# Social Connections Are Key: Experiences of Immigrant Women Learning English as an Additional Language (EAL)

by

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# Abstract

Learning an additional language as an adult can be daunting and can present a variety of challenges for newcomers to Canada, including immigrant women. In order to highlight the learning experiences of immigrant women, I explore how some immigrant women learn EAL within a community located in the Fraser Valley region of British Columbia, Canada and take into account various perspectives. In particular, I examine challenges they face and review how EAL programs and educators currently provide settlement support through a variety of programs and initiatives and provide further suggestions in order to optimize settlement. My methodology is qualitative and includes in-person interviews, classroom observations as well as personal reflections. My findings suggest that social connections are extremely valuable and beneficial in supporting language learning and settlement. Unfortunately, they may not be formally recognized as a central goal of all English language programs.

**Keywords**:    Immigrant Women; Adult Education; EAL; Immigration; Social Connections; the Fraser Valley

# Dedication

Dedicated to my loving parents—Umee and Daddy—who had the courage to pursue a new life in a foreign land and to all individuals who continue to pursue similar endeavors.

My parents always encouraged learning new knowledge, through asking questions, reading books and pursuing higher education. Without their endless support and encouragement, achieving this level of education seems impossible. The following is a prayer in Arabic that my parents taught which has also guided me:

*Rabbi zidni ilma*; this translates to "My Lord. Increase me in knowledge" (Quran 20; 114).

# Acknowledgements

Words cannot express my sincerest gratitude to everyone who contributed to this research with their stories, time, expertise, insight, advice and moral support. In particular, I acknowledge my parents Nazir and Nasrin Ahmad, my husband Sajjad Rasheed, my son Hamaad Ahmad Rasheed, my sister Shama Ahmad, my brothers Osamah Ahmad and Khalil Ahmad, my supervisor Dr. Suzanne Smythe and committee member Dr. Roumiana Ilieva, my friend Sharanjit Sandhra, and last but not least all of the participants. Each of you not only provided your feedback and insight, but inspiration and motivation at times when I needed it most!

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# List of Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| EAL | English as an additional language |
| ISA | Immigrant Services Agencies |
| LINC | Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada |
| ORE | Office of Research Ethics |
| SFU | Simon Fraser University |
| TEAL | Teaching English as an Additional Language |
| TESL | Teaching English as a Second Language |

# Chapter 1. Introduction

*Language provides insight and understanding of my cultural roots and allows me to communicate with family and friends who share the same languages and culture.*

## 1.1. How I came to this Inquiry and Why it is Important

Language has always fascinated me. In my upbringing I learned three languages simultaneously—Punjabi, Urdu and English—and through this experience I became very aware that language is closely connected to culture. Without Punjabi and Urdu, I would not have had as much appreciation nor understanding of my South Asian heritage. Language provides insight and understanding of my cultural roots and allows me to communicate with family and friends who share the same languages and culture. This interest in language led me to pursue a career in the teaching English as an additional language (TEAL) field. Because I was exposed to multiple languages at a young age, I feel I learned them effortlessly; however, I have observed my parents—both of whom immigrated to Canada as young adults—strive to enhance their fluency in English. Through watching them and by working with individuals who are learning English as an additional language (EAL), I recognize that learning an additional language as an adult can be daunting and can present a variety of challenges, particularly for newcomers to Canada.

I have many memories of my mother learning English because she started EAL classes while I was in high school. In the Punjabi language, the word for mother is *Umee,* and I will use this term in my thesis because this has always been my name for my mother. Witnessing my Umee's determination to learn the language further has inspired me to examine this topic of the experiences of immigrant women learning EAL. I noticed that learning English provided my Umee with more independence, a stronger sense of confidence, and, most importantly, connections in the community. Not only did she advance her English communication skills, but she also gained employment. In fact, both my parents indicate that making social and linguistic connections is what helped them to stay in Canada, and I have noticed a similar attitude amongst newcomers whom I have worked with. While my dad completed his post-secondary education and then pursued a career to support his family, my Umee recalls that she initially "felt like a bird

in a cage" when she first moved to the community of Chilliwack, British Columbia in 1983.  During recent conversations on this topic, she explained that English language classes as well as other activities offered to newcomers in her community helped her to build connections and become "free" from her cage. I will provide more details of my Umee's immigration story as her experience inspired me to pursue this research topic. I have noticed aspects of her story that relate to the stories of the immigrant women in my research as well.

My thesis builds on the current existing research on immigrant women's experiences learning EAL in community settings. Although research on this topic exists, I have found there is little research focusing on immigrant women residing in the Fraser Valley and currently no published research that highlights immigrant women and their EAL learning experiences in the community that I chose to focus my research. I believe that the experiences of immigrant women learning EAL is important because of the many immigrants who are coming to Canada on a daily basis and because of the integral roles women have in society. This research contributes to scholarly and professional conversations about how EAL educators and programs might further support the integration and settlement of newcomer women. In particular, I examine the challenges that some immigrant women face when learning EAL and how EAL programs and educators can support language learning for immigrant women in Canada in order to optimize their settlement. I also reflect on how I can improve my personal practice as an EAL educator regarding recognizing challenges and supporting settlement.

In the following sections, I will provide more details of my Umee's immigration story as well as share my own personal observations and reflections. In addition, I will outline my research questions and provide relevant information about the current context of immigration, including both political and critical views. I will also discuss some relevant theories and research which have guided my work. Furthermore, I will provide an overview of my methodological approach and how I answered my research questions. Finally, I will give a synopsis of my thesis and provide chapter summaries in order to outline information presented in the subsequent chapters.

### 1.1.1. Research Questions and Purpose

Through teaching in an adult EAL program, I have noticed there are not as many students in attendance as reflected by the number of adult refugees and immigrants statistically reported. Furthermore, immigrant women are one group of language learners who face discrimination and marginalization (Norton, 2013). I have become aware there are barriers and other issues preventing immigrants and refugees from accessing EAL classes, and I want to investigate these. In addition, my Umee has also mentioned various barriers, including lack of awareness of language classes, lack of childcare, transportation issues and lack of time; I have learned that her barriers are similar to those existing today, and this makes me question what progress in EAL programs practices and pedagogies has been made. I draw upon Umee's story to highlight how her unique experiences intertwine with the shared experiences of immigrant women learning EAL. I find it intriguing yet also frustrating that certain issues which my Umee dealt with are still prevalent today. Most importantly, I want to highlight the experiences and challenges that some immigrant women have in terms of learning EAL and how services and service providers can further support these women as they settle into their community.

In order to highlight the learning experiences of some immigrant women I will explore the following question in the form of a qualitative study: What challenges do immigrant women experience when learning English as an additional language (EAL)? In investigating this question, the following are the areas I will explore within the context of one particular community located in the Fraser Valley region of British Columbia (BC), Canada:

Illustrate the policy context for adult EAL education in Canada and in the Fraser Valley

Examine the challenges that some immigrant women face when learning EAL

Examine how EAL programs and educators can support language learning for immigrant women in Canada in order to optimize their settlement

Reflect on how I can improve my personal practice as an EAL educator with regards to recognizing challenges and optimizing settlement.

To address these goals, I have engaged in a qualitative study that has involved policy analysis as well as interviews with learners and service providers, including

settlement workers, instructors and volunteers. I also draw upon my Umee's personal story of immigration and learning as a catalyst for my own experiences as an educator. My Umee shares positionalities with those of many of the women I met in my study and my story and hers are connected. As I pursue the goals of my study and the learning challenges faced by immigrant women like my Umee, I hope to offer more support, new insights and perhaps solutions for immigrant women who are facing barriers to learning English, and ultimately settling into a new community. That said, the interpretations I draw from the study are mine. I am grateful for the participation of generous and thoughtful people who do the work of teaching and learning a new language, of settling into a new home, and making a home for others. I have done my best to share their experiences, though I may draw conclusions that are not shared by all participants.

**A story of immigration.**

Each individual's story is unique. I have learned through teaching EAL that by listening to these stories, one gains a deeper understanding of an individual and their unique experiences. Thus, because my Umee's story has influenced me to research this particular topic about the experiences of immigrant women, I will share her story in the following and focus on areas that I believe are most relevant to my research. It strikes me that some of the experiences and challenges she has shared with me are similar to the experiences and challenges of the immigrant women whom I have interviewed. I believe this indicates that despite our unique life experiences, there are certain aspects of being a newcomer and learning EAL which are the same for everyone and which perhaps have remained relevant over time. By sharing my Umee's story, I will illustrate how the presence of social connections supported her settlement years ago, and how social connections remain an important aspect of settlement and language learning for immigrant women—and others—today as well.

Some newcomers come to Canada seeking refuge from persecution in their native country while others are exploring better economic opportunities for themselves and their children. My parents fell into the latter category and initially immigrated to Canada to pursue a better life for themselves and their future family. Since I was young, they have shared their experiences growing up in Pakistan—their country of birth—as well as their experience in Canada, and have highlighted the differences and similarities between these two countries. Both my parents indicate that connecting with others and

getting involved in the community helped with settling into their new environment. Despite the fact that they decided Canada was their new home, to this day, they reminisce over fond memories from their homeland.

My parents spent a few years in the city of Chilliwack, BC from 1983 until 1986, and then relocated to the town of Boston Bar, BC where they lived for ten years. Prior to moving, my dad was commuting to Boston Bar for work, and relocating was more convenient than commuting. Boston Bar is a significantly smaller town in comparison to Chilliwack and it was a big change for both my parents but they focused on spending time with family and raising their children—myself and three siblings. My family was part of a small community of people from Pakistani and Muslim backgrounds sharing a mother tongue of Punjabi. This common language helped my parents meet and build friendships in this tight-knit community, which supported settlement into Boston Bar and being a part of the larger community.

Despite living in a very small community, my Umee recalls meeting other young mothers and families and making lifelong friends with whom she is still in contact. There was not a place to formally take English language classes in Boston Bar at that time but the local Family Place offered a free drop-in center for parents and children and was an informal context for language and settlement (Chilliwack Community Services, n.d, Early Years). My Umee became involved with this organization where she learned English language skills and connected with her neighbours.

It was not until 2005—nine years after moving back to Chilliwack—that my Umee pursued formal English language classes. When I asked her why she did not start these sooner, she explained there were several barriers and challenges. First, when she initially came to Canada in 1983, my parents simply were not aware of the services offered—such as English language classes—and then, she became busy taking care of their first child (my sister). Even after moving back to Chilliwack in the late 90s, my Umee explains it was a very busy time in life because she had four young children—ages 2 to 13—to take care of and wasn't able to take out the time commitment to formally learn English. She did look into daycare options but it was too expensive and she wanted to spend the time with her children. Both my parents express a fear they had of raising children in Canada, in that they did not want any of their children to forget their Pakistani and Islamic cultures and values. I believe this is why my parents placed such

an emphasis on speaking Punjabi at home. They decided that the more time they could spend with their children, the greater the benefit they would have to expose them to Pakistani and Islamic cultures and values. Another challenge was transportation to go to the classes. My Umee explains that she did reach out to the Chilliwack Family Place, and I have many fond memories of spending summer days at the Chilliwack Family Place as well as going on various day trips. We would also walk to and from the Family Place and my Umee would share stories of her childhood.

Once my Umee did start EAL classes at Chilliwack Community Services, she connected with others who spoke Punjabi, and her classmates would often share their own unique cultures and reasons for immigrating to Canada. She remembers this time fondly and share that the experience alleviated her loneliness and isolation. After completing all the EAL levels, my Umee was asked to continue as a volunteer and assist others with learning English –she happily agreed and enjoyed this opportunity to teach her peers. She explains that this experience gave her a chance to further practice her language skills and an opportunity to assist others who were in a similar situation as herself. I remember being exposed to the EAL program while I was in high school and would often be invited to various lunch and afterschool events in my Umee's classroom; I recall these experiences as opportunities that supported social connections. It was an eye-opening experience for me to learn the unique stories of these individual and this inspired me to pursue a career in education and in particular in teaching EAL.

Although my parents have now been living in Canada for over 35 years, they express that their native country of Pakistan will always be 'home'. From a young age, my parents took my siblings and I on trips to Pakistan—these trips kept us connected with family members in Pakistan, and allowed my parents to share their heritage as well. These experiences were invaluable and to this day, I have countless fond memories. The trips also provided an opportunity to be fully immersed in the languages of Punjabi and Urdu and strengthened these language skills. Although learning the language of their new country and connecting to the community aided my parents' integration into their new home, Canada did not replace their feeling of 'home'. They learned to live with their Pakistan and Islamic values within a Canadian culture. I admire them for this and appreciate the emphasis they placed on valuing our cultural heritage throughout my upbringing. I feel my parents were constantly balancing both their Pakistani and Islamic

cultural values within a Canadian culture, and I am aware of the many sacrifices they made.

These conversations with my Umee illustrate her settlement experiences and connect to my research too, because her story highlights the value of social connections and how social connections ultimately supported her language learning and settlement. What intrigues me in particular is how aspects of my Umee's experience from over 30 years ago resonate in the experiences of immigrant women today. I follow this theme in this inquiry and elaborate in my findings, the ways in which the challenges, desires and efforts of my Umee are prevalent today for immigrant women and other newcomers. I also highlight the value of social connections as integral to language learning and settlement. While my Umee's story provides some insight into one individual's immigration experience, in the next section, I explore the current policy and research context for immigration in Canada with focus on the experiences of immigrant women.

## 1.2. Current Immigration Context

Since Confederation in 1867, Canada has welcomed more than 17 million immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2016) and is recognized as multicultural and as one of the "major immigrant-receiving countries" (Dean, Ghassemi, Mukhtar, Wilson & Wilson, 2016, p. 390). In fact, Canada is "primarily composed of immigrants and the descendants of immigrants" (Edmonston, 2016, p. 78-79) and anyone who is not indigenous can be categorized as an immigrant. While we currently have a large number of foreign-born individuals, Edmonston predicts this number will only increase (p. 78-79). According to Statistics Canada (2016), the annual number of immigrants entering Canada has fluctuated significantly within the last 150 years but, since the early 1990s, the number of landed immigrants has been quite high averaging at approximately 235, 000 per year (Zhu, 2016, p. 146). Most immigrants settle in the cities of Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal and fewer immigrants settle in smaller towns and rural areas (Edmonston, 2016, p. 88). Although Canada is well known for accepting individuals from all over the world, numerous immigrants experience various challenges upon arriving and settling in their new home. It is important to note that the immigration experience is not the same for all.

In this thesis immigrants are defined as those "who are or who have ever been landed immigrants or permanent residents" (NewtoBC, 2018), or, in other words,

individuals who have "been granted the right to live permanently in Canada by immigration authorities, but who [have] not yet become Canadian citizen[s]" (Statistics Canada, 2016). Currently, Canada's total population is approximately 37,194,691 (Canada Population, 2019) and as of 2016 the immigrant population was approximately 7,540,830 (NewtoBC, 2018). According to Census 2016, the province of BC, where my study is located, currently has the second highest immigrant population—1,292,675— which represents 28.3% of BC's population (NewtoBC, 2018). Overall, according to Statistics Canada (2016), immigrants currently residing in Canada report more than 200 birthplaces, which illustrates the sheer diversity of our nation. According to the 2017 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017), in 2017 it was anticipated that 320,000 new immigrants will be welcomed into Canada while in 2016 the immigration plan welcomed 305,000 immigrants (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017).

Within my teaching experience, I have met several new immigrant families. With the recent influx of newcomers, it is very timely to inquire into this topic of the learning experiences of immigrant women, so we can ensure their successful settlement. My research is situated in the Fraser Valley where my family has settled and where I too work as an educator. As noted by Zhu (2016), within the last 20 years several studies have examined immigration settlement policies and practice in Canada (p. 143) however, there is a lack of research focused on the Fraser Valley region of BC, despite its large number of immigrants (NewtoBC, 2018). In addition, Gibb and Walker (2011) acknowledge that within an academic context, there is "little to nothing...written about Canadian federal policy on skills, employment, training and/or lifelong learning" (p. 395), all of which are factors that not only affect Canada's economy but immigrants as well.

Furthermore, with respect to female immigrants, Zhu (2016) highlights that "most studies do not examine immigration settlement policies and practice from a feminist perspective" (p. 143). In addition, Shan (2015) believes that the "first feminist wave in migrant studies" was an article in the journal *International Migration Review* titled "Women and Migration" (Morokvasic, 1984) and the issue of problematizing women as "passive dependent immigrants" (p. 47) was discussed. Zhu also states that immigrant women's "experiences have long been ignored" (144) despite the fact that both immigration policy and settlement services directly affect immigrant women. In her research, Zhu reviews current literature and provides a feminist analysis of immigration

settlement policies and services, arguing that the experiences of immigrant women "play a crucial role in reframing research on Canadian immigration and settlement" (p. 144). Drawing on her work, I would like to specifically examine the experiences of some immigrant women, and also take into consideration the important information that she highlights, along with the recommendations that she makes.

As Boyd and Vickers (2000) explain, the number of women immigrating to Canada has increased while the "predominance of men among adult immigrants declined as family migration grew" (p. 2) and women have come to represent just over half of immigrants, whereas in 1911 the difference was significantly higher with about 158 males for every 100 females (p. 3). Given the Fraser Valley region is a rapidly growing region it is imperative to consider the learning environment for women. Formally known as the Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD), this area is situated in the south western part of British Columbia. The FVRD includes the municipalities of Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Harrison Hot Springs, Hope, Kent and Mission and it is the third most populated regional district in BC, with a population of approximately 300,000 (Fraser Valley Regional District, 2019). In addition to the municipalities, this region also includes eight electoral areas which represent the communities located to the north and south sides of the Fraser River (Fraser Valley Regional District, 2019).

With the Fraser Valley's rising population and with an increase in immigration, it is imperative for newcomers, especially immigrant women who are more prone to isolation given gendered divisions of labour, to learn and become fluent in English and to integrate into their new society. In addition, educators, settlement workers, volunteers, policy makers and others who shape the experience of newcomers, need to ensure that all newcomers, and in particular women, have positive experiences learning English and ultimately settling into their new community.

## 1.2.1. Political Views vs. Critical Views

In the following section, I will outline some contrasting perspectives in academic and policy literature on immigration. It is important to consider this work in order to highlight the complexity of Canadian immigration in relation to women's experiences.

Generally, from a political perspective, immigration in Canada is seen as positive and economically beneficial. Canada's current immigration minister, Ahmed Hussen,

highlights the economic value of immigration, indicating "[n]ewcomers play a vital role in our society" and acknowledges that immigration along with a welcoming society has shaped our country (Moving2Canada, 2017). In addition, Minister Hussen also notes "our country was built by the many significant cultural and economic contributions of immigrants and our Indigenous peoples" (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017). Furthermore, he highlights that immigration is integral for Canada's future, because it will help with economic growth and fulfill job opportunities (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017). Moreover, Minister Hussen explains that Canada needs immigration in order to support our senior population since it is estimated that five million people will retire by 2035 and it is predicted there will be fewer people who are working to support them (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017). NewtoBC (2018) also notes that immigration in Canada "is commonly viewed as a key economic solution to Canada's aging population" (p.2).

With reference to Canada's Immigration Plan for 2018-2020, Minister Hussen, believes this plan is ambitious and "will benefit all Canadians, because immigrants contribute to economic growth and keep our country competitive in a global economy" (Moving2Canada, 2017). The Immigration Plan for 2018-2020 outlines a target of welcoming 980, 000 permanent residents into Canada (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017) over the course of three years, and includes approximately 137, 350 refugees as well as up to 12, 250 individuals for "humanitarian and other reasons" (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017). This current immigration plan is different from previous plans in that it has a three-year period, whereas previous plans had a one-year period (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017).

Moreover, current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau acknowledges that in general, "Canadians are positively inclined towards immigration" simply because over the years we have seen that this works well (Keri, 2017). Edmonston (2016) outlines results from a public opinion survey conducted by Environics—a public opinion survey company active with their Focus Canada Survey since 1977—which included questions on attitudes towards immigration (p. 104). The survey suggests that in 2015, 38 percent of adult Canadians either "agreed or strongly agreed that there is too much immigration to Canada"; Edmonston also notes that the respondents are a minority and overall, Canadians are supportive of immigration and believe that immigration positively affects

our economy and society (p. 104-105). Edmonston suggests that although "immigration policies are dynamic, there is no strong public support" for reducing immigration to Canada (p. 105).

     Furthermore, Trudeau acknowledges that "we can always do more" and, we also need to balance and be aware of the number of newcomers to whom language training and support can be provided especially "during those first years where they are so dependent on society because they arrive with next to nothing in many cases" (Keri, 2017). He also acknowledges that with the skyrocketing numbers of 60 to 65 million people currently displaced around the world, "no country is going to be able to absorb them all" and thus "we have to start looking at making sure we're creating situations where they're able to return home" suggesting that a political solution is necessary (Keri, 2017). The mainstream political view attests to an official support for immigration, which is important for the ways in which newcomers are welcomed into Canadian society.

