to give him some instructions regarding what we were supposed to do, but he did not listen to me. For the period of thirty minutes, it was almost as if I wasn’t there. When the time was over, I said, “It’s time to go back to your classroom.” He immediately packed his stuff and ran back to his classroom without waiting for me.

I was not prepared for a situation like this. I thought his strong reaction to my presence was because he felt humiliated to have a helper in front of his friends; especially since it was someone he did not think he needed. However, during my following visits, he kept ignoring me, which made me feel more and more confused. I shared my feelings with Mrs. Lee two weeks later. She expressed her sympathy and told me her interpretation of the incident. She attributed his rejection to my help as me being a female:

In his country, women don’t have equal social status to men...not like in Canada. Oh, of course, we’re not equal here, either. (Laugh) But it’s much worse there, in Somalia. It’s more like a male dominated society, so he (Hassan) may feel ashamed of getting help from a woman. Uh, it doesn’t mean he always acts like

this. It takes time, you know. You must gain his trust gradually, like, even for me, he accepted my help after three...let me see, April, May, June, yea, three months. (Interview with Mrs. Lee, 2009)

I tried to approach Hassan in different ways, for example, bringing small treats, raising topics that he might be interested in, or allowing him to draw or read a cartoon book during my work time with him. All of these approaches worked only a little. He still treated me guardedly as if he did not trust me.

*Snapshot 1:* Hassan followed me to the library. Because it was class time, Hassan was the only student there. When we entered it, the librarian (a lady in her 50s) greeted him, “Good morning, Hassan! How are you today?” He lowered his head and passed her quickly. While he was passing, I heard a very vague greeting, “Hi.” He did not look at her, and he went directly to a desk and pulled out the chair and sat on it. He took out his pencil case, a dark grey case with some stains, and his exercise book, and a folder with his assignments in it. He put them in order and sat back, waiting for me to give him instructions. I said, “Hassan, you can pick a book you like here, and after you read it, can you write a short summary of the book?” He stood up and went away. After a while, he came back with a book which had a car on the cover. The book is thin and has many pictures. He paused at every picture for one or two minutes. While he was reading, I added comments such as “This car looks beautiful! What is it?” or “Are you familiar with this kind of car?” Every time he just shrugged his shoulders or moved his body away a little. He smiled sometimes at the book, but I was not sure whether he was showing friendliness to me or the content of the book was interesting. (Field note, 2009)

Hassan needed help when he was writing. He did not have much difficulty organizing sentences, but similar to Kathy, he was weak at spelling. When he asked me questions, he did not look at me. He seemed to be talking to himself, “how to spell ‘elephant?’” After I spelled it for him, he said a quick “okay” and moved on. He needed more help with generating ideas.

*Snapshot 2:* (Mr. Molham’s class) Mr. Molham explained to the class what the human body needs and gave them a handout asking them to write about how to make healthy food choices, such as what food is considered high fat, high salt, high sugar, etc. that people should avoid eating. Hassan took his assignment folder and followed me to the ESL office. Because the assignment seemed very clear to me, I did not explain very much about it, and asked Hassan to work on it directly. He sat still, looking closely at the assignment without writing a word. I



told him he could ask me any questions. He asked, “What food has high fat?” I explained to him the word ‘fat’ probably was the best explanation and it should be the fat part of meat. He still didn’t get it. I added that the white greasy part of meat such as butter. I wasn’t very sure about my answer, but he seemed to agree with me, and he asked me to spell butter for him. He surprised me with the next question about the food with sugar. I had to tell him it’s the food that he felt very sweet such as birthday cakes which had a lot of cream on it. But he still frowned. I wondered if he had ever eaten a birthday cake, so I thought of candies. I reminded him of the chocolate I brought him last time. He quickly got it and wrote down “chakolate.” (Field note, 2009)

When he was with Mrs. Lee, he was more relaxed. He had no objection to what Mrs. Lee required him to do. Sometimes when he did not listen to me, Mrs. Lee would come over and talk to him until he promised he would follow my instructions. She encouraged me, “Patience, what you need is patience. He is more easygoing than you can imagine. He will trust you soon.” Mrs. Lee often prepared several different learning tasks with him. She would read each ESL student’s assignment folder first, and decide what tasks to do with him/her. With Hassan, she would write down the words related to the theme of his class on index cards. For example, in the unit of body components that defend against infection, she wrote down “tear”, “skin”, “white blood cells”, etc. on cards. Then she held each up and asked Hassan to explain how these components defend against infection. Hassan was very interested in this activity. He checked his notebook and handouts and discussed with Mrs. Lee briefly to check his understanding. When he was ready, he answered loudly. He was also allowed to draw pictures and charts (using different colors) to explain. Mrs. Lee, on the other hand, praised him whenever he gave a correct answer. This way helped Hassan to understand the content better. In addition, Mrs. Lee did a lot of word practice with Hassan, such as cloze fill-ins, word searches, and word puzzles. She also prepared some math handouts for him to bring home. She commented, “He’s

missed a lot, a lot, even more than other ELL students I have. English language is one thing; math and other subjects are the other thing. He is like, he has to start from scratch.”

Mrs. Molham reported that Hassan’s participation was very limited; he preferred to write notes in class and digest them after class. Mrs. Lee commented, “He was not totally clear about the content. He’s like a sponge, absorbing everything that’s new. You know, he had no math, no science, no art, background when he came. So it’s hard for him to interact with the class. It’s like, I don’t know Chinese, and I would be frightened if I were in China, alone.” Hassan did not like to answer questions and get himself involved in class discussions very often. He spent most time writing notes in twenty percent English and eighty percent Somali. When there was a group discussion or pair discussion, he generally joined in. Different from his daily casual talks with his friends, he used a lot more gestures. His hands waved wildly in the air. He burst out in words instead of sentences, such as “bus, waste energy! See?” or “No, bike, bike...better.” At the end of his statement, he often added a tag question, “You see?” or “Isn’t it?” When he did not agree with his classmates, he would shake his head continuously, and as soon as his classmate stopped talking, he expressed his thoughts loudly. He seldom asked questions in class, but if there was something recurring and making him confused, he would ask. Once in class, Mr. Molham introduced windmills as a way to save energy. When Hassan wrote down the word windmill for the first time, he murmured to himself, “windmill, windmill.” After several times of writing down this word, he became very unsettled. He gripped his pencil harder and rubbed his feet more frequently. At last, he put up his hand, “uh, windmill, Mr. Molham, like what?” Mr. Molham quickly picked up what he wanted to know, sketched a windmill on the board, explained in details, and promised to bring

him more materials next time. When I visited him in the following week, I asked him about the windmill, and he quickly drew a picture for me. Although he was looking at his exercise book all the time, I could see his smile, a proud smile.

He began to talk more to me after two months and three weeks. The turning point was when I mentioned his sister. After interviewing with Mr. Molham, I learned that his sister used to be very successful at this school. Her influence was so deep that the topics about Hassan always involved his sister. I tried to start a conversation with Hassan about his sister so that I could understand her influence on him. Talking of his sister, Hassan's face was full of admiration. "She's the best in the world." This was the sentence Hassan kept saying to me. According to Mr. Molham and Mrs. Lee, Hassan received a lot of help from her at home. The interview with Hassan's mother when his sister was present confirmed this, too. Both Hassan's teachers believed his sister played a critical role in his language learning journey.

### Summary

Hassan had a tough experience before coming to Canada, and he lacked formal school education. He did not trust people easily. He tended to be on guard all the time. Although he had not learned any subjects offered at school in the past, he was studying very hard and picking them up quickly. Inspired by his sister as a role model, he had more passion to study than many other students. Almost everyone in his family spoke English, which forced his mother to study English. It is likely that Hassan will lose his home language, Somali, gradually since English was becoming the dominant language for communications among family members. This kind of home environment on the one hand promotes his English learning; however, on the other hand, it speeds up the loss of

the home language. His English learning at school seemed to go well as he received a lot of support from his ESL teacher, and he was willing to work hard on English learning. Although he was not an active participant in class activities, he would raise questions about any of his concerns. As for his English learning, he received intensive support both at school and at home (from his sister).

### Julia

#### Personal and family history

Julia and her family came to Canada from Mexico in the fall of 2007. She was a grade 11 student at Monty Secondary School during my research. She was very friendly. She agreed immediately after I approached her and invited her to participate in my research. She also introduced her friend Andy to me because he was also a refugee student.

Every time I came to Julia's class, she smiled and greeted me. Sometimes there was no chair beside her seat. She would quickly run to the end of classroom to grab one for me. Because my observations of her ESL class were all scheduled in the early morning, she seemed a little sleepy. Sometimes she could not help yawning, but she immediately realized it, so she blushed. I smiled and gave her a "doesn't matter" expression.

The whole family moved to Canada because they experienced oppression from the Mexican government. Julia's father had a decent job in Mexico. He was a well-known lawyer, and Julia's mother was a full time housewife taking care four children, two boys and two girls. Julia is the second oldest in the family. The father was very quiet, too. He seemed not interested in talking about his past, but he looked very proud when he said, "I was a lawyer." The mother was very outgoing. She giggled all the time during my interview and answered almost all the questions I had. Julia acted as the interpreter

during my interview with her parents. Julia was quiet in class, but when she was with her mother, she laughed with her.

Julia was a tall girl among her peers. She was very quiet. When she spoke, her voice was soft but clear. Although she had been in Canada for two years, when she spoke English it was hard to detect a Spanish accent. My overall impression of her was a gentle girl. She preferred sitting in the first row in ESL classes, while in math class which was a regular mainstream class, she sat in the back, where it was somewhere near Andy so that they could communicate in Spanish in class discussions. She liked music, so she attended the school guitar club although at that time she did not know how to play guitar. However, after two months' practicing, she joined her club members and performed a guitar show at the school assembly.

Her previous education was smooth, like a regular student. She finished grade 10 in Mexico, and then continued her schooling in Canada. According to her, the curriculum in Mexican schools was very similar to that in Canada, so she did not feel a big gap in subjects other than English. English to her "was very hard at the beginning. Listening is the most difficult". Her parents were very satisfied with her English learning. They commented, "She is wonderful. We're very happy." The family's home language was Spanish. The mother reported that all of them including Julia's brothers could read and write very well in Spanish. Their daily communication at home was in Spanish because the parents could not speak English. During my interview with Julia's parents, they (mostly her mother) answered in simple English such as "yes", "good", "wonderful", "nice" if they understood my questions. Most of the time, Julia translated my questions to them and their answers back to me. The parents did not conceal their pride in their

daughter and gave a lot of compliments on her daughter's school study; Julia looked shy and translated the words in a lower voice.

Emigrating has changed the family's life dramatically. The parents were working on a farm to harvest and plant crops in Canada; however, the father had been working as a lawyer and the mother as a housewife in Mexico. "We work summer. Summer work," the mother said. "Yes, summer, but we sell", the father agreed. Julia further explained, "My mom and dad work in the summer only. The farm is open in summer." I asked, "What else do you do to support the family?" Julia answered, "My brother has a job, so he helps us." Ms. Dallner, the ESL teacher, mentioned that Julia's brother had been in an awkward situation. When he came to Canada, he was almost twenty years old, so he could not go back to high school to study English, and he was immediately pushed into the job market. The mother wanted to tell me more about their past life, but the father interrupted, so I did not go on. From my later chat with Julia, they found life was very hard in Canada. I asked her if the parents had ever regretted coming to Canada, she thought for a while and said very quietly, "I think...they are good now, not like, uh, in Mexico. They don't like it there, but in Canada, they don't have to worry much, that much. So I think, they like here better." When I asked her where she liked better, she answered without any hesitation, "I think Canada. I like my school, my teachers..."

### Julia's School Experience

There were approximately twenty students in Julia's ESL class, but twenty-seven, sometimes thirty in the mainstream math class. The ESL program at Monty Secondary School was a full day program, and it was organized into five levels, A, B, C, D, and E. The levels had some common classes and others that were not. All the courses were for

ELL students. ESL program A included basic math, ESL, Family and Individual Studies, and social science. There was also a guidance class which taught learning skills for academic success in school. Grammar was not only taught in the ESL class, but also in family and individual studies, social science, and the guidance class, which illustrated how the ESL program differed from the mainstream program. ESL program B included math, ESL, Business, and Citizenship and Careers. However, students may take ESL math or a mainstream math class depending on their performance. As Mr. Green pointed out, which math class to take was “decided by their performance, but it's interesting our second level, a higher level ESL math was quoted as ‘grade 9’ math, but our experience is that they really need to take a mainstream grade 9 math after it.” Grammar in this level was divided between ESL and Citizenship and Careers. ESL C includes ESL, geography, and science, but science in this level was very academic, so some students find applied grade 9 science is a better fit. ESL D includes ESL and history. ESL E includes ESL only. The ESL course got harder and harder as the level went up, and the other courses gradually merged into mainstream ones. For Julia, she was taking ESL D which offers only ESL and history, so she was taking most courses in mainstream classes.

I observed Julia in her ESL and math classes. She enjoyed her study, and she liked all the subjects, but ESL was her favourite. She said, “I like English reading and writing.” It was very easy to understand why she said that. Her marks on her writing activities were almost perfect. The following shows how she did on her novel study.

**NOVEL STUDY**  
**The Road to Chilifa**

The project is due on Thursday, Nov 14th 2009

All writing is to be keyed double-spaced in Times New Roman size 12 font.

Make a cover page that includes:

- The title of the novel
- Your name
- The course
- Your teacher's name (Ms. Klein)
- The date

Staple the activities together in order with the cover page on top and the **completed** rubric last.

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Put a check mark to show that you completed the activity.

<b>PART A – Required activities (70 marks)</b>		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1. Vocabulary log	10/10
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2. Reading log	10/10
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3. Writing assignment 1 What were the obstacles to Karim beginning to adjust to life in Canada? Do you empathize with Karim's attitude or do you have difficulty understanding his attitude? (125 – 150 words)	10/10
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4. Writing assignment 2 Discuss the factors that contributed to Karim's healing and adjustment to life in Canada. (125 – 150 words)	10/10
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5. Character study of either Karim or Maha. (150 words)	9/10
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6. Summarize the events of the novel. (200 words) Your challenge is to recap the story briefly without going into too much detail.	20/20
<b>PART B – Choose from the following activities for a total of 30 marks.</b>		
<b>5 mark options:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Did you or someone you know have a similar immigration experience to Karim? Explain the similarities. (150 words)	/5
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. How did the novel make you feel? Explain this with supporting details from the novel. Did your feelings change throughout the novel? (150 words)	/5
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Did you dislike the novel? Write a paragraph explaining why you did not like it. Be sure to include supporting details. (150 words)	/5
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Write an entry in Karim's diary for the day after Maha died. (100 words)	/5
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5. Write an entry in Karim's diary for today. (100 words)	5/5
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6. List 21 things that you like about Canada. No more than 3 can be the same as on Karim's list.	5/5

Figure 4.1 Julia's marks on her novel study project

Her list of 21 things that she liked about Canada showed her views towards this country.



- 1.-Canada's Wonderland
- 2.-Maple syrup
- 3.-Snow
- 4.-CN Tower
- 5.-Niagara Falls
- 6.-Eaton Centre (Toronto)
- 7.-Tim Horton's (specially iced cappuccino)
- 8.-Hockey
- 9.-Getting to know people from all over the world
- 10.-Squirrels
- 11.-Peace
- 12.-Freedom and security
- 13.-The maple leaf in Canada's flag
- 14.-Ice skating
- 15.-Parks
- 16.-Music class
- 17.-Canada's national anthem
- 18.-Mr. Dillmore!
- 19.-Brownies
- 20.-Shape of the clouds
- 21.-The opportunities that Canada brings to immigrants

Figure 4.2 What Julia liked about Canada

In class, Julia would not volunteer to answer questions unless she was called upon, and every time her answer was correct. In ESL class, she loved sitting in the first row so that she could be seen easily by the teacher, but she did not raise her hand. Ms. Dallner noticed, “Even [though] Julia, she always knows the answer; she never puts her hand up”. In math class, there were many more students than that in the ESL class, and she did not sit in the front row. She chose to sit in the far back by the side wall. Although it was hard to see her put up her hand, she told me she liked math and did it very well. When the teacher called her to answer a question, she could often answer correctly. She said she had more confidence in ESL than in math. Her peers in ESL class were from a similar background to hers, and she was sure that her English was better, so she was very confident in that class. However, many students in math class were not ESL, and she felt very overwhelmed by an environment like this, and she was afraid of being laughed at if she gave a wrong answer, or her English was not good enough to present a perfect answer, and she did not want to be seen as “stupid”, so she preferred to “hide” herself in math class. One thing she liked the math class was that Mr. Hill allowed the use of home languages.

*Snapshot 1:* Everyone opens a math exercise book and is required to work individually on a page of exercises. ...After 15 minutes, the teacher asked how many students are finished. There are about 7-8 students including Julia and Andy.... They prefer chatting in Spanish. They are discussing a question in Julia’s workbook. The teacher asked them to discuss the important points in pairs. Julia and Andy are a pair. ...This is an interesting class. I can hear several languages. The teacher came to me and told me that he gave a chance to students to discuss in different languages. He said these students read in English, but they may feel more comfortable speaking their home languages. He said different languages are encouraged in this classroom. (Field note, 2009)

Julia’s favourite activity in ESL class was the word race. Every Thursday Ms. Dallner would hold a vocabulary race for the class. Julia was very excited about it, and every time

she reminded me of it before Thursday. The race was simple; students were required to work in pairs and unscramble some words and put the words on the desk alphabetically.

*Snapshot 2:* The teacher (Ms. Dallner) briefly summarized the broadcast of that morning. She asked the students to work in pairs. They arranged the words alphabetically. Julia and her partner finished first. But the teacher checked and found one mistake with their match. The other girl checked with her work and confirmed their answer. Julia and her partner ended up winning 3<sup>rd</sup> place. The teacher asked each pair to read aloud the answer. Then the teacher explained some word roots, such as ‘fragment’ used in marking writing, meaning the sentence is not a complete one. Julia was breathing hard and her cheeks became flushed due to the competition. (Field note, 2009).

Julia did not seem to have many friends. She came to class alone and took her class breaks alone. There are some groups of girls in her ESL class. Muslim girls formed themselves into a group, and Korean girls formed their own group. A major reason why Julia did not have friends in her class probably was that there were no other Spanish speaking girls. Although there were some boys who spoke Spanish, they sat far from her. According to Julia, she did not feel any problem with being apart from other Spanish-speaking peers because her English was good enough and she did not need help from her peers. Some girls came to ask her questions about the homework which was due on that day, and Julia patiently explained it to them, and even “nicely” lent her homework to them. Her communication with her girl peers was nothing beyond that. In math class, Julia often sat close to Andy, although not side by side. Sometimes she sat behind him, or sometimes they sat on each side of the aisle. There were not many girls in the math class, so although Julia hid herself in the back, she still stood out in class. She seldom initiated a conversation with students other than Andy, and no one approached her either. I asked Julia if she had any other friends in her class, she shook her head, and said, “Andy is my friend, but no one else.” I further asked how important friendship was in her life, and she answered, “I’ve made a lot of friends in Mexico, but see, the distance thing. No contact

for a long time. But I don't worry about it. I want to study hard to enter a medical school, uh, next year when I graduate from here. So I need to study, so does Andy."

Julia's great ambition was to become a doctor. She told me once that she wanted to be a doctor because her father encouraged her to do so. "They told me it's the best job here." I asked, "You have to work a lot harder than most other people. Are you ready for that?" She smiled, "Yes, I think I'll be fine." Julia's parents have a strong faith in her capability, so they showed no doubt over her future career. Julia's teachers are optimistic about it, too. Mr. Green commented, "I hope she can make it...you know, she does a very good job. She's smart." Mrs. Dallner said that Julia was smart and persistent, which were the two most important qualities to achieve her dream.

### Summary

Julia was very different from the other two elementary students, Hassan and Kathy. It was obvious that they were of different ages and at different school levels, but the difference I would like to stress here is their previous experience. All of them were studying at a Canadian public school under refugee status, but there was a big gap between what Hassan and Kathy as compared with Julia had learned in their home country and in Canada. Hassan and Kathy had received little education in respect to school subjects, while for Julia, what she lacked the most was English education in Mexico. Julia also experienced a lot of challenges in language learning because high school study required her to pick up academic English (CALP) in a short time in order to manage her study. Her Spanish may have served as a strong foundation in her English acquisition.

## Andy

### Personal and Family History

Andy's name was first mentioned by Mr. Green when I met him for potential participants in my study. He was very sure that Julia had refugee status, but was not sure about Andy, so he promised to check it out later. After I gave Julia my invitation talk, she asked me if I would consider another student, Andy. She briefly described him as a refugee student, and her description matched my criteria for a research participant, so I went to Mr. Green and asked him to give Andy an information letter.

Andy came to the ESL office on one afternoon guided by Mr. Green. He was of medium height and quite strong. He had short curly black hair and shiny eyes. He was very polite. When he saw me, he shook hands with me. After hearing my talk about my research, he thought for a while and told me he could not give consent right away because he needed to talk with his parents. To me, he seemed more mature than his age. He came back to me one week later and agreed to participate in my research.

At the time of the research, Andy and his family had been in Canada for one and a half years. Before coming to Canada, they had spent one and a half years in the United States, so it had been three years since Andy had left his home country, Colombia. Andy was the oldest child in the family, and he had two sisters. Andy's father practiced medicine in Colombia, and his mother was a home-maker. The family left Colombia because they felt very unsafe in their country because of continuous violence. They first landed in Florida, and after one and a half years, they moved to Canada as refugees.

Their life has changed a great deal since they immigrated. They had a steady income in Colombia. The father treated patients at a big hospital. However, the parents were doing

some odds and ends jobs for a local apartment building now in Canada. They did cleaning, painting, and repair work before new tenants moved in. Because the building manager was from Colombia, too, they got this job as a favour. When I interviewed the parents, they showed no regret about making the decision to flee Colombia. “It’s dangerous (in Colombia). People hurt, wound, so I said, we must run away from the government... That’s why we’re here.” the father said. Andy’s parents were very well dressed. They looked elegant which showed they took my interview seriously. Although they were able to communicate in English, they still took free ESL classes almost every morning. Andy’s father said, “We must speak English, to be Canadian.” Then I asked him a question about identity, “How do you see yourself in Canada? A Colombian, a Canadian or...?” He smiled and said, “Canadian.”

Spanish was the only language at home. Andy spoke it with his parents and sisters and even his two cousins. During the first year in Canada, the family did not have a place to live, so they lived with a relative. Andy’s after-school work was to teach his two cousins Spanish because their level was low. Andy deemed the ability to speak Spanish to be very important in future work. He said, “I think it’ll benefit my work, like in a working environment, having two languages, or multilingual or bilingual person can really, really benefit the work, that kind of stuff.” He felt bad because his two sisters used much less Spanish than him. Although he tried hard to teach them, they did not want to learn. At the same time, he realized that his Spanish has regressed, so he watched Spanish TV programs or movies whenever he had the opportunity. He commented, “Sometimes when I’m watching movies, I just don’t realize it’s English or Spanish as sometimes they change, like from English to Spanish which makes me crazy a bit because it has to be

used again, like listen to Spanish, but sometimes I understand what it's saying not knowing what language it's speaking." Andy spoke English very fluently and with no accent. His way of talking was very much in the North American style as was his body language, such as shrugging his shoulders and making some interesting finger gestures with his friends. His favourite sport was soccer and basketball. He spent every afternoon after school playing either of them. He has made a lot of friends through playing sports.