     In contrast, academic literature on immigration highlights the racialized history of immigration in Canada. Guo (2015) outlines how race was used to "restrict the immigration of Asians and other non-Whites" (p. 42) and indicates that immigration was "a means of cultural domination and social control" (p. 42). Similarly, Li (2003) also describes immigration policy as selective and a mode of social engineering. Li notes that since the late 19th century, immigration policy "defined and welcomed a particular class of desirable immigrants and restricted the entry of those considered less desirable" (p. 41). What's more, Shan (2015) explains that up until the 1970's, women were not included in immigrant studies, and when they were finally included, they were often depicted as "secondary immigrants, trailing behind their male spouses" (p. 47). This view that women are subordinate is incorrect and has changed within the past few years. This notion needs to continue to change in order to highlight the importance of immigrant women and the unique needs that they have.

     Meanwhile, Gibb (2008; as cited in Guo, 2015) indicates that current policy which oversees English language education for immigrants in Canada "emphasize[s] human capital models, the functional goal of job preparation and individualized skills" (p. 48). This prevailing perspective discounts the role of social connection in immigration experiences that I have described above. Ng and Shan (2010) believe that these 'skills based' education programs "have become a mechanism of neoliberal control to produce ideal workers for the Canadian labour market" (p. 171). On the other hand, Shan (2015)

emphasizes that although women have always actively contributed economically "their work may not be recognized and often goes poorly paid or unpaid" (p. 47).

Overall, Guo (2015) recognizes that although Canada welcomes immigrants, our approach to settlement is not as welcoming, explaining that "it is not just the newcomers who need to adapt to Canadian culture" but recommends "[t]he receiving society also needs to change in order to recognize political, cultural, linguistic and economic contributions of immigrants to Canada" (p. 48). Guo (2015) also highlights various aspects that educators can change and suggests that educators "need to adopt a critical multiculturalism approach" (p. 48) in their work. In sum, this work suggests that not only are women's experiences of immigration neglected but so too is their experience as learners. This is a concern in a society that claims to support immigration as an engine of economic and social development.  I will address this and more of Guo's (2015) suggestions in this thesis. I agree with Guo (2015) in that settlement is a mutual effort on the part of newcomers as well as those in the receiving society. In the next section I provide definitions of terms I use in the thesis.

## 1.3.  Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this thesis, I will distinguish between the terms immigrant and refugee in order to reduce confusion as these terms sometimes overlap. As noted above, immigrants are individuals "who are or who have ever been landed immigrants or permanent residents" (NewtoBC, 2018), or, in other words, individuals who have "been granted the right to live permanently in Canada by immigration authorities, but who [have] not yet become Canadian citizen[s]" (Statistics Canada, 2016). Permanent residents in Canada fall into three categories—economic, family and refugees (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017). According to Canadian legislation, immigrants become Canadian citizens through the process of naturalization and the term immigrant does not include individuals who are on a work or study permit, or those who are refugee claimants (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017).

Moreover, Canada uses the United Nations (UN) definition of refugee, coined at the 1951 UN Convention on refugees. This defines a refugee as an individual who due to "fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a

particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (Boyd & Vickers, 2000). Canada uses this definition to assess who is eligible to enter our country under the status of refugee (Boyd & Vickers, 2000). [1]

## 1.4. Chapter Summaries

Thus far, In Chapter 1 I have indicated the inspiration and goals of this inquiry and its importance to the field of adult EAL education. I have shared my Umee's story as the source of inspiration for my inquiry and have set out my research questions, locating my study within the context of Canada's current immigration context.

In Chapter 2, I provide a literature review of factors that affect EAL learning for immigrant women. The goal is to understand how educators and other community members support immigrant women, and policy and practice challenges they encounter. These challenges include immigration policy in Canada, the effects of Neoliberalism, as well as numerous gender, economic and social barriers that immigrant women face when pursuing EAL. I locate this discussion in the context of the history and current context for EAL learning in Canada. Finally, I highlight theoretical frameworks that guide my work including feminist and critical theories of neoliberalism.

In Chapter 3, I will outline my methodology and describe my approaches to data collection. My research includes 13 interviews with immigrant women and service providers who work with immigrant women to support their language learning and settlement within the Fraser Valley. In addition to my individual interviews, I observed a total of six hours of classroom learning, focusing on women's learning experiences in the classroom. To contextualise this data, I provide details about my research site, as well as share information about my interviewees.

Next, in Chapter 4, I outline my results and provide an analysis of my findings. One common notion prevalent in all my interviews was the benefit of social connections. Immigrant women—and in fact all newcomers—each have a different experience when it comes to learning EAL, and social connections are recognized as beneficial to

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[1] A detailed timeline outlining Canada's history in accepting refugees from numerous countries since 1776 until 2018 is available on the Government of Canada website (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2015).

supporting both the EAL experience and settlement overall. I will draw on the research by Drolet and Moorthi (2018) and Wilbur (2016) as the work of these scholars' intersects with and opens up new ideas in my own findings. I provide details of their research endeavours in section 2.4 of the literature review.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I offer final thoughts, personal reflections and recommendations for further areas of research to enhance the education and settlement experiences of immigrant women and all newcomers. As mentioned, I will address some of Guo's (2015) suggestions as well. It is important to note that I have interpreted my results and shared my research based on these interpretations. My goal is to provide information and insight which will benefit all newcomers as well as contribute to this field of study.

# Chapter 2.    Literature Review

*Immigration in Canada is experienced differently by newcomers from diverse parts of the world, settling in different regions in Canada, and at different points in Canadian History.*

*(Norton, 2013, p. 80)*

## 2.1.  Immigration in Canada: Historical Developments

In this next section, I will provide more information about immigration in Canada, focusing on how it has evolved over time. Immigration in Canada has taken many forms and has had different motives. Boyd and Vickers (2000) outline 100 years of immigration in Canada and note that although there are "superficial similarities at the beginning and the end of a century of immigration" the characteristics of immigrants have changed throughout this time (p. 2). This change is a reflection of numerous factors, including amendments in immigration policies, human displacement due to war and politics in various world countries, economic difficulties both in Canada and worldwide, as well as the vast expansion of communication, transportation and networks which have connected people from all over the world (Boyd & Vickers, 2000, p. 2). According to Boyd and Vickers (2000), these changes have collectively affected Canada's immigrant population in the following ways: the importance of immigration for Canada's population growth has increased, immigrants more often than not choose to live in Canada's larger cities, the gender balance has changed with the number of men in comparison to women declining, the various countries that immigrants come from have increased ethnic diversity in Canada and finally, more immigrants have been employed in the manufacturing and service sectors as Canada's economy has transitioned from agricultural to more knowledge-based(p. 2). Edmonston (2016) agrees that Canada has had "a long and complex immigration history" and suggests that it is crucial to understand this history in order to appreciate the current ethnic backgrounds and contributions of immigration to Canada's population (p. 78).

According to Hudon (2015), immigration is still a main reason for Canada's population growth and as of 2016, Canada's population is more than 35 million (Statistics Canada, 2016). Edmonston (2016) believes that "immigration levels will have a major effect on Canada's future population growth" and because most immigrants

settle in the provinces of Ontario and British Columbia, it is projected that the fastest population growth will occur in these two provinces (p. 102). Between the years of 1996 to 2016, approximately 4 million individuals were immigrants while 2 million were born in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016). As Hudon (2015) outlines, due to changing trends within immigration, there has been a shift in demographics of Canada's immigration population, and she further explores these trends and their implications from a gender-based perspective. Edmonston (2016) also draws attention to a shift in demographics, and predicts three effects of continued immigration on the composition of Canada's population (p. 103). First, there will be changes in the foreign-born population in terms of which world countries immigrants are migrating from, secondly there will be changes due to births of future generations and finally, there will be an increase in religious diversity (p. 103).

Shortly after Confederation in 1870, Canada had a population of 3.6 million and immigration was viewed as a fundamental way expanding the country as well as its economy (Dirks, 2017). During the beginning of the 20th century, in 1900, approximately 42,000 immigrants arrived and in 1913, there were over 400,000 immigrants in Canada (Boyd & Vickers, 2000). As Boyd and Vickers outline, immigrants were attracted to prospective jobs and there was a labour demand as a result of building the transcontinental railway, encouraging settlement in the prairies and expanding industrial production (p. 3). By 1914 there was a record-breaking amount of over 2.9 million people who had immigrated to Canada (Boyd & Vickers, p. 3). Initially, men significantly outnumbered women and this may be because labour recruitment efforts were often targeted at males instead of females (Boyd & Vickers, p. 3-4). Up until World War One, immigration numbers were consistently high, but by 1915, they dropped immediately to less than 34, 000 and although numbers increased after the war, they never reached the high amounts that they were prior to 1914 (Boyd & Vickers, p. 6).

A critical perspective evident in the works of both Shan (2015) and Maitra (2013), draws our attention to the racialized history of Canadian immigration.  According to Shan, historically immigration in Canada was needed to build a "White nation" and thus females who fit the criteria of being "morally sound wives for prairie settlers" were chosen whereas others were denied access (p. 48). On a similar note, because Canada was initially imagined to be a "white" nation, in order to implement this notion "Canadian immigration policies have always tried to control the flow of immigrants from so-called

'third-world' countries, by using race, ethnicity, nationality and colour to determine" entry into Canada (Basran and Zong, 1998; as cited in Maitra, 2013, p. 129). Furthermore, specific groups have been excluded as well, including "the Orientals" and gender control was put in place to in order to place a limit on the number of racialized individuals settling in Canada (Shan, 2015, p. 48).

On a similar note, Boyd and Vickers (2000) outline that in the early 1900's, the majority of immigrants originally came from the US or the UK and gradually there was acceptance from other countries as well, including Russia, Hungary, Italy and the Ukraine (p. 4). At the time, there was preference for British and American immigrants over those from other European countries and thus, immigration from Asia was very low (Boyd & Vickers, p. 4-5). In fact, legislation in 1900 focused on preventing immigration based on "the grounds of poverty, mental incompetence or on the basis of non-European origins" (Boyd & Vickers, p. 5). In addition, an act in 1908 did not allow individuals to enter Canada who did not come directly from their country of origin; this specifically prevented immigration from India because there were no direct sailings between the two countries at the time and there were also several agreements restricting Japanese immigration as well (Boyd & Vickers, p. 5). Despite the notion of multiculturalism, which is often publicly depicted today, it is interesting how openly discriminatory certain practices were.

Later on, in 1967, Canada's point system "officially marked the end of Canada's overt discriminatory immigration practices based on racial and ethnic preferences" (Satzewich, 1998; as cited in Shan, 2015, p. 49). Within the point system, an individual's eligibility to immigrate to Canada is based on various factors, including work experience, educational background and language proficiency (Shan, p. 49). Through the point system, Canada has accepted immigrants with desirable educational and occupational backgrounds regardless of which country they are from (Shan, p. 49) and thus immigrants today are from many different parts of the world. In addition, Canada also has a temporary immigration program allowing immigrants to fulfill certain labour shortages without giving them citizenship rights (Shan, p 49). As noted by Shan, given the various options that immigrants can take to come to Canada, the diverse categories that immigrant women choose "may indicate that women have varying expectations, needs, aspirations and struggles [which] warrant researchers' attention" (p. 49). As noted by Dlamini, Anucha and Wolfe (2012), the Canadian government has an economic

view on immigration and believes that male and female skilled professionals "are more likely to obtain employment and are therefore less likely to become dependent on welfare", thus these professionals are viewed as the most suitable for immigration (p. 421). Despite this, many immigrants and in particular women still face various barriers when it comes to employment.

Although Canada initially had quite a racialized approach to immigration, the attitude shifted significantly once the point system was in place. As Minister Hussen highlights, in 2016 there was "an extraordinary commitment to resettle Syrian refugees" (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017) and more than 62, 000 individuals were admitted as resettled refugees (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017). Although Canada will continue to focus on welcoming newcomers, Minister Hussen draws attention to the fact that the security and safety of Canadians needs to be taken into account, thus there is a focus to "make our immigration system more efficient and responsive to our economic needs" (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017).

Currently, immigration in Canada can be either permanent or temporary for visiting, studying or working purposes (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017). Our immigration system is entirely managed by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and all applicants go through an extensive screening process in order to "protect the health, safety and security of Canadians" (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada). The IRCC also works closely with provincial and territorial service providers and organizations in order to settle newcomers into our society via a variety of different settlement services, one of which includes registering for language classes (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada). Within Canada's immigration system, there is a focus on selecting individuals "whose skills contribute to Canadian prosperity" (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada), in addition to family members, refugees and others who may need protection from persecution in their native countries (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada). Immigration has not only been important historically, but, as Minister Hussen explains, it is "integral to our country's future, helping to spur economic growth, job creation and our prosperity" (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

As noted by Norton (2013), immigration in the twentieth century has been a result of certain key world events, including (but not limited to) the Russian revolution in 1917, World War II from 1939-1945, Soviet intervention in Hungary in 1956 as well as anti-Allende forces in Chile in 1970 (p. 76). Bonnycastle (2017) agrees and indicates how, various world crises including "armed conflict and civil wars have forced millions of people to flee" both within and outside their home countries in order to settle in a safer place (p. 654). More recently, the Syrian war is another world event that has displaced more than 11 million people from their homes; since the start of the conflict in 2011, more than 4.5 million people have left Syria and most of them are women and children (Syria, 2016). Such destructive world events have led EAL scholars to interact with adults who are migrating from country to country and who are striving to learn the language and culture of their new country (Norton, 2013, p. 76).

Within the past decade, newcomers to Canada are choosing to resettle in more suburban areas instead of traditional metropolitan cities (Dean et al., 2016, p. 390). With this shift, there is a greater demand for immigrant settlement agencies (ISAs) to deliver programming in more suburban areas, which is challenging since traditionally, most ISAs have been located in the larger cities (Dean et al., p. 390). This increase in immigrants settling in suburban areas has added additional demands on both the "availability and provision of services to aid in the settlement process" (p. 390) and created challenges for ISAs to plan and deliver services in these growing areas. With this influx of newcomers, it is very timely for me to inquire into this topic so we can ensure the successful settlement of recent and past newcomers into the Fraser Valley as well as surrounding areas.

Moreover, the 2017 Report on Immigration also provides detailed information about the settlement programs which offer services to all permanent resident newcomers in order to "support successful integration into Canadian Society and the economy" (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017). Given my research focus on the experiences of immigrant women, I am interested in how these are discussed within government immigration documents. The IRCC recognizes not only the integral role that immigrant women have in settling and integrating their family unit once arriving in Canada, but also the economic, social, civic and cultural contributions they make (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017). Although resettling in Canada provides many opportunities, it also comes with numerous challenges including

learning a "new language, work transitions, child-care responsibilities, developing new networks and shifts in family dynamics" (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017); all issues that emerged in my research as well.

In the 2017 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration, the Women at Risk program is acknowledged, which recognizes the "unique vulnerabilities of refugee women and girls" (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017) and provides opportunities for resettlement to women who are in unstable situations and/or those who need urgent assistance. The report recognizes that the UNHCR can also refer individuals to the Women at Risk program and UNHCR was involved with referring Syrian women to this program (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada). In 2016, there were 408 women resettled in Canada under this particular program (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

Despite the numerous challenges that immigrant women encounter, Norton (2013) discovered that all the women she interviewed in her study felt the Canadian government is generous towards immigrants and has a "generous health and social welfare system [and] puts substantial resources into providing language training for immigrants" (p. 95-96). Most individuals in my study felt the same way, but also shared their challenges and struggles.

## 2.2. Canada's Immigration Policy

Canada's immigration policy is complex, to say the least, and as Green and Green (2004) explain, because of this complexity and "interconnected set of guidelines, regulations and actions" it is difficult to conclude what the main goal of the policy is (p. 103). Guo (2013) outlines that Canada's immigration policy has historically been racist and discouraging against anyone who was non-white and "used race as a basis to restrict Asian and other non-whites" (p. 24- 25). The following will outline specifically some information about Canada's immigration policy in order to better understand the policies and regulations that immigrants encounter.

Interestingly enough, different government departments have overseen Canada's immigration policy—these include the Ministry of Mines and Resources from 1936 to 1949, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration from 1950 to 1966 and

from 1977 to present day and the Department of Manpower and Immigration from 1966 to 1977 (Dirks, 2017).  Both provincial and federal governments are responsible for immigration in each province providing funding for various programming; understandably, various groups are interested and invested in the integration of newcomers, including researchers, policymakers and the general public as well (Edmonston, 2016, p. 97). Edmonston (2016) notes that although immigration policies are dynamic, "there is no strong public support" for reducing the amount of immigration in Canada, and also indicates that public attitude regarding immigration in our country is largely influenced by economic conditions (p. 105). Edmonston (2016) explains that "when economic conditions deteriorate—and the unemployment rate increases—public attitudes change" and more individuals indicate that immigration levels are too high (p. 105). It is predicted that as long as Canada's economy remains strong, support for immigration will generally remain positive (Edmonston, 2016, p. 105).

Furthermore, as Ferrer, Picot and Riddell (2014) note, Canada's immigration policy has evolved due to various short-term and long-term objectives (p. 848). Canada's immigration policy is currently experiencing considerable changes which are driven by the following three goals:

1. a desire to improve the economic outcomes of entering immigrants, given the deterioration in the labor market outcomes over the past several decades

2. an attempt to better respond to short-term regional labor market shortages often associated with commodity booms and

3. a desire to shift immigration away from the three largest cities to other regions of the country that are seeking more economic immigrants (Ferrer, Picot & Riddell, 2014, p. 847-848).

Ferrer et al. discuss that as a result of these goals, there have been new immigration programs implemented at the start of the millennium (p. 846). In particular, these programs include "the Canadian Experience Class, the Provincial Nominee program, Ministerial Instructions, the Federal Skilled Trades program and the possibility to apply for permanent residency as temporary immigrants from the Live-in-Caregiver program" (Ferrer, Picot & Riddell, 2014).

Furthermore, our nation's immigration policy appears to be ideological and is a reflection of different political priorities, where the various policies seem to serve different

interests, whether it is fulfilling a labour shortage or increasing population in a certain geographical region. As Hudon (2015) outlines, the purpose of Canada's immigration policy is to meet three main objectives, and agrees that one of these objectives includes the promotion of economic development, in addition to reuniting families and protecting refugees (p. 4). By maintaining high levels of immigration, the belief is that economic challenges due to the retirement of Canada's baby boom generation decrease (Ferrer, Picot & Riddell, 2014, p. 847). The immigration system has gone through dramatic changes, with most of the change "focused almost exclusively on the Economic Immigration Class, with much less policy development involving the family and refugee class" (p. 847). For example, there have been more individuals admitted in the economic class, including the principal applicant as well as their spouses and dependents (Ferrer, Picot & Riddell, 2014, p. 847).

On a similar note, according to Gibb and Walker (2011) Canada is one of many nations to declare "its commitment to, and concern for becoming a knowledge economy" (p. 381). In their research, Gibb and Walker (2011) provide an overview of federal policy on education and training in Canada (p. 381), arguing that although a "highly skilled knowledge economy may form part of the overall skills discourse, it is unlikely to become a reality in Canada any time soon" (p. 382). Similar to Minister Hussen, Gibb and Walker (2011) explain that Canadian employers are concerned over the limited availability of skilled labour, especially given the aging population (p. 387) and it is estimated that by 2025 approximately 30 percent of Canadians will be over 55 years old.  To address the concerns of labour shortage, Gibb and Walker (2011) discuss that in the past, Canada has relied on immigration as one source to fill the labour shortage gap (p. 387). In addition, Canada is more recently relying on "equity seeking groups" which includes Indigenous peoples, visible minorities, and people with disabilities (Gibb & Walker, 2011, p. 387). Gibb and Walker review ten federal policies focusing on education and training and seven of these policies directly target Indigenous peoples, visible minorities as well as people with disabilities.

There are two policies which Gibb and Walker (2011) review that directly affect immigrants and newcomers to Canada. These include the Workplace Skills Initiative (WSI) policy and the Foreign Credential Recognition policy. The WSI policy addresses labour shortages by providing funding for projects that respond to various skills and challenges, which affect newcomers to Canada, as well as older and low-skilled workers

(p. 387). The Foreign Credential Recognition policy focuses on "accelerating the assessment and recognition of immigrants' foreign credentials" (p. 388) to ensure they measure up to Canadian standards.

When examining these policies, Gibb and Walker (2011) found numerous discrepancies between the concepts of "building a high-skill knowledge workforce" and government programs that focus on developing low-skilled labour (p. 389). For example, the Foreign Credential Recognition policy in particular seems to support the contributions of highly skilled immigrants but, it appears that neoliberalism is at play because high-skill labour is starting to become liberalized (Gibb & Walker, 2011, p. 389). In reality, many high-skilled professionals find difficulty gaining recognition for their credentials by professional associations and although the Foreign Credential Recognition program is meant to standardize the process, ensuring that processes are "fair, accessible, timely and coherent" (p. 389), funding is provided on a per-project basis and this does not allow for consistency and coherency (p. 389). Furthermore, another added concern is that many professional licensing groups fall under provincial instead of federal regulation (p. 389**).**

Upon completing their research, Gibb and Walker (2011) conclude that the federal government's role in employment and training policies is more passive than active and in general, tends to develop partnerships with provincial governments (p. 393). Furthermore, Gibb and Walker ponder if the nature of federalism is preventing Canada from putting together a national employment and training strategy, and their analysis of current policies suggests that having these employment and training policies develop a future knowledge economy while simultaneously building economic and social inclusion is currently limited (p. 395).For the most part, as Gibb and Walker note, the majority of education and employment related policies fall within provincial legislation and thus, it can be challenging for our federal government to coherently and consistently develop policies across Canada (p. 381). That being said, the LINC program is one which falls within federal legislation and, many community services that provide LINC services also receive provincial funding (Marie, January 25, 2018).

As discussed, Canada's immigration policy is multifaceted yet, an understanding of its complexity can provide further insight into what immigrants' encounter. The fact that Canada's immigration policy has evolved extensively over the years shows that this

policy has responded to demands and needs of the evolving immigration dynamics. Although it appears as though the policy is ideological, there is work being done and it is integral that this work continues, because immigration is predicted to increase. Next, I will shift to a discussion on the effects of Neoliberalism and how this ideology has shaped current settlement processes.

## 2.2.1. Effects of Neoliberalism

According to Zhu (2016), since 1995 one major factor that has influenced current research on immigration settlement policies and organizations in Canada is "the changing relationship between federal, provincial and municipal governments," which has led to debates over various responsibilities of immigration settlement (p. 144). As noted by Dean et al (2016), there was a fundamental change between state funders and non-profit Immigrant Settlement Agencies (ISAs) in the mid-1990s, when "neoliberal tenets of governance became embedded in social welfare policies" and as a result in immigrant settlement policies (p. 390). In fact, Dean et al (2016) indicate that neoliberalism has emerged as the "dominant global economic, social and political" philosophy within the past three decades and has been established in Canadian public policies (p. 391). Moreover, Zhu (2016) also highlights that the concept of neoliberalism influences immigration policy and focuses on how "the interaction between neoliberalism and immigration policy impacts [both] social service delivery and immigrants' everyday lives" (p. 145).

As Zhu (2016) describes, Neoliberalism is "a historical process that shapes current immigrant settlement policies" (p. 145). The main beliefs of Neoliberalism include "privatization, devolution of government responsibilities in social welfare production to non-state actors, the promotion of free-market principals in the non-profit sector, and the marketization of social services provision" (Dean et al., 2016, p. 391). As noted by Weaver et al. (2010; as cited in Dean et al., 2016), these tenets have pervasively restructured social welfare policies in both North America and Europe (p. 391). The privatization of public services can manifest in many forms, including deregulation, cutbacks in public services and devolving services to both for profit and non-profit organizations (Dean et al., 2016, p. 391).

Dean et al (2016) highlight that the challenges which non-profit ISAs experience are not necessarily due to limitations in financial resources but instead, related to "system-level" challenges which are encountered when planning and delivering services to newcomers (p. 389). There has been criticism that neoliberal settlement policies have placed restrictions on how much ISAs are able to plan and direct services and programs (Dean et al., 2016, p. 390). Although Dean et al's research is focused on the Peel Region in Ontario Canada, the results of their study reflect the complexity of challenges faced within an environment influenced by neoliberalism. The researchers note that while adequate funding is an ongoing issue for ISAs, there are other conditions resulting from this lack of funding which affect the types of programs that can be planned and implemented (p. 389). These conditions include "types of programs...mandatory quotas, and restrictive eligibility criteria" and their results also show that funding limitations lead to competition between various ISAs for limited resources as well as challenging both program structure and continuity (Dean et al., 2016, p. 389).

Dean et al (2016) also highlight that there is little research which focuses on what ISAs experience when planning and implementing programs in a neoliberal policy environment (p. 390). Thus, their research explores the effects of neoliberalism on non-profit organizations, and although their research focuses on a specific region, their results and speculations can be applied to a non-profit organization offering settlement services in the Fraser Valley. As these authors recognize, ISAs are unique in that they are "the point of transmission between government policies and the larger communities that [these] policies affect" (p. 390). As noted by Dean et al although neoliberalism advocates for "market-based approaches to solve complex social problems" (p. 390), the effect of devolution in terms of settlement services within the Peel Region have contradicted neoliberalism and have "reshaped the landscape of settlement services provisioning in suburban regions" (p. 390).

One example of how neoliberalism impacts immigration policy is that the purpose of immigration policy in Canada has "shifted from long-term nation building to short – term economic development" (Zhu, 2016, p. 145) and there has been a change in that there is more demand for "flexible" immigrants who can adapt to different economic environments (Gates-Gasses, Root, Shields and Baudre, 2014, p. 4). This shift exemplifies neoliberal ideology which tends to focus on immediate "economic benefits to

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immigration and requires immigrants to integrate quickly" into the labour market (Zhu, 2016, p. 145).

Again, we can see how immigration policy and the influence of neoliberalism makes it challenging for immigrant women to settle into their new communities and learn the language as well as become acquainted with their surroundings. Although neoliberal policy has a focus on immediate economic benefits requiring immigrants to adapt to the labour market quickly, in reality this may not be the case as it can take anywhere from a few months to a few years for newcomers to settle into their new community.

In sum, Zhu (2016) argues that neoliberalism has changed the notion of multiculturalism (p. 145). As mentioned, our nation is often recognized as being "multicultural" where cultural diversity and democracy are both promoted, which is very welcoming for new immigrants; however, within neoliberal ideology, the focus of multiculturalism is shifting from accommodating differences to emphasizing adjustment to a "Canadian society" and associated value systems (p. 145). Thus, various pressures experienced by immigrant women within our current settlement system are, as Zhu argues, a result of "Canada's racialized immigration history" (2016, p 145). In fact, she suggests that "studies on immigration policies and settlement services need to be reframed to challenge inequality" and to be a path for social change (p. 146). Similar to what I have found, Zhu (2016) also notes that there are not enough studies which explore how immigrant women have created their own strategies to integrate into their local communities (p. 146). My inquiry is limited as well, because I only interview three immigrant women and although this provides some insight into their personal experiences, this is not a sufficient amount of data and more research is required to further explore how immigrant women have developed their own strategies.

## 2.3. EAL Programs in Canada – Then and Now

Learning English as an additional Language (EAL)—I use this synonymously with Learning English as a Second Language (ESL)—has had a long history in Canada. As noted by Guo (2013), Canada has traditionally recruited immigrants for both economic and political interests yet, gaining full economic benefits from immigration "depends on the integration of immigrants" (p. 23). In order to support integration and to promote fluency in language national EAL/ESL programs exist throughout the country and

policies on immigration, bilingualism and multiculturalism have influenced what EAL looks like today (Guo, 2013).

Upon Canada's confederation in 1867, "two immigrant societies—British and French—agreed to form a polity fundamentally divided into a two-language, two-culture country" (Li, 2003a; as cited in Guo, 2015, p. 42). In order to "reconstruct the character of the nation", Canada attempted to implement policies on bilingualism and multiculturalism (Guo, 2015 p. 42). The Official Languages Act of 1969 fulfilled bilingualism and provided the languages of "French and English [with] equal status as official languages of Parliament and the federal government" officially excluding Aboriginal languages (p. 42). With regards to multiculturalism, Canada was the world's first nation to identify multiculturalism as an official state policy which was implemented in legislation as the Canadian Multiculturalism Act in 1988 (Guo, 2015, p. 42). This appeared to be a solution which recognized various other minority ethnic groups, in addition to the French and English, because other minority groups, particularly Ukrainians and Germans, believed that their language and culture were just as vital to building Canada as a nation (Guo, 2015, p. 43).

Multiculturalism has multiple meanings and as Guo (2015) acknowledges, over the past 40 years, Canada's implementation of multiculturalism has been internationally praised and adopted, but also criticized (p. 43). Fleras and Elliott (2002; as cited in Guo, 2015) explain that Canada has been criticized for "endors[ing] diversity in principle without actually changing in any fundamental way how power and resources [are] distributed" (p. 43). For example, as Guo (2015) further explains, one defect in the multicultural policy is with regards to the separation of language and culture (p. 43). According to bilingualism in Canada, French and English are recognized as the official languages of our nation, which "de-emphasiz[es] the languages of other cultural groups" resulting in a "cultural and linguistic hierarchy" (p. 43). While multiculturalism policy suggests that "newcomers [are] free to preserve their traditional cultures", bilingualism policy outlines the opposite and entails "the assimilation of immigrants into the cultures of the two founding races" (p. 43). In other words, "[m]ulticulturalism within a bilingual framework maintains White-settler hegemony while also disavowing exclusion of Aboriginal and other ethnic groups" (Haque, 2012; as cited in Guo, 2015). Awareness of the implications of these two notions can provide a useful context and framework for

learning English as an additional language in Canada and in particular, how this influences the experience for immigrant women, and in fact all newcomers.

As Guo (2015) outlines, the purpose of EAL/ESL programs for adult newcomers has transitioned from assimilation to integration over the years (p. 43). EAL training was first offered to adult immigrants by the federal government in 1947 and since then both the federal and provincial governments have continued to administer EAL programs (Guo, 2015, p. 43). These specialized training programs are offered through a variety of avenues, including via "school boards, community colleges, universities, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector" as well and as Guo outlines, EAL programs have four purposes: to provide English language training, to prepare for the labour market, to prepare for the citizenship test and for integration into society (p. 43).

As Guo (2015) notes, until the early 1990s, EAL programs in Canada had an assimilationist focus, with the goals of "citizenship preparation and nation building" (p. 43). In 1947, when the Citizenship Act was implemented, the government created programs known as "the Citizenship Instruction and Language Textbooks" in order to provide EAL classes for adult immigrants and the purpose of educating immigrants was to familiarize "the immigrant into the habits, customs and institutions of Canada" (Joshee, 1996; as cited in Guo, 2015, p. 44) and there was an expectation that immigrants' languages and culture would be replaced by "English and French and the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture in Canada" (Ciccarelli, 1997; as cited in Guo, 2015, p. 44).

Overtime, the focus of EAL programs has shifted from assimilationist to an emphasis on language training for employment purposes. In 1978 a national language training project was introduced, which provided language training for adult immigrants and native Canadians who were unable to find employment due to lack of English or French language skills (Guo, 2015, p. 44). Unfortunately, this policy on language training was discriminatory towards immigrant women because the program eligibility allowed language provision for "only heads of households, who were mostly male" (Giles, 1988, as cited in Guo, 2015, p. 44). Due to criticism from several immigrant organizations as well as from the public on this language policy's discriminatory nature, the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission created a new program in 1986 called the Settlement Language Training Program (SLTP) (Guo, 2015, p. 44). SLTP provided up to

500 hours of language training "to adults who were not destined for the labor market" which primarily included immigrant women (Canada Employment and Immigration Commission, 1986; as cited in Guo, 2015). This program also provided day care and transportation, and other programs including the Secretary of State Citizenship and Language Training program and the Citizenship and Community Participation Program, both prepared newcomers for their citizenship test (Guo, 2015. p. 44). In 1992, all of these programs were replaced by the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) which is currently implemented and immigrants and refugees in all provides, aside from Quebec, are entitled to accessing LINC programs, ideally within their first year in Canada (p. 44).

The Immigration Plan for 1991-1995 introduced the LINC program as its main component (Guo, 2015, p. 44). LINC's primary objective is "to provide basic language instruction to adult newcomers in one of Canada's official languages" and it also supports the social, cultural and economic integration of immigrants and refugees, while also providing information to "orient newcomers to the Canadian way of life" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006). As Guo (2015) highlights, the LINC program "indicates a policy shift from a focus on language training for employment to a focus on language for integration" (p. 44). As Bettencourt (2003) notes, the LINC program orients newcomers to "Shared Canadian values, rights and responsibilities" (p. 25) and content includes information on Canadian laws, basic vocabulary for topics such as shopping and banking, and awareness of local services such as public transportation and housing.

Despite the shift in focus from assimilation to integration within EAL programs, Li (2003) questions whether integration is simply "slow assimilation" (p. 44). Guo (2015) agrees, and indicates that although currently immigrant and adult immigrant language policies appear to "endorse a conceptual framework of integration" in practice, the policy is more "assimilationist" rather than "integrationist" (p. 47). She believes that EAL programs which focus on teaching Canadian values have actually "failed to integrate cultural difference[s] and diversity into language education" (p. 47). In fact, as Guo (2013) notes, these programs also place emphasis on "present ability and employability of immigrants through processes such as anglicizing one's names, acquiring 'soft skills' and 'fitting in' the Canadian work place" (p. 24). For example, Ilieva (2000) illustrates how sections from a unit with the title of "Department Stores" in the LINC text book *Canadian Concepts 3,* showcases the shopping habits and values of middle class

individuals, and assumes there is a common cultural experience regarding shopping in Canada (p. 23). According to Ng and Shan (2010), adult EAL programs have become "a mechanism of neoliberal control to produce ideal workers for the Canadian labour market" (p. 171).

Guo (2015) suggests that EAL educators need to do more than only focus on language skills in the LINC program (p. 48). Instead, there should be more focus on looking at "real issues facing immigrants, such as non-recognition of foreign credentials, racism in hiring practices and accent discrimination" (Guo, 2009, p. 46, Munro, 2003; as cited in Guo, 2015, p. 48). One suggestion is to perhaps place more value on the professional knowledge that immigrants have and to "activate such knowledge for Canadian contexts" (Guo, 2015, p. 48) acknowledging that immigrant professionals are aware of relevant professional concepts in their native language but they may not be able to express their knowledge in English (p. 48). Guo suggests that bilingual programs in both English and the immigrants' native language should be offered in large cities where many immigrants share a native tongue and through increased funding "different language programs can be designed to meet different needs of the learners" (Guo, 2015 p. 48).

In March 2010, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) published an Evaluation of the LINC program. This evaluation reviewed the relevance, management and delivery of the program as well as assessed its impact (p. v). In order to evaluate the program, a variety of methods were used, including a review of documents, an administrative data analysis, interviews with CIC officials, case studies of LINC classes, focus groups and surveys with various participants and program stakeholders including instructors, learners and newcomers who did not participate in the LINC program. This evaluation outlines key findings related to the relevance and design of the LINC program, its management and delivery, the impact that LINC has, as well as its cost effectiveness. Although this evaluation was completed in 2010, what I found most interesting is that the following still appears to be relevant today based on the findings in my research:

> Language constitutes the most serious barrier newcomers face to furthering their education or training and is among the most serious barriers to finding employment. (p. v).

In my research as well, learning the language, along with making connections appears to be one of the greatest challenges faced by immigrant women in particular. I will refer to this evaluation of the LINC program in my results section as well.

Moreover, Guo (2013) believes how overtime, the shift in Canadian immigration policies parallels with the shift in language policies and programs for adult immigrants and the limitation of employment preparation in current ESL/EAL programs (p. 24). On a different note, Norton (2013) explains that

> theories of the good language learner have been developed on the premise that language learners can choose under what conditions they will interact with members of the target language community and that the language learners' access to the target language community is a function of the learner's motivation. (p. 44)

As Norton notes, research has emerged which addresses the "provision of formal second language instruction for adult immigrants, including perspectives from community-based programs, workplace training, postsecondary education and family literacy programs" (p. 77) because researchers and educators within the field of EAL are encountering adults who are migrating from country to country including many who are struggling with learning the language of their new country (p. 77).

Next, I will now turn to the work of Drolet and Moorthi (2018). In their research, Drolet and Moorthi examine the experiences and challenges that newcomers in the province of Alberta face. Similar to my research data, they discover that social connections are critical for successful integration and settlement. In particular, Drolet and Moorthi explore the notions of social networks, social support and social capital as well as compare the resettlement experience of newcomers in larger versus smaller areas. They discuss the importance of community organizations and sponsors in the settlement process as well and outline that while many newcomers felt a certain sense of belonging to Canada, they still experienced racism and social exclusion, both of which are settlement concerns. I used Drolet and Moorthi's work because their emphasis on the importance of social networks is similar to the findings that I have.

Moreover, in her research on creating inclusive EAL classrooms, Wilbur (2016) interviewed LINC instructors to determine how LINC instructors can decrease learning barriers for students who have experienced trauma in particular. In her interviews, instructors talk about how restrictions on funding and policies affect both their teaching

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and the students' learning and how "policies and funding structures could make it less possible for LINC instructors to create inclusive classrooms" (p. 10). Wilbur also mentioned that the instructors she interviewed talked about other barriers including student attendance, assessment and more emphasis on measurement as well as changes in lesson prep time, hiring practices and job security (p. 10). As Wilbur points out, when the federal government took over the LINC program in 2015, "key areas of change affecting LINC instructors were policies around professional development and decreasing preparation time" both of which significantly affect the learning that happens in a classroom and thus create teaching challenges. Overall, by taking a closer look at how EAL emerged in Canada, we can have a better understanding of why newcomers, and in particular immigrant women, face multiple challenges in particular when learning EAL and settling into their new communities.

## 2.4. Challenges Experienced by Immigrant Women in Canada

Immigrant women, in particular, face numerous challenges when learning EAL, and these are a result of gender, economic and social barriers. As Edmonston (2016) notes, immigrants have given up their own home in search of "more rewarding careers and greater opportunities for their children" and, they may also struggle with "a receiving society that is ambivalent, and sometimes hostile, to their presence" (p. 105). Each individual's experience is unique and various factors influence a newcomer's experience; these factors include the country of origin, which region the immigrant(s) settle in within Canada, as well as other current events that are happening at any particular time.

Hudon (2015) explains that the number of female immigrants has significantly grown within the last 100 years (p. 3). In fact, in 2011, 52.3%of immigrants were female whereas the total population of females in Canada's population was 50.8% (Hudon, p. 3). This gap is much smaller in comparison to 100 years ago, where the immigrant female percentage was 38.7 and the total number of females in Canada's population was 47% (Hudon p. 3). Perhaps there are more females now than in the past because policies are not as restrictive.

My inquiry will focus on immigrant women because I believe their experiences are unique in comparison to those of males as well as those coming to Canada as

skilled immigrants. Statistics Canada (2017), provides the Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report (89-503-X) which outlines information about the diverse situations and experiences of women, and specifically provides data on "family status, education, employment, economic well-being, unpaid work, health and more" (Statistics Canada). The purpose of this report is to provide better understanding of the experiences of women compared to those of men while recognizing that "women are not a homogenous group and that experiences differ not only across gender but also within gender groups" (Statistics Canada). Norton (2013) agrees, explaining that "the multiple meanings of immigrant" should also be understood while referencing the various reasons that people have to immigrate, the experiences they have before coming to Canada as well as their living conditions in Canada (p. 81).

As Norton (2013) highlights, although the multiculturalism policy in Canada accepts immigrants from a variety of different backgrounds and officially promotes both acceptance and respect on the part of Canadian society as a whole, it has been recognized "that some immigrants have been marginalized and subjected to discrimination" (p. 81) and immigrant women, in particular, suffer such difficulties. Norton's research with five immigrant women emphasizes not only the effects of marginalization and discrimination, but also the ways in which individual women "work around" the identities they are assigned. Her research exemplifies that the way these particular women learned English, their exposure to the language and the opportunities they had to practice English "were structured to a large extent by their identities as women" (p. 80). Darvin and Norton (2015) also note, "how learners inscribed by race, ethnicity, gender, social class and sexual orientation are accorded or refused the right to speak" (p. 37). This focus on the unequal distribution of capital and how that inequality impacts women as language learners will provide important theoretical background to my study.

Boyd (1992) also acknowledges how some immigrant women tend to be "triply disadvantaged by their status as female, as foreign-born and by their origins or race" (p. 81). Because of this disadvantage, certain groups of immigrant women tend to find themselves at the bottom of the socio-economic scale in Canada, especially if they are from Asian or Southern-European countries (Norton, 2013, p. 81). Even after living in Canada for several years, immigrant women in comparison to immigrant men are more than two times as likely to lack enough knowledge of an official language in order to

carry on a conversation (Boyd, 1992, p. 81). Lack of an official language results in fewer job opportunities for these immigrant women (Statistics Canada, 2016) and even when immigrant women are successful in finding work, it tends to be in low-paying and ethnically segmented occupations (Norton, 2013, p. 81) where oral language is not a requirement. Statistics Canada (2016) also highlights that immigrant women have a higher need for formal language training than men.

As Norton (2013) explains, many women who are learning EAL have priorities that include taking care of their children and household and it is only after their domestic responsibilities are fulfilled that they can "indulge in the luxury of an education" (p. 82). In addition, it is the males/husbands in the households who take on most of the interactions with the outside world including purchasing items, and interacting with public institutions, among others, which further limits the amount of interaction that these women have with society (Norton, p. 82). Zhu (2016) also highlights numerous barriers that immigrant women face in accessing settlement services including "the gendered wage gap, unpaid care work, lack of support for childcare, and the racialization and marginalization" (p 144) of their everyday lives.

In addition, Ng (1981) agrees that men and women's experiences as immigrants are different and through her research has discovered that "immigrant women occupy a particular and different location in Canadian society" from men (p. 98). Ng further examined how immigrant women's experiences are positioned within the social and economic structure. Overall, Ng highlights that immigrant women's situations and experiences need to be regarded in terms of the social organization of Canadian society as opposed to certain cultural aspects that they bring with them to Canada (Ng, 1981, p. 98). Norton (2013) also draws attention to the important factor of identity and how it affects learning an additional language. She emphasizes that the relations of power in society affect a learner's access to the target language community and states how "learners who may be marginalized in one site [could] be highly valued in another; thus, of particular interest is how opportunities to speak, read and write are socially constructed in both formal and informal sites of language learning" (Norton, 2013, p. 2). Consequently, this affects the opportunities for language learning and in particular, the conditions under which learners speak, read or write the target language (Norton, 2013, p. 2).