He wanted to be admitted to a medical school after finishing high school, the same as Julia's ambition. He attributed his ambition to the fact that he grew up in a doctor's family. He also said, "I'm pretty sure, hmm, yes, I'm pretty sure doctor is the best profession, and I'll be good at it."

#### Andy's school experience

Andy was in the same class as Julia was, so he was also taking ESL D. He was late for almost every ESL class. I could see he did not have much passion for ESL. In class, he often sat in the back beside the wall. Boys and girls sat in different areas in the classroom. All the boys occupied the two vertical rows along one side of the walls, while girls occupied the rest. Andy was quiet in class. Sometimes he was sitting there, lost in the teacher's instructions. When everyone else started to work on a class assignment, he seemed to suddenly wake up from his dream and quickly looked around to see what his classmates were doing and did the same. He was not doing very well academically in ESL class.

*Snapshot 1:* Mrs. Dallner told the class today's plan. Each student was given a quiz and a sheet of blank paper. The 15-minute quiz consisted of three sections, filling in blanks, multiple choice, and matching questions. Andy began to work on it. He browsed the test and decided to start from the last section, matching questions. He spent almost ten minutes on it. He seemed to be quite relieved when he finished this part. Then he moved on to the multiple choice questions. Before

he finished this section, there had been two girls including Julia who submitted their completed tests to Mrs. Dallner. He looked quite worried and sped up. He was the second to last to submit his test. On his way to Mrs. Dallner, he was still checking some of his answers... Mrs. Dallner gave the class a word list to copy in their notebooks, and she began to check students' quizzes. After five minutes, She announced, "We are now having more 15s". 15 is the full mark for each quiz. Several students did not do well, and they were called to the front one by one. Andy was the third being called. Ms. Dallner explained every error he made on the quiz. He was standing there uneasily, seeming very embarrassed. (Field note, 2009)

Andy told me that he found no difficulty in the subject areas because they were what he had learned in Colombia, so English was the only obstacle. When he was in the United States, he had some Spanish friends who spoke English only. By hanging out with them, he found his listening and speaking improved greatly within just one year. When I asked him why he spoke English without a Spanish accent, he smiled proudly. He said there were some English sounds that Spanish does not have, for example, nasal sounds and some sounds from the throat. He demonstrated these sounds to me in Spanish. Then he commented that after he realized these differences between the two languages, he was able to speak English very naturally. He felt his reading and writing had improved a lot after he came to Canada, but they were still not as good as his listening and speaking. As for reading, he explained that he did not like to read very much, so he struggled with it sometimes. He was very afraid of English writing. He complained, "I just don't get it. I think I did a good job, but not at Ms. Dallner's." He shrugged his shoulders to show he had no choice. He was very reluctant to share with me his written work. After several efforts to persuade him, he finally agreed to bring one piece of writing to me, two weeks after I first mentioned it. After reading it, I complimented him on his work because it read very well. He was a bit shy and told me that it was actually the 5<sup>th</sup> version after having made a lot of revisions.



Karim had a lot of obstacles <sup>awk</sup> beginning to adjust to life in Canada. It was a really big change. <sup>WC felt</sup> He faced sadness, guilt, anger, loneliness and depression. <sup>I would omit these</sup> Karim was very sad for the death of his love, Nada, and <sup>WC be</sup> for Maha's death as well. <sup>this needs to be re</sup> The war in Lebanon caused a lot of problems for Karim because he suffered the destruction of his country, death of his friends and disruption of his education. Karim was separated from his best friend Bechir. <sup>awk</sup> Guilt represented a big problem to Karim because he was blaming himself for Maha's death. He felt bad for the way he had treated her and for the things he said to her before he went for <sup>a</sup> the walk. Karim was also angry at himself because he thought that he had abandoned Maha and that because of it Jad had lost the rest of his family. <sup>2</sup> Making new friends was almost impossible for him. Karim made everyone curious because he never talked about himself, <sup>r=0</sup> he rather tried to hide his feelings and his thoughts, and even though he tried not to remember what happened, it seemed that everything was bringing him back to his past. <sup>1</sup> I empathize with Karim's attitude because it was really hard to get used to a different country, school, friends, weather, to the way people were in Canada and to the absence of Nada, Maha and Bechir.

① Did the obstacles have anything to do with cha  
 ② Did he want to make friends?

Figure 4.3 A Sample of Andy's Written Work

Andy admitted that he was not a big fan of ESL, but he did like math. He acted differently in math class. However, he was not punctual for this class either. Although he was not the last one to arrive in class, every time he was right at the last minute. Sometimes he entered the classroom with Julia. He was very active in math class. Again and again he put up his hand to answer questions.

*Snapshot 2 (math class):* Mr. Hill asked Andy to walk through the question to explain what he did different from others...Andy followed the teacher's instructions. Mr. Hill explained the general mistakes that the students had made. Andy raised his hand trying to explain how he got the correct answer, but Mr. Hill did not give him the chance. Julia seemed to understand and began to make corrections. Andy explained some points to Julia. He was the only one who answered the question correctly. He was very active. Students from his front and back all asked him, one after another. (Field note, 2009)

Andy and Julia both studied in a technology assisted class. Instead of using pens or pencils and calculators, students used a handheld device to do calculation and submit the results via a wireless portal. Mr. Hill had a terminal installed in the front desk, so he was able to see everyone's submitted results and draw conclusions on certain questions, such as which question was comparatively harder than the others, or where the skills needed for certain questions had to be strengthened if most of the class did not do well, or how students mastered the content, etc. According to Andy, math was made much easier with the new technology.

Mr. Hill was very satisfied with the use of wireless technology in his math class. This class was the only one equipped with this technology in this city. He shared with me his perception of the use of technology in math.

And so that's really when, of course, when I'm using wireless communications now, your whole paradigm shifts because it's not really the sage on the stage anymore, it's them steering and driving the car, I'll put it to you that way, because now I'm spending more time listening than, I'll say, the word I'm looking for is very specific to the technology – and all I can do is compare it to what I used to do, which was teach and I felt good because I taught the concept, but I had no understanding that they knew it or not until the test, and then I would discover that they really didn't know it, but I felt good along the way, and so having access to the technology very early made me think about how it was that I was delivering material, and the delivery had to change part and parcel because the technology afforded it, I mean you now have the capability of assessing a student, every student, all the students were doing, if all the students were answering the question, why wouldn't you do that. Well you wouldn't do it prior to technology because your brain couldn't process the information, it wasn't compiled for you, it wasn't aggregated, but now that you have a tool that allows you to do that, why

wouldn't you do that, so it forces you to rethink everything about the delivery, and so I found myself very quickly shifting into a more supportive role in the classroom, than a teacher role, if you know what I mean. And so the teaching still came out, but in different ways. The teaching came out as a result of flushing out problems. (Interview with Mr. Hill, 2009)

He felt the use of technology saved time. He said, "because if I was, if I was giving students a set of questions, and I was able to see the aggregate responses, why on earth would I spend time taking up a question where 95% of the class got it right?"

Andy liked the technology very much. The wireless device had a small screen and a typing panel with around thirty buttons. Andy said he had no difficulty learning it.

Mr. Hill showed us how to log in and how to respond to a question and then I got it that day. Actually there's a lot of different functionality in this device because it's also a calculator, but when we answer a question, it's like a quick poll. Mr. Hill can see them all. I think it's very simple; we are very interested in technology anyway.

Andy has a lot of friends. He made many friends through sports. From what I observed in class, he seemed to be popular among his classmates. He liked music, too. He was also a member of the school's guitar club. He could play trumpet, too. He had performed several times in the school band.

### Summary

Andy's proficiency in BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) is obvious. I think the main reason is that he had had an over-one-year exposure to an English environment before he came to Canada. However, his CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) needs improvement. He was still struggling with academic English. The technology in the math class may have assisted ELL students with solving math problems, but on the other hand, it may have given students less chance to practice academic English such as reading and writing because there were no long questions.

Instead, there were only math formulas and numbers.

In the next chapter, I will discuss findings related to the research question on funds of knowledge.

## Chapter 5 Funds of knowledge

The profiles described in the previous chapter reveal the refugee students' backgrounds and their English language learning experiences in various settings such as one-on-one with me, in ESL classrooms, and in mainstream classrooms. Their school experiences including their behaviours, emotions, their verbal expressions, and teachers' perspectives demonstrate some aspects of the challenges that they face in learning a new language. In demonstrating the microsystem that refugee students interacted with, the case studies also reveal the critical role of teachers and schools and families in bringing the students a positive language learning experience. Based on my research questions, my research was organized around the two elements in refugee students' English language learning: the role of refugee students' funds of knowledge play in their language learning and acculturation at school and the types of school support available to them.

Close examination of the collected data from interviews, class observations, and documents suggests that funds of knowledge play an important role in refugee students' school lives, and may boost and support their language learning development if the school and teachers recognize the world experience students possess and use that in teaching. However, from my study, because schools were unaware of which of their students were actually refugees, they could not make use of the particular type of knowledge and experience that refugee students might bring to schools. Still, sensitive and competent educators would be able to make use of funds of knowledge in any form that students bring to class. Students themselves and the parents have not given a lot of attention to the knowledge and values they brought to Canada. At the same time, schools have provided a considerable amount of help to ELLs as a group, but because refugee

students were not identified at school, they were not receiving special or extra help to target at their difficulties. In this chapter, I will present findings from my research, such as students' and educators' funds of knowledge as viewed from various people's perspectives and discuss themes that emerged.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the data analysis process used triangulation methods (Yin, 2006; Stake, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To make sense of my findings, I put data into category systems. There are different vertical levels of triangulation: refugee students and their parents, the teachers, the social workers, the school administrators, and the school board. The horizontal categories arose from my research question: What role do funds of knowledge refugee students bring with them play in support of their language acquisition and acculturation to the new school? Themes emerged from the vertical and horizontal items of my category systems. Recurring themes were captured. In each theme, data were triangulated among different people and different sources of data (e.g. interview, observation, etc.).

Because of the multiple themes that emerged from data, I categorized the themes into two chapters. This chapter will discuss the themes that emerged from the investigation of funds of knowledge related to language acquisition. The chapter that follows will detail the other research question which will look at the linguistic support that refugee students receive in the classroom, in school, and in the school board.

### Funds of Knowledge

The concept of funds of knowledge is based on a premise that “people are competent and have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge” (González & Moll, 2002). Funds of Knowledge should be viewed as a tool to retrieve

students' knowledge and prior experiences which will serve as a scaffold for new learning (González & Amanti 1997; González et al., 1995; Moll 1992). In this respect, teachers' pedagogy becomes crucial in refugee students' new learning experience. At the same time, teachers possess views of teaching that have been shaped by the sociocultural contexts of their lives (Goodson, 1991). Therefore, teachers' own funds of knowledge impact what they believe about education, how they teach, and how they interact with students (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996). With most teachers coming from the certain middle class and typical Canadian backgrounds, their attitude and their own funds of knowledge may come into conflict with the funds of knowledge that some of their students bring with them (Nieto, 2003). The students' experiences may be very different from what the teachers have known or have been educated about. As Nieto said,

All teachers, whether new or veteran, also need to know more about the students they teach... Most know very little, either from direct experience or training, about the diversity of their students. If this is the case, they may become frustrated and impatient, longing for an idealized past that never was, when all children were easy to teach and looked like them. Unless we prepare new teachers with the kinds of experiences that equip them to go into diverse urban schools with both level-headedness and hope, the situation will remain the same. (p.185)

So the funds of knowledge that students bring with them not only reflect a family's values (e.g. education, cultures, and languages), but also shape teachers' pedagogy at school during interactions with teachers' funds of knowledge. Preparing teachers to deal with the challenges that refugee students may present needs to be considered as an important profession development issues for schools.

During my interviews, not every education practitioner was familiar with the term funds of knowledge. ESL teachers understood the term, while for subject teachers, it was something new. Therefore, I replaced "funds of knowledge" with personal resources,

knowledge, and world experience. I mainly looked at the funds of knowledge brought by the students instead of looking at the families as a whole because my research is grounded in the school only. This does not capture all of what funds of knowledge entails (Moll et al, 1992) exactly. By examining the school setting, I was able to identify what teachers know about the funds of knowledge that their refugee students bring to class, and the language learning environments created for refugee students. As Monzo & Rueda (2003) see it, an effective learning environment for children of minority groups can draw upon their diverse funds of knowledge.

No one is a *tabula rasa* when coming to a new host country. Refugee students may lack experience in English learning or formal school education, but they have a lot of other life experiences that many people do not have, such as fleeing from violence and persecution in their native country. In my study, the four refugee students had had various experiences before they arrived in Canada. After their arrival, the students were not passive bystanders in the construction of their lives in school. They actively engaged in negotiations of the meaning of their language learning experiences while they learned to adapt themselves to the new social setting. In this section, I will discuss themes that emerged from the data around the funds of knowledge and provide detailed discussions about the funds of knowledge that the students brought with them from my perspective, and from the teachers' perspectives as well as from students themselves, the parents, and social workers.

### *Theme 1: Home Language*

Home language is an important asset that refugee students and indeed all students bring with them. Research has already shown that bilingualism or multilingualism has a



positive influence on children's linguistic and educational development (Baker, 2000; Cummins, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). As children continue to develop their first and second language, they gain a deeper understanding of language processing and decoding, and they may develop more flexibility in thinking because of processing information through two languages. Cummins (2001) stressed that "the level of development of children's mother tongue is a strong predictor of their second language development" (p. 16). The knowledge and skills that children have already acquired in their mother tongue can be transferred to new language learning. The more solid the foundation in the first language is, the better the educational outcome in the new language will be.

Looking at the four refugee students in my study, they had differing proficiency in their home language. Kathy's prior language development was disrupted. She was able to understand and speak Albanian, but she could not continue to learn the reading and writing of this language due to the whole family's moving to Bosnia. Therefore, Kathy missed becoming literate in her first language, Albanian, and when she had just begun to learn the new language Bosnian, she came to Canada, where she needed to learn a new language again.

Based on Cummins' Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis (1981), the level of second language (L2) competence which a bilingual child attains is partially a function of the type of competence the child has developed in the first language (L1) at the time when intensive exposure to L2 begins. He holds that when a child's first language is not well developed, learning a second language may be difficult and may negatively affect the child's cognitive growth. Kathy's situation is that literacy in her L1 Albanian was not developed; however, her listening and speaking of it were still maintained. Her cognitive

skills, such as comparing, classifying, synthesizing, evaluating, and inferring, developed in her L1 may be transferred to the third language. What were also transferred were her math skills which were acquired in a second language environment in Bosnian.

According to Mr. Molham, she did well in math. He said, “From what I’ve heard she’s stronger in her math skills than she is in her, in her language acquisition skills.” Mrs. Lee confirmed it, “I think her math is better than other subjects, especially science, because Mr. Kentucky (the math teacher) seldom sent her to me.” Kathy’s subject area teachers could send her to Mrs. Lee for any problem she had with the content. So it seems Kathy’s prior knowledge of math may have assisted her in the mainstream classroom.

As to Kathy’s language acquisition, Mrs. Lee commented that:

You know, if children are proficient in their first language they already know about language: by “know”, I mean really good at it, they can apply this to different circumstances. Just like Kathy, if she were literate in her first language, she would have known how language works. Unfortunately, she didn’t have it. Although I don’t know what her first language is, I know she didn’t have it. So in cases like guessing the meaning of a word from the context, predicting meaning, learn about text structure, things like these, she was in the middle of nowhere because she doesn’t have the foundation, and you have to remember, she missed some school education, I mean, the regular education.

Mrs. Lee’s words reflected Cummins’ Interdependence Hypothesis. She believed because of the home language literacy was not well developed, Kathy’s learning of English became difficult. Without knowing how language worked, Kathy’s development in English seemed to be very slow. But Mrs. Lee was very positive about Kathy’s linguistic development:

She will pick it up sooner or later. She’s made tremendous progress in English. When she came to our school, she could barely say anything. Now she can say hi and make friends. Both need English, right? There’s still a lot of work to do on reading and writing... She works hard if I push her constantly...so she will become more and more proficient,...and she’ll get there.

Another noticeable behavior related to Kathy's language learning is that she became very anxious when she was required on her own to complete a reading/writing task. She looked around to search for any help she could use including me. With respect to her anxiety, SLA researchers have tried to find what caused language anxiety among ELLs. Scovel (1991) believed it is a psychological construct which most likely stems from the learner's own "self" in the sociocultural context, for example, the way he or she sees self, sees others such as peers and teachers, and the target language communication situations (p.16). Language anxiety can also be a result of "insufficient command of the target language" (Horwitz, 2001, p.118). It occurs due to the linguistic difficulties that ELLs face in learning and using the target language. There are also extrinsic motivators, such as the different sociocultural environments and people's own concerns about ethnicity and, foreignness (Scovel, 1991). The social status of the ELLs and their families, a sense of power relations between them and the native speakers can also contribute to language anxiety. Kathy not only held ELL status, but was also a refugee student whose socio-economic status was low, so she might have felt imbalanced power relations when she tried to become a member in her classmates' friend-circles. Also, her anxiety could stem from her low mastery of English. For teachers, probably a further investigation of these factors could possibly help them to identify the difficulties ELLs are experiencing and help them make the classroom setting less anxiety-provoking and hence to improve learners' performance in English.

Hassan had acquired some language skills before he came to Canada. He learned to speak and understand Somali, and read and write it although not much. His first language was still deep-rooted, and he tended to code-switch often between the two languages. As

his sister mentioned in the previous chapter, he spoke with mixed languages, and sometimes he had a hard time finding an appropriate English word when he spoke English. Being nine years apart, Hassan might be a stranger to the family, especially to his siblings. All of his siblings were speaking English, which means they might have forgotten their home language or they preferred to use English because they felt more comfortable with it. So Hassan tried to be a part of the family by means of English, and keep his first language to communicate with his mother. However, the mother was studying English, too, so that she could communicate with her children and get a job more easily. Therefore, English was encouraged in the family. With the foundation in the first language, Somali, and the intense English environment at the home setting, Hassan made impressive progress in English. Although Kathy and Hassan have been in Canada for a similar length of time, their performance in English differed. Mr. Molham compared Hassan and Kathy's English development, "And you know, I would say of the two, she (Kathy) struggles more with school right now. Her language skills aren't where Hassan's are, Hassan has been able to pick up a lot in the last couple of months." It may be safe to say that first language plays an important role in a child's second language development, and a second language (English) supportive home setting is crucial, too.

Both Julia and Andy were in secondary school, so they were older than Kathy and Hassan. They had solid foundation in the Spanish language. English was not a totally new language to them because they had been exposed to English in some ways. Julia said, "I love [the English language Canadian rock star] Avril Lavigne, but it's not easy to get her songs in Mexico...I still managed to get some...That's why I like guitar and start to learn it." Andy said he had learned some English in Colombia because he needed to help his

father with refugee application. “There was tons of paperwork, so I learned some, and I would say, it’s a lot better if you learn English before coming, because, because you don’t want to come to the U.S. or Canada without knowing anything because it’d be very tough.” Looking at BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) (Cummins, 1982), the most difficult part for Julia in learning English is oral English, which was BICS. However, her CALP developed quite well, even better than her BICS. She could easily get high or perfect marks on her reading and writing, but she was still not confident in her English speaking. Andy was the opposite. He spoke English proficiently, but was struggling more with CALP. The two different pattern of acquiring BICS and CALP may point to some other factors that influence English language learning. For example, a student’ personality (outgoing or introvert) may have an impact on BICS acquisition. An adolescent who likes socializing may have more chances to practice oral interpersonal English and therefore, improve it quickly.

To both Julia and Andy, Spanish was a great asset they bring with them. They both believed it was very important nowadays to be bilingual, and they must keep their home language. “I feel mastering two languages is very important, like finding a job, travelling...I can travel to my home country, and Colombia, and Europe. I won’t worry about talking to people, because I know Spanish, yea!” said Julia. Their home language was also strongly supported by their parents. Julia’s mother commented, “She speaks Spanish to us. We don’t know English. She must speak Spanish.” In addition, Julia’s parents wanted their children to speak more languages. Julia translated, “My parents want us to speak as many languages as we can, English, Spanish, French...” When I asked the

reason why they wanted their children to learn so many languages, the parents answered, “To find jobs.” Andy’s parents stressed the importance of Spanish, but at the same time expressed their concerns. Andy’s father said, “He should keep it. It’s very important. Very very important. He talks to grandparents in Spanish, his cousins, friends, and us... He says English too much. Sometimes I don’t like. Keep telling them, Spanish, Spanish...you know, the kids.” Spanish is encouraged in Andy’s family for the communication needs with people who speak Spanish, while English is for daily use. The parents saw the use of Spanish in their life in Canada.

Home language is an important aspect of funds of knowledge that refugee students bring with them. Its importance lies in that students use it to communicate with family members and relatives in this new country, and they could build on their new language learning on the basis of their home language. The three refugee students who developed English at a speed that teachers were satisfied with all had first language foundation. As adolescent learners, Julia and Andy had the consciousness of knowledge of learning a second language. For example, Andy was able to analyze the differences between the English and Spanish phonetic systems. Julia endeavoured to perfect her English and tried to make as few mistakes as possible. Therefore, home language contributes much to refugee students’ second language learning.

### *Theme 2: Identities*

Besides home language, refugee students also bring with them their identities. Identity has been theorized in many ways and is featured in a diversity of theoretical traditions, such as postcolonialism, feminism, and decolonialism (Hall, 1996; Swadener & Mutua, 2008). Identities are thought to "inform the development of social movements and

mediate popular responses to state projects, institutional projects, and to changing social and economical conditions" (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007, p. 135). Students' sense of who they are has many implications for their school and social lives.

The relationship between identity and language learning has received a lot of attention from researchers in the field of second language acquisition. Norton (2000) argues that the English language learner's identity is multiple, a site of struggle, and subject to change. She maintains that SLA theorists have not adequately addressed how relations of power affect interaction between language learners and target language speakers. She raised the construct of "investment".

If learners "invest" in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital. As the value of their cultural capital increases, so learners' sense of themselves and their desires for the future are reassessed. (McKinney & Norton, 2008, p. 195)

In other words, if the relationship between the language learner and the target language is positive, then the learner has the desire to learn. If not, the learning process will be a struggle.

Refugee children have to play many roles beyond that of a student such as translator or interpreter for their parents because:

Frequently, the children pick up English long before their parents, and they must translate for their parents when, for example, the adults require social services. Many students also must take responsibility for writing checks for family expenses. So in addition to finding their own way through a new country and a culture, many refugee students bear adult responsibilities. (McBrien, 2003, p. 77).