According to Norton (2013), second language acquisition (SLA) theorists have not yet developed a comprehensive theory of identity which integrates both the language learner and the learning context and thus there is a challenge to conceptualize the relationship between the language learner and the social world (p. 44). In addition, theorists have also not yet questioned how power relations in society impact the "social interaction between second language learners and target language speakers" (p. 44). In fact, unequal relations of power may limit the opportunities that language learners have to practice the target language outside of the classroom and this phenomenon needs to be explored further (Norton, 2013, p. 45). According to Norton, identity is "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 45). She argues that SLA theory needs to have a conception of identity that is understood in relation to unequal social structures, which are produced daily in social interaction (Norton, 2013, p. 45). In addition, the majority of researchers note that one's construction of identity must be understood in reference to "relations of power between language learners and target language speakers" (Norton, 2013, p. 46).

As Bonnycastle (2017) explains, both immigrants and refugees not only carry the distress and struggles they have experienced in their home country, but also have "an enormous amount of knowledge, skills and experiences" which can contribute to the society in which they settle, but there is a risk that the latter may not be used or even recognized if these individuals are viewed as "passive victims [who are] in need of protection" (Bonnycastle, 2017, p. 654). She also draws attention to the fact that this idea of passiveness is quite often depicted in literature, portraying women as "passive actors in the conflict" which risks disregarding the knowledge and expertise they bring (p. 654). In her research, Bonnycastle (2017) looks closely at the knowledge and skills that refugee women brought to Canada and how they are currently using these to restore their life in a new society (p. 654). In addition, Bonnycastle (2017) also draws attention to the agency that these women demonstrate as they settle into their new community (p. 655). Although Bonnycastle's (2017) research focuses on the lives of Columbian refugee women who have been affected by war and are living in exile in Canada, her focus on presenting agency and how women use this when settling in Canada is relative to my study and provides an important perspective.

Moreover, Bonnycastle (2017) notes that the importance of agency is growing and in her research the participants demonstrate different forms of agency (p. 657). Similar to Norton's (2013) study, Bonnycastle also indicates that the women in her study faced barriers when it came to taking EAL classes. Although all of the women were eligible to take classes, some were unable to because there were taking care of children or were working to help support their family (Bonnycastle, 2017, p. 660). In addition, three of the 17 women in Bonnycastle's study felt comfortable and confident working in an English speaking environment but, the others did not (p. 660). The "lack of ability to communicate in English has been a barrier" to access jobs in an English-speaking environment (Bonnycastle, 2017, p. 660). Moreover, more than half of the women in her study were either not working at the location they wanted to or in the field they were trained in and this led to feelings of not feeling proud or appreciated (Bonnycastle, 2017 p. 660). Overall, Bonnycastle's research and the stories of the women she focuses on shows that refugee—and immigrant— women should not only be viewed as individuals in need but also as "agents who make use of their knowledge to transcend the limitations of their situations in order to succeed in a new society (p. 663).

On a similar note, Heller (1987; as cited in Norton, 2013) outlines that language allows an individual to negotiate "a sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time, and it is through language that a person gains—or is denied— access to powerful social networks" which provides opportunities to speak (p. 45). Thus, language is understood in reference to its social medium, as opposed to being neutral (Norton, 2013, p. 45). When discussing the literature that began to include immigrant women experiences, Shan (2015) indicates that the "first wave" of such literature focused on comparing the experiences of immigrant women to men, with a particular focus on "the changing roles that women play as a result of immigration" (p. 47). Furthermore, subsequent studies began focusing on the trend of "transnationalism" which is when immigrants merge and maintain multiple social relations that connect their original society and the society they are going to settle in (p. 47).

Furthermore, Massey (2013) also draws attention to the fact that class inequalities have increased significantly due to gender interactions, and in addition to the "historically powerful interaction between race and class" (p. 1747). Massey explains the concept of intersectionality, which is "the study of how categorical distinctions made on the basis of race, class and gender interact to generate inequality" (p. 1747). According

to Massey (2013), scholars in the US use intersectionality as a way to showcase social stratification in the country. Goffman (2009, as cited in Massey, 2013) provides an example of intersectionality at work—factors such as deindustrialization, failing schools and an increase in the punitive justice system have created a "precarious existence for poor minority men" (Massey, 2013, p. 1748). Massey (2013) also draws attention to work by Desmond (2012) and Desmond and Valdez (2013) who indicate how the "emergence of a two-tiered service economy, cutbacks in state support for children and high rates of foreclosure and eviction" has led to an increased marginalization of poor women (p. 1748).

As we can see, there are numerous challenges faced by immigrant women in particular, as they settle into a new community. These include social disconnection, finding employment, learning the local language, discrimination and marginalization, despite the various supports and programs that are available. I will further explore these challenges in my inquiry and present information from different perspectives. I will first describe the methodology of my inquiry in the next section.

# Chapter 3.    Methodology

*[T]he qualitative interview is a construction site of knowledge. An interview is literally an inter view, an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest.*

*(Kvale, 1996; as cited in Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 75)*

## 3.1.  My Approach

I have located my research in an EAL/ESL program in the Fraser Valley. My research has been carried out over a period of one year from the time of approval from the Office of Research Ethics (ORE) (approval date: July 14, 2017). My research approach is qualitative and includes both interviews and observations. It is important to note that my research is unique to the context that I was in, to the participants that were involved and to the interpretations that I arrived at; thus, it is not necessarily generalizable. Instead, this inquiry provides insight that I hope other individuals can learn from. It is also important to highlight that within this research I draw upon my own experiences and my Umee's personal story as a way to understand immigrant women's learning. As already mentioned, this inquiry is my interpretation and the comments and insights shared are reflective of a specific time, place and context. I chose to take a qualitative approach because I wanted to illustrate multiple experiences and views on this topic with the goal of capturing valuable information that would inform my inquiry.[2]

I initially contacted the agency where I carried out my study via email and proposed my research topic. This was followed by a welcoming response and eventual approval by the administrators. I was grateful for the opportunity to speak with educators and staff and to carry out observations in English language classrooms. Once I started observing in the classrooms, I was able to approach students directly with an invitation to participate in my study. I provided a short presentation to their classes with details

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[2]There is no element of deception or partial disclosure in the research and there were no foreseeable risks or no known risks to participants in this study. This study was designated as minimal risk because the potential harm or risk to participants is no greater than what they could encounter in the course of their daily lives.

about the goals of my research and invitations to participate in interviews and with a request to observe learning in their classrooms. I was also able to interview volunteers.

I interviewed 13 individuals including three immigrant women language learners, three settlement workers, two EAL instructors, three other staff members, and two volunteers. The interviews were audio recorded and each was approximately 60 minutes in length. At the time of the interview I asked participants if I could follow up with them by phone or email if needed to clarify information and indicated that they could also contact me.  All participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time; each participant also signed a consent form. No incentives were offered for the interviews, aside from informing participants that they have an opportunity to share their insight and contribute to providing information about this topic. Although there may not be personal benefit, the field of EAL may benefit from gaining more insight into the learning and settlement needs of immigrant women. My hope is that individual participants benefited from sharing and reflecting on their experiences. I audio recorded each interview, transcribed the interview and analysed my transcriptions to inform my results and discussion section.

Throughout these research activities in this agency, I felt very welcomed and respected. Out of the 13 interview participants, I had previously met four of the administrators because of my experience completing a teaching practicum. I truly appreciated the warm welcome and openness to accommodate provision of a space for my interviews as well as adjustment of schedules to include an interview time. Furthermore, when completing the class observations, I also felt very welcomed and was initially concerned that my presence may have an effect on the learning environment but, this did not appear to be the case. I felt that because I introduced myself and the purpose of my research prior to observing, students continued to learn as they normally would without my presence because they knew why I was in the classroom. Also, during all of my observations, I sat in the back of the classroom. I also followed up with one of the instructors after my first observation and she felt that all her students still acted and learned in the same way that they did when I wasn't in the classroom. In general, the instructors and students seemed pleased to have me a part of their class and some students also requested to have a copy of the completed research. Next, I provide more details about my research site in the following section.

## 3.2.  Research Site: Community Services Agency

The community services agency that my research took place at is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) which is also a non-profit organization recognized by the Ministry of Children and Family Development in BC and more info about the accreditation process is available online (Polyglot Agency, 2019, Accreditation)[3]. The agency is overseen by a volunteer board of directors who coordinate various functions including policy, financial decisions and fundraising (Polyglot Agency, 2019, Board of Directors). All of the agency's programs and services are provided at no cost to the community, and funding is received from federal, municipal and provincial government grants as well as from local service organizations (Polyglot Agency, 2019, About us). About 10 % of the organization's budget is from personal donations, memberships, earned revenue as well as numerous fundraising efforts (Polyglot Agency, 2019, About us).

### A brief history of the EAL program.

The agency where my research is situated is well established in the Fraser Valley and responds to the current needs of its community in terms of programs and services. The agency has expanded over the years to new locations and has a variety of programs that enfold language education, settlement and family services. Like many such programs in the Fraser Valley and beyond, these services are integrated and the work of educators is inclusive of a wide range of services in order to accommodate the needs of different people. One of the settlement workers I interviewed mentioned how each work day is different for her because "people just come in with different needs" (Claire, January 18, 2018)

Due to its history and broad scope of programming, this agency is experienced in working within the paradigm of non-profit budgets. One interviewee with extensive experience at an administration level, acknowledges that although they do not have all of the funding, she believes there should be allowance for "flexibility, experimentation and practice at the local level because circumstances differ from community to community"

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[3]For anonymity, the pseudonym Polyglot Agency (PA) is used in this article to refer to the name of the agency where this study was conducted, and in sources published by the institution that are cited herein

(Angie, March 15, 2018). Essentially, she explains how "the state can't provide everything" so you have to be creative and look at other options (Angie, March 15, 2018). Another staff member observed that "we don't have as much resources or funding, compared to Vancouver" (Claire, January 18, 2018) and this limitation has posed issues with regards to expectations that some learners have in terms of the types and scope of services that could be provided. For example, there was an expectation by some newcomers that the women would learn separately from the men but, it was made clear by staff that due to limited space and funding, and perhaps for other cultural reasons as well, this would not be possible (Claire, January 18, 2018).

**Services offered.**

My research in particular falls within the scope of Immigrant Services, which is a division of the agency that receives both provincial and federal government funding and includes language education as well as settlement services. The mandate of Immigrant Services is to support newcomers to become contributors to the economy and full participants in the community. As a part of its vision, Immigrant Services outlines that by gaining English language skills, in addition to finding employment and establishing community connections will assist with successful settlement and integration. Overall, the agency's goal is to build a more welcoming and inclusive community through supporting the successful settlement of newcomers. Sofia, one of the settlement workers whom I interviewed, explained that "settlement is three-fold—information and orientation sessions, community connections and referrals" (Sofia, January 25, 2018). As a part of my interviews, I asked what programs and services are provided for immigrant women and in addition to the formal services that were listed, one of the settlement workers mentioned that although English language classes is what the agency is most recognized for, she believes her "job covers everything, from paperwork, to making phone calls, [to] help with housing, getting kids in school, finding a family doctor, getting a driver's license, [and] wanting to find [out] about evaluating credentials" (Claire, January 18, 2018). I believe this comment reflects how committed the agency staff are to ensure they are meeting the varying needs of the population they serve.

Learning a language is essential to successful settlement in a community. For adult immigrants in particular, research has shown that learning the language is one of the most difficult challenges experienced as they settle into their community. As Guo

(2013) highlights, EAL programs for adult immigrants need to take into account that immigrants have "multiple attachments to specific languages, cultures and values" and thus both policy and practice in language programs needs to be changed (p. 38) in order to reflect these aspects. The agency accommodates language learning by providing a few different options for individuals including formal English language classes, as well as drop-in conversation workshops, known as conversation circles. The English language classes are free and are in session from September to June in the morning and evening to all immigrants who are 17 years and older. These classes are not available for citizens but for those who are permanent residents. Childcare is also available onsite for students who have children that are 0 to 5 years. There is also a conversational English program offering an opportunity to learn and practice English without being in a formal class setting.

I describe these services in detail to illustrate that this agency works hard to connect their clients with programs and opportunities available in the larger community, including introducing clients to the library as well as the other service agencies, which has federally funded programming available (Claire, January 18, 2018). As one of the settlement workers expressed, they are essentially trying "different ways of connecting our clients to [the] community" (Sofia, January 25, 2018). These comments from Sophia and Claire emphasize the value of community connections.

## 3.3. Study Participants

The participants in my study include newcomer immigrant women, all who have been in Canada for one to three years and who are a part of the English language program. In addition, these women may or may not be a part of additional language learning programs including conversation circles or working one on one with a volunteer tutor. I chose to observe and interview women learners from the LINC 4 level class because I was informed that these learners had a high enough fluency in the English language in order to comprehend my interview questions and the purpose of this research. Furthermore, I interviewed other agency staff including settlement workers, instructors, administration as well as volunteer tutors who work directly with language learners.

Since there is a limited number of staff at the agency, I have supported confidentiality by using pseudonyms when citing the interviewees, and by omitting any details that may personally identify respondents. After completing all of the interviews, I emailed each interviewee and asked them to provide a pseudonym. I was unable to contact the three immigrant women language learners and thus I chose the pseudonyms for these women. The pseudonyms do not necessarily reflect the participant's cultural background as I did not suggest this as a requirement when asking participants to choose a pseudonym. In addition, I believe that a pseudonym that does not reflect the participants cultural background further supports the confidentiality of their identities. It is also important to note that because I had limited access to the learners, the perspectives of the service providers are more dominant. More information about each interviewee is included in the next section.

## 3.4. Participant Information

Demographic data was collected to provide information about the participants and their backgrounds. I felt that this particular demographic data would provide enough contextual information to illustrate who my participants are and the unique backgrounds they each have. I was pleased that everyone was open to providing personal information and, informed them that they were not obligated to answer all the questions.

All questions regarding demographic information that was collected are included in the research instruments (See Appendix B). While the questions are similar, they were tailored to fit the role of the person that was being interviewed. For example, a settlement worker was asked about how many years they have been working in settlement services whereas an instructor was asked how many years they have been working as an EAL instructor. Although I collected information about educational background, familial situation, ethnic background and number of years working with the agency as well as within this particular field, I chose to not include this information in my final research because there is a possibility that the participants can be identified since the agency is well known and the characteristics of the participants are quite unique. Nonetheless, I do summarize some of the information below as a guide to readers. The following table provides a list of all of the participants, identified by their pseudonym and their role as it pertains to this study:

Table 3.4.1 List of Participants

| Pseudonym | Role |
|-----------|------|
| Angie | Agency Staff |
| Marie | Agency Staff |
| Kaitlin | Agency Staff |
| Claire | Agency Staff |
| Jenny | Agency Staff |
| Sofia | Agency Staff |
| Ashley | Agency Staff |
| Nicole | Agency Staff |
| Margaret | Agency Volunteer |
| Gemma | Agency Volunteer |
| Annie | Language Learner |
| Kayla | Language Learner |
| Heather | Language Learner |

The participants in this study bring a diverse range of knowledge and experience to language education. In particular, the service providers had postgraduate degrees in K-12 education adult education, TESL, sciences and medicine. Some EAL instructors have taught elementary school education before completing their TESL certification and moving into adult education. Some of the settlement workers and volunteers also had additional certificates.

With respect to the participants who are language learners, one learner—Annie—arrived in Canada a few years ago and has not had formal education in her home country beyond grade eight. Annie is currently not working but hopes to open up her own daycare. Another learner, Heather, worked as a nurse for 15 years in her home country and is starting her career and education over again in Canada because the circumstances of her migration meant that she lost the paperwork that prove her credentials.  Heather is currently working to improve her English to recommence studies at university. Finally, the third learner—Kayla—attained secondary school and then got married. She and her family were living in refugee camps before coming to Canada and they are now settled in the Fraser Valley. One of her goals is to open up her own day care as well. Overall, she expresses she is very happy in Canada, and she feels as though it is her country because she knows more people now, but she still really misses her family and worries about their safety.

It is important to note that there are different ways to immigrate to Canada, including through government assistance or through private sponsorship. For purposes of confidentiality, I did not ask the language learners to disclose what process they experienced to immigrate although, whichever process they went through would reflect their experiences with settlement and the types of support they received.

## 3.5.  Data Collection: Semi-structured Interviews and Classroom Observations

For this inquiry I used the semi-structured interview approach. In this approach, the topics I want to address were predetermined but how I framed the questions differed depending on the participant. For example, I asked questions in different orders or not at all if the question was not relevant to my interviewee. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview approach allows for following up on items that are shared which may be interesting and which I would want more information on. As mentioned, in addition to ascertaining demographic data, I asked each participant a series of questions related to the experiences of immigrant women. These interviews provide information on the experiences of immigrant women who are learning EAL in the Fraser Valley from a variety of perspectives. I gained insight on the learning experiences of immigrant women along with some of the challenges that are faced. While the topics that I discussed with each of my interviewees are similar and are outlined in the 'Research Instrument-Interview Topics for Participants' (Appendix A), the questions were framed differently depending on who I was interviewing. All of the questions that I asked are in Appendix B.

It has been recognized that interviews can be challenging since they are limited data sources simply because they are based on perceptions and these perceptions can be distorted due to personal bias, anxiety, politics and even a lack of awareness (Patton, 1990). In addition, another challenge is that interview data can be influenced both by the time that the interview takes place and the participant's emotional state as well as the nature of the questions and the context (Patton, 1990). Despite this, I believe interviews offer rich data and valuable insight into people's lives, and are unique in that the information is in the participants' own words. As Dyson and Genishi (2005) note, interviews are supplementary and they provide further understanding of what was observed, perhaps in a classroom, and sometimes help to interpret observed activities

from participants' perspectives as well (p. 76). In addition, Kvale (1996; as cited in Dyson & Genishi) notes the valuable nature of qualitative interviews in the following:

> [t]he qualitative interview is a construction site of knowledge. An interview is literally an *inter view,* an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest. (p. 75)

Interviews can be formal or informal, where the formal interviews have predetermined questions while the informal interviews are similar to quick conversations. Even "the most formal interviews …are conversational and narrative in style" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 76). As Dyson and Genishi (2005) note, interviews serve another purpose in that they assist researchers with filling "gaps in their data" and allow researchers to "hear about what is happening in participants' own words" (p. 76).

### What I learned in the research process.

Each of my interviews provided plenty of valuable insight and data that informed my inquiry and also provided me with more information from the participants' perspectives. Throughout my data collection process, including conducting interviews and completing classroom observations, I came to the realization that as an EAL instructor, I am so focused on teaching the content and the language skills that other aspects which also influence EAL learning may be overlooked. These include contributions and experiences of my colleagues, the students and administration staff and how all of their input can collectively influence the students and their EAL learning experience. This influence can be direct or even indirect, simply because the context in which students are learning can so strongly affect their experience. These interviews reminded me that when teaching EAL, there are numerous other aspects at play and each person in an organization contributes to the quality of the experience.

Furthermore, I also gathered data from two different classrooms throughout six, one-hour observation sessions. All students consented to the observations. As Dyson and Genishi (2005) note, most of what we know regarding language and literacy is "embedded in observable everyday activities and transcribed conversations in the classroom or elsewhere" (p. 75). In particular, I used the structured observation check-list to observe these classrooms; this observation check-list is titled the *Observation Guide* and is included as Appendix C. The purpose of these observations flows from the issues raised in the literature review in Chapter 2, that we need to understand more the

non-linguistic aspects of how immigrant women learn a new language in the Canadian classroom context.

Data from the classroom observations was generated via hand-written notes with reference to my observational checklist. The data from the interviews included answers to the questions asked as well as audio recorded material, which was transcribed into a word document and anonymized by having identifying names and information removed. All of the data was typed and saved in a word document on a USB drive and the audio-recorded data was also stored on a USB drive and has been kept in my possession, as the principal investigator. The audio recordings and the consent forms will be destroyed after submission of the master's thesis as per Research Ethics Board (REB) requirements.

## 3.6. Data Analysis

Overall, my goal was to highlight the learning experiences of immigrant women, from different perspectives: the immigrant women language learners, service providers who work directly with immigrant women language learners (settlement workers, instructors, volunteers, administrators), my Umee's personal experience based on conversations that I have had with her and my own observations as well as reflections. I promoted the trustworthiness of my data by sharing this data with the participants and providing opportunity for feedback. In addition, I also looked for counter examples in order to ensure that I was not over-simplifying what my participants had said and finally, my findings relate to what others have found in their research, including Wilbur (2016), Drolet and Moorthi (2018), Ng and Shan (2010) and Dean et al (2016) among others. Upon completing my interviews and observations, I had—what seemed like—endless amounts of notes, audio-recordings, random pamphlets and papers that I had picked up during my visits to the agency along with various ideas of how I wanted to organize my data. On the one hand, I was excited to have completed the data collection and to have gained such rich and useful information, while on the other hand, I was nervous thinking about the vast amounts of data that I had collected and was unaware of how to start organizing it. Dyson and Genishi (2005) illustrate, to an extent, exactly how I felt upon the completion of my data collection:

> [b]y the time we as researchers are ready to focus on data analysis, messy human experience has become notebooks (and disk files) of typed field notes, bulging folders of artifacts of one kinds or another, piles of (hopefully mostly transcribed) audiotapes and other evidence showing that we have been there and done that work of gathering data (p. 79).

Although perhaps a bit exaggerative, Dyson and Genishi capture how upon data completion a researcher has several items to work with, and the next step is deciding how to approach the data analysis, which they describe as "the process by which one transforms data (field notes, interviews, artifacts) into findings (assertions about a studied phenomenon that answer posed questions" (p. 79).

I began my data analysis by exploring the research questions indicated in my inquiry and by looking for patterns in terms of the learning experiences of immigrant women. I began with reviewing the audio transcriptions of each interview and color-coding common ideas and information. I then reviewed the various interview questions that I had and organized the information from my interviews to answer these questions. Next, I wrote out an outline of how I would write my results and discussion section and adopted the following steps to guide my inquiry:

- Illustrate how some immigrant women learn EAL within the Fraser Valley;

- Examine the challenges that some immigrant women face when learning EAL;

- Examine how EAL programs and educators can support language learning for immigrant women in order to optimize their settlement;

- Improve my own practice as an EAL educator.

I also categorized the various questions that I asked each of my interview participants within one of these three subtopics. Finally, I also include reflections of how I can improve my personal practice as an EAL educator concerning recognizing challenges and optimizing settlement.

In addition to the data from the interviews and observations, I provide insight from my parents' personal story and in particular my Umee's personal experience as an immigrant woman. As mentioned, my Umee's experience is what initially inspired me to pursue this particular topic of looking at the experiences of immigrant women. I find that

too often people and experiences are categorized based on what is available on media, without perhaps the realization that although there may be similarities, each individual's experience is unique. In addition, I also wanted to illustrate that although immigration has significantly evolved throughout the past several decades, the individual experiences that immigrant women particularly—and in fact all immigrants—have with regards to settlement and language, have similarities no matter when these individuals arrived in their new communities.

Furthermore, I feel that my data is limited with regards to the amount of contextual information I received from all the interviewees. It is also limited because I focused on interviewing a select group of individuals who are all associated with my research site in one way or another. This introduces a limitation because all of these individuals have a direct relationship with the research site. It is also limited because I only interviewed women and finally, it is limited because my positionality has also influenced how I have collected, interpreted and analyzed my data based on my own perceptions and biases. I have become much more aware of my own perceptions and biases and how both of these are influenced by my personal experience, as well as by how I may be judged and viewed by others. I will discuss this further in the following chapters.

# Chapter 4.    Results and Discussion

*I think women have, just generally speaking, a need for connection. I don't know if men have [that need] maybe as much or they don't express it, but I think women in particular want to feel like somebody knows their story and somebody cares for them.*

*(Claire, January 18, 2018)*

## 4.1.  Overview of my Findings

For my research, I had initially proposed to explore the following question: What challenges do immigrant women experience when learning English as an additional language (EAL)? As stated in the Methodology chapter, I pursued this question in the following research steps:

- Illustrate the policy context for adult EAL education in Canada and in the Fraser Valley;

- Examine the challenges that some immigrant women face when learning EAL;

- Examine how EAL programs and educators can support language learning for immigrant women in Canada in order to optimize their settlement;

- Reflect on how I can improve my personal practice as an EAL educator with regards to recognizing challenges and optimizing settlement.

Upon completing my research and reflecting on my notes and observations, I have become more aware of the complex and unique experiences of each of the participants I met. In this findings chapter I will focus my discussion on the perspectives that I gained through interviewing the service providers and learners. I also bring in my own perspective where relevant to my findings.

I have learned that EAL programs, educators and other service providers at the agency are doing all that they can to support the successful settlement of newcomers in the Fraser Valley. For example, they check in with newcomers and find out specific needs, reach out to other organizations when needed, hold informative sessions to create awareness of the different issues and circumstances that newcomers face,

continuously educate themselves and also strive to get funding in order to support more programming and services. Sometimes services providers are limited by factors such as funding and resources, as well as by the fact that not every strategy is going to work for each person. I also became more aware of the power dynamics that exist among the educators, learners and program administration, which can be traced to positionality and privilege, but to federal government language and settlement policies as well. Perceptions and assumptions of who women are influence the type of support offered to newcomers. For example, a service provider raised in Canada may have a certain perception and expectation of immigrants' needs whereas newcomers themselves may have a different perception, yet the former would have more power due to their positionality and role.

It was also mentioned more than once that learning English and improving one's English language skills will support integration and job search. While I agree with this notion, I can also understand that newcomers want to continue speaking their native language. I have had newcomers express that they fear their children may forget their native language if they don't continue to speak it, especially when they are home, but simultaneously also express that they want themselves and their children to become fluent in English. My parents also emphasized learning the languages of Punjabi and Urdu during my upbringing, and insisted on speaking these languages when at home as a way of ensuring that these languages would not be forgotten. Although I believe I needed English to function and participate in certain aspects of society, as I got older, I appreciated knowing the languages of Punjabi and Urdu even more—without these two languages I would have missed out on a lot of interactions and opportunities with family and friends who share the same culture and language.

As noted above, I started out with a set of inquiries and yet new and unintended themes emerged; one of these is the important role of social connections in learning. I was reminded that valuable social connections are integral to learning and settlement, in particular for newcomer women. This important aspect not only came up during my interviews and observations, but it was also prevalent in my Umee's story that I shared in Chapter 1.2. What I have found most interesting is that although social connections are not formally acknowledged as a learning goal in the LINC programs, they are integral to the learning experience. In addition to discussing the importance of social connections in the community and in the learning environments, I will also address the challenges

associated with social disconnection. I have thus organized my research results into three categories:

Social Connections and Learning EAL;
Challenges of not being Socially Connected;
Learning English and Settlement.

I organize these topics further into subtopics based on my analysis and the themes that emerged during my interviews. I felt that by organizing my research this way, I was able to capture and highlight the information collected through my interviews, class observations and personal reflections and bring my own voice into the analysis while also respecting the voices of the participants. Throughout the results and conclusion sections, I will also provide some reflections and personal insight regarding how I can improve my personal practice as an EAL educator and researcher.

## 4.2.  Social Connections and Learning EAL

The theme of social connections became a powerful thread throughout my research. Recalling my Umee's story, the impact of social connections was vital to her; the friendships she made and the contacts she established during her early days in Canada ultimately supported her settlement and sense of belonging, which in turn has shaped my own life and that of my family. My interviews suggest that this is still true today among more recent arrivals, and the importance of social connections emerges in the texts and goals of this language settlement agency which takes a team based approach to build a more welcoming and inclusive community for newcomers to Canada where they prioritize 'making solid community connections'. I appreciate seeing this distinct statement on the website, and have found this approach is recognized in EAL and settlement research.

In their study, Drolet and Moorthi (2018) found that "social relationships are crucial to settlement and integration" and they discuss the importance of ethno-cultural communities, sponsors as well as community organizations in the settlement and integration process. In particular, they examined social networks, social support and social capital among refugees who arrived in 2015 and 2016 and collected data via surveys, community forums and interviews. The participants in this study indicated that

the social connections were so integral to their settlement because these connections allowed them to "feel part of the community" (p. 116).

Wilbur (2016) made a similar discovery in her research on creating inclusive EAL classrooms. Wilbur interviewed LINC instructors to determine how they can decrease learning barriers for students who have experienced trauma in particular. She shares that the instructors she interviewed talked about creating a sense of connection and the importance of listening to and valuing their students' stories in order to create inclusivity in the classroom (p.13). Wilbur also shares that one of the instructors she interviewed highlighted the importance of being able to refer newcomers to settlement workers and counselors when needed—this also emphasizes the notion of fostering and building connections. In her words, Wilbur explains that "[a]n important relation besides that of colleagues and supervisors is the connection to settlement workers and other resource people in order to develop links with various services outside the classroom" (p. 16)

Despite this, I have found that LINC does not formally recognize social connections as a learning goal or pedagogy. On the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) website, there is an evaluation of the LINC program and within this evaluation, it is outlined that LINC

> provides basic language training English or French to legal school-leaving age permanent residents to facilitate social, cultural, economic and political integration into Canada. By developing linguistic communication skills, immigrants, and refugees are better able to function in Canadian society and contribute to the economy (Government of Canada, 2011).

While it is indicated that learning English or French will aid in "social integration" there isn't mention of the importance of social connections as a pedagogy or practice that can be cultivated in LINC programs. Despite a lack of formal acknowledgement in the policy, the emphasis and value on social connections was very prominent in my interviews and classroom observations. Perhaps this is an example of where information on the website needs to be updated.

All the interview participants spoke of the importance of social connections and the value of connecting newcomers to one another while also building connections within the community. Many interviewees also shared examples of how social connections

supported their language learning efforts. It was interesting that no particular question elicited a response about the importance of social connections, rather, the theme emerged spontaneously. In the next section I highlight various perspectives on the importance of social connections.

## 4.1.2 Perspectives on the Importance of Social Connections

Several interviewees including educators, learners and administrators believe that women have a greater need for social connection than males. It is important to note that all my interviewees identify as female, and although this was unintentional, I believe it does influence the various perspectives and ideas that are shared. While studies have shown the importance of social connections for women, I found that there is a limited amount of research on social connections and immigrant women in particular. Perhaps this is an area of research that could be further explored. That being said, it was interesting to hear more than one interviewee mention that they believe women have more of a need than men for social groups and interactions. The quote I started this chapter with highlights how one of my interviewees explains this in her own words:

> I think women have, just generally speaking, a need for connection. I don't know if men have [that need] maybe as much or they don't express it, but I think women in particular want to feel like somebody knows their story and somebody cares for them. (Claire, January 18, 2018)

Moreover, one of the settlement workers acknowledges that there appears to be more women social groups than men social groups and suggests that perhaps women need these groups more than men. She believes that so many women groups exist because women "need that social connection for emotional well-being" (Sofia, January 25, 2018). I question whether social groups for men exist as well but, they may not be as well known; perhaps this is a reflection of the fact that all my participants are female.

On a similar note, one of the instructors explains the importance of friendships for immigrant women as this provides an avenue for having someone to talk to. She believes that "the first part of getting used to the language is making friends" (Nicole, April 11, 2018). Nicole explains that friendships are important because they provide a sense of security and allows individuals to not feel alone (April 11, 2018). Nicole agrees that immigrant women, as opposed to men, have more of a need to connect and build

friendships because, in general, their priorities are difference. She explains that while "men are very focused on getting jobs" the "women are very focused on looking after kids" but when kids go to school the women are home alone.

I find it interesting that there are similar gendered viewpoints regarding a need for social connection, amongst my interviewees, given that all of the interviewees are women themselves. I question if a certain viewpoint becomes accepted in an organization and perhaps influences individual workers and their practices. Instead of working from the assumption that social connection is not important to men, I wonder if the needs of men are simply different, and are also expressed differently. This is another area of research that would need to be further explored.

On another note, Gemma—one of the volunteers whom I interviewed—shares her approach to teaching and how she first focuses on creating a personal connection and relationship with those with whom she is working by simply listening to their story. Through this relational approach, she builds a friendship and expresses that she has "a lot of friends from a lot of different cultures" (April 4, 2018). I think these friendships indicate that this pedagogy of listening (Low & Sonntag, 2013) is effective. According to Low and Sonntag, truly listening to one another can promote better relationships, create trust and ultimately foster an environment for learning (p. 7851). In her own words, Gemma explains how she builds her connections with newcomers by listening to them:

> I'm very receptive to listening to their personal stories, which they are very willing to share. They have such a need to express themselves, to share their story, and I'm so interested in each person's story, because each person is so unique and their experience in the world is so different from how I've lived my life. I find that by being a good listener to them, they appreciate my interest in them as a person, as an individual. From that what happens to me, is I become their friend—their English friend— because most of them have a hard time making connections with people who speak English. (April 4, 2018)

This volunteer describes in detail how she focuses on personalizing each relationship and takes the time to find out what is unique about a person and what their interests are in order to support the connection and relationship. I realized that the one-on-one tutor opportunity is more than just teaching someone English. It's building a trusting relationship where a newcomer learns about the language and culture as well in ways that sometimes become friendships.

As already mentioned, it is clear that the art of listening is central to forming social connections that in turn make language learning possible and supports the settlement process for newcomers. This is most effective when connection work is intentional and carefully crafted. Another settlement worker whom I interviewed shared a specific example which highlights this. She had met women through her work at the agency who are all fairly fluent in English. She was hearing the same story from all three women—they didn't know how to make connections, where to find friends, felt isolated and couldn't find work (Claire, January 18, 2018). Claire thought they all had things in common and were also similar in age, so she facilitated a coffee meeting and received positive feedback from each of the women. Not only did the women exchange contact information but she expresses that "they all appreciated the fact that I facilitated something to make that connection happen" (Claire, January 18, 2018).

Furthermore, another agency staff member provided an example of how social connections led to friendships for one group of moms from the same culture who formed a mom's group and attended conversation classes together with a common motivation of wanting to improve their English language skills in order to have access to better education and career options. They wanted "a better education for themselves, so they could also have better education for their children" (Kaitlin, January 18, 2018).

On a similar note, Kaitlin described how during coffee break in the morning classes, women tend to gather in their cultural and language groups, and "obviously there is a reason that is happening, because they miss it" (Kaitlin, January 18, 2018). She expresses she would do the same since she values time with her close girlfriends. Although these language-culture groups are important, they may also prevent social interaction and integration among diverse culture and language groups. These examples highlight the importance of social connections. I question if women do have a greater need for social connections and believe this is an important area for further research.

## 4.2.1. Social Connections in the Community

Furthermore, the importance of connections in the community was also highlighted. As one of the interviewees acknowledged, it can be overwhelming, in particular for women, to settle in a new community and establish a home, find their traditional food, and connect with others, which is why a central community service or

"contact point" is so integral because these connections can happen more quickly (Angie, March 15, 2018). Angie also talks about how soon newcomers make connections in their new community, is related to how successfully and quickly they can settle and perhaps experience less settlement related stress. In her own words she explains that "potentially early connection and provision of service can lessen tensions and facilitate processes" and although tension may not be eliminated, she believes that early connection can definitely help (Angie, March 15, 2018). Another participant, Marie, agrees it is very beneficial to connect as soon as possible. In particular, she believes that for those who connect right away, there is access to a support system and an opportunity to get involved and have access to information (Marie, January 25, 2018).

In addition, building connections also leads to creating a safe environment. Wilbur (2016) highlights the importance of creating a safe and inclusive space for students explaining that by that doing so community is built (p. 16). I was informed that the agency encourages their students to attend the numerous community opportunities and workshops because "every little bit helps and these are safe environments to practice the spoken language" (Marie, January 25, 2018). Marie also mentioned that the agency always encourages additional programming opportunities just to focus on building language skills (January 25, 2018).

Another settlement worker, Claire, shares the importance of connections with community sponsors in the lives of immigrant women, and all newcomers in general. In reference to refugee women who are privately sponsored and those who are government sponsored, she explains that private sponsors are quite involved with the newcomers and thus believes that those women are "far better off…because the latter are left to do things on their own" (Claire, January 18, 2018). Claire describes these private sponsors as companions who "will step in their lives and almost make them feel like family [which] makes the world of a difference" (January 18, 2018). Settlement worker Sofia talks about how sponsors have really helped newcomers in the community as well:

> sponsors have gone over and above and beyond. I think without those sponsors I don't know how the settlement would have gone, because it really does take a community. There is only so much we can do, but for the most part it's been positive so we are making movement. (Sofia, January 25, 2018)

Sophia's comment highlights that support for newcomers is not necessarily only available at any particular service agency, but is also from the wider community.

Drolet and Moorthi's (2018) findings also highlight the important role that sponsors have for newcomers explaining that "these relationships were often the first social ties" that newcomers develop (p. 111). In their study, the participants talked about how sponsors provided immense support including connecting newcomers to employment, introducing them to immigrant serving organizations and assisting with housing as well as finding schools for their children (p. 111). It is emphasized that for some newcomers this was a very close relationship "not simply for material resources or social capital, but also for emotional or psychological needs" (p. 111). That being said, newcomers who had private sponsors also indicated that they had weaker connections to settlement agencies and a greater sense of self-reliance as well as used networks through their sponsors to find work, housing or access to language education (p. 111). It was also discovered that some sponsors in Canada provided support for a short while and then expected newcomers to find out information on their own (p.111). Drolet and Moorthi (2018) acknowledge that further research is required to understand the relationships between sponsors and newcomers and the different settlement experiences that flow from different refugee experiences. My own inquiry is limited in this as well and I signal this as another area for further research.

On a different note, I was also curious about how newcomers, and in particular immigrant women, find out about services in the community. My presumption was that all newcomers either receive information about immigrant services formally from a government agency or upon their arrival to Canada, or informally via the connections they have, be it family and/or friends. It was eye opening to discover that most newcomers don't find out about Immigrant Services right away and those who do tend to find out about the programs via word of mouth, hence another reason that social connections are important. This introduces a circular dynamic in which those who are better connected upon arrival are more likely to access language and settlement services that in turn facilitate greater social integration. This can lead to inequalities and differences in newcomer experiences that requires more attention.

I asked all of my interviewees about how immigrant women find out about the agency and it was interesting to hear the staff members' perspectives about how their

clients find them. Claire explains that people learn about their programs through "family and friends" (January 18, 2018) which supports the importance of social connections as already discussed. Claire describes that she believes people are usually quite eager to connect with individuals from their own home countries and it is through these networks that newcomers tend to find out about services (January 18, 2018).

Another settlement worker, Sofia, explains that a needs assessment is completed by each newcomer. This assessment probes a variety of topics including housing, immigration, employment and education, in order to identify individual needs. From this information, community connections are formed including connecting to different local agencies. In her own words, Sofia outlines this process:

> we set goals, then we work towards achieving those goals, and then that often means we have to connect with different agencies in the community. (, January 25, 2018)

Sophia explains that further community connections are thus made. For example, if employment is a goal, they will connect newcomers to an employment agency, and if education is a goal then newcomers will be connected to an education institute (January 25, 2018).

Furthermore, because of these connections and networks, cultural communities will form as well. In Drolet and Moorthi's (2018) research, participants highlighted the importance of social connections within their own cultural group (p. 114). In particular, most of their participants talked about positive and supportive connections and relationships which had the "familiarity and comfort of a shared history and culture" (p. 114). An interviewee in my research also echoed that many people find out about services via word of mouth and also through posters, brochures, the website and via email (Marie, January 25, 2018).

It also happens that other government agencies in the community refer newcomers to the agency even when the issues they are experiencing may not be language or settlement related; this can contribute to people 'getting the run around' so it takes longer for people to get the help they need. This suggests that settlement in a new community, and in a new country, isn't just about learning the language and finding out where certain services are, but rather about relationships. These not only assist with the settlement process but enrich it as well. As already discussed, the needs of men and

women are different, and are perhaps expressed differently, yet social connections are both apparent and important for building friendships and finding out about community services. Together with learning the language, this leads to successful settlement in a new community. On a similar note, the importance of social connections was also apparent in the learning environment, and I turn to that next.

## 4.2.2. Social Connections in the Learning Environment

In my observations and interviews I learned about the formal classroom learning environment as well as the non-formal learning environments which include one-on-one learning with a volunteer tutor as well as conversation circles—a drop-in opportunity for newcomers to practice English at the local library. In both the formal and non-formal learning environments, I was again reminded of the value of social connections and how creating a sense of inclusivity and community can foster these connections. I will discuss social connections in terms of the learning environment in the following.

In Wilbur's (2016) research, instructors indicated that in order to create an "inclusive" classroom, the aspects of listening, social justice, building relationships and connection were required (p. 16). I noticed in all my classroom observations that the instructors placed emphasis on creating a comfortable and inclusive environment both of which have a positive influence on learning EAL. There was also focus on comprehension and being able to understand as well as having oneself understood, as opposed to focusing on perfecting one's language skills, which I found some of the students seemed to be more concerned with. It was humbling to see the various methods instructors used to teach a concept when they noticed that what they were saying was not being understood. It made me feel as though the instructors were persistent and focused on wanting their students to understand and they tried any method they could to ensure this understanding occurred. My observations of the instructors' approach to teaching in their classrooms speaks to how committed the instructors are to support language learning for immigrant women, and in fact all newcomers.

In my view the instructors did certain things to ensure a comfortable learning environment including building relationships in the classroom by encouraging students to become familiar with one another and physically setting up the classroom space in a

certain way. In both classes, each student had a name tag which included their first name and the country they were from. I felt very welcomed as well because I had a similar nametag. As an instructor, I know that nametags assist with learning all the students' names in a classroom and I find they also provide a level of comfort for the student because a name tag determines where a student sits and thus there is a space for each individual in the classroom. By having the student's country of origin on the nametag I feel it acknowledges where that student came from and thus highlights as aspect of their identity.

Furthermore, the physical set up of each classroom, given the tight space, also contributed to creating an inclusive learning environment. In particular, one of the classrooms was set up in a U-shape, and throughout my observations, I found that the U-shape allowed for students to easily work in groups as well as individually. Meanwhile, in the other classroom, students were sitting in rows with two to four students per table. This classroom had more students and the instructor—Nicole—explains that she had experimented to find the most suitable layout. For example, she explained that they "used to be in a U-shape and then the class got full and it was really tight and then I had them [seated] individually" (April 11, Interview 11). Nicole further explains that the students indicated they did not like U-shape format, and she responded by changing the layout to rows and decided to keep it this way because there was positive feedback from all of the students (April 11, Interview 11).