Ngo (2008) furthered the discussion on refugee children' identities:

For instance, in limited-English-proficient families, immigrant children may become decision makers, as well as culture and information brokers. One possible outcome of children taking on adult roles and responsibilities is a shift in power relations across generational and gender lines. As research in immigrant education

has documented, this process creates a role reversal that empowers youth at the same time that it disempowers adults (p.2).

These students in my study inevitably undertook some responsibilities that adults had, such as communicators between school and family, translators of mail or notices, interpreters in daily life (e.g. shopping), etc. Kathy translated her school work and school notices to her mother although she sometimes played “tricks” during translation. Hassan did not actively get himself involved in this, but his sister was obviously taking many roles in this family. From my interview with the mother, I could see that Hassan’s sister was very experienced in acting as an interpreter. Sometimes before his mother said anything, she had already guessed what she wanted to say and answered the questions to me. When the mother could not express herself in English, she would say it in Somali and check her understanding with her mother’s carefully. When the interview almost came to an end, she apologized to me that she had to leave with her mother in ten minutes because her mother had an appointment with the social worker. Other than her role as an interpreter and parents’ companion, she was also an important helper to her siblings such as Hassan. The role as a helper seems to be common among older siblings in refugee families. Julia had an older brother who did not have the opportunity to learn English in the way she did at school, so basically he could not help Julia and the younger siblings with learning English. Therefore, although Julia was not the oldest, she was an older child in the family who was proficient in both languages. So her out-of-school roles include being an interpreter, home and family communicator, and a home helper as well. It is the same case for Andy because he was the oldest child in his family.

At school the refugee students struggled with their identities. They pursued the same identity as their English speaking peers. Hassan’s initial rejection of me showed his



strong desire to be the same as other students. Especially he felt his English was good enough and he did not expect to be exposed in front of all of his classmates that he needed extra help. Kathy desired to be accepted by her peers, but felt frustrated at her attempts. She complained about her hair as the reason that she could not make friends with Tracy.

Kathy (while coloring a picture): I like Tracy.

Interviewer: Why?

Kathy: Her hair. Look, this color.

Interviewer: Hmm, yellow. Do you mean blonde?

Kathy: Maybe.

Interviewer: I like your hair.

Kathy: I don't like my hair. It's black.

Interviewer: Why do you want to have blonde hair?

Kathy: They will talk to me.

Interviewer: Who?

Kathy: They. They're in my class.

As Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill (1994) have pointed out, all refugee or immigrant children will unavoidably have direct confrontations with the language and culture of the new country, so they must learn to balance or reconcile their previously held beliefs and values with the norms of their new societies. When Kathy could not explain why her relationships with her classmates went against her expectations, she searched for various excuses; by attributing her bad relationship with her classmates to her different hair color.

Her previous words showed she was not very welcomed by her classmates, which had caused her a lot of confusion.

Interviewer: Why don't your classmates talk to you?

Kathy: They don't like me.

Interviewer: Why don't they like you? You know, you're a nice girl.

Kathy: My hair...

Interviewer: Do you feel bad?

Kathy: Yes. They don't like me.

Interviewer: You should think about areas where you are better than them. What are you better at than them?

Kathy: I run fast!

Interviewer: Yes, you see, you are good at a lot of things. You can also speak Albanian.

Kathy: No no, I **speak English**. (Emphasis added by researcher)

Julia and Andy believed they were only seen as ELL students instead of refugee students.

Julia said, "I don't tell people I'm from a refugee family because I don't think my classmates would care. We are the same in ESL course. I don't feel different." I asked how she felt in mainstream classrooms. She answered, "I don't mind being seen as an ESL student. I am. So I don't care. I don't think they care if I'm a refugee or not." Andy felt the same. He explained, "Many people are ESL students in my school so I don't feel I'm ESL... We don't identify, say, a student, a refugee or not. We may say, hey, that guy plays basketball, or like me, play soccer." He further stated, "My English is pretty good so nobody, not many of them know I'm ESL (in mainstream classes)[laugh]". But he also showed his concerns, "I don't know how my refugee status will affect my work, I mean, when I look for a job, will I find a job as everybody else? I'm not sure." I asked, "Do you mean discrimination at jobs?" He nodded, "Yea, sort of, I know everyone is equal, but, who knows?" Both Julia and Andy's parents are very concerned about the children's future jobs. They want their children to speak English well and study well and find good jobs. Andy's statement shows his worries about his identity and his future. He was worried whether his refugee identity might have a negative effect on his search for a job. Although he was aware discrimination is not allowed in jobs and everyone's right to equity is protected by laws, he was still feeling insecure. He was also worried that his parents might experience discrimination because they could not speak English well. He said:

The people don't show it to you. I mean, they don't say it to you, but sometimes you can tell. I'm talking about my parents. They don't speak English very well like me. So people just look at them and they have certain stuff in their mind. You know, like you are here for free money, free food, and everything is free. The school is pretty good though, but out of school, it's hard.

Refugees arrive with certain identities or notion of who they are, and at the same time, construct new identities in the new environments. As Mosselson (2006) elaborates, identities “are responsive to the unique situations of each refugee’s life” (p. 22). Each refugee’s identity is characterized by their past and current experiences and their future aspirations. According to Cummins (2001), teachers must create classroom conditions for ELL students to invest their identities during the language learning process. “teacher-student interactions must affirm students’ cultural, linguistic, and personal identities” (p. 126). He further explains:

There is a reciprocal relationship between cognitive engagement and identity investment. The more students learn, the more their academic self-concept grows, and the more academically engaged they become. However, students will be reluctant to invest their identities in the learning process if they feel their teachers do not like them, respect them, and appreciate their experiences and talents. (p.126)

One important way to maximize ELL students’ identity investment is to activate prior knowledge or build background knowledge in classrooms (p.126). By doing this, refugee students may have a stronger willingness to learn English, and the second language input can be made more comprehensible to refugee students who may face i+100 challenges in language learning. They can relate their new learning to their previous experiences and develop a deeper understanding of new topics and texts (Krashen, 1991).

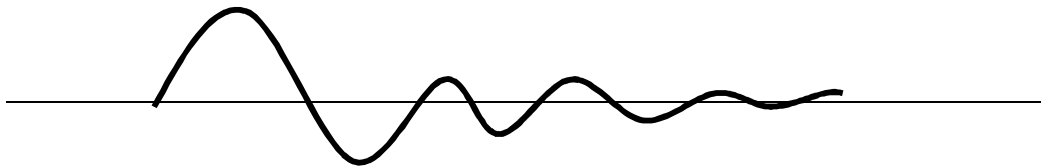
### *Theme 3: Adaptation*

Refugee students’ prior knowledge includes knowledge from life experiences and school education. They may be different from non-refugee immigrant ELL students in the way that the knowledge from their life experiences outweigh the knowledge they acquire from schools. Their experiences of the past and the present are crucial in their identity construction, and guide their future directions. In these refugee students’ school lives, they need to be resilient and take an active role in overcoming the difficulties of their past and their present lives

(Anderson, 2004). Based on the Cultural Shock (CIC, 2011) document, refugee students' adaptation follows four stages: Euphoria period (fascination period), Disenchantment (frustration or irritation and hostility), Gradual adjustment (or recovery), and Acceptance (adjustment or acculturation). They can be illustrated in the following two ways:

A. Successful adaptation:

Fascination ----- Frustration ----- Adjustment -----Integration



B. Unsuccessful adaptation:

Fascination ----- Frustration ----- Depression/ Destructive behaviour

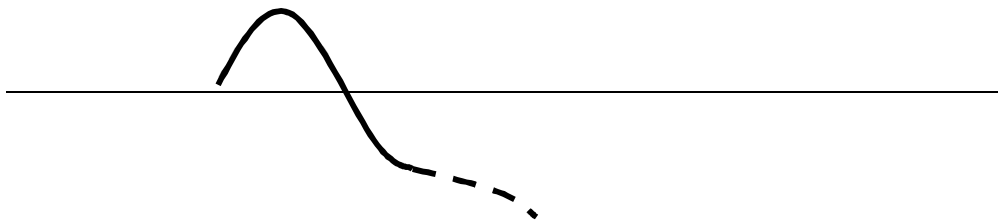


Figure 5.1 Cultural shock pattern (CIC, 2011)

Both Kathy and Hassan seemed to be in the stage of Frustration where Kathy could not understand why her friendships with other classmates did not go in the direction she expected, while Hassan's feeling of being inferior to others made him work with me involuntarily. Mr. Molham attributed Hassan's attitude towards me to that he needs a long time to trust people. He said,

He's, now that he knows me, he is much more accepting and he is open. And I have seen a huge change with him in the last 3 months, a very positive change. So, but September to November he was struggling a lot more in class, and now through positive reinforcement and the extra support I have been able to give him and I know you have been you know, working with him as well, but he doesn't trust right away, it's something that is built up over time.

The distrust in people and the emotional distancing among refugee students have been well documented in studies of refugee children's mental health (Kinzie, 1986; Sack, 1985; Rousseau, Corin, & Renaud 1989). As Hyman et al. (1996) discuss,

Refugee children, many of whom witnessed violence in their homelands and experienced perilous journeys to safety, may be at high risk for post-traumatic stress disorder... by the original traumata, intrusive thoughts about the past, nightmares, distractability, hyperalertness, and emotional distancing from others. (pp. 4-5)

Considering Hassan's years of experience in the refugee camps, it was not surprising that he did not trust people easily, even in the microsystem. It took him time to trust people he interacted with every day.

Julia and Andy were more in the stage between Adjustment and Integration. They experienced some difficulties in their study initially, but according to their ESL teacher Mrs. Dallner and the math teacher Mr. Hill, Julia was a top student in class, and Andy was a top student in math. However, both of them were not fully integrated into the social settings of school. Julia was not keen on making friends and developing her social circle, although her personality played a major role in her problems with relationships. She still felt different in the regular classrooms such as math class, where many students were first language English speakers. The language challenge from her peers in regular classrooms definitely put a lot of pressure on her. Although Andy could speak English as fluently as a native English speaker, he still worried that he would be treated differently when job hunting because of his refugee status. The refugee identity he carried made him feel different from other people, so in this regard, linguistic proficiency could not bring refugee students an absolute sense of security. Refugee students have worries that originated from their previous experiences in various aspects of their lives.

Microsystem 1: Funds of knowledge from refugee students' and their parents' views

The systems within the microsystem were key determinants in refugee children's language learning. Although funds of knowledge are embedded in households and communities, not all of the refugee students and their parents realized they brought any form of funds of knowledge with them. Since the word "funds" also refers to money resources, when asked about what funds of knowledge the children brought with them, Kathy's parents were suddenly on the alert:

Interviewer: In your opinion, what funds of knowledge did Kathy bring to school?

Kathy's father: What do you mean?

Interviewer: It's like, what resources and world experience did your daughter bring with her, or what did she contribute to class?

After murmuring to the mother, Kathy's father asked: Who are you? Are you from the government?

Interviewer: No, I'm a researcher.

Kathy's father (very worried): We didn't bring anything. No one told us.

Interviewer: No, no, everything you told me today will not be released to anyone else.

Kathy's father: Oh, we didn't bring anything.

Kathy's parents may have totally misunderstood my question although I had tried to explain in other words, but it showed how much they felt insecure. They were afraid their words might bring them bad repercussions, so they looked very nervous when I asked questions about funds of knowledge. Considering they came from a war-torn area (Kosovo and Albania) where people in power were harsh with citizens, they would naturally be suspicious of questions like this. Hassan's family showed unawareness of funds of knowledge, too.

Interviewer: In your opinion, what resources and world experience did Hassan bring to school? It's like, what did he contribute to class?

Hassan's mother: I don't understand at all.

Hassan's sister interpreted the question to her mother again.

Hassan's mother: I still don't know.

Interviewer (turned to Hassan's sister): How about you, then?

Hassan's sister: I don't know.

Interviewer: What are the differences between Somalia and Canada?

Hassan's sister: Food, people, English...and religion.

Interviewer: Are you able to talk about these differences at school?

Hassan's sister: No, not really. No one asks me.

Based on the above interviews, funds of knowledge seemed to be a new concept to them. Both the parents and the children did not realize their languages and cultures could be valuable resources to the school and Canada. However, as the last chapter revealed, the parents in both families encouraged their children to learn English and improve their study at school as best as they could. They understood what it meant to their children's adaptation in Canada. This understanding echoes what Oikonomidou (2007) stresses, "English language learning is an essential component in the students' adaptation to the social and the academic aspects of schooling" (p. 17), and it is "a significant cornerstone and a central force in the ways in which immigrant and refugee students come to understand and constitute their lives in the schools of their host country" (p.18).

The secondary school participants had a better idea of the funds of knowledge they brought, contrary to elementary school participants. Andy said that he brought to Canada his language—Spanish.

I brought here my language. My language is a really beautiful language, in the way that you can explain things as many different ways as you want. And it has different types of speaking. For example, in Colombia, we have 5 different cultures of the country, right? And all 5 just pick the Spanish schools first, but this is a different level and the way they say things and the way they relate to things are different, so Spanish is a big language. So I think if I have an opportunity to study Spanish again, I mean here to increase my Spanish level, I would sure take the opportunity as having my language is a blessing if I can put it that way.

He also stated that he brought himself with English language learning skills so he could help other ELLs, especially Spanish speaking students with their English development.

Julia thought the funds of knowledge she brought with her was her migration experience.

She said, "I would say my experience, like travelling from Mexico to Canada, is not what

everyone can have. Like the novel study, I found I had a lot of similar experiences in the novel, so I can easily write my reflections.”

Funds of knowledge were described as the “cultural glue” (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 2005, p.54) which maintains that relations between households and communities and are expressed in certain family rituals, cultural beliefs, and kinship networks that help immigrants to gain access to resources and developing social networks. Although the elementary school families did not express their views towards it, partly because of our communication problems, they could not completely discard the funds of knowledge because they were in every aspect of their lives. The secondary school families had a better understanding of funds of knowledge probably because of their backgrounds: both families had a high socioeconomic status in their home countries, and the children had received regular school education and have formed their world views and values. The knowledge of education that both families had acquired in their home countries is a valuable fund of knowledge they brought with them to the new country.

Microsystem 2: funds of knowledge from teachers’ views

The Ontario guidebook *Supporting English Language Learners: A practical guide for Ontario educators* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) suggests that teachers should “tap the rich resource of knowledge and understandings that ELLs bring to school, and which, in turn, enrich the learning of all students in the classroom” (p. 7). The teaching of refugee students requires a lot of sensitivity and carefulness. As Ngo (2008) claimed, “For these students, their experiences fleeing from violence and persecution in their native country adds another dimension to the contexts of being a student in a new country. For teachers and schools, teaching these immigrant students effectively may mean being



aware of and addressing issues related to post-war trauma” (p.1). Therefore, the teaching of refugee students does not mainly involve language teaching; rather, it also includes considerations of their mental health.

As the proportion of ELL students at schools continuously increases, “not only will the refugee child be required to adapt but schools, teachers and existing students will also need to adapt” (Hamilton, 2004, p. 83). The values that teachers hold represent the teacher’s life goals, and the forms of the classrooms (Gupta, 2006).

Mr. Molham had ten years’ teaching experience at three different schools—two elementary and one secondary. This was the second year for him to be the vice principal of Wharton Elementary school. He believed there were a large number of ELL students at his school.

I can find out that data. I don’t know off the top of my head. I’d have to check with Mrs. Lee or Ms. Kelly so, but, if I was guessing, I would say it’s about, probably about 3-4 % of our students, if I was, you know, estimating, which is a fairly large number when you think about the fact that we have 700 you know, plus students you know. It is still quite a large number there.

Because this school did not identify regular immigrant students and refugee students, he was unaware of the number of refugee students at his school. When asked what resources and world experience that refugee students contribute to class, he answered:

I think they bring with them a huge amount of knowledge and I think it’s up to us to try to tap into that and to share. And again, each student is very unique in their backgrounds and experiences: some of them have experienced more in you know, their 8 – 10 years of life than I have experienced in 33 years, right, with everything that they have been through and gone through, sometimes the things that they’ve seen. And some of them have lost family members or they have had to separate from family members so I think the biggest thing is try to make them feel welcome and make them feel safe and to get to know them and provide opportunities when they are able to and when they want to, to be able to share with the class.

Mr. Molham showed his understanding of what the resources and world experiences refugee students brought to class—various experiences which could be traumatic. He stressed the importance of creating classrooms where students would feel comfortable and safe. Mr. Molham was also a grade 5 science teacher. As a teacher, he felt that in order to tap the funds of knowledge, teachers must provide opportunities for refugee students to contribute to class, and design thoughtful activities.

But you know, try to provide opportunities for them to be able to contribute because sometimes it's tough for them because you know, they are trying to learn the language and it's overwhelming. And you know, so sometimes they become withdrawn, so it's important to try to make them feel comfortable and you know, let them know it's ok to talk about things. And I think as teachers it's important that we try to make our curriculum very multicultural and try to include the views and opinions of others. I know one of our teachers did that with a unit, where they studied Afghanistan, right and the impact of the war, and looked at some letters that were written by you know, the kids in that country, and I think that was very powerful and those kind of task can open up conversations where other students who may have gone from refugee, that might have gone through you know, similar types of experiences and be able to you know, make those connections. So I think those kinds of things are important, that we you know, do that as well.

The example he gave about the teacher connecting refugee students with the content of class demonstrates the use of funds of knowledge in class, which also showed as a school administrator, he might encourage retrieving funds of knowledge at school teaching practices.

The concept of funds of knowledge builds the bridge between teachers and students' home backgrounds. I asked Mr. Molham how he and the school communicated with the refugee students' families, and he answered, "I would say in my experiences as a teacher, I communicated with all my parents in a variety of ways. I had an internet website so that provided 24/7 access." However, considering that not every refugee family could afford computers or internet, he provided other options:

Every month we did newsletters, we had planners and I communicated through the planners, and then by phone I would say I communicated at least once a month with the parents as a class room teacher, so you know, they were all, again it was always building that trust and that relationship with them as well so that I knew the things that were going on in their life and I was able to help, so if they had a tough weekend, I could say you know what, don't worry if the home work's not done, right, it's not a big deal, we can work on that and we can work on it over a couple of days, right and be able to support them as well so that they're not feeling more pressure and more tired, and I think it's just understanding their needs that's really important and know what they're going through and also trying to help them adjust to the you know, the country and the culture here as well, because there's usually so much going on and just, you know, just trying to get food on the table sometimes can be, can be a challenge there.

Mrs. Lee, the Wharton Elementary school ESL teacher, had taught English for over fifteen years. She had worked here for five and a half years. She commented on the funds of knowledge that refugee students brought to school:

As you can see, all of the children who come to me are international travelers and yet refugee students are not recognized during the initial assessment. I know the ELD program, but as far as I know, there's no such a program in any school here. I guess there are some in Toronto? What refugee students contribute to class, hmm, I would say culture. It's so important to learn how culture is expressed in their lives, how they see their lives. They've also brought their experiences, such as war, loss of a family member, so what I can do is to make this place as comfortable as possible.

She further stated,

I think they (Kathy and Hassan) must've found it hard in terms of being aware of what's going on in classrooms initially, and they must, I assume they found it frustrating to learn a lot of new stuff, considering the fact, you know, they probably had never seen what a real school was like. The basic things we do are, uh, try our best, you know, to work with them and help them develop the sense of belonging.

She felt social workers were much needed at her school as the key communicator between teachers and students' homes:

I don't see Kathy's parents very often. Even if I do, I mean, I'm not able to talk to them because obviously they don't speak English. I have little idea of what Kathy's life is really like outside of the classroom, and [what] she knew about the world previously, before she came to my school. I don't see that because I really can't... Hassan's parents, I don't see them either, but I know his sister, so it's a

much different case. I mean obviously they grow up with different backgrounds, and they grow up with different people. Hassan's sister's given him a lot of help in English learning, but Kathy doesn't have such a person in her family. So it's very hard for her...I would say knowing more about refugee students' homes can facilitate our teaching. I think a lot of teachers do feel especially in our school, that English learning has a lot to do with how much we value their cultures and home languages, but we have students from everywhere, and we have very limited time in school, so fortunately we now have Mr. Richardson, he is the social worker, and he helps bridge ELLs' families and school. It's a real blessing!"

As an ESL teacher, Mrs. Lee was very clear about the importance of refugee students' funds of knowledge in their English learning. Like Mr. Molham, she also pointed out teachers should create a comfortable classroom environment for refugee students. She recognized that refugee students contributed their cultures and world experiences to the classroom, and they might have been daunted by the initial adaptation to the new environment, new language, new people, etc. However, language barriers and teachers' tight schedules restricted their attempts to get to know the students' families, so although as she indicated, she and other teachers were aware of the need to know about students' families, in fact, the funds of knowledge could only be acquired through the help of the school social worker.

During my observations, I found funds of knowledge were seldom tapped in the science class. Mr. Molham admitted it was hard to include students' cultures and languages in his science class; however, language and social studies should be able to achieve that. He said,

I would say yes, especially in my case being Vice Principal and then going and teaching just you know, basically that one period with that class. It is more difficult as a rotary teacher that way, like going in for just the period, whereas when I had my homeroom class for an entire day you're able to do a lot more of those activities and build on them each day. Where it definitely is more difficult, let's say, just within science, where I don't have as many options to, you know, draw in those types of activities and articles because it just doesn't blend itself as well to the science curriculum, whereas within language or social studies for example, those are great opportunities to be able to make those connections.

He felt math class was in a similar situation to science, while with history or geography it would be much easier to include students' backgrounds.

Maybe similar to math, where math doesn't really lend itself to you know, those kinds of opportunities as well, but there are definitely subject areas that I think open themselves up to make a lot more of those kind of world connections. So history and geography for sure provide a lot of you know, chances for students to learn about the countries, and you know, just learn from each other, I think that's the key. So I think those students, the refugee students and our ELL students, they can offer a lot and sometimes we have to remember that, but you know they have as much to offer as any other student, so and, you know, it's important that we give them a chance to share and give them a voice.

Mrs. Lee believed that refugee students should be given more opportunities in every classroom to share their funds of knowledge. She commented, "Like Kathy, she's learned some math in her home country, and I'm pretty sure Mr. Johnson had done a great deal to retrieve that part of knowledge, and you see, she is doing well." She said she had tried different ways to include refugee students' and ELL students' backgrounds in her ESL class. She said, "I sometimes require them to write in both English and their first language, and sometimes I ask them to translate their writings to their parents. I just do what I can, but I think it'd be better after they've learned basic English, ... they can't do the dual languages very well." From my observations, Mrs. Lee often selected some story books for Kathy and Hassan to bring back home to read. In a class about pets, Mrs. Lee encouraged Kathy to draw cats she loved, tell stories of cats, and choose books about cats. She did the same with Hassan who liked dogs and jaguars. In the next session when I worked with Kathy, she proudly told me how interesting the books were when she shared them with her younger brothers and sisters.