It was interesting to hear that Nicole adjusted the classroom seating based on feedback from the students and took their input into consideration. I believe it shows that she had the students' best interest in mind and was focused on ensuring the classroom layout worked and allowed them to learn. With regards to the physical layout of the classrooms, I found both were fairly small and were accommodating the maximum number of students that could actually fit in the classrooms. Despite the tight space, I felt as though the instructors tried to utilize the space they had to accommodate as many students as possible and have a positive learning environment. During my observations, I noticed that the students relied on and supported each other in their learning. For example, if a student didn't understand something, another student would try to explain before the instructor explained; in the instances that I observed, the explanation was in English and across different language and culture groups.

As mentioned, in addition to formal language learning in the classroom, another option for immigrant women to learn and practice their English language skills is one-on-one with a tutor. I was fortunate to interview two tutors who work with a variety of newcomers, including immigrant women, both individually and also in group settings. From my interviews, I gathered that both of these individuals also value creating a comfortable environment for their learners and focusing on comprehension instead of pronunciation or perfection in the language.

One of the volunteers—Margaret—shares that she leads a weekly conversation circle but she doesn't always plan on having conversations "because that gets boring" (March 15, 2018). Instead, Margaret introduces various games and grammar lessons as well. She explains that how she teaches each week "depends on who is there, what level [they are at] and how many people [attend]" but emphasizes that "it's gotta be fun" for those who attend and she tries to include humor as well because she believes humor is effective in teaching (Margaret, March 15, 2018). Margaret also mentions that what works best is when she begins to know the group because she can prepare better. Again this speaks to the value of connections and creating an inclusive learning environment. In her own words, she explains her approach to teaching:

> I find I am not preaching but I talk a lot. I also talk with humor and some of them catch it and they laugh; I am a firm believer of humor. What these people are going through, and still struggling to learn English is humungous. They are already under stress so you want to make it light and you want them to come back. (March 15, 2018)

This view on teaching where things are kept "light" and humorous yet learning still happens appeared so welcoming to me, and I appreciate that this volunteer takes the time to make sure those who are attending her sessions are comfortable.

Moreover, I interviewed three immigrant women from one of the EAL classes, in order to gain further insight and gather their perspective of what it is like to learn English as an additional language. I asked what they are currently doing to learn English outside of class. One of my interviewees proudly shared that she not only comes to class every day, but she also has "many Canadian friends" whom she practices speaking English with (Heather, April 11, 2018). Another immigrant woman learner explained that she also attends the classes but tries to speak outside of class, and finds that speaking and listening are most important for her because she doesn't usually have the opportunity to do this (Annie, April 16, 2018). Finally, the third immigrant woman language learner that I

interviewed explained that to learn English she studies in the classroom and at home via the computer and by talking to her children (Kayla, April 16, 2018). She also felt that she needs to have more practice with speaking because she tends to understand well but has difficulty when it comes to expressing herself (April 16, Interview 13).

What I gathered from each of these immigrant women is that learning English formally in a classroom is not enough. In fact, all of them indicated that they wanted to practice speaking in authentic, everyday settings and searched out other opportunities to do this. This links to the value of community connections as well—by having more connections, be it other individuals or community organizations, newcomers will also have more opportunity to speak and learn the language they must use every day. On a similar note, I also inquired about the learning expectations that newcomers, and in particular immigrant women have, and the value of social connections in that regard was highlighted once again, and I will discuss it next.

## 4.2.3. Social Connections and Expectations

In terms of settlement, one of the settlement workers—Claire—explains that when individuals first arrive, "they might have really high expectations that it's going to be easier than it is" but she doesn't think "anybody fully understands what it means to learn another language" (January 18, 2018). Claire believes that newcomers probably expect it will be easier and that more support will be available, specifically indicating that many immigrant women have expressed how learning a language is much more challenging than what they had thought since it affects so many different areas of their lives (January 18, 2018).

Ng and Shan (2010) also discovered a similar notion in their research with immigrant women. In their study on examining the concept of lifelong learning as an ideological practice from the perspective of immigrant women, Ng and Shan interviewed several Chinese women—all who immigrated to Canada after 1998—and asked them to describe their professional occupations and their knowledge and expectations of Canada's labour market, prior to immigrating to Canada (p. 174). The authors discovered that many of the women researched Canada's labour market prior to immigration and "expected a short period of adjustment" (p. 175), shorter than what they actually experienced. In fact, Ng and Shan explain that several of the women they

interviewed were surprised by the difficulties they experienced and the amount of time it took to "regain a foothold in the host society"; many were also discouraged that they were unable to continue their professional occupation in their new home (p. 175).

Dlamini, Anucha and Wolfe (2012) also note that one of the barriers identified for immigrant men and women is related to employment. They refer to this as the "double disadvantage" where foreign credentials and work experience are not recognized and employers insist that their employees have work experience from Canada (p. 422). As Dlamini, Anucha and Wolfe (2012) note, immigrants who have worked in companies that "have some exposure to North American standards" have a better chance of getting their work experience acknowledged and finding employment in Canada. In addition, for those who want their credentials recognized, there is an added barrier of having to pay for exams or certification (Dlamini, Anucha and Wolfe, 2012, p. 422). What's more, immigrant women have even more obstacles related to gender and race in addition to all this (p. 422). Dlamini, Anucha and Wolfe (2012) conclude this is why it is important to examine how "women make meaning of their work experiences as they navigate the norms of a new culture and working climate" (p. 422). This additional barrier adds to the expectation that one's credentials may be easily recognized. With this added barrier, I suspect that immigrant women have pressure of wanting to get their credentials recognized in addition to also wanting to learn English. Perhaps there is also more motivation to learn English if credentials are not easily recognized, in order to gain access to employment. Personally, I know that part of the reason I pursued higher education was to obtain a well-paying job in order to sustain a certain living standard. This is another area of research that could be further explored and that would need more data as my data is limiting.

Furthermore, I also asked the immigrant women learners whom I interviewed what they expected from the programs offered by this particular agency. One of them explained that for now she wants to improve her English and in the future she wants to find a job (Annie, April 16, 2018). I followed up and asked Annie if she felt whether learning English in the LINC classes was enough for her and she said that it wasn't and she needed extra help but the conversation classes available in the evenings at the library don't work in her schedule. She does have a tutor who she meets with weekly for one to two hours and she finds this one-on-one session to be very useful. In her own words, she explains,

> [w]hen I work one [on] one, it's good because, you know I ask questions
> and she teach[es] me. But in class, [there are a] lot of people in
> group[s]. (Annie, April 16, 2018)

Annie's comment draws attention to the fact that each individual learns differently, and thus I believe that having different options available is very beneficial.

Another learner explains that she expects the agency will help her with a variety of different aspects related to her settlement, including how to interact with other people, look for work and even rent or buy a home (Heather, April 11, 2018). In addition, Kayla describes that her expectations include the agency will help her to learn English as well as "make friends and find a job" (April 16, 2018). I find it interesting that each of the three immigrant women mentioned they expected some assistance related to employment. Perhaps this indicates that through employment, these immigrant women feel they will be more connected to and settled in their new community. In addition, it should be noted that these particular women's expectations appear to align with what the agency offers, in terms of programs and services to support newcomers with their settlement.

As explained by Dlamini, Anucha and Wolfe (2012), when immigrant women—among others—have access to public services and public resources it gives them "an opportunity to become part of the dominant society and to participate in community life" (p. 430). In their research, Dlamini, Anucha and Wolfe illustrate the experiences of a particular group of immigrant women in the area of Windsor, Ontario in terms of the challenges they face in the workplace and the value that these women place on working outside the home. Their research findings suggest that there needs to be more work done in terms of examining the complexities of the lives of immigrant women and the challenges they face when it comes to employment (p. 432). Their study shows how the traditions and cultures of their local community and their community of origin affect their household and workplace cultures (p. 432).

In addition, another settlement worker in my study highlighted how varying cultural values also have an impact on expectations. She describes how one of her clients shared their view on comparing Canadian cultural values to their Syrian cultural values expressing that "in Syria, we all look out for each other, but in Canada we are all in our own little apartments" (Claire, January 18, 2018). As the settlement worker notes,

that's where the settlement piece can be so challenging, especially for those who are coming from countries with different value systems, whether it's a value on community or time etc. (Claire, January 18, 2018)

Moreover, another instructor whom I interviewed also shared that she finds out about her students' expectations at the beginning of every term by asking her students to share their goals for learning the language (Nicole, April 11, 2018). She also shares that most of the things her students strive for is wanting to "be able to communicate with teachers in their children's schools, be able to communicate with doctors and describe what their problems are [and] what their children's problems are" (April 11, 2018). It appears that a lot of the expectations are associated with wanting to be connected to different resources in society.

Thus far, I've highlighted the important impact that social connections have in terms of the community, learning environments and learning expectations. In the next section, I will talk about various challenges associated with not being socially connected.

## 4.3. Challenges of not being Socially Connected

There are numerous challenges that newcomers face when it comes to learning a new language. Not only are they learning a new language but they are immersed in a new culture, and may feel lonely and unaware of their new surroundings. I learned about a plethora of challenges that immigrant women may encounter and I discuss these in this section. In particular, I will talk about the difficulties faced by these immigrant women when learning EAL as well as comment on experiences of marginalization and discrimination, noting that these challenges are associated with social disconnection.

In their research, Drolet and Moorthi (2018) acknowledge that immigrants and refugees experience several systematic and structural barriers in their settlement process and many of these challenges are interconnected (p.105). Some of these challenges include learning a language, having their education and/or training recognized, establishing housing, finding employment, health issues and various forms of discrimination (p. 105). Norton (2013) also notes that immigrants are subjected to both marginalization and discrimination highlighting that "immigrant women may be particularly vulnerable in this regard" (p. 81). In addition, she also recognizes the interconnectedness of the various challenges faced, for example how lack of proficiency

in an official language in Canada poses numerous challenges and fewer job opportunities.

Norton (2013) also acknowledges the challenge of establishing social connections. She explains that on the one hand, newcomers, including immigrant women "need access to the social networks of target language speakers" in order to improve their own language skills, yet on the other hand, they have difficulty accessing these networks due to the lack of language skills (p. 81). In my study, Marie highlights a particular conflict that immigrant women encounter in that they want to learn the language but they also need to earn income, so the agency tries to support these women in accomplishing both (January 25, 2018). She explains that there are other options available for learning English including LINC home study so newcomers can study online and at home at a time that is most convenient for them (Marie, January 25, 2018). Although the home study is an option, students may not get the benefits of learning in class with others. This is another example of where the agency provides options in order to support the unique needs of newcomers.

Other challenges related to social connections and awareness of one's surroundings include access to childcare and transportation. One of the instructors explain that it is difficult for newcomers to find childcare because they "don't know people [and] they don't have connections" (Ashley, March 15, 2018). With regards to transportation, one of the immigrant women in particular indicates that transportation has been most difficult for her in terms of settling in the Fraser Valley (Annie, April 16, 2018). While it is unrealistic to conclude that public transportation is difficult for all newcomers based on a comment from one of the immigrant women I interviewed, I do find it interesting that the challenges of childcare and transportation are still apparent for newcomers today. My Umee had also mentioned these challenges, and that they were barriers to accessing English language classes. Interestingly, I found out from one of my interviewees that recent newcomers were provided with bus passes and orientation sessions on how to use the bus system and these sessions included travelling on the buses. This highlights that perhaps Annie's experience is unique to her and although she may have experienced difficulty, it does not necessarily mean that public transportation is difficult for all newcomers. I identify this as another area where more research is required.

Furthermore, as I noted above, it appears as though newcomers don't find out a lot about the services and/or programs available prior to coming to Canada or even upon arrival. In fact, one of the settlement workers—Claire—mentions that very little information may be provided, and even some of that may be inaccurate (January 18, 2018). That being said the Immigration and Refugee Citizenship Canada government website does have a significant amount of information and even information in different languages. Based on her experience, Claire believes that "Canada is doing their best but there are still gaps" and notes that having information published in different languages does take time (January 18, 2018). In reference to the recent arrival of a large number of Syrian refugees, Claire indicates that in Canada "we weren't proactive necessarily" but acknowledged that it was a crisis issue and there has been progress in the past two years (January 18, 2018). For example, we now have some documents in Arabic, which parents can use when it comes to community expectations of behaviour and other information related to education and health care among other topics.

I question the effectiveness of information on a website, because people may not know how to interpret or apply this information based on the context of their lives and needs. They may not be able to relate to the information and may even require assistance with understanding it. Angie also addresses the power and relevancy of information, noting that although "information is very powerful…it may not mean anything, [unless] you can go back to the source" which is when it can make a difference and also explained that information is "just info, until you need it" (March 15, 2018). Despite this, she also reminded me that settlement takes time and is a process, and that "information is powerful and access to it can smooth and shorten [the] process" (March 15, 2018). Access to information is about access to power and so settlement agencies and educators as well as settlement policy need to attend to the inequalities in access to social networks and proactively address these, rather than expect newcomers to self-organize.

These challenges of not being socially connected are related to additional challenges in learning EAL and in settlement I discovered during my research. These additional challenges are related to marginalization and discrimination, which I will address next in further detail.

### 4.3.1. Immigrant Women and Marginalization

I've mentioned that several scholars, including Norton (2013), Darvin and Norton (2015), Boyd (1992), Zhu (2016), and Massey (2013), highlight the ways in which immigrant women experience marginalization throughout Canadian history. Maitra (2013) also identifies the marginalization experienced by immigrant women in Canada. In particular, her research focuses on South Asian women who she describes "have always borne the brunt of racial discrimination and marginalization, despite being highly educated and motivated to work" (p. 129). She believes that some ways which South Asian immigrant women have experienced marginalization have resulted from "institutionalized and racial barriers, patriarchal control and gendered divisions of household work" (Maitra, 2013, p. 130). Marginalization is defined as "the process or result of becoming or making marginal" or isolated, for example, "the process of making an individual or minority group marginal in relation to a dominant social group" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018).

I will now address the kinds of marginalization that some immigrant women, in particular, face as well as consider pedagogies that seem to address marginalization. I asked each of my interviewees about whether or not they felt immigrant women are marginalized and will share their perspectives below. It is important to note that some of the educators, settlement workers and volunteers are Caucasian women and others are visible minorities and some may have experienced migration whereas others have not. Regardless, their positions of power along with their unique perspectives have an influence on how their view on marginalization is different in comparison to the views of the immigrant women who are experiencing the marginalization. I'd also like to point out that my own experiences have an influence on how I interpret my findings as well.

First of all, several learners noted that social connections can decrease marginalization; my Umee shared this as well when she indicated that meeting others and building relationships allowed her to not feel as lonely. One of my interviewees, Kaitlin, believes that although there are numerous factors which can lead to marginalization "most of the time these things can be conquered as time goes by" noting that the amount of time varies for each person (January 18, 2018). Kaitlin believes that with time marginalization may decrease and I felt that she was perhaps speaking from experience. I would like to point out that this would be different for each individual

depending on their personal experiences. I can identify this as another area where more information and data is required to many further conclusions.

According to Wilbur (2016), because of marginalization, "a group of people are excluded from useful participation in social life and the labour market" and students who experience trauma may even drop out of language classes which leads to further marginalization because they may not have the English language skills required for certain opportunities and choices in the community (p. 3). In her research, Wilbur discovered that placing value on listening to those who feel marginalized was one way to decrease this sense of marginalization (p. 13). In fact, the instructors that she interviewed talked about the important aspects of listening, which include respect, trust and acknowledgement of conflicts, all which may help make the feeling of marginalization more bearable (p. 13). Furthermore, the instructors she interviewed mentioned that certain students were marginalized or excluded due to reasons of economics, race and access to resources (p. 15). The instructors also talked about the importance of a sense of community as a way to counter marginalization (p. 16) and that includes having a sense of community both inside and outside the classroom.

That said and as previously discussed, building a wider sense of community in Canada can be very challenging because for many newcomers there is a lack of family support in Canada and as one of the instructors indicated, making Canadian friends can also be a challenge (Ashley, March 15, 2018). One of the volunteers I interviewed also talks about the challenge that newcomers have with making friends, because of certain judgements and racial stereotypes others may have. In her own words, she explains:

> It's hard for them to find a Canadian friend because most women are either working or they have their families or circle of friends and they don't know how to integrate into Canadian society. It is really difficult and not all people are that receptive in wanting to include people from other countries into their lives because they have a preconceived notion of people in general you know. (Gemma, April 4, 2018)

These preconceived notions exemplify how marginalization can lead to racism and discrimination, which I will talk about in section 4.3.2.

In general, most of the interviewees felt that immigrant women were marginalized to some extent and in varying degrees. However, as already noted, many also believe that social connections can help to decrease this marginalization. One of my

interviewees explains that the feeling of marginalization can change for some, including those individuals "who are highly motivated or have the opportunity to learn" because their skills progress (Angie, March 15, 2018). In addition, Angie also explains that as newcomers build community and connections, marginalization decreases and the progression comes as a result of those connections (Angie, March 15, 2018). For example, she explains that if a newcomer connected with another individual to figure out childcare, this would create connections and a community, and thus decrease marginalization in one context (Angie, March 15, 2018).

Furthermore, Angie also mentions that in many communities within the Fraser Valley, it is possible to be geographically marginalized, "unless you have family or you're comfortable using the bus" but having connections can help decrease this marginalization as well (March 15, 2018). As mentioned, bus tickets were provided to newcomers in order to assist them with accessing services such as EAL classes, but Angie notes that it can be challenging for someone to take the bus who perhaps has three or four children (March 15, 2018). I reflected upon this and thought that it can also be challenging for an individual who is not even familiar with the public transport system, let alone the new culture they are in. I, for example, have not regularly used public transport and would feel it to be a challenge even though I grew up in the Fraser Valley.

On a different note, marginalization can also occur due to age. For example, one of the settlement workers explains that the younger generation tends to get out and learn, "but the older ones may just stay at home and watch the kids" which is one way they get marginalized (Claire, January 18, 2018). Claire also notes that for some culture groups, it's very easy and convenient to just stay within that particular culture group (January 18, 2018). Similarly, another settlement worker notes that for many seniors, attending classes is "a home away from home and they come here for socialization" but, it's hard when they have been attending classes and are not making linguistic progress because the language classes have long waiting lists and at some point, individuals who are not making progress are then removed from the formal EAL classes (Sofia, January 25, 2018). Sofia explains that the agency does offer different options for these individuals as well as suggests different groups to connect with (January 25, 2018). This information made me think more about the diverse needs and expectations that various people have. On the one hand, there is a linguistic need and, on the other hand there is also a need for socialization, perhaps to combat feelings of isolation. This also leads to

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new questions about how an educator's positionality influences their perspectives of their students and the work of settlement.

Moreover, another aspect that can lead to marginalization, is simply not knowing which services exist. One of the settlement workers explains how difficult this can be, and how many people may want to be more involved but are not as a result of marginalization (Claire, January 18, 2018). My Umee agrees that not being aware of the services can lead to marginalization, and also mentions that in her experience access to information was not as convenient as it is presently, since we now have more information available via the internet as well as social media. It appears that digital access to information has increased and become easier but there are individuals who do not have access to digital information, which will still cause a barrier and thus contribute to marginalization.

Another interviewee also explains that a lot of people tend to find out about services in the community after being in the Fraser Valley for several years (January 25, 2018). She notes that if they are a refugee, they usually get connected right away, but if people move from a different province to BC or are immigrants, they don't necessarily connect right away and often express that they wish they had connected sooner (Marie, January 25, 2018).

On a similar note, Claire points out that young mothers and those who don't know the language may not get involved with various services in the community and then this can lead to isolation as well, in addition to a lack of confidence in going out to find work (January 18, 2018). Claire further explains that marginalization can also be connected to a lack of education in their home countries and if women are not educated, not only is it challenging but it also means they are not going to get the higher paying jobs (January 18, 2018). In this way, gender discrimination can continue to play out and even intensify when women come to Canada.

I've discussed the value and importance of connections already and another settlement worker talks about how making connections is in fact one of the greatest challenges for immigrant women and how a lack of social connections can lead to marginalization as well. She mentions that although learning English is a challenge, another challenge is "just getting used to making new friends" because newcomers, in

particular immigrant women had connections in their home country (January 25, 2018).

In particular

> [t]hey had their mothers and their sisters and their friends, and quite often there were big homes with so many in a home, so there was always someone around. (Sofia, January 25, 2018)

Sofia further talks about how social isolation and marginalization result from a lack of connections and acknowledges that although the experience is of course different for each individual, overall "it's tough to start a new life [because] you just almost feel paralyzed at the beginning" (January 25, 2018).

On a similar note, one of the volunteers I interviewed also mentions that a challenge for newcomers is that they don't know how to make English speaking friends, because people tend to socialize within their own communities and with people that may share a similar culture, religion and/or language as well (Gemma, April 4, 2018). This seems to suggest that newcomer women choose to be with people from their own "social circles". In contrast, earlier I noted a different volunteer's perspective who indicated who indicated that judgements and stereotypes are made, which prevent women from participating in society. While these perspectives may both be true and reflect reality, they also indicate the differences in perspectives that we tend to have, and how our own experiences and biases have an influence on our perspectives.