The ESL teacher Mrs. Dallner at Monty Secondary school had over twenty years' teaching experience at various schools including elementary and secondary schools as

well as vocational schools. She had worked at Monty Secondary School for five months. She expressed a similar view that ELLs bring a lot of funds of knowledge with them. She said,

Well most of them, they have so much experience, and I think that's something that we always try and draw on prior knowledge, and so you know, what's it like in your country, has this happened, so you're always going back there, they don't come in as a blank slate, so I think that's something to realize, and we're not trying to replace their culture with the Canadian culture, so it's an add-on and I even, you try and encourage them to just say, keep reading in your own language, keep building your vocabulary in your own language, because that makes them stronger English speakers and learners as well, to keep building, so it's to acknowledge and I mean some of those students go to classes on Saturdays in their own language, which is important to do and we just got something too, there's Korean summer school, so it's encouraging them to do that and realize that I mean I think that's the one thing about Canada that I'm teaching in my geography class right now is that we are a mosaic, unlike the US that's a melting pot, and so we value your culture and to bring those experiences in, and even in the novel study I just did with them, the book we did was the *Road to Chlifa*; did you have a chance to read the book?

Mrs. Dallner promoted the idea that the new things learned in Canada represent an add-on to students, and the purpose of new language learning was not to replace their prior language and culture. The book she talked about was the one that Julia had mentioned. It described how a boy and a girl fled their home country Lebanon by overcoming many obstacles and finally settled down in Quebec. Julia resonated very much with the journey that the main characters had taken. She felt she had a lot to reflect on while reading this book. In my observations of novel study, Mrs. Dallner encouraged intense discussions about the difficulties and barriers that the main characters had been through. She asked the students in her ESL class to share with the class the difficulties they had in their life time, so she nicely connected the class content with students' previous experiences.

Mrs. Dallner also noted that both ESL teachers and mainstream teachers should receive more professional development (PD) in regard to supporting ELL/refugee students.

Because the school was multicultural at a high level, the need for more PD was becoming pressing.

I think we need more PD time. We sometimes have waves of ELL students. I remember in one week we got 8 students in the mid-term. The other teacher called the head teacher to ask what we should do about it. He gave us permission to use two half-days to talk about what was going on and prepare a lot of necessary materials. We also arranged for a psychiatrist [to come in].

Another thing she hoped to see improvement in is contact with students' parents. She said:

No, I've never met the parents, and this is the unfortunate part, is usually the parents or family that you end up talking to would be if we call home with a problem, you know, of course families can come in when we have parent/teacher night, so we do that twice a year so that's their opportunity to come in, and but otherwise, although with Julia, a friend of mine knows her and her family because I think they were, I don't know, I don't know if they were coming, I don't think they were coming to our church because I go to the same church as my friend, but my friend said, "Do you have Julia in your class?", and so I did one day I said to Julia, Mrs. Marshall says, hi, so we have a connection that way, so when I first met her, you know that was it, and I hoped that that made her feel welcome too, that we both have this person who we both know, right? So I made that point of saying, Oh yea, she's a very good friend of mine, but otherwise I don't have the opportunity to meet the families.

From the above statement, Mrs. Dallner showed the difficulty of getting to know her students' home backgrounds. She only heard about Julia's family from her friend at church.

Mr. Hill, the math teacher at Monty secondary school, had worked there for seventeen years. According to him, "Half of my teaching career has been with this school and dealing with students that are English language learners, and half of it not." Mr. Hill did not believe that he had any refugee students in his math class because "By the time they get to me they've already had mathematics through the ESL department, they can't come in to grade 9 applied math, let's say, or any other math, until they complete some courses

in the ESL department, again because we're a magnet school; if we weren't a magnet school I would have a whole other host of issues, that I don't need to deal with because I'm a magnet school, so no, that's not my case." When students got to his class, they would have been equipped enough English skills, so in his eyes, there was no difference between ELL students and mainstream native English-speaking students.

As to the funds of knowledge, Mr. Hill was hesitant. He said, "Actually I haven't thought about this question much. I know the ELLs are from different countries. They speak different languages, so I encourage them to use their home languages in my class, because I think they'll feel comfortable, and it will help them understand the content better. So far I still like this idea. But other than that, I don't know." He also explained why he could not design more culture-related activities in class. He told me because his class was equipped with hi-tech, and all the students used the device to do the calculation, it would be very hard to include cultures in a technology-embedded classroom. During my time of observations, his classes were mostly designed in this way: introducing new math concepts, showing examples with the device, doing exercises, allowing students to discuss answers in their home languages, and checking answers. Allowing students to discuss in their home languages was a way to tap their funds of knowledge. However, it was worth noting that the class was divided into several groups. Native English-speaking students formed themselves in a group, and ELLs formed themselves into several groups based on their home languages. There were one or two students who could not find a partner and had to sit there alone.

Mr. Hill seldom met students' parents. He said, "No, that's not part of my job. I mean, if they have any questions, they're welcome to come to see me. I never make a call or



arrange a meeting with the parents. But, you know what, I do meet them at parent-teacher nights.”

### Microsystem 3: funds of knowledge from social workers' views

The social worker system is also located within the microsystem. When ELL students had any questions or problems with their families and schools, they could go to the social worker on site for help. At the same, the social worker worked between the school and the family to provide help to both sides. Mr. Richardson was the social worker at Wharton Elementary School. He had been working for this school for seventeen years. His initial work was an office assistant, but with the influx of immigrants and refugees in the past ten years, he began to work as a social worker with the school board to help these students with their schooling. According to him, the community of Wharton Elementary School was composed of a majority of Somali people, followed by Koreans and Spanish speaking people from Central America.

Mr. Richardson described his job as “My job, as a social worker with the school board, is to help families who are at risk, this could be the high risk population at school, and work with the students and families, and the school to help keep children in school longer, to be better at school, see schooling a better way as well.” He actively got himself involved in students' families and the communities, and sometimes represented school teachers to communicate with them. However, he was worried that teachers were too much dependent on him and they lost the opportunities to get to know their students. He said:

So you have to take it in that's Richardson's opinion, but just from everyday status, ESL is easily overlooked you know. Somebody's problem; it becomes somebody else's problem if a teacher says, “I want, I need to talk to Kathy's mom, can you? Here're three questions I want you to go and get the answer to those

three questions.” Well if you just look at the student outside a culture, what that teacher should do is phone that parent, struggle with the same things that I would struggle with, and, but get it on a better relationship with that person as opposed to me having that relationship, all right, that becomes the dependency of the teacher say, oh, Richardson will do it. Right? Or the vice principal will do it. Right? So it’s easy to give those things away rather than to take them on as a problem that you can solve very easy, but it’s time consuming.

If teachers had Mr. Richardson do all the communication work with the students’ families, then they would barely know the funds of knowledge these students bring, so the retrieval of students’ prior knowledge suggested in the Ontario guidance was problematic in practice. Mr. Richardson also reported that direct communication between the parents and the school only took place once a year. After the report cards were distributed, parents could make phone calls or visits to school to discuss these report cards. However, Mr. Richardson told me it was almost impossible for non-English-speaking parents, so he called the whole thing “a game”.

As to the funds of knowledge, Mr. Richardson reported:

I think they bring a lot of knowledge with them, but, again, I think a lot of it has to do with, I want to be careful, the cultural opportunities provided by the school, and what I mean by that is that we have a broad number of refugees that are here from cultures that don’t place a lot of value on education, their parents may not have had any formal education yet when they come here they’re expected to go to school, right, and that might be the only school that they might have ever really had to attend...But also so the cultural expectation – sorry, the family expectation on learning and then also cultural in terms of you know, if you’re from a central war torn country, and in a camp, school might happen one day but might not happen for another two weeks. So I think the school should provide them the cultural opportunities or any learning opportunities because, because the families may not know. Not all families are like Korean families. The emphasis on education, a lot of Korean families that come are motivated to learn the language and motivated to excel at learning in general, whether there’s a language barrier there or not, they still expect their children to do well and to perform at their best, so there’s lots of variables,

Mr. Richardson pointed out that due to the differences among families, education might be accorded different values. For example, according to him, in Korean families, children

were motivated to learn. However, in other families, security issues were probably of top priority, so education was given less attention. Therefore, Mr. Richardson suggested that the school should pursue ways to help children from these families since the support from them was very limited.

Ms. Tallman just started to work as a social worker for Monty Secondary School two months before my interview. Although she was very new to this position, she actually had a lot of experience working with refugees because her parents had sponsored two refugee adolescents from Kosovo. The largest communities she worked with were a Mexican community with people from Central and South America and a Muslim community with people from Sudan and Somalia.

Ms. Tallman believed that the concept of family provided the most important funds of knowledge that refugee students bring with them:

It's difficult to say, well, I think family is what these students value the most. But you can't make a generalization because my experience is from a new social worker... The people have come from so many different parts of the world, and they all have different cultures and different values and different strengths, but overall, family is highly valued, family connections, family is the most important, so family here, families that they've left, and family could be not what we think of as like a nuclear extended family, family could be like a whole clan of people, it could be 40 or 50 people and they call them all aunt or uncle or cousin, and in our western perspective, they're distant relatives, but in their culture they're family, and family is hugely important, absolutely.

When I asked her what resources or world experience the refugee students bring with them, she answered:

Again you can't make a generalization, and I don't have a lot of experience with refugees. Refugees have been forced by their circumstances to be resilient, and to be, to take advantage of whatever is available to them, to do whatever they need to survive, they are survivors and whatever it takes, that's what they do, even in Canada. We may not think personally, and I try never to judge them. This is understandable. Somehow they got from some horrible experience, war trauma,

personal trauma, personal violations, seen, witnessed incredible things, somehow they got to a refugee camp or they escaped or they got somewhere, got connected to a visa post and somehow got here, and that takes incredible courage, it takes incredible resilience and fortitude, and I don't question what they did, what they had to do to do that, you know, people will do what they need to, to protect their family, protect themselves, yea.

According to Ms. Tallman, refugees had gained a lot of survival skills before their arrival because they had been through horrible and probably life-threatening experiences, and they might use these skills to continue to take any resource that was available to them in Canada. Ms. Tallman suggested that people should try to understand them instead of discriminating against them.

Ms. Tallman had not encountered the problem that Mr. Richardson had—too much dependence on the social worker. She commented that because secondary school students were more mature and autonomous learners, there was much less need for communication with the parents than in elementary schools, but she was not sure what her work with school families would be like in the future.

Exosystem: Funds of knowledge from school administrator's views

The further environment around refugee students is the system of school administrators. Mr. Molham had two roles: a science teacher and a vice principal. He had expressed what he thought about the funds of knowledge in the previous section: funds of knowledge from teachers' views. He found it hard to incorporate students' funds of knowledge in his science class. Also, he pointed out that it was almost impossible to get to know all of his students as a vice principal. He could only be in contact with people who got into trouble or went against school rules. He believed that classroom teachers should have more contact with refugee students' families "because you're working with a smaller group of students, whereas the vice principal, you know, you're basically managing the entire

school so you definitely don't have the time to be able to put in the phone calls to 750 parents like you do when you have a class of 25."

Mr. Green who was the ESL head teacher and the manager of the ESL program at Monty Secondary school expressed his views towards the funds of knowledge that refugee and ELL students brought. He stated:

That depends on the students. One of the main goals of the Ministry of Education is to try to get teachers to use students' prior learning, so it really depends on what the teacher does to draw the students out. One of the things I will do with the beginner class is that we will have a food day. And I will ask everybody in our class to bring in a dish from their country, and so we take over the social science kitchen at lunch time and we have a feast and that's fun part. Then I ask them to go home and sit down with their parents and write the recipe in their mother tongue. Now I'm asking, of course some of them don't know how to write Chinese, or they don't remember how to write in Persian, so they have to get their parents to help them write the recipe and they are learning how to cook. So they all write a recipe for their favorite dish, so they bring that in, and then the next piece of the puzzle they have to translate that in English. So what we were doing there is, what we are drawing on is the culture they bring to Canada. And they are using it to learn English.

From his words, Mr. Green as an ESL program leader seemed to be quite aware of Ontario policy and had designed activities to blend different cultures together.

Furthermore, he helped students to develop English skills and maintain home languages through multicultural activities. However, the same situation existed at the secondary school as at Wharton Elementary School; namely, they did not have identification procedures for refugee students, so it was unknown which students were refugees.

The opportunities to get to students' families were limited, too. He met the students' parents twice a year. He said, "We have 2 parent- nights a year. I see them when they first register and I am available any time they might want to call and make an

appointment”. His words proved what Mrs. Dallner said that teachers did not have many opportunities to meet the parents.

#### Reflections on the funds of knowledge

The funds of knowledge from the participants’ views include cultures, languages, experiences, prior learning, identities, and survival skills. Most teachers, school administrators, parents, and social workers showed a good understanding of the importance of students’ funds of knowledge in their English learning. Educators have also recommended that school instruction should be closely connected to the cultural and linguistic practices in ELL students’ homes and communities (Gregory, Long, & Volk, 2004; Cummins, 1982; Orellana & Reynolds, 2008). Moll et al (1992) have shown their concerns that schools often fail to include the knowledge of the out-of-school lives of ELL students, which makes it hard for students to build on the funds of knowledge of their homes and communities, and my study shows controversial results. Although most participants were aware of tapping refugee students’ funds of knowledge as an important educational practice in their English learning, under the circumstances they were unable to do so.

#### Factor 1: Lack of training or professional development on teaching ELLs

Based on the provincial guide *Supporting English language learners with limited prior schooling: A practical guide for Ontario educators Grades 3-12* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008), in the both elementary and secondary levels, ELLs should be supported in every classroom, and there are many resources teachers can use in their individual classrooms, for example, photographs, printed materials, manipulatives, images, or art materials (p. 10-11). It also suggests that students’ first languages are “a critical

foundation”, and teachers can “build on English language learners’ language skills, other prior knowledge, and cultural backgrounds to enhance their understanding of English and ease their integration into the mainstream classroom, while increasing all students’ awareness of the benefits of cultural diversity” (p. 14). Teachers should “learn as much as possible about students’ existing knowledge, skills, and interests, and to use this information as a foundation for teaching them English and other subjects “(p. 17). So generally, this guidebook has well illustrated the importance of the funds of knowledge that ELL learners have and provided ways to connect the funds of knowledge with the everyday classroom.

In the teachers’ views about students’ funds of knowledge, mainstream subject teachers found it hard to include refugee students’ funds of knowledge in their classes because their subjects, math and science, were more academic and related to concrete numbers or facts, even though such subjects do not preclude funds of knowledge as will be discussed in Chapter 7. However, as the provincial guide suggests, they should be able to integrate students’ funds of knowledge in their classrooms. Teachers could honor contributions from other parts of the world in science and math if they were aware of it. For example, the term algebra is an Arabic word; so it was Arabs who contributed that to world knowledge. Mayans in Latin America had a concept of zero before Europeans did. Both Mr. Molham and Mr. Hill should see the possibilities for using cultural knowledge about other countries, what they have contributed to mathematics, even to technology, in math classes. According to Roth & Tobin (2007), because students cannot engage in science classrooms due to their cultures and languages, they are often marginalized in the class. What Mr. Molham could probably do is to examine his students’ past experiences and

look for points that can be connected to class content. For example, in the class on green power, he could praise the areas with few resources that manage to be sparing with essentials like water, and then see if Hassan would volunteer how people might be less wasteful of water and manage other resources in a more ecologically sound way. My example is just a suggestion to show that there are ways to include funds of knowledge of immigrant and/or refugees students. It could be hard for mainstream teachers to deliver instructional strategies that can tap students' funds of knowledge because many mainstream teachers have never received any training about working with and teaching ESL students. As Field (2008) showed her concerns, "Many English language learners spend the majority of their school day in mainstream classes taught by content teachers who have not been trained in second language acquisition, cross-cultural communication or sheltered instruction strategies" (p. 25). As a result, the mainstream teacher may not know the important information about students, their home language proficiency, and prior schooling experiences. Therefore, mainstream teachers may not provide differentiated instruction for the ELLs in their classes without receiving further training on how to do so. Therefore, teachers need more preparation in possibilities of funds of knowledge from other parts of the world and from other cultures.

#### Factor 2: Lack of identification procedures for refugee students

Since there were no identification procedures in place for refugee students in their initial assessment, teachers might have very limited access to refugee students' backgrounds, such as what the student had experienced, what the student had learned, what the student's home language proficiency level is, etc. Without knowing the funds of knowledge refugee students brought from the first day, teachers' work was actually



doubled or tripled later because they had to spend extra time to find out them later.

Considering the time constraints that teachers had, they can hardly spend time exploring the funds of knowledge that students brought.

### Factor 3: Parents' own awareness of funds of knowledge

Refugee families should work with school closely. If they are unaware of their strengths and values of language and culture, it would be hard for them to support their children in the home setting. They should also communicate with school on a regular basis to check their children's learning at school so that they can detect problems at an early stage. However, according to teachers, due to the language barrier, refugee parents do not do so very often. Kathy's mother was very concerned about her marks on the report card, but she did not know what she could do with it, so she asked me to be her tutor hoping she could improve with an outsider's help. If she could sit down with Kathy's teachers and had an interpreter present, she might have understood her daughter's problems better.

A family's education level may influence the parents' interpretation of the cultures and languages because the education that family members have received also contributes valuable funds of knowledge. The elementary school families and the secondary school families have shown different understandings of funds of knowledge when being approached with the same interview questions. There could be communication problems with the elementary school families because they did not seem to understand what I was asking about. However, the secondary school families were able to share with me that mastering more than one language was important, and the children should keep it.

Although Julia's and Andy's parents were not poor English language speakers, they

required the children to speak Spanish at home. They might not have realized that a good level of the first language could be a strong impetus to their children's second language learning, but their practices might have helped the children to learn English language in a positive way. The different responses to funds of knowledge can be the result of the education that the parents had received. I am not stereotyping families with low or no education. The lack of education may prevent parents from seeing the importance of the value of home language and cultures.

It is also possible that the parents are overwhelmed by the challenges presented by the new environment such as survival, communicating with others, recovering from the past trauma, etc. Just as the social workers explained, to families that have had horrible past experiences, safety was the foremost issue that they attended to. Therefore, parents in this kind of situation may not consider funds of knowledge as important or of a high priority in their children's language learning.

#### Factor 4: Overdependence on social workers

Funds of knowledge require teachers' constant contact with the students' families. However, the chances for teachers and school administrators to get to know students' home backgrounds were rare. In the elementary school, Mr. Molham as both the school administrator and the subject teacher pointed out the necessity of getting to know the students' families. An important practice he talked about was that he made calls to his students' families every week. In this sense, he was actively communicating with families about the children's performance at school and may find solutions to some problems that he detected. Mrs. Lee knew that learning about the funds of knowledge of the students' homes could facilitate her teaching, but it was limited by her work and time schedule.

Direct communication was very rare, too. According to Mr. Richardson, there was only one time per year when the school contacted parents. In the secondary school, the major direct contacts could only be conducted during the parent-teacher night which was held twice a year. The general tone of teachers from both schools was if the parents had any questions, they could come to talk with them. However, as Mr. Richardson has pointed out, because many parents were unable to speak English, the idea of coming to school to talk to teachers was impossible. In viewing of these cases, the role of social workers became critical. They were the bridges between the school and the students' homes and communities. However, social workers are not teachers. They do not spend every day observing students' academic performance and language learning. If teachers solely rely on social workers and do not attempt to get to know students by themselves, the instructional strategies in classes may not work effectively. By no means can social workers replace teachers because they are different in many ways such as background education, different training, roles, and perceptions.

In summary, although drawing on students' funds of knowledge plays a key role in children's second language learning (Genesee, 1994), the funds of knowledge in my study appeared to be more of a concept instead of being able to lend itself to educational practices. The funds of knowledge as understood by participants in my study appeared to be more of an abstract concept that was not employed in educational practices. The funds of knowledge were recognized by most people in the microsystem and exosystem. However, some certain conditions limited the application of them at school, such as teachers' time commitment and their unpreparedness for refugee students. In addition, the mesosystem did not function well in the relationship to refugee students. As discussed

previously in chapter 2, the experiences in one context can impact other microsystems. The parents' low English proficiency made them unable to identify their child's problem with language learning. The teachers' busy schedule made them unable to go to explore students' funds of knowledge. From an ecological perspective, it is important to develop effective linkages among the systems through improving communication and developing shared strategies to address challenges that refugee students face.

In the next chapter, I will discuss themes around the other research question which will detail the support that refugee students have received regarding their language learning.

## Chapter 6 School Support

In Chapter 5, I addressed my first research question about how the funds of knowledge that refugee students brought with them affect their language acquisition and school acculturation. The funds of knowledge have a lot of implications for refugee students' language learning experiences in Canada. My research studied mainly the diverse funds of knowledge brought by students, and it should also be recognized that teachers bring their funds of knowledge to the classrooms, too. However, the majority of the teaching force in this city is mainly represented by groups with little ethnic diversity. Considering the refugee students had been exposed to diverse cultural practices and various life experiences, this pattern makes teachers' practices that address such diversities difficult (Monzó & Rueda, 2003). According to Sleeter (1994), such a teaching force may be unaware of minority students' cultural and background experiences, and they may regard minority students from a perspective of deficiencies. The discussion in the previous chapter has shown traces of the difference in the awareness of immigrant or refugee students' lives among teachers. ESL teachers who have been specially trained to deal with ELL students and who have more contact with them were more aware of the problems and challenges that newcomer students face as well as the resources they brought with them. On the other hand, teachers who were particularly concerned with a subject seemed less cognizant of the many factors that affected immigrant students' language learning in schools and so may tend to stand by or make few efforts to accommodate them.

Research has shown that the increase in the refugee population has not been accompanied by appropriate educational support targeted to assist the adaptation, integration, and school success of refugee students (McBrien, 2005; Hamilton & Moore,

2004; Gándara & Contreras, 2010; Stewart, 2011). This lack of supportive and targeted education may account for refugee students' high dropout rates and social alienation (McBrien, 2005). A good school education is critical in refugee students' lives in Canada, and has further implications on their well-being, too. Learning English, the official host country language, has been deemed the foremost task that refugee students and adults face in resettling in the new land (Watt & Roessingh, 2001). According to Schumann (1986), the degree of the success in adapting to the new environment of refugees depends on how successful they are in learning the language of their host country. Guided by sociocultural perspectives in language learning, educators should recognize that the environments around refugee students play a significant role.

In this chapter, I will detail the support that refugee students received concerning language learning within layers of environments. Based on the data analysis and triangulation, I will discuss the following themes: school board and policy issues, school administrator involvement and leadership, teacher support, and social worker involvement. However, before arriving at that section, I will briefly present the challenges and the obstacles to refugee students' language learning in my study.

#### Educational challenges

One of the obvious challenges is the disrupted formal education that refugee students may have had. Because of the unstable infrastructure that refugee parents may have experienced in their home country, such as poverty, war, or disasters, refugee children may not have had an opportunity to attend school and learn the basic skills in their first language. The cases of Kathy and Hassan were exactly like this. Kathy's formal education was affected by her family's relocation and Hassan received his informal

education in the refugee camp. When they started grade 4 in the Canadian elementary school, their lack of formal education and the opportunities to read and write presented a lot of challenges while they were learning new vocabulary and English script. They were not only struggling with the new language, but also the content. As Mr. Molham observed,

I think they do struggle more with the science, social studies, history and geography which are very much content based subjects, whereas a subject like math is, and language, it's easier to modify to be able to find different reading passages or you know, different stories at different levels or different math questions and things like that, those resources I think are a lot more readily available than within science.

Both Kathy and Hassan reported that the hardest subject was science. Kathy said, "I don't like science. It's hard." Actually she did not show interest in any subject except physical education. I asked her what kind of help she needed from teachers, and she answered, "I need the answer. I don't understand the questions." The academic language used in subject areas created barriers for her to understand the content, so she seemed to become impatient and ask for direct answers. Hassan's teachers reported that Hassan was often absent-minded in class, but if he understood the content, he would be very engaged in class. They believed that as Kathy's and Hassan's English skills improved, they would develop a stronger interest in their studies.

The ESL coordinator, Mr. Kent, at the school board believed that the differences in life experiences and the lack of reading and writing opportunities presented huge challenges to refugee ELL students. There were many things in the new school that refugee students may have never encountered before, so they needed to fill the gap resulting from their uneven experiences in education in different countries. He said,

They don't know what reading and writing are. They don't have the content. They can look at a map. They can have no idea what a map means. They don't even

know where the start of a book is. Is the front at the back? They don't know how to read the numbers in the book, the page numbers. You know, so they have to learn all of that plus English at the same time. So there is a huge difference between how much they have to learn in a short time before they graduate. They could become very disadvantaged in Canada, because if they are going to be members of Canadian society, they have a long way to go, much further than ESL students.

All the teachers and school administrators considered language acquisition the biggest barrier to refugee students. The students encountered two levels of challenge. One is that they need to acquire basic communicative English for conversations, and the other is that they need academic language and literacy skills to advance their level of education. The ESL head teacher at Monty Secondary School, Mr. Green, found that some ELL students were unable to recognize their real level of English proficiency, especially after they have developed oral proficiency in English, and ended in repeating in the same ESL program again and again. Ms. Tallman, the secondary school social worker, questioned if the current ESL program fits the needs of refugee students.

I think in public school, the children need a real ESL program, and not some kind of a part time immersion program, that doesn't work. I think the public school system is not helpful for, for the older children, but maybe if they're starting at kindergarten or Grade 1 total immersion is probably fine. But again, like ... this Palestinian family, the boy was 9 when he came here; they put him in a Grade 5 class, because of the war back home, and being in a refugee camp, he doesn't, he's never been to school and the thinking is that he should be with his peers, and they're doing math and geography and science, he's never had any of those things, and they pull him out for a few hours a day with an ESL teacher which is great, and she's wonderful, but he's struggling; he would benefit from a total ESL program with other students who are at the same language level as he is, ... and emotionally this particular child is not at the same level as his peers, he's immature compared to his peers. And that's made life very difficult for him because he's not well accepted by his peers, which is compounding his difficulties. So I think that's a big one.

In Ms. Tallman's opinion, refugee students should receive education in groups with students of a similar language and prior knowledge level. Considering that the middle-sized city where my research took place currently does not receive a large number of



refugee students every year and they are scattered in many schools, it is impractical to provide an ESL program like this.

The lack of parental support is a barrier to refugee students' language acquisition. According to Portes & Rumbaut (2001), refugee and immigrant students are positively affected by parental support and interest in their children's education. Parents in this study expressed high aspirations for the academic success of their children in the Canadian schools. However, based on the interviews with them, parents cited several personal factors that negatively affected their students' academic success. The first factor was economic constraints. All the parents were busily working in order to support the families. The fathers of both Julia and Andy mentioned that they had to work overtime. Hassan's mother said, "I'm busy. I go to ESL class. I watch my little kids." Because there were small children in the family, the mother was mostly tied up with housework and childcare. However, if there was any opportunity for a job, all the mothers expressed their willingness to work so that they could get extra income. Hassan's mother said, "If I earn more money, I can buy new clothes for my children." Both Kathy's and Hassan's mothers reported they had a long and hard time getting used to life in Canada. Kathy's mother said, "I don't know how to shop. There are many things I don't know (in the store)." Hassan's mother said, "I cannot read the price. My daughter helps me." Julia's and Andy's parents had similar difficulties in this aspect. Therefore, the parents' slow acculturation may create gaps between the children and parents in gaining new knowledge of the new environment. The parents may not understand what their children were talking about right away. The third factor is the parents' limited English proficiency. As Mr. Richardson, the social worker at the elementary school, pointed out, "...it's that

they can't help their children sometimes because they don't have that basic English piece, and yet there's still expectations on those kids to take homework home and you know, meet the homework expectations, prepare for tests, and they can't get that help at home, as a rule they can't...". Mrs. Dallner, the secondary school ESL teacher, chose not to give her ELL students much homework because as she saw it, most ELL students did not receive help from their parents, and as a result, they might look for other people to help them finish the homework. She said,

There's not much homework, and part of the reason is one, you don't know whose work it is, if you send something home, you don't know whose work am I marking when it comes in and so especially at the beginning, I want to know and I can tell, I know the writing styles, I know, I don't have to look at their names on most of the papers any more.

Mrs. Lee believed that parents should take the initiative to actively work with the school. She said, "If a child wants to be successful, he or she needs to understand what's going on between the school and the home. The parents, they should check from time to time, check the children, like what they did today. My concern is, I'm afraid most ELL parents don't check their children at all. They consider our school as a daycare. They just drop off their kids and leave." However, it is very difficult when the parents do not speak English and are unable to follow the progress their children make every day. Stewart (2011) comments that "this creates an unequal power structure that complicates the roles between the child and the parents" (p.89). In short, the language is a barrier for parents to become more involved with their child's education.

### Psychosocial Challenges

The psychosocial well-being of refugees refers to their resilience to achieve good developmental outcomes (Anderson, 2004), overcoming of traumatic experiences, acquiring a sense of self and appreciation of the values of the home country (McBrien,

2005). McBrien's review of research on refugees' psychosocial well-being showed that a large portion of refugees from war-torn countries are still troubled with traumatic memories of wars, and their separation from family members, and those two factors greatly affect the academic performance of school aged refugees. The lower-skilled jobs in the new country and the different power relationships between adult refugees and the children often added stress to the families.

Psychosocial stress was evident among the refugee students and their families interviewed for this study. Andy's father said, "I feel I'm useless. In Colombia, I can help a lot of people. Here, I need help." Julia's father expressed that because he had never done any farm work in Mexico, the summer work in Canada was the most tiring thing for him and his wife. Both families have placed a lot of hopes on Julia and Andy. They hoped they would find a good job as soon as possible.

In Mr. Richardson's opinion, the cultural differences, the language barrier, and the dysfunctional community that refugee families live in made social connections a huge challenge to refugee students and caused misbehaviour. He said,

Social connections. Kids, at a young age, kids are more accepting but as you start getting older, kids become a little bit more established in their friendship patterns, they are a little bit more selective in who they want to be with, and if you've got a language barrier you're trying to reach out and make friends, sometimes that doesn't work so well, actually it doesn't work well. So, you know, language, it does come back to language I think a lot, and then social pieces are part of that. Isolation, challenges, not only isolated here but isolated in the community. I still see this as that if you don't have a network around you, the world is very isolated and small. A lot of our immigrants also live in 1481 [the street number of a large immigrant community close to the school], that community I said, is very dysfunctional and the sad reality is that in that dysfunctional unit, people tend to be very strongly opinionated, probably racist, in terms of their limits as well as people, so that's what they tend to project out, is an intolerance for different people, so there's a huge isolation piece there with those families and their

children. .. I've heard parents say, these children are bad; my children aren't bad. And I know they don't mean it in that way, they're misbehaving, and my children don't misbehave, so they worry about that influence sometimes.

Mr. Richardson believed that refugee students' behavioural problems were also the result of the lack of formal education. In other words, refugee students had little idea about a real school.

...even though there's a language barrier there, not just [a] barrier of course, there're many of them who have never attended school, so they don't know what school is. I think it's important that kids doing the right thing modeling for them, how they need to behave because if you don't have language, you learn by what you see, right, so some kids who are at risk might see fighting going on as a way of solving problems, and they very quickly would want to join in and help somebody who's being picked on or being beaten up or whatever, and then consequently would get in trouble themselves, and that's true because I helped a little guy who he felt he was just helping somebody and that's the way you help somebody, by grabbing and hitting people because that's how helpers are perceived. So, he had to change that...

His statement resonates with the Ontario practical guidebook for ELLs with limited prior schooling (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) which says, "They are likely to bring curiosity about their new country and very little experience with school routines and expectations" (p. 8).

Some of the refugee families in my study have been offered programs such as counselling programs and services by local cultural organizations to help them deal with possible traumas they may have. However, they chose not to go because they could not understand and they felt it was a waste of time. There were also volunteers and social workers assigned to the community to provide on-site assistance such as food and medical services. However, because refugee students were not identified at school, they had not received any treatment or been provided with psychological counselling services. Mrs. Lee shared an incident that happened to Hassan. She said, "We had a fire drill that day, but poor Hassan, he didn't know what was happening. He just ran all the way out of

the building and to the street. I was scared because there were...cars, yes. When I found him, he was shivering.” The past experiences that refugee students had made them different and distinctive among school students. Although their English proficiency was not good enough to express the influence of these experiences, they were still vivid in their minds and might interfere with their learning.

Theme: Support related to Macrosystem -- School Board and Policy Issues

It is the Ontario Ministry of Education’s policy and practice to place elementary school children with an age-appropriate group, and place secondary school students “in a grade or in specific subjects” based on “the student’s prior education, background in specific subject areas, and aspirations” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.21). The practical guide for supporting English language learners with limited prior schooling provides step-by-step instructions to teach ELD students based on many specific cases (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). In both Wharton and Monty schools, there were no transition literacy programs for children with limited or no English proficiency. In all the public elementary schools under the school board where Mr. Kent worked for, ELL students spent time away from their regular classrooms to join a class with an ESL teacher for English language learning. Depending on the school size and the number of ESL teachers, the hours of receiving ESL support varied. In some schools, there was an on-site full time ESL teacher; however, in many schools, there was only one part-time ESL teacher. Normally, an ESL teacher worked in at least two schools, which made his/her working time at each school very limited. If there were a large amount of ELL students at one school, an ESL class would be organized. An ESL teacher could teach several students, usually at least five of them, at the same time. In schools such as

Wharton elementary school, there were only a few ELL students who needed English support in each grade, so Mrs. Lee provided ESL assistance on a one-on-one basis. If the ESL teacher was absent from school, then ELL students would stay in the mainstream classroom all day. In the secondary school, as Mr. Green said, ELL students would be placed in the corresponding ESL program (A, B...E) in accordance with their English levels. So secondary schools' placement of ELLs was different from elementary schools.

ESL programs and ELD programs are outlined in the Ontario resource book about education for ELL students to address their different needs. The latter program is for students who “have had limited opportunities to develop language and literacy skills in any language” and their schooling “has been inconsistent, disrupted, or completely unavailable” (p.22). The Ontario policies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) describe detailed procedures to welcome new ELLs, conduct initial and ongoing assessment of ELLs, identify ELLs, define the roles and responsibilities of teachers and administrators, and collect data related to ELLs for monitoring and tracking their progress. All of these procedures are designed for both elementary and secondary schools. To implement these procedures, “all boards will include a section that addresses the needs of English language learners” on their Board Improvement Plan and the Student/Success/Learning to 18 Action Plan (p.13).

The school board in which Wharton Elementary School and Monty Secondary School are found is one of the largest school boards in Ontario. It serves more than 8,000 students, and it includes more than 150 elementary schools and over 25 secondary schools in this area. However, there were only 43 elementary school ESL teachers and 20 secondary school ESL teachers, so the need for ESL teachers greatly surpassed the

availability of ESL teachers. Although in the policies, “When making staffing decisions, school boards should consider the number of English language learners in the board, and, in individual schools, the number who will require ESL or ELD programs and services” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 24), Mr. Kent, the school board ESL coordinator, expressed that the policies could not reflect the reality, and insufficient funding from the Ontario government made it impossible to hire more ESL teachers. He explains,

So part of our issue is how much money we get from the Ontario government. But Toronto has a lot of ESL teachers, but they have also a lot of ESL students. And if you think Toronto gives more service to them, but maybe not, because they have so many more ELLs, and service varies even in our school board because I would send a teacher to one school and that population would change over the school year. Maybe they'll have fewer or maybe the groupings in that school will be easier to get students to work with. It depends on the school and so in some schools the ESL teacher will see all of the students are in stage 1, 2, and 3. That's good. In some schools they'll only see students in stage 1 and 2. And stage 3 students, they won't have an opportunity to work with them, just because of the way the school is. So it depends on the school, how many are there, and like that. Look, I can say that all the students who have an ESL teacher, who are in stage 1 and 2, they receive support. 3, sometimes not. [Stage 1,2 and 3 refer to the different English proficiency levels of ELLs]

From Mr. Kent's statement, the distribution of ESL teachers depended on the number of ELL students in a school. With the change in the pattern of student population at schools, the distribution would change accordingly. Although every ELL student had an ESL teacher, how often the student would receive the support, and how intensive the support would be, remained unclear.

Mr. Kent had read about Cummin's BICS and CALP theory, and he agreed that ELL students should be given 5-7 years' ESL support. However, the Ontario Ministry of Education could only support it to a maximum of 4 years. Based on the Ontario Ministry of Education document (2011), ESL/ESD programming is one of the five components of

the 2011-2012 language grant and an amount of \$235.6 million is allocated to school boards in order to meet costs for language instruction of minority and second languages. The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (2005) noted that ESL/ELD support was available for four years for Ontario ELL students, but local boards had some flexibility in deciding how to allocate resources for ESL programs. Mr. Kent stretched the support to five years on his board. He said,

We take the money for 4 years and we stretch it out for 5 years, so we say that students are able, not always, that they are able to receive support from an ESL teacher for 5 years. But not all of them will, right? Some of them don't need support after 2 or 3 years, it depends. ELD students will need support longer. The ESL students won't, sometimes.

ELL students with formal prior education might graduate earlier from ESL programs than students with little or no formal prior education, so the resources could be extended for students who had greater needs.

At the time of the study, schools did not have as much autonomy with the funding they received from the school board as they used to. As Mr. Kent explained,

So when you give a school board money, sometimes the money has written on it, "this money is for ESL", "this money is for language", "this money is for math", before the policy, we gave them money but didn't have anything written on it. They can use it buy furniture, they can use it to pay for heating, as some school boards did, even Toronto. But now they say, this is the money for ESL, use it for ESL, or we're going to ask for the money back. So the policies are important, so that the school boards are responsible with their money.

The publication of the first version of the Ontario policy English language learners ESL and ELD programs and services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12 in 2001 signified that all ELLS had access to ESL programs. But before 2001, it was impossible to know where ESL funding was applied in school board expenses.



At the time of my research, the school board was not prepared for refugee students and ELD students. Mr. Kent admitted that the board should start identifying refugee students soon and providing “unique” support to them. He said,

This school board doesn't/ has not provided, hmm, discrete or targeted support for ELD students in the past. Right now we're making a change, a transition, so that we will identify the ELD students and provide unique support for them. Right now many of our ELD students are being treated like ESL students. And even our tracking right now treats them all the same, but we are changing it, in the middle of changing right now. I can tell you why, there are two reasons why we are changing. No.1 is because we know that they need unique support, different kind of support. No.2, our Ontario government has said we must. We must start tracking them as ELD students.

The recognition of ELD students' special needs and the Ontario Ministry policies were the driving forces for the school board to make new changes. But since so far refugee students were not identified at school, it was hard to learn how refugee students performed. Mr. Kent attributed the lack of initial assessments for ELD students to the small number of this population.

Even when we go looking for the research about students without prior schooling, it's this much. But it's this much for ESL research. So in North America, we'll only start to talk about the effect of limited prior schooling. We are only starting to understand the implication of limited prior schooling. Perhaps it's because there are not so many of them, right?

Although the initial assessment was not in place yet, Mr. Kent would like to make it happen within two years.

An ELD program was not provided at elementary schools under this school board. However, at the secondary school level, there were so-called ELD courses to support ELD adolescents. According to Mr. Kent, in fact, they did not exist in a concrete form. He said that the school board was considering making the change, too, but was unaware when the courses could become available. As to the future ELD programs, he hoped to

learn from Toronto's experience which grouped students from grade 6 to grade 9 in their particular ELD classrooms based on their English proficiency. It would be possible for grade 6 student and a grade 9 student to be placed in the same class because both of them had just started to learn to write. Mr. Kent explained the LEAP program (Literacy Enrichment Academic Program).

So they'll be in the ELD classroom. I should tell you the name of them. They are called LEAP classrooms in Toronto. L-E-A-P. And it means, it's an acronym, it means something, A means academic, proficiency like that, I can't remember exactly what it means. The LEAP classroom is half a day. And in the LEAP class, they'll only study language and math, literacy proficiency. Then in the other half, they'll go and join their grade peers and study other things like music and art and geography and history. Of course that's difficult for them. But they also get strong support in the morning with language and math. It's a good plan. They have many more ELD students in Toronto than we do, so funding the program and establishing the program may be difficult here, but we'll consider it.

To me, there are many factors to be considered in implementing LEAP programs in the city where my study took place, such as the distance among schools, interactions among students of different ages, and the local situations (e.g. pattern of student population, funding, resources, etc.).

Teachers in this board did not receive any training regarding how to teach ELL students. ESL teachers had already received the training in ESL certificate programs. This matches what I have observed. ESL teachers in my study seemed to have a better understanding of supporting ELLs' linguistic needs than mainstream classroom teachers. They had the provincial guidelines and policy books for ESL education in office, while mainstream teachers did not have those.

As a school board ESL coordinator, Mr. Kent expressed his helplessness to support refugee students. The Ontario publications for ESL education, in his opinion, targeted

in-service teachers. He expected to see teacher candidates who received ESL training at teachers' colleges with these books. At school, he would like to see mainstream classroom teachers working with ESL teachers instead of ESL teachers just taking ELLs out of the regular classroom, which "made them special". He said,

I think, we know that teaching English in isolation is not as efficient as teaching English to content, so I'm trying to impress upon teachers who do the same thing for many years that they need to change but you know, it's hard to change people's habits, so especially it's not fair for me to tell the older teachers. But mostly the older teachers still prefer primarily withdrawal support. Younger teachers might be more open to working in a classroom with a classroom teacher. But remember that when you have 2 teachers in one room, they can see each other teach and that's difficult for some teachers. They need to stop having the problem.

Mr. Kent felt the biggest obstacle the school board had with supporting refugee students was the funding problem. He compared the over 50% ELL student population in the Toronto school board to his school board which has 5% ELLs in elementary schools and 2% in secondary schools, and indicated that the small number made his board powerless in asking for more funding [This number was very different from my interview with the previous school board ESL coordinator who said ELLs took up one fourth of the student population on this board in 2006]. He said,

But the policy didn't change funding. Policy came out and the funding stays the same, so perhaps we'll have to change the funding. I don't know. What a board will do or what our board does now is we take all the money we get for ESL or ELLs, and we count the numbers and then when I assign teachers to schools, I use a point system. A student who comes from a refugee country gets more points and so technically they get more teachers' time than students who come from countries like China, Japan, countries that have strong school systems.

It is not surprising to see policies and policy implementation going in opposite directions. School boards play a vital role in the education system. "The decisions made by boards across the province can have a significant and direct impact on teaching, learning and student achievements in our schools" (Governance Review Committee,

2009, p. 2). However, Timperley and Robinson (1997) state that policy is rarely implemented as intended. As a result, “policy development and implementation is likely to be compromised and become contradictory” (Moore, 2004, p. 105).

In summary, school boards are supposed to undertake a lot of responsibilities, such as planning curriculum for schools, providing education programs that meet students’ needs, supervising schools, and helping teachers improve their teaching practices (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011). It should be recognized that Mr. Kent’s school board had done many things for ELL students. The support includes initial assessment tools for schools upon ELLs’ first arrival, extended English support for ELLs, changes to provide even more support in the future, etc. Problems were significant, too. The lack of refugee student identification procedures has made this group of students invisible. Wallitt’s (2008) research showed that the invisibility of Cambodian students in the school setting resulted in disproportionate dropout rates and feelings of alienation. Furthermore, compared to the number of ESL students in the board, there seems to be a great shortage of ESL teachers. In addition, most mainstream teachers had no ESL training, so their pedagogy may not meet the needs of ELLs effectively. Last but not the least, according to Mr. Kent, due to the funding problems, new changes proposed may not happen in the near future.

Theme: Support related to Exosystem -- School administrator involvement and leadership

Undoubtedly, schools play a crucial role in refugee students’ post migration experiences. Schools and teachers need to prepare themselves well in order to “best facilitate the involvement of refugee students and families within schools” (Hamilton, 2004, p. 83). Schools fulfill the functions of facilitating children’s development and

preparing them to contribute to the wider society. From what I have observed, school was the most prominent system in terms of providing English support to the students. It is the place where students are exposed to the most English learning opportunities. It is the place where the most learning activities take place.

Although Mr. Molham had not received any ESL training, he took three additional qualifications Special Education courses. He described how he helped ELLs with their English language learning with the example of Hassan's sister.

His sister, last year, who was a student here in grade 8, is quite a story as well because, again, going back and making them feel safe, I think one of the important things we do is try to find things that are of interest to them. And you know, not so much Hassan, but with the older sister really loved music, even in her home country, you know, was into music and was able to bring that here last year and got involved in all of our choirs and bands and you know, playing instruments and all that kind of stuff and I think you know it's building their character and making them feel you know, accepted at the school, which greatly helped her English acquisition.

Mr. Molham believed that fostering students' interests and providing a safe environment could encourage them to like school and help build their character and develop a feeling of belonging. He hoped the same strategy would work with Kathy and Hassan, but so far it had not been effective.

whereas you know for Hassan and Kathy, they haven't yet quite found you know things that they want to get involved in, although Hassan does like the house leagues and things like that, like playing floor hockey and those kinds of things, so he seems more into the sports, right, whereas his older sister was very much into the arts and music, but I think as a school, it's important that we offer those kind of activities to try to you know, find every student's interest and talent so that they're able to share and you know feel good about themselves and feel good about coming to school.

Mr. Molham was able to provide multiple kinds of activities for students to develop an interest in and to get involved in school. At the same time, by attending these activities

and interacting with peers, many opportunities for English practice were created.

According to Cummins (1991), playground English is where ELLs learn the fastest in language acquisition. The more they play with their friends or classmates, the more comfortable they feel with the new environment, and the faster they develop BICS. Mr.