On a different note, settlement worker Sofia highlights that marginalization is subtler because "people are moving forward…towards acceptance" but despite this she still has heard stories of people "who didn't get a job even though they were just as qualified as the person who did get the job" (January 25, 2018). Again, she mentions that perhaps it isn't direct, "but sometimes you look into it a little bit and think maybe it was marginalization" (Sofia, January 25, 2018). On the whole, she believes marginalization is decreasing, especially in larger communities where there is probably more exposure. Sofia also believes that getting to know others can help decrease marginalization and she has particularly noticed how people with certain biases and views have changed their perspectives because they have gotten to know more about newcomers (January 25, 2018).

Furthermore, another settlement worker gave a specific example of how one of her clients experienced marginalization that was rooted in discrimination on the basis of

language. This particular client was turned away from an employment service and sent to the agency because the individual was told she could not complete some forms in English and thus the employment service was not able to assist her (Jenny, January 25, 2018). The settlement worker explained that this has happened before and she believes individuals experience marginalization because they are judged in addition to the lack of English language skills creating a barrier (January 25, 2018).

Despite most of my interviewees indicating that immigrant women experience marginalization to some extent, one of my interviewees also talks about the opportunities that are available to newcomers and how some individuals have a more positive attitude and are more open to pursuing these opportunities. This openness and positive attitude is what may help to reduce marginalization (Marie, January 25, 2018). This comment made me think about how focusing on positive aspects, such as 'the future' may contribute to reducing the impact that marginalization has for immigrant women, in some cases. By having a more positive outlook, I was informed that this allows individuals in the organisation to focus on solutions. Again, this is another area where more research is necessary to determine further conclusions.

Moreover, when it comes to learning in the classroom, both instructors whom I interviewed don't think marginalization exists in their classrooms in particular, because they haven't noticed it. One instructor explained that she has had situations where the men will have priority to attend class while the women choose to stay at home with their kids and perhaps this results in marginalization (Ashley, March 15, 2018). In addition, she mentions that she noticed when there are couples in the same class, the student might behave differently if their spouse is in the room or a student gets upset if their spouse scores better (Ashley, March 15, 2018). Other than that she does not believe there is an issue with being marginalized in the classroom (March 15, 2018). I question if more forms of marginalization do exist, yet go unnoticed unintentionally and thus are not addressed.  As an instructor myself, I know there is a lot going on when one is teaching in the classroom and certain aspects can go unnoticed unintentionally because there is so much focus on teaching the material.

Furthermore, one of the volunteers whom I interviewed initially mentioned that she believes immigrant women may feel "freer" in Canada but are also aware that their lives are very different than in their previous home countries (Gemma, April 4, 2018).

She also believes that marginalization is quite individualized. Gemma provides an example of one of the students she works with who is in her mid-40s and just got her first job in a bakery, explaining that it is not necessarily about getting an income but "it's about being in a place where she has to speak English all day" (April 4, 2018). She also describes another immigrant woman with whom she worked for five years and who has been in Canada for about 39 years. Despite this length of time, the immigrant woman's English is very poor. She connects this to this woman's experience of marginalization upon immigrating to Canada explaining that upon arriving in Canada, she met her future husband and in-laws and was within that family for many years without having an opportunity to meet anyone else nor learn English. Gemma explains that this particular individual

> was in a cave, so she was marginalized because she was forced, against her will to just stay in a tight knit community but as things changed for her many years later she now has the freedom she never had before. (Gemma, April 4, 2018)

She also explains that learning English is important for many immigrant women because they may have a drive and a goal, but in order to reach that goal, they need to learn English and it depends on how much of a priority learning English is (Gemma, April 4, 2018).

These excerpts allow us to see that educators and learners alike believe marginalization shapes newcomers and immigrant women's experiences. Educators relate this to a lack of social connections. This was also indicated by my Umee and, as an instructor, I have noticed it as well. I do still believe that the positionality of the educators, settlement workers and volunteers has an impact on their interpretation of marginalization and that not all issues of systemic gender and race discrimination can be resolved through social connection. But, I believe that each individual has a certain perspective, based on their positionality and experience, and different experiences can change that perspective. Because there is a large number of immigrant women who feel that social connections support settlement and integration, one can understand that social connections also contribute to decreasing the feelings of marginalization. In contrast, marginalization can lead to racism and discrimination as well, especially when individuals and groups are marginalized due to preconceived assumptions and notions. Discrimination is another challenge that emerged in my research and one that is faced by many newcomers including immigrant women, and I will talk about this topic next.

## 4.3.2. Immigrant Women and Discrimination

Drolet and Moorthi (2018) found that both racism and discrimination were challenges in building social connections. In fact, their participants shared stories of experience at their work place and in the community "where they felt used or mistreated because they were considered outsiders" (p. 115).  In addition, Norton (2013) explains that "adult immigrants are frequently subject to discrimination" and this significantly impacts social interactions (p. 78). For the purpose of this research, discrimination is defined as "unjust or prejudicial treatment of a person or group, especially on the grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation etc." (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018a).  I was intrigued by the varying responses from the service providers who are more directly involved with immigrant women (i.e. Settlement workers, instructors and volunteers) and those who are not as well as from the immigrant women themselves. As one of my interviewees explained, discrimination is everywhere and it occurs in all societies and cultures (Marie, January 25, 2018).

In general, Marie believes that less discrimination exists because there is more understanding, and employers—in particular—are now more accountable for their choices as well (January 25, 2018). Marie also believes that because the culture of the agency she works at is so inclusive she doesn't recall any specific instances of discrimination although acknowledges that she gets second hand awareness of certain instances when some people choose to tell her. I signal this as another area where further research is required to determine if instances of discrimination exist.

One of the settlement workers also talks about how there are examples of direct discrimination, but those are just the stories that they hear and she is sure there is a lot that she does not hear about. She draws attention to the fact that "not everyone is going to be warm and fuzzy and welcoming [and] that's just the sad reality of things unfortunately" (Sofia, January 25, 2018). Sofia also mentioned that discrimination is due to a lack of knowledge, as well as ignorance and non-acceptance (January 25, 2018). She further shares that there are perspectives and opinions where people question why we help refugees come to Canada when we have so many homeless people. Why don't we help our "own" (quotes intended) people? Here we are bringing in so many of "these" people" (January 25, 2018). This exemplifies the racism that exists within the community and how there are people who label refugees as not our "own" people, and thus should

not be supported. These different comments from Marie and Sofia highlight the diverse perspectives that exist and how such perspectives are influenced by our daily experiences as well as our positions. It is important to highlight again that because my interviews are minimal, I am unable to draw conclusions although, my goal is to provide insight.

Furthermore, both of the instructors mentioned that they don't believe women, in particular, feel discriminated in their classrooms. As Nicole explains "we have a very good environment…and they feel very comfortable" (April 11, 2018). Although both instructors felt there wasn't discrimination in their classroom per se, Nicole mentions that she has had students talk about what they feel is discrimination from outside of the classroom (April 11, 2018). For example, her students have told her that when they go out, some people don't like to respond to their questions and the students feel it is due to not being able to communicate and be understood. On the other hand, Nicole also indicates her students have shared that many people are really nice to them as well (April 11, 2018).,

Another important perspective that Kaitlin shares is how sometimes clients think they may have been discriminated against but it could have been a different reason. She talks about an example where immigrant women were shopping and were asked multiple times to repeat a question; they may have felt as though they were discriminated, when in fact they just weren't understood (January 18, 2018). Kaitlin believes immigrant women are subject to discrimination because of language barriers (January 18, 2018). She describes that misunderstanding, communication breakdowns and even different tones of language can be confusing and nerve-wracking and can be interpreted as discriminatory, when she feels they are not. Norton (2013) acknowledges that misunderstanding between immigrants learning the language and non-immigrants who are native speakers of the language are due to "different culture-specific assumptions about the way social interaction should proceed" (p. 78). It has also been noted that factors such as "non-recognition of foreign credentials, racism in hiring practices and accent discrimination" are just some of the issues immigrants experience (Guo, 2009, p. 46, Munro 2003; as cited in Guo, 2015, p. 48).

On another note, some of the settlement workers and volunteers—both of whom work more directly with immigrant women—shared first-hand stories of discrimination.

For example, Claire informed me that she has heard of instances where women feel discriminated against because of their skin color or the way they dress and expresses that she can't believe this still exists given the amount of awareness we have of different cultures (January 18, 2018). She also believes that discrimination against immigrant women is subtle and perhaps more indirect because she does not have newcomers directly express that they have been discriminated against (Claire, January 18, 2018). She did have a client tell her that the client believes she was treated differently due to wearing a Hijab (headscarf), and she also has seen several clients who tell her that nobody talks to them and it is assumed that it is because of how they look or because they cannot speak English (Claire, January 18, 2018).

Furthermore, another settlement worker was also confident that discrimination does exist but may not be as prevalent in our society right now (Jenny, January 25, 2018). Jenny believes that the agency she works at has a safe environment and because of that students don't necessarily judge one another and "people are more accepting of each other's beliefs and culture" (January 25, 2018). She also shares her opinion that the general Canadian population is hesitant in that most Canadians have the following thought process when it comes to newcomers:

> I don't know about you. I respect your values and I don't want to offend you and I am going to stay away from you. This is the thought process. This is the Canadian way, because the Canadian way is about respecting other people's privacy. It's not about, you know, not opening up. It's different. It works both ways; you have to seek out and people also have to get knowledge. (Jenny, January 25, 2018)

Based on my conversations with the staff and volunteers, I was surprised at first as to how varied the responses were. This again exemplifies that we each have different perspectives and these are influenced by our experiences, biases and positionalities.

Furthermore, I was curious to know if the immigrant women felt as though they faced any discrimination. It was interesting to hear their different responses. One of them explained how she has never had any issues and it has been "very good" (Kayla, April 16, 2018). In addition, another one also described that she hasn't experienced discrimination and "the people here [are] very friendly" (Annie, April 16, 2018). I question if discrimination was experienced and they either did not want to share, or it did not occur in the context of learning EAL and thus they did not mention it.

Moreover, another immigrant woman whom I interviewed shares that she has faced direct discrimination, particularly within the community and she describes an incident where she took her children to a local swimming pool. She explains that there were a couple of people at the swimming pool who were staring at her and she overheard them talking about how she was dressed. She explains that although they were not talking to her directly, she did overhear their comments and acknowledged this, telling them directly "you don't have to look [at] me" and then put on a big smile (Heather, April 11, 2018). She describes another instance of discrimination where one of her friends stood up for her. In this particular situation, Heather mentioned that an individual told her that because she is in Canada she should take off her Hijab and then her friend commented that choosing to wear a Hijab is Heather's choice. She talked about how she is discriminated against by some people based on how she looks but a lot of people don't discriminate and they provide help as in the example above (April 11, 2018).

It was interesting to hear diverse perspectives on discrimination among learners and educators. It is evident that discrimination still exists and that people experience discrimination differently. In addition, our experiences and positionality also have a strong effect on how discrimination is interpreted and experienced, for example, it may be viewed differently between a service provider who has experienced discrimination themselves and one who has not. The different responses that I received with regards to experiences of discrimination is another reminder that each individual regards their experience as unique but that there are patterns that connect experiences yet are not always visible. It was also relieving to hear that at this particular agency, there are service providers who take the time to listen to the different experiences that their clients have while also focusing on positive and practical aspects such as job search and learning English. Due to the diverse nature of discrimination, I believe educators, service providers and policy makers should pay close attention to how newcomers may experience discrimination and point out the patterns in their instructional approaches. Again, it is important to note that this is my interpretation and we all interpret differently, based on our own experiences.

## 4.4. Learning English and Settlement

Learning the language of one's community is integral to successful settlement, yet it is also one of the most challenging aspects (Guo, 2013). As one of the settlement workers I interviewed illustrated, "English just opens those doors [and] makes things a lot less complicated" (Claire, January 18, 2018). Another way that English really assists with settlement is that it provides confidence. As one settlement worker explained the confidence can be in numerous aspects of our lives:

> It opens doors and opportunities for jobs and employability. It certainly helps for immigrant women that have children in the school system [and are] communicating with the teachers. Part of the settlement for immigrant women is becoming confident and knowing and understanding how things work and grasping the language and knowing how to communicate what you want to communicate and not feeling embarrassed about it and feeling self-assured. (Claire, January 18, 2018)

Claire makes a strong point about the level of confidence involved with resettlement and that not knowing the language is just one aspect. Her comment on the struggle associated with resettlement depending on the culture one comes from, appears to be an assumption. In my opinion, I find the assumption is that every immigrant woman will struggle with this, regardless of who they are and where they come from. I find this viewpoint puts all immigrant women into a similar pool and depicts them all as vulnerable. While this may be true for some immigrant women, I find it is a preconceived notion and is unfair to apply to all immigrant women equally. I find perspectives like these may position immigrant women in a certain way as well as lead to certain stereotypes and further biases. One way to counter these assumptions is by understanding the unique experiences of each individual and discovering the varying dynamics that exist.

Another interviewee also mentions how it can take "so long to develop the confidence" (Gemma, April 4, 2018). Gemma explains that

> it's really difficult to go out into a store, or wherever you are and feel that you're using the right words, the right vocab, the right grammar— it takes a lot of courage. And for somebody who's an introvert or a shy person to begin with it's even more challenging. (April 4, 2018)

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She also explains how, in general, it can be difficult to get out of one's comfort zone and attend an English language class for example, due to a lack of confidence (April 4, 2018).

Again, although Gemma may be speaking based on her experiences as a volunteer, her view may be applicable for some newcomers but not necessarily for all. I find there could be some assumptions here as well with regards to the perspective around having confidence and courage. Again, it is important to be aware of the fact that each newcomer, and in fact each individual, has different experiences, and although their experiences may be similar, they are still individual experiences. It is also important to be aware of our own assumptions, biases and perspectives, taking into account that these may not be applicable towards all individuals.

I also asked each of the immigrant women whom I interviewed how learning English will help them settle in the Fraser Valley. All three replied that English will definitely help them with their settlement and each had different reasons based on their personal goals. In particular, one of the women mentioned that speaking in English is "very good for me to learn" because she wants to work and speak to her friends (Kayla, April 16, 2018). Another explains how attending class is very useful for her because "every day I learn new word[s] and practice speaking, writing [and] reading" (Annie, April 16, 2018) and finally, Heather explained how speaking English has helped her in all aspects of her life, and how when she didn't know English it was very difficult. In her own words she says,

> Ya, it [helps me] so much. To [get a] job, speak to my son['s] teacher and if I need anything I need to speak English you know. For everything [and] for the [rest of] my life, because I am here. Like when I first [came] to Canada, every day I cr[ied]. I cannot understand any words. It was so bad you know. But now, I feel better, because I can understand [and] I can speak [English] when I go shopping, when I go with my children [to their] friend's birthday… you know everything. (Heather, April 11, 2018)

This particular individual's response really struck me. I am aware that learning the language of one's culture and community is integral; however, when this individual explained the particular impact that learning English has had on her personal life, it reminded me of how vital language and communication is in all aspects of our lives.

When I asked what might be most difficult for immigrant women in settling into their new community, one of the volunteers whom I interviewed responded with "oh,

what isn't?" (Margaret, March 15, 2018) and further explained that a variety of aspects are challenging, including "shopping, food, cooking, banking, children go[ing] to school" adding that she doesn't know how newcomers are able to do all this in a different culture and with a different language (March 15, 2018). She also added in a different perspective and explained that "some of them must hate it. The change, [the] weather, the way we dress, our agenda, the way we carry on with each other, the familiarity, the customs" (March 15, 2018). Margaret expresses that she is not always aware of their customs either, admitting that she does not "know if I'm stepping out of line [or] being rude" (Margaret, March 15, 2018). I have had a similar feeling before where I was not sure if I was perhaps coming across rude unintentionally, simply because I was not aware. In situations like this, I think one can come across as being discriminatory when in fact it is simply to the fact that one is unaware.

In addition, one of the women summed up that absolutely everything has been difficult for her in terms of settling in the Fraser Valley although she has met helpful people in her experience so far. She explains that "everything is different" and when she first came to Canada people were very helpful (Heather, April 11, 2018).  On the contrary, another immigrant woman shares that that nobody, aside from relatives, has helped her in settling into the Fraser Valley (Annie, April 16, 2018). She explains that when attending English classes, she just "learn[s] English, but nothing helps" (Annie, April 16, 2018). These different views and experiences from two immigrant women who both reside in the Fraser Valley and who are involved with the same agency, exemplify just how unique the challenges are for each immigrant woman. As already mentioned, it is important to note that there are different ways to immigrate to Canada and if an individual is privately sponsored versus government funded, their experiences will be very different. Although I did not ask the immigrant women if they were sponsored or if they were government funded and thus cannot draw conclusions based on this, I do believe this additional information would be useful and thus more research here is required.

On another note, I also asked both instructors—Nicole and Ashley—about how women learn EAL in their classroom. Ashley explains that she believes men and women don't have different challenges but does sometimes accommodate requests from women to not be seated next to a male because they don't feel comfortable, but she doesn't identify this as a challenge because it is accommodated (Ashley, March 15, 2018). I

suppose that if this request was not accommodated, it may create a challenge for that particular individual to feel comfortable in the classroom. Nicole mentioned that she has noticed all her students have a difficulty of some sort, but she does not "see [this] as a huge thing" because all her students have a difficulty with a certain skill (Nicole, April 11, 2018). Nicole describes her current female students in the following, with regards to how they learn in her classroom:

> They do really work hard. I would say right now in this class, I think all of the women I have are really focused and they really are working hard to learn the language. I think this is one of the first years, whenever I send homework they will return it. They're really focused, but I feel that whenever I'm teaching them, when they're here, they are really learning it and they are not afraid to ask questions. (Nicole, April 11, 2018)

In addition, Nicole explains that one of the biggest challenges she has noticed is "when they are not able to come to class because they have something happen at home, like a sick child or they are sick themselves" (Nicole, April 11, 2018). Ashley agrees and explains that other priorities can come in the way of immigrant women having time to practice their English language skills. She explains that because most of the women have the main responsibility of taking care of their children and their homes, she suspects they may have less time or energy to practice English outside of the classroom (Ashley, March 15, 2018). This resonates with me. As a mother with a young child, I too find it difficult to carve out time for my school work, on top of balancing a full time job and taking care of other daily tasks including household related chores. Although my partner is involved with both, I still always prioritize both family and housework before my school work and have learned that I need to schedule in time for school work in order to make sure it happens. Nicole observes how gendered divisions of labour affect immigrant women, and explains this in the following:

> I can see that really affects them, [be] because they come and say 'sorry, can you give me the work' because they are really interested in coming and learning. I don't think it's just the learning part, it's also the social part, and I think they really appreciate that social part, making friends and being in a different place and not just being at home. It's mostly the personal things that are challenges, rather than having challenges in the classroom. (Nicole, April 11, 2018)

It's interesting how this educator views these challenges as personal, whereas they may be challenges related to other issues, such as expectations of gender differences between men and women.

Ashley, one of the instructors, explains that a primary goal for newcomers in adjusting to their new community is learning English because that "is the key that unlocks so many things" and in addition to that, just learning the cultural norms not only for themselves but for their children as well (March 15, 2018). In addition, some realize they will need to work in Canada, but just adjusting to not having a job or a lack of finances is also challenging (Ashley, March 15, 2018).

One of the volunteers I interviewed mentioned that she believes the students she works with just don't get enough practice of the English language nor do they have enough time and believes that it would be very beneficial to meet one-on-one and every day because "once a week [or] twice a week isn't enough" (Margaret, April 4, 2018). Another volunteer agrees and also believes that newcomers just "don't have enough opportunity to speak English" (Gemma, April 4, 2018). Another aspect related to learning English and settlement is the issue of experiencing trauma and I turn to that next.

## 4.4.1. Trauma Learning and Settlement

These women's experiences remind me that settlement is more than just learning the language—it is becoming accustomed to an entire new culture and perhaps even a new way of completing daily tasks. I was glad to hear that one of the women shared she had met helpful people so far, but disheartened to hear that the other woman indicated nothing has helped her aside from learning English. This is a reminder that the experience of settlement is unique for each individual, but also rooted in social and political factors.

One such factor is that of trauma, which deeply shapes the settlement experience and yet is only beginning to be understood and addressed in LINC classes. It is also important to note that patterns and instances of discrimination and marginalization are socially influenced rather than random individualized experiences; in other words, these patterns are linked to the social capital that immigrant women have, for example their educational backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. In her research in a women's language and settlement program in BC, Wilbur (2016) noticed challenges that newcomer women experienced with learning including irregular attendance, flashbacks, cognitive difficulties (for example, memory lapses) and difficulty interacting with others (p. 2). Although the students in this program were identified as either

suffering from trauma and/or diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), I believe these learning challenges are common among newcomers learning a new language. As explained by Wilbur (2016), many immigrants and refugees coming to Canada may have experienced trauma through either war, persecution or other forms of violence and these effects of trauma can cause ongoing psychological challenges that affect learning in a new country (p. 5). In addition, it should also be noted that immigrants and refugees who may not have experienced trauma in the countries they are arriving from might still experience trauma due to the migration and settlement process (Wilbur, 2016, p. 5).

One of the immigrant women indicated that what she has found most difficult is missing her family members still in her home country, and gets "very scared" when she hears about bombings that happen. A challenge she has when learning English is difficulty with listening because she describes how other people speak very fast (Kayla, April 16, 2018). On the other hand, she also shared about some very supportive people she has met in the Fraser Valley so far and how she found support via social media as well (Kayla, April 16, 2018). She explains that

> [b]efore I came to The Fraser Valley, I live[d] in Surrey [for] one month, and in that house I had bugs, you know, many, and I call[ed] someone [to] help me and my friend call[ed] Claire and Claire post[ed] on Facebook, [and] many people here help[ed] me. When I came to The Fraser Valley I had all [the] furniture [for] my home. (Kayla, April 16, 2018)

My interviewees also talk about trauma and/or depression, though these experiences seemed to depend upon the situation. One of the instructors whom I interviewed talked about how she has noticed specific behaviour in students, which may be a result of trauma and/or depression (Nicole, April 11, 2018). For example, she has noticed that in the beginning levels of English classes when students are more new to learning, "some students are really scared [and] some of them start to cry and find it very difficult" (Nicole). Nicole explains that she does not notice this particular behaviour in her class, because once the students come to her class the English level is higher (April 11, 2018). Nicole shares her observation about one student in particular, whom she believes language helped to address trauma:

> I remember one student from South America, and she came and she was crying every day because she couldn't understand and she wasn't

getting adapted. She was by herself with three kids and then I had her in my class last year and she is super out going, she was one of the best ones in speaking, and she remembers how she started, and now she volunteers and she has a job. (Nicole, April 11, 2018)

This is a powerful example of how knowledge combined with appropriate pedagogy, time and language can support an individual and their settlement in a new community. It is important to note that language alone does not contribute to an individual's settlement success, but it is a combination of the individual's efforts, knowledge of the language, social networks, experience of teaching and personal experience.

As we can see, learning the language of one's community can significantly support successful integration and settlement. In addition, the entire settlement process is multi-layered and involves a combination of social, cultural, political, as well as physical aspects. Thus far, I have outlined that the fostering of community connections, learning the language both inside and outside a classroom, and having a safe space to learn and practice the language all impact the settlement processes and provide a positive experience for all newcomers and in particular, for immigrant women. In the following, I will summarize my research and suggest a few recommendations as well as discuss what I have learned and become aware of on a more personal level.

# Chapter 5.   Conclusion

*Starting a new life in a new country, is no small undertaking and research has shown that the sooner individuals can get connected—whether that is connected to resources or to people—the more positive their experience will be.*

As has been illustrated throughout this research, learning an additional language as a newcomer adult, and in particular as an immigrant woman, can be overwhelming and may pose a variety of challenges. Individuals from all over the world have significantly contributed to Canada's society but for many immigrants their contributions have also come with great sacrifice. Immigration has evolved significantly overtime, and immigration policy has been—more or less—a reflection of political motives. In addition, numerous historical and current world events have had a significant influence on the number of immigrants entering Canada, and it is predicted that this number will continue to increase. We can also see how factors such as immigration policy, neoliberalism and EAL programming have a direct impact on the experiences of newcomers in our country. Most importantly, as I have already highlighted, establishing social connections is integral to successful settlement and integration in a new community and having these social connections aids learning EAL.

On another note, there is an important distinction between assimilation and integration that needs to be more understood. I understand that many newcomers want to be "accepted" into their new society, but should this be at the cost of completely giving up, or being forced to give up, one's personal culture, language and value systems? Is it not possible to adopt a practice where individuals select what they want to maintain from their own culture and embrace from the "Canadian" culture, allowing the two to exist harmoniously? While I do believe that learning the local language will aid in successful integration, I do not believe that losing one's accent to adopt a "Canadian" accent should equal greater professional or employment success. Why is there an assumption that anyone with a non-Canadian accent may not be as educated?

Throughout my research, I became aware of numerous positive initiatives and experiences that are currently happening in order to ensure that all newcomers are welcomed, within this particular community located in the Fraser Valley. At the same time, I also became aware of various challenges that immigrant women are still facing,

and believe that in addition to the individuals involved with settlement services and EAL programs, community members could also provide more support for immigrant women in Canada in order to address the specific challenges they face. In addition, through self-reflection and analysis of my research, I believe that we—as a collective society—need to prepare and inform ourselves of how further support can be provided for the successful integration of newcomers. Whether you are directly involved in settlement programs or whether you encounter newcomers in your community, everyone can have an active role in welcoming new individuals and assisting them with various challenges that they may face.

## 5.1. A Few Recommendations

I conclude with a few recommendations that have arisen as a result of my research and insight into this topic. These suggestions are possible solutions that may further facilitate the settlement process for newcomers to Canada. Guo (2015) highlights some very useful implications as well and I will use her implications as a guide. My suggestions are particularly related to be implemented by educators, but can be adopted by any individual; it is important to note that my personal interpretation of my research has also influenced these suggestions.

Guo (2015) believes that the EAL programs which focus on teaching Canadian values do not integrate cultural difference and diversity into language education, yet they have "become a vehicle to assimilate immigrants into the norms of the dominant culture" (p. 47). Although my research did not look directly at EAL programs, as a result of my research, I've discovered that EAL instructors along with others supporting EAL programming, such as administrators, volunteers and settlement workers, are doing all that they can to support the successful integration of newcomers and truly strive to meet the unique needs of the individual but, they may be restricted by other factors such as funding and policies. As already mentioned, S. Guo (2009; as cited in Guo 2015) advises that adult educators "adopt a critical multiculturalism approach" (p. 48) and I believe that this approach is used by the EAL educators that I interviewed, based on my classroom observations.

As discussed in my research analysis, I noticed certain teaching and learning strategies which illustrate a multiculturalist approach. For example, there was emphasis

on learning the language for comprehension purposes and not necessarily linguistic perfection. In addition, instructors highlighted they informed their students that the students did not need to strive for perfection nor focus on removing their own accents. Likewise, I noticed students aiding their peers as much as they could and really working with one another, despite varying backgrounds, all because they have a common goal of learning the language. Moreover, instructors and settlement workers noted that although there is emphasis on only speaking in English in the classrooms, students are free to speak in any language they please during the break, and this supports the fostering of both connection and community.

Now, based on my research, numerous individuals whom I interviewed are doing all that they can to support the successful integration of newcomers but, more support—whether it is from a federal, provincial or community level—can be provided in the following areas: employment, childcare, program awareness and connections. I will further explain each of these in the following. This is by no means a criticism of the work that this agency or anyone associated with this organization does, rather it is a list of suggestions and recommendations based on how I interpreted the results of my research as well as based on my personal reflections.

First, more support for employment can be provided. As Guo (2015) notes, "immigrant professionals know the professional concepts of their fields in their native languages" and they might not know how to express this knowledge adequately in English (p. 48) however, this does not mean that their credentials and knowledge should go unrecognized, nor should they have to repeat their education. Rather, their knowledge and education should be more recognized and used in order for them to gain employment successfully. I am reminded of one of my immigrant women participants who indicated that in her native country, she was a nurse for 15 years, yet in Canada she is re-starting her nursing education. Granted, in this situation, she mentioned that she has no proof of her credentials and this may be unique to her situation. She also indicated that the first step for her is to improve her English language skills prior to being able to take further education in nursing (Heather, April 11, 2018). This seems unfair—I was able to understand her English very well and I believe there are other ways that she could be assessed for her professional knowledge and experience as a nurse. Perhaps there could be an exam in her native language or a practical assessment. As Guo (2015) recommends, one solution is to offer bilingual programs both in English and in the

immigrant's native language (p. 48). While this may involve collaboration from other community organizations as well, this solution would support many newcomers in gaining employment, much quicker than the current process.

Furthermore, another issue that arose which poses challenges is lack of childcare. On the one hand, although childcare is available at this particular agency for those who are taking classes, there is limited space which creates barriers to learn English in a formal setting for those who do not have other childcare options. It was also noted that childcare is not only lacking but it is expensive. As one of my interviewees noted, more affordable childcare will not only benefit newcomers, but those living here as well. It was interesting to hear a different view from another interviewee in that perhaps we can encourage more connection among newcomers to take care of each other's' children, allowing for at least some to take part in English language classes. Regardless, having more childcare options and ensuring that childcare is more financially accessible will support successful integration as well, in particular for immigrant women.

Moreover, I believe that there needs to be more awareness among all community members and not only newcomers, about the various programs available for newcomers at the agency and other organizations. I believe the particular agency where my research is located provides as much information as possible, and invites the community to find out more about their programs, but this is still seen as each individual community member's choice. If community members encounter newcomers, they should take it as a collective responsibility to connect these new neighbours to community organization or even to befriend them. Informing themselves of the various resources available for newcomers in our community would be the first step and after that, finding out what resources are required by a newcomer—if any—is the second. That said, all the referral and advice in the world is not helpful if there are not adequate accessible services to assist immigrant women as they settle into the community.

On a similar note, with an increase in awareness, I believe that discrimination must be addressed as well. As discussed, discrimination occurs in various forms, and although I believe that not all forms of discrimination are necessarily intentional, there are individuals who choose to discriminate. This flows from various factors and influences in our society including lack of critical awareness of what discrimination looks

like, a lack of awareness of class and racial privilege as well as perhaps fear. As already noted by Drolet and Moorthi (2018) the discrimination experienced by newcomers is a result of systematic and structural barriers which are a part of the settlement process (p. 105). Unfortunately, discrimination which occurs in our community can also enter learning environments and have an overall impact on newcomers' experience and settlement. For this reason, in particular it is important for service providers to receive training and education on how to address and alleviate if not eliminate discriminatory practices.

Moreover, similar to what I have found, Zhu (2016) also notes that there are not enough studies which explore how immigrant women "have developed their own strategies to fit" into their local communities (p. 146). Based on the interviews with the three immigrant women, it was interesting to find out about creative strategies for fitting in. For example, one of the women talked about her entrepreneurial efforts and how she shared her own culture by taking orders and preparing food. I thought it was quite ambitious and unique in that not only is she sharing her own culture, she is earning income as well. I also remember how excited and proud she was when describing her personal business. Moreover, my Umee also talked about how upon completing all the English language levels, she was offered a volunteer position to assist in the classrooms and work with other language learners as well as provide assistance as needed to the instructors. She happily took this opportunity, and felt a sense of responsibility to assist others who are in a similar situation that she was once in. She talks about how through this volunteer opportunity she felt as though she was giving back to the community. By building further interpersonal skills and gaining volunteer experience, she was able to apply for and successfully attain her first job. Both of these are examples of how each of the women took it upon themselves to build connections, but were also supported in different ways by the community.

Throughout this research, I have pulled together what people have told me but also what I have observed, my reflections on readings and literature in light of these interviews and observations, and of course my own life experiences and family history. It is important to highlight that this is a partial view. The interviews and stories I was offered are snapshots from a certain context and within a specific time period. As educators, settlement workers, volunteers, policy makers, community members and citizens, we all have an impact on the experience of newcomers and can play an active

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role in ensuring that all newcomers have a positive experience when settling and integrating into their new communities.

With this inquiry, my goal was to contribute to current knowledge regarding how EAL educators and programs may better support the integration of newcomer women, in order to optimize their settlement within the Fraser Valley where I live and work. The purpose of the interviews was to provide further insight into the experiences of current immigrant women and their experiences, in particular the challenges they are currently facing. As mentioned, although organizations such as this agency are working hard to ensure the successful integration of newcomers, I believe that more support from the wider community can be provided. This study provides a brief glimpse into the settlement journey and I believe, more long-term research is needed to track long-term impacts and outcomes of migration as experienced by women.

## 5.2.  What I have Learned

When I first began this research, I had intended to ask certain questions. As I gained more information from my interviews and observations, I learned a lot more beyond the scope of my original questions. I also became more aware of my positionality and my outward appearance as a visible minority—factors that I did not take into account prior to beginning my research. I did not consider that these factors could have an effect on my data collection, including both the interviews and observations. I question if the immigrant women whom I interviewed would have been as comfortable sharing their personal insights with me if I was not a visible female minority, and in particular a visible Muslim woman, (i.e. I wear a Hijab).

On a similar note, I have become more aware that my research is a reflection of my perspective and experiences. Although I have taken into account the work of other researchers, I am still bound by my own interpretations and output of the information I have gathered. I believe all this should be taken into account. Through this experience I have become more aware of my presence and my positionality as a researcher. On a similar note, I have become more aware of how qualitative research and interpretations of one's research are quite limiting and specific to a certain context. There were times when I felt I had to defend my interpretation, but I have learned that it is ok to indicate

one's interpretation while also being open to other perspectives. I find these different perspectives provide more comprehensive and stronger research.

I also question if my presence in the classrooms had an effect on the students' performance and behaviour. During my observations in both classes, I felt as though I was an observer for the most part, but there were instances where I was asked to take part in an activity with the other learners. In addition, during my first observation in both classes, the instructors asked me to introduce myself and my research. They had already informed their students that I would be observing on certain days and, I really appreciated the personal touch that I was able to add by explaining my research in my own words. Although I felt as though my presence did not have an effect on the students' behaviour, I am aware that I do not have enough data to know otherwise.

This inquiry has made me more aware of the current immigrant situation in the Fraser Valley, and has provided more insight into the programs and services that this particular agency provides. Moreover, I have gained more information about immigration in Canada and the numerous factors associated with the process of immigration and settlement. As an educator, I am more aware of the numerous aspects that directly affect immigrants and in particular immigrant women. As a result of my awareness for these aspects, this will affect my teaching and my presence as an educator in the classroom. Instead of just focusing on teaching the language skills, I will be more aware of other potential factors and issues that the students in my class are experiencing. While I only interviewed a few people, their unique insights and stories provided valuable information that I can learn from as I work towards creating more connection and ensuring a positive settlement experience for immigrant women and other newcomers. In addition, because I am more aware of the different challenges such as childcare, transportation and building social connections, I plan to ensure that I can advocate for minimizing these challenges as much as possible.

Finally, what I found encouraging and relieving at the same time is that each participant whom I interviewed mentioned the importance of social connections. My Umee talked about this as well, highlighting that having social connections allowed her to feel less lonely. Starting a new life in a new country, is no small undertaking and research has shown that the sooner individuals can get connected—whether that connection is to resources or to people—the more positive their experience will be

(Wilbur, 2016; Dlamini, Anucha and Wolfe, 2012). It should be a responsibility of each individual living in Canada to ensure that newcomers feel connected. As educators, we can take the extra step to check in on newcomers and find out perhaps where they are already connected and where else they could be connected. Thus, both learning the language and building social connections will increase access to information and overall, support settlement for immigrant women.

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# Appendix A.

# Research Instrument – Topic for Participants

**Research Topics for Participants**

**Research Instrument**

**There's More to the Story – An Insight into the Experiences of Immigrant Women Learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) in The Fraser Valley, BC, Canada**

**Study Team**

Principal Investigator: Sidrah Ahmad, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University,

Thesis Supervisor: Suzanne Smythe, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University,

The results of this study will be presented in a master's thesis dissertation. The following is a list of topics that I will be covering with the participants:

1. Demographic Data

    a. Age

    b. Ethnic or national background

    c. Educational background

    d. Employment status

    e. Familial situation

    f. Number of years working in the field

    g. Number of years working with language learners

2. Experiences learning English in Canada

3. Preferences for learning English

4. The role of learning English in settlement

5. Difficulties learning English

6. Approaches to learning English

7. Expectations in learning English

8. Available support for learning English

9. Learning strategies

# Appendix B.

# Research Instruments – Interview Questions

**Interview Questions – Director, The Fraser Valley Community Services**

**Research Instrument**

**There's More to the Story – An Insight into the Experiences of Immigrant Women Learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) in The Fraser Valley, BC, Canada**

**Study Team**

Principal Investigator: Sidrah Ahmad, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University,

Thesis Supervisor: Suzanne Smythe, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University,

The results of this study will be presented in a master's thesis dissertation.

1. Demographic Data

2. Number of years working with language learners

3. Number of years working with the agency

4. Educational background

5. Are immigrant women marginalized? If so, how?

6. Are immigrant women subject to discrimination? If so, how?

7. How can we reduce experiences of marginalization and discrimination?

8. What pedagogies can reduce the experience of social marginalization and discrimination?

9. How does learning English assist with settlement for these immigrant women?

10. What is most difficult for immigrant women in terms of adjusting to their new community?

11. What expectations do immigrant women have in terms of the services and programs provided by the agency?

12. What do you think would help immigrant women feel more settled in our community?

**Interview Questions – EAL Instructor**

**Research Instrument**

**There's More to the Story – An Insight into the Experiences of Immigrant Women Learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) in The Fraser Valley, BC, Canada**

**Study Team**

Principal Investigator: Sidrah Ahmad, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University,

Thesis Supervisor: Suzanne Smythe, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University,

The results of this study will be presented in a master's thesis dissertation.

1. Demographic Data

2. Number of years working as an EAL instructor

3. Number of years working with the agency

4. Educational background

5. How do immigrant women learn English in your LINC classroom?

6. What expectations do immigrant women have in terms of learning EAL in your LINC classroom?

7. What challenges do immigrant women have when learning EAL in your LINC class?

8. Are immigrant women marginalized your LINC classroom? If so, how?

9. Are immigrant women subject to discrimination in your LINC classroom? If so, how?

10. What pedagogies can reduce experience of social marginalization and discrimination?

11. What is most difficult for immigrant women in terms of adjusting to their new community?

12. What do you think would help immigrant women feel more settled in our community?

**Interview Questions – Immigrant Women Language Learners**

**Research Instrument**

**There's More to the Story – An Insight into the Experiences of Immigrant Women Learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) in The Fraser Valley, BC, Canada**

**Study Team**

Principal Investigator: Sidrah Ahmad, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University,

Thesis Supervisor: Suzanne Smythe, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University,

The results of this study will be presented in a master's thesis dissertation.

1. Demographic Data

2. Age

3. Ethnic or national background

4. Educational background

5. Employment status

6. Familial situation

7. Is learning English important to you and if so, why?

8. What are your goals for learning English?

9. What has been most difficult in adjusting to your new community in Canada? What supports have been important for adjusting to life here? What supports do you think you need?

10. What challenges do you face when learning English?

11. What are you currently doing to learn English? What particular learning strategies do you use when learning English?

12. What do you expect from programs offered by the agency?

13. Do you feel part of Canadian society?

14. What hinders that feeling?

15. What helps you feel a sense of belonging?

16. What do you think would help you now or in the future to feel more settled in Canada?

17. Do you have any suggestions for learning strategies that will help you learn English?

18. How do you like to learn? What do you find different about learning in Canada?

**Interview Questions – Settlement Worker**

**Research Instrument**

**There's More to the Story – An Insight into the Experiences of Immigrant Women Learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) in The Fraser Valley, BC, Canada**

**Study Team**

Principal Investigator: Sidrah Ahmad, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University,

Thesis Supervisor: Suzanne Smythe, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University,

The results of this study will be presented in a Master's Thesis dissertation.

1. Demographic Data

2. Number of years working in settlement services

3. Number of years working with the agency

4. Educational background

5. What services do you provide in terms of settlement for immigrant women in the Fraser Valley?

6. What services do you provide in terms of language learning for immigrant women in the Fraser Valley?

7. How does learning English assist with settlement for these immigrant women?

8. Are immigrant women marginalized? If so, how?

9. Are immigrant women subject to discrimination? If so, how?

10. What expectations do immigrant women have in terms of learning English and settlement?

11. What is most difficult for immigrant women in terms of adjusting to their new community?

12. What do you think would help immigrant women feel more settled in our community?

**Interview Questions – Volunteer Tutors**

**Research Instrument**

**There's More to the Story – An Insight into the Experiences of Immigrant Women Learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) in The Fraser Valley, BC, Canada**

**Study Team**

Principal Investigator: Sidrah Ahmad, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University,

Thesis Supervisor: Suzanne Smythe, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University,

1. The results of this study will be presented in a Master's Thesis dissertation.

2. Demographic Data

3. Number of years working with language learners

4. Number of years working as a Volunteer Tutor with the agency

5. Educational background

6. What do you do to assist immigrant women in learning English?

7. What expectations do immigrant women have when learning English with you?

8. What challenges do immigrant women have when learning English with you?

9. Are immigrant women marginalized? If so, how?

10. Are immigrant women subject to discrimination? If so, how?

11. How can we reduce experiences of marginalization and discrimination?

12. What is most difficult for immigrant women in terms of adjusting to their new community?

13. What do you think would help immigrant women feel more settled in our community?

# Appendix C.

# Observation Guide

**Observation Guide**

**There's More to the Story – An Insight into the Experiences of Immigrant Women Learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) in The Fraser Valley, BC, Canada**

**Observation Guide for LINC classroom observations**

**Study Team**

Principal Investigator: Sidrah Ahmad, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University,

Thesis Supervisor: Suzanne Smythe, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University,

The results of this study will be presented in a master's thesis dissertation.

The following checklist will be used to observe six, one-hour sessions of a LINC classroom.

1. Physical layout of the classroom

2. Number of students in the classroom

3. Teaching strategies used in the classroom

4. Learning strategies used among the students

5. Successful lessons

6. Areas of difficulty

7. How students and teachers adjust to one another

8. Languages spoken in the classroom

9. How learning unfolds