Molham concurred:

They will learn English if they spend more time with their friends, and it depends on the student's personality. Hassan's sister has a very bubbly personality so her friends really, you know, accepted her as well and I think again, sometimes that's a challenge for some of those students, is just you know, gaining friends and it's tough being in a new country, but it's even tougher if you don't have friends to help you out.

Mr. Molham felt English education was important for children, but also for parents.

I think one of the things we try to do is meet with the parents and get to know the parents as well, and really build that partnership because I think that's so important, so when they come to our school we like to give them, you know, a welcome package and make them feel welcome, not just in the school, but within that package give them lots of community resources, we've also basically created a parent library, I know you've been in our library, if you go in the doors you basically got a parent library which as you know, has different resources for parents such as how to help your children with reading, how to help with math, community resources for them, where the local libraries are, where the local community centers are and different kinds of events, not just to make them feel welcome in the school, but start to feel welcome, you know, within their community and start to establish friendships and connections that way as well.

Mr. Molham talked about building partnerships with the parents and provided a warm and welcoming reception for ELL students. What he described matches the Ontario policies which require schools to “provide a warm welcome for all English language learners and their families” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 15). The community resources that Mr. Molham mentioned could effectively assist in the orientation process. By setting up a library for parents, ELL parents can be included in the school community and they can have access to ESL resources to help them develop their own language

acquisition. Moreover, they can have a basic understanding of what their children are reading.

Mr. Molham favoured a one-on-one English support approach, contrary to Mr. Kent's belief. He argued that individual support can build trust between the teacher and the student.

You know, be able to work with them one on one as well and be able, I think, to provide those supports and gain their trust, you know, so I think those are, those are important things as well, because as I said earlier, sometimes it's not easy to gain their trust, so working one on one you know with the same individual, you know, helps to do that as well, and then those teachers are able to get and provide feedback to us as administration, and let us know if there's more that we need or if they're starting to see you know, improvements or if they feel like there's a possible learning disability issues, whatever it is, they're able then to communicate that to us so that we can provide the supports that we need for each of those students, you know, as we move forward.

Different students may need different types of English support. Students like Hassan who have had troubling experiences may find it hard to trust other people, so the one-on-one approach may work for him. The one-on-one mode allows students to receive full attention from the teacher and concentrate on the work, whereas their social needs may have to be compromised (i.e. staying away from peers, feeling isolation). The integration mode works the other way.

The provincial guide *Supporting English language learners with limited prior schooling: A practical guide for Ontario educators Grades 3-12* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) provides several ELD program delivery models. In elementary school, students may benefit from a congregated model and literacy learning block classes. The congregated model refers to a situation where students are placed in a congregated ELD setting for a significant portion of each school day with other ELD students, while

whenever possible, they should also be integrated into mainstream classes that are less demanding in English, for example, physical education and the arts. In this model, refugee students are able to share similar topics with other refugee students, and develop oral English proficiency in P.E. class and art class. The learning blocks mean that ELD classes are also organized in the way that regular classes are, so every day is organized into literacy and numeracy learning blocks. In secondary schools, students can study in a full-service program of either ESL or ELD. Both Mr. Molham and Mr. Green expressed that because there was no identification of refugee students, they did not use the guide.

Mr. Molham also considered the basic living requirements of ELL students. Under the help of Mr. Richardson, the school was able to organize several activities to help people with low socioeconomic status.

I know we do things like, we did a project Love, for example where students basically brought in school supplies, like pencils and erasers and backpacks and whatever else, pencil crayons, crayons, and then basically we gathered all of those things and then we're going to be giving those to you know, some of the charities and things to be able to use in third world countries to help support them. And then we also, we're very involved in food drives and can drives and we did a collection of winter clothing and stuff that we were able to then give to the families within our own school that were struggling, you know, which did include some of our ELL students and things like that, who maybe couldn't afford winter coats or new boots, or things like that so. You know, very, yea, very cautious of the environment around us, especially with today's economy and doing what we can do to try to help support them as much as we can.

Many ELL families are low-income families, so the basic living requirements like food and winter clothing are much needed in those families. As Dennis (2002) and Rutter (2003) state, schooling plays an important role in the lives of refugee children, but the quality of the schooling experience is more important in the acculturation of children and



young people in the host country. Meeting the needs of students related to their daily living is definitely one important factor affecting the quality of their schooling experience.

Wharton Elementary School also tried to include parents in English learning activities, such as literacy nights and workshops. Students could take the reading strategies they learned on literacy night back home and teach their siblings and parents to read. In addition, the school prepared a book bag for each student.

We give them a free book bag with all these resources, and then while they're here for the hour and a half, we take them through different lessons and rotate them through centres on how they can use all of the items in the book bag, to try to help their children with literacy and within the book bag are things like alphabet cards, and books and highlighters and you know, note pads and just different resources that they might be able to use with their kids, because I think again we need to be able to support their learning.

For older ELL students entering Monty Secondary School, initial assessment took place at an assessment center outside the school, so Mr. Green said he was not present during the assessment, and as the ESL department head teacher, he was unaware what the initial assessment was like.

Interviewer: What are ELL students assessed about?

Mr. Green: That I couldn't answer very well. Usually the assessment center lets me know what level the student should be put in. I am really focused on the English language skills and if they have been in an elementary school, I will go on the basis of what their grade teacher said and interpret what their math skills are or are not. When students come to me through the assessment center, which means, they are new Canadians or coming here for the first time, I will give them [a] simple math test. Students' backgrounds often revealed a lot of information about their placement. By and large, if the student comes to me, I assume depending on the country, like if they are from Korea or China, I assume they know the math, but are going to struggle with English. And sometimes I find out they don't struggle with English either, in which case, but it's easier like I say, buddy somebody up. If they come from Afghanistan on the other hand, I will often assume they don't, they are illiterate in math and will start up at the low end of things and leave it up to the teacher to determine whether or not they are well placed.

Based on the Ontario Ministry of Education policies (2007), initial assessment is conducted at schools, and the final decisions regarding placement in secondary schools “are made by the principal in consultation with the student, staff, and parents. The principal will communicate the placement decision, and the rationale for the placement, to the student and parents” (p. 21). Monty Secondary School assessed new students twice: The first time at the assessment center; the second time with a math test at school depending on the student’s home country. Teachers were the people to determine where the student should be placed. Therefore, the whole assessment procedures seemed to be different from the provincial policies.

According to Mr. Green, there were some difficulties existing in secondary school English instruction.

One of the difficulties of teaching English language learners at the secondary school level is that there are 2 criteria. One is allowing the students or giving the students enough instruction that they can function in Canadian society, so that the focus there is in understanding what is around them [so they are] be able to respond to that and being able to work in the environment, so that is one main criteria. The other criteria and sometimes they are the same, and sometimes they are exclusive, is preparing the students for academic success. On the one hand, the focus is largely oral, on the other hand, you have to make them literate so that they are able to understand what they read and respond in writing adequately.

His statement reflected the difficult situation that adolescent ELLs face. They must master oral English while at the same time develop English literacy in a short time. There are triple challenges in English language learning: being able to communicate with teachers and classmates orally, mastering a high level of academic English to understand English instructions, and absorbing academic content delivered in each class.

At the same time, because students had different future directions (e.g. academic and applied), Mr. Green felt to provide appropriate programs for different types of students was not an easy task.

You have students who are academically, or have academic direction, you have kids who are applied direction after college and you have kids who are at work place oriented and the streams. The 3 streams are largely separate from each other. In ESL, each classroom has all of those children, so that the delivery of the curriculum has to be simple enough for the workplace kids so that you know basically oral, and very simple writing skills [are] necessary. It has to be, on the other hand, it has to be academic enough to give those that are in university bound what they need to be successful. And we have to satisfy everybody in between. That's one of the main difficulties with the ESL program as it is presented.

Students with different needs present a challenge to classroom teachers. Because of their different future directions, the level of English proficiency varied.

In English language learning, he stressed the role of parents was important. When he met parents, he stressed two things: One was to ask the parents to maintain the first language. The second thing was to ask the parents to tell their children to “read, read, and read”.

It doesn't matter what they read. For example, they could take a grade 3 reader, sometimes it does sound like a grade 3 reader. However, in a grade 3 reader, there are going to be roughly 50% more low frequency words that are words that are not used in conversation but only on the page. There are going to be 50% more low frequency words in a grade 3 reader than there is going to be in carrying on a conversation so when I say doesn't matter what they read, as long as they read, I really mean it. So for example, if they, especially girls, she is only into her hair, her clothes and everything, she's got to read fashion magazines, because she is going to be encountering the words that matter to her and she'll be learning vocabulary. So it's not what a student reads, it's that they read.

Forming good reading habits was the core of Mr. Green's teaching philosophy. He took every chance to share with the parents the stories of his two teenage daughters who start every day with reading a book and end the day with the same thing. He believed every ELL student would improve his/her English by developing an interest in reading.

Mr. Green also deemed making the classroom inclusive very important in English language learning. He understood that refugee students “have been in a situation that they do not want to remember, they do not want to live, so they may be a little bit more

resistant to come out in the class". He believed as teachers, they should draw the students out a bit more and give more care to them to involve them and make them part of the class.

Mr. Green maintained weekly contact with the social worker in order to get to know any problems with the students and pursue solutions with Ms. Tallman. If a problem arose, he would sit down with the student and the parents and work on the problem together. When new students arrived, he would introduce them to Ms. Tallman and she would provide her service accordingly.

Based on the two school leaders' descriptions of their work, both schools provided a lot of help to ELL students. The provision of a safe environment that made students feel included was mentioned by both schools. According to Hamilton (2004), "Unless schools are safe environments in which children can flourish without being victimized, taunted, bullied, or at worst, physically harmed, then the children will be seriously hampered in their attempts to learn and develop" (p. 87). There have been studies about the bullying issues among refugee students. Rutter (1998) reported that peer hostility to refugees is something common and often reported by refugee children and young people (p. 29). Richman's research (1998) showed more than half of her newly arrived refugee children have reported being bullied at school in England. Fandrem, Strohmeier, and Roland's (2009) study also showed bullying is a common problem for many refugee children. Refugee students may be more vulnerable to bullying because of their color and non-Christian religious beliefs (Abada, Hou, & Ram, 2008). However, refugee students are likely to be the perpetrators of bullying, too, such as Kathy and Hassan. They may bully other students because of a desire for affiliation or to belong (Graham, 2006).

Both school leaders have infused their beliefs and philosophy into their school practices. Mr. Molham believed that students could learn English effectively if they were involved in things they were interested in, so he promoted various activities at school. He also understood the importance of including parents in the school community, so there were resources and activities for parents. Mr. Green, on the other hand, believed reading was the foremost thing for ELLs to learning English, so he encouraged students to read and asked parents to tell their children to read. He also stressed the importance of keeping the home language for parents to support the learning of a second language.

The above discussion also showed that all the English support both schools provided was intended for ELLs as a group, with no unique support for refugee students. Both school leaders seemed to have no familiarity with the practices described in the Ontario guide about teaching refugee students. Take the initial assessment procedures as an example. At the secondary school, the assessment was done outside the school by an assessment center. There are two potential problems with this practice. Firstly, both Mr. Green and the ESL teachers may be unaware of the student's exact English/home language level and background. Mrs. Dallner was totally unaware of whether Julia had learned English in Mexico or not. My interview with her was the first time she knew Julia had not learned English there. Secondly, depending on the student's home country, Mr. Green may give students a math test to re-consider the placement of the student. What Mr. Green did may present a stereotyping threat to minority students. As Gudykunst and Kim (1984) pointed out, there is a need to create a framework to organize our perceptions of other people. However, if such a categorization becomes stereotyping, it can harm individuals by denying them educational, work, and social opportunities (Wright, 2004).

Spack (1997) expressed the same concern that ESL instructors make “unwarranted generalizations” of the students (p. 767). If a school leader conducts practices that may lead to stereotyping, it is hard to guarantee that teachers would not do the same because the school leader’s act may reflect a school’s culture and attitudes toward education.

Another problem facing the secondary school ESL program is that the program may not be the best fit for all ELL students, according to Mr. Green. ELL students had different goals after graduation. Some might want to further their study in academic surroundings such as universities, while some might go to college to learn work skills in order to find a job. Their needs for English proficiency may vary. The school needs to work out ways to fit the different English proficiency needs that ELL students have.

Theme: Support related to Microsystem 1-- Teacher support

Hamilton (2004) believed that adaptation is a two-way process between students and teachers. Not only must students adapt themselves to the new school and linguistic environment, but also teachers have to adapt themselves to the diverse populations in classrooms. In both schools, the ESL teachers indicated that because they had a lot of experience dealing with ELLs, they knew how hard learning English was for them, so they had been trying to help as much as they could. Mrs. Dallner of Monty Secondary School shared her feelings towards ELL students with no prior schooling with me.

...I’ve had some students who have never held a pencil, they’ve not had any schooling and I remember when I was at Monty working as a supply teacher, we had the Kurds come in and there was a whole group of them and they had not received any schooling, and then you get sitting beside them, a student perhaps who’s come from somewhere like Korea, who’s received very, very formal education, so that, that’s a challenge for the students to just get used to; once they get used to education, it’s a challenge for the teacher because you have such a variety in the classroom, and I think for a lot of them they’re just, they’re overwhelmed, I feel sorry for them because they’re being inundated with English

all day long, and I just think their heads must hurt! You know, because it's a lot for them, so not only to be used to the school situation, and so many of them, even if they've been in school, we have four periods and some of the, say, it's much easier here because where they've come from, they may have spent a lot more time in school, okay, so some of them find it much easier because it's not as strict and not as much time, but just for them to get used to the Canadian ways you know in our education system, yea, what the expectations are.

Mrs. Lee said teachers had the responsibility to be informed about the cultural differences instead of focusing on textbook content only.

Teachers should teach more than texts. It's not like, math teachers teach math only, art teachers teaches art only... Students need to have someone tell them what is the right thing to do, and what you're not supposed to do. Some kids don't know what's the right thing. I mean, mostly ELL kids. When they come here, everything looks different. They just come to school, they don't know what they can do and [what]they cannot. So I tell them not to do it again.

In her opinion, teachers not only teach students academic content, but also how to behave in school because students' backgrounds could result in unacceptable behaviour in Canadian schools.

Mrs. Dallner believed the class environment played an important role in students' language learning.

Well the students are always running after a moving target, they're always, and I realize that and I think the main thing is, I try to give all the students a stress free learning environment, and that's what you want to do, so they don't feel the pressure so that they can be relaxed, then they're going to learn, so you don't want to put pressure on them, so it's giving them the idea that everything is an achievement whether its learning to write with a pencil or whether its figuring out something more complex, but it's to give them that place where they can take risks and I think that's what you want them to be able to do, that they're comfortable enough, that they are going to take those risks that are needed to learn anything.

Mrs. Lee had the same thought:

When I teach, I try not to give them a lot of pressure. I want to make my office a very comfortable place for them to learn English. I seldom push them because I

know it's already been very hard for them to make every achievement...probably this is the reason why Kathy hasn't made much progress. (Laugh)

Mrs. Dallner and Mrs. Lee used different strategies for grouping students when they taught English. Ms. Dallner paired or grouped students with diverse backgrounds, personality, and languages. For example, quiet students were grouped with more vocal students. She felt this way could "balance students". Sometimes she might change the patterns in order to give every student opportunities to present him/herself as a leader. Mrs. Lee looked at only students with a similar English proficiency level because they were learning similar content, and they could compete with each other.

I do believe competition gives impetus...They'll feel peer pressure, which is a good thing. This is what I think. For example, if Hassan gets a higher mark in a word puzzle, Kathy will become very anxious. She will then put in more effort. The difference between them, I would say, Hassan works hard out of school, too, while Kathy doesn't.

All of the provincial guide books for ESL education stress the importance of drawing on students' prior knowledge in language teaching. Both ESL teachers indicated they used different ways to help students identify their past experience and knowledge in the new language learning. Mrs. Lee told me that when she was teaching Kathy and Hassan new words, she would use a picture dictionary and asked them if they had ever seen these objects before or if they had ever eaten some food or fruit. She found they memorized the words of objects they knew much faster than words they did not. Mrs. Dallner had spent a long time looking for the right novel to do a novel study project in her class. Her retired colleague recommended *The Road to Chlifa* (Marineau, 2003), and she thought it might be helpful because "I thought it was something the students could identify with because the characters are teenagers, the main character has left a war torn country". Because the novel was about "the immigrant, the life, the kind of refugee life", she saw her students



reading it very often. Their ESL approaches matched the concept of funds of knowledge which was built on the assumption that the educational process can be greatly enhanced when teachers learn about the everyday lived contexts of their students' lives (Moll et al, 1992).

Both of the ESL teachers considered students' interests when teaching English. Mrs. Lee designed more family-related topics in teaching because she felt family was everything for Hassan. However, she found it was hard to find what Kathy was interested in, but she still managed to find some topics such as sports and cartoon movies. She tended to give Hassan a lot of work to do as soon as she detected that he was interested in the topic, while she slowed down her teaching for Kathy if Kathy showed difficulties in learning English. Ms. Dallner found students were poor at connecting their grammar knowledge to writing practices, so she used different colors to mark students' writings.

This year I tried something new this semester, and I think it's working, I'm going to fine tune it, is where I mark it: I use red for grammar and spelling, I use purple color to tell them here's my suggestion for the wording and then I use green for when I'm talking to them, because if I just hand something back with all the same color, they can't tell, well, does she want me to write this? So I thought this seems to be working better when they're doing their revisions.

Mrs. Dallner felt very frustrated with some ELL students. Those students were good at speaking but weak at writing. No matter how hard they tried, they could not reach the expectations for the level described in curriculum. She realized that a weak foundation in students' first language would impede second language learning.

Because I realize, as soon as there's that gap between the speaking and the writing, and I think a lot of them, if they probably were not strong students in their own language, they probably had learning issues in their own language, then you put them into learning a second language and well there's a student who's in that English class of mine, I feel so bad for him, he tries, he's always trying to answer questions, his parents want him to be successful in university courses, he can't do it, he is doing his best, and I've talked to Mr. Green, and even, it's not about the

mark to me, it's putting him somewhere where he's going to be successful, he's never going to write perfect, you know, syntax.

Mrs. Dallner had noticed if a student was strong in his/her first language, he/she would experience a lot of difficulties in English learning, even though the student tried very hard. What she found points to Cummins' Interdependence hypothesis which argues that there is a strong relationship between first language and second language, and first language serves the learning of a second language.

Mrs. Lee pointed out that it usually took a considerable time for ELLs to develop enough English proficiency in order to function in the mainstream classroom. The ultimate goal for teachers, in her opinion, is to "give students the linguistic skills that they need to function in mainstream classes". There were two problems reported by her mainstream classroom teaching colleagues: one was ELLs did not participate in the classes and the other was they took too long to do things. Mrs. Lee felt sad when other teachers made such complaints "because they don't know how to teach ELLs, and they don't have patience". She said "those are the challenges that all the ELL students have, or most of them have when they go into the mainstream".

I don't know if you're familiar, ELL students can come to me if they struggle in the mainstream. So they're getting math taught by a mainstream teacher. Now there are some students especially say the Korean students who are very good in math, but struggle because they don't understand the English so they can't do word problems, so they are sent to me again and again. They're like running in circles around the math teachers and me, but they can't stay in the math class for the whole period because the pace is too fast, the word problems, so I help them with that. And to my surprise, they are so good at math. Because of their English, they just cannot go into their classes. This is really bad.

In order to help these students, she reported it to Mr. Molham who agreed to extend their stay in the mainstream classrooms. At the same time, she gave students focused practices on academic vocabulary to help them keep up with classes more quickly. Her concern

revealed the gap between ESL teachers and mainstream teachers. It seemed mainstream teachers were more focused on delivering class content and making sure most students were on the same page; however, they failed to understand the length of time for ELLs to develop CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). Their negative comments about the slow progress ELLs made and their reluctance to participate showed their unawareness of both ELLs' funds of knowledge and basic ESL education.

Mr. Molham, as mentioned in the previous chapter, found it harder to draw on students' prior knowledge in his science class than in history and geography classes. He was more concerned about behaviour issues that ELL students or refugee students had. He found behaviour issues were related to students' English proficiency as after students had some English, they began to understand what behaviours were acceptable and what were not.

You really see Hassan, you know, shine, like he used to get in trouble 10 – 12 times a day in my classes at the beginning of the year. I think once in the last two months I've had to talk to him about appropriate behaviour, because he's focused, he's opening up his notes now, he's doing his homework, he's, you know, really making good decisions, but I think some of that is the language acquisition, he's starting to understand the material a lot more.

Considering ELL students' weakness in English, Mr. Molham had made modifications to his science tests. He discussed what he did with Kathy and Hassan.

I think I've done a lot of things to try and modify and accommodate all of her tests, for example, have no written answers, I'm very cautious of the types of words I'm even putting in the questions so she can understand, and trying to use more opportunities but oral communication where if she struggles with the written part, I'm able to, you know, at least communicate orally with her and ask her those questions because I find the ELL students are able to sometimes tell you about it, but they just don't know how to write it down. So then I can still see if she understands, and as well, using things like true, false, or multiple choice, so questions that you know, don't require as much of the writing in the explanations, which she struggles with terribly, and Hassan does too, and most ELL students who are struggling with their language don't do very well, you know, as the students, you know, who have been in Canada all their life, they struggle with those longer, written answer questions, so it's not just an ELL thing.

He indicated many native English speakers also experienced the reading and writing difficulties as ELLs did, and he had modified tests for students with such a need, not ELL students alone. His modifications on tests include rewording the questions, increasing the oral communication part, and providing more choice-type questions. Based on Abedi & Lord's (2001) research, modifying the linguistic structures in math word problems can improve student performance.

Mr. Hill at Month Secondary school did not feel English language for ELL students in his math class was a big concern. He believed the technology had solved this problem.

The first thing is the auditory, the instructions for ELL learners because they're verbal, sometimes it's processed better than if they had been written, for students that have a strength in oral communication, the device I think is a more seamless way of helping them understand math, so that cohort I would say is the majority of my students because they've already gone through an ESL program before they get to me.

Because students in his class had gone through the ESL program, they were considered to have possessed BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and acquired some CALP. Students just needed to click on buttons to do the calculation, so basically they did not do the traditional writing part in math class. There could be some problems with using technology only. This is a method to avoid making students learn English in a subject area. Students were "deprived" of the opportunities to read and write in math, which may become a potential problem for them in future academic study. Also, not all universities or work places are equipped with the technology. Students have to study academic language again at a place without such technology. Oral communication skills do not necessarily guarantee the understanding of math content because the English language in math is different from oral English. For students whose oral communication

skills were not good enough, they still struggled in his class. The technology did not work on them. As Mr. Hill said,

But there are those students who are not strong orally, and they do struggle a bit with the spoken language, I would say there is probably about 5 to 10% of the students that I teach that have that oral challenge and so I have not yet found an effective way to help those students process the verbal instructions or oral instructions only because the time that it would take to fabricate the exact instructions that I'm going to give for a particular class is very difficult to construct.

Overall, Mr. Hill believed that the technology was beneficial to ELL students:

So the technology in my mind, if I look at the entire ELL population, is helping more than its hurting, once those students do figure out what buttons they need to push and what word is connected to what button, they do come along.

My concern was the technology-embedded classroom was the only place where students are learning math and using math. I wondered how students could enhance their math skills when they returned home where they had no device. Mr. Hill explained,

Well, at home, to answer your question, they don't have a device so they don't have that support mechanism, but there's nothing that says they can't come in to class and when class is starting to at lunch or whatever, just do that to check their answers, I would say that built in to the lesson though, is always that component... and technology and the ability to screen capture is very important to me that there's a discovery process in my classroom, and that the tool is used to, I'll say, leverage math rather than the other way around.

In his opinion, the technology was an important add-on to the classroom, and students were not over-obsessed with it. From my observation, 95% of class time was spent on using it. Students had formed a routine that as soon as they entered the classroom, they picked up the device and turned it on and held it all the time. I am afraid too much dependence on the device would greatly reduce students' opportunities to develop necessary literacy skills in academic courses.

When asked if there were students who had had disrupted education and might have little math skills in his class, Mr. Hill told me that firstly, this would not happen in his

class because students must have grade 8 math before coming to his class; secondly, even if it were the case, there was nothing he could do.

In summary, the interviews with both the ESL teachers and mainstream teachers showed some discrepancies in their teaching and thoughts. Obviously, the ESL teachers were more prepared than mainstream teachers, as related to their understanding of the difficulties and challenges that ELL students faced in language learning, their support of ELL students, and their efforts in creating more chances for ELLs to develop their English. The issue of teacher preparation could be the cause of the differences between the two types of teachers. Although there was time allotted for teachers' professional development (PD), because ESL education was not a topic that concerned every teacher, PD did not often involve training in this aspect (Interview with Ms. Dallner). The school board had not been able to provide ESL training to all teachers although cultural diversity had become very common in Ontario schools. Instead, the board expected teachers' college to make more efforts, such as providing TESL courses to teacher candidates and informing them of provincial policies and guidelines for ESL education. It is not a rare case that mainstream teachers were not very prepared for teaching ELLs in the two schools I have visited. Research has already documented the failure of programs to adequately prepare teacher candidates (Lewis et al., 1999). It is very critical for teachers to understand the sociocultural characteristics of ELLs and enact effective instructional practices for ELLs (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005).

Theme: Support related to Microsystem 2-- Social worker involvement

The school board outlined that every school had access to school counselling/social work services. The statement of the services is as follows:

The School Counselling and Social Work Services Department helps students and families to overcome personal social and emotional barriers and problems to promote students school performance, development and achievement. Through a variety of modalities, including individual, family, small group and classroom programming, counsellors promote a strength based approach seeking to enhance students' social/emotional competency, promote resiliency and increase students' availability for learning. Counsellors also provide crisis intervention response, case management and assessment services, as well as community development, outreach and referrals. As part of the school multidisciplinary team, counsellors are available for case consultation, provision of professional development, and intervention planning (TVDSB, 2012).

During my research, no one mentioned the counselling services at each school, and the social work services were very new to Monty secondary school.

Based on interviews with Mr. Richardson and Ms. Tallman, their duties included “helping families who are at risk” and “keep children in school longer” as well as helping children “do better at school” (interviews with Mr. Richardson and Ms. Tallman). Both of them had rich experiences with immigrant and refugee students. Although Ms. Tallman just started her work as a social worker at Monty Secondary School, she had had helped her family with refugee sponsorships for over ten years.

“Families at risk”, according to Mr. Richardson, were identified from several factors, such as socioeconomic, demographics, and a high risk community. He was involved in dealing with many issues, alcohol, drugs, weapons, abuse of all sorts, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse, which explained why help was needed for at-risk children and families.

When a new ELL came, he would register the student, show him/her around the school, introduce him/her to teachers, arrange an assessment interview with Mrs. Lee, and give initial instructions on the appropriate behaviours in school. At the same time, he collected the family data from related agencies and arranged meetings with the family to get a clear picture of the child's family background. If necessary, he would also bridge the family

with local translation and interpreter services, LINC schools, and other social service organizations.

The help Mr. Richardson provided was mainly in social aspects instead of academic aspects because he was not a teacher. He gave me a concrete example of the support he provided for ELL students.

So we try to help them in all areas, she (a girl who knocked at the door of his office and interrupted my interview) just came to the door and said I've got two bags of clothes. I collect clothes from our teachers and some of our community parents and partners that are older, and I've got good money, so they're handing in American eagle clothes, clothes that kids want, but some kids can't afford, so I collect all that and I have a closet upstairs that I put them in and when I see kids and families that need clothing, I offer that to them as well, so that's just one way, so it's a way for kids to identify with each other too; it's, it's a sad statement on society that they, that we see who you are by what you wear, but I don't like kids not having... It's like our one family from Bosnia, I've tried to get them the latest kinds of clothes that they can wear, because I know with a lot of children they don't have the money to, to put out there so, so we've helped them in those kinds of ways.

Actually minority or ELL students are sensitive to clothing because it is related to their identity. What they wear may make them feel different from other students. For students who wear cultural clothes, the pressure they experience is enormous. In an article by Cummins et al. (2006), there was a Pakistani girl whose cultural clothes were rejected by her peers, which made her feel isolated. However, her negative feelings from the rejection by peers were offset by her teachers' respect and affirmation of her clothes and culture. Therefore, "teachers have to orchestrate interpersonal spaces where ELL students' identities are affirmed, thereby increasing the confidence with which they engage in language and literacy activities" (p.2).

Mr. Richardson deemed language as the biggest barrier for immigrant students.

I try to take on what it's like to walk into a school of 850 students and not knowing any other word other than hi. And then having to be a part of that, I might go home that morning after I'm registered, come back at lunch and then be



totally into a language, like it would be like us sitting here and going blah, blah, blah, blah, blah to each other and not understanding. So I have a lot of empathy for that overwhelmedness and then trying to think from, from not knowing the language, how am I going to learn the language. I have a lot of faith in resiliency in children though, and I trust that resiliency in most of the kids to be able to adapt and rather than to give in to it and not learn, so any child who walks in that door, from the moment they enter, I believe are always on that learning curve.

Besides his regular work, Mr. Richardson also involved himself in the school's homework program because he realized that many families did not know how to help their children with the homework.

We've been a part of developing program supports in the community; we have a homework program we developed with the university, and they support students in a homework program. It's on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, or Monday, Wednesday, Saturday mornings till noon so there's, we've developed things along the way. I've involved myself in developing those programs because it's a need, when you have a high immigrant population in your school; you want to support them as much as you can. And we've kind of done that over time, different ways to support families as well.

Ms. Tallman was very new to Monty Secondary school. Her work was mainly "a communicator between teachers and families". She helped new students get to know the school, arranged the meeting with the ESL head teacher, and prepared basic school stuff for them such as pens, pencils, and notebooks. She felt "there was a lot to do every day, but no time to get them done in one day". When a teacher reported problems with a student to her, she would look into that, and if the problems were serious, she would visit the student's family and community and discuss the issue with both Mr. Green and the teacher. "But this happened only once, and it turned out to be a cultural misunderstanding", she said. She was also the first one to contact when ELL students needed help. She opened most afternoons for meeting with students.

They came to me for all sorts of help. A girl once asked if I would help her mother to find a job and at one point she wanted to work. Her kids are all at

school. So I, my neighbour was looking for a housecleaner and she took on that position herself, and it's been a good thing for about three years now.

Ms. Tallman believed every bit of help would work in ELL students' life.

You know, little things that you can do to help people, it just makes them feel a lot better about the connection to the school. They may see me as a part of the school and they see, and Sarah (the girl mentioned above) would tell other people, oh the school will help, go to see Ms. Tallman at the school, so probably I'll get a lot more people of culture coming and saying can you help, so right. You can see, I keep some little notes like I need, looking for a fridge, a stove, a dryer because theirs are broken, right, so you know, I don't like doing that but if somebody comes to me and I can help, I will do that.

Both social workers expected to have more communications with teachers they worked with. Ms. Tallman felt close cooperation and communication between her and teachers would help her know how well the students adjusted themselves to the school and if they needed any extra help. Mr. Richardson felt teachers were too busy to give more attention to ELL students. He told me an incident that happened to Hassan one month after his arrival. At that time, he did not have his immunization records up-to-date, so he received a letter from Public Health stating that he need to get this done within two weeks, otherwise the school would not let him in any more. He and his family did not realize how important it was. But Mr. Richardson noticed this and asked Hassan if he was aware of getting the immunization done soon. However, Hassan told him his teachers just handed out the information without explaining anything. Mr. Richardson then invited his mother and sister to school because his sister was a good interpreter. He told them what they needed to do, but they had no idea where the Public Health office was and what needed to be done. Mr. Richardson said, "We tend to just go ahead and do our thing in terms of impose our ways on people, and yet to some, they're still grasping on how to make theirs".

Mr. Richardson shared another incident that happened to Kathy.

One of the teachers would not accept when Kathy would return a trip form to go on a trip, \$2. Right, a trip form. Her mom had no idea what she was signing, and put an X there because that's how she would sign initially, just an X. The teacher wouldn't accept that because that wasn't the mom's name, so I'm going that's how she signs her name. And this was like about two weeks after they were here right, so I said, for now we'll accept that because mom signed it. Well, why did she sign it with an X? Well, that's not her signature. Well, you know, that's a guess, right? So I would then vouch for the family and say they can go on the trip, there's the \$2, they can go on the trip. And that's hard for people to say, well, that's not her signature, so we can't take the child on a trip. Well, it's all we could do to get mom to understand what they were signing for in the first place, and giving up money, too, right? \$2.

Both Ms. Tallman and Mr. Richardson believed mainstream teachers definitely needed ESL training. Ms. Tallman reported that a lot of problems ELL students had occurred in mainstream classrooms. ELL students were often irritated by white students' rude comments on their different cultures and accents, so conflicts happened. She said,

They're just teachers. They're actually teachers who then take on the ESL portfolio and then start acquiring knowledge of a knowledge base around ESL. I think it needs to be refocused on training people to be ESL. If your population is going to have an increase of 20 to 30% immigration influx in your country in the next five years, proactively you have to look at the areas where those people are going to end up being, a lot of them coming to school, so you have to make sure that you're being more, working in a proactive way to help that department rather than overwhelming it, and I look at here, and the tendency is to get them ready for society, there's so much to do in a short period of time, because the learning curve in high school is huge, being on top of school work, being on top of projects, those kinds of things, plus the social factors so there's a lot to do there.

Mr. Richardson felt ELL students were not getting enough time in the ESL program.

Sometimes ESL teachers can only find, my little boy gets 40 minutes a week in a 6 day cycle of ESL time, that's not enough, even for a boy who's been immersed for two years, it's not enough, and I think that, I almost think the other way around, I think kids need to have when they first arrive, to have a lot of ESL support and then you start weaning them off that, 40 minutes is not near enough time. Because you're, I call it shot in the dark, you're hitting and missing on things that you can be helpful with.

He was also concerned that some ELL students with learning issues were not identified and helped in time.

Some students who come have gotten some significant learning issues and we have no way of acknowledging that unless they are developmental, to be honest with you, this is a, the medical, you can assess for developmental in all languages, but when you get into learning issues and learning disabilities which is even grey in our own culture, it becomes extremely grey when you try to figure out what is ESL as opposed to a learning disability or a language issue or a true comprehension issue, right, so there is, there is more of a reluctance to help ESL students with learning issues that are based in what I call other learning areas, like as I say comprehension, so we all can read things, but how we interpret what is in that information is how we comprehend it, and to me that's, you read that or if I read that or if a Somali boy or a central American boy reads that, we should all have the same understanding if we read it, because there's a comprehensive piece there so there has to be some way to help these students. Otherwise, we're passing students along and by the time they get to high school the issues are related to learning as opposed to cultural in ESL base, right, and by then it's [too] late to try to help that student.

In summary, although social workers have not received ESL training, they appeared to be very knowledgeable about ESL students. Different from teachers (both ESL and mainstream), they formed a more holistic picture of refugee students' school life. They provide a bridge between school and communities. Their help was a useful add-on to the academic help that teachers provided because theirs was more based on students' social needs and living needs. Their insights on ESL training for all teachers and the learning issues that ELL students may have are valuable because they provided another perspective towards ELL students' needs and challenges. Although they dealt mainly with issues out of class, some work Mr. Richardson and Ms. Tallman were doing was beyond their duties, such as paying for Kathy's field trip and finding a stove or fridge for refugee families. As Ms. Tallman stated, a little help can make people feel better at school.

In this chapter, I responded to my research question about school support within the data. Clearly from the layer of provincial policies to the layer of individual teachers and social workers, different levels and types of support for refugee students' language learning were provided. Some support was intensive, and some support was provided with limited efforts. Some support addressed refugee students' linguistic needs, while some support addressed their social needs. The majority of support centered on the need for a safe language learning environment. Equally remarkable were the requests for more communications among people who work for refugee students and increased opportunities for refugee students to improve their English language proficiency. Teachers and school staff agreed that funds of knowledge needed to be tapped in classroom.

Another topic that appeared to be in the forefront of all participants was the unpreparedness of teachers for ELL and refugee students. Mainstream teachers clearly wanted to see rapid improvement of ELL students' English proficiency, but did not know how to use effective strategies to help them. ESL teachers had a better understanding of how to teach ELL and refugee students, but felt frustrated with getting ELL students from the mainstream classrooms too often and having little access to their prior knowledge. Nevertheless, most of the teachers, the school board coordinator, school staff and administrators in this study showed a strong interest in hoping to learn more about refugee students and ways to provide more support to assist their English learning. In the next chapter, I will discuss further the findings and the themes that emerged from the data.

## Chapter 7 Discussion

This study aimed to explore how schools address the needs of refugee students in English language learning at elementary school and secondary school and how the funds of knowledge refugee students bring with them affect their language acquisition and school acculturation. A holistic approach was used to gather information from a wide range of sources including: students, parents, teachers, school administrators, school board ESL coordinator, and school social workers. The research questions are 1. 1. What role do refugee students' funds of knowledge play in support of their language acquisition and acculturation to the new school? 2. How do schools and teachers support refugee students' language learning to promote their success in school? With these questions in mind, I collected information by attending regularly each student participant's ESL and mainstream classes, conducting interviews with people working with refugee students, such as teachers and school administrators. I also collected students' school work as an important source of data.

In this chapter I will discuss the major findings and the themes that emerged from the data and their relevance to second language acquisition theories, funds of knowledge, and the theory of the ecological model. Based on the findings of this study, I offer recommendations for ESL program implementation. I also suggested ways for schools, parents, and communities to bring about better service for refugee students. The chapter continues with limitations of the study and implications for future research.

### *Discussion of themes related to findings*

Theme 1: The issues of communication

Theme 1 included issues of communication among educational environments around refugee students. The communication issues include communication between parents and teachers, communication between teachers and social workers, and communication between ESL teachers and mainstream classroom teachers. When refugee students come to school to study, an bioecological system for his/her development is formed. As Bronfenbrenner & Morris (1998) stressed, “[H]uman development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment” (p.996). Communication plays an important role in reciprocal interaction. It is essential in building trust and developing understanding among school personnel and families about refugee students’ language learning. A study by Perez and Torrez-Guzman (2002) show communication is important for schools to create a safe environment and improve parents’ involvement in school activities. My study indicates that ineffective communication hinders the English language support provided by schools, parental involvement, and implementation of funds of knowledge in teachers’ practices in the classroom.

Both social workers and teachers mentioned that because refugee parents were ESL learners themselves and did not possess good English proficiency, they did not communicate with schools about their children’s language learning problems. On the school side, schools presented themselves as an open place for any problem that parents raised. However, they failed to provide a communication channel between themselves and non-English speaking parents. Therefore, parents had limited access to their

children's school performance, the nature of problems they had with English learning, and guidance for providing home support for their children's language learning.

The issues of communication transcended in all environments within the microsystem. ESL teachers expressed their intention to learn more about refugee students' funds of knowledge. However, their heavy work load became a huge barrier. Social workers mediated between refugee students' homes and communities and teachers, and they would like to see teachers getting to know the students' backgrounds by themselves because what they noticed could be different from what teachers may notice about refugee students' language learning. All in all, social workers were not classroom teachers. The communication between ESL teachers and mainstream teachers need to be enhanced, too. Without sufficient knowledge of ESL education, mainstream teachers have developed misconceptions about refugee students, for example, complaining about their slow progress in academic study without understanding how language proficiency might be a reason for that. Their misconceptions may lead to the labeling of students as underachievers. This phenomenon revealed the distinction between BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). As Cummins (2010) concerned,

This intersection of the cognitive and social aspects of language proficiency, however, does not mean that they are identical or reducible one to the other. The implicit assumption that conversational fluency in English is a good indicator of "English proficiency" has resulted in countless bilingual children being "diagnosed" as learning disabled or retarded. (p.61)

School leaders also expressed the hope to have more communication with parents. They offered parent-nights or office hours to meet with parents. However, as mentioned previously, these ways of communication did not work well due to parents' low English proficiency.



This study showed that improved communication was a vital area of English language learning support needed by schools for refugee students. To increase communication, it is important to have bilingual and bicultural liaison between the home and school. Schools need to offer translators and translated materials (such as report cards, school notices) to support refugee students' language learning and keep their parents informed of their children's progress.

#### Theme 2: The significance of a safe environment

Theme 2 addresses the importance of providing refugee students a safe environment for language learning. The importance of a safe environment was paramount in all of the conversations. In observations, generally students seemed to be comfortable with the class environments.

A safe environment is a key factor to refugee students' well-being in the new country. As McBrien (2005) states, "The psychosocial wellbeing of refugee students...includes a sense of safety, a sense of self, and an adjustment to the cultural expectations of a new country while maintaining a connection to their heritage" (p. 339). If they do not feel safe at school, they will feel they do not belong to the place and alienate themselves from it.

Being safe, as described by Mr. Molham, referred to the school environment that can help students develop their interests, get to know other students, provide opportunities, and share with class their thoughts when they want to (see chapters 5 & 6). From a psychological perspective, a safe environment is a place where refugee students are not haunted or disturbed by past traumatic memories (Hyman et al.,1996). This view towards a safe environment also resonated with some other teachers such as Mrs. Dallner.

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1985) is closely connected to the environment where ELL students learn a second language. The learners' emotional state acts as an "adjustable filter" which freely passes or hinders input necessary to acquisition (p.7). Language input, therefore, must be achieved in low-anxiety contexts. There are many factors affecting this process including motivation, self-confidence, comprehensible input, and the creation of an environment that fosters a low affective filter. For the refugee students in my study, the affective filter seemed to be more intertwined with confidence in English mastery, refugee identities, and pressure for learning academic English. It also seems to be true that personal characteristics influenced the affective filters. Julia was confident in her English in the ESL class, but was afraid to answer questions in the math class where there were many native English-speaking students. It is evident, too, that if students' funds of knowledge were tapped in class, they were more comfortable with English learning. In the science class, Hassan experienced huge difficulties when the content was new to him as described in the class about "windmills". If Mr. Molham had not shown illustrations of a windmill, Hassan would have felt anxious because of being unable to associate the word with an object he recognized. Mrs. Lee often asked Kathy about what she knew already before introducing a new topic, so Kathy was able to connect it to her past experience and learn the new topic easily.

A safe environment also requires all the environments around the student to cooperate. The creation of a safe environment threads the macrosystem, exosystem and microsystem together. Creating a safe environment should be outlined in provincial policies, school board planning, and teaching practices.

### Theme 3: Linguistic support and social support

All the parent participants in my study overwhelmingly showed a desire for their children to learn English and do well in school. However, refugee students are affected by some barriers. They must learn about a new culture and language, and at the same time, need to acquire the content area skills to meet the expectations of the level and abilities of students their age (Green, 2003; Anderson, et al., 2003). There are also barriers that directly affect refugee students and their academic achievement in school including linguistic, social, and cultural factors (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Ogbu, 1993).

Support for refugee students and their families, both linguistic and social, is crucial in their language learning experiences. The linguistic support, based on Cummins' and Krashen's theories, includes first language maintenance, oral language and academic language support, and comprehensible English input support. The social support lays the ground for refugee students' linguistic development, so it is about support for their well-being.

Cummins' Developmental Interdependence hypothesis (1981) describes the relationship between the first language and the second language. A child's first language and second language are reciprocal and function together to contribute to academic success. The development of a second language depends on the skills acquired in the first language. In this regard, first language maintenance is needed for the second language development. Schmid (2001) supports this theory by indicating that immigrant children who speak both first language and English fluently have a better chance of succeeding academically than monolingual students. Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch (1995) also state that bilingual students who are proficient in English and their first language tended to

achieve higher marks and perform better in their academic study than peers who spoke only English.

My study showed the first language was stressed in the secondary school students' families, while not as much in the elementary school students' families. Students such as Kathy even denied her home language, Albanian. On the contrary, Julia and Andy felt it was a blessing to have their first language well developed. The differences can be attributed to the age gap between the two groups of students because elementary school students may not have developed an awareness of the importance of their first languages. In addition, the weak foundation in the first language that elementary school students have may lead to their feelings of difficulty in maintaining one language and studying a new language at the same time. First language seldom appeared in interviews, although Mrs. Lee expressed she would like her students to use both languages but the attempt did not work well because of their low mastery of their first language. First language was encouraged in the secondary school math class as a way to make students communicate better about the content and make them feel comfortable.

According to Cummins (2000), as ELL students progress through the grades, they need more academic English than communicative English skills. Gibbons (1991) outlines the differences between what she terms playground language and classroom language, as playground language “enables children to make friends, join in games and take part in a variety of day-to-day activities that develop and maintain social contacts”, while classroom language normally requires the association “with the higher order thinking skills, such as hypothesizing, evaluating, inferring, generalizing, predicting or classifying” (p. 3). In Cummins' view (2000), there are two types of support—internal and external

support. Internal support address the support that promotes the attributes of the individual which makes the learning task more familiar or easier, such as prior experience, motivation, and cultural relevance (p. 59). External support facilitates comprehension, for example, providing comprehensible input for ELL students. (p.59).

Internal support parallels funds of knowledge which also asks teachers to retrieve students' prior knowledge in teaching. To refugee students, how their funds of knowledge interplay with teachers' funds of knowledge has an impact on their learning at school. However, teachers may find it difficult to find out what exactly refugee students have been through and what mental and physical sufferings they had experienced because these are things teachers usually have not encountered in their own lives. Also, as discussed previously, due to teachers' heavy workload and duties, it is impossible to explore students' funds of knowledge by themselves, which may lead to insufficient awareness of both academic and emotional needs of their refugee students. What should be recognized is that as the number of ELL students is growing, teachers and schools need to develop sensitivity to the different backgrounds and experiences they bring so that they can accommodate these students accordingly.

My study showed that both schools have recognized the importance of retrieving refugee students' prior knowledge. There was a social worker who was in place to help bridge refugee students' families and the school. However, most social workers have not received teacher education and their perceptions and use of the funds of knowledge may be different from that of the teachers, so their understanding of funds of knowledge could be different from that of teachers. Therefore, the funds of knowledge may not work well

in patterns like this. I would suggest schools to allot time for teachers to find out funds of knowledge in their own and use them in the classroom.

The external support reflects Krashen's Comprehensible Input Hypothesis (1985). As refugee students face enormous challenges with language when they enter the new school environment, teachers need to make their language more comprehensible to students.

Based on the input hypothesis, people acquire a language the best by understanding input that is a little beyond their present level of competence, that is,  $i+1$  (Krashen, 1985, p. 3).

Teachers should send meaning messages and create opportunities for students to access  $i+1$  structure to understand the meaning. The teacher participants and social workers in my study realized that learning English presented enormous challenges to refugee students as they did not have prior English support, and even first language support.

During my observations, ESL teachers tended to scaffold learning by using simplified English, a lot of illustration methods (pictures, charts, and props), slowing the pace of their speech, clear pronunciation, and clear marking and handwriting on written work.

Mainstream teachers seemed to have little discretion about this as there was a majority of native English-speaking students in class. They stopped and provided more comprehensible input when refugee students showed confusion and asked questions, but most refugee students did not like to ask questions in mainstream classrooms.

Both schools provided support for refugee students' social needs. The elementary school gave students study supplies and clothing. The secondary school helped the families with jobs, home necessities, etc. However, refugee students in my study seemed to have difficulties making friends with other students. In this respect, schools and teachers need to inform native English-speaking students of how to welcome and get

along with students of a different culture, and what to expect when being with students from different cultures.

#### Theme 4: Preparedness: policies, administration and practice

By reviewing this study project, much data have pointed to the issue: are we prepared for educating refugee students in English language learning? The provincial policy book Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12 has outlined programs for ELL students with little or no prior school education and provided many practical ways for teachers to design classes, create a supportive environment, and modify curriculum. However, from school board to individual teachers, ELL students and refugee students were treated the same. It is also not hard to notice in most interview data, that few references have been made that specifically address refugee students and their situation. This reflects the fact that refugee students have not been recognized as a special group that needs special or extra support. This problem originated from the lack of identification of refugee students at every level. Considering the high dropout rates among ELL students, school boards should put an ELD program into place in a short time, and schools and teachers should provide extra linguistic and social support to meet the needs of refugee students.

My research found a great need to inform and train mainstream classroom teachers about ESL education and how to tap into ELL students' cultural and linguistic funds of knowledge. They need to be more prepared for their role as teachers of students of diverse backgrounds. In the student ecological model that applied to my study, language learning and development occur through the interactions between multiple layers and from the relations within these layers. In the process of students' language learning,

teachers' perceptions of teaching evolve when working with refugee children. It is a reciprocal relationship between teachers and students. Some teachers and social workers in this study showed a deeper understanding of refugee students' linguistic needs and tried to help them in various ways not only because they have ESL teaching qualifications, but also because they worked intensively with refugee students. They might have naturally evolved into their roles such as Mrs. Lee and might have personal experiences that motivated them to be more involved in their position such as Ms. Tallman. The very important outcome is they learned and developed as a result of working with these students. Because of the differences in the recognition level of funds of knowledge that refugee students bring to the classroom among people working in school, they were dealt with differently by each individual. Some mainstream teachers expressed helplessness and sympathy over the situation of refugee students, while some other teachers opened their hearts and actively involved themselves in the reciprocal exchange of learning. Therefore, teachers' training in ESL education is important so that they can develop informed views towards the education of ELL students. It should be realized that ESL education is an issue concerning all types of teachers.

#### Limitations of the present research and further research suggestions

As I reflected time from time throughout my research, I realized there were some limitations worth noting. I have tried to illuminate the process of interpreting the data in the exploration of my research questions. In this process, I noted the following limitations:

1. The refugee students in my study may lack representativeness. My research only included students from limited language minority groups. Both of the secondary school participants were from Spanish speaking countries (Mexico and Colombia)



and their families had similar backgrounds in that they both had high socioeconomic status in their home countries, so my research is not able to address the language learning experiences that secondary school students with little or no prior school education have. However, the research showed that not all refugee students came from war-torn countries or had no access to formal school education before coming to Canada. They could come from wealthy families, too. Future research could involve students with more diverse linguistic backgrounds and home backgrounds to grasp a more holistic picture of refugee students' language learning at school.

2. All of the interviews were conducted in English. Several of the participants such as refugee parents used an interpreter. It was hard sometimes for me to know what they really said because I did not know if the interpretation truly reflected their meaning. As Albanian was a little-used language in this region, it was very hard to find an interpreter. I was not able to tell whether the interpreter was qualified or not. Missing information could have occurred during the interviews. If during future research I would look for students or people who can speak this language to double check the interpretation if I were dealing with Albanian speakers.
3. The length and time of research could be another limitation. I have studied refugee students for a period of six months. I was not able to study them from their initial arrival, which made it difficult for me to explore what the initial language challenges looked like and how daunting they could be.

However, as a learner, teacher, and researcher myself, I can say these four cases provide a comparatively comprehensive perspective that demonstrates refugee students'

language learning experiences in Canadian public schools. They came from four countries, which may not represent all other refugee students, but each of them provided vivid pictures of their struggles and successes. I had no intention to generalize my conclusions. I only hope these cases can act as a window for educators to understand how they learned English in Canada and contribute to the existing research about refugee students' English learning in the context of Canada.

While my research clearly indicated schools, teachers, and social workers have provided a great deal of support to ELL students' language learning, there is still the need to further develop the area to determine what support can be provided regarding refugee students. Currently, many studies center on ELL students' language learning and development. Only a few were conducted on refugee students' language learning in Canada. So there is a need to carry out more research fitting Canadian contexts.

In the end, I dedicate my research to the refugee students in Canada who despite their many challenges are working hard to make their way in their new country, and to the dedicated teachers who do their very best to support them in any way that they can. I would like to cite what Andy said as the conclusion remark. When he was asked what he would suggest ELL newcomers to do at school, he said,

We must learn English well because English is the best tool; you have to learn it. English improves when you speak a lot. Don't be afraid of saying anything, or saying anything wrong. If you do, anyone speaking this language will correct you. This is the way you learn to say English in the right way. [You should] Ask questions, and try your best to listen to your teachers, mostly the ESL teacher, because she is in charge of making you understand the language as best as she can.

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## Appendix A: Ethical Review Approval

# THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO FACULTY OF EDUCATION

## USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS - ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE



Review Number: 0810-2  
 Applicant: Hongfang Yu  
 Supervisor: Suzanne Majhanovich  
 Title: The Language Learning of Refugee Students in Canadian Public Elementary Schools  
 Expiry Date: June  
 30,2010

Type: PhD Thesis  
 Ethics Approval Date: November 13, 2008  
 Revision #:  
 Documents  
 Reviewed  
 &

Approved: UWOProtocol, Letters of Information & Consent

This is to notify you that the Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board (REB), which operates under the authority of The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects, according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the date noted above. The approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the REB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

No deviations from, or changes to, the research project as described in this protocol may be initiated without prior written approval, except for minor administrative aspects. Investigators must promptly report to the Chair of the Faculty Sub-REB any adverse or unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected, and any new information which may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study. In the event that any changes require a change in the information and consent documentation, newly revised documents must be submitted to the Sub-REB for approval.

Dr. Jason Brown (Chair)

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2008-2009 Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board

Faculty (Chair) Dr. Jason Brown

Faculty Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki

Faculty Dr. Jacqueline Specht

Faculty Dr. John Barnett

Faculty Dr. J. Marshall

Mangan Faculty Dr.

Immaculate Namukasa

Assoc Dean, Graduate Programs & Research (ex officio) Dr. Robert Macmillan

UWO Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (ex officio) Dr. Jerry Paquette

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The Faculty of Education Karen Kueneman, Research Officer

Copy: Office of Research Ethics

## **Appendix B: Letter of information and consent form for parents of elementary school refugee students**

The Language Learning of Refugee Students in Canadian Public Elementary and  
Secondary Schools

### LETTER OF INFORMATION

(For parents of refugee children)

Dear Parents,

My name is Hongfang Yu and I am a Doctoral Student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into the language learning of refugee students and the support that schools provide, and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

The aims of this study are to examine particular needs of refugee students when attending Canadian schools and the support schools provide for them, as well as background knowledge of refugee students that can contribute in a positive way to their school experiences. If you agree that your child may participate, on a weekly basis, I will be joining your child's classroom as a participant observer during the morning or afternoon, once a week, one hour in the ESL class and one hour in the regular class. During this time, I will observe while helping them during activities, taking notes when appropriate and making sure not to disrupt the class.

Information for this research will be collected by observing and speaking with your child as well as occasional photocopying of your child's class work (e.g. drawings, journals) with your child's permission. An audio voice recorder may be used at times with your child's permission to capture informal conversations with only your child, no other children, for further reflection.

The research will be conducted during the normal part of your child's school day without any interruption to the required curriculum expectations and your child will not be required to make any time commitment to the research above this.

In order to learn about what your child's background and experiences contribute to his/her schooling in Canada, I would like to conduct an interview with you about your home culture and your views on your child's particular needs at school and what you would like the school to do to support him/her. If you agree to participate, the interview can take place at a time and place at your convenience. It will last approximately an hour. A voice



recorder will be used to record the interview. The transcript of the interview with you will be given to you for your comments or clarifications and any change you'd like to make.

All information collected will be used for research purposes only. Neither your name nor your child's name and information which could identify you and your child will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. I will probably use quotations from interviews with you in my thesis and the quotations will not identify you. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. All data will be kept in a safe place and will be destroyed five years after the completion of the research.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You and your child may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. There are no known risks to participating in this study with no effect on your child's grades.

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Manager, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario. This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

[Signature]

#### CONSENT FORM

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

#### CONSENT FORM

I have read the letter of information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree that my child may participate in the study. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Student

\_\_\_\_\_

Student's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian

---

Parent/Guardian's Signature

Date

Name of Person Translating (or Reading) Document:

Signature of Person Translating (or Reading) Document:

Date:

## **Appendix C: Letter of information and consent form for parents of secondary school refugee students**

The Language Learning of Refugee Students in Canadian Public Elementary and  
Secondary Schools

### LETTER OF INFORMATION

(For parents of refugee children)

Dear Parents,

My name is Hongfang Yu and I am a Doctoral Student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into the language learning of refugee students and the support that schools provide, and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

The aims of this study are to examine particular needs of refugee students when attending Canadian schools and the support schools provide for them, as well as background knowledge of refugee students that can contribute in a positive way to their school experiences. If you agree that your child may participate, I will conduct a one-hour interview with your child at school. An audio voice recorder will be used during the interview. The interview will be conducted a time suitable for your child without any interruption to your child's school study.

In order to learn about what your child's background and experiences contribute to his/her schooling in Canada, I would also like to conduct an interview with you about your home culture and your views on your child's particular needs at school and what you would like the school to do to support him/her. If you agree to participate, the interview can take place at a time and place at your convenience. It will last approximately an hour. A voice recorder will be used to record the interview. The transcript of the interview with you will be given to you for your comments or clarifications and any change you'd like to make.

All information collected will be used for research purposes only. Neither your name nor your child's name and information which could identify you and your child will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. I will probably use quotations from interviews with you in my thesis and the quotations will not identify you. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. All data will be kept in a safe place and will be destroyed five years after the completion of the research.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You and your child may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. There are no known risks to participating in this study with no effect on your child's grades.

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Manager, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario. This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

[Signature]

#### CONSENT FORM

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

#### CONSENT FORM

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree that my child may participate in the study. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name of child (please print):

Signature of Child:

Name of Parent/Guardian (please print):

Signature:

Date:

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix D: Letter of information and consent form for principals and ESL program managers**

The Language Learning of Refugee Students in Canadian Public Elementary and  
Secondary Schools

### LETTER OF INFORMATION

My name is Hongfang Yu and I am a Doctoral Student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into the language learning of refugee students and the support that schools provide, and would like to ask for your permission to include your school as a research field site and also to invite you to participate in this study.

The aims of this study are to examine particular needs of refugee students when attending Canadian schools and the support schools provide for them, as well as background knowledge of refugee students that can contribute in a positive way to their school experiences. On a weekly basis, I would like to come to your school and join an ESL class and a regular class as a participant observer during the morning or afternoon, once a week, one hour in the ESL class and one hour in the regular class. During this time, I will observe while helping the students during activities, taking notes when appropriate and making sure not to disrupt the class.

If you agree to participate, I would like the opportunity to conduct a one-hour interview with you at your convenience during the research phases of my study. The interview will be about the support that your school provide for refugee students. An audio voice recorder will be used to record the interview. The transcript of the interview with you will be given to you for your comments or clarifications and any change you'd like to make.

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you or your school will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. All data will be kept in a safe place and will be destroyed five years after the completion of the research.

There are no known risks to participating in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your employment status.

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Manager, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario. This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Signature:

### CONSENT FORM

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix E: Letter of information and consent form for school board ESL coordinator**

The Language Learning of Refugee Students in Canadian Public Elementary and  
Secondary Schools

### LETTER OF INFORMATION

My name is Hongfang Yu and I am a Doctoral Student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into the language learning of refugee students and the support that schools provide, and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

The aims of this study are to examine particular needs of refugee students when attending Canadian schools and the support schools provide for them, as well as background knowledge of refugee students that can contribute in a positive way to their school experiences.

If you agree to participate, I would like the opportunity to conduct a one-hour interview with you at your convenience during the research phases of my study. The interview will be about the School Board policy and guidelines of supporting refugee students in elementary schools. An audio voice recorder will be used to record the interview. The transcript of the interview with you will be given to you for your comments or clarifications and any change you'd like to make.

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you or your school board will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. All data will be kept in a safe place and will be destroyed five years after the completion of the research.

There are no known risks to participating in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your employment status.

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Manager, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

[Signature]

## CONSENT FORM

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree that my child may participate in the study. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix F: Letter of information and consent form for secondary school students

The Language Learning of Refugee Students in Canadian Public Elementary and  
Secondary Schools

### LETTER OF INFORMATION

Dear student,

My name is Hongfang Yu and I am a Doctoral Student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into the language learning of refugee students and the support that schools provide, and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

The aims of this study are to examine your particular needs when attending Canadian schools and the support schools provide for you as well as your background knowledge that can contribute in a positive way to your school experiences. If you agree to participate, I will conduct a one-hour interview with you. An audio voice recorder will be used to record the interview.

The research will be conducted during the normal part of your school day without any interruption to the required curriculum expectations and you will not be required to make any time commitment to the research above this.

All information collected will be used for research purposes only. Neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. I will probably use quotations from interviews with you in my thesis and the quotations will not identify you. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. All data will be kept in a safe place and will be destroyed five years after the completion of the research.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. There are no known risks to participating in this study with no effect on your grades.

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Manager, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

[Signature]



## Appendix G: Letter of information and consent form for teachers

The Language Learning of Refugee Students in Canadian Public Elementary and  
Secondary Schools

### LETTER OF INFORMATION

Dear teachers,

My name is Hongfang Yu and I am a Doctoral Student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into the language learning of refugee students and the support that schools provide, and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

The aims of this study are to examine particular needs of refugee students when attending Canadian schools and the support schools provide for them, as well as background knowledge of refugee students that can contribute in a positive way to their school experiences. If you agree to participate, I would like to conduct a formal interview with you about how you support refugee students' language learning in your class. The interview with you can be held at a time and place you prefer. It will last for approximately an hour. The transcript of the interview with you will be given to you for your comments or clarifications and any change you'd like to make.

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and your name will not be used in any presentation or publication of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. All data will be kept in a safe place and will be destroyed five years after the completion of the research. There are no known risks to participating in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your employment status.

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Manager, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario. This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

[Signature]

## CONSENT FORM

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix H: Interview questions for secondary school students**

1. Where are you from?
2. How long have you been in Canada?
3. Could you briefly describe your learning experiences in your home country? For example, what subjects were there in your curriculum, how many hours did you stay at school, etc.
4. How well can you read and write your home language?
5. Before coming to school, what grade did you finish in your home country?
6. When you started to study in a Canadian high school, was it a smooth transition from your previous school to a Canadian school? If not, what was the main obstacle?
7. How important do you think English is in your academic study?
8. When you had difficulties coping with your school study, who did you go to for help?
9. What were the difficulties and challenges in learning English?
10. In learning English, which do you feel most difficult, listening, speaking, reading or writing? Please elaborate.
11. How did you overcome the difficulties?
12. Did your family help you with your school study? How often?
13. Do your older siblings help you with your study? Or do you help your younger siblings with their study? In what way?
14. What world experiences/world knowledge do you think can contribute to your class?
15. What subject are you best at?
16. What subject are you not very good at? Why not?
17. What school support have you received since the day you came to the school? Are you satisfied with it?

18. In what way do you think the school can improve in order to better meet your needs?
19. Do you have a settlement worker at your school? If yes, how important do you think a settlement worker is in liaison with your family?
20. What academic resources are available to you at your school?
21. If you were invited to give a lecture to new immigrant/refugee students about learning in Canadian secondary schools, what suggestions would you make?

**Appendix I: Interview questions for parents**

1. What is your home language?
2. How well can you and your children read and write your home language?
3. What do you think of your child's English language development?
4. Could you describe what learning experiences your child had before you came to Canada?
5. Do you encourage your child to keep his/her first language? If yes, how? If no, why?
6. What difficulties or challenges does your child have in learning English in school?
7. What help do you provide to your child when he/she has difficulties in learning English?
8. What support does the school provide in your child's English learning as far as you see?
9. In what aspects are you satisfied with the school support?
10. In what aspects do you think the school should improve to better meet your child's needs?

**Appendix J: Interview questions for teachers**

1. What world knowledge or experiences do refugee children have that contribute to the class and to their learning experiences in schools?
2. How do you make use of background knowledge and experiences that refugee children can contribute?
3. What linguistic challenges do refugee students have as far as you observe?
4. How do you help refugee students cope with the challenges and difficulties in language learning?
5. What are the strengths of refugee students in language learning?
6. Based on your teaching experience, how different/similar are refugee students and regular immigrant students in their learning of English?
7. What subjects are refugee students interested in and good at?
8. Could you describe a time when refugee students are struggling with the content and how you helped him/her out?
9. How did you adapt your pedagogy and lesson plans when you have refugee students in class?
10. What resources do you and the school provide for refugee students?



**Appendix K: Interview questions for principals and ESL program managers**

1. What is the value of students' home languages and cultures?
2. What are the School Board policies or guidelines on educating ESL/ELD students?
3. How does your school implement the School Board policies or guidelines? Any adaptation to better fit your school's situation?
4. What are the linguistic needs of refugee students? How different/similar are they from regular immigrant students?
5. What concerns you most having a large population of refugee students in your school?
6. What possible challenges does your school face with refugee students and how do you deal with the challenges?
7. What are the good aspects of having students with diverse backgrounds?
8. How do refugee students' experiences and backgrounds contribute to the school?

**Appendix L: Interview questions for school board ESL coordinator**

1. Do current schools under your Board offer ESL students and ELD students the same language support program? If not, why?
2. What training programs does the School Board provide for teachers of refugee students?
3. How does the School Board make sure that refugee students' first languages and home cultures are valued in schools?
4. What specific policies and guidelines address the needs of refugee students?
5. What measure does the School Board take to assess a school's performance of meeting the needs of refugee students?

## CURRICULAR VITAE

Hongfang Yu

PhD Candidate

Faculty of Education

The University of Western Ontario

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### **Education:**

**Ph.D in Education** **2006-current**

Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario

**Master's Degree in Education** **2004 - 2006**

Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario

Graduation date: August 15, 2006

**Bachelor's Degree in Arts** **1993 - 1997**

English Faculty of Foreign Language

Henan University of Science and Technology Henan Province, China

### **Work Experience:**

**Full-time ESL professor, Faculty of Language and Liberal Studies**

**Fanshawe College** **January, 2010 – Present**

**Part-time ESL professor, Faculty of Language and Liberal Studies**

**Fanshawe College** **November, 2008-December, 2009**

**Teaching Assistant for Dr. Shelley Taylor** **September, 2007-May, 2008**

Course "English as a Second Language", Faculty of Education, UWO

**Research Assistant for Dr. Kathy Hibbert & Dr. Teresa Van Deven**

**May 2007- August 2007**

Radiology & Nuclear Medicine Education, Schulich School of Medicine, UWO

**Research Assistant for Dr. Shelley Taylor**                      **May 2006- April 2007**

Faculty of Education, UWO

**English Instructor**    **September 2001- July 2004**

Beijing New Oriental School, China

**English Instructor**    **September 1997- August 2001**

Luoyang Technology College, China

**Other Work Experience:**

**ESL Consultant**    **November 8-present**

International Baccalaureate Organization, Britain

**High Quality Personnel**    **November 6- present**

UNESCO Project “*Development of a Framework for Multilingual Education*”

**Reviewer of submitted proposals**    **May 2007**

Canadian Society for the Study of Education

**Publications and Presentations:**

Yu, H. (2007). Common Factors in High-Achieving Immigrant Elementary School Students' Success. *Bilingual Basics*, 9, 1.

Taylor, S. K., & Yu, H. (in preparation). Portraits of diversity: Minority language students in an Early French Immersion program in Canada. To be submitted to the *Canadian Modern Language Review* (a refereed journal).

Yu, H. (2007, May 19). The Gap between Policy and Implementation in ESL Education: An Ontario Perspective. Paper presented at Ontario Conference on Applied Linguistics 2007 Programme, Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

Yu, H. (2007, March 21). High-Achieving ESL elementary school students' English journey. Paper presented at Doctoral Forum, 41<sup>st</sup> TESOL (Teaching English Speakers of Other Languages) conference, Seattle, USA.

Yu, H. (2005, May 26). ESL children can make a difference: A case study of bilingual development in a mandarin-speaking child. Paper presented at the LLRC (Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada) pre conference, London, Ontario.

**Invited Speaker for a University Course:**

Title: Creating an inclusive classroom for immigrant ESL students, Faculty of Education, The University of Western Ontario. London, Ontario. November, 2006.

Title: Useful practices for regular classroom teachers to meet the needs of immigrant ESL students, Faculty of Education, The University of Western Ontario. London, Ontario. February, 2007

**Poster Presentation:**

Faculty of Education 2006-2007 Seminar Series. Faculty of Education Research Day

University of Western Ontario. London, ON (April 25th, 2007). Poster co-produced by Dr. Shelley Taylor.

March, 2005 Presented a poster, proposal of “ESL Children Can Make a Difference: A Case Study of Bilingual Development in a Mandarin-Speaking Child”, at 1st Poster Session of Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario

March, 2006 Presented a poster, proposal of “How Did They Make It? Case Study: Exploring the success of High-Achieving Immigrant Elementary School Students”, at 2nd Poster Session of Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario