

**Triple Learning: The Journey from International Student to Scholar**

A Dissertation Submitted to  
the College of Graduate Studies and Research  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada

by  
Yolanda Michelle Palmer-Clarke

## **PERMISSION TO USE**

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree from the University of Saskatchewan, I agree that the libraries of this university may make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for copying of this thesis in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor who supervised my thesis work or, in her absence, by the head of the department or the dean of the college in which my thesis work was done. It is understood that any copying, publication, or use of this thesis or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition should be given to me and to the University of Saskatchewan in any scholarly use that may be made of any material in my thesis.

Requests for permission to copy or to make other use of material in this thesis in whole or part should be addressed to:

Department of Interdisciplinary Studies

University of Saskatchewan

C180 Administration Building

105 Administration Place, Saskatoon

SK S7N 5A2.

## ABSTRACT

*Triple Learning: The Journey from Student to Scholar* emanates from a phenomenological exploration of the lived experiences of six international graduate students studying at the University of Saskatchewan. Grounded in the knowledge of the growing numbers of students studying at post-secondary institutions, I aimed to unearth and re-present the daily lives of the selected participants to shed light on the experience of being an international graduate student. A phenomenological inquiry through in-depth and semi-structured interviews and observations, undergirded by an interdisciplinary culture, allowed me to explore their daily experiences. Exploring and airing their daily practices, though difficult, illuminated the worlds of international graduate students as they study in and negotiate communities of practice overseas. Furthermore, by examining and ventilating their stories I was able to portray and clarify the essence or meaning of being an international graduate student at a Canadian university in a new way. This research reaches into the lives of the selected students uniquely, revealing their personal and academic experiences while studying at the university. To date, such experiences have been minimally addressed by university officials and prior qualitative research.

The anecdotes and reflections shared by participants bordered on and were based in lingua-cultural, social, and academic adaptations, and, ultimately, transformation. Participants were enthralled by the adaptive process of living in a new community. Being newcomers, these students viewed themselves fundamentally as *outsiders* within the community of practice. Yet their stories encapsulated change from being dependent “scholars to be” to becoming independent scholars. Essentially, findings pointed to the international graduate experience being similar to advancing from *student to scholar*. Through participation in the academic community of practice, they were learning to become independent scholars in the university.

Participant accomplished the non-linear movement from student to scholar by seeking to engage in the communities of practice through situated learning and a process of triple learning. *Triple learning* emerged as a lingua-cultural phenomenon and was a significant finding borne of participants’ storied experiences. Qualitative data revealed that, in learning, participants were constantly weaving around and through three distinct registers of English lingua-cultures. They were negotiating the English lingua-culture acquired in their home countries, which positioned English as a formal language; that of the provincial community, which seemingly was less formal; and the academic English language specific to their area of study in the university. The

academic language includes a variety of discipline-specific language skills, such as vocabulary, syntax, and discipline-specific terminology, and rhetorical conventions that allow students to acquire and develop knowledge and academic skills. These lingua cultures differed significantly, so students constantly shifted among the three to make approximations deemed appropriate for their academic purposes.

A significant implication of this research is that it highlights the daily experiences of international graduate students, their perceptions, and conceptualized meanings of these experiences. Findings from this study also have implications for social learning theories and places learning as lingua-cultural in nature. In addition, an understanding of the phenomenon of being an international student can inform universities' policy makers, recruiters, faculty members, and other staff of the daily plights and experiences of international students as they study. This knowledge has the potential to inform policies and plans to attract and retain a diverse international student body.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Thanks, thanks, I give you thanks... I am so blessed.*

As we embark on life's journey it is necessary to “develop an attitude of gratitude, and give thanks for everything that happens to you, knowing that every step forward is a step toward achieving something bigger and better than your current situation” (Brian Tracey, University of Alberta). Completing a Ph.D. is laborious and rarely if ever can be accomplished single-handedly. I am grateful to those who influenced and assisted me throughout my research, from its conception to its completion.

- Dr. Linda Wason-Ellam, my co-supervisor; like a precious gem, your words of encouragement shone through my dark days and inspired me to push even when felt I could not make it. Your motherly concern and encouragement did not go unnoticed. You said I could do it and at every step of the way applauded my efforts and prodded me to go deeper and try harder. You taught me to seek my own voice through the voices of others and then to speak. You guided me to readings and personalities who became friends and partners on the journey, and for this I am eternally grateful.
- Dr. Karla Jessen Williamson, you willingly engaged me as a supervisee. You were always receptive of my conversations and encouraged me to continue on the path to success. You were saddened by my disappointments and joyous about my accomplishments. Our many talks and work together have left an indelible mark on my life. Your inquiring mind and dedicated, focused approach helped to steer me on a clear path to completion of this project. From the outset you showed keen interest in my work, and I will never forget it. I thank you.
- My dedicated and hardworking committee members, Drs. Bonnie Stelmach, Veronika Makarova, and Susan Fowler-Kerry: Individually and collectively, you all served to shape me as a professional and as a researcher. Your probing and insightful comments, gentle questioning, and kind suggestions kept me grounded and focused on what I needed to do and what this project needed to represent. I value every moment and every conversation. I wholeheartedly thank you all.
- Dr. Dirk Morrison, you stepped in at the very last minute to save the day, and for this I am most grateful.
- Dr. Mary Maguire, my external examiner, you took time out of your schedule to read and critically examine my dissertation; it was an honor and a pleasure to have worked with you.

- Garcia, Georgie, Kuri, Maria, Owaja, and Rueda, my participants and the heart of this dissertation: You all willingly and openly shared your stories with me. It was through your shared stories that the research has been able to grow and develop into what it has become. Thank you all.
- Taneisha and Chrysalis, my sister and niece; what a journey! From being mere acquaintances to becoming sisters; we did this together. Chrysalis, you made my journey a little lighter. Your vibrancy in the house brought joy. Taneisha, you were an inspiration to me (if only you knew how much). Thank you guys for keeping me rooted and grounded.
- Curline and Paul Lindo, for your kindness and hospitality throughout my course; I thank you. The many calls, hails, and encouragement and the open invitation played a part in making me feel at home and at peace. It helped me to be able to push on in my work, knowing that I had a family in you whenever I needed one. This was greatly needed and I appreciate you for it.
- Teddy Bandima, you always were so pleasant and kind with your comments and suggestions. Thank you for being there.
- Mommy Dawn, my darling mother, thank you for instilling in me the desire to reach for the stars and always giving me the space I needed to pursue my dreams.
- My darling Aunt May, how can I not thank you? We have become so close from this. You call every other day to check in on me and to remind me to keep warm and eat well. Thank you, Grandma.
- Hugh Clarke, you became my chief motivator, prayer warrior, and partner. Thank you for being there and for propping me up when I needed it most.
- Señora Bailey and my Jamaican church family, your prayers were felt and have been answered. Thank you for all your help and encouragement.

This journey was a collaborative effort. Time and space will not allow me to mention everyone. I am grateful to all for the part you played on this journey. Whether you were an active cheerleader or a casual bystander, I thank you for helping me through the process of this research. It is finished! All thanks and glory be to God Almighty!

## DEDICATION

“My faith looks up to thee, thou Lamb of Calvary, Savior divine!  
Now hear me while I pray, take all my guilt away, O let me from this day be wholly Thine!”  
“O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the works thy hand hath made,  
I see the stars; I hear the mighty thunder, thy power throughout the universe displayed:  
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God; to thee, How great thou art, how great thou art!  
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God; to thee, How great thou art, how great thou art!”

To the Almighty God, my forever inspiration,  
To those He sent to guide me,  
To those He called home before me,  
To those who look to me for strength,  
I dedicate this work to you. You too can do it!  
God’s richest blessings.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |      |
|---|------|
| PERMISSION TO USE .....   | i    |
| ABSTRACT .....  | ii   |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....  | iv   |
| DEDICATION .....  | vi   |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS .....   | vii  |
| List of Tables .....  | xii  |
| List of Figures .....   | xii  |
| List of Acronyms .....  | xiii |
| PROLOGUE .....  | 1    |
| Looking in the Mirror I See Me .....  | 1    |
| The Early Years: Growing Up In Jamaica .....  | 2    |
| Education in Jamaica .....  | 4    |
| Educating the Jamaican Woman .....  | 6    |
| My Life as a Student in Jamaica .....   | 7    |
| Life as an International Graduate Student .....   | 9    |
| The Journey .....   | 9    |
| Being in the University .....   | 10   |
| Organization of Dissertation .....  | 12   |
| If Only I Knew Their Story .....  | 14   |
| CHAPTER ONE .....   | 15   |
| Introduction to the Study .....   | 15   |
| Background: International Graduate Students in Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions ..... | 17   |
| Context: International Students at the University of Saskatchewan .....                   | 18   |
| Statement of the Problem .....  | 22   |
| Purpose of the Study and the Research Questions .....                                     | 26   |
| Hermeneutic Phenomenology .....   | 26   |
| Interdisciplinary .....   | 28   |
| Limitations of the Study .....  | 30   |
| Assumptions .....   | 31   |
| The Significance of the Study .....   | 31   |
| Freezing Lands .....  | 32   |
| CHAPTER TWO .....   | 33   |
| Review of the Literature .....  | 33   |
| Introduction .....  | 33   |
| Part One .....  | 34   |
| Bourdieu’s Social Capital: Key Elements in Learning .....                                 | 34   |
| Situated Learning: Learning in a Community of Practice .....                              | 36   |
| Sense of Community .....  | 38   |
| Sense of Belonging .....  | 41   |



|   |    |
|---|----|
| Part Two.....   | 43 |
| International Students Adjusting to Overseas Post-secondary Institutions .....            | 43 |
| Discrimination.....   | 44 |
| Academic Adjustments .....  | 45 |
| Academic Language and Literacy Adjustments.....   | 47 |
| Financial Adjustment .....  | 50 |
| Canadian Immigration Policies for International Students.....                             | 52 |
| Summary .....   | 53 |
| CHAPTER THREE .....   | 54 |
| Research Design and Methodology .....   | 54 |
| Introduction .....  | 54 |
| Hermeneutic Phenomenology: Towards a Deeper Understanding of Phenomenon.....              | 56 |
| The Pilot Study .....   | 58 |
| The Research Setting: Time, Place, and Space.....   | 59 |
| Description of the Data Collection Process .....  | 59 |
| The In-depth Interview Process.....   | 59 |
| <i>Stage one</i> .....  | 60 |
| <i>Stage two</i> .....  | 60 |
| Participant Selection .....   | 60 |
| The Participants.....   | 63 |
| The Data Collection Process.....  | 64 |
| Interview with Participants: Harvesting Their Experiences.....                            | 65 |
| The Observation: Seeing Participants in Action .....                                      | 65 |
| Conversational Interviews: Debriefing and “Chit-chat” .....                               | 67 |
| Field Logs and Journals: Keeping Records.....   | 67 |
| Analysis and Interpretation: Making Meaning of Data .....                                 | 68 |
| Horizontalization and Data Reduction: Horizons of Meaning .....                           | 70 |
| Experiential Descriptions: Re-telling Participants’ Narratives .....                      | 71 |
| Highlighting Themes: Getting to the Meaning of Experiences.....                           | 72 |
| Interpretation and Verification: Seeing the Bigger Picture.....                           | 73 |
| Trustworthiness and Verisimilitude.....   | 74 |
| Member Checks: Confirming Authenticity.....   | 74 |
| Peer Scrutiny .....   | 75 |
| Reflexivity: Bracketing the Researcher.....   | 75 |
| Credibility Checklist: Assessing the Process .....  | 75 |
| Ethics.....   | 76 |
| Summary .....   | 76 |
| CHAPTER FOUR.....   | 77 |
| The Other Side of the Mirror: The Shared Stories of International Graduate Students ..... | 77 |
| Organization of Chapter.....  | 77 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Kuri’s Story: A Mixed Bag.....                                    | 79  |
| Background Information .....                                      | 79  |
| “It is Difficult to Find a Good Place to Live” .....              | 80  |
| Making Ends Meet .....  | 80  |
| "I Have Very Little Time" .....                                   | 82  |
| "I Draw Strength from God and My Parents" .....                   | 83  |
| "I Am a Misfit" .....   | 83  |
| "It Is Easier for Them to Fit In" .....                           | 88  |
| "Your English Is So Good" .....                                   | 89  |
| "It Took Me Some Time to Get Adjusted" .....                      | 90  |
| Learning How to Fly .....   | 91  |
| Garcia’s Story: The Trade Off .....                               | 92  |
| Background Information .....                                      | 92  |
| "I Had to Work Thrice As Hard" .....                              | 94  |
| "I Was Doing a Trade Off" .....                                   | 95  |
| "They Did Not Know I Was a Speaker of English" .....              | 95  |
| A Strange and Challenging Experience .....                        | 96  |
| "We Do Not Feel the Connection" .....                             | 97  |
| "You Cannot Pinpoint It, but It Is There" .....                   | 98  |
| "I Am More Confident, More Informed" .....                        | 99  |
| Owaja’s Story: Every Day Is a Fight .....                         | 100 |
| Background Information .....                                      | 100 |
| Life Running on the Track .....                                   | 100 |
| "I Did Not Know What Was Appropriate" .....                       | 101 |
| "I Am a Cultural and Linguistic Baby" .....                       | 102 |
| "We Feel Defeated by Others" .....                                | 104 |
| "I Felt Unsafe and Uncomfortable" .....                           | 105 |
| "The Scare in Their Eyes" .....                                   | 107 |
| "Crazy Blowing Wind" .....  | 107 |
| "I Was Once Very Confident about My English" .....                | 110 |
| Always Catching Up with Other Students .....                      | 111 |
| "I Am a More Understanding Person" .....                          | 112 |
| Maria’s Story: Juggling to Survive .....                          | 112 |
| Background Information .....                                      | 112 |
| "A Normal Day Is Just Unending" .....                             | 113 |
| "There Is Everything Wrong with It" .....                         | 114 |
| "I Felt Like the Ground Would Just Break" .....                   | 116 |
| "This Guy Is Very Biased" .....                                   | 117 |
| "Because I am an International Student, Because I Am Black" ..... | 117 |
| "It Is Colder Than a Freezer" .....                               | 119 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Lonely in a Crowd.....   | 120 |
| Juggling Many Things.....  | 122 |
| Preparing for Better .....   | 123 |
| The Story of Georgie and Rueda: Learning Together .....                          | 124 |
| Background Information .....   | 124 |
| "Here Everything Is New".....  | 124 |
| "Every Voice Is Respected and Valued" .....                                      | 125 |
| "The English Here Is Different" .....  | 128 |
| "I Keep Losing Some Parts".....  | 130 |
| "You Feel Kind of Distant" .....   | 133 |
| "Your Roots Are Always in This Tree" .....                                       | 135 |
| "It Has Taught Me How to Think" .....  | 138 |
| Summary .....  | 139 |
| Outsider From Afar.....  | 141 |
| CHAPTER FIVE .....   | 142 |
| What We See Now: Taking a Closer Look at the Data .....                          | 142 |
| Outsiders in the University: Learning Peripherally .....                         | 143 |
| Cultures Colliding: The Dialectic between Country of Origin and Settlement ..... | 147 |
| Learning from the Periphery: Seeking Belonging.....                              | 152 |
| Unconnected to Place .....   | 157 |
| Seeking Recognition and Validation.. .....                                       | 158 |
| Condescending and Discriminating: Feeling Judged .....                           | 160 |
| Securing Funding: Surviving Economically .....                                   | 162 |
| Acquiring and Maintaining Academic Literacy and Academic Discourse .....         | 165 |
| Communicating in English.....  | 167 |
| Mentors and Mentees: Learning from Others .....                                  | 176 |
| Summary .....  | 177 |
| CHAPTER SIX.....   | 179 |
| Summations, Reflections, and Recommendations.....                                | 179 |
| Overview and Discussion of Findings .....  | 180 |
| Being a Student, Becoming a Scholar: Learning through Situated Practice.....     | 181 |
| Situated Learning .....  | 185 |
| Adapting to University Culture .....   | 188 |
| Triple Learning through Situated Practice .....                                  | 190 |
| Methodological Reflections .....   | 194 |
| Reflecting on the Interview Process .....  | 195 |
| Reflecting on the Observations.....  | 196 |
| Reflecting on the Field Log and Journal .....                                    | 196 |
| Reflecting on the Analysis and Interpretation .....                              | 197 |
| Reflecting on the Writing Process .....  | 198 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Recommendations for Further Thought.....                   | 199 |
| Recommendations for Further Explorations.....              | 201 |
| EPILOGUE.....  | 202 |
| Connected at Last.....                                     | 202 |
| References.....  | 207 |
| APPENDIX A -Information and Invitation Letter.....         | 226 |
| APPENDIX B - Letter of Consent and Consent Form.....       | 228 |
| APPENDIX C -International Graduate Student Interviews..... | 230 |
| APPENDIX D -Researcher Log.....                            | 232 |
| APPENDIX E -Transcript Release Form.....                   | 234 |
| APPENDIX F - Concept Maps.....                             | 235 |
| APPENDIX G - Reawakening Model.....                        | 236 |

## **List of Tables**

|           |  |    |
|-----------|--|----|
| Table 1.1 | Overall Graduate Student Enrollment in the University .....      | 19 |
| Table 1.2 | International Graduate Student Enrollment in the University..... | 20 |
| Table 3.2 | Demographic Overview of Participants .....                       | 63 |
| Table 3.3 | Summary of Data Collection Tools .....                           | 64 |
| Table 3.4 | Credibility Checklist .....                                      | 75 |

## **List of Figures**

|            |   |     |
|------------|---|-----|
| Figure 1   | Map of Jamaica showing parishes and boundaries .....                    | 2   |
| Figure 1.3 | International graduate student enrollment trends in the University..... | 21  |
| Figure 1.4 | Top five countries of origin for international graduate students.....   | 22  |
| Figure 1.5 | Summary of interdisciplinarity .....                                    | 29  |
| Figure 2.1 | Diagram illustrating the elements of situated practice .....            | 37  |
| Figure 3.1 | Summary of research design, methodology and methods .....               | 55  |
| Figure 4.1 | Coming in from the Cold .....   | 109 |
| Figure 6.1 | Student to Scholar .....  | 183 |
| Figure 6.2 | The Process of Triple Learning .....                                    | 191 |
| Figure 7.1 | The Road to River's Edge .....  | 202 |
| Figure 7.2 | The river flowing through the property.....                             | 203 |

### **List of Acronyms**

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| APA    | American Psychological Association                              |
| AUCC   | Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada              |
| BC     | British Columbia  |
| CBIE   | Canadian Bureau for International Education                     |
| CIC    | Citizenship and Immigration Canada                              |
| CXC    | Caribbean Examinations Council                                  |
| EAL    | English as an Additional Language                               |
| FAIT   | Foreign Affairs and International Trade                         |
| JC     | Jamaican Creole   |
| JSE    | Jamaican Standard English                                       |
| MOE    | Ministry of Education   |
| NNES   | Non-native English speaker                                      |
| UNESCO | United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization |
| WES    | World Education Service   |

*[For] I am a stranger and a sojourner with you...*

*Genesis 23:24*

## **PROLOGUE**

### **Looking in the Mirror I See Me**

On September 6, 2011, I started my journey as an international graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan. As I disembarked Air Canada flight AC1121 from Toronto to Saskatoon, I thought, “Finally, after more than two months’ wait, I am here!” I was a long way from my home in Jamaica, but I entered my course of study with ambition, confidence, dedication, determination, independence, perseverance, and pride.

As an international student, I constantly grapple with my position in the university and its inherent nature. Entering the Canadian post-secondary academic environment from a rich cultural, linguistic, and academic background, I was highly aware of the differences between here, my host environment and there, my country of birth. My approach to my studies and daily life contrasted starkly with the way things were done at the university. Furthermore, as I interacted with other international students in the new academic community my struggles were heightened as I began to question the day to day experiences of these students. Many of the students with whom I spoke had trouble with the new social, cultural, linguistic, and academic environment of the university. I contemplated their questions and wonderings, which became my concern. I wondered about their individual and collective stories as they negotiated the new social, cultural, and academic landscape. Often I pondered how these stories enhanced the lives of international graduate students. These musings drove my exploration of the lived experiences of international students at the graduate level in a Canadian university community. My aim was to explore, through an interdisciplinary lens, their daily lived experiences to elucidate the essence of being an international graduate student.

I wanted to capture the stories and the underlying assumptions and meanings—the essence—that these students accorded to the experience of studying in a cultural and linguistic environment quite different from their home countries. I was interested in the stories of international graduate students and believed that their stories and narratives could provide access to their individual claims about their experiences (Maynes, Pierce & Laslett, 2008). Furthermore, narratives would organize their experiences, which are not always observable, into meaningful episodes that could help unlock the essence of the lived experience of being an international graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan.



My inspiration for the current research, then, is rooted not only in my interest in the experiences of students studying in new academic environments, but it also stems from my own sojourn as an educator, an international graduate student, and a researcher. For this reason, my own story plays an essential part (Creswell & Miller, 2010; Merriam, 2009) in the process of unfolding the stories of international graduate students and deriving meaning from the phenomenon. I, therefore, begin this dissertation by positioning myself; in so doing I am “outing” myself to my readers and establishing validation and relevance of my story to the process (Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). I believe my own story is important because it positions my biases and helps me figure out who I am as an international graduate student and researcher.

### **The Early Years: Growing Up In Jamaica**

I was born in the late 1970s in a small district in the parish of St. Mary, which is located in the north eastern section of Jamaica (Figure 1). St. Mary is known to be a farming parish, which is evidenced in the lifestyle of its people, who are traditionally farmers of green produce and livestock. The parish nestles between two of Jamaica’s most prominent tourist destinations: St. Ann, home of the famous Dunn’s River Falls, and Portland, which houses the world-famous Somerset Falls. St. Mary also shares borders with St. Andrew—in which the capital city Kingston is found—and the old capital, St. Catherine.



*Figure 1:* Map of Jamaica showing parishes and boundaries

I am the first of two children born to my parents. During my early childhood, my parents, my brother, and I lived in a large family house with our extended family members (my grandparents, uncles, aunts and their families). This kind of family arrangement is common in my community and in Jamaica. When a child is born into a Jamaican family, the entire family takes responsibility for its upbringing and maintenance (Bailey, 2002). This familial arrangement allows members to share resources and take part in nurturing younger siblings and relations. It is also representative of our African heritage, as this tradition reflects the African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child.” In our home, managing the family and raising the children was a communal responsibility among the adults in the family, supervised by my paternal grandmother.

Jamaican parents are very strict, urging children from an early age to excel academically (Bailey, 2002) even when they themselves are not well educated. So my brother and I grew up knowing that schooling and education were very important. We never missed school even when there was a scarcity of resources. Our parents and extended family members taught us the value of education and discipline. My brother and I—as well as the numerous cousins that lived with us—were taught to value our education and to work hard to become better versions of our parents. I am the first member of my family to have graduated from college and university and one among a new generation of formally educated Jamaican women who have shattered the stereotype of being housewives to surge ahead academically. I owe these ambitions and successes to my Auntie, with whom I spent many of my growing years.

My maternal grandmother migrated to the United States in 1985, so I spent countless vacations and weekends with my grandaunt, Mommy’s aunt, whom I called Auntie. Auntie’s home was my second home. As a matter of fact, it could be deemed my primary home since I was there more often than I was at my mother’s house. We spent countless hours talking about “the good old days,” what things were like, and our family history. From my grandaunt, I learned that I came from a line of strong black women who stood behind their husbands and worked hard to maintain their families. These were women of pride and valor who had no formal education but ran businesses and were role models in the community.

As I grew older and began to spend more time with my Auntie, I saw less of my father. I recall him being a strict disciplinarian as well as a kind and gentle person. He was educated at the local elementary school. With my mother, he ensured that we had all we needed for survival.

Today, we have a special father-daughter bond. My mother and I have always had a special bond. I saw her often because she regularly visited Auntie and me.

Christianity has played a pivotal role in Jamaica's history and still continues to influence the society. Therefore, a fundamental part of my youth was attending weekly Sunday church services and Sunday school. From these obligatory meetings I learned, developed, and to this day maintain strong Christian virtues, values, and morals; we were taught unconditional love, kindness, hospitality, courtesy, patience, and loyalty. These continue to be the hallmark of my everyday existence. My strong Christian upbringing and conviction guides me in everything I do.

As I write, I nostalgically reflect on the refrain of the song "Jamaica, Land of Beauty," by A. L. Hendricks and L. Hall: "[f]rom riverside to mountains, from cane fields to the sea, our hearts salute Jamaica, triumphant proud and free." Surrounded by the Caribbean Sea, the island of "One Love," Jamaica, is home to more than 2.7 million people. *Jamaica* derives from the Arawak word *Xaymaca*, meaning "land of wood and water." It is the third largest island in the Caribbean. The diverse and picturesque flora and fauna that is characteristic of Jamaica forms a beautiful permanent backdrop to the island country. Palm trees sway in the wind caressed by the beautiful, cool and refreshing breeze from the magnificent surrounding body of water; the surrounding waters in shades of blue and green accentuate the island scenery. Jamaica is a natural blend of mountains and plains, with Blue Mountain being its highest peak.

Like Harry Belafonte, I am proud to call Jamaica "my island in the sun." Known for its magnificent and pristine waterfalls and beaches; the island is also the home of reggae and world-class athletes. It is the home of Robert Nesta Marley, musical legend and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, and the world's fastest man, Usain Bolt. Jamaica boasts a year-round tropical climate with average temperatures of approximately 26<sup>0</sup> Celsius to 13<sup>0</sup> Celsius. The people of Jamaica are fun-loving, jovial, and kind. There is a genuine atmosphere of love and caring among Jamaicans, which extends not only to relatives, neighbors, and friends but to everyone they meet, wherever they go.

### **Education in Jamaica**

A former British Colony, Jamaica is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. Its population is approximately 2.8 million (Statistical Institute of Jamaica [STATIN], 2013) and is made up primarily of people of African descent, whose ancestors were enslaved by European

colonizers. The official language of Jamaica is Jamaican Standard English (JSE). Most Jamaicans are also fluent speakers of Jamaican creole (JC), the local parlance. JSE is the language of instruction and students are taught and expected to converse in the language. This negotiation often requires students to switch from the common Jamaican vernacular, JC, to the more official JSE.

Although the country has been emancipated from Britain since the 1830s and gained full independent status in 1962, the country's educational system is modeled on the British system. Management of educational services is still steeped in patriarchal and hegemonic practices, which are chiefly hierarchical, maintaining a top-down structure. In the early years, education in Jamaica was based in an agrarian society that was intent on preserving and strengthening "a social structure characterized by a small white elite and largely black labor force" (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2014). The Education Act of 1965 was formulated to regulate the system and the way education was structured and delivered to Jamaicans (MOE, 2004). Today, although the structure still resembles that of the British system, successive ruling parties have taken measures to localize education to meet the particular needs of Jamaican citizens. This initiative allowed for education to focus on local needs and accommodate the shift from an agrarian economy to an economy geared to global trade and commerce. British examinations were discontinued and replaced with regional ones as a means of preparing Jamaican students to join the globalized workforce. As this transition took place, I received my formal education.

The country's educational system is divided into four levels: early childhood, primary, secondary, and tertiary. There is free compulsory education for students from early childhood through the secondary levels. Schools are managed by the MOE through regional bodies (officials in the form of education officers and other personnel) and school boards, which are locally nominated persons who represent stakeholders in individual schools.

Education in Jamaica is competitive and students are tested at every level. These tests determine students' readiness to move from one level, grade, or class to the next and their competence to join the global workforce. At the primary level students are tested at grades two, four, and six. At the secondary level there are the terminal regional examinations offered by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), which determine students' readiness for college, university, and work. There was strong competition to succeed in schools, but it was this competitive spirit that motivated me to achieve.

## **Educating the Jamaican Woman**

In the early days the Jamaican woman was relegated to domesticity and so the country's history contains little about the academic pursuits of early Jamaican women beyond housekeeping and sewing (Net Industries, 2011). The lack of formal education, though it has perpetuated inequality, should not be taken as a weakness because women have been the backbone of their families. They stayed home, raised children, tended farms, and managed households. Jamaican women have always been independent and powerful. This is evidenced in the country's historical archives, which includes Nanny of the Maroons as one of the country's seven national heroes. She fought against injustices and inequalities in Jamaica's struggle for independence from British colonizers and slave owners.

My Auntie, like so many women in my family and in Jamaica in its early years, did not complete her formal education, yet she was an example in the community and encouraged me and other neighborhood youth to strive for a better standard of life that could only be achieved through education. Thinking back, I realize that Auntie's philosophy, though not often verbalized, extended to the many local children, whose academic pursuits she facilitated through her encouragement and sometimes economic support. Her home was a playground and inspiration for many in the community. She ran a successful business as well as various farms in the district. I learned the value of education and hard work from her, as she insisted that we go to school and made sure we had everything needed for learning to take place.

My mother, on the other hand, completed her primary and secondary education successfully. She started her tertiary education at a college in Kingston. After her first year in college, family circumstances interrupted her studies. Mommy might not have completed college, but she was a great motivator. She would walk me to the library to get books and help me with my assignments to ensure that I completed them on time. Mommy quietly insisted and checked that all assignments were finished in a timely manner and that all set goals were accomplished. We still joke about the time I returned home for a weekend from training college and my mother went through my bags and books to ensure that all work was done and everything was in order.

When Auntie died in 1994, I vowed to continue doing well at school and to pursue my academic dreams to the highest level in her honor. In fact, only days after she was interred, I entered teacher-training college in Kingston. This was the culmination of work that Auntie and I

had started, as she had encouraged me to pursue my dream of becoming a teacher. It also marked the beginning of my life and career as an academic scholar. Auntie left an indelible mark on my life, as she did for other family and community members.

### **My Life as a Student in Jamaica**

Thinking back to my early childhood and elementary school years, I recall them as simple and fun, yet they profoundly shaped who I am today. I remember attending Ms. Neil's Basic School, which was less than a block from my home. In retrospect, I realize that even from those early years, I knew I would become a teacher and scholar. I was reading way above my grade level, ravaging Mommy's many books and those I got from the local library. I loved school and everything about it. To me, back then, teachers were sages and Ms. Neil knew everything. As I advanced in age and began to teach students myself, I realized that teachers were smart but in no way do we know everything. I recall teaching the little I had learned to anyone who would listen. When people did not want to listen, I taught the trees, the grass dolls I plaited, or whatever inanimate object I could find. I mimicked my teachers perfectly, much to the amusement of family members.

At age 5, I transitioned to one of the three primary schools within my community. I grew up at a time when children were to be seen and not heard. Hence, as a student I was always reserved yet dedicated and hardworking. My reserved personality, however, did not hinder me from being both a good student and a loyal friend and peer. I remember clearly the many games my friends and I played on the hillside and beneath the huge tree in front of our school. The tree was a significant part of our history as students because this was where many of us learned to spell, read, and recite our times table. If those hills could talk, they would tell of our gallivanting and playing dandy shandy and box baseball. Those days, for me, as a student were much like that of any other child. I had many friends to play with. We lived close to school and so we would walk home in groups playing our many childish games along the way. Some days we even went home during our lunch break for a hot meal and returned before classes resumed.

I was a disciplined child who loved to learn and heartily drank the knowledge that came from my teachers. I became accustomed to the community and school libraries and knew every book and section by name. Like Marguerite in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, I often retreated into my own world of reading, where I found solace and escape from the

world around me. I was always ranked among the top students in the class, had very good relationships with my teachers, and wanted to be like them.

By the time I reached high school I was certain I wanted to become a teacher. I remember the first day of class boldly stating that I wanted to be a teacher, unlike many of my mates, who wanted to be doctors or air hostesses. I cannot recall anyone else saying they wanted to be a teacher then. I attended an all-girl high school outside the general locale of my community; which required me to ride the bus to school each day. My hunger for learning did not allow for absences from school and so I was always there, “up front and center” ready to learn. At high school I soared academically and was always among the list of awardees on Awards Day. I was also always in positions of leadership. I was class prefect and group representative for many of my years at high school and became a role model to the girls in my year and those who followed.

During my high school years our school hosted groups of students from the United States as part of an exchange program. In this program Jamaican students did one year of high school in an overseas high school while students from other territories and countries filled their places. These exchange students lived with local families and attended our school. Although they were usually seniors, the juniors looked up to them. I especially admired them and thought they were brave to have left their homes to come to Jamaica, but I never talked to any of these students, nor did I know about any of their experiences in our school.

After high school, I attended one of the few all-female teacher training colleges in Jamaica, where I trained in the areas of linguistics and Spanish, thereby becoming a qualified teacher of Spanish as a second language. While at this training college, my abilities and quest for knowledge guided my path to success. I was appointed the leader of the Spanish cohort for two years, where I was group representative at management meetings. I began to contemplate the possibility of overseas studies. We were told that the best way to do well at Spanish was to visit Spanish-speaking countries. I wanted to further my studies in a Spanish-speaking country but thought I could never afford to study overseas and did not even have a passport. Admittedly, I was unaware of the possibilities.

In 1997, after completing my teacher training, I began teaching Spanish as a foreign language at a prominent rural high school in Jamaica. I was dedicated to my students and my job. I was always professional and courteous to my charges and the community. I gained favor in the community and was appointed senior teacher with special responsibility shortly after joining the

staff. It was unusual for someone to be promoted to such a rank in such short order, but I was loyal, hardworking, and detailed in my tasks. When I left on a leave of absence to pursue studies overseas I was still a senior member of staff both in years and responsibilities. While working as an educator I took professional courses to enhance my skills and broaden my knowledge surrounding my area of expertise.

I earned a bachelor's and then a master's in education—specializing in modern foreign language—from one of our major local universities, the University of the West Indies. While I was engaged in my master's degree in 2007, I also took numerous short courses in the teaching of Spanish to English speakers. My quest took me from Salamanca, in Spain, to Mexico City, and back home to Jamaica. I wanted to do more and so concurrently I completed courses in public relations and Spanish-English interpretation.

## **Life as an International Graduate Student**

### **The Journey**

After the completion of my master's degree, I felt the urge to engage in further studies. I had always loved learning and wanted to be highly qualified and marketable within my field, but what was strange was that I was contemplating studying overseas. This was frustrating because I had planned the trajectory of my life and it did not include overseas study. I was uneasy as I began to look into colleges and universities in the United States to pursue graduate studies. My search frustrated and infuriated me because I could not find any place in the United States where I thought I would fit in. I began talking to colleagues about how I was feeling and the consensus was that I needed to take a break from teaching. I agreed that I needed to do that but continued teaching.

In 2010, I again searched for graduate programs in overseas institutions, but this time in Canada. This was the year I knew I had to do something. In my thinking, it was time for me to participate in more study activities. I realized that if I wanted to become a top professional with world-class credentials and be more marketable, then I needed to seek world-class qualifications through study in a foreign institution. This led to a dedicated search for a university that would satisfy my need to be educated in an uncrowded environment. None of the institutions I had turned up earlier were ones I wanted to attend. It took inspiration and encouragement from a friend for me to find the University of Saskatchewan.



The university's programs suited me well, and so I applied. Upon acceptance I applied to the Canadian High Commission in Jamaica for a student visa that let me enter the country. This was a long process followed by an even longer wait period.

Finally, the day had arrived when I received my letter of introduction to enter Canada and immediately booked a ticket on the next available flight. Soon I was in Canada and ready for my first day as an international student. I had received my entry letter on the same day that classes began and so by the time I got into the country, classes were already underway. I remember leaving the airport and heading straight to class. Everyone was surprised to see me, a foreigner, arriving in the country and attending class the same day. This was no hard exploit for me, rather merely showing my positive, strong, and resilient Jamaican spirit.

### **Being in the University**

Back home I was greatly admired and respected by my peers and community as a scholar, and my academic success made me a role model for many. My friends joke that I am a perpetual student. This might be true since there was never a point in my life that I was not engaged in some kind of scholarship. In Jamaica, I had taught Spanish as a second language at both the secondary and post-secondary levels. I had also taken numerous courses abroad, but when I entered the new academic setting in Canada I never really felt like I was one of “them.” I always felt I was missing something that would make me more like local students; I felt out of place.

In Jamaica I was very active in church and community activities, so when I entered the university community I also tried to engage in similar activities, however infrequently. Even so I felt like an outsider. I always felt like I was alone. My ideas and ways of thinking and doing things never seemed to align with those of locals. I saw and did things differently than they did. These feelings reminded me of Vincent Villanueva, a Puerto Rican-American scholar, who throughout his youth and academic life tried to assimilate into mainstream groups. His assimilation attempts failed, and he came to the conclusion that “complete assimilation is denied” (1993, p. xiv). As I began to read the works of bell hooks, who writes of the isolation and bewilderment she felt as she studied in a majority-white college, I began to connect to areas of her story. A particular area that resonated with me was the fact that as a minority student she felt she did not really fit into the university and classes but was determined not to be a failure. I understood that I was different, but I was determined to do what it took for me to reap my reward: being successful.

Owing to my background as a teacher and scholar, I have certain deep-rooted notions of schooling and what I perceive as the expectations of being a student. I thought I knew what it meant to be a student. I had mastered the roles of both teacher and student. So when I decided to engage in studies as an international student, I thought I was set; after all, I have had much experience as a student. I have come to realize that the two experiences are not equivalent.

After more than two years as a full-time graduate student at the university I have come to recognize and appreciate my position. I often feel like an invader in the spaces and places of the local students. Admittedly, I too struggled with being in the new social, cultural, and academic environment. I have battled my own share of challenges consistent with being a newcomer. Locals did not seem to understand me or know much about me or other international students and our experiences studying in a new culture. I felt the pangs of nostalgia for home while glaring into wild isolation; I battled harsh weather; I contemplated and overcame economic odds.

From interactions with locals I came to the stark realization that many of the issues I faced were also problematic for local students, especially the Aboriginal population. The fact that I was new to the society seemed to have exacerbated my difficulties; I was always torn between there and here: my country of origin, Jamaica, and Canada, my country of temporary settlement. I knew I had to return to my homeland and reclaim my life after completion of my studies, yet I had to live and fit in to the Canadian culture and lifestyle.

As I engaged studies at the new institution, my experiences are mixed. I constantly reflect on my life as a teacher back home and the university's academic, cultural, and social differences. I knew that I was different from the others and that locals often did not fully understand me. I simply felt I was not a part of their group.

My status as an international student positioned me differently from others who were native to the community. My dark skin and my cultural, linguistic, and social background did not afford me many privileges when I entered the university. I clearly remember my conflicting feelings on my first day as an international student. I approached the class feeling excited and nervous, though my countenance showed no evidence of my inner turmoil. I had that uneasy feeling of being in a new place and not belonging. I began questioning my position there: "What am I doing here? Do I really belong here?" I had just arrived and already I had a full class and readings that most assuredly had an assignment attached to each one. Hard work and voluminous tasks were not new to me, since I had become accustomed to the challenges of large and

oftentimes overwhelming quantities of work, but somehow this seemed different. I was no longer in my comfort zone as a student; I was in a foreign institution. What was I thinking to come here?

I entered one department but by the end of the first semester I was ready to transfer to another. This had nothing to do with a deficiency of the first department; rather, the offerings of the new department better fit my ambitions. I would be able to accomplish my goal of attaining a doctor of philosophy degree in a more feasible time frame, and then to return to the job from which I had taken educational leave.

As I grew to appreciate the ethos of the institution, my interactions with local and international students, as well as the university's facilities, aroused mixed feelings in me. I continue to wrestle with the nature of international studentship. As I developed my critical thinking skills I was able to consider international students broadly and contemplate their circumstances in a way that would allow me to look at this phenomenon differently. I began wondering: What does it mean when one says I am an international student? What are the experiences of international graduate students studying in the University of Saskatchewan? What meanings can we derive from their stories?

These deliberations as well as my own ideas of what being an international student entails, helped to frame my research and the research question: *What does it mean to be an international graduate student at the university?* The focus of the research was to extricate the meaning of the experience of being an international student from the stories of the experiences of selected international graduate students. I wanted to capture, re-present, and acquire a deeper understanding of the experiences of international students through participants' reflections on and descriptions of their daily lives in the university. As I focused on unearthing the essence of being an international student, I employed an interdisciplinary approach to the study.

### **Organization of Dissertation**

This chapter, prologue, served the primary purpose of positioning me as the researcher. I tell my own story as an international student and outline some of the experiences I have encountered in the University. Chapter One provides the study's context, background, and rationale through a brief overview of the context of the research. This is followed by a summary of Canada as a host country for international students and a description of the university as an

academic community of practice and the setting for the research. I articulate phenomenology as the qualitative method of choice. I also set out the interdisciplinary framework that undergirds the study and describe the study's purpose, significance, underlying assumptions, and limitations. In Chapter Two I outline current literature on international students, which underpins my research. Chapter Three lays out the methodology, methods, and procedures of my research and analysis. The study participants and my procedures of analysis and interpretation are also described in this chapter. Data organized as stories are presented in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five I discuss, analyze, and interpret the data presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Six offers a concluding discussion of the research and research process. In this chapter I draw conclusions, make summations, and offer recommendations for stakeholders and for future research. The epilogue is my personal reflection on the process, in which I offer my final personal thoughts and conclusions.

### **If Only I Knew Their Story**

Seated on a park bench I see them stream by one by one  
each face telling a different story; a story yet unheard; undiscovered.  
Bodies converged each bearing a different name, an identity all on its own  
with a life story to tell a story of life beginning, a life continuing, a life likely unsung.  
Their merged faces reflect familiar spaces. Spaces I often travelled whether in life's wake or  
sleep's dream. Perched on a park bench I watch them go by and

my line of consciousness zooms in,  
realizing that each one is reminiscent of my own story.

A story of wandering and wondering,  
of one who has left familiar lands to traverse unfamiliar destinies.

Their stories mirror mine. I too am as they are. I am one of them.

I too am a traveler, a visitor, a stranger looking in and looking out.

A stranger trapped in an experience I hope to conquer.

Moving in unison they enter a common place,

A place where the lines for portions of meal were beginning to grow long.

Their movement toward hotdogs, and hamburgers, and free pops

reminded me of the lines I have had to cross to arrive at my new home.

They greet each other some heartily others shyly.

I watched in awe as I see mirrored in each face my own story.

Like a collage, a puzzle of many pieces fitting together

each one has his own original individuality.

Each piece telling a story.

Your story, my story, their stories, becoming our stories.

The chatter becomes more noisy as others join in

A merger of different faces, races from all places, of all ages.

O how, I wonder about their stories. If only I knew...

Yolanda Palmer (July, 2013)

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction to the Study

The exigencies of globalization and internationalization continue to propel students and post-secondary institutions each to seek out the other and engage in study arrangements that foster international liaison (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011; McHale, 2011). Such relationships also drive international education and the engagement of international students as major revenue generators and boosters for many post-secondary institutions worldwide (McHale, 2011; Tillet & Lesser, 1992). Finnie and Usher (2007) urged that the demands of the new knowledge economy require nations to have increasing numbers of highly skilled workers, including those with graduate degrees. The need for high-caliber workers places study overseas as a major method of fulfilling the students' academic dreams and desires, and so the number of students pursuing graduate studies abroad continues to soar as post-secondary institutions vie for the brightest and best minds.

The many designations assigned to international students bear significant markers of their status and journey in overseas post-secondary institutions. These students have been called international students, foreign students, mobile students, sojourner students, and overseas students. These terms are used interchangeably throughout the text to refer to international students. There is ongoing debate about the use of the term international student and what qualifies an individual to be so named. For this reason, there exist many variations in the definition. For my purposes the term *international students* means graduate students from abroad who have entered university from varied linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds and are pursuing courses of study in a master's or doctoral program. Moreover, these students lack permanent resident status in the country and possess a student visa. Hereafter, to avoid confusion, the term *international students* refers specifically to international graduate students at university.

This distinctive group of individuals called international graduate students belong to the so-called "creative class" (Florida, 2002) and travel from afar to pursue advanced education for the love of knowledge and for personal or professional advancement. They play an important role in graduate education by bringing academic, cultural, and economic benefits to the domestic learning environment and society, and subsequently become ambassadors of the host country. Universities, therefore, have always sought to engage international students as they travel across

the boundaries of community, nation, and culture in pursuit of educational opportunities (Dubois, 1956; McHale, 2011). Furnham noted that while the increase in foreign students reflects growing university enrollment trends worldwide, the mobility of students in higher education has always assumed an integral role in the life of post-secondary institutions as students have for centuries travelled from one country to another for educational purposes (Furnham, 2004).

The movement of international students has been largely characterized as a south-to-north phenomenon, with the majority of international students globally originating from lesser-developed countries to pursue studies in major industrialized nations (Altbach & Teichler, 2001; Knight, 2006). The movement from lesser-developed countries to those thought to be more developed is steeped in colonialism, which spread the belief that Western education is more suitable as Westerners are “brighter, better and bolder than everyone else” (Blaut, 1993, p. 5).

United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], (2014) reported that in 2012 there were approximately 4 million international students enrolled in overseas post-secondary institutions worldwide. This figure marked a 100% increase over figures for the year 2000, which was 2 million and represent 1.8% of all tertiary enrolments globally (UNESCO, 2014). Foreign students spend millions of dollars in host institutions through fees and other costs, thereby fuelling the advancement of the now “multibillion dollar” industry of higher education (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada [AUCC], 2011; Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011; Gebhard, 2010; Madgett & Belanger, 2008; McHale, 2011; Water, 2008).

Singaravelu (2007) wrote that the experience of international students differs from those of refugees and immigrants due to the temporary nature of their stay in the country of settlement. According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), international students study overseas to achieve the social mobility conferred by their earned overseas credentials. Their situations differ because, unlike other immigrant groups, many leave jobs and families to study overseas for the duration of their programs with expectations to return home to resume their posts or take up new offices in their home countries upon completion of their studies.

Researchers argue that in addition to the economic benefits to be derived from hosting international students, the diverse knowledge and skills they bring add value to the host academy and contribute to the country’s work force and knowledge base (Andrade, 2006; Bamford, 2008; Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011; Gebhard, 2010; Leary, 2011; Maguire, 2011; Mamiseishvili,

2011; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). According to Cooper (2007) and Trice (2003), the presence of overseas students adds richness to the overall discussions and learning experiences in the universities in which they are enrolled.

Unquestionably, international students also benefit from engaging in studies in the new institution. The general consensus is that foreign students travel overseas to study primarily to further their chances of accomplishing their academic, experiential, financial, and career goals (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Morgan, 2012; Wang, 2004; Zhang, 2011). Recent statistical trends also indicate that many international students engage in graduate studies for immigration purposes as many remain and become permanent residents and citizens of the country after graduation (Fais, 2012).

### **Background: International Graduate Students in Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions**

Over the past two decades, Canada has become a leading destination for international students in pursuit of their academic and professional goals (AUCC, 2011; Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011; Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2012; McHale, 2011). According to the Canadian Bureau for International Education [CBIE], in 2012 Canada was ranked the world's seventh most popular destination for international students when choosing where to study (CBIE, 2014). In the same year, there was a marked increase in the numbers of international students entering the country. CBIE also reported in 2014 that during the year 2012 there was a 94% increase in the number of international students enrolled in Canadian post-secondary institutions compared to 2001 figures (136, 000 in 2001 to 265,000 in 2012). These students form a "key part of building a stronger international and intercultural scope to pedagogy and research and are crucial to Canadian campuses" (Cudmore, 2005, p. 47).

According to AUCC (2014), when Canadian classrooms and labs are enriched by people and ideas from around the world, all students benefit. Not only do international students broaden Canadian students' perspective, they also help to create mutually beneficial economic, diplomatic, and cultural ties. Moreover, according to AUCC (2014) and CBIE (2014), international students inject revenues exceeding \$8 billion annually into the Canadian economy, which creates more than 83, 000 jobs for Canadians, thereby positioning international students as lucrative for universities and colleges to attract and maintain for the period of their studies and beyond.



In 2013, Canada saw a 15% increase in student enrollment over the previous four years. The AUCC (2014) also contended that international students represent approximately 20% of the total full-time registered graduate students in Canadian post-secondary institutions. Statistics show a dramatic decline in the numbers of foreign students entering global post-secondary institutions from European countries and a gradual increase in the numbers of students coming from other non-traditional countries. McMullen and Elias (2012) reported that Asian countries continue to represent the largest percentage of international students in Canada. They also noted a decline in the number of students entering Canada from African countries. The leading countries of origin for students studying in Canadian post-secondary institutions are People's Republic of China (hereafter, China), France, United States, India, and South Korea (AUCC, 2014; Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011; CBIE, 2014; Gürüz, 2011; McHale, 2011; UNESCO, 2011). This shift in demographics increases the cultural and linguistic diversity among international students within the Canadian university landscape.

Among the Canadian provinces hosting international students, Saskatchewan receives and hosts smaller numbers compared to competing provinces. The AUCC (2014) recorded that in 2012 British Columbia (BC) and Ontario together hosted 68% of the total international student population in Canada. Quebec was the third major host, with 14% of the total number of foreign students. These three provinces combined had a total of 82% of all international students while Saskatchewan recorded only 2.14 % of the total number, or just fewer than 6,000. When compared to larger metropolitan cities like Vancouver and Toronto, Saskatchewan “provides a setting that represents the prairie provinces of Canada, given its relatively small percentage of international students” (Fu, 2013, p. 2). This representation becomes relevant because of the issues that international students may encounter owing to their smaller population in Prairie Provinces like Saskatchewan compared to cities like Toronto and Vancouver.

### **Context: International Students at the University of Saskatchewan**

In light of the competitive nature of international education and in the knowledge of the economic and cultural benefits arising from having such students within their corridors, the University of Saskatchewan (hereafter the terms *the university* and *the University of Saskatchewan* are used interchangeably) has “targeted recruitment of international students” (Report of the Support Service Transformation Task Force, 2013, p. 22) as a priority. This

explicit and active recruitment has been taking shape over several years as the university set out to “establish the University as a major presence in graduate education and recruit and retain a diverse academically promising body of students, and prepare them for the knowledge age” (University of Saskatchewan, 2010, para. 13-15). This drive has led to the steady growth in the recent numbers of international graduate students enrolling in courses of study on campus, which translates to added income for the university coffers. Furthermore, the Third Integrated Plan (guided by the Strategic Directions) in light of the intense competition for international students globally, saw the need to “develop a planned and integrated approach so that we succeed in attracting the numbers and diversity of students needed to meet our educational and discovery as well as our financial goals” (University of Saskatchewan, 2012b, p. 3).

To date, the overall number of graduate students at the university continues to increase. Table 1.1<sup>1</sup> illustrates the five-year trend of overall graduate student enrollment in colleges across campus. The period from 2008/2009 to 2012/2013 recorded an approximate growth of 25% in the overall number of students enrolling at the graduate level at the university. In 2012, the university also recorded a 94.2% retention rate among international graduate students. Even with this general growth of graduate students in the university, there is the deliberate attempt on the part of the university to increase the numbers of international students entering its doors to engage in graduate studies.

Table 1.1

*Overall graduate student enrollment in the University*

|                | <b>2008/2009</b> | <b>2009/2010</b> | <b>2010/2011</b> | <b>2011/2012</b> | <b>2012/2013</b> |
|----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>Female</b>  | 1,531            | 1,716            | 1,905            | 1,981            | 2,078            |
| <b>Male</b>    | 1,360            | 1,480            | 1,601            | 1,698            | 1,762            |
| <b>Unknown</b> | 2                | 2                | 1                | 12               | 10               |
| <b>Total</b>   | 2,893            | 3,198            | 3,507            | 3,691            | 3,850            |

<sup>1</sup> Information presented in tables has been adapted from <http://www.usask.ca/isa/uview/student/headcount.html>.

Although the university registers only minimal growth in overall international (graduate and undergraduate) student rates (approximately 9%), the international graduate student enrollment, like that of general graduate students, continues to grow steadily and represents an approximated 30% of the overall graduate student population. Table 1.2 captures the five-year trends of international graduate student enrollment in the university from 2008 to 2013.

Table 1.2

*International graduate student enrollment in the University*

|                | 2008/2009 | 2009/2010 | 2010/2011 | 2011/2012 | 2012/2013 |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| <b>Female</b>  | 262       | 296       | 370       | 440       | 501       |
| <b>Male</b>    | 365       | 406       | 475       | 548       | 637       |
| <b>Unknown</b> | 1         | -         | -         | 3         | 5         |
| <b>Total</b>   | 628       | 702       | 845       | 991       | 1,143     |

Over the five year period 2008/2009 to 2012/2013, there was an approximate 46% increase in the number of international graduate students matriculating in the university. Figure 1.3 is a visual representation of the trends and growth in the numbers of international graduate students enrolling in the university. In 2013, the university reported record numbers in the overall enrollment of international students on campus (AUCC, 2014; USASK, 2014). The number for the fall and winter terms (September to April) 2013/2014 was 1,066.



Figure 1.3: Bar graph demonstrating international graduate student enrollment trends in the University

Statistically, the increased numbers indicate that future numbers should continue to increase, positioning the university as an institution intent on engaging a diverse academic community and environment. Thus, the fulfillment of the university’s future plans is at least in sight of being accomplished as, according to current enrollment trends, it may be projected that these numbers will continue to increase, possibly to approximately 38% growth over the next five years (or by 2018).

The overall trends in countries of origin for international students at the university, although sharing similarities with overall Canadian statistics in countries of origin, exhibit a slight variation. According to the university, in 2012 and 2014, the majority of foreign students entering the university were from China, India, Nigeria, Iran, and Bangladesh, in ranking order (USASK, 2014). This indicates a steady trend in enrollments and countries of origin; in 2012, the university recorded China, India, Iran, Bangladesh, and Nigeria as the top five countries of origin. Figure 1.4 illustrates the trends of countries of origin. I used a line graph with different colors to illustrate the comparative numbers of both years regarding the number and country of origin. Interestingly, statistics for some groups at the university contrasted significantly with the general Canadian figures. For example, overall Canadian numbers showed a decline in the numbers of students coming from Nigeria, yet the numbers for this group were increasing at the

university. In addition, some countries like Jamaica and other Caribbean islands have significantly smaller student representations on campus.



Figure 1.4: Top five countries of origin for international students

### Statement of the Problem

The university's wish to increase the numbers of international graduate students drives the urgent need for studies that shed light on the essence of the phenomenon of being an international student. To date, even with the growing numbers of international graduate students engaging in studies in Canadian post-secondary institutions, very little is known about their thoughts about how they are faring personally and fitting into university life in a new academic setting. Dei (1992) highlighted a dearth of published accounts of international student experiences in the Canadian post-secondary landscape. He argued that there was a need for studies to be focused in the “subjective lived experiences as narrated by [international] students themselves” (p. 1). This need, Dei contended, was necessary because there are “intimate details” (p. 5) that surround international student experiences that can never be captured by surveys or other quantitative measures.

Throughout the dissertation the words *narratives*, *lived-experience anecdotes*, and *personal life or stories* are used interchangeably and represent any spoken or written discourse or representation of participants’ personal experiences while studying at the University of Saskatchewan. Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett (2008) held that narratives give information about

people as a whole rather than as clusters of variables, as is common in quantitative studies. In light of this, I concurred with Dei that more qualitative studies are needed to shed light on the phenomenon and to amply represent the stories of these students' experiences. Experiences are complex and subjective and cannot be quantified; they are best explored qualitatively.

Polkinghorne (1988) held that experience is meaningful and human behavior is generated from and informed by its meaningfulness. Additionally, I subscribe to Monture-Angus' belief that "without human experience we will never achieve a true form of equality" (1995, p. 11).

Since Dei's declaration, numerous studies have been conducted in reference to international students within Canadian universities. Nevertheless, there are still too few studies that address the personal perception of the experience from students themselves, as told through their anecdotal renditions. Recent debates tend to be quantitative summations of students' experiences with little attention paid to their daily experiences in the post-secondary institutions and their interpretations of them. For example, in 2013 the university conducted an online survey about the experience of international students on campus. The instrument used was more than 25 pages and consisted of over 180 questions.

Even so, previous studies into the experiences of international students yield little qualitative insight about the phenomenon of being an international graduate student studying in a foreign academic environment. In addition, the ascribed meaning of the moment-to-moment academic experience and sensory awareness of internal and external events were also missing or scantily documented. The complexity of the essence of such experiences is yet to be fully explored. CBIE (2009) reported that the experiences of international graduate students studying in Canadian universities have been understudied, and CBIE recommended continued research into the phenomenon and into how these students are faring.

Singh and Armstrong (2006) intimated that within the broad scope of literature addressing the issues of international student experience, limited attention has been given to examining personal issues that have particular impact on international students. Moreover, Leary (2011) concluded that while an extensive body of literature prevails worldwide regarding international students and their lived experiences, very little has been done on the Canadian situation because much of the available information pertains to international students in South Africa, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and China (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011; Gebhard, 2010; Gunawardena & Wilson, 2012; Synder & Beale, 2011).

Hence, the tendency is to draw from information gleaned from the countries mentioned (Leary, 2011), which may not be a fair comparison.

Combing through the literature relating to the experiences of international graduate students in Canada, I realized that the majority of the studies reporting on the international student experience at Canadian post-secondary institutions have been quantitative surveys. It also occurred to me that these studies primarily concentrated on issues of undergraduate students. Zhang (2011) wrote that most studies did not include the authentic voices and detailed, descriptive accounts of the lived experiences of participants; rather, deliberations were generalized feedback on responses from few participants. These responses, Zhang said, were usually based on quantitative surveys and questionnaires. Further, of the few qualitative studies conducted at universities relating to international student experiences, the majority tended to study international students from a deficit base, negating the skills and strengths with which such students enter their programs of study. These studies tended to refer to the difficulties and differences, transitioning, coping strategies, and language issues of international students (Erkan, 2013; Fu, 2013; Zhang, 2011; Zhou, 2012). I found none that viewed the phenomenon of international graduate students holistically.

Few qualitative studies voiced the perspectives of international graduate students. The CBIE (2009) reported that generally international students tend to find their educational experience in Canada satisfactory, but paradoxically, many of the students' pre-arrival expectations are not met. Unmet student needs may result in students abandoning the institution and their studies (Madgett & Belanger, 2008). Thus, the CBIE (2009) recommended that further studies be conducted on the experiences of international students at Canadian universities. Leary (2011) studied the first-year transition of international students into Canadian universities and argued that although there has been increased recruitment and retention of international students, few connections (if any) have been made between retention rates and students' first-year experience. Leary also recommended continued research into the experiences of international students and their engagement in studies in Canada. Maguire (2011) also urged that "more documented case studies of international students' lived experiences and rhetorical agency" (p. 39) is a good way to begin understanding the complexities of international student identities.

In preparation for this study, I conducted a pilot study of my research on the lived experiences of international graduate students studying at the University of Saskatchewan. For

the pilot study I shadowed and interviewed two participants at the university. From it I learned that international students have varied experiences. I also learned that students' experiences were important and had to be voiced so that a critical discussion in universities could take place. It was important also that the students think about what they are doing and how they were approaching their personal and collective study experiences. During the course of the interviews I found that participants were eager to share their stories, perhaps because they were never asked to before. Respondents openly shared campus issues and concerns.

The pilot's primary purpose was to test the process I hoped to use in the research. Secondly I wanted to extricate the experience of studying in the academic environment to ascertain the study's feasibility. Analysis and interpretation of data revealed that university study can be characterized by internal and external struggles for the international graduate student as they try to gain and retain control of their lives within the social and cultural norms of the new academic environment. It became clear that there were no rule books, that domestic students and university personnel often misunderstood the international students, and that international students misunderstood the local rhetoric.

Findings from the pilot inquiry fell into three major themes:

1. Need for validation: The participants felt that host members of the classes they attended did not find their contributions valuable.
2. Need for engagement and connection: Participants said they did not feel a sense of belonging; rather, they felt disconnected from the host community.
3. Rooted in home culture: The participants made frequent comparisons between their countries of origin and the host community. Everything was unfamiliar to them. They hinted at linguistic and academic challenges encountered based on their differences and the capital with which they had entered the university.

These preliminary findings, as well as the limited documentation of the experiences of international graduate students in Canadian post-secondary institutions, undergirded my desire to engage the international student body at the university. I wanted to hear and ventilate the stories of their daily experiences. Furthermore, as an international student myself, I wanted to gain a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, I approached my research reflexively. The reflexive process allowed me to me to voice my own perceptions of the



phenomenon through bracketing (Creswell & Miller, 2010; Finlay, 2009; Merriam, 2009). The instinctive process was extensive and played a significant part in my articulation of findings.

Qualitative studies that document the voices of foreign students would allow their university experiences to be aired. My intentions were to re-present—present and represent through their own voices and as close to the phenomenon as possible—students’ experiences and in so doing capture the commonalities in the experiences of these selected international students, who were from different backgrounds and colleges across campus. For this reason, I conducted a phenomenological study, grounded in the field of hermeneutics, into the essence of the life of a foreign student. The study consists of data drawn from in-depth, conversational interviews complemented by my observations of six participants. I sought to give voice to the international graduate student experience using students’ personal narratives. My research is therefore anecdotal, using verbatim the words of participants as I seek to capture and express their everyday experiences of academic tasks and commitments.

### **Purpose of the Study and the Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of international graduate students to capture the essence or meaning of these experiences. The central research question was this: "What does it mean to be an international graduate student in the university?" From this major question several questions emerged as points for detailed investigation. The following sub-research questions gave focus to the study.

- a. What are the experiences of international graduate students studying in the new academic community?
- b. What are the commonalities in the experiences for international graduate students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds as they study in the new academic community?

### **Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

An exploration of the experiences of international students studying in new academic settings and cultures by its very nature seeks to bring “essence back into existence” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. vii). *Essence* in this sense refers to that which makes the experience what it is; the nature and essentiality of things. It is the meaning of the experience (Creswell, 2012). I

intended to get to the meanings that international graduate students gave to their experiences. To attain the essence of the phenomenon of study in a new academic environment I engaged those who live the phenomenon. I opted to do a phenomenological study grounded in hermeneutics. To elucidate the path I hoped to follow in the research, I drew upon phenomenological authors like Merleau-Ponty (1962, 2012) and Husserl (1858-1938). I also drew on the works of more contemporary phenomenological writers and researchers like van Manen (1997a, 1997b, 2014), who holds two approaches—hermeneutics and phenomenology—in a dialectical relationship, wanting to “let things speak for themselves” while recognizing that (social) phenomena need to be interpreted (through language) in order to be communicated to others. I also drew on the works and writings of Cohen, Kahn and Steeves (2000), Gadamer (2004), and Moustakas (1994). My engagement with these varied phenomenologists and researchers created a fusion of viewpoints, thereby fostering an interdisciplinary approach that guided the research process.

Phenomenology is concerned with the exploration of the “structure of the human life-world, the lived world as experienced in everyday situations and relations” (van Manen, 1997b, p. 101). It is directed at going back to the "life-world" of individuals having knowledge of the experience under study. Gadamer (2004) argued that hermeneutics is an investigation into the nature of understanding. Phenomenology is the study of essences and finding meanings of phenomena (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). As an inquiry into the life-world, all efforts are “concentrated upon re-achieving a direct primitive contact with the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. viii). Gadamer (2004) emphasized that phenomenology is an exploration into something that has been largely taken for granted. Getting to the essence of the phenomenon requires the researcher to return to the lived experience to uncover its essence or meaning, which already exists within the experience (Dahlberg, 2006) and can only be disclosed through the act of research as the researcher interacts with the phenomenon.

Wiercinski (2009) claimed that understanding and interpretation are both based in the life-world. Thus, it places essences back into existence, and the only way to understand phenomena is to “turn to things themselves” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 8). To understand an experience, one has to study the phenomenon from the perspective of those experiencing it. Thus, a hermeneutic phenomenological design allowed me to explore students’ experiences as they live them and to unearth their interpretations of these experiences (Seidman, 2006; van den Hoonaard, 2012; van Manen, 1997b).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a qualitative methodology that has over the years emerged through the combination of elements of the disciplines of hermeneutics and phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology as described and promulgated by van Manen (1997b), allows for a “deeper understanding of the nature of the meaning of our everyday experiences” (p. 9). This approach to qualitative research is both descriptive and interpretive because it serves to offer description, interpretation, and critical self-reflection of the “world as world” (van Manen, 1997b, p. 5). To avoid confusion, I hereafter use the simple term *phenomenology* in reference to the method of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Gadamer (2004) argued that interpretation and understanding are framed in the languages we speak. Therefore, I used in-depth, conversational interviews and observations to obtain students’ perspectives on the phenomenon of being an international graduate student from their own narrative expressions of their experiences in the new academic environment. I also maintained a personal reflective journal and field logs intermittently in my exploration of the phenomenon.

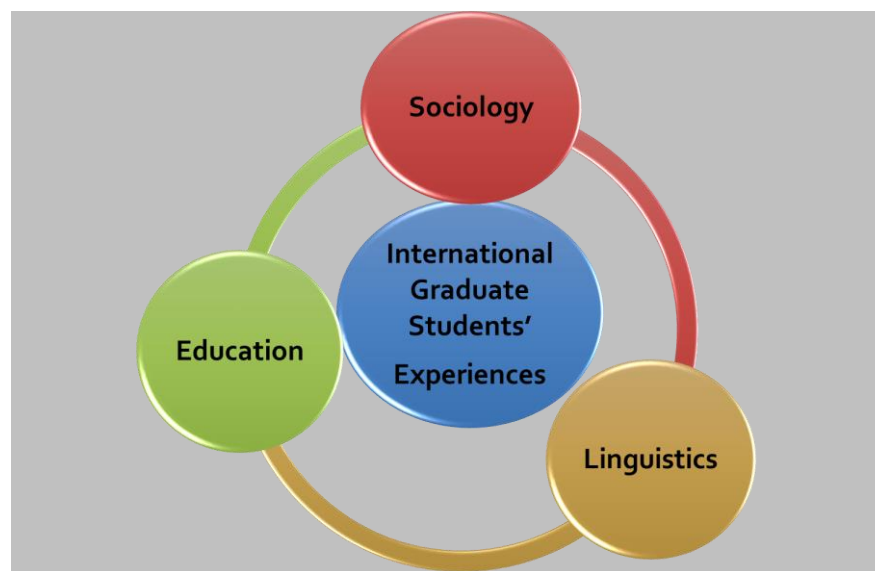
In selecting a phenomenological position, I recognized that a key part of the phenomenological process is writing, which is the very act of making contact with the experiences of the world (van Manen, 1997a). It is in this sense that to do phenomenological research is to write; the insights achieved depend on particular words and phrases, on styles and traditions, on metaphor and figures of speech, on argument and poetic image. Writing can mean both insight and illusion. And these are values that cannot be decided, fixed, or settled since the one always implies, hints at, or complicates the other. Thus, I kept in mind that phenomenological inquiry-writing is based on the idea that no text is ever absolute, no interpretation is ever complete, no explication of meaning is ever final, and no insight is beyond challenge. So the work needs to be as attentive as possible to the ways that all of us experience the world and to the infinite variety of possible human experiences and possible explications of those experiences. The guiding principle then in hermeneutics is trying to understand everything that can be understood from the text, which is written or oral utterances (Bakhtin, 1986).

### **Interdisciplinary**

Phenomenology by nature is a complex process and cuts across disciplines as it borrows from varied fields of study in its execution. Its complexity embraces and fosters the culture of interdisciplinarity that I hoped to maintain through the process of the research. Davies and

Devlin (2010) defined *interdisciplinarity* as “the emergence of insight and understanding of a problem domain through the integration and derivation of different methods and epistemologies from different disciplines in a novel way” (p. 12). This usually is evidenced in the integration of two or more disciplines. Luszki (1958), in defining the concept of interdisciplinarity, highlighted a major distinction of interdisciplinary studies as the borrowing and use of tools, concepts, and methods from other fields or discipline. The overarching framework of interdisciplinarity can also refer to the merging of ideas among two or more experts from different fields of study (Lattuca, 2003).

Within the present body of work, I would like to proffer that interdisciplinarity is the grounding of research through the bridging and merger of ideas, methods, and tools from branches of human sciences, which correspond with humanities, social sciences, and the arts. In this product, interdisciplinarity is evinced primarily through the referencing, theorizing, positioning, and integration of the disciplines of education, sociology, and linguistics.



*Figure 1.5: Summary of the Interdisciplinary Approach to the Study*

More specifically, my study was interdisciplinary through its positioning and bordering the concepts of sociology (e.g. cultural adaptation and negotiation), phenomenology, and academic literacy; writing as ways of knowing, through poems and narratives; and linguistic allocations. These areas informed and guided the process of the research by “offering a productive point”

(Repko, 2007, p. 25) for examining the data as I tried to understand and re-present the meaning of the day-to-day experiences of international students as a whole rather than fixated in any one discipline. The result is in rich, descriptive text that delves deeply into the participants' daily life experiences. Additionally, to maintain interdisciplinarity, my advisory committee included faculty members from different disciplines, departments (education, linguistics, and nursing), and research genres (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods) across the university campus. This cross-faculty collaboration also fostered the process of interdisciplinarity, as I could draw from their varied disciplines and research to formulate and execute my own research design and desires.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study had certain limitations, which were self-imposed boundaries of the study parameters and situations beyond my control that limited the research and findings. Given the nature of qualitative research and that it aimed to bring depth of experience rather than breadth, findings in this study are limited and cannot be applied generally to all international students. My aim was to bring to light the stories and perceptions of the selected participants.

The study was limited by the following situations:

1. The stories and perceptions presented were from international students from the specific university. No outside voices were included in the study in that all participants were foreign students and concentrated in one university.
2. Only international graduate students enrolled as participants in the study. The stories of international undergraduate students were not represented.
3. International graduate students with prior international study experience were not qualified to participate in the study.
4. I trusted that participants were truthful in their stories and interpretations.
5. Participants selected did not necessarily represent the overall demographics of the body of international graduate students at the university.
6. The study was based on the perceptions and perspective of the participants.
7. The study was conducted in English and participants were not allowed to respond in their home languages.

## **Assumptions**

This study was bounded by the following assumptions:

1. Participants have the ability to remember and share honestly their perceptions of the experience of being international graduate students.
2. Reality is subjective to the individuals experiencing it. Therefore, participants' experiences differ one from the other.
3. The perceptions and stories of international students are valuable, necessary resources in unlocking the meaning of the phenomena.
4. Participants were all comfortable having prolonged conversations in English.

### **The Significance of the Study**

This dissertation expands the existing literature and research base as it regards the study of international students through the provision of a deeper understanding of what it is like for international graduate students to study at the university. A deeper understanding of the experiences of international graduate students at the university enables policy makers to make more informed decisions about the development of programs for international graduate students enrolling in post-secondary institutions locally, nationally, and globally.

Secondly, sharing the stories of the lived experiences of international graduate students should inform and transform the views of students, professors, associate staff, and the general readership about the experiences and issues that international students encounter as they pursue studies on campus. Retelling the students' experiences as they describe them allows the reader to understand what it means to have this particular experience since "we easily relate to the stories of others" (Suominen, 2005, p. 23).

Stories raise critical awareness about how others perceive their own experience, give voice to the marginalized, and counter misleading perceptions and claims about international students (Maynes, Pierce & Laslett, 2008). Thus, bringing to light and re-presenting students' stories raises critical awareness about how others perceive their international student experience. Stories are analogies that open the door to other worlds and allow individuals to question their own assumptions, prejudices, and stereotypes of such students. This dissertation also adds depth and richness to conversations about the experiences of international graduate students. In general, the implications of the study have the capacity to inform policy and program planners of the needs of international students.

### **Freezing Lands**

I come from a land of sun, sea and sand  
These are the treasures of my native land.  
Time like the sand rushes through our fingers  
We are unable to grasp it never lingers

Here frozen like the willows I gasp and shiver at this ghastly coldness

Grasping and lugging at my body from vice grips of ice

No man this is not nice!

Back home people sipping drinks with ice

Here I am walking, slipping and swaying in ice.

I depend on my inner voice to help me to make the right choice

As I struggle with the thought of warmth and the reality of this iciness

Come reason with me.

Why did I leave my sweet country of sun, sand and sea to dwell here in these frozen lands?

They giggle and they ask

Liking it here yet?

What? Like it here?

Me a stranger, a nomad, an outcast in this frozen land...

Yolanda Palmer (2013)

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of the Literature

#### Introduction

At the root of this research is the essence of being an international student studying in a new post-secondary learning environment. The continued growth of these students positions the phenomenon as one of growing interest and extends the need to understand the day-to-day experiences of these students as they engage learning in new overseas post-secondary communities of practice. When international students leave home to pursue studies abroad they open themselves to a life in which they “often face difficulties, some exclusive to them” (Furnham, 2004, p. 17). Kim (2001) cited that when individuals cross cultural borders they commonly face challenges based on the cultural differences they encounter as they gradually seek to fit into the new environment. Many international students enter into the Canadian post-secondary institution of their choice purposefully and fully confident about themselves and their studies (Tannis, 2010). Lamentably, many, soon after arrival, are faced with experiences of struggling from the lack of the requisite social or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) of the institution into which they are enrolled. Realizing that the capital that they possess differs from that of local students can be a major deterrent for many students and oftentimes pushes them into phases of depression and stress that can further demotivate and hamper their academic lives. Embodying a capital base that is different from domestic groups poses significant challenges for the foreign student who do not have the “know how” and/or skills to be able to effectively negotiate the new social, cultural, linguistic, and academic environment and communities of practice that may result in students feeling a sense of community.

Learning as a social activity implies that students will learn from each other through social events (Özlem & DiAngelo, 2012). A student’s academic life is largely influenced by the social worlds in which he or she is engaged and the interactions and connections he or she has with the community. Therefore, social constructivists have always emphasized the relevance of the social aspect of a student’s life for cognitive development and ultimately for learning to take place. Vygotsky (1978, 1988) identified learning and development as primarily collaborative activities. He explained that learning occurs in social contexts and social interaction plays a fundamental role in how students learn. Students, essentially, learn through their connections with other students from which they form signs and symbols that facilitate growth and



development. In relating learning to social contexts Lave and Wenger (1991) maintained that learning is unintentional and occurs through authentic culturally contextualized activities. This kind of learning, they posit, happens when students engage a *community of practice*. Learning essentially is situated in communities of practice and is sometimes incidental. The current literature, however, argues that international students are constantly engaging in processes of adjustment as they enter communities of practice overseas. For many students, the academic, lingua-cultural, social, and financial adjustments they encounter may cause many concerns.

This chapter discusses the conceptualizations of learning as capital-based and occurring in communities of practice. The literature review is divided into two parts. Part One examines theories of learning as a social activity. In this section, I identify and highlight Bourdieu's theory of human reproduction and Lave and Wenger's theory of learning as occurring in communities of practice. In this part of the literature review the notions of sense of community and sense of belonging are also discussed as integral to the process of learning. In Part Two, I discuss relevant literature surrounding the study of international students. In closing, I discuss the immigration policies to which international students are expected to adhere.

## **Part One**

### **Bourdieu's Social Capital: Key Elements in Learning**

In his work on cultural and social capital, Bourdieu (1986) asserted that people's activities are constantly shaping and being shaped by the social world and that culture is integral to social organization and domination. The culture of a people is always marked by social class and "reproduces class domination to the extent that the dominating class can impose their cultural values, standards and tastes on the whole society... [and] the nation society" (Seidman, 2008, p. 143). And so, students coming from overseas who do not possess the capital that will enable them to adjust and integrate well into the new community face significant challenges. Thus, international graduate students entering the new educational system without the common capital sometimes find it difficult to navigate the fields to achieving their desired outcome. This lack of capital ultimately impacts the experiences of students in the new academic environment.

Bourdieu (1986) maintained that culture plays a pivotal role in the reproduction of inequality and disempowerment in society through schools. He argued that educational institutions favored the dominant group that possessed the cultural capital and cultural habitus

that are compatible with the dominant society. The habitus refers to the embodied way of thinking and the dispositions of individuals that are developed over time; cultural capital refers to the forms of knowledge, skills, dispositions, linguistic practices, education and advantages that individuals possess and the attainment of these may lead to a higher status within society (Bourdieu, 1986). This theory is important and offers valuable insight in understanding how culture is reproduced in schools while maintaining the status quo of the dominant culture among students, the society and institutions of learning.

The cultural and academic landscapes of post-secondary institutions worldwide differ from one region and/or country to the next. Studying in a new academic culture and environment requires students to shift and refocus their lenses from the familiar frames of home to the new frames of the host country and institution. Even so, the possible experiences students will have in the new academy are largely shaped by the psychological tools with which they enter the field of study (Vygotsky, 1988). These tools include gestures, language, sign systems, behavioral patterns, and decision-making systems that are largely identifiable by and rooted in the cultures from their countries of origin. As a result, international students and newcomers struggle in the new cultural environment because they are still partly dwelling in aspects of their past cultural and academic lives (Shabatay, 1991) and lack the capital base that would allow them to make seamless transitions into the new environment.

According to Brym, Lie and Rytina (2007), Bourdieu, in his deliberations, envisioned education as central to the construction and diffusion of social, linguistic and cultural capital. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) however, contended that students without the social and cultural capital of the dominant were disadvantaged from the outset. They argued that students who had the social and cultural capital of the dominant were more likely to succeed in learning institutions. This probability is heightened since the forms of knowledge of the privileged are valued over those of the “newcomers” (Egbo, 2008). Therefore, international students in many instances after arriving in the host country encounter challenges in adjusting and adapting to the new environment and its styles of language and learning. University teaching involves diverse modes of instruction, including: lectures, seminars, labs, and mentoring (e.g., thesis supervision). Disciplines, courses, and instructors also vary widely in their emphasis on such varied educational objectives as learning new knowledge, stimulating student interest, developing cognitive skills, and leading students to question established tenets. For many, classes foster

active involvement, participation, and interaction of students to communicate their openness to and respect for alternative and challenging points of view.

### **Situated Learning: Learning in a Community of Practice**

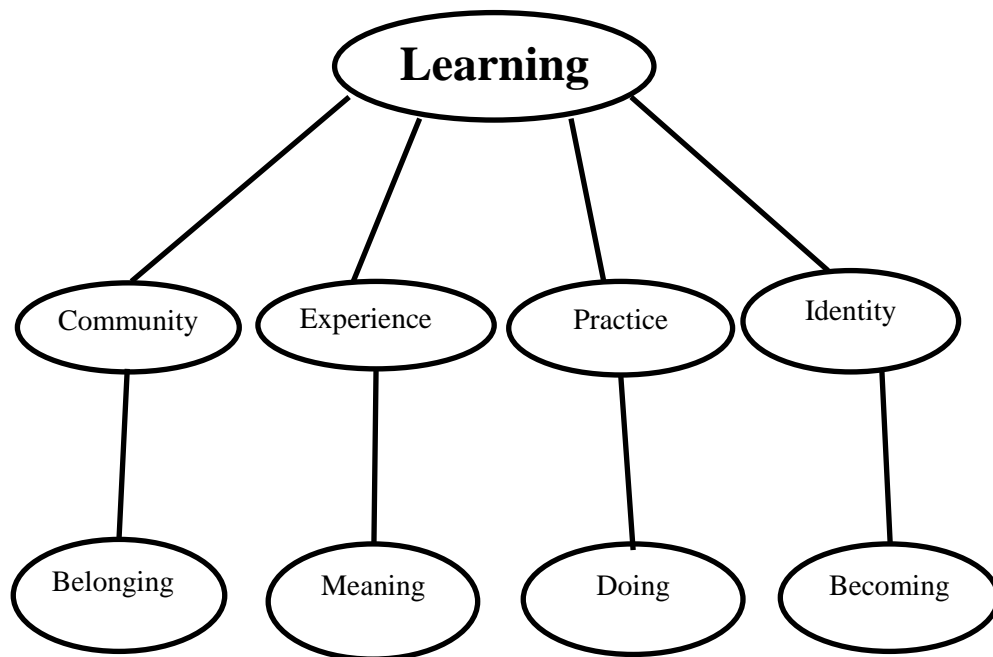
Lave and Wenger (1991) inspired by the social nature of learning and social learning theorists such as Piaget, Bandura and Vygotsky, although they differ, concurred that learning is a social activity that occurs through engagement in communities of practice. Essentially learning is a two way negotiation between newcomers to communities and the social learning systems in which they participate (Wenger, 1998). Communities of practice are groups of people who share a common concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (Wenger, 2000) as in graduate work. Within the parameters of this study, community of practice refers to the university as an academic institution which is disciplined based. Henceforth, community of practice is the academic community of practice, where students share the common goal of studying and researching to achieve a Masters or Doctorate in their field. Apparent in the situated learning approach posited by Lave and Wenger (1991), learning in community is not scripted but is unintentional and occurs through improvisation.

According to the authors, newcomers learn how to become full members of a community of practice through legitimate peripheral performance (LPP), which implies learners perform peripheral yet productive tasks that contribute to the goals of the community and builds the identity of the newcomer through discussions or class presentations in their academic classes. Through LPP students are able to learn the acceptable protocols of the new environment and move from being newcomers and apprentices to becoming masters and experts. These protocols include norms and behaviors of the new community and college or university. No one intentionally sets out to teach them; they learn vicariously through their own actions, watching, listening attentively and co-participating in community. That is, “a person’s intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29).

Wenger (1998) expounded these preliminary arguments and maintained that learning is socially undergirded and happens through contextualized situations in communities of practice (CoP). He offered a more comprehensive theoretical description of learning as a process of participation situated in a community of practice. Wenger deems situated learning as integral to

the lived experience of human beings. The inescapable notion of learning countered the general notion that learning is organized through curriculum and classroom activities only and has a start and an end. Rather for them, learning is ongoing and holistic. Furthermore, he argued that most social learning theories were based on psychological approaches to learning through observation and modelling.

In outlining a theory of social learning Wenger (1998) made a case that for learning to take place there has to be: a community, an experience, practice and changed identity. The diagram below was inspired by Wegner’s theory and captures the salient elements that allows for learning in a CoP.



*Figure 2.1:* Diagram illustrating the elements of situated practice

In situated practice, learning basically happens through doing and actively engaging socially with the academic community of practice. Therefore, in the case of newcomer graduate students, they have the opportunity of doing, undoing and redoing as they act and cooperate with “old timers” or “masters” in the community of practice. This positions learning as ongoing because as newcomers operate within the new community of practice they encounter new activities in which they will perform that will undoubtedly teach them useful skills that will assist them on their

trajectory through the community. It is believed that as the newcomers or students engage these social activities in the community of practice and co-participate their identity gradually transforms and so too does the community of practice. Learning then implies “becoming a different person” (1991, p. 53). The different tasks with which the individual interfaces differ and through improvisation he or she is able to invent and reinvent himself or herself through participation in the community of practice.

This theory assumes that newcomers, in this case international students, upon entering the new community of practice, the university or other post-secondary institutions, become engaged in activities from which they experience new ways of learning. These experiences that give light to the new ways are accessed through participation in the practices of the academic community, even if only on the periphery. Through their engagement they continue to invent and reinvent themselves through improvisation, imagining themselves as successful scholars. It is through this improvisation and approximation “trial and error” through acting, doing, participating and conferencing that learning occurs. Essentially the sojourner student takes ownership for his or her learning.

### **Sense of Community**

The social nature of human beings undergirds the universal need for community among individuals which affords them a sense of belonging in the groups they hope to join or the community of practice. Community in this regard is a group of individuals bounded together by a “natural will” and who together share a “set of ideas or ideals” (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. xvi). This sense of belonging allows for a continuity of “being connected to others and to the ideas and values that make our lives more significant and meaningful” (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. xiii). International students, in their engagement of their studies in overseas institutions, indubitably want to feel and become a part of the community which they have joined.

The social nature of learning also predicates that international students, like all other students, should experience a sense of community within the community of practice. A sense of community has to do with the interactions and relationships that international graduate students have with members within a class or a community. This notion of sense of community can be linked to Bourdieu’s idea of social capital, which refers to the relationships and connections that students have at their disposal that enables them to produce, internalize, and reproduce the

culture of the dominant, thus enhancing interactions and learning among members of the community.

International students entering post-secondary institutions are constantly confronted with the demands of the new academy and its inherent culture and sometimes harbor sentiments of being the “other” in the new academic environment. This feeling of “otherness” is based on students’ identification of themselves within the host community (Cavan, 2006; Dao & Lee, 2007; Ige, 2010; Kubota, 2001). Many face challenges with their identity based, primarily, on the cultural background from which they come and the conflicts that arise within the new learning environment as a result of their cultural or linguistic differences.

Given the proposition that learning is a social activity and that students learn from each other through social events, it follows that students, if they are to learn, should experience a sense of community within the learning institution. That is, foreign graduate students should feel that they are a part of the community. McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined sense of community as a “feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together”(p. 9). Sense of community, as described by McMillan and Chavis, comprises four components that are largely sociological and psychological in nature. When all the components are felt and achieved the international graduate student begins to feel a sense of community. The elements are: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. The first component, membership, is linked to the idea of social capital and that of a sense of belonging and acceptance in the group. The second dimension is influence, which is bidirectional in nature. It supposes that individuals bring something to the group and the group also influences the new individual. Simply put, both need the other for learning to occur.

Integration and fulfillment, the third component, means that students have successfully gained membership through their influence and begin to feel a part of the community. They have fulfilled the need to be a part thus integrating into the norms of the new environment. The shared emotional connection, the commitment relating to the commonality of experiences and stories of group members, is the fourth aspect (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). When international students feel they are part of the learning community and have been accepted by the other players in the community or field, their ideas matter and they matter as persons; they feel they belong to and fit in the community and their individual groups. Lastly, individuals begin to feel they have a shared

history with the group. Integral to a sense of community are the ideas of sense of place and sense of belonging. When students feel they belong and are comfortable in the location then learning outcomes and experiences are more positive, meaningful, and productive.

McMillan and Chavis' notion of sense of community highlights the relationality or interactions shared among members of a group or community. The physical sense of the word community was not considered for its territorial and geographical locality in this definition. Gusfield (1975) however, highlighted the duality of the term community and indicated that community refers to both the physical geographic territories in which people co-exist as well as the relationality among individuals, which points to human relationships without considering locations. Cicognani, Menzes and Gil (2011), in their study on the attachment young people to old and new places, spoke about a sense of place, which refers to the individualized experience of students in a particular geographic setting. Cicognani et al. (2011) claimed that a sense of place is often in relation to our identities and developing a sense of place helps in "creating meaning, order and stability in our lives" (p. 34).

Coming from different parts of the world, the way in which international students experience sense of place may be very different for individual students given their locations of origin. Many international graduate students, for example, have difficulties adjusting to the new physical and climatic conditions that exist within the host country and the ambits of their host institutions (Gebhard, 2010; Gunawardena & Wilson, 2012). Students from tropical countries in many instances have issues adapting to colder weather and the converse is true for students from countries with lower temperatures going to countries where temperatures are characteristically higher. This shift can cause a loss of sense of place for many international students. Many international students have never experienced snow or cold temperatures; therefore, the long harsh winters with sub-zero temperatures often brings darkness into the days and nights of overseas students. The reality of the harsher or different territorial and weather conditions can cause international graduate students to spiral into varying physiological and psychological disorders (stress, anxiety, alienation, loneliness, and depression are some disorders that international graduate students experience as they seek to have a sense of community and place). These disorders ultimately have bearings on the experiences and learning that students encounter in the new academic environment.

## **Sense of Belonging**

Although sense of belonging has been linked to McMillan and Chavis' concept of membership in community, in recent times, it has also been studied as a singular topic in and of itself. A sense of belonging enables international students to have favorable experiences in their sojourn in the host institution. A sense of belonging on the part of the international student relates to student perceptions of whether he or she feels accepted and included in the host university community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Lave and Wenger (1991) stressed the importance of belonging and participating in the community of practice. Belonging becomes relevant because it assumes that students fit in or belong to the particular group, college or university community into which they are enrolled for studies. A sense of belonging is integral to student members' identification within the university community and has both cognitive and affective implications for students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Studies have shown that when students experience a high sense of belonging, performance levels are improved and there is a greater chance of retention in the area of study; overall there is a more positive experience and students are more likely to achieve their academic goals (Hausman, Ye, Schofield & Woods, 2009; Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow & Salomone, 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al, 2007; Stableton, Huesman, Kuzhabekova, 2010).

The degree to which students perceive themselves as accepted members of the community will affect their attitudes toward the experience of being an international student in the host university: the more students feel they are accepted by other members of the school community the more positive their experiences will be. Thus, one would assume, possessing a sense of belonging is important since success is partly influenced by whether students feel welcomed and are accepted as part of the institution's "environment and climate" (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 526).

Fundamental to students experiencing a sense of belonging are the core concepts of *mattering* to and *engagement* with the learning community. Mattering stems from the feeling the individual gets that their presence in the post-secondary institution of choice is noted and valued by others. Engagement, on the other hand, in its broadest sense has to do with students' attitude toward the campus and campus activities and their participation in these activities (Willms, 2000; Johnson, et al., 2007; Stableton, et al., 2010). When students feel they matter, they feel better about themselves and their roles in the university community and more fully engage in university



life and activities. This means that they have more positive attitudes toward campus activities and are more willing to participate in them. Hence, the experience of being an international student becomes more positive as students feel they are more likely to succeed in the university.

Lacina (2002), in her study on the social experiences of international students in United States [US] universities, concluded that unfamiliarity with the host cultural capital plays a role in students' frustrations and inability to form even basic social relationships. The notion of friendship is viewed differently across cultures. Relationships across gender and age are also different based on culture. The gender relations that occur in Western cultures according to Clarke-Oropeza et al. (1991) befuddle many international students who may value less permissive and less openly expressed relationships. This also speaks to the non-verbal cues prevalent within the host culture. Unfamiliarity with these cues and the appropriate reaction can cause stress on the individual student who is trying to fit in.

When international graduate students are able to overcome these challenges and form new connections, the experience of being in the new environment is enhanced and ultimately enriched and positive. Bochner, Mcleod and Lin (1977) opined that international students belong to three fluid social networks. These network are identified as: (1) friends and family in their home country with whom they maintain long distance relationships through varying forms of media (mail, internet, Facebook, Skype, and other forms of social media). Through these, they maintain contact with their local culture; (2) interactions with host national students, professors, and counselors through which international graduate students learn culturally and socially relevant skills (social and cultural capital) to enhance their programs of study; and (3) affiliations with other international students from which they derive additional mental and social support.

International graduate students benefit from relationships with professors and locally based students (Lacina, 2002). Friendships and connections with local students provide foreign graduate students with the social and cultural capital needed to successfully maneuver academic life as well as bridging the gap to the outside world. Zhou, Jidal-Snape, Topping and Todman (2008) contended that overseas students benefit from interaction with host nationals socially, psychologically, culturally and academically. Furthermore, relationships with professors act as a protective factor to the mental well-being of the graduate international student (Olivas & Li, 2006). It is through these social and dialogical interactions, that international graduate students are able to acquire the necessary social and cultural capital. Once these are mastered, students

become more connected with the group of which they have become a part and so their experiences in the new institution are enhanced positively.

## **Part Two**

### **International Students Adjusting to Overseas Post-secondary Institutions**

Establishing a sense of community through a sense of place and belonging is an important part of being an international graduate student. Students find a sense of community and belonging when they feel connected to the group through their relationships with other members of the group. A sense of community affords them the capital which Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) declared can be expensive; thus, hard to accomplish. Students who have achieved this are better able to produce, internalize, and reproduce the cultural capital of the group. On the other hand, its lack results in varying degrees of culture shock, which according to Lin and Scherz (2014), is a major issue that impacts international students when they enter new programs of study overseas is based in culture. They also indicated that these cultural challenges have the potential to affect students' academic success.

Furnham (2004) contended that culture shock is a term that is well known to travelers and is often discussed by international students. However, he contended that as a result of the multiple aspects of the term, it still largely remains unclearly defined. Wang (2008), however, defined culture shock as the process of initial adjustment to the new academic environment. Brown and Holloway (2008) further indicated that culture shock has to do with feelings of anxiety that students experience entering into a new academic environment after losing the familiar symbols of social and academic processes to new ones they do not necessarily understand. Examining both definitions here, one could conclude that indeed the term can be interpretive and bears a different meaning according to its use and user. Wang described culture shock as a major cultural adjustment stressor that international graduate students face. Coming from diverse cultures, overseas graduate students can hardly escape the shock of entering into a new culture and as a result face numerous challenges and issues.

Feelings of culture shock can only be averted when students feel a sense of belonging which enables international students to have favorable experiences in their sojourn in the host institution. An affinity to others on the part of the international graduate student relates to a student's perceptions of whether he or she feels accepted and included (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

It assumes that students feel they *fit in* or *belong* to the particular group, college, or university community into which they are enrolled for graduate studies.

**Discrimination.** A major hindrance to achieving a sense of community and belonging is discrimination. Clarke–Oropeza et al. (1991) asserted that many overseas students face discrimination daily within foreign institutions. The discrimination encountered is based in the perceptions and presuppositions that are fostered through lack of knowledge on the part of colleagues in the host country. In a survey of international students, the CBIE (2009) noted that a major issue that international students highlighted racial and cultural sensitivity, which can lead to discrimination if not properly handled. Foreign students have to deal with the perceptions of professors, other university staff members, and other students regarding their competencies and overall performance in their programs of study. Yet, international students also enter postsecondary institutions abroad already deeply rooted in stereotypical beliefs and perceptions about the institutions they enter and of the people and culture they will meet. These stereotypes have been largely formed through interpretations of what is portrayed by the mass media (Davis, et al., 2004).

In general, many international students are considered “insufficiently adjusted to higher education in their host country academically” by professors and university personnel (Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012, p. 1). Luzio-Lockett (1998) and Maguire (2011) concurred that many educators assume that international students have issues and are perceived negatively because of the lack of knowledge and understanding of academic culture and rhetoric in North American academic institutions.

Trice (2003) proffered that many professors and local students do not adequately understand the backgrounds and experiences of international students and so they do not know how to treat the issues of international students. This ignorance sometimes translates into discrimination, which causes added frustration for foreign students. Moreover, international students in some instances also encounter and exhibit xenophobic tendencies—the fear of the other—when dealing with locals within the institution (Fiske & Lee, 2012). This xenophobia, Fiske and Lee claimed, often results from preconceived notions or stereotypes that about the ethnicity, race, religion, and in some instances, the language of the newcomer on both the part of the foreign student and locals within the settler community.

The lack of the social and cultural capital that students face ultimately inhibits their sense of community and belonging. Not having a sense of community and belonging stems from and leads to other challenges as students seek to adjust into the new academic environment. Subsequent deliberations argue that academic adjustment, academic language and literacy adjustment, and financial adjustment are significant factors that can “make or break” the experience of being an international student.

### **Academic Adjustments**

Culture plays a part in the way students learn, communicate, and relate to peers and educators. Ultimately, students’ culture impacts the motivation levels and relevance of areas of study (Guo & Zenobia, 2007). Ghosh and Abdi (2004) asserted that “culture plays a significant role in production and reproduction in schools” (p. 31). Therefore, culture and education cannot be separated: they are interlinked, since students’ worldviews ultimately influence their experiences in educational environments. Thus, students’ learning styles and cognitive processes are submerged in culture. The cultures from which students come, then, greatly affects the academic career of the student (Cummins, 1997). Chen (1999) highlighted that a student’s lack of knowledge of the host culture and the divergence from his/her culture of origin pose significant challenges to international students whose values, beliefs and customs may be significantly different from that of local students (Olivas & Li, 2006). Thus, when international students enter a new academic culture, the absence of the familiar potentially poses additional stress on the individual and will determine his or her experience within the institution. In light of the differences that divide education sectors globally, international students in many instances have issues when making adjustments to the pedagogical processes within post-secondary institutions outside of their home country and or region (Chen, 1999; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Peterson, 2013; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004).

Wu, Tsang, and Ming (2012), recorded that the prior learning experiences of many international students, when juxtaposed with those of the new learning environment, pose significant issues. According to Smith and Khawaja (2010), adjustment may become difficult for international students coming from particular cultures whose teaching and learning styles differ significantly from the institution in which they are enrolled. They noted the experiences of Asian international students, whose primary mode of learning was through rote learning and

memorization encounter difficulties with the Western way of reasoning, critical thinking, and problem solving. The issues encountered in many instances are due to the disparity between Eastern and Western cultures (Gebhard, 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). For example, Smith and Khawaja (2010) reported, from a study with Taiwanese students in an overseas institution, that participants showed concern about the informal relationship between domestic students and faculty.

For many students entering post-secondary institutions overseas, depending on their background and previous experiences, the level of coursework and class readings can be a detractor (Zhang, 2011). Whereas some students may find the workload and course readings overwhelming, for others it may seem adequate or even insufficient or insubstantial. In such cases international students have to adjust their ways of thinking and reasoning to accommodate the new teaching styles employed by professors in their courses of study (Abel, 2002; Lacina, 2002). Adjusting to teaching styles is not unique to foreign students; all students have to make adjustments as they climb the ladder of academy. The distinction is made through the social, cultural and academic differences that these students engender and the transition and transformation that need to be negotiated for successful learning to occur.

There is also the contention that adjusting to and becoming a part of a new academic community may be affected by students' expectations of themselves and their performance within the host institution and department (Chen, 1999; Clarke–Oropeza et al., 1991). For instance, many international graduate students who were ranked as top students in previous academic pursuits may face challenges in host universities. Entering into the new environment and learning to adjust means that the expectations of maintaining their rank may not be met. As a result, such students may become distressed (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Smith and Khawaja (2011) declared that there is a “mismatch” of expectations in terms of the quality and efficiency of services provided by overseas institution. These thoughts and results were also registered by CBIE (2009), which stated that one of the major issues that international students face is that their expectations of the host culture were not met. These failed expectations constitute a major issue for many international students (Gebhard, 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). When the anticipated result and/or experience are not met, some students may become despondent and stressed, thus further hampering their experiences in the institution.

## **Academic Language and Literacy Adjustments**

The culture and ways of the university as an academic institution differs from that of the general society. They differ in terms of the expectations of students as they perform tasks that are distinct to academia. Curry (2004) highlighted that academic literacy is the underpinning ingredient that determines the success of students. Therefore, students are expected to acquire and maintain the capacity to read and write various texts (Spack, 1997). This definition has been criticised as insufficient since academic literacy entails far more. Academic literacy includes more than just reading, writing and “discrete skills or appropriate language in context” (Gilliver-Brown and Johnson, 2009, p. 334) and “comprehension and decoding” (Gibbons, 2009, p. 5). Rather, academic literacy includes the range of classroom activities into which students are expected to engage. It involves the use of academic jargon and language, writing and presentations. Gilliver-Brown and Johnson (2009) contended that academic literacy should be viewed as “holistic in nature and includes reading competence, writing, critical thinking, knowledge of independent learning processes, tolerance and ambiguity, effective practice of good judgement and development of a deeper sense of personal identity” (p.334).

Canadian post-secondary institutions, like most other tertiary institutions within North America, tend to stress communicative language teaching through critical thinking. This notion and mode of teaching does not apply to many education systems in other parts of the world. For example, according to Hu (2002) communicative teaching poses significant challenges to Chinese students studying abroad. These issues arise because Chinese education is based in Confucianism which promotes rote learning—learning by memorisation—and overall consensus and acceptance of the knowledge that is passed on by elders. Chinese students are taught to memorize information word for word for examinations and never challenge information passed on to them. Growing up and learning in such an environment such students when they enter institutions of learning overseas do not transition well into communicative teaching classes that require them to be critical about “knowledge.”

Abel (2002) and Peterson (2013) argued that international graduate students in the new post-secondary environment, especially some students of Asian descent, are constantly perplexed by the use of academic language utilized in the English speaking post-secondary classroom. The internationalization of post-secondary institutions in the Western world driven by globalization has positioned English as the language of the academy (Canagarajah, 2006; Jenkins, 2011;

Lasanowski, 2011; Sawir, 2005). While this may be true, it is to be noted that although not all enter programs as non-native speakers of English (NNES) all international students, even those with English-speaking background, struggle with the credibility of their academic language usage (Gebhard, 2010; Gunawardena & Wilson, 2012; Lev-Ari & Keysar, 2010). Credibility in language use becomes questionable based on the regionalized differences within the English language as well as the traditional modes of teaching and learning languages.

Western post-secondary institutions maintain that proficiency in English language is relevant for the successful completion and performance of international students (Bretag, 2007; Cooper, 2007; Light, Xu & Massop, 1987; Xu, 1991). So relevant is international students' knowledge of English that according to Bamford (2008), international students matriculating into Western universities are expected to enter with basic knowledge of English. Yet, upon entering the institutions of their choice they face discriminatory issues based on the variations between the English they learned and that of the new academy.

Language discrimination hinders many international students from reaching their academic goals. Lacina (2002) claimed that the accent or use of expressions of international students often times hinder communication between students and faculty. Students with an accent different from the local *parlance*, though they are speaking English, are not considered credible in many instances (Lev-Ari & Keysar, 2010). This leads to second language anxiety (Chen, 1999) that causes the student to become stressed and hampers his or her level of functionality.

Bakhtin (1981) stressed that the modern world has a variety of languages and language dialects that span national and ethnic borders and sometimes even obtain within a language.

At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word (according to formal linguistic markers, especially phonetic), but also—and for us this is the essential point—into languages that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, “professional” and “generic” languages; languages of generations, and so forth. . . . And this stratification and heteroglossia, once realized, is not only a static invariant of linguistic life, but also what insures its dynamics: stratification and heteroglossia widen and deepen as long as language is alive and developing. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 271-272)

The variations he described may raise alarm and cause confusion for speakers moving from one region to the next. In congruence with Bakhtin's deliberation surrounding students' linguistic competence and the challenges they may encounter, research shows that many international graduate students studying in post-secondary institutions overseas encounter linguistic and communicative difficulties in their academic programs. Interestingly, not all students entering overseas post-secondary institutions encounter linguistic challenges.

Challenges are manifested in issues/difficulties in listening, speaking, reading, writing and comprehending in academic English and literacy in varying degrees (Chen, 1999; Lacina, 2002; Lee; 2005; Lev-Ari & Keysar, 2010; Maguire, 2011; Olivas & Li, 2006; Popadiuk & Arthurs, 2004; Sacre, Nash & Lock, 2010; Sanner, Wilson & Samson, 2002; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Tannis; 2010; Zhang, 2011). Peterson (2013) added that these students encounter challenges morphologically, phonetically and syntactically, which ultimately affects fluency, intonation, pronunciation, and word and phrase stress. Additionally, there tend to be issues with reading speed, new vocabulary, and use of appropriate language, grammar, punctuation and spelling among many international students. These may be attributed to the idiosyncrasies of the language of the academic community. Students are often confused by the variations in spelling and vocabulary as these differ across cultures as they negotiate the fields of academic language, local language, and the language in text.

Culturally and linguistically, language varies from region to region. The idiosyncratic and regionalized nature of English as a global language is manifested in the differences encountered and causes students to engage in code-switching as they engage in written and oral discourse. Code-switching is the act of switching from one language or dialect to another (Nilep, 2006). It includes any switch among language in written or oral communication inclusive of words, sentences and/or blocks of speech. When individuals are bi-lingual, tri-lingual or multilingual they often switch codes or registers in discourses; they make the conscious effort in overriding their dominant language or dialect to engage the language of the foreign culture (El-Sahir, 2010; Molinsky, 2007; Nilep; 2006). The switch from one code to the next is negotiation that foreign students encounter, and when they are unable to make successful shifts many become anxious.

Cheng, Myles and Curtis (2004) claimed that the major academic demands that international students face within the academy are speaking and writing. Oral and written presentations are common to most post-secondary studies and can be very demanding for



students. These presentations are an exhibition of students' progress in the process of higher learning. Wang (2004) asserted that presentations become demanding when students feel incompetent to perform the task because their language and, by extension, speaking abilities are lacking. Moreover, Gebhard (2010) highlighted that international students have difficulty negotiating academic language in presentations especially among their local peers. This difficulty arises from the lack of the requisite academic and linguistic capital to negotiate the new academic culture and, in many instances, causes international students to doubt their linguistic capabilities in comparison to local classmates. Foundation to being a graduate student are a host of academic processes and skills (organizing, planning, researching); cognitive skills (critical thinking, problem solving, interpreting, analyzing, memorizing, recalling), learning modes (questioning, discussing, observing, theorizing, experimenting; and work habits (persistence, self-discipline, curiosity, conscientiousness, responsibility) in addition to other forms of literacy required to succeed such as technological literacy, online literacy, media literacy, or textual literacy.

Wells and Chang (1990) expressed that the relationship between speech and writing is complex. They further emphasized that "writing is not simply speech written down" (p.122). According to Waye (2010), good academic writing is grounded in the ideas of others with proper attributions and citations and inter-texts. Inter-texts allow for the expressed ideas of the writer as he or she moves to argue and critically evaluate the arguments of others. Being a good academic writer requires critical thought, analysis, finesse, and a way with words. Good academic writing also necessitates students to have in depth knowledge and skill in the use of various academic style guidelines such as that of the American Psychological Association [APA], Council of Science Editors [CSE], Chicago Manual [CMS], and the Modern Language Association [MLA] styles. Zyuzin, (2012) cited the use of the APA style as a key requirement for graduate students within disciplines such as education. He further highlighted that the formatting skills and requirements needed for the APA might be an uncommon skill that students have to learn, the use of which is a challenge for most students not excluding local students.

### **Financial Adjustment**

The issue of financial challenges is a global concern for international students as most experience monetary issues at some time or other in their student life abroad. According to Chen

(1999), having a “[f]inancial concern is a practical and critical issue in international students’ daily lives” (p. 55). Bourdieu (1986) pointed out that economic capital or financial resources and that which can be translated to money plays a major part in the way students are able to traverse their study experience. For Bourdieu economic capital was transferable to cultural and social capital without which the student would never be fully integrated into the new culture. The lack of adequate finances causes additional stress and threatens the survival of overseas students. Research findings indicated that overseas graduate students, in fact, encounter grave financial difficulties when settling and adjusting to a new academic environment (CBIE, 2009; Chen, 1999; Gebhard, 2012; Gunawardena & Wilson, 2012; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Zhang, 2011). Many international graduate students find themselves facing financial obstacles as they progress in their studies. First, tuition fees for international students are significantly higher than that of local students (CBIE, 2009; Kapusta & Roadevin, 2011, Maguire, 2011) and escalate annually. Second, the exchange rates in lesser-developed countries in many instances cause students financial stress in accumulating the required funds before entering the host university. Additionally, upon entering the new academic environment the lack of funds thrust international graduate students to sacrifice much in terms of how much they can fully participate in academic life (CBIE, 2009). In some cases they are unable to attend conferences and academic functions that have the potential of propelling their careers because of the lack of adequate funding.

Clarke-Oropeza and Fitzgibbon (1991) believed that international graduate students become stressed by financial challenges as these represent a change in their economic status. The change from being a person with a self-sufficient income to a full-time student is a transformation that many find challenging. In addition, pursuits of studies overseas oftentimes totally consume available funds. Moreover, a disruption in financial resources may adversely impact the international students’ academic purposes, their accessing satisfactory accommodations as well as their health and food choices (Chen, 1999; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004).

The apparent lack of available funds forces many international graduate students to seek employment within the host society to make it through their studies (CBIE, 2009). International students, however, face certain restrictions when seeking employment. The major restriction students encounter when seeking a job centers on their lack of Canadian work experience (Barba,

2013). Many seek scholarships as alternative sources of funding. However, budgetary constraints have caused cuts in the quality and quantity of scholarships offered by departments and colleges throughout universities in Canada and elsewhere. Chen (2007) pointed out that without scholarships and assistantships many students would not be able to pursue studies overseas.

### **Canadian Immigration Policies for International Students**

Immigration policies that govern international students regarding how they gain and maintain positions in Canada are clearly set by the CIC. These policies in many instances seem restrictive and may cause additional stress to the newcomer student who leaves home for the first time to study overseas. Infringement on the part of the student is a serious infraction and students guilty of such may be deemed unfit and face the possibility of deportation to their country of origin. In order to enter programs of study in Canadian post-secondary institutions, international students must first meet the requirements for eligibility prescribed by the CIC. The applicant is expected to have gained entrance into a Canadian post-secondary institution of his or her choice before application for a student permit. The student is also mandated to demonstrate his or her ability to support him/herself financially while studying in Canada.

At the time of this research, international students were not permitted to work during the first six months of their programs of study. After this initial period students were able apply for an off-campus work permit which would allow them to work up to 20 hours off campus while studying in Canada. Additionally, upon completion of studies the student had the opportunity to apply for an off-campus or post graduate work permit within 90 days of completion of their course of study. At this point, study permit holders were not allowed to work while they await the decision on the application for work permit. In April of 2014, these regulations were revised. The new polices come into effect on June 1, 2014. With the new policies, students granted a study permit are automatically granted a work permit that will allow them to work up to 20 hours per week during the academic sessions and full time during breaks without being penalized or needing to apply for a separate work permit. These new regulations also allow graduates to work with the study permit up to 90 days, after completion of their courses, while they await the result of an application for a work permit. Such applicants may also continue to work on a previous work permit within these ninety days. Also with the new policy the student permit or visa

becomes invalid 90 days after completion of studies, at which point the student is expected to leave the country. These new policies became effective June 1, 2014.

International students are expected to rigidly adhere to the aforementioned regulation. Deviating from said stipulations could jeopardize or terminate their tenure as students within Canada. Many students, however, due to the practices and period of study, have issues gaining long term substantive employment thereby facing financial issues and constraints.

### **Summary**

Vygotsky (1978, 1988) advocated that learning is essentially a social activity and human beings learn from their social interactions with other students. Scholars and researchers such as Lave and Wenger (1991) concur with Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and posited that the social activity of learning occurs as newcomers act from the periphery through doing and redoing using improvisation until they learn the ways of the new environment and become members of the community of practice. Bourdieu's (1986) theory of human reproduction, however, assumed that students entering institutions of learning without the dominant social or cultural capital often face challenges in adjusting to the new academic environment. Consequently, international students tend to have issues adapting socially, academically, linguistically and financially. Conversely, possession of capital allows for a smoother adjustment and better learning outcomes. The concepts of sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) and sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) have been explored as important elements in the social process of learning. When students feel they belong they embrace a sense of community that affords them "insider" positions in university classes and groups. Being "in" allows for better adjustment into the new environment. Adjustment may also be impacted by the language, financial issues, and literacy policies and tendencies in the post-secondary institution of choice.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Research Design and Methodology

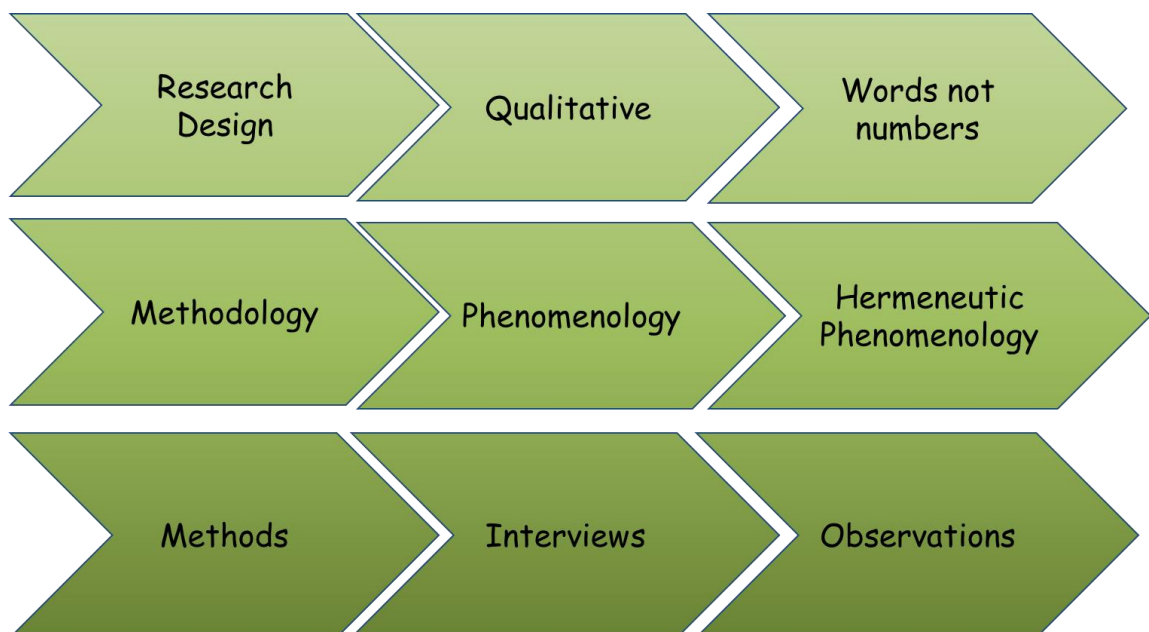
#### Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the day-to-day experiences of international students from their perspectives to come to an understanding of the essence of being an international graduate student studying at the University of Saskatchewan. The study was grounded in the belief that human experience is multi-layered and complex and for the most part is hidden from the public's eye. Hence, an exploration into these experiences could give insight into the phenomenon and reality of being an international student. Merriam (2009) argued that realities are socially constructed and there is no single observable reality from which one can objectively measure the realities of others. Furthermore, realities are basically "constructions existing in the minds of people" (Guba & Lincoln, 1999, p. 142). Therefore, there is the possibility of multiple realities or interpretations of a single event. Hence, research based on people's realities can only be done within its natural setting, as lived by individuals (Guba & Lincoln, 1999), while attempting to understand experiences through the lens of individuals with the experience (Slavin, 2007).

My intentions in conducting this study were not only to explore the experiences of international students but also to capture and re-present their lived experiences from their own gaze. I hoped to unveil the meanings of participants' experiences rather than draw inferences from predetermined questions that are characteristic of surveys used in quantitative research. Notably, a research of this nature cannot be conducted without "the conscious or unconscious use of underlying theoretical perspectives which inform methodology, guiding theory, questions pursued, and conclusions drawn" (Broido & Manning, 2002, p. 434) in the research process. The theoretical perspective that underpins the current research is interpretivism. Often referred to as *verstehen*, which means "understanding," interpretivism proffers that human action and experience are meaningful (Shwandt, 2000) to understanding the life-world of individuals. The interpretivist investigator is obliged to represent participants' meaning of their experiences as relevant since their understanding of their experience is integral to the experience itself. Interpretive research assumes that reality is socially constructed and there is no single observable reality. Rather, they promote the presence of multiple realities, or interpretations of a single experience. Essentially, the researcher does not go out to find knowledge or meaning (Crotty,

1998); it is constructed by those who have the experience (Merriam, 2009) and lends itself to any number of interpretations.

I chose to use a qualitative design because qualitative research is concerned with understanding the multilayered interpretations and/or meaning that individuals give to their own experiences and represents an “interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). Furthermore, such inquiries are concerned with context and meaning and generally focus on how people make sense of situations and human experiences (Ary, Cheser - Jacobs, Razavieh & Sorensen, 2006) and uses “language data” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 137) to derive meaning and understanding. This research is grounded in the knowledge that there is no objective truth or reality to be uncovered; rather it gives investigators and participants the freedom to act as co-interpreters and co-creators of experiences and transforming them into representations of meaning (Patton, 2002). Guided by my desire to explore the lived experiences of international graduate students in the university, to come to an understanding of its nature, within the broader framework of qualitative study, I opted to do a phenomenological study grounded in hermeneutics. Figure 3.1 summarizes the research process that is described within this chapter.



*Figure 3.1:* Summary of the research design, methodology and methods

## **Hermeneutic Phenomenology: Towards a Deeper Understanding of Phenomenon**

My understanding of phenomenology and hermeneutics has been influenced by a number of researchers and phenomenologists, thereby broadening my approach and understanding. The writings and research of scholars like van Manen (1997, 2014), Merleau Ponty (1962, 2012), Polkinghorne (1988, 2005), Gadamer (2004), and Moustakas (1994) among others combined to form an infusion of the methodology, which I employed throughout the study.

Hermeneutic phenomenology espouses two unique approaches to the study of human experiences: phenomenology and hermeneutics. Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a methodology of research. Husserl has been credited as the father of the philosophy of modern phenomenology. Husserl's notion of phenomenology was to be the study of phenomenon in its purest form (Groenewald, 2004) as it aims to clarify the sense of the world (Husserl, 1913). The sought clarification can only be found when things are made to speak for themselves, for it is returning to the things themselves as they occur that we are able to derive meaning from them. van Manen (1997b) framed this as returning to the "life world." Phenomenologists are concerned with unearthing the meaning of phenomenon from the experiences of the very thing under study. Inherent in the process of phenomenological research is the principle that in order to understand things you have to go back to a pre-reflective notion of that thing itself to get to its essence (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). One can only understand meaning as they reflect on past experience since in the moment of the experience individuals become enwrapped in living through it (Merleau-Ponty, 2012; van Manen, 2014).

Hermeneutics, on the other hand, tries to understand how people make interpretations of their world and tends to be textually based. It is the art of understanding and interpreting (Gadamer, 2004). It involves the comprehension of written and spoken text, through language. Text is multimodal and is therefore evinced in multiple ways. Bakhtin (1986) argued that although text is primarily expressed through oral or written language it may also be understood through any "coherent complex sign" (p. 103). Therefore, the study of art, music, dance, gestures and other visual or oral performance routines can also be viewed as text. Dilthey and Jameson (1972), in explaining hermeneutics, contended that in order to attain understanding one has to first make interpretations of that which is the object of understanding. Hermeneutics is applied when the aim is to make sense of an object of study (Regan, 2012). Wiercinski (2009) argued that understanding and interpretation are grounded in the life world. Human beings are always

interpreting as interpretations and meanings derived from experiences are based in culture (Bruner, 1990; Crotty, 1998). Polkinghorne (1988) contended that the human processes of making meaning are mental and vary from individual to individual based in the cultures from which they come. In summary, hermeneutics explains meanings and assumptions dwelling in text that participants themselves are not able to bring forward when sharing stories (Crotty, 1998).

Van Manen (1997b) described the hermeneutic phenomenological method as a qualitative approach that allows for a “deeper understanding of the nature of the meaning of our everyday experiences” (p. 9).

[I]t is a descriptive (phenomenological) methodology because it seeks to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena. (van Manen, 1997b, p. 181)

Thus, every element of an experience or phenomenon can be interpreted. Phenomenologists are interested in the common features of lived experiences (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Researchers engaged in phenomenological research focus in-depth on the meaning of a particular aspect of experience, assuming that through dialogue and reflection the quintessential meaning of the experience will be reviewed and understanding attained.

Integral to the phenomenological process is the idea of researcher reflexivity, which refers to the critical self-reflection on the part of the researcher as the instrument being used to gather data. Merriam (2009) contended that “[i]nvestigators need to explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken” (p. 219). In reflecting on my own biases I was able to reflexively “turn inward to [my] personhood” (Freshwater & Rolfe, 2001, p. 529). In so doing, I suspended my biases toward the area of research and bracketed my beliefs and experiences to ensure that the true meaning of the phenomenon be openly explored. Drew (2004) described bracketing as both an act and an attitude that phenomenological inquirers should adapt when engaged in phenomenological research. Lee (2005), however, proposed that bracketing is more like an attitude of engagement throughout a research process rather than a simple one-time act. Grounded in this knowledge, as I reflected on the research data, I took precautions to ensure that my background, prior knowledge, and presumptions did not affect the understandings that participants gave to phenomenon (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; Merriam, 2009).



I was swift to claim my biases because I feared that not doing so would lead me to objectifying data reality rather than focusing on the real world of lived experiences as encountered by participants. This unloading began in the *Prologue* of this study where I offered my story as an international student and my experiences in the institution and continued throughout the chapters and “wraps up” in the *Epilogue* as I reflect on the data and process at every step of the process. I found throughout the process that in assuming this attitude I constantly had to engage in bracketing which I did through my journaling, poetry and silent reflection. In doing this, I was able to investigate the lived experiences of the participating international graduate students openly and free of judgment or premature imposition of meaning (Patton, 2002).

As a hermeneutic phenomenological researcher, I aimed to “reconstruct the self-understandings” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 193) of participants in the study who are international graduate students at the university. I wanted to re-present participants’ stories and the meaning they bring to their experiences as relevant since their understanding of the experience is often tacit in nature and integral to the lived experience itself. To understand what it is like studying at the university as an international student, I turned to the lived experiences of international students in the new academic setting and environment at the university. In my thinking, the lived experience of these students amplifies and crystalizes the tacit knowledge of each individual in a way that allowed me to experience a deeper understanding and make their knowledge explicit.

### **The Pilot Study**

In light of my intentions to conduct a phenomenological inquiry I conducted a pilot study to do a trial run of the methods and procedures of the research (Leon, Davis & Kraemer, 2011). I solicited the help of two international students at the university in this mini study. The primary purpose of the pilot study was not only to collect data; rather, it was to evaluate, learn and develop an appreciation for the process of the intended research, interview questions and technique, and my purpose and role as the researcher (Glesne, 1999; Seidman, 2006). Because my plan was to use interviews as my primary data collection tool, I wanted to test the language, structure and nature of the questions to be used in the broader study. In so doing, I engaged the data collection methods of observation, interviews, researcher reflexive journaling and researcher field logs. From this pilot study I was able to refine interview questions to facilitate deeper

probes and explorations that would yield more open and rich experiential anecdotes. From this test, I also learned that interviews in the phenomenological research needed to be done at different intervals to capture the experience in totality. The use of non-participant observations allowed me to better read insights of participants' experiences and could guide me in the interview process with more pointed questions based on what has been seen. Overall, I was able to sharpen my skill as both interviewer and observer. I felt my research was relevant and these methods, if structured and properly implemented, could yield rich data.

### **The Research Setting: Time, Place, and Space**

While the setting for the interviews was not a key factor in unearthing detailed descriptive lived experiences from participants, it was important that they felt comfortable in the process. van Manen (2014,) like Mischler (1986), argued that formal interviews in university offices may not be the most conducive venues if the researcher wants to acquire "rich" stories which would hint at the meaning of the phenomenon (Wetherell & Noddings, 1991). With this in mind, interviews were conducted at places convenient to participants, whether it was their office, their home having dinner with them, the general meeting area, or outdoors. I made every attempt to accommodate the wishes and needs of the participants. In-depth interviews each lasted forty-five minutes to an hour. In few cases the interviews exceeded one hour. Additionally, I shadowed participants during regular classes as they were engaged in classroom activities, at the libraries, social gathering places, and within the general campus community.

### **Description of the Data Collection Process**

#### **The In-depth Interview Process**

I adapted and synthesized a three-phase interview process used by Dolbeare and Schuman (1981) as cited in Seidman (2006) for my interview protocol. They offered a three-stage in-depth interview process but I found that stage three, though relevant, did not yield much data in the pilot study and opted to merge interviews two and three (See Appendix C). I chose this particular method because according to Seidman (2006), the interview process should be reciprocal and more like a bond between interviewee and interviewer. I found this interview process to be useful for my research since it lent itself to developing a relationship with participants. Interview questions were examined and refined during the pilot of the study. In-

depth interviews that sought phenomenological meanings allowed me to explore in detail and at greater depth the experiences of study participants. Seidman (2006) noted that in-depth interviews allow participants to share details of their experiences from their point of view.

The adapted interview process, informed by the pilot study, included the opportunity to build rapport and relationships between myself and participants. Having this kind of relationship allowed me to be able to ask students about their previous study experience and also explore the experience of study at the university. Students were presented with the opportunity to give follow-up information and register changes in thoughts, as well as make an evaluation of their status, propose a future outcome, and their own meaning of the experience

**Stage one.** This stage served dual purposes. Firstly, at this stage of the interview process the researcher and each participant engaged in an exploration of the experience of being a student in his or her home university. This “explorational” phase served to establish and build rapport between the participant and the researcher as they explore the interviewee’s past experience as a student in his or her home country up to the time of entrant into the new academy. Secondly, I explored participants’ experiences at the university. This was where I elicited and explored descriptions of the experience until they became clear.

**Stage two.** At this stage, I asked participants to clarify and explore questions that I formulated during horizontalization—scrutinizing data for horizons—as follow-up. International students also had the opportunity to add information they deemed appropriate in discovering the meaning of the experience. Finally, I explored participants’ interpretations and the meanings they ascribed to their experiences as international graduate students at the campus of the university. This is in tandem with the van Manen’s (1997b) suggestion that the second interview be used to review and discuss interpretations from the first interview with the aim of getting confirmation or addressing divergences in thoughts. Interviews with participants were conducted in English, recorded, and then transcribed verbatim. After transcription, I presented transcribed data to participants allowing them the opportunity to review, add, delete, or change information as they thought necessary.

### **Participant Selection**

Merleau-Ponty (2012) argued that meanings and understandings of phenomenon can only come from those who experience it. My central research question was: *What does it mean to be*

*an international student in the academic environment of the university?* The subjective nature of such an experience dictated that the study seek for depth of experience rather than frequency of occurrences. I needed thick rich descriptions of the experience, therefore I selected participants that corresponded to the specified criteria and who were “information rich” regarding the phenomenon under study (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2011). I also needed participants from whom I was able to learn about the area of research (Patton, 2002). I, therefore, heeded the advice of Moustakas (1994) and sought to collect data from those with the experience, who in the case of this enquiry were international students.

In the study, participants were international students enrolled in a masters or doctoral program at the university, who at the time of the study had already completed one year in their program of study. This criterion was important in the selection process, as interview questions required respondents to reflect on past experiences as international students in the institution. Furthermore, I wanted students who have never studied in another international post-secondary institution. I wanted to see the phenomena of international students studying in the Canadian post-secondary academy from fresh lenses. I was convinced that prior involvement in an international setting would have yielded data that were prejudiced by that connection, thereby inhibiting an authentic expression of the Canadian experience.

All colleges, departments and groups at the university were possible sites from which participants could be drawn as international students were engaged in studies across campus and in various social and cultural activities. To gain access to participants, I approached the gatekeepers—those with access to the group I hoped to draw participants from—of the university about my study and the possibility of nominations of participants. Gatekeepers were faculty members, graduate and undergraduate groups, campus social and academic groups, as well as classmates. My aim in doing this was to reach a more diverse sample through snowballing. Also known as *chain referral*, snowball sampling is a purposive sampling technique that allows for the recruitment of other participants through initial participants and gatekeepers, who through their social connections referred other potential candidates fitting the criteria and who could contribute to the study (Polkinghorne, 2005). I used this approach with the knowledge that gatekeepers and participants had access to other possible contributors with whom I did not have direct contact.

From this engagement, I received four nominations for possible participants for the study. Once the nominations for participants were received, I sent a letter of invitation by email to these individuals, in which I requested a response by email or by telephone (See Appendix A). One of the four did not respond. Emailed responses were followed with a meeting and or phone call. The purpose of this meeting was two-fold; I wanted to meet the participant and (a) give him or her details of the study and (b) allow him or her a chance to withdraw before I began collecting data. I also used this screening process to ensure that participants met the specified criteria. For example, one individual admitted having studied in Europe before coming to the university. Having studied elsewhere disqualified the participant. I explained the sampling procedure and expressed my gratitude for his desire to participate in the study.

With confirmation of their participation, I briefed participants of the purpose and expectations of the study and the critical role they play as participants. It was important that participants understand the nature of the study and what I hoped to accomplish through our interactions. I reckoned that knowing the role they would play in fulfilling the goal of the study would increase my chances of accessing rich detailed descriptions from participants (Cohen, et al., 2000; Seidman, 2006). Participants were individually asked to read carefully the letter of consent (See Appendix B). Each participant had an opportunity to ask questions and or withdraw at this point. With no further questions or issues regarding the study procedures and purposes, I asked each participant to sign a consent form indicating consent to tell their stories in the study through observations and interviews. I also signed each form in the presence of the individual participant. Consent forms were then coded and filed for safe keeping. These were stored in a locked drawer to which only I had access.

After this initial process I proceeded to obtain demographic information for each participant. Procurement of demographic information indicated that participants had gone through the initial phase of the research process. I then made arrangements with each participant regarding meeting times and place for interviews and observations. The dates, times and places had to be consensual to enable the inclusive process I hoped to maintain throughout the process of the inquiry.

## The Participants

There were six participants in the study—two males and four females—who were drawn from five colleges and departments across the campus and four geographical regions globally. These individuals ranged in age from 25 years to 35 years old. It is noteworthy that while there were six participants, two persons that came forward were a married couple who decided that they wanted to share their experiences together and were interviewed together. While more is revealed about participants in subsequent chapters through their anecdotes and reflections; Table 3.1 below gives a general overview of their demographic details. In order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of the study, participants were assigned pseudonyms.

Table 3.2

### *Demographic overview of participants*

| Name           | Level of Study | Year of Study   | Country/Region | Gender |
|----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|--------|
| <b>Garcia</b>  | PhD            | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Jamaica        | Female |
| <b>Georgie</b> | PhD            | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | China          | Male   |
| <b>Kuri</b>    | Masters        | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | India          | Female |
| <b>Maria</b>   | Masters        | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | Ghana          | Female |
| <b>Owaja</b>   | Masters        | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | China          | Male   |
| <b>Rueda</b>   | Masters        | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | China          | Female |

My intention was to explore the depth of the phenomenon, which is multi-layered and complex rather than its breadth. I wanted to extricate the essence of what it is like, the flow of their experiences, for the selected students, studying in the new academic environment of the university; hence I opted to use few participants. Using few participants allowed me to engage each participant more intimately. Additionally, the sample selected was only representational of the international student body and does not seek to offer a generalized picture of the larger group of international students. My aim was to re-present and document the storied experiences of the selected cases as exemplars and highlight overlapping features that could shed light on the experience of being an international graduate student studying in a new academic environment and in this case the university.

### The Data Collection Process

I collected data through in-depth interviews with six overseas students registered in a masters' or PhD program at the University of Saskatchewan. The process of data collection spanned four months (December 4, 2013 – March 31, 2014). As I sought to gather fertile data that could assist me in capturing the essence of being an international graduate student, I employed a rigorous multi-method approach. My multi-method approach to collecting data included two one-hour interviews (one at the beginning and another at the end of the research) with participants which were the primary data collection tool. The process was complemented by researcher reflexive journaling and field logs, observations and conversational interviews. Table 3.2 provides an overview of the tools that were used in the process of data collection. I also provide a detailed overview of the data collection process in subsequent paragraphs.

In total, I spent approximately eight hours with each participant through in-depth phenomenological interviews, observations, and follow up conversational interviews. There were also many emails sent back and forth between the participants and me as I engaged them in each step of the research process, seeking their approval and confirmations before moving to the next phase.

Table 3.3

*Summary of data collection tools*

| Data Collection Tool             | Description of Data Collection Tool   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <b>In-depth Interview # 1</b>    | 1 hour individual interview at the beginning of the process   |
| <b>Conversational Interviews</b> | Informal chats/unstructured interviews done individually with participants once every three weeks and after observations                            |
| <b>In-depth Interview #2</b>     | A 1 hour follow-up and closing individual interview between researcher and participants   |
| <b>Observation</b>               | 2 days shadowing of participants engaged in daily activities on campus  |
| <b>Researcher Journal</b>        | Kept over the course of the research. Recorded researcher reflection of research process, feelings, reactions, thoughts and change of thoughts etc. |
| <b>Field log</b>                 | Log of activities during the research process.  |

### **Interview with Participants: Harvesting Their Experiences**

Upon receiving ethics approval I contacted research participants via email to request their participation in the study. I then met with each participant and requested that s/he sign a consent form (see Appendix B) representing their voluntary participation in the study. I also set up appointments with participants for the first interview. I scheduled interviews at participants' convenience. Interviews were conducted in English and recorded using a digital voice recorder. I used open ended questions directed to the participants' experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions about their life as international graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan.

During the interviews with participants I was humbled as they openly shared their experiences and stories with me. Data gathered from these interviews were transcribed and horizontalized within two weeks of the first interview. According to Moustakas (1994), horizontalizing means that every statement initially is laid open to scrutiny and treated as having equal value to allow for the unlocking of the essence of the phenomenon under study. Consequently, in horizontalizing, I laid and examined transcribed data free from the hindrances of my own personal thoughts or theories, through a reflective process to understand the horizons that were emerging. To achieve this, I scrutinized transcribed data and highlighted emerging themes and areas of interests such as quotes and stories for which I might need further clarifications. These were recorded as areas of focus to be probed in subsequent interview.

Later, repetitive or overlapping statements were deleted, leaving only the horizons that being the textural meanings and invariant constituents of the phenomenon. This was a way of reduction through which I was able to reduce the data to salient points regarding the phenomenon that I would probe in consequent sessions with each participant. For example in the first meeting Kuri said her experience was a mixed bag. I wanted to understand the use of the term and what it meant for Kuri as an international student. I therefore highlighted and recorded these words as a question for the next interview.

During the week March 17-21, 2014, I met participants and engaged them in a second in-depth interview. In the second in-depth interview I asked follow-up questions and clarifications that arose from previous interviews and horizontalization processes.

### **The Observation: Seeing Participants in Action**

There is a general consensus among some researchers that the best ways to enter and understand a person's life world is to participate in it (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; van Manen,



1997b) and observe the phenomenon as it unfolds (Patton, 2002). With this in mind, in the second academic term, January to March, 2014, I reconnected with students; this time I observed students and had conversational interviews with them about their academic experiences and progress and possibly changing thoughts. I had these conversations with participants once every three weeks. I shadowed participants over a two-day period as they engaged in the daily activity of campus life. This was carried out on a limited scope because participants were not always comfortable being observed. I was respectful and courteous when I was given only limited and specific times that I could view them “in action.”

I observed participants in the university for two days as they were involved in varying aspects of academic life for example, at the library, at classes, conversing with friends, grappling with writing papers. To me, observations yielded ample opportunity to view participants in an academic context. I wanted to see each student as s/he participated in the classroom environment. In shadowing and seeing students as they interacted with their surroundings, I was able to observe individual action and capture behaviors that could not have been uttered verbally but aided in solving the puzzle of international studentship at the university.

Kawulich (2005) expressed that observations allow researchers to make vivid photographic like descriptions of situations through the use of the five senses. Reflecting on the strengths of observation, I prepared an observation log to be used in the process on which I made personal intermittent jottings of my observations (See Appendix D). These jottings were transformed to expanded field notes soon after observations. Log entries were dated and coded. For example, I coded the first observation Owaja Observation # 1 February 10, 2014.

Based on my observations and the jottings I made, the participant and I had debriefing sessions and follow-up discussions. These were much like a discussion among friends (Mischler, 1986) regarding his or her feelings, reactions, and interactions about the occurrences I witnessed. My goal was to gain rich and inclusive accounts of participants’ experience of being an international student in a class at the University of Saskatchewan. The process of meeting and conversing with participants was repeated throughout the observation period. Conversations were recorded on a digital compact recorder and transcribed, manually and verbatim, as soon as possible following conversations. Participants had the opportunity to edit and rework transcripts before they were accepted as a complete data set.

### **Conversational Interviews: Debriefing and “Chit-chat”**

Mischler (1986) argued that interviews should be more like authentic conversations with friends. He contended that in this way participants feel free and will divulge useful data since they are not under the scrutiny of a rigid interview process. My attempt at doing this research was to acquire rich data that would shed light on being an international student. Rooted in the need to get detailed and descriptive data, during the period January to March, 2014 I met with participants once every three weeks to have “friendly chats” about their experiences and progress in the university. According to Polkinghorne (2005) unanticipated elements of an experience provide the most useful stories. These new frontiers often occur during participants’ description of their experience and enhance the data. These unanticipated situations and experiences also urge the researcher to probe and explore further in view of acquiring insight into the phenomenon. Consequently, from this process I was able to probe unexpected occurrences and utterances yielding additional data that enriched the interview process and broadened my own perspective of this otherwise singular experience.

### **Field Logs and Journals: Keeping Records**

As I sought to explore the lived experiences of international graduate students studying in the academic environment of the university, I kept a researcher journal, as well as a researcher field log (See Appendix D). Both supplemented the data collection process. Writing assisted me to record insights gained into the phenomenon under study. I documented emerging patterns throughout the progress of the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; van Manen, 1997b, 2014). I used the reflexive journal primarily to record notes and snippets about the process; any literature I felt I needed to read; and interesting thoughts from participants that I needed to query further. For this reason, any idea, change in process or thought was reflected in this journal.

In a section of my journal I recorded my personal recollections and reflections on the research process and my own journey as an international graduate student. For example, I often reflected on the interview sessions and participants’ experiences. I then engaged in “self-questioning” about the shared experiences or something I observed that lingered. These reflections, as well as my personal thoughts and ideas, were recorded as it was a valued source of my on-going thinking. There were no set formats for what or how I wrote. As I reflected, I made crude jottings, wrote words, wrote short paragraphs, extended passages and poems.

Richardson (1998) argued that poetry is “a special language, particularly suited for those special, strange, even mysterious moments when bits and pieces suddenly coalesce” (p.51). I made frequent entries in my journal about the research process and my own journey as an international graduate student. Using a journal to record my own personal thoughts about the process and experiences gave me the opportunity to “lay bare” my own assumptions and beliefs about the phenomenon. Field logs and journal entries were dated and headings used to reflect what each entry was about and have been presented throughout the dissertation. These ideas were presented through the Prologue, my poems, my intertextual commentaries and my final personal reflections in the form of the Epilogue.

### **Analysis and Interpretation: Making Meaning of Data**

The major concern of the phenomenological analysis in this study was to understand the components of the everyday lived experiences (Schwandt, 2000) of being an international graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan. Freshwater and Avis (2004) described analysis as a reductive process that allows the researcher to clearly delineate meaningful patterns from participants’ experiences. Additionally, the process of data analysis in hermeneutic phenomenological studies is constituted of a movement away from the “field of text” that was formulated in data collection to a “narrative text...” (Cohen, et al., 2000, p. 76). Owing knowledge of the reductive process of analysis I set out to reduce the data, which was the participants’ experiences, to come to an understanding of the phenomenon.

In keeping with the interdisciplinary and fused approach that premised this research, I gleaned insight into the analysis processes adapted from a number of phenomenologists and researchers from whom I developed a workable approach of analysing the gathered data. Throughout this research, data analysis was ongoing and began at the initial meeting with participants (Holland, 2003; Patton, 2002; Saldana, 2013) through to the end of the project. Data analysis in this study followed an emergent interdisciplinary pathway, which has been developed and presented through first and second order analysis. This proved to be a powerful means of accessing a pluralistic view of the research context and data. In the first stage of the analysis, data were synthesized and laid out openly as I re-presented the participants’ lived experiences as closely as possible to the actual renditions through *narrative descriptions*. I wanted to organize the data in a way that mirrored the day to day experiences of participants through their own

words. With this in mind, I focused on the knowledge that participants in the study were the “knowledge holders” of unique experiences that could uncover what it means to be international graduate students. I was aware that their narratives constitute the key to unraveling and developing the unique picture of what it is to be an international student studying in a new academic environment. I also found that the use of narratives allowed me to “tidy up” data and present these in a way that allowed stories to be read and understood with currency and fluency through participants’ voices.

Polkinghorne (1988) held the use of narratives as “a mode of meaning making... [that] serves as a lens through which the apparently independent and disconnected elements of existence are seen as related parts of a whole” (p. 36). van Manen (1997a) in congruence offered that stories and narratives are not just literary adornments used in research but also a valuable teaching tool. He contended that stories are powerful tools because “it makes it possible to involve us pre-reflectively in the lived quality of concrete experience while paradoxically inviting us into a reflective stance vis-à-vis the meanings embedded in the experience... [and] pulls us in but then prompts us to reflect” (p. 121). Further, the use of anecdotal narratives creates tension between the pre-reflective and the reflective through which we are able to reflect upon the transformations that occur in language and text and brings us closer to the essence of experiences.

Moustakas (1994) argued that the establishment of the truth of a phenomenon begins with the researcher’s perception. Therefore the researcher must first reflect on the meaning of the experience for himself or herself before turning it outside to those being observed and interviewed. I needed the data to speak for itself and so I was cautious to suspend my own thoughts, the literature, and presumptions of what the data would reveal about the experience of studying in the new academic environment (Ahern, 1999; Crotty, 1998; Patton, 2002). I also represented emerging analysis metaphorically with new eyes through social-poetics and ethno-poetics throughout the dissertation. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) contend that metaphors are part of our everyday experience and speech because human beings understand events in their lives through their resemblance to another. They not only function as vehicles for the articulation of sublime visions, private thoughts, or images, but also take those visions into a public form to provide visual metaphors. Greene (1978) articulated that metaphors are important in analysis. She further highlighted that meaning lies in the transformation it brings about in the perceiver. It

performs what might be called an existential function in that “it provokes a change in the way we view things; it brings about a transformation in our thinking” (Greene, 2001, p. 102).

van Manen (2014) reasoned that poetic thoughts play a crucial role in generating phenomenological meaning and allow for expression of intense meaning without losing “sense of the vivid truthfulness that the lines of the poems are somehow able to communicate” (van Manen, 1997a, p. 71). Furthermore, poetry “penetrates experiences more deeply than prose” (Furman, 2006, p. 561). Both forms of poetry served similar purposes. Therefore, through social poetics I was able to transmit my own thoughts and feelings about being an international student. On the other hand, the purpose of ethno-poetics was to represent elements on the narratives of participants poetically or creatively. Essentially, through poetics I hoped to expand understanding of the experiences through presenting subtle ideas that might be paradoxical or dialectic in simple forms and through participants own words.

### **Horizontalization and Data Reduction: Horizons of Meaning**

The purpose of data gathering in qualitative research was to document “languaged” evidence for the experiences I was investigating. The evidence was in the form of participants’ storied accounts of the experience of being international graduate students in the University of Saskatchewan. I read and reread the evidence to produce a preliminary description of the participants’ experience. The data served as the ground on which the findings were based. In doing this, I perused individual transcribed data sets multiple times to unmask the essence of the story each participant shared. According to Polkinghorne (1988), stories in interviews are never told in fluidity; rather, they are told in parts, in bit and pieces. Cognizant of the non-linear modes through which individuals relate stories, I immersed myself in the “collected lived experiences” (van Manen, 1997b, p. 53) gathered through interviews, conversations and close observations. I sifted through words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs to be able to orient myself to the question of meaning that will cast light on the essence of the individual stories, while mindful that “all transcribed recollections of lived experiences are transformations of that experience” (van Manen, 1997b, p. 54).

As early as the first meeting with participants I began to focus on key expressions: adjectives, adverbs, verbs, phrases and sentences and observed behaviors during conversations with participants. I zoomed in on information—verbal or non-verbal—that I thought was

interesting or had the potential of answering the phenomenological question, what is the meaning of being an international graduate student as human experience? As I transcribed and listened to interviews, I highlighted and made notes of words and phrases that were recurring and possible themes that emerged from the data. These notes were further expanded into detailed field notes through elaboration and paragraphing. In some instances, I also represented these ideas graphically through concept maps as I brainstormed and reflected on the ideas that emerged from the data (Appendix F). Furthermore, as I observed, I focused on “snapshots” of the experience. Observed behaviors were the glue to putting together the picture of the essence of studying in a foreign academic setting. Later my observations and notes were used as targets for further probes in interviews and conversations with participants as I tried to capture the connecting pieces or “snapshots” that would develop into participants’ stories.

### **Experiential Descriptions: Re-telling Participants’ Narratives**

To get a general feel of each story, I contemplatively selected, read and scrutinized individual transcripts multiple times to obtain an overall picture of each participant’s story. This process of packing, unpacking, and repacking stories continued until I came to an understanding of the snippets presented and was able to re-create the story. As I engaged and cogitated on the data I experienced a range of emotions. I was concerned, intrigued, bewildered and often frustrated throughout the process. What emerged from my rummaging were snapshots of data, which when packaged together yielded rich and engaging stories of the experiences of participants as international students.

From this deep perusal of the accounts I prepared individual *narrative descriptions* that shared the essence of experiences as participants described it. Polkinghorne (1988) deemed that stories and narratives are pervasive in all human activity and therefore fill the sociocultural landscape of all individuals, thereby shaping perspectives. “Story means narratives, something depicted in narrative form” (van Manen, 1997b, p. 115). The terms are used interchangeably through the works of Polkinghorne (1988) to identify descriptive accounts of experiences. van Manen (1997; 2014), also uses the term narrative only he uses it synonymously with anecdotes. The work of Maynes, Pierce and Laslett (2008) affirms that personal narratives air the voice of the marginalized and counter “the misleading generalizations or refute universal claims” (p. 1) and are a major way that humans are able to make sense of their experiences (Mischler, 1986). In

light of the power of stories and narratives, in capturing and representing the stories of the participants, I sought to retell individual stories from the gaze of individual students rather than as combined. I sought to rigorously represent participants' stories as they described them. In many cases, I had to dig below the surface to bring up student accounts.

In preparing participants' stories, the pieces were organized by categories. Categories were developed as I read over my notes while focusing on snapshots of individual passages and then pasted the pieces together to reflect the story. Furthermore, categories were labeled using portions of participants' direct speech that I felt captured the essence of the particular story being told, thereby honoring and respecting the words of participants as powerful and relevant by giving voice to their expressions. Stories in the first order analysis were framed and retold through the words of participants and are presented in Chapter Four.

### **Highlighting Themes: Getting to the Meaning of Experiences**

In the second order analysis, I read and reread data and participants' narrative descriptions in Chapter Four, multiple times, to arrive at themes. As I immersed myself in the data I made marginal notes and highlighted adjectives, verbs and general words I found interesting. This allowed me to begin to identify important elements that could be essential to understanding the experience of studying in the academic setting of the University of Saskatchewan. As I read my marginal notes, I began to group data in chunks and corresponding words recorded in the margins. As I went through the stories, ideas that bore similarities were labelled accordingly. For example "belong," "language" were some words I used. These words were mapped and organized on charts and then later organized by a process of grouping and regrouping to arrive at themes. From this process, I delineated five major themes which were ultimately subsumed into major themes and subthemes. These themes are presented in Chapter Five of the dissertation. I wanted to grasp the essence of being an international graduate student and to explore the concept from new and fresh lenses (Cohen et al., 2000).

In explicating and elaborating on themes, I borrowed from fictional and non-fictional literature, songs, poetry, movies, pictures and photos to assist me in analyzing the data. Hegel (1977) acknowledged the holistic interconnectedness of all things and refused to accept language [words as things] as the sole shaper of our intellectual world [our knowledge]. The intertextual

use of literature, art, music, films, and songs in research can make human experience more visible, believable and analogous.

Themes represented in books and works of art are often relational to life activities. For this reason, there is much to be gleaned from these sources during data analysis given that the more we read the work of others; the more we are open to new themes that may emerge to help us to interpret collected experience or data (van den Hoonaard, 2012). Considering Hegel's acclamation and the nature of the research I believed that the engagement of these sources were beneficial to me as these sources not only functioned "as a vehicle for the articulation of sublime visions, private thoughts, or images, but also takes those visions into a public forum" (L.Wason-Ellam personal communication, October 18, 2013). Drawing on these sources also strengthened my aim of using an interdisciplinary frame in analyzing the data as these sources intersected numerous disciplines. For example, ideas in these sources often overlapped disciplines such as education, communication, politics, sociology, and linguistics.

As I engaged these sources I was looking for similarities in thoughts and experiences with those shared in the data that would make analogies and derive themes based on the life events of characters. For example, I found that drawing on these stories and movies added value to my own interpretation of the data through the intertextualities they share with other real life events like those expressed through the data. Also, making alignment to current theories and ideas gave strength to my arguments.

### **Interpretation and Verification: Seeing the Bigger Picture**

Cohen et al. (2000) argued that in interpreting data "the smallest statements must be understood in terms of the largest cultural contexts" (p. 73). Interpretation was a recursive process and was ongoing throughout the process of the research. Each theme and category was again scrutinized as I again poured over the data to firstly ensure that the themes were amply accorded and recurred throughout the data. I then read highlighted themes and anecdotes line by line as I reflected on the major research question and how each theme and substantiating *snippets* could aid in unravelling the essence of the phenomenon of studying at the University of Saskatchewan.

Interpretation unlike analysis is an inductive process and necessitated that I meditate on the analysis and patterns derived to make an alignment or hypothesis of how these connect to



current theories in the field. In offering an interpretation of the data, I critically reflected on and reanalyzed the analysis of the data. I also drew on the literature and the daily experiences of my participants individually and collectively.

As I scrutinized themes and portions of data line by line, I was careful to look at the words and phrases used and how these were used. I was also cautious to review field notes and reflective notes regarding participants' reactions and my initial feelings about what was said by posing questions such as, *What does this sentence or cluster reveal about studying at the university? How do these themes fit into the bigger picture?* This questioning, probing, and exploration of the data functioned-as a guide as I reviewed data to get to its essence. This helped me to interpret the essence of the phenomenon, as participants view it.

### **Trustworthiness and Verisimilitude**

According to Lincoln and Guba (2011) the aim of trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry is to support the argument that the inquiry's findings are of worth and valued by the reader. In ensuring that the information findings presented are trustworthy and credible, all data collected was recorded and transcribed verbatim. These records included the dates, times, and direct transcriptions of each interview. Transcribed data was analyzed according to like themes. Given the subjective nature of such an exploration I employed member checks, peer scrutiny, and applied for and achieved the relevant ethics approvals to ensure trustworthiness and verisimilitude in the research findings and deliberations. Throughout the process, I also assumed and maintained a reflective attitude.

#### **Member Checks: Confirming Authenticity**

Data and findings were subjected to a process of member checking. In member checking participants were given the chance to clarify transcribed and interpreted data gained through follow-up interviews or conversations to verify and ensure accuracy and completeness (Gall et al., 2012). Interviews and conversations were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Transcripts and findings were shared with participants because their input was sought throughout the process. This input was ensured as I shared my own interpretation of the data with participants to get their feedback on its appropriateness.

## Peer Scrutiny

I engaged a number of individuals including co-supervisors and committee members to read drafts of the final the project. The purpose of this activity was to have individuals independent of the research process to read the final document to assess readability, correctness of expressions and grammar and general credibility of the overall thesis (Findlay, 2008; Merriam, 2009).

## Reflexivity: Bracketing the Researcher

As the researcher, the “human instrument” in the process of data analysis, I developed an attitude and aptitude of bracketing. This process allowed me to explain my biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken” (Merriam, 2009, p. 219) thereby, being able look within the data with a fresh eye free from my own beliefs.

## Credibility Checklist: Assessing the Process

At the end of the research process, I engaged in a credibility checklist. For this I designed a credibility checklist that covered the pertinent areas that I believe might have been otherwise overlooked that impact my dissertation and the overall credibility of findings.

Table 3.4

*Credibility checklist*

| Action  | Yes | No | Comments |
|---|-----|----|----------|
| 1. Did I, through my dissertation, honour the participant voices adequately through representations of their thoughts and perspectives? |     |    |          |
| 2. Did I present my biases that could impact the research process adequately to my audience?  |     |    |          |
| 3. Did I successfully bring forward the essence of the experience to life evocatively?  |     |    |          |
| 4. Did I give back to the group with which I worked?  |     |    |          |
| 5. Did I prepare and present a paper that is readable and grammatically and contextually appropriate?                                   |     |    |          |
| 6. Did I correspond with and heed the suggestions /recommendations of my supervisors and committee?                                     |     |    |          |
| 7. Did I subscribe to and maintain appropriate ethical procedures in conducting the research?   |     |    |          |

## **Ethics**

University policies regarding research among human subjects stipulate that I seek and receive ethics approval for such studies. An application for ethics approval was tendered at an appropriate time to the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Ethics Review Board. The research process did not commence until the review board approved the research protocol. Research of this nature poses no direct threat to any participant. Participants were asked to sign a letter of voluntary consent that serves to protect their anonymity and confidentiality.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I examined and discussed the study's design, methodology, and research methods. I described the processes used in data collection and the selection of participants. I also discussed the interdisciplinary approach used in analysing data as I sought an understanding of what it means to be an international graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan. I closed by explaining the ethical procedures used to allow for the trustworthy transfer of data and findings. Chapter Four re-presents participants' daily lived experiences as they were shared with me. Their stories are told through their own voiced expressions intertextualized with paraphrased sections.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **The Other Side of the Mirror: The Shared Stories of International Graduate Students**

The study was situated within the fields of hermeneutics and phenomenology; therefore, it was critical that participants' experiences be represented as they were animated (van Manen, 1997b). Subsequently, the five accounts presented in this chapter are the experiences of international graduate students at the university as they perceived and recounted them. It is the culmination of a process of inquiry that spanned months (December, 2013 to September, 2014) and involving interactions of more than eight hours with each participant through in-depth interviews, conversational interviews, and observations. There were also numerous emails sent back and forth between the participants and me as I engaged them in each step of the research process, seeking their approval and confirmations before moving to the next phase. There were also conferences with my supervisors as I explained my findings. The chapter includes descriptions of the events in participants' daily lives as international students that they deemed relevant. I also included participants' thoughts and reflections about events they encountered in their daily lives within the ambits the community of practice, the university, and the peripheral community.

Honoring participants' stories this way gave me the opportunity to represent their experiences from their individualized perspectives. It also appealed to the conscience and enabled empathy for participants. I was guided by Moustakas (1994), who encouraged that descriptions bring out meanings that would not be evident only through an explanation of findings. Rather, the essence is revealed through the self-portrayed and anecdotal accounts of participants. It is through an immersion of the story that the reader is able to come to deeper and richer understanding of the phenomenon. This design was aimed at preserving the meaning and original words of participants to allow that the underlying essence would come from their stories. Therefore, what is presented in this chapter is the data synthesized and unanalyzed. I deliberately refrained from making overt analysis and interpretation of the data in the chapter and reserved all analysis and interpretation for subsequent chapters. Here, I simply wanted to represent the stories as they were told to me and intact as much as possible.

#### **Organization of Chapter**

As I re-presented participants' experiential accounts depicted in narrative form, I begin each account with a brief background note about its author. This kind of introduction allowed me

to acquaint the reader with the participants' backgrounds thereby giving strength and focus to their actions and reactions as their stories are told. It also reinforced the idea, previously put forward in Chapters One and Three, that international graduate students enter programs of studies already possessing diverse knowledge and skills. To me, it was important to put this information forward as participants' backgrounds may affect the way they view their experiences and which experiences they position as relevant to their understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, by doing so, I affirm Dewey's idea that experiences stand on the shoulders of other experiences and will lead to other experiences (1997).

In representing participants' experiential accounts, I tried as much as possible to present data in the words of individual participants, so their voices would be heard authentically. In light of this goal, stories were represented through headings and subheadings using direct quotes from the data. There was no deviation from this. Nevertheless, actual events and stories were presented through a merger of my paraphrased descriptive representations of their stories interspersed with inter-text with direct participant quotations that strengthens the story. In very few cases, I may have added a word or changed a sentence to make it more grammatically appropriate. As much as possible, the words of participants are incorporated in the writing of the text so that I could render their lived meanings of real experiences. I was concerned with ontological inquiry of what it means to be. In so doing, I wanted to animate their stories and position them as powerful and relevant to reveal the many facets of being international students. Essentially, I wanted, in this chapter, to give voice to the participants who were the contributors, whose stories I wished to capture.

In order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of the study participants were assigned pseudonyms. Given the nature of some stories and the potency of portions of data shared some participants asked that any information that would identify them within their respective colleges be withheld or removed. I have sought to heed to their wishes. Therefore in introducing my participants, the names of their colleges, and or department have not been mentioned in their stories. In some instances the nationality was not mentioned as some participants felt that mentioning their nationality may jeopardize their anonymity.

## **Kuri's Story: A Mixed Bag**

### **Background Information**

Kuri was in her final year of a master's degree at the university at the time the research was conducted. Her enrollment in a master's program was the fulfillment of a lifelong dream for her as she declared "it has been since childhood that I always wanted to explore opportunities abroad." Her position at the university came about through her dedicated efforts and search at finding the university that she thought would be just right for her. Gaining acceptance into three Canadian universities, she chose to settle at the University of Saskatchewan. Her choice to study at this particular university was driven by the fees-structure offered for graduate studies within the particular university. Furthermore, this university was located in a smaller city and she preferred smaller cities as against larger metropolitan settings.

Mindful and appreciative of the fact that things would be different in the new environment, Kuri set out on her journey as an international graduate student to start a new life in a foreign country. She anticipated that things in the new environment would not be easy and she accepted this, or so she thought:

It is extremely tough especially if you are from a middle class family. I had no clue of what is going to befall me to be totally honest. I was very cool I was working a day prior to coming to Canada. I remember the night before I was packing up my bags and I was cool basically, because I did not know that it would be such a huge change. I knew that life, something is opening up for me but I did not know it would be such a huge change. Three years into her program of study, Kuri described her experiences as a "mixed bag." For her, the sojourn in the university was marked by both challenges and opportunities. Kuri encountered many "firsts" as she negotiated life as a student at the university. She recalled entering Canada "tired and jetlagged," yet proud to have gained acceptance into the university of her choice and eager to start her studies. She was even more honored that her journey to the university was self-funded. She had not received funding from the university or any other external agencies when she first began. Her pleasure in her independence was short lived as slowly she came to the realization that she was alone and needed a place to live and the inadequate resources she possessed were restrictive and would not suffice. She said, "I had come into Canada with nothing in my pocket. I mean, I needed to bring money. I did not have anything at the time. When I had come into Canada I was all alone."

### **“It is Difficult to Find a Good Place to Live”**

When Kuri entered the country she lived in a dormitory that was recommended by the university. Soon she became overwhelmed with the limited dietary offerings from which she could choose based on the mandatory meal plan package offered by the hall. The inability to prepare her own meals perturbed her. You see, “[f]or someone who boasts of an extremely high spice-tolerance meter, perogies and boiled eggs were not exactly appealing to my taste-buds, so I decided to move off campus.” Knowing that she first needed a place to live Kuri sought to find adequate accommodations and began her search for a new place to live, somewhere close to the campus.

In her search for housing opportunities, Kuri found that the lack of adequate funding posed challenges and affected her lifestyle and living arrangements. It became apparent to her that her living arrangements would be costly, given that “[i]t’s difficult to get a bachelor suite for less than \$900 and grocery prices are at its peak” and housing in the city was expensive and rents were rapidly increasing and “grad housing is too expensive.” The search for a good and decent home, in her opinion, was contingent upon proper and adequate funding, which she lacked upon entering the university. After much search, she found a basement apartment for which she shared a lease with three local female students. She shared her experiences when she first engaged living arrangements in the new community.

The first four months I was all alone. I will never forget those days. I think, when I had come into Canada, if you don’t have a place to live that’s another very important thing because grad housing is too expensive. Secondly, it is difficult to find a good place to live, a cheap place to live that is close to the university. I was living in a basement, a cold basement. The heating was pathetic. Basements are supposed to be cold, right? I did not even know there was something called a “space heater”.

### **Making Ends Meet**

Living and studying abroad can be an expensive event in the life of the international student. Kuri candidly verbalized the struggles and sacrifices she encountered and made in a bid to survive as an international student studying in the university. She knew that by virtue of her status as a foreign student things would be different than how they would be if she were a domestic student. Thus, Kuri characterized her experience as one in which she had to prioritize

and constantly make compromises to be able to afford studying and maintaining a good academic standing. She argued that she had to plan and make sacrifices to be successful in her overseas studies. She mused that her journey as an overseas student was characterized by long hours as she often worked fifteen to eighteen hours each day. Kuri also pointed out that being an international student, for her, nothing was the same as before when she lived in her home country. She cautioned that she had to be aware and keep track of these differences and changes:

You cannot expect to have the same lifestyle you had back home. You cannot expect to party or go to a restaurant each week. You cannot expect new clothes each week. You cannot expect trips each month. You have to know because after all anything happens to you will be deported. You cannot take the law into your hands you have to be careful which day my passport is going to expire, which day my visa is going to expire. You have to plan ahead.

To her, it seemed she had to work harder to achieve her academic and life goals compared to local students.

I firmly believe that an international student who makes it big in this country has to put in ten times the effort of a Canadian student. You have to wake up early in the morning. You may have to go to work depending on when your classes are... You will have to kind of manage those jobs. Unless, you are a multi-tasker, unless you are ready to put in like 18 hours a day, unless you are ready to sacrifice a lot of personal things... Most of the days I work something like 15 to 18 hours a day.

Her long hours as a student were driven by the urge to survive in the university as an individual who funded herself when she first entered the university. Her financial limitations caused her to take on myriad jobs to “make ends meet.” She acknowledged that she had to work long hours at establishments like MacDonald’s and Sears at minimal wages so she could earn and survive in the new environment.

I have walked two kilometers in minus forty degrees just to save money on the bus.

There have been instances when I have walked in minus 40 degrees just to get groceries done because I could not afford the bus. Some people would say “no I cannot walk in winter. I need a bus pass. I am ready to pay [for it] each month.” That’s great! It depends on what is important to some people.



Having to engage in such tasks was a blow to her self-esteem. She admitted she often felt badly and questioned herself as she asked herself “why am I doing this to me?” in relation to the numerous jobs and long hours she had to endure. These were difficult times for her. Therefore, when she received a prestigious scholarship in her second year she was excited and began viewing her experiences differently she was happy to have received such an award:

I still remember the day I received that scholarship. It was 23rd July 2011. It was around 4:20 in the afternoon. I still remember. I was at school. I was checking my email, when all of a sudden I got an email, *Congratulations! You have been awarded a scholarship. It is worth \$22,000, which I think is great! And if you are interested we will need the following documents and once again congratulations. We hope you will make a good addition to our program...* I think I have started viewing the world in a better light.

### **"I Have Very Little Time"**

The extended hours of work and study that characterized Kuri's international student experience often hindered her having a social life. She found she had to prioritize and choose how her time was spent if she were to accomplish her academic goals:

Studies or academics, friends and sleep, you can just select two of them. Either you choose studies and friends so you compromise on your sleep or you select friends and your sleep and so you compromise on your academics. In my case I try to choose academics. I give academics extreme priority because that is the reason I am here, that is the reason we are all here, academics. I try to balance between friends and sleep.

Although she believed it was important to have trustworthy friends she was always busy. The choices and priorities she set and met cost her the ability to establish and maintain long term friendships. Therefore, she had few friends within the university:

I hold a couple of part-time positions... I had to wake up and I had to reach [work] by say 7:30... So probably I will be free by 12:30 or so I would and have my lunch. Depending on if I had classes. My classes were in the afternoon, I would have to take the classes. Then, before I was working on campus... I have done myriad jobs. I have worked at McDonald's and Sears, just in a bid to make ends meet. So I head to my evening jobs and still I am working on campus. Then after my evening jobs I come home I cook my supper. I eat pretty late which is very bad for my health, I know it. Then I pack my lunch

for the next day. That's a typical day. I mean I have very little time for recreation and that's the reason I don't have too many friends outside the university... Most of my friends are people from my department, whom I see every day or people at my place of work. I don't have the time to go out of my way to make friends.

### **"I Draw Strength from God and My Parents"**

Not having many friends was not really a bother to Kuri as she indicated that:

Overall when I just came into the country I just had God as my savior. I draw strength from God and talking to my parents. I am here because of them. However bad I am they have to talk to me, they are my parents. They have to talk to me. I think my strength comes from my parents and God and friends of course.

She remembered when she won the scholarship, as with other instances throughout her studies, where firstly she prayed to God then she called her parents to apprise them of the developments.

These were the source of her strength:

The first thing I did was kind of said a thank you prayer to God and I called up my parents, which was like 4:30AM in India. My parents were very happy because I am an only child. Whenever anything good happens I call up my parents. Even if its 3:30 AM or 4:30 AM, for them, I call up my parents. Because I am a worrier I tend to worry a lot and I keep on plaguing them too. *Will I get this scholarship mama? I'll never get this scholarship; I will never get this scholarship, blah, blah...* I think it is important to keep them in the loop especially if something good happens. After all, I am here because of them. Sometimes, of course, what they say I don't agree to all that. However, I know that they have my best interest in mind. So it is important to keep them informed.

### **"I Am a Misfit"**

Moreover, Kuri felt that she never really fit in, especially during her first couple months in the city and university. She declared "I am a misfit and will be until my last breath." She recounted numerous incidences in which she felt she just did not fit in and was being judged by how she looked and her "outsider" background:

I find that people are judgmental. I mean it is not only in Canada even back home. The way you look, the way you dress, the kinds of clothes you wear, it is important. Like

people are judgmental, they kind of condescend you if you don't dress appropriately. I think that is everywhere not only in Canada or India wherever. I think especially if you are a visible minority you are judged by what you wear. You are judged on a different plane especially if you are an international student.

As a student in a previous course she found the attitude of Canadian students towards her as an international student very condescending. She thought she was treated differently and hardly spoken to by other members of the class:

I do not know what it was that they thought that we are not up to their mark. People did not talk to me; people did not want to work with me because they perceived me in a different manner. Again, it could just be my error but I do not think I was wrong.

She also felt she was judged by her roommates during her first four months in the country when she lived off campus. She divulged that they did not speak to her:

My first four months I was living in a basement, right, a cold basement. The heating was pathetic... My other roommates, I do not know, probably they thought I should not be spoken to or they thought I was some sort of an alien. I do not know what they thought me to be. Again, because they were from small villages in Saskatchewan where there are probably not too many colored people. I do not blame them either. So, my roommates they were in their own worlds...

Now, the thing is I was a 25 year old girl and these two they were like 16/17. They had their own friend circles. They had their own group of friends and I realized they did not want to mix with someone who is not from their ethnicity. That's o.k. with me. So what happened, I just needed to get out of that place. So I got an offer to live on one of the buildings on campus. I asked my friends and they were like "damn this place!" I was supposed to move out at the first of the January, 2011. Then I learnt that, sometime in mid-December or probably early December, just after I had given notice to my landlord, I just learnt that first January I cannot get the keys because it is still Christmas break. Right! That year school was reopening on January 4th. So hurriedly I went to the residence office and told them that I had already given the notice to my landlord for first January and for three days, where will I live? The residence office tells me there is YWCA; there are so many shelters for destitute women (long pause).

That is when I realized what a huge pile of trouble I am in. I then, once again, went and spoke to my landlord. My landlord was like “you should try to contact that girl and see if you two can work out something, right. This is three days, if you two can work out something that will be great. I personally do not have an issue. If the other girl does not have an issue I do not have an issue.” So, he was like “you do not have to pay me for those three days.” The thing I realized, and I don’t mind, was that he did not want to interfere with this kind of confusion, which I think is o.k. from his point of view.

So I asked that girl if for that three days somehow we can work it out together. Oh my God! She was like “how can I stay with you? How do I know what kind of person you are?” The issue was and she had even said that she would like to purchase all my furniture and then she was like, “I am not interested in purchasing any of your furniture. You can just throw it. I don’t need any of your furniture.” That’s when I realized that the people you meet at the university and the people you meet, you know like the common person, are very different. It is very, very different but then what happened, somehow, I was able to get rid of all my furniture. I sold it at ridiculous prices. I sold my sofa for \$5 and I sold my table and chair for like \$5. I dumped my coffee table and stuff like that. It was peak winter at that time, you know, December...

On a trip to the provincial capital city, Regina, she was shouted at to leave the country and return home. This event devastated her. She felt lost and alone:

I remember when I had been to [the city] for a job interview I was waiting, I had this trolley bag with me. There were two young guys, I had not even seen their faces, I was waiting at the bus stop for the bus and these two guys come up shouting “go back to your country!” From their car they said go back to your country. From that, the way they were driving, the way they behaved, I presumed that they were young Caucasian teenagers.

I think that after the move to the campus apartment my attitude changed. On residence there is a mixture of international students and Canadian students. That is when I realized that not all roommates are bad, that some of them can be very good people and actually if you have the right kind of roommates you will make friends for life. I am still friends with my initial roommates from that apartment on campus. Of course I moved to another apartment on campus and now I am living off campus but I think initially I was in a horrible place. Again, I think if you are living with international students, even if you

are living with students on the whole, it is much better than living people who do not appreciate the value of education, who do not know what it is like to be a university student.

Kuri in trying to explain her thinking as to why it was better to associate with people of like stature and academic qualifications and goals said

I must say the first four months it was difficult for me to get to class on time. I do not know why, I was always late. But then what happened once I moved to campus apartments I then observed what other students were doing. I observed that they were packing their lunches the night before. I observed that they did their laundry on Friday. I observed they were doing their groceries on Saturdays. That is when I noticed how the other students are living a disciplined life. When did they cook? They all cooked only on the weekends. They do not cook every day. Back home, my mom she is a stay at home mom so I had the luxury of getting freshly cooked food each day. I noticed at the apartment that all the other students they used to cook only on the weekends. They used to make their gravies, their sauces and they used to freeze it up for the whole week. That is when I noticed that wow that is a great thing. In the morning they used to just pick up their lunch. So, I felt that was so good! I mean, and in the morning, they used to keep, from the night before, like what they are going to wear the next day to school handy. And, you know, you learn if you are staying with students. Then I realized, like these guys how do they chill? How do they relax?

One of them was Chinese and she said *I would go to some Chinese gatherings*. The other girl, who wanted to get into Vet. Med. She said *I volunteer at an animal clinic. I would volunteer at SPCA*. I think if you are with people who are on the same plane as you are, with the same ground as you are, you tend to mature as a person. You will tend to mature as an individual.

I noticed what my other roommates used to do. They would pack up their lunch the night before because at the apartment on campus there was one common fridge. So I realized that my friends use to pack up their lunch a night before. They used to, what they were going to wear the next day; they used to keep it ready. For winter they used cleats, which is a great thing I learnt. So you learn these things from people who are on the same level as you are. I am not saying that you live on campus halls simply because they are

cheap, no. But I will always advice international students to live with students. It is my sincere advice to international students do not live with, even if they are from your part of the world, do not live with people who are not going to school or probably like those who are working at Tim Horton's or MacDonald's. You are way above that. That is my advice to international graduate students. Maybe you will do the same jobs as they are in a bid to make money and to make ends meet. We all do that as students but you are above them. Do not think that a guy that is working at Tim Horton's or Macdonald's or at Wal-Mart is on the same pedestal as you are. You are much, much, much above them. The issue is that probably, this is what I have noticed, see to it that the people you live with are wise, kind. They do not have to be from your country. No! But at least they have to be students.

The thing is, they were all students, none of them from my department, but at least we have something to talk about. *What happened in class today? Or what happened in your department? How are your friends? O, this is what happens in my class today. We have such a good Prof. this Prof is really good. This Prof is really bad.* At least you have a common ground to talk about. But if you are living with people who have not seen the face of university or who have not seen the face of school, what conversation will you have with them? Especially if they you are an international student and they are Canadians. Especially in a university that is extremely diverse. And, well someone who is coming to university when they entered the university will within two or three months will not be shocked when they see a colored person. These kids who are from rural Saskatchewan, more like from some small villages in Saskatchewan, they were like... I am sure they have never seen colored people. It is not their fault, I mean, even I would be the same. Because back home there are no Caucasian people so I would have felt the same if I saw a Caucasian person back home.

Kuri was always cognizant of the need to have friends and people she can trust. She had particular challenges with friends. She stated that when she first entered the university she tended to befriend people who came from her home country. This did not particularly work well for her:

The mistake I made at the initial stages was I usually befriend people depending on if they are from my country of origin, if they are from my part of the world or not. I think it took me time and I think it took me a lot of bad experiences to realize that race is just external. It is important to recognize the person internally. That is the reason I have very

few friends from my part of the world. I mean, that's me. But overall I feel like when I had come as a student I did not know anyone

Kuri came to the conclusion that friends from her own region and home country were not necessarily what she needed. She recalled that some of her best friends were not from her ethnic background. She argued that in friendships race was peripheral. Kuri further commented that she knows that if she was in trouble it would be others that would help her and not those from her own community.

She recalled a moment in time when she was really sad and worried. These were not very good times for her. This lack of empathy and assistance reflected the feelings Kuri had. Once she tried to get audience for her consideration at doing a PhD. this opportunity was denied her and so she became saddened:

Honestly, those few months were really bad for me. They were really, really bad for me. I felt the whole department was mocking at me. I mean come on, who has ever heard of it?! You want to do a PhD in the same department as you have done your masters with a different supervisor and you are being told no. I felt like an idiot. Especially, being told "You are scholastically immature."

She still remembered the experience very clearly. She also reflected on the fact that relief came to her through her office mates, to whom she went crying. They assisted her to become calm.

### **"It Is Easier for Them to Fit In"**

Her disinterest in cultural activities especially as it relates to her home culture further left her isolated. For her, engaging in cultural activities from the homeland was not necessary nor were they important. She stated that she is seen somewhat as a cultural outcast for not engaging in these cultural activities from her original culture. What was important to her was knowing the Canadian way and trying to fit into her new life and role in the new environment:

There are people I know who probably think I am some kind of an outcast. The way I dress, the way I talk, the way I behave in society because I have to work according to Canadian norms. I have to work according to Western norms. If at all my job requires me to wear a skirt, I have to wear a skirt. If my job requires me to dress in a certain way I have to dress up in a certain way. Back home I cannot think of wearing a skirt and going to work because that's the way it is. But people, the way they look at me as if I am

something weird as if I am an alien. I can feel the difference. I can feel that difference in outlook, the difference in mentality when you go for community gatherings.

For me, personally, cultural events are not very important. I know what I am saying is kind of not very right. But for me, personally, I think even if I am on YouTube if I just listen a couple of songs that relaxes me that is more than enough. I don't have to go to a cultural organization where people of my community are and kind of start dancing or singing. That's not important to me. I mean, that's the way I am.

Kuri believed that her feelings of "misfitting" in the environment stemmed from differences along racial and ethnic lines. To her, people of European descent were more readily accepted into the new environment without prejudice compared to people of other races. This, she concluded, is based on the similarities such individuals bare to the local populace:

I think if you are a Caucasian immigrant coming from a different country, it is very different from a colored person coming from a different part of the world, it is very different. I think it is just easier for them. It could just be me. I could be wrong. I have two friends of European descent and they are great people, don't get me wrong. She graduated with a masters' in political science. She could not get a job so she is working like as a secretary and I think it is easier for them to get employment. Again, as I said because first of all when you see them, they will never be asked , "where are you from?" they will never be asked where are you from, though they are immigrants whatever, because even my friends who are colored and who were born and raised in Canada, they are always asked the question: where are you from? But someone who has come into Canada and who is Caucasian, a day before he has come into Canada, will never get asked this question.

### **"Your English Is So Good"**

Kuri noted that there was a general perception that she should not be able to speak English as well as she does. She viewed herself as a good English speaker but found that people, were amazed at her use of English and continually commented on it. She further argued that no professor has ever had to comment on her English:

[From] the common person on the street, I get this each day almost: "Your English is so good! How long have you been staying in Canada? Were you born and raised here? How



come your English is this good?" I get this often. My landlord's wife, she spoke to me and she was like, "Oh, your English is so good. How long have you been in Canada? How come you speak such good English?"

### **"It Took Me Some Time to Get Adjusted"**

Kuri informed me that, for her, the academic environment at the university was very different from that of universities in her home country. She struggled with class structures, the use of technology, critical thinking, and speaking up for yourself. She was further challenged by the "relationality" that existed between professors and students:

The way you are here functioning is very different; the way of working is very different. It is a different culture. It took me some time to get adjusted to the culture and I still think that I am still adjusting. I have not yet adjusted and everything is just different. The system is different, the way you address people is different. It's a different atmosphere. But yeah, I have started liking this atmosphere and I think this atmosphere is more friendly. This atmosphere is more all-embracing. I think in Western culture you don't have to learn things by heart it's more performing the procedure, which I think is excellent! There is nothing to learn by heart or learn by rote. There is very little rote learning. That is something I was used to back home.

Here, it is more like putting across your point of view. Back home I was not at all used to group work assignments. There it is like you have to manage your own stuff. It took me some time to get used to things like formatting, and spacing and font sizing. It took me time because it is something I had never done back home. We used to handwrite all our papers. It took me some time and my grades in my first two terms really plummeted because of that. I mean there was this whole change in systems. Back home we are more used to handwriting our papers. There was very little emphasis on formatting and proper use of font size and spacing and stuff like that. So it took me a lot of time to get used to it. I think because there is more emphasis on critical thinking, there is more emphasis on putting across your point of view compared to back home where it was like you had such a huge textbook you need to learn the whole thing by heart.

Back home you never refer to an older person by their first name. Here it is common, some adults of my grandfather's age, I can call them by their first name. This is

unheard of back home. That is something that it took me a time to get adjusted to but once I realized that if you were to call them by something else other than their first name then they will be kind of offended. So, I said o.k. then fine. That is the reason I call everyone by their first name. Back home we never ate in the class but here so many times even I have eaten in the class and I was even famous for it.

### **Learning How to Fly**

Kuri thought that based on her differences compared to the local students and general populace she would never fit in. However, she highlighted that her experiences as an international graduate student have made her mature and self-reliant; she shared:

I have learnt so much here... I think overall it has been a mixed bag. But for sure I would not have matured as a person if I would have stayed back home. The thing with international education is that it gives you the wings and just pushes you off the cliff. You have to learn how to fly. No one will teach you how to fly. And the thing is when you are in the water you have to learn how to swim, right? Here it's more like you are responsible for what you do. It's your life and you are in charge of it.

And I think as an international student what happens is that you learn to face challenges on your own. You realize that you are here all by yourself and somehow you have to kind of face them on your own because there have been so many challenges that I had to face. I mean of course if I would not have come here as an international student, I would not have made the decision; I would not have matured as a person. My thinking, too, would have been extremely narrow. A foreign education will not give you a fish it will teach you how to fish. And of course it teaches you to be independent. The fact that you are responsible for the decisions you make. It is your life. I think this is something you realize when you are staying away from your parent, in a foreign country.

I have learnt to take life as it comes. There have been a lot of ups and downs. And I think as an international student what happens is that you learn to face challenges on your own. You realize that you are here all by yourself and somehow you have to kind of face them on your own because there have been so many challenges that I had to face. I think I am actually motivated to strive to do my best further. I think life is such that we are kind of encouraged to do better, to improve on our candidatures each day. That is

human nature; we keep on striving for something better. I will keep on striving for something better. I think I am encouraged to do better; I am encouraged to do more. But there are certain things I do not understand at times. Like certain very simple things, I think Canadians just do not get.

### **Garcia's Story: The Trade Off**

#### **Background Information**

This story was authored by Garcia, a doctoral candidate at the university. At the time of the research Garcia was in the second year of her program and was excelling academically. She is a teacher by profession. She entered her program of study with a diverse professional and academic repertoire. As a teacher in her home country, she taught within the secondary system and achieved scholastic success both among her students and for herself. Being an avid student and scholar she always sought ways to engage her mind. And so when she became bored after completion of her Master of Philosophy (MPhil.) she looked abroad. "I was not really interested in Canada. That was not on my radar. I was looking at places in the US because I had no knowledge of Canada and I had no one there or anything to link me to that particular place." Acting on the advice of a friend she became interested in Canadian post-secondary institutions as an avenue to her doctoral studies instead of doing it in the US or maybe at the local university in her home country.

An avid scholar and researcher, she wanted to broaden her horizons and prospects at attaining her professional dreams. She thought such elevation could be captured through the achievement of an internationally-accredited degree. Once she made the decision to pursue studies at the university, she applied to and gained admittance into her program of choice.

Gaining entrance to the university was only the beginning of the journey for Garcia. She had to apply for permission to travel to Canada, which would come in the form of a temporary resident or student visa issued by the Canadian government through its Department of Immigration. This for her was a long and seemingly endless period of waiting. She described the application process and wait as an "invasive and very challenging."

It is very difficult when you are coming from a Third World country to enter Canada because of their perceived notion of first world resources and everything else connected to that. The embassy gave me a hard time to get the visa. They actually called me, after I

applied, to ask me whether I think I will be able to survive living here based on the amount of money I had. That in itself was a problem. The whole idea of filling out the forms they had was a problem too. It was very difficult, time consuming and a little belittling for want of a better word because they wanted to know all these things which in my perception were just not relevant. It did not reflect well for me. That was a problem. Though she felt the process was less than favorable, she never gave up and persisted on her dream and soon entered into Canada and her program of study in pursuit of her academic goals.

### **Standing among Giants**

Upon entering into the new landscape, Garcia noted that everything and everyone was different. During her first meeting with members of her cohort she noticed that she was the only student of her race among the group. She felt out of place because of the fifteen students in the class she was “the only black person in the room” and that fact unnerved her. She was unsettled because the telltale sign of her complexion stood clear for all to see. She admitted that there was also a Chinese international student in the class but “for some strange reason [she] just seemed to fit in better than I did.” On the other hand, she was starkly different and stood out. In her mind her local classmates and professors were like “giants” in their fields and accomplishments. The many undertakings and honors her fellow classmates seemed to have achieved both amazed and intimidated Garcia. The glowing and magnanimous introductions attested to their achievements academically and personally:

I was intimidated but also very proud. It was a mixed emotion, I guess. I was the only black person surrounded by whites at least that is how I saw them all – as whites. Though later I learned there was an Aboriginal – they looked all the same to me. As the only black person, I felt that I didn’t quite fit. Their worldviews and frames of reference were just way different from mine. I didn’t feel comfortable “hanging out” with them in the beginning. However, things changed a bit when we started to gel as a group, but I always remembered my place. I was black, I was not the same. I wouldn’t dare ask for extensions, or be lazy in my group. I wouldn’t dare be deemed incompetent – that for me was non-negotiable. I felt like I had to do well for all black persons to be respected.

This caused her to work hard at reaching her targets and deadlines. She simply could not be found lacking.

## **"I Had to Work Thrice As Hard"**

The truth of the matter is that Garcia always felt that as an international student she had to work much harder than local students. She always felt she was judged differently from other students and this pushed her to work doubly hard to prove her competence and knowledge. This was her way of proving she was capable of doing well even in the Canadian learning environment:

As an international graduate student, I always felt that I had to work thrice as hard as domestic students. I just felt that we were “judged” differently. This may just be my own preoccupations as I really didn’t have any concrete evidence to justify it, but that is just how I felt. Also, my orientation in my home country was to work very hard in order to achieve in life, so I came here with that attitude. In my opinion they did not work as hard as I did as most times their assignments were late or they would be scurrying to finish them at the last minute. This seemed like quite the norm for them. They didn’t seem perturbed by this. In my country that was totally unacceptable. Students who were consistently late or always hurrying were perceived as lazy and rarely did well in the academic system at any level.

Garcia also articulated that she had developed the habit of studying from an early age and this helped her to be able to put more effort and energy into her work. This habit guided her focus as she always wanted to do well, and for her the only way to do well in academics was to study hard:

Honestly, for me, studying has always been like a habit and I think the reason for that habit is just the nature of our education system. We are trained to be very, very rigorous in what we do because the landscape itself is competitive... So studying became a habit for me from a child growing up. Knowing that the only way to get through in life was to do well at school, I took that same habit of studying and exceeding my own expectations to the university even though it was a different landscape. I took this with me because it was something that I grew up doing. It has always been like that for me so wherever I went that is the same habit that I carried throughout.

### **"I Was Doing a Trade Off"**

Garcia found her job to be two fold as she was a student and a mother and had to be performing both roles simultaneously. She seemed to be always pressed for time. The level of effort and time required caused Garcia to negotiate strategies to prioritize in order to get both tasks accomplished. She described these negotiations as a “trade off” between herself and her child. She expressed,

I am a mother and I am here with my child. I came here with him at age five and it was very, very difficult for me because my job was kind of two-fold. I had to be doing my work as an academic at the institution and I had to be a mother in all its aspects. In the mornings I had to prepare my child for school and after sending him off to school, I had to go myself. I had to deal with making sure that his homework was done as well as mine. That for me was very difficult. My time had to be structured. I had to break up my time in parts knowing that when I am at school working, I had to be extremely focused. Because, I know that when I come home I had to block off at least five hours to pay attention to my child before he goes to bed. Even with that, that was not followed through perfectly to the tee either.

The work was so much that I found that I had to come home and as soon as I get in and put away my stuff I had to be in the books again. There were times in the process that he was neglected. That for me was not o.k. psychologically because I had that in my mind that I was not paying enough attention to my child. But then there is the desire and the need to exit this place as soon as I can and that for me was my motivation. I was doing a trade off in a sense. It was like o.k. if I can leave quickly then he will not have to deal with this experience.

### **"They Did Not Know I Was a Speaker of English"**

Garcia entered the university already fluent in written and oral discourses in English since it is the official language and the language of instruction in her home country. With English being the official language of instruction students were expected to work, study, and communicate with the highest competence in English. Nonetheless, upon entering the university Garcia felt there was a perception that she would have challenges with English. This bothered her greatly.

She recalled that even before she entered Canada and the university she felt there was already a perception formed about her as a non-Canadian entering Canada to study. She shared that she was asked by the department to do a course called “Canadian Acculturation.” The course was primarily geared toward students whose first language was not English. Being asked to do this course caused her to think that her knowledge of English was being questioned. It worried her but being the scholar she was she did not complain but willingly engaged in the course. She confessed that the course was very beneficial to her as it had helped her significantly with her writing and presentation:

I had to do that course they say because once you are coming into the country or if you are not a first language speaker then you would have to do that course. I figured I was asked to do that course because they did not know that I was a speaker of the English language. All in all, the course has proven to be very beneficial so I am not very upset at that. But it shows the perceptions that they have. I do not know that the recruiters do enough research to understand that the people coming in are qualified, competent people, who are capable of managing themselves.

### **A Strange and Challenging Experience**

The misconception for her was further highlighted by the shocked expressions of her colleagues after and during classes and presentations. During the first class when she presented herself to the class she found it strange the bewildered looks on their faces. They seemed genuinely surprised that she spoke English and so well:

... when I spoke, it actually came as if these people did not know that I spoke English or that they did not think that I could actually speak English so well. I could see the expressions on their faces “like seriously! She speaks English?” That was the experience as far as I read and that for me was a little disturbing because I was thinking that these people are strange, they are crazy. Don’t they know that we speak English? That for me was the most strange or challenging experience.

The surprise of her colleagues and some professors during her earlier presentations in class is something that Garcia found intimidating and challenging to understand. They seemed genuinely surprised that she could conduct herself so well in her presentations. Yet she thought she was

doing only what she should be doing and there was no “awesomeness” in the mode and content of her presentations:

I remember when I had my very first presentation to do and I did my presentation in class the day, I cannot forget. The class was very surprised that I was able to do the presentation so well and I was saying to myself: this is what I would do back home in my class. This presentation in a classroom in the Caribbean would be o.k. it would not be anything that would be considered oh so perfect and so well done; but for some strange reason they thought that it was so well done. It just shows that they are not really aware of what we are capable of as Caribbean people or as black people. It also shows that they have a perception of their standards, that their standards are the best and no one else can be compared to them.

Back home, no professor pulls me apart and speaks about how articulate I am because it is the order of the day. We are all articulate, we are expected to be. Here, I speak and I would think that I do not sound any better than another person in the class. As far as I am concerned we sound the same way but they think that it is different. I think it is because they have this preconception that black people, people of my stature could not articulate like this. Therefore it has to be some strange occurrence why I am able to do it. Those things just do not sit well with me. It is just showing me what their beliefs are about people. As far as I am concerned that is racism. Institutionalized racism or otherwise, it is still racism.

### **"We Do Not Feel the Connection"**

Garcia expressed that as the days progressed she confirmed in her mind that this is not the place for her. She missed home, her family, plants, and friends. She missed the communality of her home country. She was homesick and longed for home and yearned for the day she would complete her studies and return home to tend to her plants and be with her family:

I didn't feel connected with the place because it was very different from home. Back home we are very communal. We have verandas, so people call out to each other. Here they have back porches – totally hidden from the world. There was a great divide with the cultures and I struggled with that. I knew I had to play my part to assimilate, but it was very difficult for me. Still, I have not assimilated and unlike the majority of graduate



students who I communicate with I have no desire of staying after completion of my studies. I have failed to integrate into the culture or some would argue that I have refused. But either way my decision is final.

She was not in the new community alone and was afraid of how the changes were affecting her child. She shared that her child was also having issues connecting with the community:

My child is here and I am here and I do not know that we are fitting in and we do not feel the connection. I know for sure that my child does not because every night, and I am not exaggerating, he asks me when we are going home. That is how I know that he is not connected to this place. Perhaps things are happening in his school life that he is not able to articulate and I cannot definitively say that I can speak to it other than the fact that he was placed at the back of her classroom in his grade one year. When I went to the school he was at the back and so were all the other immigrant students. I assumed that it had to do with racial issues but I have no other evidence to that effect. Those are the underlying things that happen why I would say that this is not the place for us to settle.

### **"You Cannot Pinpoint It, but It Is There"**

Garcia strongly believed that some people were judgmental of people coming from outside their general area. Furthermore, she felt that members of the host community harbored misconceptions about people like her coming from a Third World country. She saw this as limited as the world is so much more than this little area and people here seemed to be ill-informed about black people and Caribbean nationals. Firstly, she found that at the university and within its surrounding community everyone black was considered African and came from Africa. For her, there were implications of some underlying racial issues in the responses she received and the conversations she engaged. She explained that such issues were subtle and difficult to distinguish:

It is very subtle so I cannot speak to it directly, but it is there. You would have to be in the position of an international student to really understand the underlying issues, the innuendos, the silence, the questions and things like that.

She recalled one such insinuation when a classmate told her unquestionably that the country from which she, Garcia, came had no drinking water. This infuriated her. "I am like 'what the

hell! Don't these people at least read?" They are so enclosed in their little space that they do not know what is happening outside there in the world."

One cannot really pinpoint that it is racism or they are racial issues because their behaviors are so subtle but you know that it is that you know that you are being slighted, you know that your ability is being questioned, you know that your competence is being measured, you know. You know that because of the expressions on their faces, the things they say, like "Oh my God I cannot believe you were able to do this." Little comments like that, which perhaps they would not make to their white counterparts. That is how I know.

Garcia conceded that though she encountered people who were ill-informed and judgmental, she had also met some persons who were open-minded, genuine, and generous to her:

I had a very genuine professor who invited me into her home, opened up her space and let me in. With her, I cannot pinpoint any subtlety or any hypocrisy in her doing. She is exceptional, if only others could be like her. There are other people for whom, it is very clear that they know what they are about so you do not get any negative feelings from them. There are others though from whom I have seen just little instances in their expressions on their faces or the questions they ask that they are not very well educated socially.

The idea that people could be judgmental and harbor ignorant perceptions was "very unsettling emotionally" for Garcia. She was, however, driven and motivated by her desire to get her doctoral degree and that was what helped her to survive the rough days. In her opinion, she just needed to complete her studies and go home.

### **"I Am More Confident, More Informed"**

Despite her feelings about the university, Garcia worked hard at her goal and excelled academically. She achieved excellent grades across the board and was highly respected and recommended by her professors. Being held in such high regard by her peers and professors was encouragement for her to continue to work hard. Garcia indicated that:

Coming away from this I think I have become more confident. I think I know myself more. I think I have a better grasp of who I am and what I want and certainly what I do not want. I think I have been strengthened academically. I think I am now better able to

defend a particular position. I also know my limitations and how to deal with them. Nothing or no one intimidates me anymore. I know that people are just different. I think I can speak from a platform of informed understanding on certain issues. Personally, I think I can deal with people from any culture, nation or society.

## **Owaja's Story: Every Day Is a Fight**

### **Background Information**

After completing a Bachelor of Arts degree in English back home, Owaja worked as a translator in an Indian factory where he translated between Chinese engineers and local Indian engineers. His original plans were to spend two to three years working at home before pursuing studies overseas. These plans were cut short when he contracted a rare illness in his eyes that debilitated him for several months. After his brief illness, he was encouraged by his cousin to take the bold step to pursue further studies to enhance his chances of finding a better job. Because he possessed a degree in English he wanted to study in an English-speaking environment since studying in an English-speaking environment would allow him to improve his "speaking and writing skills" in English.

Sponsored by his parents, he enrolled in a master's program at the university. When he first came into Canada he lived with his cousins in the city. After several months he decided to move to the campus student residences since these were in closer proximity to the university campus, thereby making the university facilities more accessible to him. He likened his international graduate student experiences to a fight. He insisted that every day for him was like a fight. According to him, his struggles were renewed every day as he interfaced with life and study at the university. One of the many fights he constantly had was negotiating the beginning of each day. Living in the new environment he felt like a "baby trapped in an adult body."

### **Life Running on the Track**

After more than a year into his master's program at the university, Owaja recalled and told of his many fights in the university as a "foreigner." His many fights, he argued, were exacerbated the moment he left his cousin's house and had to begin fending for himself. Originally, after entering in the new environment of campus residence he had to learn to prepare his own meals, which posed particular challenges to him because cooking was not something he

was used to doing for himself. Back home all his meals were prepared for him by his parents. Owaja knew cooking his own meal would be difficult, but thought he would get the hang of it in time; after all, most students, including those from his own country, did it every day. He was soon frustrated with his efforts. He joked that cooking for himself made his life running “on the track.”

He was even more alarmed at the eating habits and choices of food in the Canadian diet. To him, food in Canada was more expensive than it would be in his home country. He expressed that in his home country even if his parents did not cook for him he always had a wide array of choice foods at low cost. Here, in Canada, because it was so expensive and he was being funded by his parents, he chose to cook for himself and this proved difficult for him:

It seems people have easier ways to do breakfast here. Either you can go to a restaurant, or a cafeteria or whatever or have some Cheerios and milk and some bread or some bacon. There are kind of not good choices for me because on one end they are kind of expensive to an international student who did not have a job. I really don't like the breakfast here to be honest but, well it is ok for you to eat the same kind of food for one week or two but not every day and the same thing for cereal, bread. I wasn't raised to eat bread or yogurt or milk every morning. In the morning, in China, I usually have porridge, eggs and pickles or whatever and most importantly it was cooked by my parents and not by me.

Owaja had become accustomed to the eating habits and food choices back home. To him, food was not only an important start to his day but also it was integral to his overall experience as a student attending classes. He shared his opinion that if one was not properly fed, it could have a negative impact on class participation and reactions:

You know sometimes when you are really hungry it is not good for you to be into the classroom because into a classroom studying is quite an energy consuming thing, especially for me as an international student. Because there would be lot of listening in English and also responding is another important thing, being a student.

### **"I Did Not Know What Was Appropriate"**

Being in the Canadian post-secondary classroom, Owaja felt “like a foreigner all the time besides being an average student.” He was a foreigner in that he was new to the university and to

the ways of the university and community. The way things were done at the university was different and strange to him. Consequently, sometimes he felt like an outsider within and outside the classroom. This situation, he opined, persisted because he did not know things he thought he should know as “a new people” in the country. He shared with me that there was some “capital” that he should have as a new student that he did not think he possessed. Therefore, he struggled in the culture and with negotiating appropriate behaviors from his first day at the university until the point of this study. He always tried to negotiate his way and act in a manner that was culturally appropriate. He reminisced on his very first class at the university:

It was the first day of class and I was so nervous to get into the classroom because it was my actual first class in this university and I did not know how usually a class would run. Well, if in China a class would begin by the introduction of the new professor or teacher and followed by just getting started maybe or each other’s introduction. But here for my first class I was nervous because I did not know what to share with everyone... I did not know what was appropriate, funny, and memorable, at least decent... So when it came to my introduction I think I made a mistake, well, not a mistake but a kind of an embarrassing moment. I did not know at the time. I only knew that after class. ...So I literally spelled my last name in front of the class and to the professor. I think probably the professor was a little bit embarrassed when I say that word, but I only knew that after class. Everyone laughed when I spelled my last name in front of the class.

At the time that they laughed at me, I thought it was just because the way I introduced it... I did not know the culture thing behind the two letters, you know. It might be common sense in English speaking countries but well, it might be something I think people purge it from the English textbooks for students who learn English as a foreign language. Well, I found out it just meant some kind of taboo word. I was confused.

### **"I Am a Cultural and Linguistic Baby"**

In his opinion he had particular difficulties because of the cultural and linguistic differences between his country of origin and the host country, Canada, and by extension the university. He saw himself as a “cultural and linguistic baby” who is supposed to act like an adult and socialize with other “adults.” He argued that he was unable to socialize with them

because his interests and that of domestic students are divergent. His contribution in conversations with local students was minimal because he is ignorant of the contexts and areas of discussion. Consequently he had difficulties making friends since he did not know what to say. He did not know what was appropriate. Furthermore, in many instances he perceived a barrier to his relationship with locals because of the age difference. In his department and the particular classes he attended individuals seemed to be considerably older than he was. Therefore their choice of topics for discussions was generally outside his cultural or experiential background. Many local students in his classes lived far away and had already established lives and families which limited their contact and time for socialization. This caused him to feel like an outsider who was not able to engage in deep, meaningful discourses with local students in his class.

In a classroom usually when told well, talk to your elbow partner. Sometimes when you sit somewhere, you know, you become awkward when the professor say that sometimes because I can feel that I am not people's first choice and they would turn to someone else. Well, not just beyond me because that would be rude but to just turn to someone else instead of picking me directly. On the one hand, I might not feel comfortable talking to or discussing with the native speaker next to me but it is kind of the same, you know? It is kind of reciprocal maybe because for them they may feel comfortable discussing with another female, talking to another native or local student who is Canadian.

Sometimes I did not know what to talk about so the atmosphere became kind of awkward, you cannot just look at each other in the whole three hours so sometimes you have to talk about something or otherwise the person is going to turn to another person to talk about something they are both interested in and you feel isolated then. Because for most graduate classrooms in my department it would be mostly Canadian students so they have the power to kind of control the topic of the whole classroom.

It's the kind of majority versus minority thing because you know if you reached a certain percentage and well you really cannot switch the topic or go for a topic that you are interested in cause well it seems that most of the people are interested in this and while for me as an international student I don't have that kind of experience and to be honest sometimes I don't think the topic is interesting to me. So, sometimes I would feel isolated... another thing I think is probably the generation thing because we are definitely

from a different age range as most of the students in the classroom seem to be in their mid-thirties or forties some of them even fifties.

### **"We Feel Defeated by Others"**

Feeling left out, Owaja often retreated to forming alliances with other students from his own country in the class. In the event there were no such students he would join with other international students. He desperately wanted to have relationships with locals but was hampered:

I just feel it should not always be like that. Every time when in a classroom it would just be three of us in the group, the Chinese graduate student group. I think the reason we stuck together, was not because we liked to stay together, I mean that is definitely not the first reason we can think of. It is just because we kind of feel defeated by others and we will sit and then we were pushed into that corner and at the same time we have to work. It is interesting that it would be comfortable for us to sit with other international students. I can remember our groups we always international students. Well some groups like they are so hard to break... They are always together and it is hard for you to get in.

Owaja yearned for engagement in the new academic environment. He was saddened, lonely and needed to be engaged. In reflection, he talked about happier times as a student back home. He explained that he loved to laugh and enjoy himself with friends. He does not like to be alone but here he finds himself alone a lot and he does not laugh as much. He noted that as a graduate student it was not mandatory for him to be in school every day and this allowed him significant time by himself and he would much rather be among his friends, having fun:

I believe [myself] and others are not just there to take notes and write our papers and that is it, or just to take some knowledge me, you know. I hope to become personal or make some friends during class and get so intimate or kind of close even after class so we can, you know, share something both relevant to the course or something about our own lives.

I used to laugh and be very positive everyday but when I got here because there would sometimes be frustrating experiences I do not laugh that very often so... that is something I hate. I want to be surrounded with friends, hanging out, enjoying things, enjoying life and everything but here it just all of a sudden disappeared the first day I got here and I have to learn step by step, all by myself.

I really got jealous when I was alone on campus and see a lot of Canadian students or other students. They have a large group and [are] talking with each other, laughing and screaming you know and that kind of stuff and they look so natural and that kind of remind me of my experience back home in China. I found when I was here I was like, a watcher an outsider watching other people having fun and enjoying their life. Well back home I am just being myself enjoying the moment talking and chatting with my friends while paying less attention of what is happening around me. But here since I am alone most of the time so it gives me more opportunities to watch what other peoples were doing and that kind of you know.

### **"I Felt Unsafe and Uncomfortable"**

Owaja was often put off by the silence of other students within his classes. Lacking the knowledge and proper interpretations of the silence caused Owaja much anxiety in his classes. To him they seemed unresponsive to his presentations and he never knew if their silences meant they were not interested in what he was saying or they were awed. He did not understand and this affected him because he hoped to make valuable presentations and to receive feedback during the process. Through this he hoped to establish and maintain a connection with his audience:

So, there was a summer class and it was the first day of the summer class and I started to the classroom and well just because most of the classmates I did not know most of them and I did not sit down. Then suddenly another student followed me into the classroom. I took the same class with that person last semester and I tried to talk to her but she seemed to kind of avoid me so I did not get a chance to talk to her. So that was for me kind of not very comfortable cause if I did not talk to her I would worry about whether that would be a sign showing hostility or you know being not very polite, you know. And then say in the class the professor started to talk or to ask everyone to introduce themselves and talk about their stories, kind of as a way to tell people who they are and well when they came to me well I talked about the hardships; the hardship of my cousins' first few years in Canada.

The moment I finished my introduction I felt a little bit unsafe or uncomfortable. Like whether talking... because I... well its interesting for me I was always worried



about whether my words would kind of let someone down or you know not [be] very funny like what others did. Some of the students they... well their introductions were quite interesting and people laughed but when they come to you people nod and well I'm not sure whether that's a sign of well I'm not interested or you are so boring or you know. Most of the time I found when I finished my words, or question or my presentation or something I think people are kind of... or are sometimes silent so I'm not sure whether that is a sign you know...

Once, after a presentation, Owaja confessed he had spent many hours preparing for this presentation and he felt uncomfortable by what he perceived to be the silence of his Canadian counterparts:

I hate when people talk and without communication or eye contact or reading script like presentation so I always tried to use and maintain eye contact and try to talk to people instead of reciting my script. I think probably my presentations were sometimes a little bit dry without references to jokes or you know, using puns or you know to kind of cheer everybody up or try to capture everybody's attention, since my experiences could not evoke other people's experience. So, most of the time when I am finished, there would be a silence and I really did not like that. During the break some of the people who approached you said "you did a very good presentation and we really enjoyed it." Well for me honestly, I appreciate them to ask questions or reduce the pain more by just supporting me during the presentation.

Owaja admitted that he had good rapport with and support from his professors. However, he often wondered whether his professors really understood him. He felt there was a kind of "expectation" that they had of him and he was never sure just how he was living up to this perception:

One concern I will always have with professors is whether they understand me or whether they understand what I am going to say. I am, kind of, afraid of, you know, letting them down. It is like they are always expecting something from you, like their eyes. Sometimes that makes me nervous. They are so encouraging and this is kind of different from Chinese professors. I would definitely say Chinese professors, at least according to my own experiences are not as encouraging as the professors here. [F]or

most Canadian professor I don't know why they thought I was always working very hard. They always tell me don't work so hard enjoy your life or whatever.

### **"The Scare in Their Eyes"**

Owaja once told me that he often felt "the scare in their eyes" when he approached people in the service sectors and tried to get help or have a conversation. This, he stated, frustrated him. For him, the "scare in their eyes" was the feeling he got when he approached someone for a conversation or assistance and individuals go silent and begin to look scared. This was challenging for him because he could not understand why, for example, an individual would be talking to someone and smiling and when it was his turn they became all serious and business-like:

Because I am a foreigner and probably I think maybe I am a foreigner and people outside the campus especially, you know, I think those that do not meet people outside of their race often you can feel they are scared sometimes when you talk to them. It happens mostly when I checkout in a super store. It is very common, you know, people talk to the one before you. They seem to have a very nice talk and when they come to me when I try to have a very nice conversation with them well, sometimes they just do not even say, how are you? Hello... Things like that. Well, I can feel the scare in their eyes.

Owaja shared a story that exemplifies "the scare in their eyes."

So, it was the first time at the library. I think when I got there and I needed to check out my books, it is probably just me, but I think the atmosphere, you know, there between us was kind of strange and awkward. I do not know you just kind of, you can feel the scare. Most of the time there would be someone before you and they would be laughing, smiling and sometime giggling or whatever, like they are so close. When it came to me well it would become so stiff, like they are just doing their job without any personal interaction, nothing like that. Well, I have actually I have met the same librarian for a couple of times by far already. Well things got much better.

### **"Crazy Blowing Wind"**

Owaja's feeling of being an outsider is all encompassing as he also felt like an outsider in his daily traverse of the physical environment and changing climates. This had a significant

impact on his life as a student. The harsh winter conditions, particularly, caused him to feel like he does not belong. This came about as he traveled by bus and by foot in the harsh Saskatchewan winters and in many instances passed by homes where families seemed warm and happy inside. He recalled and illustrated through a picture (see figure 4.1 overleaf) one experience that stood out during winter while shopping for groceries:

There is the experience of my shopping trip in winter. Usually it would be below 30 degrees with the wind crazily blowing. This is a stop sign (pointing at picture). I do not have a car and generally have to go by bus to get groceries. So in winter, especially when it came to the evening and the bus would come every one hour instead of every half hour. That is kind of long to me. In my home town the bus would usually come every three or five minutes. So when it comes to one hour and you cannot stand outside for one hour to wait for the next bus. I would walk home and it would take 20/30 minutes and on my way back home, back to my apartment, I always wonder why I came to this country and suffering from all of these and you know. Well, anyway just not having a car is miserable, in winter especially.

You are seeing other people enjoying or spending time together with their family, laughing and you are all alone carrying four bags of food and walking half of an hour to where you live.



walking bare feet required.

Figure 4.1: Coming in from the Cold

## **"I Was Once Very Confident about My English"**

For Owaja, everything about studying here is a fight. He shared his conflicting feelings about entering the classroom each day and quipped that the moment he stepped into the classroom "it is like the beginning of the war." Owaja described the act of taking classes in English as a general fight:

I even have to think about what to say to professors and other students because sometimes well it is not like back home in my university. Well, here the communication sometimes seems not that natural you know not between native speakers here sometimes they seem very natural, so relaxed but for me sometimes I even have to come up with some... Before going into the classroom and well then sitting down and sometimes I would have trouble say picking the side I am sitting on because, well because in picking where you are about to sit for me would be a sign to show the kind of relationship with that student.

Owaja was also bothered by his challenges with the dominant language of the classroom, English. He felt there is a language barrier within the class and that this too served to hamper his progress as a student and a colleague to domestic students. He shared the following:

I got frustrated, not because of the language barrier, you know. But sometimes when you could not follow what [people] said, well it was not because you were not focusing on them or something. I would say sometimes it was because I just could not get used to their voice speed. Sometimes when I say "pardon" or "excuse me I did not catch your speed." They just kind of repeated again the sentence with the same speed again and I was like, "Oh I still did not catch it." Well, sometimes it was because I do not know that way of saying. Say for example, one time a student asked me: "what are you up to it?" I did not know what it meant but she kind of repeated that for a couple of times and I still did not understand. Then she asked "are you ready?" Then I got what she meant. So that is the kind of difference between what the language people are using here and what kind of English we were taught back home. So, that is why I kind of struggle and it took me a while to get used to both the accent and the way of using the language.

Sometimes, I felt embarrassed to ask the people to repeat, so I just pretended that I had understood them. I had my moments where I could articulate myself very well and ended the conversation naturally. More often, I came back to my little apartment room

from campus or grocery stores thinking, “Maybe I should have said that.” I once was very confident about my English, but it was true when compared with other students in China. But now, here in Canada, almost everyone speaks the language. And I felt lost as I had no idea what I was good at then. I’m a super fluent Mandarin Chinese speaker. But I wonder here whether someone can really value that. Some people do in fact and I, myself feel that is my strength here. So who needs that then?

Owaja also encountered difficulties in academic literacy. He observed and noted that there were differences in the way he learns and accomplishes assigned tasks compared to local and other students. For example, for him reading was always challenging. The idea of conceptualizing and articulating complete papers in English was intimidating for him. Primarily his issue was transferring his thoughts from his native tongue into English to elaborate enough to make for a fluent paper:

Sometimes I would have a lot of opinions well expounding those opinions into much longer paragraphs and articles would be difficult. And the grammar thing is one part and word choice and another thing I was struggling with most of the time was avoiding plagiarism. Just to avoid using the same word in an article... Sometimes my paper would seem kind of not very organized by my professor but for me I think they are organized in a logical way. Well in some ways but not that just one single idea or one or two but with more profound thoughts something like that so probably that is the problem.

### **Always Catching Up with Other Students**

Unlike domestic and some other students, Owaja tended to follow the lead of his professors and had very few questions about class content and assigned tasks. Therefore, he was awed when local students upon receipt of a course outline were able to ask probing questions of professors. In his thinking, one had to first engage the work before questions can be asked:

At first when I see the assignment, I would usually have no idea what I can write about the assignment so I did not know what to say during the discussion. It always made me wonder how someone could come up with questions about the assignment even if they have not even started. For me, if I have not even started doing the assignment I would have no questions that would come up during the process of the paper.

For me, I just follow the professors say sometimes they would explain all the assignment to you and I thought that was good enough. Well I really did not have a lot of questions at the moment I got the assignment, I mean in paper. After that, probably a week or two when I started doing the assignment, most of the time I would maybe have some problems. The way I solve it is maybe talking to other Chinese students to see how they would do the assignment and whether they got any response from the professor. If I cannot solve that problem within the circle of Chinese students then I would probably say ask the professor and or a classmate.

He felt he was always trying to catch up with professors and other students. This was necessary because he took a longer time to process new information:

I am always catching up with others not responding to them or you know. When the professor says something I am using my time to process, to figure out what did they say or what do they mean instead of coming up with some questions really quickly.

### **"I Am a More Understanding Person"**

Owaja conceded that he has learnt a lot from his experiences as an international graduate student. In his opinion he understands himself better, he is more confident, and hopes to integrate more with locals to enhance his English speaking skills before returning home:

I'm proud that I'm definitely better compared with two years ago when I got here. I feel occasionally like I am a baby. I had to learn things step by step. I feel like a flower that is moved out of the warm house for the first time. I wanted to act like an adult but like a baby that I had to learn everything from the ABC.

I'm also glad that I could have this kind of experience albeit difficult. I feel I have become more sensitive, I am feeling what's like to be a minority who's not strong and who barely have a chance to dominate a conversation. Consequently, I think I'm a more understanding person.

## **Maria's Story: Juggling to Survive**

### **Background Information**

Before coming to the university, Maria attended the state run university in her home country. She considered herself lucky to have gained entrance to such a prestigious university.

Her coming to the university was due to her superior performance in her bachelor's program in her home country. She was offered a scholarship to a European university which she declined so she could study at the university. Her choice was influenced by her uncle who was already in the environment and told her great tales about the university. She had just completed her National Youth Service (NYS), a mandatory work internship program in her home country. Upon completion of this program she left home to pursue graduate studies at the university.

### **"A Normal Day Is Just Unending"**

In her third year of her master's program, Maria described the experience as overwhelming. As a student she was always busy and kept on being busy. She was always on the go and had many things to do in school. The nature of her course required her to do many courses, a practicum, and a final research paper, and so she was always engaged in studying, and had endless assignments to prepare and presentations to execute. She constantly asked herself, "Oh, what have I found myself in? I just want to finish this program and go back home." There were no free moments; she felt like she just kept going and going. For Maria, a normal day was hectic with so much to do. Her roommates, who were Canadian undergraduate students, could not understand why she was never home.

A normal day when I am taking classes is like "you just go!" It is just unending. From class you have all these assignment. There was no day that I did not have something going on. Every day I had something going on. Even in the summer you still had to do your research and everything so there was no break. It has been like that since day one. Every single day I had something to do in school. I remember my roommates asking "why are you always in school?"

I had to explain to her that I really needed to get things done because I am on funding and if it runs out it would be tough so I had to get things done. The other thing was I did not have internet at home. She offered to share with me. She went and bought a long cable and connected from her room to my room. It still did not help because I still did not stay home. Staying at home just means lazing about, not getting my business done and stuff like that so I rather stay at school. I remember that Arts building. Geography used to be in the Arts building on Sundays it would be dead you walk in there and you would be so scared but then you still had to get your work done. I would just walk into



my office and lock myself in until I am done. I would just stay there, get some work done then go home.

### **"There Is Everything Wrong with It"**

Maria soon became overwhelmed by the differences and nature of the Canadian postsecondary institutions and students. She was amazed and overwhelmed by what she described as the liberal nature of Canadian students. She was unaccustomed to the way things were done in the new community. She recounted an incident that occurred while she lived on campus. One night, while on her way to the bathroom, she bumped into a young man in the hallway. The young man, who was her roommate's boyfriend, happened to be having a sleeping over that night. She was shocked at this because in her home culture this was never an acceptable norm. She felt very uncomfortable with these arrangements. She thought that with the other females in the building such visits should be prohibited:

To them it was normal. I did not know it was normal. I started complaining and then someone told me that there is nothing wrong with that. I was like, "Really? There is everything wrong with that!" I did not see why he should come and sleep over and I had to bump into him in the washroom in the middle of the night. That is just unacceptable but then I kind of had to suck it up and just live with it. That was one of the things that really shocked me and I thought that this was just not right for me.

Coming from an education system steeped in "power struggles" where there was an obvious gap between students and professors, she became alarmed at the relationship patterns that existed between students and professors in the university. The idea of a student referring to a professor by his or her first name was something that Maria had never experienced in her home country. In fact, students who did not address professors with the forward "Dr." were often deemed rude and thought to lack moral and ethical standards:

The professor student relationship here was kind of shocking to me. I remember when I was corresponding with my professor I was addressing him as "Dr." at a point he corrected me. Then I came and I had a co-supervisor who wanted me to just call him by his first name. I had to tell him that I was uncomfortable calling him by his first name. He insisted that I call him by his first name. It was hard but I kept at it and tried greeting him that way whenever we met. Eventually I got used to that.

Our system is different. There is a lot of power struggle. People want to feel very important so... I mean if you have a Ph.D. it is like you have achieved. That is the highest achievement that you could ever have. There is always that gap between students and professors. Unlike here where we can easily approach professors. Back home the professors are perceived as higher than the students. That was the kind of experience that we had. We were not really free to interact with them. So, there was this distance. I would sit in a class and just listen to the professor talk or sometimes people would not even show up for class. They allow their friends to come to class and bring the notes. Sometimes for a whole term some people do not even attend a class because there is no connection. The classes are usually huge so the professor probably does not even know you. They probably know one or two people, maybe the class representative. That environment actually was not the best. We had a few professors that were nice and who we could actually talk to. If we had a problem with a class we could actually approach them and talk to them one on one but those were very few.

If I were to compare with this place you can see the difference. Here you are free to talk to your professors. I forgot to mention the fact that [back home] we like titles a lot so you have to address them by the professional titles. You dare not mention their first names without adding their titles that would just cause a lot of problems. That is viewed as a big disrespect so you do not dare to do that. I think it is more about power. I find it is like they want to feel on top and belittle students. They do not see the need to draw students closer and allowing them to learn from them

Maria found it particularly strange when she witnessed students talking up in class and voicing their opinions about their work. What further troubled her was that it seemed acceptable. It sounded to her like they were arguing. This was unacceptable for her based on her culture:

I remember in this class and this girl was arguing with the professor about something. She went on and on. This was surprising for me. I thought "this is just not acceptable. You do not do that." I came to realize that it is not a big deal for them. That is unlike us where you dare not challenge your professor. If you want to pass the class you had to take everything "hook, line and sinker" and not argue with them. If you do argue you will forever fail that particular class. So when the student was arguing with the professor about something and went on and on this would be a no-no in our culture.

I had this other classmate; her research was on some migrant farmers in rural Saskatchewan and he kept complaining that the professor did not want her to do this or that and it was her research. I did not see it like that. I just thought that whatever my professor tells me is what I am going to do. You know me; I do not really take ownership of my thesis, and you just follow whatever the professor tells me that is what I will do. That was me I would just go ahead and do it. She was like no, no. She was in control of her thesis. I think for her, she also had some personal issues. She actually ended up leaving for Calgary and she defended long after.

### **"I Felt Like the Ground Would Just Break"**

On the other hand, she was impressed and amazed at the presentational skills that her Canadian counterparts possessed. Maria admired the ease with which these students were able to make in class presentations. To her, it seemed they were very “confident” even when they were not sure what they were presenting. This is something she thought she lacked based on the knowledge that she did not do many, if any, presentations in her previous studies in her home country. She conceded that her first presentation at the university did not go well:

My first presentation was a total nightmare. It was in our research methods class. We had to present our proposal. We were to give an idea of our research since it was evolving we probably did not know exactly what we were going to do. It was just to give the class an idea of what we wanted to do. Our supervisor was supposed to come in and sit in the class. My goodness! I could not speak. It was just a nightmare. It was the first time I was doing a presentation in front of a group. We were like ten people. I just felt like the ground would just break. I kept reading from the screen. I was not making enough eye contact. When I was done my professor was not too happy with it. The content was not bad. It was the presentation of the content. It was my presentation style it was not too good. Even I did not feel good about it.

After the class I met with my professor and I asked him how I did. I was happy he did not hide his feelings. He told me it was not particularly good and that I should work on my presentation skills and so on. Then I would sit and admire those girls talking and they are all over the place but they are very confident about what they are saying. I had

things that were well researched and everything but presenting it effectively was an issue. That was because I was not used to presenting.

### **"This Guy Is Very Biased"**

Maria did not see herself as having any major issues with English or writing papers. In fact, she claimed, "I did not do too badly at writing papers. My writing skills were not that bad." After all, English was the official language of instruction back home and she spoke and wrote using English very well. Moreover, she had previously worked with a NGO where she was required to do research and write reports in English and she did well at it. She knew well that her issue was with her presentation skills and that was what she needed to work most on improving. Thus, she was gravely disturbed by the comments of a teaching assistant in one of her courses who made what Maria thought to be a blanket statement about the competency of international students in the use of English in written papers:

My first day of class for my management class was filled with anger and bitterness. This stemmed from a comment passed by the teaching assistant for the class. Surveying the class and realizing that the majority of the class was international, this is what he had to say "for those of you who do not have English as a first language, make sure you get your assignments proof read..." My instant reaction was this guy is very biased and disrespectful to international students. I thought to myself, I never used The Learning Center but I got all my paper done and got very good grades so I didn't understand why he was emphasizing that. Discussing with classmates after the class, I realized that I was not the only one but so many other people felt the same way.

Maria felt that the comments of the teaching assistant were discriminatory since she too was once a teaching assistant and would never judge students so openly and jointly. This was not to be the first time that she felt she was being discriminated against in the university and the particular department in which she studied. She further recounted an incident that happened between herself and a former professor.

### **"Because I am an International Student, Because I Am Black"**

Failing a course is a devastating event in the life of any student. Maria once failed a course which she needed to retake. Maria got wind that the repeat class was being taught by the

same professor for whom she failed to score a pass. Feeling uncomfortable to be doing the course again with the same professor she asked to be placed in another class. This sole request triggered a series of fiery meetings from which she felt she was being discriminated against. The idea of meeting after meeting with the director and writing and rewriting letters to make her case was very unsettling for her. She thought she was making a simple request and that as the student and consumer, there should be value in her request and should at least be taken seriously. She felt the department, through the director, was unsupportive of her situation and request.

So, after series of meeting with the director Maria rewrote the letter for the “umpteenth time.” This time she had the help of a law student, who was the friend of a friend, in drafting the letter:

That day, I sat and I looked into his [the director] face. He was going on and on. I was staring in his face and then he said we should go back and write it again because we have to prove that the instructor is intimidating and vindictive before he can approve it. So I sat there staring at him. Then he turns to my friend and said "Your friend looks depressed..." That was when I lost it. I mean I just lost it. I told him that it is his program that is making me have mental problems. Then he told me that this program was not for me and I should not be here. I said “I do not care it is your program that is making me mad."

I said "you do not have any right to tell student what you have told me." I do not think he would say that to a white student. He would not do that. So I was trying to make a point to my friend that this man is racist and I have to make him know that he is racist. And because I am an international student and because I am black that is why he has the guts to tell me that I have a mental problem. Why would he even say something like that? If you are really concerned about your students; that is not something you should tell your student that "your friend looks like she is depressed." How on earth would you tell me that I am depressed? I said “I have never been depressed in my life and this program is stressful but it will never make me depressed." He had no right to tell me that I am depressed. He had no right. I thought it was inappropriate in the first place so I went to the student counseling center. I met a counselor there and I told her that this was what the director of the school said to me. The lady could not believe he said that. I said yes he did. So they referred me to a guy and it was just one thing after the other. At a point I just decided that I was not going to waste my time on this useless thing. They just drain your

energy so I am not even going to waste time. I went back to our course advisor and made the point again.

Fortunately for us we had a new director. I met with him and again made my case. I presented my case to him and eventually he approved it. He said I can take the course online. It was as simple as that. It made me wonder why the other director made such a big deal of it. These are some of the things that international students go through. Meanwhile we are paying a lot of tuition fees and we should be treated like eggs because we are bringing money into the university. But that is how they frustrate you because they know you do not have the papers; you are not permanent residents so they can intimidate you. I was like; I am not going to be intimidated in any way.

In the department she also had issues with the way the mandatory practicum was handled department-wide. For this practicum students are expected to procure their own placements in institutions throughout the province. Maria felt the entire process was unfair, especially to international students who do not necessarily know the Canadian organizations in which they are expected to seek placements. She felt the school could and should do more to assist students in their placements:

You are supposed to start in May and you end up starting in June. That is not fair. The school is not even supporting us. They should negotiate with the organizations. It is the international students who suffer. We pay a lot of in tuition fees and we suffer. We suffer because we are not from this area and they are asking me to go out in search of a practicum site. Now, how do I do that? The school has few spots and some of these agencies will insist that they need Canadian citizens or permanent residents. If I am an international student then I am cut off.

### **"It Is Colder Than a Freezer"**

Maria talked about her experiences of winter. This too was overwhelming for her. Maria is from Ghana and had no prior ideas of what it entails being in a temperate one. For her this was a big issue. In anticipation of the winter, Maria traveled to Canada during the summer to allow for a smooth transition. So she experienced summer and summer turned into fall. Finally it was winter. She thought she was well prepared since she had heard all the stories. Yet with all her preparations she was not prepared for what she was to experience. She divulged to me:

I could not imagine how cold it would be. I thought it was a joke when people said that it is colder than a freezer. I felt like this is just too much for me to bear. It was just so cold. I did not anticipate that much cold. Before I was thinking that it would be something I could manage if I really dress warm. But then walking from residence to school every day I realized that it was not even funny. Some days you actually slip and fall on the way, sometimes two times before you get to school. I did not find it funny at all...

I remember bragging to my cousins when they asked if I had had my first fall, that no I had not yet registered my first fall because I am very careful when I am walking and I know my winter boots have a good grip so they should not be worried about me falling. I will never fall so they should not worry about my falling. Then one day at the traffic light between Dairy Queen and Subway, I was walking as carefully as I could be then I slipped and fell. My goodness someone ran to me asking whether I was ok. I responded that I was ok and doing very fine. After it happened I was very quiet about it. Then one day we were talking about falls during the winter. That was when I revealed to them that they were right and that I had registered my first fall. They were laughing and assured me that everyone has to fall at one point or the other during winter.

Maria was convinced that daily commute in such frigid weather affected her mentally. She argued that it affected her mood and made her dull. She felt that the cold affected everything including how she dealt with her studies and social life. She figured the best way to deal with the winter was to become physically active and so she found a gym partner and joined the gym and she saw where this was helping her to be more focused.

### **Lonely in a Crowd**

Maria was from a big family and would have regular daily interactions with her family. Coming from collective cultural background Maria found that living in Canada with a group of strangers to be a lonely experience and she often felt out of place. She still felt lonely being away from home and missed her relatives and friends. She asserted:

Even in the midst of all your house mates or dorm mates or whatever but you still have this emptiness. Even though you greet everyone and "chit-chat" with them you know deep down that you do not have that connection with them and it makes it very difficult. That is the hard part.

She argued that although she felt lonely and missed home, having friends helped to alleviate those feelings though it will not take it away completely:

So you have to be very outgoing. If you are an introvert it does not help. That is what I find in this environment. Being outgoing helps but if you prefer to be by yourself, no. That loneliness will always be there. But if you find other activities and mix with other people that helps a lot. Once in a while you will still feel that way because you are away from home, you miss certain people in your life and so on. But sometimes if you are busy with activities or you make friends; it helps to take away that feeling. It won't take it away completely but it still helps.

Maria, however, contended that her busy academic and work schedule does not always allow her time to socialize and be involved in social events and gatherings:

You do not have social life anymore. I have had friends accuse me of being too busy and you do not want to visit me and so on. I am like you guys have to be reasonable. You know my situation right now. I do not have probably what you have. I do not have the luxury of staying at home or maybe visiting. I wish I could. Everyone enjoys being at their home and staying in. But I cannot do that because I have to be juggling between things to survive. For now I just do not have a social life anymore.

At the beginning I kept to myself. I actually liked it that way because for me that helps me focus. Sometimes people who do not understand they think you are anti-social but then it helps me focus. When I have all these people around me, I feel it is a distraction.

Therefore, there are times when I just pull away from all the social events just to get things I need done. Then I will have all the time to socialize. For me, the goal is to get the program done. So, my ultimate goal is to just get this program done. I did not really care; a social life was totally out of the question. I remember them having all these Pub-Crawls and all those social events I wanted to attend, to just show up and sit for a while but I do not want to go drinking on a weekend and spending the whole night, no. that is not my thing.

In Maria's opinion, professors and department staff were very friendly and helpful and always willing to help international students. For her the responsiveness and care showed by staff to international students were unusual:



My departmental secretary was really helpful. They are very nice people. You can just walk up to them and tell them you have this problem and they always have solutions. If they do not have the solutions they will direct you to someone with whom you should speak. Everywhere you go people were very friendly and willing to help. That helps a lot and makes you feel better. I found that really, really important.

The professors are very friendly and are always willing to help. They care a lot not just about your academic life but your social life as well. My professor would invite me to his house for dinner during Christmas and so on. He would even come to my house and pick me up to give me a ride to his place. All those things make you feel at home. When it is like that that loneliness and homesickness does not really come into the picture. I mean there will be days that you feel that way but then it helps. You find people are really helpful here.

### **Juggling Many Things**

A major obstacle that Maria negotiated daily in her journey as an international graduate student was the lack of funding. She is often overwhelmed by and with her financial obligations, especially in the absence of a scholarship that would significantly alleviate some of her financial challenges. Maria found it difficult and very expensive to live and pay fees and other expenses that continue to rise annually. She shared:

I entered this program thinking eventually I would get a little funding to at least cover my tuition fees. That has not happened at all and I have had to juggle many things to be able to pay my tuition and it is huge. We are paying a differential fee that is over one hundred dollars for one class. That is a lot of money and if I do not have funding from anywhere, I probably will not have enough funds to pay my tuition. It is really stressful. I am not the only person going through that. There are so many international students in my school that are going through this. It is not a pleasant experience at all. Physically and mentally you are tired it just gets to a point where you are just wanting to be done and move on and then I will be done with this university...

The lack of adequate funding caused Maria to take on numerous part time positions on and off campus so she would be able to survive and accomplish her academic goals:

Now, this summer I just told myself I have to work and work really hard. So I go to the call center then I go and do overnight at Wal-Mart. All this is just not for nothing. If it were that I had to just like paying my rent and little things like that I do not think I would stress myself by doing all these things. It is just that the tuition fee is killing. It is just killing me. I am taking two classes and I am paying almost two thousand dollars. When you take like three classes you pay almost like four thousand dollars. If you do not have funding how are you going to survive? It means you have to raise the funds yourself.

Which means you have to sacrifice a lot and juggle a lot of things.

Maria managed to find a way to make ends meet through her numerous part time jobs. Even so, she was still concerned that having to “juggle” so many things may be detrimental to her mental health and academic career. After spending so many hours working outside of her academics she sometimes has difficulty getting enough rest:

When I am juggling too many things your attention is divided. I am not able to perform well academically probably because I am not able to put in enough. It is not like you do not want to put in a lot but it is just the circumstances into which you find yourself. I come home from work, I am tired, what do I do. I have to work because I need the money to pay all these things. I need to pay my rent, I need to pay all these things and eat. So, what do I do? It is really hard. It is not the best anyway. I wish they could do something about it. The university does not care anyway. It's just money that they want. They just want more money. That is all they care about. I find even right now that they place more emphasis on research than they do academic stuff, how much money professors bring into the university and what money they are raising from students.

### **Preparing for Better**

Maria's story is one that she described as overwhelming. Yet she has managed to find ways of survival and has grown as an individual. The struggles have helped to strengthen her resolve, faith, focus, and drive to survive and be successful:

I am a Christian and sometimes when things happen you kind of fall on that and say it is ok. As a Christian it is normal to go through ups and downs. I think that kind of helps... I think it has been an experience. For me, if I go through this program and if I am finished I would really be proud of myself that out of nowhere, out of nothing I have been able to

get through this by my own hard work. I see it as just preparing me for better things in life or maybe more challenges that if you ever find yourself in even more difficult situations than this, you can so survive it. It is all useful experiences.

## **The Story of Georgie and Rueda: Learning Together**

### **Background Information**

This account is about the experiences of a couple, Georgie and Rueda, who were both engaged in graduate studies in separate departments at the university. Although their presence on campus was primarily to facilitate Georgie's goal of pursuing doctoral studies, they both attended the university in different colleges. Before coming to the university Rueda graduated with a Bachelors of Arts degree in English and was a middle school English teacher in their homeland. She decided she wanted to pursue graduate studies at the university instead of staying at home. She hoped that her studies she would improve her chances for better employment when she returns home.

Georgie, on the other hand, never had a professional appointment since he entered his program of study at the university immediately upon completion of his double degree. He completed both his bachelor's and master's degrees concurrently in four years instead of the typical seven years both degrees would have taken. Upon completion of his double degree he opted to engage in studies at the university over a top European university that had also offered him admittance. His choice was influenced by his desire to become a professor, and the program offered by the university, in his opinion, gave him this opportunity.

### **"Here Everything Is New"**

At the time of the study Rueda was in her final year of her master's program and Georgie was nearing the completion of his third year of doctoral studies. Rueda was excited about the prospect of studying at the university and the improved status she would enjoy from having an international degree. Nonetheless, she was worried and nervous because she did not

... [k]now how the professors deliver knowledge in a class. I did not know how Canadian professors or Canadian universities provide their classes, how they deliver knowledge, how their homework, how the assignment should be assigned or marked. So I just

worried about the difference. I worried about myself whether I can adapt to a new academic environment or not because this is quite new.

Georgie pointed out that when he first arrived at the university, he observed that everything was different from his home university. He was curious about the newness and the possibilities. As we spoke about his impressions he acknowledged that when he first arrived on campus he straightaway realized that

[e]verything was new. It was not just the place. If you move from one place to a next or from one university to another university in China maybe you would not be so excited because you already know about the university, how they operate and how the people will operate in China, because they have the same culture. Here in Canada everything: the atmosphere, the environment, the building construction, people and language everything is all new. I was just like a baby and my mother brings me to the supermarket and everything is new for me.

### **"Every Voice Is Respected and Valued"**

Both scholars engaged in conversations about the changes and the differences that they encountered as they studied in the university. Rueda found the Western mode of inquiry challenging at first. She shared the story of her first encounter with the university in the form of a class and how critical thinking was introduced to her. The idea of probing one's thoughts, knowledge, and ideas was new to her. At first it was very offsetting for her coming from an educational culture that never encouraged such thoughts as the norm; rather, students were expected to know direct responses for questions asked of them:

I still remember he [the professor] asked me about racism in China I first responded there is no racism in China. But when he asked more I found, you know, that there did exist racism in China. So, I found this asking, what he called the Socratic form of asking questions is quite important for critical thinking. I had never heard about critical thinking, never heard people talking about critical thinking in Chinese university. Chinese people do not pay attention to this, this asking and the way of thinking. They just want students to be high in scores and memorize a lot of knowledge. Your memorizing is quite important to take lots of test. To get our certificates is important. Here is different. What

you learn, how you think is important. I found that to be different. I think they pay more attention to the process.

Rueda learned to embrace the idea of critical thinking and probing ideas and thoughts and soon was employing her newly acquired skills in her learning and conversations with her husband and family back home. This allowed her to be able to challenge the dominant knowledge with which she entered and also her previous academic stance and mode of learning. Georgie, for his part, recalled the many discussions and probes he has had in his sessions with professors and fellow students. While he admitted that at first the questioning and probes were offsetting for him, he also conceded that “there is something in there” [the questioning] because it caused him to stop and think about his actions and responses. It also allowed him to see that there are no set responses, and according to Rueda, “every voice is respected and valued.” He shared how he saw this played out even in the way examinations are run. He explained that in China students are expected to memorize information that enables them to do the examinations; what they learn is the knowledge itself. However, he is coming to realize that here there is little or no memorization, and they more care about the ability to learn and develop the critical-thinking ability of students:

I remember for the first middle term exam in a statistics course I worked really hard to try to prepare for the exam but the questions were just out of my expectations. They were just different types of questions as those I did in China. I couldn't understand what the question was asking. In China when you memorize the skill or steps to solve the questions then you can survive in exam. Here, after you memorize it you also have to understand everything like why and when you need to use it, then you transfer what you memorized into solving the actual problem. There is no direct answer in your mind for most questions in exam in Canada. I can never get a direct answer. I need to get used to that... here in Canada, there are more open questions... so you have to think broader and more critically.

Rueda agreed with Georgie that the two ways differ from one another. In her opinion, the voices of students were valued, and so professors encourage students to speak up and air their opinions. This was unlike her previous student experiences back home, and she had great difficulties at first becoming accustomed to the new behavior. She stated:

Students here they dare to speak up their voice. At first I really had difficulty trying to speak out. Chinese students always tend to be obedient in class. They dare not speak different opinions in front of the professors or teachers because this behavior would be considered impolite or not respectful. This kind of thinking is really deep rooted in my heart and also influenced how I behave in my class, so I did not speak out. I was so scared and worried about making mistakes. I am worried about being laughed at in front of the class. I am worried the professor would be mad at me or will feel I did not respect him. So I have a lot of concerns when I try to speak out in class. So I am not as active as those Canadian students. They always speak out their opinions, make different arguments and discussions but I just... most of the time I just listen.

Georgie, too, was finding great success with the new approach and listening to the opinions and ideas of others. He found that this process and mode of teaching had helped him significantly in his course. He sometimes struggled with his experiments and findings. He struggled because he tended to rely on his own wits to get responses for his queries, as was the standard thing in his culture. He did not think that anyone else could help him with his research; after all, it was his research and he knew it best. However, he found that at the university he could get help probing colleagues about his research. These meetings were designed and intended to do just that: help:

I was talking about my experiment and the supervisor asked what my problem was and then I said "I cannot figure out why the water that comes from the sand is not uniformed. How do I make it uniformed?" How can I solve this? I had tried many methods but could not figure it out. It was at that meeting, one of my office mate's gave me some suggestions to use the agar to stabilize the water without changing sand's thermal properties. That finally solved my problem... Even they do not know much about my research they still can help me to solve some tough problems. After that, if I have the chance I always talk to my office mates and we did very well we always try to help each other. We all do a good job at cooperation. We always try to understand about what everyone else is doing.

Georgie found his department members helpful as they would arrange times to meet as a group to discuss their progress in their research and discuss assignment and presentations ahead of submission and occurrence. From these meetings feedback was provided and this helped Georgie in his tasks. He stated that

Anyone wanting to attend this department's seminar or to do a poster or do a presentation at a conference outside of university we will meet and do a practice. Everyone else will pretend that they are the audience and ask questions to make suggestions on everything: your gestures, how you talk, what you should talk about and what you should not and the figures, typos, mistakes, everything. Why do you use this theory? Why do you use these words? Why do you use this sentence? How do you transfer this slide to the next slide? What is the connection?

Both Georgie and Rueda thought this kind of learning liberated and allowed them to express their own ideas and challenge dominant ideals with which they struggled. The processes of probing and responding helped them to become more open to other ways of viewing things and varied possibilities for any situation. What appealed them most was that this was acceptable rather than denied. Rueda declared:

Here you feel yourself is respected. You feel more human. You feel you are respected in the learning process. I feel the respect I get from the educational experience, no matter your classmates, your friends; you feel you are respected here. They want to hear your voice that is quite important. In China most people tie it to authority. Who has the authority? Who speaks? Here everybody can have a choice to have their own voice to speak out their opinions, you know, you can have different opinions. And you brainstorm a lot. You can share different opinions from others.

### **"The English Here Is Different"**

Both Rueda and Georgie shared stories of their struggles in their communication in English. Rueda taught English at the middle school level before leaving her job to come to Canada. She studied English for numerous years as her major. Before coming to Canada, she considered her English to be very good, yet living among the people she found there were particular challenges she encountered in the use of English here:

I learned English for maybe ten or eight years in China and I also learned English as a major in university so my English, I think, is above average level in Chinese student but I still face a lot of problems, you know, communication problems when I try to communicate with some of my English speaking friends. You can just talk some kind of superficial, not deep, you know. But if you speak in Mandarin or Chinese we can speak a

lot broader, a lot deeper and yes. You know, in English when you try to say something and you are stuck and you have to find the words, *what that word is?* Sometimes, you know sometimes your language problem makes your communication less powerful, less impressive.

I remember once he [Georgie's friend] told us a joke. He said, "You went to a bar, ouch!" He went to a bar ouch. *Why? What is the point? What is that?* I just felt so puzzled. You went to a bar ouch? He saw us so puzzled and that we do not understand so he felt a little bit disappointed or he tried to cheer us up but the result turned out to be like this; we do not understand... Then he explained to us like bar as two meanings. One is, you know, a pub another is something like a stick. So "you went to a bar, ouch!" I did not understand until he explained to us. He tried, you know, to improve communication, to improve the relationship but we do not understand. There are language problems sometimes he tell us some jokes but I do not know the words or I do not understand what the point of laughing. Why do you laugh? I do not understand, so you feel you are left out sometimes. They are talking about these movies, band, music and we do not understand, we do not know them you also feel left out.

Rueda felt that these kinds of inconsistencies in the language proliferated misunderstanding. Furthermore, she argued that when such issues existed they enabled superficial relationships as individuals were not able to have deep conversations and connections. Georgie, too, struggled with this issue. In his opinion, the English he learned from the text books and the English he experienced in the university were different. The variances for him caused many challenges, especially when he was not sure what was being said. Georgie explained:

What we learned about the English language is different from here especially in speaking and listening. What we learned in China as how to talk, the way people greet each other is always different from here. So when we come here it is different. Some students who were very good at English in China and they come here find they do not understand. For me, I am not a good language learner my English was never so good when I was in China but as I told you I want to be a teacher in the university in the future. I want to be doing research so I needed to come to a better university. So it is not because I am good at English why I wanted to study in an English speaking country. Many people are like "I am very good at English and I want to study in an English speaking country" or some



people come here because they want to become immigrants here. My situation is not a common problem. My English level may be lower than the average Chinese students here so it took me a longer time to get used to the language.

Georgie remembered clearly examples of times he was confused with the way things were said as opposed to what he had learned as appropriate. In offering insight he offered and shared,

In China, the way we learned greeting in China, like we learned "hello" or we say "how do you do?" What we learned in China is that when you first meet someone say "how do you do?" For the second time around or for your friends you can say "nice to meet you." Or for the first time you can say "nice meeting you" and then the second time or after that you can say "nice to meet you." But here no one pays attention to that. No one is saying "nice meeting you" everyone is "hey, what is up?" or "hey, how is it going?" No one says "how are you?" like we learned in China, but everyone says "how are you doing?" instead. We did not know what "how are you doing" means the first time we heard. I asked my wife and my younger sister "do you know what is how are you doing? They both responded "no", they do not know.

My wife, she majored in English. Her English is better than most Chinese students. She knew what "how are you doing?" means because she was a teacher of English in China after graduating with her bachelors. She taught in a middle school in China before coming here. She learned from the text book that "how are you doing" in 2010. Maybe Canadian people began to say it ten years ago but even now in 2013 textbooks in China just began to show up "how are you doing?" Before that there was just "how do you do?" or "how are you?" or "nice to meet you." So that is totally confusing for me. In China in the textbook we say "what is your major," "who is your supervisor?" I remember when I was in the orientation people did not say it like that. People say: *what are you taking? Who are you working with?* I was confused the first several times. It is not something difficult it is just that you do not know it. Once you know it you will never forget.

### **"I Keep Losing Some Parts"**

For both Rueda and Georgie, the language issues they encountered affected their studies in ways they would not have imagined. They both had missed opportunities and deadlines based

in their lack of the cultural and linguistic knowledge. Rueda always felt that she had to play ‘catch up’ since she felt she had to do more preparations for class than other students since her language was not as good. She elaborated:

When I am having class, for sure, I cannot completely understand every word the professor says. So the way you acquire knowledge is some kind of losing, you losing some parts because you cannot completely understand what the professor says, what your classmate says. When they are doing discussions, you know, this is big problem because maybe other students they learned eighty percent or ninety percent in class but for me maybe fifty to seventy percent. So you are losing some part so you have to spend more time after class to read that material or before the classes to read more times. Maybe you read one time and that is enough to understand everything, for me I read twice sometimes three times, four times, that is possible. So you have to spend more time when you have language problems. When doing assignment also sometimes I cannot read the professor’s remarks. I do not know what they are writing because their handwriting is so hard to read. So we cannot get full response from the professors that will kind of helpful for your improvement in your next assignment because of language problems and with writing also. Because with language problems your writing cannot be as good as the native speakers and they will impact your marks, your scores.

Writing, I always have issues, I think because I have a lot of assignment... I remember a lot of professors tried to correct my grammar errors, and the words I use, sometimes the tenses and some verbs I did not use right... But although it looks like small points and not so important but it really make me a little bit frustrated. I feel like, Oh, I make so many mistakes in my writing. Before I came here, I have heard that Western people they tend to use the passive tense because they want to be objective and they say Chinese people they like to use active tense. They always use “I” as the subject because they are more subjective or something, so when I did my writing I paid special attention to this. Then I found out that not every assignment you need to use passive tense; it all depends on what you are writing about. At first I really always tried to write in passive tense.

They both conceded and shared stories of how this lack of linguistic knowledge affected their grades. There was at least one situation where they each had to redo some area of assignment

because of language barriers. Georgie had to redo an entire course because he was not competent in the academic language, English.

For me, yeah, I had some hard times with the course, as an international student. I took the statistics course twice: the first time when I arrived here and I took that course and then, maybe after one or two months I was worried my score could not over 80 which will affect my scholarship, so I dropped that course.

The second year I was much better at English than one year ago and got used to the teaching style here so there was no problem for me and language so I did very well in that course. So for the first time I guess there was a language problem, language barrier.

For Rueda, this issue would be enlivened in the form of a final assignment that she had to redo. She shared:

My last assignment with a research course, the professor told me I had big problems in my literature review part because she pointed out two problems. The first one is I did not have my own thought in my literature review I just wrote down what happened, I just put what they wrote in the literature. I did not put in my own thoughts inside. That is a big problem. The second one is when I cite literatures... the form is not right. It made me look like I had plagiarized. She said I need to make some changes. She also pointed out a lot of citing forms, you know, incorrect forms here and there in my assignment. That was my last paper and at first I felt so upset and shocked because before when I tried to finish this last paper I spent two or three weeks on this, finding literatures and reading those, but the results turned out to be like this! I felt so frustrated. I felt I am a loser or something like that, you know you feel, and I feel I made so much effort on doing this but the professor still was not satisfied.

I did not know what to do until I found a friend to give me some help, you know, some writing tips. I also have to thank my husband who also helped me a lot correcting my papers. Then I spent like a whole week rewriting my paper. I submitted my paper again and this time the professor was satisfied.

## **"You Feel Kind of Distant"**

The challenges both Georgie and Rueda encountered affected the way they saw themselves in the university and their respective colleges. Rueda stated that she did not feel like she belonged in the environment. This she explained was because she felt distanced from other students.

People here are nice, polite, and respectful, and the campus environment is quite welcoming; people are helpful but sometimes I feel distant, you know. You feel people are very polite, they are very respectful but you feel kind of distant. You feel you are not touching their heart, you sense some kind of distance. They may be very polite to you. They speak very nice to you, but you feel distance still. That is my general feeling on a whole.

I think the hardest time for me, was the first period of my program. It was the first semester. The first class and in another class I had a lot of experience and people tended to have discussions, separate discussions in three or four groups. People just speak fluently and very fast, talking about their topics but I do not understand what they are talking about because of the language problem. So I felt left out. It was just so lonely at that time and when it was my turn I cannot speak very fluently. I tried to find the proper words to express my feelings, my topics and because of the language problems people tended to be not so interested or not so focused on your talking. So they were not so helpful in your learning improvement or something like that.

Both seemed to be at their best when they are engaged and were eager to do so. Georgie explained:

At the new student orientation I made many friends. Also in my group I have some friends from China. We attended the same university and were in the same group. So, there was the orientation and that happened in the Bowl where there was dance and free food. Then we walked around the city and talked with everyone from different countries. We talked about the difference. That was a very exciting moment. Those were very exciting days for me. Orientations take two or three days in the summer. There is the new student orientation and the graduate student orientation. I also went to see the fireworks with my friends. That also happened during orientations. I still remember other stuff but they are not as clear as this one. This one is very clear in my mind.

Georgie is a graduate teacher assistant in his department and boasts that he always tries to help other members of his department. He meets regularly with his fellow colleagues and when they go on regular field trips for their laboratory work. They also regularly have lunch together. Georgie also enjoyed helping others and getting involved in department activities. He stated, "Tomorrow I will go to Swift Current to help other guys in my department."

Rueda, too, felt like she fit in when she had the friendship of other students. She indicated that she did not have many relationships with local students outside of class, and so she tended to bond more with people from her home country. She attributed this to the fact that she always felt she did not belong in the new environment. She felt "no matter how welcoming the country is, the culture is, you still feel different it is not your place. You do not feel the sense of belonging." She admitted that she felt more at ease with her fellow Chinese students because they were from the same culture and so they could better "swim the tides together."

Here, with the local students, I do not have too much interaction in daily life nor to other international students most of the time it is just the Chinese students. But I have to say I still do not have too many interactions with them because if I live in a residence on campus maybe I will have more interactions. I know a lot of Chinese international students who live there and most of the time they will go out shopping together. Once I have any Chinese students in the same class I feel, "Oh Chinese student!" And I feel so eager to talk to them and we will exchange opinions on what the class and professor will be like, how the assignment would be something like that. That is how Chinese students always bond together like a group. When you are having class when you see Chinese students they are always together. I think for me one reason is that you feel a little bit helpless but when you find your partner from the same country of the same culture you feel you can rely on them or you feel kind of help so you kind of always bond together because you are the same. As for my interactions with Chinese students; yes, when we are in the same class but as for our daily life I do not have too many interactions because me and my husband we live a little far from other Chinese students.

I do not know how other international students feel but in Chinese culture people tend to be together instead of being separate but here in Western culture I found they more tend to be individual. You solve things yourself or they think more about individualism, not individualism, you know what I mean? They are more into individuals

but Chinese tend to be together more like a whole or something like that. So, that is why I feel lonely and there are not too many Chinese people here, yes. You know when I was in China, eight people together, we spend our classes together, we sleep together, and we talk together. If you have problems they will automatically know that and they will help you or talk with you. At least you feel better no matter is the problem is solved or not at least you feel better. Here you just sometimes feel lonely because of the language, because of the culture. Even if you some friends here but you know from different cultural backgrounds they cannot, you know, completely understand how you feel. Of course they can give you some comfort but sometimes I think that is far from enough.

[W]hen I first learned this I tried to imitate the way of how they dealt with problems. I have to say, I think I changed a little bit; not a little bit, a lot. Now I tend to be more individual or I tend to be more individual or, rely on myself, self-reliant. So this is a big impact on me because... but I still kept some of the characteristics of being working together. So right now I get used to this impact so I will not feel uncomfortable with Western people when they just... sometimes I feel they are cold you know because they are not so tend to be together but now I understand that and I try to try this myself and I did not feel uncomfortable so I get used to this. I adapt to this culture a little bit. I also, I kept my own culture also. So, yeah, I think that is actually a great improvement for myself. You are not just limited to one culture; you need to be open to others.

### **"Your Roots Are Always in This Tree"**

Rueda pointed out that for her, feeling a sense of belonging was very important and was steeped in her culture. In her culture the idea of maintaining “roots” is important to citizens and so Rueda always sought to embrace and engage that sense of belonging:

Chinese people love to talk about roots. No matter how far you are your root is always here (China or home). It is like leaves, always compared with leaves. No matter how far you are your root is always in this tree, something like that in our culture we have, even if I am in Canada.

She disclosed that she sometimes felt a sense of belonging through her interactions with fellow Chinese students. She further found belonging in her husband and family, but there were still times that she felt lost. She felt displaced in many instances because she missed the essential

elements of her own culture. She wished she could still engage in her own cultural traditions and teach her local compatriots some of her culture and by so doing forge a more wholesome connection with the new community and its citizens:

Here people just spend the day like a normal day and the Chinese people here they tend to not, a lot of Chinese people here try to adapt to the Western culture and they are no more celebrations or get together for the Chinese festivals. So you feel kind lost you know. I really want to celebrate these festivals with people, with Chinese friends, you know with some of my foreign friends so that I can introduce them to my culture, but I did not have many chances to do that. I think these festivals also provide a good chance for you to get, to receive a sense of belonging because this is your festivals, this is your festivals and you can feel some comfort in these different festivals because they have their history of why they became this; you have special food to eat and when you are doing this, when you are celebrating you have a sense of belonging, but here no.

As Rueda shared that she felt no sense of belonging with local students, but she felt more connected to professors in her college than with local students. She discussed this below:

I do not have too many local friends. They are helpful in class, you know when we are doing some discussions they always put out a lot of new and creative ideas. That is quite helpful for me because I have never thought in that way. After class they are also helpful because I have some language problems and when I ask them they are always willing to help. But in life we do not have too much interaction, we just have interactions in class.

I experienced, I think, different kinds of professors in Canada and think it is the happiest experience in Canada. The general features are they are: very nice, helpful, respectful, and they like to have interactions after class even in daily life, you know. Like we go to a professor's home to have potluck and we can drink beer or have some very nice chat in a restaurant or something like that. Yes, I think that I even have more connections with Canadian professors than with local students. I did not expect that before. I do not know why. Maybe professors are more open, more patient to hear about your story or your country, your culture because not every local student is willing to hear you talk about your country, your culture or how you feel about what, what and blah, blah. They just try to, you know young people, like to talk about those things they are interested in not what you are interested in. but to professors they always like to hear

about your voice. I think that may be because of their occupation, they are professors. They always like to listen so I feel even more interaction with professor. Professors here are more encouraging. They want you to be more active in class.

Georgie had a different opinion about professors since he has had mixed experiences both experientially and vicariously through his friends and colleagues:

My supervisor is a very nice person. He is Chinese and has been an immigrant here for maybe twenty years or so. I recognized that his thinking is more like a Canadian than a Chinese. He is busy now so there is no time for him to organize the lab meetings. Before, we had meetings every month or every two weeks. When he is in the office everyone goes to talk to him one by one about the research. If I have a problem I go to his office to talk to him. My supervisor never pursues us, he never pushes us. He never gives us deadlines like "you need to finish this by next week." He never says that. Sometimes myself or other people do not go into the office, but my supervisor never asks why one is not in. He never does that. He never pushes us; that is also a problem for us. If we cannot manage our time well then it is not good. My progress will be delayed. There is no real relationship between me and him.

While Georgie had a good personal and professional relationship with his professors and supervisors, he confessed that he knows of situations in his department where professors are less than fair to students. He shared that there are instances in which some professors treated students poorly and exploited their positions. One such situation existed with one of his former colleagues:

One of my office mates he and his colleague, another friend wrote a paper and put their supervisor as the third author and themselves as the first two and my supervisor as the fourth and that guy graduated before the paper was published so the supervisor removed his name. Yes, so now there is only the name of one student and two supervisors. That student that graduated his name was not on the paper so but they still cannot publish because it has to be revised. The supervisor now put his name as the first author and my office mate as the second. So now, my office mate worried about if the paper is accepted finally, maybe his name will also not be on the paper.

Both Rueda and Georgie had issues with the eating habits of Canadians. There were many things about the eating "Canadian food" that perturbed them. To them the food is different



and this caused them to have to prepare more of their meals and eat out less. For Georgie this was challenging because he had to learn how to cook and play a more active part in preparing meals. He declared:

The food here is different. In China we have all kinds of delicious food. Here there is not so much Chinese food and I have to cook. Most Chinese children do not cook at home and their parents will prepare it for them, so when we come here we have to learn how to cook. Chinese food always takes a long time to prepare. It takes hours. So each time my wife prepares food for me for dinner it always takes one hour or more. That is different from what we experienced in our daily life in China.

Rueda agreed with Georgie and shared that in addition to the differences in Canadian food choices compared to their own local dishes, she found that the Chinese restaurants here are also different. To her they have changed the original flavors of food to match the Canadian clientele and so even in that setting the food is different. It is not the same as in China. For her, she found it difficult and uncomfortable to figure out foods here.

They are also perplexed by the mode of transportation around the city. When they had just arrived, Georgie drove them everywhere. After a minor accident, Georgie stopped driving and began traveling by bus or by bike. Occasionally, if they were traveling out of town he would rent a car for the duration of the trip. They would have loved to walk to school and enjoy the views but the distances are too far to walk unlike in China where they walked everywhere. The mode of transportation is particularly challenging for them especially during the winter. Georgie pointed out:

The winter is just tough, especially when you do not have a car. It is very cold and very boring. In winter I do not enjoy the drive so I do not want to go to other cities.

Sometimes I go to the Hot Spring but most times I am just in my office. In summer you can see outside and see the blue skies, the green grass and in it is so bright sometimes you cannot even adjust your eyes on the screen it is so terrible.

### **"It Has Taught Me How to Think"**

Both Rueda and Georgie contended that the international student experience changed their lives and perspectives. Rueda declared that through her experiences as a graduate student at

the university she has grown more self-reliant. She also felt that it has drawn her closer to her husband, Geogie, as their bonds have been strengthened:

This kind of experience changed my way of thinking not academic thinking but thinking as general when you are thinking about, you know, daily life issues. It is daily not just academic environment. Sometimes I will put what I learnt in my daily life. How I see things; how I deal with things. I think I made a right choice to study here. With this international experience I feel I am a little bit closer with my husband because he studied here, he is changed. I think I made the right choice too, you know, make your family more harmonious and you can think more coherent or in the same line with your husband. It will make your family much happier. My academic life, my career life and my whole life, yes...

Geogie was affected by the experience of studying overseas. He boasted that he saw overall improvement in his life. He learned how to think and act and treat his wife:

Generally I feel my experience has been very good and I would say very successful and has given me a lot of improvement on everything. The way they teach me how to treat with my life, how to treat with my study, how to treat my family give me fresh ideas. This experience is very important for me and I will never regret choosing to come here. When I go back to China and for the rest of my life I guess this is wonderful experience for me. That is about everything for me, everything in my life. It has taught me how to think.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, participants shared their stories through their reflective thoughts, retrospectively, and painted five different pictures of what it is like to be an international graduate student studying at the university. Accounts of participants' experiences were presented in a way that gave voice and credence to their respective authors. Kuri's story painted the picture of a student who had to surpass many challenges as she sojourned in the new academic community. Garcia's experiences told the story of a student who felt unconnected to her surroundings and was driven by her desires to complete her program of study and return home. The author of the third story, Owaja, saw every day of his study experience as a fight as he constantly engaged in "battles" as he studied within the community. Maria constantly felt

overwhelmed by her daily activities and having to balance her life and study. Her account was one of juggling to survive. Georgie and Rueda told a story of working and studying together in the new community. Through their engagement in studies in the university they have learned how to work and play together.

My aim in the study was not only to air participants' experiences but also to uncover what it means to be an international graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan. With the accounts described it became necessary to conduct further analysis to arrive at an understanding of the data. In order to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of what it means to be an international graduate student, in Chapter Five I will further arrange the data into themes salient to understanding the phenomenon of being an international student studying at the university. To do this second analysis the data had to be studied intensely for themes that would bring out the essence of what the participants shared through both their individual uniqueness and their comprehensive representation of the phenomenon.

## **Outsider From Afar**

**They see me yet they do not know me**

**Who am I really?**

**I am outsider from afar**

**I entered this haven**

**Now recognizing the ground is uneven**

**Will I be able to shine?**

**Will this place ever become my home, my haven?**

**As I sit and stare their smiles portray**

**An unconscious snare**

**Who is she and what name does she bare**

**Why is she even here?**

**The outsider from a place, way out there**

**By introduction on instruction**

**I keenly watched their reaction**

**Surprise perhaps even delight**

**This was no small plight she has the fight.**

**Minutes grew into hours and**

**Hours turned into days, months and**

**The feigned surprise every time I rise**

**Who am I really?**

**I am the outsider from afar**

**Yolanda Palmer (2013)**

## CHAPTER FIVE

### What We See Now: Taking a Closer Look at the Data

The complex and heartfelt stories related by participants in Chapter Four were engaging and revealing of their lived experiences while studying at the university. Although I share the common experience of being an international student, I now realize and admit that, for me, their stories were eye-opening and reflective. The articulation of stories through participants' lenses individually and collectively also offered valuable insight into the phenomenon of studying as international students in the university.

As this was a phenomenological inquiry, it was never aimed at generating sweeping theoretical generalizations about the life of international students and its inherent meaning. My aim was to, through an interdisciplinary approach highlight participants' experiences and from them delineate and present commonalities that might help me to derive a more comprehensive understanding of what it is like being an international student studying at the university. To accomplish this I needed to re-search—go beyond the surface meaning—participants' stories, which I did by closely reflecting on the data for themes, so that the essence of what participants shared could be explained through both their individual uniqueness and their comprehensive representations.

Wanting to stay true to the research process and research question, I appropriated data within this chapter by responding directly to the research question: *What does it mean to be an international graduate student studying at the university?* This is in keeping with the phenomenological process which entails capturing the meaning and/or essence of a phenomenon (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). As I contemplated the overarching question, many other questions flooded my mind. In an attempt to maintain focus on the phenomenon and its meaning, I posed questions to myself and the stories in the previous chapter: *What are the commonalities across the stories? Is this significant to the overall understanding of the experience of being an international student at the university?*

As I struggled with the data and coming to an understanding of what it means, many patterns and themes converged in my mind. The tussle with the data was tiring and bewildering because each set of pattern or themes, in my mind, were worthy representations of the essence of being an international graduate student at the university. I therefore struggled with each; weighing them against the literature and against the data to arrive at designations that could be

considered more appropriate. As I struggled with ideas, the words of Robert Frost came to mind, when he reflected on his decision to take the path less traveled, “I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference” (1992).

I essentially needed to see past the obvious to tacit nuances exhibited through the data to come to an understanding, a wide awakening, of the lived experiences of these international students and reasoning by which these understandings were undergirded. In keeping with the interdisciplinarity focus of the research, I sought confirmation through the literature and data, I also had conversations with participants, other graduate students and my supervisors. It was through these deliberations that I was able to arrive at the themes that have been presented within this chapter. Themes were ascribed according to the frequency and similarity in responses by any one or more participant in the study.

In this chapter I discuss the interconnections across the perceptions of the six participants about their experiences as international students. In discussing the central themes and/or ideas across stories, I drew upon arguments from previous studies and literary works to strengthen the interpretation of data. In addition, I echo some of the participants’ words already expressed in Chapter Four. This was done primarily to demonstrate how their words led me to the conclusions I drew. A major tenet of phenomenology is that it offers the researcher an opportunity of personal reflection when evaluating stories. I assumed a reflective and reflexive stance through this chapter as I interwove my own thinking with that of the participants and their stories. I was reflective in that I mulled of participants’ stories while reflexively looking inward to my own experiences as an international graduate student, educator and researcher. This discussion is also guided by and confirmed by the review of literature presented in Chapter Two of this study.

### **Outsiders in the University: Learning Peripherally**

This research is grounded in the field of hermeneutics so I wanted to present a view of the data that depicts hermeneutics at work. Inspired by the concept ethno-poetics used by Hymes over the last several decades I contrived a poem using excerpts and direct quotes from participants’ narratives about their experiences as international students. The term ethno-poetics is a merger of the terms ethno—people and poetics—poetry and is used as a form of narrative analysis (Hymes, 2006). The background picture is representative of participants combined expressions of being overwhelmed in the university. Words and phrase taken from each

participant are strung together as in a found poem to give a collective view of the experiences these individuals encountered during their tenure at the university.

### **International Student**

A foreigner, you come into a new country, tired and jetlagged.

Every day is a fight “life running on the track.”

Everything is new here.

I feel like a babe, a cultural and linguistic babe having to deal with adults.

I had to learn everything from the ABC.

What am I doing to me?

Trading life for studies, standing among giants

Judged differently, condescended, and treated unfairly. I feel the scare in their eyes.

Feeling defeated by others. Feeling unsafe and uncomfortable,  
unconnected, not belonging, branches seem far from the tree; no matter how far you are your  
root is always in the tree; in your country.

Why did I come here to this country?

Lost in language; having to work thrice as hard as other students.

The days are just unending. Always something to do at school.

minus 30; cold winds blowing crazily enwrap me

I trek miles to the supermarket. I register my first fall. They laughed.

Passing people inside having fun, oh it is so frustrating.

What am I doing to me?

Juggling many things to survive. Sacrifices, priorities no time for friendships.

An international education does not give you a fish it teaches you how to fish.

Mixed bag of experiences, overwhelmed but I feel more confident more mature as a student.

I made the right choice to study here...

The preceding found-poem when taken at face value hijacks organization, rhythmic patterns and style. Yet, on closer observation, it does have a distinct style of its own and tells the story of the international students in the study converged. As I strung together the pieces to compose this poem, it rang true to me that these individuals were outsiders in the new academic community. Learners entered the university to pursue their studies; but also they were largely non-members or outsiders of the community into which they hoped to join.

As a premise of their international status foreign students' experiences are characterized by their non-citizen outsider status (Margison, 2012). International students by virtue of their status as non-citizens, which does not afford them the needed capital, have difficulty gaining access to and entering into the inner sanctum of local groups within the university. The Oxford Online Dictionaries define an outsider as "a person who does not belong to a particular organization or profession." In the case of international students, such students do not belong in the local students' groups within the institution.

Sentiments of being outsiders have been documented by scholars, who chronicled their stories of alienation during their periods of study. Himani Bannerji (1995), in her book *Thinking it Through*, wrote about her experiences as an international graduate student in Canada. She recalled her feelings as a graduate student then:

I was an outsider in and of my discipline and the classrooms I inhabited... Students would talk among themselves with ease and were willingly responded to by professors even when there were disagreements. I looked for reasons for their sense of shared reality. I was not in their reading or thinking ability... I was an outsider and not much by the way of intellectual performance was expected of me. (1995, p. 57-58)

Bannerji's feelings of alienation and disillusionment are but one example of the scholarship of being a peripheral learner or an outsider. Villanueva (1993), Rodriguez (1982), and hooks (1998) are scholars and writers of color who also recorded detailed descriptions of their tenure as students and scholars in universities in which they felt they were outsiders.

These feelings were echoed by participants in the study who felt they were not "on the inside" of the local groupings on campus and the general community. Vygotsky (1988) maintained that students learn through social interactions with other learners. The social nature of learning therefore implies that for students to learn they need to have social connections within the new academic environment which affords them a sense of community and belonging.



International students indubitably want and need to feel a sense of community within their university of choice. A sense of community allows students to harness a feeling that they “matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9).

Contemplating the data and the idea that these students were painting a picture of individuals on the periphery—outsiders—I became enmeshed in thoughts of my days as a youngster growing up in Jamaica. I grew up in the days when ring games were popular among Jamaican children. One of the most popular ring games we played as children was *Farmer in the Dell*. I hated that game because in the end the “cheese” always stood alone. Why must the cheese stand alone? Entering into the new academic community, students found themselves to be outsiders because they were unable to gain full membership much like the “cheese” in the dell. The data revealed that although participants were registered full time students in the university they were still primarily “non-members” of the community because they faced particular issues based on their backgrounds which influenced their membership in the community. As I pondered this position, I began to tether thoughts of other examples that were analogous.

Finnerman et al. (1994), producers of the motion picture *Forrest Gump*, positioned the protagonist, Forrest, as the consummate outsider. Forrest did not fit into any groups or career ventures throughout his life. Jenny was the love of his life since childhood. Forrest always tried to get on the inside with Jenny despite her refusals. He desperately needed to belong to her group of friends and community. In response, she often offered him a token friendship, but Forrest, based on his physical and mental limitations, never really-fit in or felt he belonged. He always appeared to be different from the others.

The problem with being an outsider in a community of practice is that many engulfed in feelings of alienation and invisibility. As outsiders, these students had the ubiquitous feeling of not “belonging and of being different, of having a lost sense of self, of being alienated...” (Shabatay, 1991, p. 137). Like the narrator in Ellison’s (1982) *Invisible Man*, they do not see themselves fitting in with the membership of local groups. Yet they want to be a part of the group and be involved and feel valued by other members of the group (Wilson, 2001). These individuals, through their stories, illustrate that they often stand in observance from the periphery and hardly assume full membership or fit into the dominant group or community of practice [CoP] (Wenger, 1998) as oftentimes their attempts at fitting in fail. This puzzled me and later I

was to realize that failing is indeed a part of the process of scholarship. This argument is congruent with that of Lave and Wenger (1991) who argued that newcomers learn the ways of their new communities through reinventing. According to them, through the seeming failure and doing and redoing activities, individuals are actually in the process of learning. This idea is elaborated at a later point in the dissertation.

Being an outsider means an individual is not integrated into the group into which they hope to join. Underlying in the concept of outsider is the idea that there is a bordering or a social order that determines who gets in and who stays out. Merleau-Ponty (2012), however, argued that “inside and outside are inseparable” (p. 407) as both need the other. One cannot get on the inside if s/he has never been on the outside. Therefore, the outsider is dependent on the insider and vice versa.

### **Cultures Colliding: The Dialectic between Country of Origin and Settlement**

Hoffman (1990), in *Lost in Translation*, wrote about her struggle with the differences in the culture from which she came and the “Canadian” culture. She and her sister were alarmed at the differences between themselves and the other students in the school they attended. Nothing seemed like it did in Poland. Furthermore, once they entered the classroom their Polish names were changed to names that reflected the new culture they have now become a part of. Most international students maintain their names in the new Canadian post-secondary institution; yet, there are others who change their names to take on the newness of the environment that they have joined. This trend is typically among Asian students and is symbolic of a change in identity for the individual (Kang, 1971) as they seek an identity more in tandem with the new settlement community.

My sister and I stand in the schoolyard clutching each other, while kids all around us are running about, pummeling each other, and screaming like whirling dervishes. Both the boys and the girls look sharp and aggressive to me—the girls all have bright lipstick on, their hair sticks up and out like witches’ fury, and their skirts are held up and out by stiff, wire crinolines. I can’t imagine wanting to talk the harsh sounding language. (Hoffman, 1990, p. 105)

Like Hoffman and her sister, the selected participating international students struggled with and expressed shock regarding the differences they perceived when they entered the new learning

academy. They were faced with the polarization of their culture of origin and the new culture. This divergence was evidenced through the opposing ways of doing and knowing. Kuri spoke about the difference in culture and expectations when she said, “you cannot expect to have the same lifestyle you had back home.”

From the interviews and observations, I realized that participants were challenged by their encounters with the unfamiliarity of the environment and the way things were done. Kuri, in our first interview, highlighted the idea of newness when she said “[f]irst of all when you come in, you come into a new country... The way you are here functioning is very different; the way of working is very different. It is a different culture.” Kuri acknowledged that she was no longer in her home country but rather a new one which undoubtedly bore unfamiliarity to her and other newcomers. Her statement affirmed that when one leaves his or her country of origin and university to pursue graduate studies overseas the experience in the new country can differ significantly. This marked variation is rooted in the fact that the routine behaviors and worldviews from which we come are no longer appropriate and in some instances become irrelevant (Kim, 1994).

In *Hunger of Memory* Rodriguez (1982) told his story of being a young Mexican immigrant attending school for the first time in California. As a student, he quickly became aware of and was affected, even confused, by the differences between home and school. “What he grasps very well is that [he] must move between environments, his home and the classroom, which are cultural extremes, opposed” (p. 49). This caused the young Richard to become quiet and withdrawn around teachers and other students. Likewise, participants in the study struggled with the move from their home culture to the host culture. The two seemed polarized to participants and they often in retelling their stories made comparisons of the two cultures as they wondered about appropriate behaviors in the university. Monture-Angus (1995) shared similar sentiments as she engaged post-secondary institutions both as a student and professor she was conscious of that the ways of “understanding and learning” that she engendered were not the same as those of the dominant institutions that she found herself a part of. Therefore, she was constantly torn between two opposing cultures, Aboriginal and a mainstream Eurocentric culture.

Kuri shared her story of when she first entered the country and had to find a place to live. She became frustrated at the process because there were so many new things for her in this one experience. Before leaving home, she lived with her parents and never had to contemplate paying

rent. She contended that rental prices in Saskatoon were expensive, which caused her to settle for living in a basement. The concept of living in a basement was alien to her since she came from a tropical country; where houses are not constructed with basements. She also learned that the basement was a “cold place” and that there was something called a “space heater” that could help her heat the basement. She stated, “I did not even know there was something called a ‘space heater.’” This activity of finding a home took Kuri on a roller-coaster journey. She had no idea what to expect in searching for a house in a foreign country.

“Dear Basia,” I write, “I am sitting at a window looking out on a garden in which there is a cherry tree, an apple tree, and bushes of roses now in bloom. The roses are smaller and wilder here, but imagine! All this in the middle of a city. And tomorrow I am going to a party. There are parties here all the time, and my social life is, you might say, blooming.” I am repeating a ritual performed by countless immigrants who have sent letters back home meant to impress and convince their friends and relatives—and probably even themselves—that their lives have changed for the better. I am lying. I am also trying to fend off my nostalgia. I couldn’t repudiate the past even if I wanted to, but what can I do with it here, where it does not even exist? After a while, I begin to push the images of memory down, away from my consciousness, below emotion. Relegated to an internal darkness, they increase the area of darkness within me, and they return in the dark, in my dreams. I dream of Cracow perpetually, winding my way through familiar-unfamiliar streets, looking for a way home. I almost get there, repeatedly; almost but not quite, I wake up with the city so close that I can breathe it in. (Hoffman, 1990, p. 116)

The experience of leaving home to live and study in a foreign country comes with much anxiety and nostalgia. Hoffman in the above excerpt portrayed a picture of an individual who missed “home” and felt like an outsider in the new environment. She started her account by portraying an image of someone having fun in the new environment but ended up admitting that she felt unattached to the new environment. Nothing was familiar to her and she was constantly on a search for “home.” Hoffman’s account reflects the experiences of international students and helps us to envision the range of feelings experienced by foreign students as they seek to pursue studies in overseas institutions.

Critical and reflective analysis of the data pointed to students being perturbed by the unfamiliarity of the new culture. This unfamiliarity caused them in many instances to feel like

they were in stages of infancy in the new academic milieu. Georgie admitted that he felt like “a baby and my mother bring me to the supermarket and everything is new for me.” Challenged by the overall foreign culture, which according to Peterson and Coltrane (2006) encompasses the gamut of possible daily activities into which students possibly find themselves engaged, participants expressed shock and bewilderment, thereby reducing to a state of infancy (Maravelias, 2010) based on the overwhelming nature of the differences encompassed in the experience. Owaja expressed similar sentiments to those of Georgie and said he felt like “a cultural and linguistic baby who is supposed to act and socialize with other adults.” In relating their experiences to that of being toddlers these participants evinced the degree of foreignness they encountered in the new environment. Owaja further stated that he wanted to act like an adult, “but like a baby I had to learn everything from the ABC.”

The phenomenon of adults being like children bears frustration and anguish for individuals. Garcia, Kuri, Maria, Owaja, Georgie and also Rueda were all from educational cultures and systems that structured differently from Canadian post-secondary institutions. The foreignness of the new environment coupled with the shift participants made when they left their home cultures—into which they have been immersed for many years—to embracing new ways and means of life was a source of disorientation and frustration for them. Blaut (1993) pointed out that the issue at hand is not only adapting to Canadian culture but also moving into an academic culture that is specific to North America. This experience can be difficult for learners as they seek to maintain being adults while feeling and operating like infants in the new learning environment (Wagner & Magistrale, 1995). While I hasten to point out that international students are not infants or neophytes, I also note that international students when they enter new learning communities overseas are placed in positions where they have to become acculturated to or learn new ways of thinking, feeling and behavior within the new institution (Berry, 1992; Kim, 1994). The experiences students have as they navigate the new environment take them back to a place of infancy, a place of “nothingness,” “ground zero,” where they are expected to learn the ways of our new environment and perform within the given conditions.

When I first entered the university community, many of my thoughts and impressions somewhat mirrored those of a child in a new place. I knew nothing about the community and its culture. My research and readings online did not prepare me for what I found. In the weeks and months that followed my arrival I lived in curious anticipation as I learned the “ropes” of the

place and people. Every move was preceded by a call for directions and/or suggestions from my friend. Firstly, getting around was an activity plagued by challenges as I attempted to learn the art of riding the bus. Here buses travel “east and west” not “up and down” as is the common vernacular in Jamaica. Back home we paid our “fares” when we entered a bus; here I had to get a bus pass. At the time I was negotiating these cultural and linguistic differences I felt like a child who was having his first day out. I felt like Alice in Wonderland spiraling downward through the tunnel of uncertainty, whisking through time and space not being able to fully capture or understand the happenings; not having a clue of the intricacies of my new surroundings. On that first day I ended up taking the wrong bus and went through the city for almost one hour.

Owaja and Rueda shared stories of being uncertain about what was required of them as they entered the university and daily class activities. Owaja and Rueda identified with the differences in expectations and argued that they were both confused about the expectations of the university and more so what professors expected of them. They were caught between two cultures and value systems. Their preoccupation with the expectations of professors against their own expectations gave them the drive to work toward accomplishing tasks efficiently to satisfy the requirements of their professors and respective departments. Although Kuri highlighted the idea that the expectations of the host and home universities and communities differ, she, like the other participants, expressed shock at the differences.

One example of the shock expressed at the differences came from the experiences of Maria came from a culture and education system which maintained a hierarchical power structure and embodied a constant struggle for power between staff and students. Hofstede (2001) described this distance between staff and students as a *cultural distance*. There were specific and rigid ways of addressing faculty. Coming into the new environment where there seemed to be a democratic culture power structure, she expressed shock at the relationships that she witnessed among faculty, staff, and students. Furthermore, that she was expected to follow suit perturbed her. Both Maria and Kuri were surprised at the way students were allowed to speak with faculty members. To them, this was strange because in the cultures from which they came, such informal relations would be considered discourteous. These findings corroborate those of Khawaja and Smith (2011), who reported that international students often have issues addressing and forming relationships with their overseas professors in the overseas post-secondary institutions.

On entering the university; I, too, struggled with this issue and it took me some time to become accustomed to the system. At first, I was shocked at the idea. Not following suit, I often felt left out so I have learned to accept and do likewise. As a Jamaican scholar, I learned to show respect to elders and people in authority. Respect in this regard means that I address people the “proper way” by adorning them with their proper accolades when greeting and/or communicating with them. So, the trend of addressing professors, in the new academy, by their first names, rather than the customary forward of doctor or professor was enigmatic. Within my native culture professors and lecturers are viewed as superior and having accomplished the great task for which many students struggle and of such were never viewed as equal to students. Referring to them by their acclaimed titles is our way of showing respect.

Although, over time, I have come to appreciate and accept this as the cultural norm of professor and student interaction within the new institution, I still have difficulty referring to professors by their first names. I am challenged with this because previously, when I studied, the acceptable manner was to precede a professor’s name by his or her title of Professor or Doctor. In my sojourn here, I have learned that professors are more relaxed and allow for first name interactions to open themselves and students to the idea that together we are co-learners as we both learn one from the other.

Thinking about this theme evoked memories of my first class as a student at the university where I first encountered this issue of addressing professors by their first name. I needed to speak with the professor about the first assignment. In addressing him I prefaced his surname with doctor so and so. I was taken aback by his gentle nudge that I was to call him by his first name. I found this difficult to do and explained to him that if he does not mind I would like to call him *Dr.* until I am used to the idea since in my own culture this is what the acceptable norm. It took me almost the entire term to get accustomed to this informal mode of teacher-student relationship.

### **Learning from the Periphery: Seeking Belonging**

“No matter how welcoming the country is, the culture is, you still feel different it is not your place. You do not feel the sense of belonging.” (Rueda)

Rueda’s statement confirmed my finding that participants did not feel they were connecting to the new community nor did they feel they *fit in* with local students and the general community.

Mirroring Pecola Breedlove in Toni Morrison's (1993) *The Bluest Eyes*, Kuri shared her story of alienation in the university. She described herself as a "misfit," an "outcast," and an "alien." She felt isolated by members of her department and roommates, who she said did not necessarily talk to her. She perceived that this was because of how she looked. Similarly, Morrison's Pecola was alienated from her community because she was considered to be "ugly" and was born into a "strange" family. She did not have many friends because she was unlike "them," who were from the "good and normal" homes. In childlike simplicity she begins to fantasize that if she were to have a pair of blue eyes then she would be the envy of everyone and they would all want to be her friend because she would have had the bluest eyes.

*Outsiders in academia* are side-lined based on the different repertoire of social, cultural, linguistic and academic knowledge and skills that they bring to the academy. These differences do not afford such individuals full membership in the "in group." These variations cause these selected foreign students to "live on the edge between [their] unique world and world of others that they have just entered" (Shabatay, 1991, p. 136). Living between both worlds ultimately results in various issues for these students since they never fully fit into either.

Richard Rodriguez (1982), in *Hunger for Memory*, told his story of a failed assimilation into mainstream schools in the United States. Attempts at assimilation into the California school he attended were unsuccessful. The failed efforts subjected Richard to spend much of his youth in confusion, loneliness, fear and depression. He was literally caught between two worlds; none of which he felt he really fitted into or belonged to. Much like Rodriguez, Owaja highlighted through his story that he has always sought to fit in with his classmates and the general community but failed to do so adequately. His inability to gain membership caused him to feel like "a watcher, an outsider watching other people having fun and enjoying their life." The feeling of being an outsider or a watcher implies that the individual is alienated from the general group and does not have inside access. He insisted that some groups were hard to break and so he was often jealous when he saw large groups gathered and seemingly having fun. Coming from a culture that embraces collective relationships, "fitting in" was very important to Owaja. He admitted that he did not like being alone and needed to have relationships with others to feel a sense of belonging and "rootedness" in the group and university.

Recognizing she was the only "black person in the room surrounded by whites" not only intimidated Garcia but also made her feel different from other students in her group or the



general community. Not having any commonalities with other students other than being members of the same academic class caused her to feel out of place. Thus, she always remembered her “place” as a minority and outsider within the group. While Garcia shared that she felt unconnected to the new environment, it did not perturb her as it did other participants. In contrast to Rodriguez (1982), who made deliberate attempts to get himself “assimilated” into the new culture, Garcia made little attempts at connecting or *fitting in*. She was confident that she was not a member of the dominant group—and would never be, based in her ethnicity—and she was content with this reality. Fully confident of her role and position in the university, Garcia was very deliberate in doing only the “bare minimum required” (Kim, 1994, p. 393) to fulfill her role as a student. She said:

I knew I had to play my part to assimilate, but it was very difficult for me. Still, I have not assimilated and unlike the majority of graduate students who I communicate with... I have failed to integrate into the culture or some would argue that I have refused.

This deliberate non-attempt at gaining insider status, in my view, may be her way of preserving her own cultural heritage and identity. From the onset she was determined that she wanted to return home. Knowing she had to return home she wanted to maintain roots with her country and culture of origin so it would be easier for her to resettle. These findings are concretized by Wason-Ellam (2001), who in a study among Chinese immigrants families in Saskatoon found that these families participated in the periphery of Canadian society as a means of survival but never deliberately assimilated into the new culture. Myles and Cheng (2003) stated that international graduate students with families have less time for socializing since they have to see to the needs of their families. This lack of time inhibits the parent from sharing in regular social activities. Garcia was accompanied by her child, who she did not feel was fitting in with the new environment; her aim was to complete her program of study as soon possible and rejoin her family in her home country. Her motivations and motherly responsibilities did not allow her the time to get attached or connected to the new community.

Contemplating my own experience as an international graduate student, I realize that it reflects the stories of the above authors and those of the participants. Often when attending social and academic gatherings, I felt like Meursault in Camus’ *The Stranger* where it seemed that everyone else was “in” as they were “waving and exchanging greetings and talking, as if they were in a club where people are glad to find themselves among others from the same world”

(1988, p. 84). This was how I viewed local students, faculty and other staff, at least at first. I thought of their gatherings as an elite club into which I was yet to have gained membership. I always felt a certain discomfort from the feeling that I am not one of them but an outsider, not a member of the group. The uneasy feeling that comes with being in a place where I do not belong always lingered. I did not recognize my alienation as such because I am by nature very reserved. Yet as I listened to participants' stories, I realized more and more how much their stories echoed my own. I, too, have felt the pangs of jealousy as I watched students converge in groups that seemingly shared a bond and membership that I did not see myself possessing.

In the absence of connections among local student groups, participants shared that they remained rooted in their home cultures and family members. Bochner et al. (1977) asserted that one of the major sources of support for foreign students is their families and friends back home. In the case of the participants in the inquiry, I found that they felt more connected with groups and family members in their countries of origin. Maria, for example, spoke about having a big family back home which afforded her close relationships with relatives. In contradiction, within the macro-social and micro-social environment of the university she felt alone even when in a crowd. She felt no attachment to these groups as relationships and conversations, to her, were "surface" and she did not feel she could have deep connections and/or relationships with those individuals.

Participants expressed that they missed their families and friends back home. Missing their families, who were not in proximity to them, caused students to seek connections with other students on campus. Not finding this attachment among local students foreign students like Rueda and Owaja confirmed findings by Smith and Khawaja, (2011) and Gebhard, (2010) that international students, in the absence of family members and old connections, seek solace in other students from their home countries and culture. Kuri, in contrast to Owaja and Rueda, argued that she had no relationships with students from her own region. Instead, she made connections with other international students. Her only connection with her home country and region was through her parents. Rueda and Owaja shared that they made friends with other international students from their home country because of the similarity in culture and that they could safely speak in their mother tongue without feeling different.

Ironically, while participants felt they did not fit in with their local peers, all but one student indicated that their relationships with faculty and support staff on campus were very

good. They highlighted the genuine spirit of some professors who visited and invited them for the occasional meals at their home. Rueda expressed that the best thing about her time studying at the university was the good relationships she had with professors and support staff in her department. She felt that professors at the university were more open to and interested in her as a person. Lacina (2002) suggested that the relationship between professors and international students factors as an integral part of the experiences and possible success of these students in overseas universities.

The students in focus came from cultures and education systems steeped in hierarchical power structures which maintained *high power distances*. Hofstede (2001) defined *power distance* as the “relationship between a boss and subordinate” (p. 83). Power distance, I have adapted to mean the relationship between students, faculty, and other educational administrators. High power distance refers to the shift from a formal relationship to a more casual relationship among international students and faculty and staff. The shift to having close connections with professors and support staff outside a professional realm seemed challenging for participants. Similar to Maria and Kuri, I, too, contemplated the shift in relationships that I experienced here in the university. Being invited home by a professor or asked to call him or her by his or her first name “humanizes” them and lessens the power distance between faculty and students. This lessened distance is interesting for me because it also speaks to the idea that professor and students are co-learners in the classroom and so both can learn from the other. It makes teaching and learning less formal and allows for mutual and beneficial exchange of thoughts among professional scholars and “scholars to be.”

Maria, Georgie, and Kuri, while agreeing that there were some professors with whom they had very good relationships, argued that there were other professors who were not as cordial to overseas students and greatly devalued and/or exploited international students to meeting their own ends. Rebecca Gilman (2000) in her play, *Spinning into Butter*, depicted student exploitation. The curtain opens with Dean Sarah Daniels doing a supposedly good deed for Belmont College’s Patrick Chibas, who is a student of color and of Puerto Rican descent. She offered him a scholarship. This seemingly innocent act we would find was Dean Daniels’ exploitation of the student’s minority status to meet her own ends at clearing her warped conscience. Patrick soon recognized Dean Daniels’ intent and transferred his course to another university. Stories told in the study ended with students feeling frustrated and out of place. The

power differential or the lack that existed in the social relationships with faculty was stressful for these students. Kuri and Maria both spoke about being treated in a way that they perceived was tainted with racial biases. However, unlike Patrick my participants were determined to complete their courses of study and remained in the university even in their frustration.

### **Unconnected to Place**

*When we met for our “chat and follow-up” she was clad in multiple layers of clothing and a toque yet she shivered slightly. “I hate this place and the cold,” she told me. Sometimes I wish I could just be finished and go back home. What’s with this cold? Will it ever end?”* (Journal Entry, 2014)

My observation and conversation with Maria confirmed the feelings of the international students in the study. Gebhard, (2010) and Gunawardena and Wilson (2012) argued that many international students have difficulties adjusting to the new weather conditions that exist within their host country and the ambits of their host institutions. Reflections shared by the participants confirmed that students did have challenges adjusting to the new weather. Their experiences also indicated that they felt alienated by the physical environment. They did not feel attached to the physical “environment and climate” (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 526) of the university and its surrounding community. Participants in the study shared stories of feeling disconnected to the environment and the seasonal changes and displayed a level of discomfort with the reality of the ever-changing climatic conditions. They described the weather condition as “harsh,” “bad,” “tough,” and “boring,” and shared stories of feeling alienated and lost especially during the dark dreary days of winter. Rueda and Georgie shared briefly the impact that the weather condition had on them, especially winter. This affected them greatly as they were not able to move about as freely as they would have desired. Maria shared that she felt that the weather “slows you down.” Maria, Owaja and Kuri were also perturbed and further alienated by these harsh conditions. For Maria these conditions impacted even in her mood and performance in her academic pursuit.

When I first arrived into this city it was fall. That year, the first snowfall was early October. I remember looking through my window and envisaging going out in such weather conditions. As a Jamaican, coming from a tropical country; we never see snow. I decided not to go out that day. Instead I viewed the snow from the window while entangled in a sea of nostalgia

drifting along with the gentle island breeze my skin been kissed by the tropical sun. Embedded in my self-deliberations were feelings of confusion and alienation. These nostalgic feelings, I believe, were also implied in the stories of participants as they shared stories. Three participants like myself were from tropical countries (India, Ghana, and Jamaica) where they had never experienced snow; therefore, operating in such weather conditions was new to them.

As newcomers they were alienated because they found some areas of the city inaccessible. They complained about having to walk long distances especially in winter because of the accessibility of buses to reach some areas. A major area of concern was that there was a limitation on the hours buses go by, especially in the evenings. Owaja shared his experience of feeling alienated and isolated when during the winter he had to walk long distances from the supermarket to his home.

**Seeking Recognition and Validation.** As a teacher of foreign languages, I tend to use multiple approaches in my teaching. Among my teaching methods I liked to use the communicative method. I appreciated this method because it allowed students to use the language communicatively—rather than theoretically—in class. One of my most treasured memories is the effect congratulating and recognizing students’ efforts had on them and their participation in class. Whenever I recognized and hailed a student, I immediately saw its impact through a change in attitude, which in most cases was followed by a change in grades. I recognized and validated the student and this encouraged and motivated him or her to continue doing well.

Villanueva (1993) shared his story of his English 301 class and how he felt undervalued for his efforts. After working hard at assigned tasks he noted:

“[e]very reading is an adventure, *never a nod*, no matter how late into the night the reading. For his paper, Victor, the 3.8 at Tacoma Community College, gets 36 out of a possible 100—“for your imagination,” written alongside the grade (p. 70).

The above reflects the author’s frustration of being neither recognized nor validated for his hard work and knowledge in the preparation of a class assignment. Bannerji (1995) also documented that she felt “unvalidated” (p. 62) in the university and the classes she attended. Her “unvalidation” was due to the differences she bore racially and experientially.

Participants in the study also felt invalidated and unrecognized by peers and faculty. Owaja shared that he often felt uncomfortable and strange when his classmates remained quiet

after his presentation; this is only one example of the search for validation on the part of the participants. In relating this story to me, Owaja admitted that he interpreted their silence to mean what he was saying was not interesting or valued to fellow classmates. The lack of validation was confirmed when he said he wished they said something during his presentation to “ease his pain.” For Owaja, recognition from his peers would mean that they saw him as a valued member of the group. It would lessen the feeling of loneliness and isolation on his part. An acknowledgement would also help him to “save face” which is important to him as a Chinese scholar. To him, losing face—which is the image of self that the individual wishes the world to see—is a direct blow to his self-confidence. Moreover, based on his culture, losing face or not being recognized is invalidation and is a signifier that he has failed in his attempt to fit in the group.

There are other ways that Owaja’s story could be viewed. One such way was revealed to me at a conference I attended. During my presentation I shared Owaja’s account. After my presentation came an opposing view to Owaja’s confirmed perception that what he said was irrelevant because there was a “silence” upon his completion. He hoped someone would have said something to build his confidence and confirm that he knew what he was about and shared valuable information. On the contrary, one member of the audience, a Canadian male of European descent, responded. He thought that the other members of the class remained quiet to prove that what Owaja said was valid. He explained that by remaining silent they were in fact recognizing Owaja as an expert rather than say something that would invalidate him. As I reflected on this story, it brought to my mind Silverman’s (2010) declaration “every way of seeing is a way of not seeing.” Evident in this story was a polarized view of the same situation. I began to wonder, which of the perceptions was most accurate? Was accuracy even a factor here? This, for me, also opened the door to the possibility of the dispersion of misconceptions and misunderstandings between groups. Reading between the lines, it dawned on me that Owaja was acting on his cultural belief of “saving face.” It was important for him to feel valued in the society and be recognized as a valuable member of the group.

In contrast to Owaja, Garcia expressed shock at the comments colleagues and faculty made about her presentations. She felt that the utterances of her peers and faculty were discriminatory because for her and in her culture it was obligatory to do and speak well. She insisted that owing to the fact that she was from an English speaking background, whose

education system was very competitive, speaking well was standard for her and other scholars like herself. A major part of her training in her home country was being able to perform and present in written and oral forms. Therefore, to her it was not strange for her to do well presenting in English.

### **Condescending and Discriminating: Feeling Judged**

From the interviews I conducted, I realized that participants felt they were being judged by racial perceptions and stereotypes held by the host community. These findings are supported by Clarke-Oropeza et al. (1991), who claimed that international students face discrimination daily. Kuri stated:

I find that people are judgmental. I think especially if you are a visible minority you are judged by what you wear. You are judged on a different plane especially if you are an international student.

Embedded in Kuri's words is the idea that international students were treated differently and as "minority" to the local group. Kuri's feelings were corroborated by Garcia who stated, "As an international graduate student, I always felt that I had to work thrice as hard as domestic students. I just felt that we were 'judged' differently." The fact that participants perceived and argued that they felt they were being treated differently is important. The university continues to strategize and formulate policies and anti-oppressive programs aimed at diversifying its faculty, staff, and students, yet participants feel they are discriminated against. This situation demonstrates a disconnection between university policies and policy makers and those in direct contact with the international students: students, faculty, and other staff.

Maria and Kuri recreated experiences in which they felt they were blatantly treated differently based on their race. Egbo (2008) intimated that implied in the issue of racial discrimination or racism is the belief that one group is "intellectually, physically, and culturally inferior" (p. 6) to the other. This idea is imbedded in Kuri's statement when she said, "you are judged on a different plane, especially if you are a minority student." At the time of the interview Kuri, Maria, Owaja and Garcia willingly shared accounts of feeling inferior to other students based on the actions and comments of their peers toward them.

While the above excerpts represented Maria and Kuri's expression of being racially discriminated, Garcia spoke of the subtlety of racism she perceived in the learning environment.

Garcia, like hooks (1988), felt racism and discrimination is alive within the institution. In hook's experience, she stressed that while there were no racist slurs spewed at her and other international students, the covert stares and insinuations made through the comments and jests of locals bordered on being racism. This covert discrimination made participants feel condescended to and uncomfortable:

... they did not make direct racist statements. Instead, they communicated their message in subtle ways—forgetting to call your name when reading the roll, avoiding looking at you, pretending they do not hear when you speak, and at time ignoring you all together. (hooks, 1998, p. 57)

In the case of the international students, they felt they were considered inferior to local students. Garcia explained that the discrimination she perceived was subtle because there were no open attacks but she sensed it in their comments and stares. Kuri used the term “sugar coated” to describe the discrimination she encountered in the university but tells of an openly racist attack on her off campus. The use of the word “sugar coated” indicates a subtlety and had me thinking whether I too have experienced this “coated” covert discrimination or was this just a perception that the participants held about locals. My mind spun in a thousand directions. I am drawn back to the crux of the matter at hand; the meanings that international students derived from their experiences.

I recall Owaja's story about feeling “the scare in their eyes” when he approached members of the community for conversation or assistance. As he shared his story it became clear that the “scare” for him meant that the people behaved differently toward him based on his race, and that he appeared different from locals. Racial discrimination was recorded by the CBIE (2009) as one of the major issues that international students encounter in Canadian post-secondary institutions. Fiddler (2014) reported that many Aboriginal students were suffering from the effects of racism and discrimination meted to them by their white counterparts. Racial discrimination is also widely recorded among minority groups in the United States. Morrison, (1993), hooks (1988), Villanueva (1993), and Rodriguez (1982) chronicled racial and discriminatory treatment being meted to groups and scholars that have been adorned with minority status. Chief among these groups which have documented stories are *los puertoriquenos*, *los mexicanos* and *the negroes*. These stories have been documented for years and shed light on the delicate issues of racial discrimination within schools and university.



## **Securing Funding: Surviving Economically**

From participants' stories, it was evident that they felt powerless and isolated in the university and this spiraled into numerous challenges. Their anecdotes further revealed that they constantly negotiated life, living, and survival within the university and its surrounding community. Living a negotiated life meant participants were constantly interplaying between their academic lives and the life of those in their immediate social and geographic community and making connections and choices on how to move forward with their studies and lives.

Owaja, in his first interview, noted that his daily experiences at the university were like “a fight.” Owaja used the word “fight” here to describe the struggles and issues he encountered. His description of his day-to-day experiences being like a fight, in my opinion, aptly captures an essential piece of the puzzle of studying in the international environment of the university. Participants in the study all highlighted fights that they encountered at the university. They struggled socially, academically, linguistically, mentally, culturally and financially in their negotiations of daily life and living. Bourdieu (1986) pointed out that a lack of relevant capital—cultural, social, economic, academic and linguistic—ultimately results in struggles and issues for newcomer students when seeking to adapt to the new environment.

The struggles encountered came with much emotion on the part of individual participants. Maria expressed that she was “overwhelmed” by the struggles she had to negotiate in her daily activities on campus. Kuri also expressed concerns about the struggles she encountered. She, like all participants, did not feel she fit into the university environment. Their reactions as they shared their stories indicated that these struggles frustrated them. Their collective frustration was stenciled in my mind as Kuri looked sadly at me, almost in tears, when she talked about the many struggles she encountered as she engaged her program of study and the community. hooks (1988), in *Talking back*, lends support to participants' stories about struggling in the university. She was a minority, black female, facing multiple issues in her journey as a student. Villanueva (1993) and Rodriguez (1982) struggled with the dominant discourses of the university and their status as minority students. Bannerji (1995) chronicled her experiences as an international student in a Canadian post-secondary institution. She struggled with fitting in and the general rhetoric of the new university. Monture-Angus (1995), in her work, highlighted the struggles of Aboriginal students including herself in trying to shed the past

and its colonized effects on herself and other Aboriginal students. Monture-Angus voiced frustration at the disconnection between the way of the university and the Aboriginal way.

Owaja, Maria, and Kuri candidly spoke about the financial challenges they each faced in the university that threatened their academic status, and so did Georgie and Rueda. These participants highlighted the relevance of being financially stable when engaging studies overseas. Bourdieu (1986) asserted that of all the forms of capital economic capital is the most significant in distinguishing and maintaining class elitism. A lack of financial or economic capital allows for the domination of culture and social networks by those in possession of such capital. Participants' stories and perceptions of their financial struggles and its impact on the sojourn of overseas students also found confirmation from studies conducted by Chen (1999) and Popadiuk & Arthur (2004), who concurred that a lack of funding affects the life of international students in the host institutions. According to Clarke-Oropeza and Fitzgibbon (1991), a financial challenge on the part of foreign students represents a change in their status and this led them to wanting to do something about it. Owing to the challenges they faced economically, Owaja, Maria and Kuri sought and achieved part-time jobs to meet their financial needs and to survive. Whereas not all participants sought jobs to assist them in their studies, these three did, and this made it significant enough to be mentioned. Chen (2007) articulated that without funding many foreign students are unable to pursue studies overseas. This need is played out in participants' need for financial stability to help them through their studies. Maria shared:

I entered this program thinking eventually I would get a little funding to at least cover my tuition fees. That has not happened at all and I have had to juggle many things to be able to pay my tuition and it is huge... It is really stressful. Now this summer I just told myself I have to work and work really hard. If you do not have funding how are you going to survive? It means you have to raise the funds yourself. This means you have to sacrifice a lot and juggle a lot of things.

The stories told by participants and their work exploits for survival mirrored that of Villanueva (1993), who also, in light of his financial limitations, engaged numerous jobs to make ends meet during his studies. For Villanueva,

[t]he daily routine has him taking the kid to a day-care/school at 6:00 a.m., then himself to school, from school to work as a groundskeeper for a large apartment complex; later, a maintenance man, then a garbage man, then a plumber, sometimes coupled with other

jobs: shipping clerk for the library, test proctor. From work to pick up the kid from school, prepare dinner, maybe watch a TV show with the kid, tuck him into bed, read. (pp. 71-72)

In the case of the participants in the study, the jobs provided the funds they needed to survive. Paradoxically, having jobs limited the time Maria, Kuri and Owaja had at their disposal to engage in social and cultural or general activities outside of their studies. Kuri and Maria both agreed that the jobs they had, coupled with their academic obligations, kept them busy. Garcia's statement best summates the feelings participants had regarding their status and negotiations in the university: "As an international graduate student, I always felt that I had to work thrice as hard as domestic students. I just felt that we were 'judged' differently."

The idea that they were judged differently has been expressed elsewhere in this chapter but forms a major part of the experience and motivation of the international students in this study. The perception of participants that they were viewed differently in the university urged them to place added emphasis on accomplishing academic tasks to ensure that they were proven valuable and hardworking members of the group. They felt obligated to work harder than local students. Therefore, they each one exerted more time and energy to ensure that they do not fail. The central idea of working harder than local students is one that was also reflected in the stories of Garcia, Kuri, and Maria. All three told stories about how busy their lives were as students in the academy. They were always on the go. Kuri pointed out that "[m]ost of the days I work something like 15 to 18 hours a day. But at the end of the day if you work hard you can make it."

Maria and Kuri were concerned that "juggling" work and school threatened their physical and mental health as well as their academic career. Both said that after spending so many hours working and studying, they had difficulty getting enough rest and eating well. Maria pointed out:

When I am juggling too many things my attention is divided. I am not able to perform well academically probably because I am not able to put in enough. It is not like you do not want to put in a lot but it is just the circumstances into which you find yourself.

Garcia struggled with the unavailability of time, which, like in the case of Villanueva (1993), affected the time she could spend with her child, thereby causing her to feel she had cheated her child of valuable bonding time. She did not engage part-time employment like others but felt overwhelmed by her dual tasks as a mother and a student. For her, there simply was never enough time for anything else.

### **Acquiring and Maintaining Academic Literacy and Academic Discourse**

Even though Kuri highlighted the idea that the expectations of the host and home universities and communities differ, she, like the other participants, expressed shock at the pedagogy employed in the institution. The use of critical thinking demands much of international students whose previous learning did not require such practices. According to Smith and Khawaja (2010) many students find it difficult to adjust to Western educational principles since according to Maguire (2011), these students are often negotiating “competing textualities between the dominant North American academic discourses and their own internally persuasive discourses” (p. 38). Smith and Khawaja (2010) maintained that students, especially many of Asian descent, find it challenging adjusting to the process of thinking critically. Critical thinking plays an integral role in communicative language teaching which is the dominant teaching method encouraged and employed in most Canadian post-secondary institutions. The challenge arises when students such as the participants are called upon to critically address classroom issues and concerns and based in their cultures they were used to memorizing and regurgitating verbatim. The shift from one to the other causes challenges.

The idea of critical thinking and that the possibility of probing and owning knowledge was new to most participants and this caused them much anxiety. Being immersed in the new teaching and learning style, participants suffered adverse effects as they adjusted to the change. Five of the six participants shared stories where their grades plummeted because they were not familiar with the ways of the university and its expectations. Garcia did not seem perturbed by the difference. She developed a method and a strategy and this for her was “location proof.” It worked for her wherever she went. Her determination and drive underscored her strength to move forward even amidst the varied differences.

Zyuzin, (2012) highlighted that in universities there are specific literacy skills to which students are expected to comply. Participants in the study were also challenged with the developmental processes of academic literacy. Rueda, Owaja and Georgie came from NNES territories and so they were more challenged by the academic literacy within the university than other participants who entered from countries where English was widely spoken and used as the standard language of instruction. Sufficed to say, all participants faced challenges in writing, using English as an oral tool for presentation and understanding. Rueda told a story about her challenges with the academic language and writing papers. She was asked to redo a paper

because the professor was not satisfied with the level of work and thought she had plagiarized rather than synthesizing and make the ideas her own.

As she told the story, sadness overshadowed her face and she sighed deeply. To me, her story and observed reaction registers the feelings and experiences of many international students. From her story, I learned that she had difficulties with scholarly reading and writing. She reckoned that she had to be always “catching up” with other students, which may suggest that she had difficulty adjusting to the Western pedagogic mode (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). I realized also that being told to redo the paper was not an easy task for her. When probed about her reaction she admitted that she was embarrassed and ashamed and at the time of the incident she felt useless and shameful.

Academic culture in my previous studentship—when it came to written presentations—was marked by strict rules and guidelines regarding how papers were to be written. The expectation was that papers were rigidly written academically in the third person. The first person was never used. The thought was that academic writing should be neutral, and so, the writer should maintain distance from the writing and not get personally involved. Owing to the presumed neutrality of academic writing, the use of the first person in writing tasks was often highlighted and identified as inappropriate. It was very evident to me that the use of critical thought, which is a self-guided, self-disciplined thinking with the intent of improving the quality of thought on the part of students (The Critical thinking Community, 2013) was something that was encouraged within the university. Overall, there was a more relaxed atmosphere in the production of assigned coursework than I had encountered previously.

My recollection of my first assigned written task as an international student at the university is imprinted in my mind. This seemingly simple task of writing a paper caused me great anxiety. I was accustomed to writing to structured questions that outlined exactly, on point, what I needed to write and what my professor hoped to read. I soon learned that this was not the culture of the particular department of which I was a participant. Free thought and critical thinking was encouraged and students were allowed to write about their own interests. At the university, professors across campus seek to raise the critical awareness of students and so students are allowed to develop their own ideas and craft appropriate responses that are unique to the individual. When individuals are critically aware, it promotes divergence in thinking and production, which makes for a diverse university and diminishes the power of egocentricity and

allowing thinkers to recognize that reasoning can always be improved (The Critical Thinking Community, 2013).

### **Communicating in English**

Human beings are communicative beings, thus, our lives are influenced largely by our ability to linguistically connect with others around us. Language is one of the most important expressions of self and identity (Delpit, 2002). When individuals can neither use their language nor understand another's language they become lost. Bakhtin (1986) noted that language can be both a cognitive and a social practice. We become connected to others through knowledge and use of language. While connecting may be done on many levels, the most significant level of connecting is when international students connect with fellow students, faculty, and other staff through language in particular contexts. The theme of language is one that is significant since

[w]ithout language, one cannot talk to people and understand them; one cannot share their hopes and aspirations, grasp their history, appreciate their poetry, or savor their songs. I realized again that we were not different people with separate languages; we were one people, with different tongues. (Mandela, 2013)

Essentially, language enables the individual to communicate with and understand others as well as learn important things about the ways and life of a people and become appreciative of them. When students do not know the language or feel they are lost and/or discriminated in language then they become powerless because language is the vehicle through which power is dispersed (Foucault, 1980).

Canadian post-secondary institutions, like other Western counterparts for the most part, promote and utilize English as the standard language of instruction (Jenkins, 2011; Lasanowski, 2011; Sawir, 2005). The use of a Standard English according to Foley, (1999) is hegemonic and positions the English of the dominant as superior and other "Englishes" are seen as inferior because they do not match the standard. The prominence of English in these institutions promotes the need for all students entering the universities to possess at least Basic English skills (Bamford, 2008).

As a Jamaican scholar, I entered my program of study from an English-speaking background and was accustomed to the use of an Academic English. Yet, during the process of the customary introductions it became obvious to me that I was the "other" amidst the group. My

Jamaican accent was pronounced and obviously different. To make things worse, I did not understand nor could I react to the banter of the other members of the class. The seemingly shared humor expressed, to me, was a secret code, one I was never meant to understand (at least so I thought). My speech, marked with an accent, caused looks of amazement from those present in the room. They were astounded to hear that English is the official language spoken in Jamaica and that there we speak fluently in English. Somehow, there seemed to have been the assumption that I was African and spoke a language other than English. Furthermore, in my writing I often noticed that there were certain words and/or expressions to which I had become accustomed that were never used among the members of the new academic community. My current status as doctoral candidate positioned me in recognition that, like reality and truth, there are multiple “Englishes” spoken throughout the world and certainly in academia. The multiple variations of the English language are often regionalized and based in particular cultures and so words and phrases used will differ according to the location into which we become inhabitants.

Maguire (2011), in her report, highlighted that even students with English speaking backgrounds need to be proficient in the “diverse repertoires of World Englishes” (p. 38). From my investigation, I learned that participants, even in possessing the required Basic English skills, faced linguistic barriers as they engaged other students, faculty, and locals within the new community. There were numerous anecdotes that participants shared regarding their use of the English language in the academy and the general community. They felt discriminated based on their accents and enunciations based in their own regionalized versions of the English language learned in their home countries. They felt that the reactions of locals to their appropriate use of English was stereotypical and that locals thought people like “them” should not be able to speak English so well. Kuri, Garcia and Maria all came from English speaking nations but found that their English was different from the Academic and local provincial English used in the context of the university. They felt that their linguistic abilities were undervalued in the new community. They berate the non-appreciation of their English language skills because they recognized that the English they spoke was different from the English used at the university. They varied phonetically, morphologically and syntactically. These variations necessitated that students switch codes from their own versions of Standard English to the standard of the university. When Kuri shared the story about her former landlord’s wife saying to her “[y]our English is so good.

Are you from here?” Kuri interpreted her comment to be that based on a judgment or stereotype harbored about people from her country or people who looked like her.

Lacina (2002) and Lev-Ari and Keysar (2010) concurred that the English spoken and used by international students is often not recognized in the universities into which they are enrolled. This invalidation of their use of English was confirmed through the anecdotes that participants shared. They recalled that their previous knowledge of English was not readily recognized nor accepted. These three participants spoke about the reactions of others when they speak English, which is the official language in their individual home country; Jamaica, India, Ghana. They felt that their prowess in the use of English is screened by stereotypes and misconceptions that are held by locals. This idea infuriated participants and their ire was reflected in their tone of speech and their facial expressions when they shared their stories.

As I grappled with the anecdotes and the emergence of linguistic challenges as a possible theme I had a follow-up conversation with Garcia where I asked her what was her experience learning in English. Her response bore similarity to that of Maria and Kuri. She like these two other participants did not feel she had issues with English. She explained that her experience was that the language and vocabulary she used were not readily accepted by the university.

I was surprised that there were some words that I knew to be scholarly and have been using for years in the Caribbean and were accepted as scholarly, there were not recognized here and so they were considered incorrect or inappropriate. Words like *postulate*, *posit*, *purport* were not used in the North American setting and I knew these to be legitimate words.

Interestingly, Owaja, Georgie, and Rueda were non-native English speakers (NNES) who studied English as an additional language (EAL) also expressed sentiments that the Academic language used in the academy was different from what they learned in their country of origin or from books. These students learned English as a second language. I found that the idea of a *linguistic variance* was highlighted in the stories of all participants. Georgie pointed out that “[w]hat we learned about the English language is different from the English spoken here [at the university] especially in speaking and listening.”

These differences caused much anxiety and stress for individual participants who struggled to acquire the academic language required for participation in classes. Owaja, for example, was mostly perturbed by speed of speech of locals and faculty. He was bothered by the



fact he could not always “catch” the speed and full understanding of what was been said to him. He also confessed that he did not always know what the appropriate thing to say under varied circumstances. Hence, he was often confused.

Not knowing what the appropriate language utterance can cause individuals to be stressed as they constantly have to check and recheck language using digital translators and this hampers fluid conversations and negotiations within the university and its environs. Owaja and Rueda spoke about their “having to catch-up” with local peers because of their language abilities. Both individuals were from China and studied English as their major at university in their country of origin. They both expressed shock with the difference in the “Englishes” that they encounter in Canada. Rueda argued that she studied English for nine years in her home country yet she was baffled with the English here. She thought there were gaps in the language she learned from the text, the language that is spoken among local groups, and that which she is expected to write and perform at the university. These thoughts were echoed by Owaja who self-proclaimed that he was a good English student back home yet here, at the university he was constantly at odds with the language.

I became enthralled with this interesting dynamic of the interplay between dual language learning and tri-language learning. Participants were engaged in negotiations between two variations of English, which were formal and informal. It also pointed to a shifting and weaving through three registers of the English language. They were constantly shifting through the English they learned and spoke in their home countries, the English spoken widely in the local provincial culture, and the academic language of the university that often varied by the disciplines. Participants tended to code-switch among the three registers of English to attain a consensual appropriation of acceptable academic protocols within the university.

Evidently, both Georgie and Rueda felt lost in the use of Academic English within the academy. As I observed Georgie one day I noticed that he spoke little and tended to use his home language and have his wife Rueda translate. He admitted that he never did well at English and was not comfortable with its use, and so he avoided using it as much as possible. They were amazed that the English they learned from texts back home differed substantially from what they hear in everyday speech in and around the university. As I contemplated the stories of the participants and my observation of Georgie’s language use, my mind flashed to Barrie’s (1950)

story of Peter Pan,<sup>2</sup> who one day after a battle with his archenemy Captain Hook<sup>3</sup>, himself and Wendy<sup>4</sup> fell into the river. Peter was on the verge of drowning and the Never Bird tries to save Peter by throwing down her nest.

She called out to him what she had come for, and he called out to her what she was doing there; but of course neither of them understood the other's language. In fanciful stories people can talk to the birds freely, and I wish for the moment I could pretend that this were such a story, and say that Peter replied intelligently to the Never bird; but truth is best, and I want to tell you only what really happened. Well, not only could they not understand each other... but they forgot their manners. (p. 133)

Like Peter, participants felt lost because there was a shift or variation in the language. Owaja, Georgie and Rueda, who were not from traditional English speaking countries, found that there were stark differences between the English they learned from the textbook compared to the English they heard and were expected to use in the university and its surroundings. They recognized that they were operating in different codes.

Georgie and Rueda previously shared their story about their visit to a friend who tried to make a joke about “going to the bar.” This anecdote exemplifies what it means to be lost in language. These students were familiar with “going to the bar,” a place where friends hang out and have a drink. They were unaccustomed to the word being used in its form as “a ledge.” Their friend’s use of the word with the latter meaning threw them into confusion.

The idea of being lost in language was also animated in the writings of Hoffman (1990) and Villanueva (1993). Both wrote about the feeling of being lost in the English that was spoken at their respective schools and universities. Hoffman was an immigrant student from Poland who studied in the United States and Canada. She entered her study experience in Canada from a different language background which posed specific challenges to her entering into a new environment. Villanueva (1993), on the other hand, was an American of Puerto Rican descent who had challenges with rhetorical aspects of languages. He, like Rodriguez (1982), found that the English he used to was more formal than that used within the university he attended.

---

<sup>2</sup> Peter Pan is a famous children's story that chronicles the life and adventures of young Peter Pan, who ran away from home and formed his own army of children.

<sup>3</sup> Captain Hook is Peter Pan’s archenemy in the story.

<sup>4</sup> Wendy is a character in the story that Peter had abducted from her home to be mother to his bad of boys.

The findings presented here also align with those of studies done regarding international students in the university (Fu, 2013; Tannis, 2010; Zhou, 2012). These researchers positioned issues with language as a major issue that international students encounter as they pursue their studies in overseas post-secondary institutions.

### **Situated Practice: Learning by Doing**

Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that learning occurs through engagement in communities of practice. This means that students learn through acting and doing activities that are common to the community. The transition to graduate school requires the acquisition of new skills and competences. Unfortunately, students at the graduate level receive minimal formal training (Maxwell, 2006) regarding these expectations. In lieu of formalised training sessions participants were able to learn cultural and academic protocols through participating in and doing everyday academic tasks by themselves and sometimes with the help of other students.

Being lost in the struggles of daily life, participants, through their stories, demonstrated that at some point they recognized their peripheral status in the environment or on the edge of the academic community and needed to take action to “fend for themselves.” Recognizing their outsider status and their intended outcome of becoming better scholars, each critically assessed his or her situation and reached inward to find strength and resolve, through their own agency, to overcome these challenges. Egbo (2008) regarded critical reflection as the most significant element of praxis. He, further, described praxis as the process through which the individual assesses him or herself critically through a series of deep probes surrounding the personal histories, beliefs of the individual, and how these affect their journey as overseas students. When individuals are able to identify who they are, they are able to “unleash their personal power, ... an internal force” (Egbo, 2008, p. 127) that enables them to recognize the inner strength that lies within and are able to effect positive changes in their lives. This inner strength is their resilience or the ability to overcome.

My thoughts and deliberations became arrested by an interesting commonality through the stories of the participants. During the second in-depth interview, each participant, when asked to give a summative expression of the experience as international student sang a song of transformation. My fixation and contemplation was with all the sad stories that they told; how did they happen to, at the end of the process, suddenly shift gears to tell stories of success,

maturity, and growth? This was puzzling to me. How can they be having such trying times and yet say they have grown? Was I missing something?

To clarify, I reconnected with participants to inquire and ascertain how is it that they were able to make such transformations. “I realized that I was here by myself and needed to find a way to deal with the issue” (Maria, personal communication August 22, 2014). These utterances were echoed by Kuri. She, however, added that she managed to become better through her daily activities and conferencing with peers and professors, who might have had similar experiences. The engagement of Kuri and other participants in the study mirrored Lave and Wenger’s (1991) belief that people initially join communities and learn from the periphery of the class. As they became more competent, they became more involved in the main processes of particular community; that is, watching and listening to others. They move from legitimate peripheral participation to ‘full participation’ (Lave & Wenger 1991, p. 37). Learning, thus, is not seen as the acquisition of knowledge by individuals rather it can be viewed as a process of *social* participation. Learning is ubiquitous in ongoing daily activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and the nature of the *situation* impacts significantly on the process.

Listening to Kuri speak, brought to mind my observance of the activities in which participants engaged. One particular instance stood out for me. I recall when I observed Rueda in class.

*Staring steadfast ahead, her eyes intermittently glancing from the professor to the screen she sits attentively. The professor speaks something of interest she momentarily bows her head to write it down then looks up again. She is sandwiched between two females of her own nationality. She continues to write on her pad shifting only briefly to take a picture with her iPad. She labels her picture.*

*She smiles to herself as she writes. The professor assigns a group task. She turns to the student on the left. The professor says “no you have to sit with someone else.” She looks around uncomfortably. The professor decides to pair students for the task. Her partner is a local Caucasian female. Shyly she smiles and moves over to the work area sitting first at a distance... close enough but not too close. She seems uncomfortable with the encounter.*

*She soon leans in and begins discussing earnestly with her partner. They worked together occasionally with a snicker as they share ideas. The allotted time ends. The*

*professor calls her to respond to a question. Startled she hesitates. She turns to her partner and after a brief discussion responded to the question. Professor thanked and congratulated. She smiled hanging her head low. She is the last to respond. The class ends she chatters with her “sandwich” friends one on either end (Class Observation Extended Notes, February 12, 2014).*

When I first wrote these notes, I had no idea what they meant or how they would fit into the scheme of things. I now realize that this was an important part in Rueda’s growth as a student and “scholar to be.” She was operating in a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Through participation and observation she was able to learn not only the lesson of the day from her professor but also how to work with another student from a different culture. I remember in our follow-up conversation after the observation, she said she felt successful working with her Caucasian peer. Showing agency, she was able to discuss which word was most appropriate in response to the activity. She also now knew why the other words were not suitable.

Realizing the importance of praxis and agency in the process of being an international student, I re-examined the data for further clues that could possibly help me to understand the phenomenon more clearly. Kuri’s statement “A foreign education does not give you a fish it will teach you how to fish. And of course it teaches you to be independent...” leaped from the pages. This simple statement I believe captures what I have been trying to understand. I wanted to be sure what she meant so I called Kuri and asked her to elaborate on the statement. Her response confirmed my initial suspicion. What she meant here was that as an international student one learns through his or her own actions and initiatives. One learns to be independent through doing and practicing.

I knew I was on the way to becoming a scholar when I came to the understanding that the academic ways of the university were poles apart from that to which I had become accustomed. This recognition and the motivation I had to accomplish my goal of successful completion of my graduate studies helped me to begin to critically reflect on my role as a student and individual. Who I am and what I hope to accomplish was “put through the wringer,” and from this process of contemplation was able to look past the issues I perceived and encountered. Kuri, Garcia, Owaja, Maria, Georgie, and Rueda also realized their strength and began to surmount the challenges as they engaged in the environment of the university. Rueda claimed she found her voice through her critical reflections of her situation. Finding voice through seeing how

classmates interpret text, solved problems, synthesized ideas for essays nudged her agency and praxis allowing her to take control of life and progress from “struggling” to “becoming better.” As I reflected on her experiences, I came to the understanding that my strength was evinced in becoming more participatory in academic discussions as I learned increasingly challenging concepts and the developed the language abilities to act accordingly. I realized that which causes me to “bounce back,” came through my religious beliefs. When faced with challenges, I reflect on and channel my energies through these beliefs. These sentiments were shared by Maria and Kuri, who both spoke about God and their Christian beliefs being their source of strength and hope for better. Each participant also demonstrated their strength and resilience through the relationships they maintained with their families back home.

Realizing and accepting their situation in the social world of the academy, they gained access to sources for understanding through a growing involvement within the social practice of the classroom community. Through peripheral participation and practice, these individuals transformed from a state of powerlessness and dependence to one of being empowered, “self-reliant” and independent members of the community. As they learned to justify a response, to see other points of view, and engage in deeper levels of talk, they were able to participate in profound discussions in classes. Through a multilayered practice of observing, listening, speaking, reading and writing they were engaged in self-praxis, which is an emancipatory tool.

Praxis involves “critical reflection—and action upon—a situation of some degree shared by persons with common interests and common needs” (Greene, 1978, p. 100). This, I found interesting since Maria, in her explanation to me over the phone expressed a similar vein of argument. She thought she needed to take ownership of her own life and its trajectory and so she participated in learning to strengthen and interweave strands of language, literacy, and content learning (Zwiers, 2008). These utterances were echoed in similar terms by Kuri who through her shared experiences spoke of her engagement with fellow hall mates and classmates and then imitating their movements. By doing this participants were able to replicate and reinforce the acceptable behaviors of the community of practice.

In time, Maria engaged in multiple tasks, making approximations and eventually learning the ways of academic literacy fostered in the university. These findings are congruent with Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of situated practice. I previously shared in Chapter Two that in situated practice the learner learns by directly and overtly acting in the community. The theory

also alluded that learning is ongoing as students do and redo activities until they have a grasp of the process. Therefore, all participants were situated in a community of practice, since each related anecdotes about doing their scholarly tasks and achieving. Rueda and Georgie both spoke about their missed opportunities or what some would have deemed a failure in assigned tasks. Situated learning however, would say that even in having to redo these tasks learning was occurring because in rewriting the papers and examinations they were learning the appropriate and desired behavior at a university level.

Finding praxis fuels transformation and empowerment from a powerless situation (Greene, 1978). Through my study, I found that participants found praxis through the resilience strategies or skills they employed that enabled them to cope in the face of challenges. Resilience refers to the individual capacity and support from family and academic community that international students have available that would result in them adapting to and ‘bouncing back’ from stressful situations with which they are faced during their courses of study. It is that process or processes that allow foreign graduate students, at the university, to deal with stressful situation and yet continue on their path to success.

### **Mentors and Mentees: Learning from Others**

The “scholars to be” presented in this study also highlighted the relevance of mentorship. Each student identified being mentored by another as a way of the university. When they spoke about the differences in professor student relationship I argue that this was indeed mentorship. Unlike their previous studentship in their home countries, professors in the university were approachable and sought to assist students with adaptation strategies in the new academic environment. Garcia, Maria, and Rueda spoke about being invited to the homes of their professors. They found this to be uncharacteristic of professors.

Mentorship is a personal relationship that ensues between an individual who is experienced (mentor) and one who is less experienced (mentee or protégé) in particular areas. Dednick and Watson (2002) argued that it is a reciprocal relationship aimed at promoting development and growth. Such relationships, notably brings about identity transformation. In the case of the study, I would argue that mentorship is a major implication that enhanced and assisted in the transformations they described in their stories.

Generally, the term mentor and mentee is used in academia as it is in reference to a professor/advisor/research supervisor and a student. My observation throughout this study was that participants were also being mentored by their fellow students and colleagues. When Georgie spoke about department meetings where fellow students would assist each other through questioning and suggestions, this to me, constitute mentoring. These fellow students were more familiar with the ways of the academic literacy and were modelling for their colleagues who were less knowledgeable about writing thoughtful papers and doing higher quality oral presentations. As Christie (1990) argued, “to be alert to the ways that one’s language works for creating and organizing meaning is to be conscious of how to manipulate and use it” (p. 22). These participants were able to harness their own skills and ways of operating in the new community through their observations and assisted tasks with other members of the university.

Through their interactions within the University, participants shared stories of transformation. Rueda expressed that she found her voice through her critical interactions and reflections; she was able to see value in the new way of thinking to which she was exposed. She and Georgie both thought they grew from the experience and it affected their lifestyle. They now viewed life differently, they said. Owaja thought he was better from the experience when compared to when he began his studies. He, too, thought he grew and had a better self-understanding and was more confident about his life as a “scholar to be” and learning in a Canadian post-secondary institution. Rueda shared that through her interactions at the university, she found her voice. She and Georgie both spoke about how their experiences changed their lifestyle and how they treated each other. Owaja, Kuri, and Maria all shared that they have through their experiences become independent. Garcia has grown in confidence and sees herself in a platform of advocacy. Each participant expressed that his or her negotiation through graduate school empowered him or her thereby fostering self-reliance, independence and confidence.

### **Summary**

The chapter sought to discuss the essence of being an international student from the combined viewpoints of the participants in the study. Their combined stories tell a stunning tale of transformation. Through their narratives these “scholars to be” painted a landscape of linguistic, social and cultural maneuverings and negotiations which transformed their thinking



and identities. These peripheral learners (outsiders) gained membership into the university by virtue of being offered positions to pursue graduate studies but largely did not fit into the local academic and social groups because of the differences in capital (social, academic, linguistic, cultural, economic) they encounter and the lack of academic language and relevant cultural capital to negotiate the new community.

The experience of being international students has been rendered a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon. Students enter the university as a community of practice as newcomers and outsiders enmeshing in the subject specific discourses, which builds on their prior knowledge and current language abilities and behaviors. Owing to their “outsidership” students had challenges adapting to the new academic community, language, and culture. Having difficulties in adapting to the new community of practice in many instances hampered students and their progress as they waded through the unfamiliarity of the new academic institution and to become acculturated to new worldviews. In closing, I argued that the experience of study at the university was transformational. Accounts from participants solidified that the experience changed their worldviews and lives. They have learned to be autonomous and confident.

The forthcoming chapter summarizes the research process through a discussion of the findings and its contribution to previous and upcoming research and literature. Also included in the chapter are recommendations for practice and future research.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Summations, Reflections, and Recommendations

This dissertation is the product of a phenomenological inquiry into the lives of international students at the University of Saskatchewan. The genesis of this study lies in my search for an understanding of the phenomenon of being an international graduate student at the university. As an international student I constantly faced the reality that things in the new environment differed from what I am accustomed to. I saw that, even with the extensive body of research in the area of international graduate student experience globally, (a) there was a dearth of documented studies pertaining to the topic in the Canadian system, (b) few studies have been conducted qualitatively and gave voice to participants, and (c) even fewer inquiries explored the experience through a phenomenological lens. I wanted to explore the stories and experiences of international graduate students to capture what it means to them to study in a Western university. I also wanted to give voice to their stories.

My objective was to explore the day-to-day experiences of foreign students to capture and re-present the meaning of these experiences. Essentially, I hoped to arrive at a framework through which the phenomenon of being international students at the university could be understood. This study shows that the nature of being an international student is multi-faceted; there is no singular reality to it. Different individuals view the experience differently according to their culture, social backgrounds, and experience.

In light of my research question (What does it mean to be an international student at the university?), I chose to do a phenomenological study, which would allow me to explore the experiences as students live them (van Manen, 1997b) and arrive at a co-interpretation of the experience (Crotty, 1998). This co-interpretation is grounded in a social constructivist approach, which focuses on the learning that takes place through an individual's social interactions in a community of practice. Learning is essentially a social phenomenon because learners are partially motivated by rewards provided by the knowledge community. Nevertheless, because the learner actively constructs knowledge, learning also depends, to a significant extent, on the learner's internal drive to understand and engage in the learning process from their own reality.

The interdisciplinary lens with which I approached the research allowed me to view the research process through a kaleidoscope of changing impressions. Like an artist engaged in the meaning-making process of creating a collage, I set out to uncover the essence of being an

international graduate student at the university. I first collected participants' individual stories, which were trimmed into essential chunks of meaning peculiar to individual stories. These pieces were then set against the backdrop of the prevailing literature. The result was an emergent collage of impressions that was co-constructed with participants.

In assembling the collage of this research, I was guided by the artistic process: I looked at the smallest detail of every story and then aligned the details with the bigger picture as all the pieces came together to tell one story of newcomer students at the university. In the process I found that some pieces did not fit well, and in true craftsmanship, I had to return "to the drawing board" to add new pieces to recut pieces to fit them into the piece I was crafting. Some things may have escaped my artistic eye, but this is essential to the crafting process. The collage continues to emerge.

### **Overview and Discussion of Findings**

This study addresses the dearth of qualitative studies of how international students understand their lives as students in a Canadian university. In addition to enlarging the scope of growing literature on international students, this study provides storied accounts and insights into the lives of selected overseas students at the university from the participating students.

The themes and patterns presented in Chapter Five depict the experience of being an international graduate student through patterns and commonalities across the narratives of the six participants. The stories pointed to a negative experience. The stories shattered me, and awakened a need to re-evaluate the data. I was perplexed because participants portrayed their struggle, yet their stories ended positively. At this point, I recognized that I had to broaden my perspective and dig deeper to unearth the essence of the narratives and the patterns in the stories. Moreover, phenomenology necessitated that I search and re-search the data until I came up with a new way of viewing the phenomenon. This recognition allowed me to step outside the box. Hence, as I sifted through the data and narratives, I rigorously scrutinized theories and patterns to arrive at a description that fits into the broader picture.

Guided by the intuitive nature of interpretation and the fact that it should provide hypothesis and connections with theory (Freshwater & Avis, 2004), I revisited the data, laying it against my interdisciplinary knowledge to come to an understanding of its essence. Tunneling through the collected experiences against the backdrop of the interdisciplinary concepts and tools, I saw new horizons emerge, and I began to see the experience of being an international

student from a wider angle. I was able to look beyond the obvious and see the story embedded within the stories.

The intention of this research was to respond to the question “What does it mean to be an international student?” The question itself is broad and led to multiple interpretations, but I wanted my findings and elucidations to be profound and unique yet also resonate and ring true with readers, and even more so with the participants. This led me to reconnect with participants through follow-up clarification interviews and chats. I needed to confirm my theory and ensure that my belief of how their stories read was a worthwhile description of their experiences. Relinking with participants was complicated since by that time it was summer and so I could not connect with all participants. I was able to contact three participants. I wanted to ascertain how they were able to succeed in spite of the hardships they described. Their stories gave credence to my interpretations of the findings.

Trying to make sense of the data and its significance to the research question, I also went back and forth between the literature and the data, peeling away the layers to get to the heart of the matter. It was through this peeling process that I suddenly experienced an epiphany. It dawned on me that while participants were not able to explain their methods of learning or the metacognitive processes in play, the data pointed to a story of adaptation and transformation through participation in the community of practice, the university.

In lieu of set guidelines and processes, participants were adapting to and code-switching in the new academic language environment and culture by participating in learning activities at the university. According to Zwiers (2008), different disciplines have different ways of viewing the world, gathering information, interpreting data, and organizing knowledge. Learning occurs while students participate in authentic tasks within discipline-specific endeavors. These daily activities were the very ones participants had trouble negotiating. It was clear, however, that through their attempts—their trials, approximations, and perceived failures—they were learning the ways of the academy. Essentially, they were transforming from being mere *students* to becoming *scholars* in their own right through situated learning.

### **Being a Student, Becoming a Scholar: Learning through Situated Practice**

The theme of international students becoming scholars was a new view of the data, representing a transformational outlook on the phenomenon of being an international student.

The path from student to scholar is inspired by Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of apprenticeship to masters. Lave and Wenger maintained that newcomers learn the ways of the community of practice from the periphery through co-participation and situated practice, and as they learn the social norms of the community, shift positions as they become a part of the community.

Student to scholar is new in the sense that previous research tended to view international students from a point of deficit. This novel way of viewing their experiences highlights the idea that these students enter their programs of study with strength, and when stressed or pushed to the limit, they are able to call upon these strengths and remain resilient in their academic pursuits. Through critical reflection and praxis, these students assumed agency for themselves and their studies, thereby transforming themselves into stronger individuals, who in spite of their struggles are successful in their academic pursuits.

The path from student to scholar is holistic, experiential, and transformational. When the idea first came to me, I did a search of key terms "student" and "scholar," which have long been used interchangeably. In a broad sense they are related as both the student and the scholar are engaged in learning, but I realized the two words described different aspects of being. According to the Freedictionary.com, a student is one who is under the tutelage of a teacher or instructor, whereas a scholar is considered an expert in his or her given field. Implicit in these definitions is the idea of dependence and independence. Students are often dependent on their teachers or advisors, and scholars must function and learn independently of such forces and agents. Students are dependent because often upon entry into the new academic group they do not possess the cultural, linguistic, and academic capital that would allow them to meet expectations of the community of practice. They are, however, able to move along the continuum to becoming independent scholars. This marks an interesting finding since it tells the story of a journey of becoming, a story of moving from dependence to independence.

Being and becoming are often seen as opposing elements. How can one *be* and also *become*? *Being* is a gerund derived from the verb "to be." My understanding of being in relation to the current study is who an individual is as a subject or an object in time and space. It is tied to a person's identity. *Becoming* for me denotes a change. It is the moving from one state to a transformed state. When seeing with fresh eyes, we realize that the terms are interconnected, since if one is to become, one first needs to be. For indeed it is through being that we are able to become.

Maslow (1968) positioned becoming as a future goal, a prescribed need to discover our essential biology based in nature. He identified the ultimate goal of every human being as wanting to become better. *Better* for Maslow is progressing along the theoretical hierarchy of needs to, ultimately, gaining self-actualization. In the case of these international graduate students in the study, they left their homes ambitious and fully intent on becoming better human beings; that is, achieving self-actualization through their studies. Participants in the study shared that their university studies were based on their need to be better, to “become.” Yet they felt challenged by the differences they encountered.

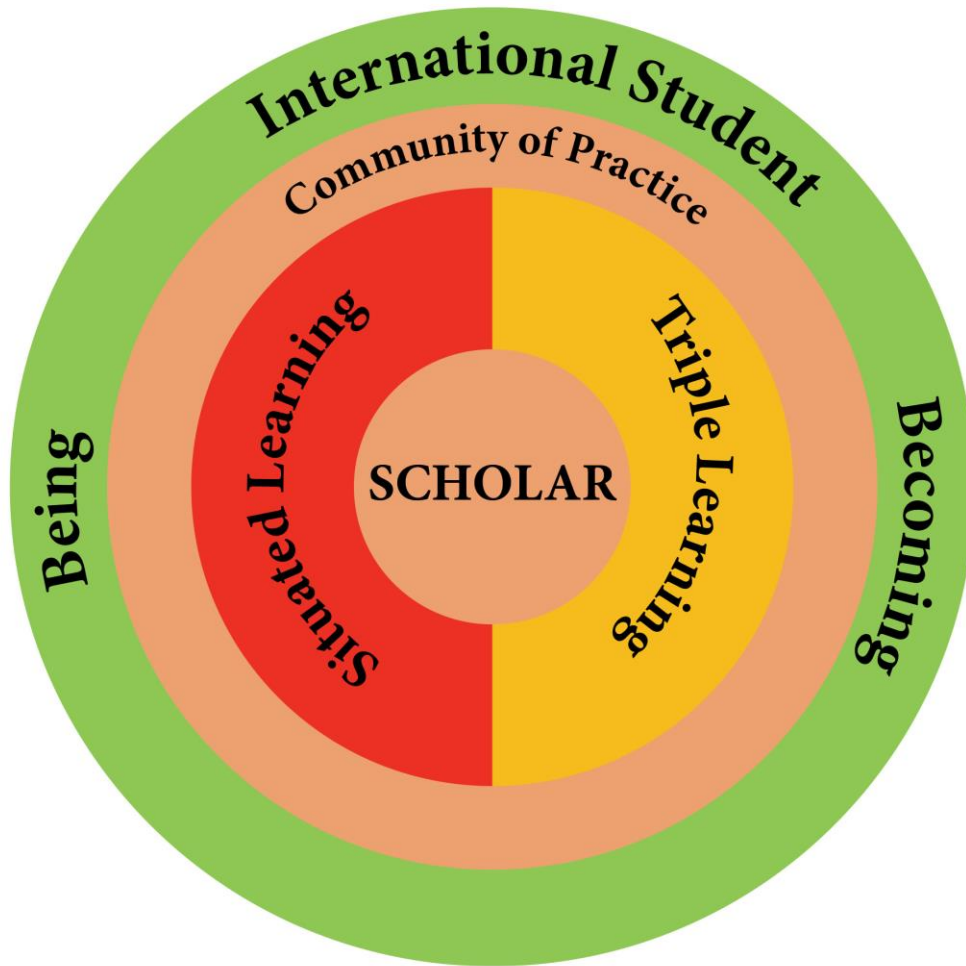


Figure 6.1: Student to scholar

Figure 6.1 represents the “student to scholar” process. I used concentric circles to show the interconnectedness and the ongoing nature of the experience. At the center is the scholar. It is positioned at the center to emphasize that the goal of the international graduate student experience is to become a scholar, or an independent and capable learner. Respondents in the study, through their combined stories, showed that as students in the new community they were often on the periphery of the learning environment.

The road from student to scholar is one of negotiating three levels of learning (triple learning) through situated activities in a community of practice. (Owing to its prominence in the data analysis and interpretation, *triple learning* is discussed alone later in this chapter.) Notably, these “scholars-to-be” entered the university, a community of practice with varied knowledge and skills. Each was amply qualified for the level of study on which they were engaged, having studied previously at the tertiary level in their home countries. With the exception of Georgie and Maria, who entered graduate studies immediately from their previous home university, participants were working members of their society who gave valuable service and contributed to their communities of origin. They entered the university with the aim of becoming accomplished in their fields and gaining mastery that would allow them to act independently in their areas of study. The acquisition of master status positions students as scholars; no longer are they scholars to-be or scholars in waiting. Rather, through their daily work in the academy, they acquire the requisite scholarly knowledge of conversation, mindful reading, and written discourse as well as the ability to think and analyze critically. They analyze complex situations and information and interpret outside the frame of current literature—and they do so independently.

The collected experiences suggested a constant interplay between being and becoming, as participants through their stories showed themselves as unique beings seeking to become a part of the university ethos. Aristotle (1994) argued that the term *being* usually presupposes the idea of becoming, which means that one has to be at a particular state before one can become another. Students constantly shift their roles as they “search for meaning and a negotiation of ethical behavior” (Suominen, 2005, p. 19) owing to their outsider status and inherent lack of the requisite social, cultural, academic, and linguistic capital. Essentially, the study participants became who they needed to be as a means of surviving in the host community. The idea of change and becoming throughout my study implied that participants had to step out of their comfort zone to confront new and varied situations.

Through my interactions with the participants, I found that although their stories differed, they all experienced a change in their perspectives and lives. While they negotiated the challenges of study, their world views were also transforming and they were becoming “better” as they continued their courses of academic study. According to Putman (1998), becoming is transformational and developmental and plays an integral part in the life history of individuals since human beings are always evolving for the better. Wilcock (1999) maintained that while “being” establishes who individuals are, it also drives them to continually hope to become. In the early stages of the research, participants said their matriculation in graduate studies, at the university, were driven by the need for mobility in their financial and social status upon their return to their countries of origin. As Kuri said,

The thing with international education is that it gives you the wings and just pushes you off the cliff. You have to learn how to fly. No one will teach you how to fly. And the thing is when you are in the water you have to learn how to swim, right? It will not give you a fish; it will teach you how to fish. And of course it teaches you to be independent. Kuri’s statement epitomizes the move from being a dependent student to becoming an independent scholar. Kuri began by sharing the negative realities of her experience, and these negative stories continued throughout most of my interactions with her. Yet in concluding she said, “I have learned so much here... I think I am more mature.” All the students echoed Kuri’s sentiments. I pondered the meaning of this obvious shift in the reasoning of participants. What accounted for Kuri’s shift in perspective?

As I ruminated on these changes, I realized that while participants could not adequately express and detail the shifts and turns in their thinking, they were actively engaged in the process of transformation from student to scholar. The internal and external maneuvers in which they engaged daily were responsible for their transformation. This reality was not immediately clear to participants because their energies were expended on adapting to the new academic and social setting and negotiating daily tasks. They were oblivious to the changes as they happened. It was not until I brought it to their attention that they understood that a shift had occurred. Admittedly, I too was almost swept away with the stories, which prevented me from seeing the reality.

### **Situated Learning**

Kim (1994) argued that for international students to become insiders they must participate in academic, cultural, and social activities in the new environment; this will give them



the requisite knowledge, skills, sensitivities, and behaviors that will allow them to function as members of the group. Acquiring these skills becomes difficult because they are grounded in their own cultures and ethnic behaviors. The ethno-cultures from which these students come often hinder them from participating in the new culture (Mori, 2000). Participation becomes restricted because the overseas student is still operating under the rules of the home cultures and is not ready to relinquish its hold on them (Shabatay, 1991). Contrary to findings highlighted by Mori (2000) and Shabatay (1991) participants in the study—although limited by their cultures and lack of capital—were still able to participate in the “trade” of learning through their participation in everyday activities in an academic community of practice. That participants could learn the norms of acceptable behaviors through doing brings to mind the term *situated learning* (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Situated learning refers to contextualized learning where newcomers operate from their peripheral situations and through doing; they learn the ways and the language of the community and thereby gain access to the group.

As I struggled with the meanings of the interview and observational data, I came to the realization that based on their stories participants as peripheral learners in the absence of a structured and organised text for learning were able to accomplish academic tasks and they continued to be successful. This shift confounded me as I tried to understand just how they were able to make such a drastic transformation. Thinking about the change, I was reminded of van Manen’s (2014) argument that tension is an essential part of the phenomenological text. For van Manen (2014), evidence of tension is good; it is through the tension that the true meaning of the experience is revealed. To resolve the tension I was experiencing, I reconnected with participants and asked them pointed questions about what challenges they faced from the use of English as the language of instruction. I also wanted to understand how they could reach these positive ends amidst their struggles. Their responses were confirming of my beliefs and understandings of their stories. After revisiting the data many times, it finally dawned on me that these students were actually learning the steps of scholarship by engaging in the process. They were learning through practice. Kuri, who painted a picture of doom, realized that she had indeed learned to use academic literacy and processes and had matured. She could not verbalize how she had learned, but looking back at her story I realized that she accomplished it through her interactions with other students. From these interactions with her peers, she was able to act, and in acting she learned the appropriate actions and behaviors required to explore and present her ideas in the

forms and for the purposes that are typical of her academic discipline. This mode of learning is consistent with Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of situated learning. In situated learning newcomers to a society learn the way of that community through apprenticeship and move to mastery by participating in activities. This is incidental learning.

These individuals soon came to realize that there is no text that prescribes how learning is to occur or how students are to act in the university. They learn acceptable behaviors and protocols through their interactions, engagement, and participation with other members of the community. This engaged learning became evident through participants' narratives. In the absence of a manual, participants as peripheral learners engaged with members of the three linguistic communities, enabling them to accomplish desired academic goals and continue to success by doing.

My negotiations of the collected stories led me to conclude that through situated learning and their participation in the community of academic practice, participants were able to achieve a composite of the generic, transferrable skills that are required of and developed by academic study and research. They improved critical thinking skills while taking courses that required critical analysis and intensive thinking and writing. University courses required students to recognize, understand, and critically analyze in writing an argument read or presented to them. As students wrote on a subject matter and learn to analyze an argument, they discovered how arguments are constructed and became familiar with how experts in various disciplines think and communicate. Students gained access to intra-disciplinary concepts, subject-specific vocabulary, and fundamental issues around complex arguments. This process is considerably more complex than simply learning and repeating a set of facts. Indeed, this process exposed students to the sorts of higher-order thinking skills that prepare them to critique their world and to formulate solutions to complex problems.

Students channeling their resilience through praxis and agency demonstrated an interesting lack Bourdieu's (1986) human capital theory and Vygotsky's (1978, 1988) theory of social learning that posit that students need external sources in the form of other individuals and in the case of Bourdieu, social and cultural capital. In the study, I found that these sources were indeed important. Not negating their relevance, the study offers the insight that these theories could be enhanced by an exploration of the internal sources that drive students to learn. In the absence of social networks, participants in the study found their inner selves and resilience,

which helped them to accomplish their goal of becoming scholars. I found that within the parameters of the study, becoming a scholar was an ongoing process plagued with mistrials and challenges. This finding is strengthened by Wenger's theory of learning, which indicates that "perturbability and resilience are characteristic of adaptability" (1998, p. 97), which promotes the continuity and emergence of new learning.

### **Adapting to University Culture**

One of the major issues that participants faced as they traveled the path from scholar-to-be to scholar is cultural adaptation, which is described as the changes that take place in individuals in response to a change in environment and the demand thereof (Berry, 1997). My findings extend the otherwise psychological implications of Berry's adaptation and adaptive processes to one that is more holistic. I found that as students contended acclimatization to the university and its surroundings, their stories implied that the adaptation process was holistic and multidimensional since students were adapting to cultural, social, linguistic, and academic principles that are characteristically different from those they had internalized living in their countries of origin. Initially, participants felt they did not fit into the university. Not fitting in was attributed to differences in cultures. Students encountered academic, social, linguistic, economic, and cultural challenges. My findings were more aligned to Kim's (2006, 2008) cross-cultural adaptation. Kim defined cross-cultural adaptation as the fostering and maintenance of a sustained relationship with the host environment. According to Kim (2008), in cross-cultural adaptation is a natural tendency for individuals to struggle to gain and maintain balance when faced with changed and adverse socio-cultural and environmental challenges. Kim emphasized that the key to adjusting to these conditions is developing communicative competence in the new environment.

I found that participants struggled internally and externally as they negotiated their daily lives at the university in an attempt to adjust and adapt to the new socio-cultural and linguistic environment. These struggles involved a change in their thought processes and ways of knowing and doing to accommodate the new culture. This often resulted in "self-questioning" about their place in the new space. External struggles also prevailed as students-problematized the systems and processes within the macro and micro social and cultural environment of the university and community. These findings parallel studies related to any group experiencing a sense of

otherness. My findings may also be representative of students entering programs of study in general.

Being in a new country means unfamiliarity and dissimilarity of knowledge, ideas, and ways of doing. Newness implies that the individual has never before experienced the particular act or culture since s/he is “coming up against something very different—very other” (Shabatay, 1991, p. 140). Participants told stories that showed they were unfamiliar with the academic, linguistic, and social culture of the new learning environment, which was profoundly isolating. Like the cheese, they stood alone. These differences kept such individuals from full group membership. Living between worlds ultimately results in problems for these students since they never fully fit into either. Not only were these students hampered by their ability to fit into the general surroundings based on their cultural ambivalence, but they were also hindered by their lack of the socio-economic capital with which to enter the university and its community.

According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), many international students leave home and family to travel abroad in pursuit of their academic and economic goals. Leaving home to enter a new socio-cultural and economic environment is a major step for anyone who has become *enculturated* in their home cultures and is driven by the precepts of that specific world view. Huntley (1993) argued that older foreign students have greater difficulty adjusting to new learning environments than do younger students because they are already rooted in the world view and behavioral repertoire of their home country. When they enter overseas post-secondary institutions, these students are expected to become *acculturated*. Overseas students in the study felt distant from both the home and host cultures. With every step forward they seemed to take “two steps back” (Wagner & Magistrale, 1995, p. 4). This distance between the culture of nationality and the host culture makes it difficult for foreign students to fit in, and so they often feel marginalized by local students and the community. My findings indicated that participants in the study were challenged by the overall culture and milieu of the university; that is, they were challenged culturally and socially.

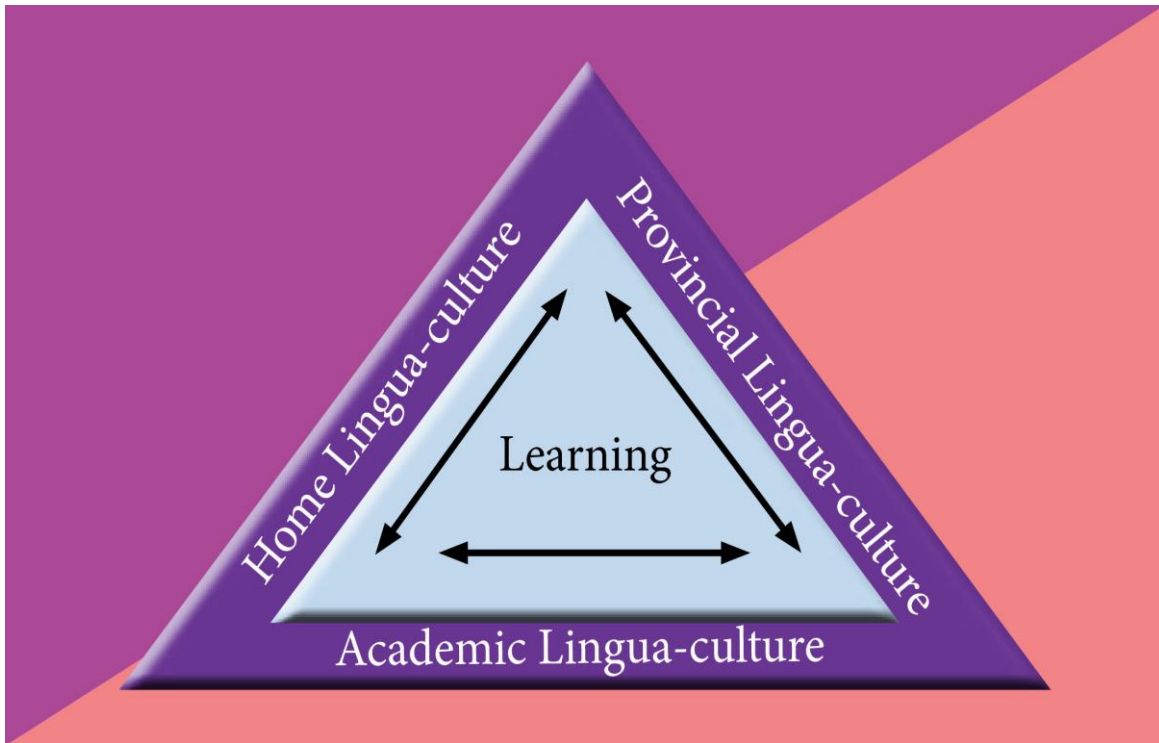
Most participants described their home culture as hierarchical. Therefore, they experienced a paradigm shift as they soon recognized that the education in the university is less ranked and that more informal communications and deliberations were permitted among students and professors and other staff. The democratic nature of Canadian post-secondary institutions puzzled participants. Maria, Georgie and Rueda, for example, spoke about times they were

amazed that students were challenging professors. They all hinted at the idea that in their home cultures professors and teachers were viewed as the ultimate purveyors of knowledge and were not to be questioned. They found it difficult to understand that local students at the university could be so independent, assertive, and critical in their thinking while they were behaving as the docile learners they were taught to be, ones who never challenged knowledge but accepted authorities and ideas as solid and irrefutable.

### **Triple Learning through Situated Practice**

While pondering the learning practices of the participants in the community of practice it occurred to me that these individuals are engaged in a process of triple learning. Triple learning emerged as a *lingua-cultural* and social phenomenon and provides valuable insight into how learning occurs among international graduate students studying in the university as a community of practice. The term *lingua-culture* was first used by anthropologist Friedrich (1989) to talk about the inextricable link between language and culture. Derived from the words *lingua*—language—and *culture*, the term has gained popularity and has been adopted by many scholars in the field of linguistics and anthropology. For the purposes of this study, *lingua-culture* has been operationalized to mean language culture. It has been so described because culture influences our perceptions and world views; both language and culture play significant roles in who we are and how we speak and represent ourselves.

Triple learning is a transactional process between three distinct languages and registers, as well as three cultures and subcultures within the community of practice as they engage their studies. The three *lingua-cultures* that international graduate students negotiated are represented as home, academic, and provincial *lingua-cultures*. Figure 6.2 illustrates the triple learning process. I used a triangular base to highlight the three *lingua-cultures* and how they interact together. Converging arrows form a triangle, showing the interconnectivity of the three *lingua-cultures* in the process of learning. As students negotiate these three *lingua-cultures* through their transactions, they arrive at consensual appropriations and behaviors in the community of practice.



*Figure 6.2: The Triple Learning Process*

Learning in a new culture can be taxing on the individual who has already internalized one set of cultural practices. The social nature of learning allows for a holistic, interconnected approach and dimension to learning. People are who they are based on their cultures of origin and their learning practices; however, they are also at the university amalgamating these practices with those of the surrounding linguistic community and the university itself. Notably, throughout the discussions with participants, this idea was not a tangible deliberation that they could easily articulate. Instead, careful critical analysis revealed the phenomenon. Kuri's story was the first through which triple learning began to emerge. She spoke about her stint living off campus. From living off campus she learned distrust; when she moved on campus she learned from her colleagues new ways of thinking and acting. She began comparing the ways of her home, the host community, and the university. This triple learning also arose in the stories of other participants. Rueda's and Georgie's stories, however, provided the strongest delineation of the approach. By taking agency for their learning in the community of practice, they could transform their thinking and move from dependent students to independent scholars, who were

able to successfully engage the harsh reality of graduate studies in a new university and culture to become changed individuals.

Monture-Angus (1995) explained that she was often confronted with the duality of learning in the university, coming from a place where learning was seen and understood differently. She entered the university already ingrained with one style of learning and so became unknowingly engaged in two distinct forms of learning. This resulted in an interplay among the home knowledge, the academic knowledge of the university, and the local knowledge of the general community that surrounds the university. If learning is to occur, the three realms are separate yet interconnected. The idea of triple learning emerged from participants' navigation of their home culture and language and that of the university and the language community of theorists and professors.

I uncovered the hidden idea of triple learning as they switched between three registers and sub-registers of English. Bakhtin (1986) maintained that students enter institutions of higher learning overseas with a repertoire of oral and written language that has characterized their thinking and learning. Their home language and culture have shaped their thinking and behavior. As they enter the university, they encounter the local language of the community, which is characteristically social and dialectal. In addition to their home language and the local community language, they must contend with the academic language used in the university.

These findings have implications for the area of language learning. Proponents of language learning have always argued the navigation of learners between first and second language. Triple learning is an extension of an idea evidenced in the work of Monture-Angus (1995), who in talking about her learning experiences, expressed that she constantly switched between academic English and that of her local community. The switch perplexed her because the languages were different syntactically, morphologically, lexically, and phonologically. Therefore, when she entered the university she was challenged and tended to switch to meet expected goals. The switch was always difficult for her as she was all too aware of the differences in structures of each language.

My study adds the dimension that the international graduate students were maneuvering among three distinct registers of English. Fluent in their home language, these students came to live in the social realms of the local environment. The local provincial English heard in everyday speech in the local community is not the same as the academic language they are expected to

master as they progress to success. Academic language is largely discipline based and tends to be restrictive and more formal compared to the social language used in their home countries and local community. Academic language is complex and specialized because each discipline uses variations or sub-registers. According to Dutro and Moran (2003), academic language proficiency is the ability to construct meaning from both oral and written language, relate complex ideas and information, recognize features of different genres, and use various linguistic strategies to communicate. In contrast, Diaz-Rico and Weed (2002) see academic language as a cognitive toolbox, a set of thinking skills and language abilities used to decode and encode complex concepts.

Lost in deep contemplation I re-envisioned my trip to Chile in 2006. As a Spanish teacher I travelled to Chile for an intensive immersion course. I remember being puzzled by the many variations of Spanish. I had studied Spanish for several years and had a fair grasp of the language. Even so, when I entered Chile I was dumbfounded because I had studied Spanish mainly through communicative teaching methods and from texts. However, in Chile many of the words and phrases just never stuck. They were unknown. The locals spoke dialects and at the university I attended the language was formal. How do I then learn with three different registers of the same language? Furthermore, I was an English speaker.

As I pondered my own story, I was reminded of the stories of Georgie, Owaja and Rueda, who were non-English speaker at the university. Like me, these students were often challenged and perplexed with the structural and linguistic variances in the English within the community of practice. In addition, these students were also contending with their native language, which they used to buffer the agitation they felt while switching and negotiating appropriate communicative patterns in the new linguistic community. Georgie and Rueda spoke about the English they had learned in China, the English used by the locals in Canada, and the academic or higher register of English they had to use in school. They were primarily concerned that the three were distinct and they had to learn and know which is appropriate.

Triple learning was also manifested in the stories of Maria, Garcia, and Kuri, who entered the university from English-speaking backgrounds. Like their NNES companions, these students were perplexed as they engaged the different registers of English in the local community as well as their own standard and dialects of English. They witnessed constant code switching among three registers of English.



Triple learning points to the holistic and ecological perspectives of learning and communication. Learning and operating necessitated the negotiations among these different registers and cultures as each played an important part in the learning process for participants. In the case of the Chinese students, I often observed them translating local and academic language through hand-held digital translators and cellular phones. Participants with stronger English backgrounds were also attached to their own native dialects, which they maintained with their counterparts from their homelands. Switching and translating from one register to the next points to the interconnectedness of the home, local community, and academic language in the process of learning. The three go hand in hand and must be properly negotiated. When students are able to switch appropriately among the three, a paradigm shift occurs that results in transformations of their lives and their perspectives, and learning takes place.

### **Methodological Reflections**

An important part of the process of conducting research is to find a methodology that can capture the researcher's desired outcome. I wanted to explore the essence or meaning of being an international student at the university, and I found hermeneutic phenomenology to be an apt approach since phenomenology is the "study of essences" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.55). Van Manen (1997b) described hermeneutic phenomenology as a method that encapsulates both the exploration of the lived world of individuals, as described and lived by them, and the individual's interpretation of the experience. This method fit my objectives since I wanted to obtain the international students' experiences at the university. From these experiences I hoped to arrive at the meaning of that experience.

To be able to delineate the meanings and interpretations individual graduate students brought to the experience, I first needed to listen to their stories. I wanted thick, rich data and so I used a multi-method approach to collect data. The multi-method approach was supplemented by reflective journaling, which was very useful in the process. This was an important tool that allowed me to reflect critically and reflexively on the process of the research and my own role in the process as the researcher. In this journal I recorded my thoughts and ideas, personal reflections on stories, and changing impressions that could cloud the horizons of narratives. Journaling enabled me to review data unobstructed.

Before embarking on the actual research, I conducted a pilot study among international students at the university. My participants in the pilot study were two overseas students with whom I ran a test of the interview methods (interviews and observations) and the process. The interview process at this time included three in-depth phenomenological interviews. From this process I was able to adjust the questions and my interviewing technique. I learned that a list of pre-set questions would not work for my research. During the course of the pilot, I was also able to restructure the data-collection process I hoped to follow. The three-stage interviews became two-phased, and I decided to include more semi-structured chats or interviews with participants.

I conducted two in-depth interviews at the beginning and end of the four-month period over which I collected data. During the first interview, I built rapport with participants and began delving into their experiences as international students. From this process I was able to, after horizontalization, identify key areas that I needed to probe deeper. Between the first and second in-depth interviews, I observed and talked to students about their progress in the university. Collecting good-quality interview data usually involves multiple sessions with participants, including follow-up interviews to clarify and expand participant descriptions during the analytic process. The second interview was done toward the end of the period and allowed students to add information they thought important and respond to ideas and questions for which I needed clarification. Additionally, in the second interview, each student was asked to summarize his or her experiences. My findings emerged from the information gleaned from all the methods combined.

I tended to lean more toward data gleaned from the in-depth interviews. Such richly presented data lends itself to understanding the phenomenon under study. The study's limitations, including its small sample size, also limit the extent to which these findings may be generalized. In addition, I found that participants were limited in what they could recall and explain. Hence to understand better their experiences I observed participants while they went about their daily activities in the university.

### **Reflecting on the Interview Process**

To realize the experiences and meanings of the phenomenon, I conducted two one-hour in-depth interviews with each participant at the beginning and end of the data collection period (four months). I had sharpened my interview skills through the pilot project so I was able to elicit rich data through stories from the participants. From the pilot I had also learned that a “structured

list” of questions would not work, and so, like Wason-Ellam (2001) in her research as an ethnographer, I adapted a “conversational attitude.” I found this approach useful because it allowed me to “lean in” and probe more when participants gave information that was interesting but sparse. This approach was also used in the conversational interviews with participants, including open-ended questions directed to the participants’ experiences and changes in thought and reasoning as they progressed through the term at the university. Patton (2002), however, argued that what people say in interviews may be limited. Hence, in my research I also used observations to get to the root of the experience of studying at the university.

### **Reflecting on the Observations**

Although researchers contend that making observations is one way to enter and understand a person’s life world (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; van Manen, 1997b) and observe the phenomenon as it unfolds (Patton, 2002), I struggled with it. I wanted to see students as they interacted and reacted to the university environment. I was challenged by this data-collection method because I thought my subjectivity, being an international student myself, might inhibit the process. In conversations with participants after observing them, I learned that some issues I noted did not seem relevant to them and the experience of being an international student. Recognizing that my subjective stance may be affecting the observation process, I sought to suspend my feelings and thoughts each time I observed the participants. I did this primarily through my journal. Thereafter I was careful to engage in bracketing before and after observing the student. I had learned from the pilot study that I needed to write things down and do so as soon as possible. With this in mind, I made extensive notes within 24 hours of the observation. I used these observational extended notes in the study to help me write descriptions of participants and their reactions.

### **Reflecting on the Field Log and Journal**

Supplementary to the data collection process, I kept a field log and a reflective journal. Field logs (see Appendix C) allowed me to record the insights I gained into the phenomenon under study through emerging patterns and the progress of the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; van Manen, 1997b). For this reason the field log reflected any idea, change, or thought. I also used the field log for notes from interviews and observations and to keep track of the decisions I made in my research.

I made frequent entries in my reflective journal about the research process and my own journey as an international graduate student. This gave me the opportunity to uncover my own assumptions and beliefs. Field logs and journal entries were dated and headings used to reflect the content of each entry; they have been presented through this dissertation in the prologue, in my poems, and interspersed through Chapters Five and Seven.

For example, as I struggled with incubating ideas, I wrote poems in the form of free verse, uninhibited by the rules, protocols, and restrictions of popular academic discourse. Through poetry I was able to liberate my thoughts (Jessen Williamson, 2014) and enter the world of wonder, which is consistent with phenomenology and getting at the essence of things. Essentially, through poetry I was able to use synthesized experiences in a “direct and affective way” (Prendergast, 2009, p. 545). It served as a sounding board for my ideas, frustrations, wavering thoughts, and deep-rooted beliefs, and provided a way of voicing thoughts and ideas that might not otherwise be voiced (Cahnmann, 2003).

Through the tool of poetry, I was also able to distance myself and see myself as an agent of experience and meaning even amidst the tradition of academia and phenomenology. Through poetry I was able to represent my own fleeting ideas and impressions as well as “clarify and magnify human experience” (Faulkner, 2007, p. 218). The poems present a fresh view of the experience, and the reader sees the experience of being an international student from a non-prescriptive, non-linear lens.

These tools of inquiry allowed me to record my impressions, assumptions, and feelings about the research process. Distancing myself enabled me to return to my work, identify issues I may have missed, and check my assumptions or biases. I became aware of the relevance of writing things down in the research process. Admittedly, I preferred not to write things down and rely on memory, which I learned in the pilot was not always successful for me. So throughout the research process, I constantly made jottings and wrote things down that could jog my memory, and then as soon after as possible made extended notes.

### **Reflecting on the Analysis and Interpretation**

Early in the research process I had a vision of how I wanted to present the data, especially the participants' experiential accounts. I knew I wanted to animate their experiences by presenting their stories in a way that was unique to the individual and would respect and honor their voices. I did not want my analysis to merge main ideas from the storied accounts; I wanted

the story of each participant to speak for itself. This, I thought, enlivened participants' stories. I wanted to present their stories as individual accounts, thereby giving voice to each participant and allowing them to embody their distinct expressions (hooks, 1988) of the experience of being an international student at the university.

I searched for a method that would enable me to tell participants' stories through their own voices. My search led me to the research method of hermeneutic phenomenology. I searched for studies that presented participants stories in the way I desired and found few that did so. In the end, to avoid confusion and chaos, I settled for an abbreviated/editorialized description of participants' experiences. In these accounts I re-presented their expressions which were presented in the participant's own words intertextualized with my paraphrased and editorialized descriptions and notes.

Through the process of participant descriptions I was able to express the feelings and emotions of participants and make my own judgments of the data. In this way I felt I was honoring the idea that understanding of the data was being co-created. The process, however, was messy, nerve-wracking, and time consuming. I had to tunnel through all the data—word by word and line by line—for the stories to emerge. It took hours of dedicated time, effort, and focus.

There were many times in the process that I had to seek clarification from participants. One participant asked that a section of data be removed from her story. She thought the information was too potent and might serve to identify her based on the nature of the case and situation she described. I had to remove the section and resend it by email for her approval. Another participant, upon receipt of his story, added information that he thought helped explain how he interpreted his experiences. Incidents like this happened as I went back and forth through emails and telephone calls to clarify the stories and ensure that I was representing participants' stories authentically as well as honoring their individual and collective voices.

### **Reflecting on the Writing Process**

Murray (1985) argued that writing is rewriting because it is in the process of writing and rewriting that one is able to clearly articulate thoughts. As a process, writing is “not linear but recursive. There is not one process but many” (p. 4). I admit that I struggled with writing this dissertation. Every step was a challenge. Every word, every sentence, every paragraph of every page was a battle of words, wit, and vexing commas, which through sheer determination I

overcame. I came to realize and understand Murray's statement to be true. The multiple drafts I wrote the self-questioning and probes after each draft, and the realization that in many instances my representations through writing were unclear was frustrating for me. Yet, it was through that process that I was able to come to an understanding of the phenomenon of being an international student.

### **Recommendations for Further Thought**

I believe that research should guide practice. Therefore, having completed this ambitious study, I hope its findings will serve as a source to guide the thoughts and processes of international education and international students entering post-secondary institutions overseas. My recommendations for further inquiry follow.

- I found that the experience of being an international graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan is like advancing from student to scholar. My findings pointed to adaptation and transformation through situated learning by way of a process of triple learning. Given these findings, I suggest that international students entering programs of study overseas should approach international studies with an open mind. Through this study, I realized that participants were not fully informed about the institution and its expectations. I recommend that in anticipation of newness, prospective international students should be open and accepting of change. It is also important to know about the country, people, rules, values, and guiding policies before entering its borders. This can be accomplished by forming relationships with universities and departments before entering the university. I also recommend that the prospective student form alliances with other students who have attended the university they will attend.
- In light of the notion that students feel like outsiders, I offer that the university and its recruited students engage in partnerships with the local community through local student host families, faculty, other staff, and organizations. The aim of these partnerships should be to help students adjust to the new environment. This alliance could be ongoing, and as students progress through the university, they could be monitored and assisted by these partners. This relationship has the potential to foster collaboration and allow for the development of an open mind. It could also enhance the potential of gaining "insidership" within university and community groups.

- It would be beneficial to organize and implement sustainable mandatory support services, programs, and strategies within the university and its adjoining community that offer care and assistance for students entering from overseas. Such programs might alleviate the stress of settling into new communities of practice and allow students to develop the necessary financial and social capital needed to help them learn the ropes. For example, given financial pressure and the possible stress that stems from a lack of money, international students could benefit from a funding measure put in place to assist them with their financial needs as they study. This would greatly decrease potential stress that could occur as students work and study within the new environment. Participants in the study complained about negotiating place and space during the harsh winters. I believe the university could offer a transfer bus without additional costs to students.
- Cognizant of the issues participants had regarding housing and living conditions, I propose that the university offer students more affordable housing. In the event that housing for students is inadequate or if students prefer to find alternate living arrangements, Campus Residence should have a registry of possible housing solutions outside of the university for long-term or medium-term renters.
- Given the university's drive to increase the number of international students, it is essential that university officials and policy planners become aware of the plights and experiences of such students. The need for growth in student numbers places the university and international graduate students in a unique relationship of client and service operator. The university as a service operator should be knowledgeable of its clientele and what affects them. My research highlights these issues in a manner that is distinct to the selected participants.

I recommend that the university implement mandatory inclusive intercultural training educational programs for faculty, staff, and students, including international students. This course could serve to acquaint all stakeholders within the university and communities of practice with the soft skills and knowledge of dealing with the diverse body of students. These programs should make students, faculty, staff, and the general community aware of discrimination and what fosters racism and other prejudices. Integral to the program should be open discussions about discrimination and how all parties can better deal with these challenges.

- In light of the cultural loss that students may encounter, I suggest that activities be arranged on a regular basis that will showcase the diverse cultures represented on the university campus. These events can be hosted by colleges, departments, or the university in general.

### **Recommendations for Further Explorations**

Throughout the research process, many questions arose that I could not answer. I therefore offer these questions and issues for consideration for future research.

1. Based on the findings of my study, I recommend that phenomenological studies be conducted among a larger, more diverse group of international students at the local, provincial, and national levels. Such studies could ascertain whether the findings in my sample are similar or contrary to others.
2. I conducted this study on the meaning of being international students from the perspective of overseas students and did not give the view of host students. I therefore submit that similar inquiries be carried out among local students to determine what the phenomenon means from their perspectives. Such a study would greatly affect academia since it would balance the argument of international students entering universities overseas. This would also serve to document the impact international students have on local students.
3. The university boasts a high retention rate among international graduate students. My research suggests that comparative studies could be done among “dropouts” as well as those who stay on their study path, like those in the current study. This would offer balance to the current research and give more detailed information on the factors that helped students attain their positions as emerging scholars.



## EPILOGUE

### Connected at Last

As I approach the end of this dissertation, I reflect on my life in Jamaica and my life as an international graduate student at the university. Many experiences come to mind that bring together these two parts of my life. In my capacity as youth director of my church youth group some years ago, I planned a camp and retreat for young people in the churches. The venue was a place called River's Edge. River's Edge turned out to be an interesting name for an interesting place. Unlike the journey to this place, River's Edge is a beautiful, rustic laid back group of cottages on a rural river bank in St. Mary, Jamaica. The river running through the property is beautiful, serene, and calming. One naturally felt at peace at River's Edge. The lush vegetation and calm environment were relaxing.



*Figure 7.1: The Road to River's Edge*

Contrary to the place itself, the journey to River's Edge was long, lonely, winding, and rough. The terrain and bumpy roads caused the vehicles to bump much like the bounce-about at the Six Flags Amusement Park. The treacherous stretches of road on the rickety bridge

threatened to drop our bus into the deep below. There were groans, sighs, screams, lamentations, and vehement requests to quit the journey and go home. We nearly did.

Then the bus pulled into a driveway and there was a hush from the young congregants. Mouths gaped and eyes fixed on the paradise before them; someone shouted, “This is heaven!” In the bible the road to heaven is described as narrow, much like the one we had just travelled to get to this place.



*Figure 7.2:* The river that flows through the property

My progression through this dissertation reminds me of my journey to River’s Edge. The transformative journey to my PhD began in September 2011. When I started this research, I had no idea how it would progress. I entered the communities of practice from a country with a rich colonial history steeped in hegemony, which had anglicized my perspective. This perspective fostered expectations and assumptions about my culture and global cultures. I had travelled extensively but never had the opportunity to study in an English university environment. My previous study trips were short courses and the language of instruction was Spanish.

As I reflected during my research, there were many bumps along the road for me, mostly due to my lack of social, academic, cultural and sometimes linguistic capital. The failed attempts, the writer's block I often nervously faced, and the many things I lacked remind me of my journey to that majestic location in rural St. Mary, Jamaica. There are great differences between the formality of the Jamaican education system and the looser but academically rigorous university culture and its local provincial community of practice. During the research analysis and interpretation it dawned on me that I was often stuck in my own head; my own views, steeped in hegemonic practices and Euro-centricity, needed to experience a paradigm shift. I had to extend myself to see that which remained hidden more clearly. I needed to adapt a counterhegemonic stance to get through the mountain of data and arrive at interpretations.

I became inspired by Jessen Williamson's Reawakening Model (K. Jessen Williamson, personal communication, January 2014), which proffered a six-stage transformation process through self-reflection and action—praxis, to engage my personal journey as a scholar to be. The Reawakening Model (see Appendix G) grew out of the author's desire to have teacher candidates become more aware of themselves as individuals and thereby acknowledge their roles and responsibilities in the two-way process of teaching and learning. The stages of the model are awareness, acknowledgement, acceptance, evaluation, actions, and role. Through Jessen Williamson's model I could channel the process of my transformation. The notion of praxis, agency, and critical self-reflection were also critical tools for Egbo (2008), Freire (2011), and Greene (1978). By deliberating on the works of these authors I was able to find my own praxis and agency. This was very influential to my own transformation from scholar to-be to independent scholar and researcher.

Once, in a class about antiracist and anti-oppressive education, I realized the many assumptions about diversity among students. This class informed my thinking about assumptions with which I entered the university. Drawing on the idea of praxis and critical self-reflection and guided by Jessen Williamson's Reawakening Model and conversations I had with my co-supervisors (Dr. Karla Jessen Williamson and Dr. Linda Wason-Ellam), I became aware of myself as a Jamaican female educator, scholar, and researcher. I became conscious that my unique background had already provided many assumptions, expectations, and ideals about who I am and who I am to become. As I became aware of these, I acknowledged and accepted them. Over the years, I have come to accept these things for what they are—assumptions, expectations,

and ideals—and to realize that they are not the same in my new environment. As a student going through the process of this research, I have learned to be a life negotiator. I reflected on students' narratives and realized that their stories indeed mirror elements of my life.

Like my study participants, I did not particularly feel that I fit in to this environment. As for the study participants, feeling out of place was difficult, but it was not a significant factor for me. My path and intentions were clear. As a learner I understand that learning is transformational and that if I am to be transformed I have to take responsibility for my own learning and anticipate my role as a researcher, scholar, and educator to assist others in finding their way. Essentially, I had to engage the communities of practice in which I found myself and through situated learning and triple learning move inward, from being a learner always on the periphery, into the community of practice through my earned capital. This negotiation in many ways has been the nucleus of this research. I wanted to understand the experience of being an international graduate student as others live it and through this understanding better negotiate my role as a student, educator, researcher and scholar in the university. While traversing the wheel of the reawakening model, and decoding conversations I had with Dr. Wason-Ellam, the wheels in my mind began to turn as I became aware that I did not fit in because of my skewed perspective on learning and academia. My conversations with both advisors helped me come to terms with the fact that I had entered the field of study with my own ideas about research, life, and what I would find. Their questions let me face how deeply steeped I had become in the revolving hegemony of my Jamaican education and to see that I needed to approach the research from a broader, more reflective and analytic framework. The prevailing hegemonic practices had failed me. I had hoped for a linear progression of both my life and the research. In reality, the process was nonlinear, and that resulted in my feeling of alienation. As I worked through my alienation, I thought the process mirrored the journey of life. Like Heffner (2003), I realized that:

Life is not an easy road for most;  
It twists and turns with many forks,  
Although always, and inevitably, we are given choices...  
Do we turn to the right ... or the left?  
Do we take the high road ... or the low road?  
Do we take the easy path ... or the difficult one?  
Decisions are not easy for those struggling for direction...

And sometimes the many choices become overwhelming.

Throughout the process I cried, I screamed, I joked, I sang, and then I cried again. Lord tek di case and gimmi di pilla (“Lord help me! I cannot handle this”). Had it been up to me and my own strength, perhaps I would have yielded to the voice that said, “What are you doing? Who said you could do this? This is too difficult.” But I had a friend who walked with me. We talked along the way and He assured me that He was with me; I just needed to continue on the path.

And so, embracing my own resilience and strength in God, I ignored the voices of negativity and surrounded myself with calming and positive vibes. "You can do it. Yes you can. Just keep at it. You will be fine, dear." I had to engage my community of practice and through situated learning move inward from the periphery through my earned capital. And so like our bus driver, who shifted and turned as he negotiated the rugged terrain of the country road to find new paths that would take him to River’s Edge, I persisted. As I wove for myself a fusion of ideas and methods through many approximations, failed attempts, anguish, and pain, I began to emerge from the rubble.

Through this interdisciplinary approach I envisioned the light at the end of the tunnel and as it got closer, the stories became clearer, the burdens got lighter, and the thoughts began to flow more freely. As my thoughts flew in every direction, I was able to understand the journey of international graduate students. Finally, I have seen the light, I am enlightened. I myself have walked the path to becoming a scholar, even through the struggles and negotiations of this dissertation; this product is evidence of the journey. I am being transformed; I am becoming a scholar; I am evolving.

I felt the hand on my shoulder and I awoke from my reverie. I realized it was time to go, but go where? Where do I really belong? I am now a scholar and must continue on my journey, on to the next phase of the journey.

## References

- Abel, C. F. (2002). Academic success and the international student: Research and recommendations. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 117, 13-20.
- Ahern, K. J. (1999). Ten tips for reflexive bracketing. *Qualitative Health Research*, 9, 407-411.
- Altbach, P. G. & Knight, J. (2007). *The internationalization of higher education: Motivations and realities*. Retrieved from <http://jsi.sagepub.com/content/11/3-4/290>
- Altbach, P. G. & Teichler, U. (2001). Internationalization and exchanges in a globalized university. *Journal of Studies in International Education* 5, 5-25.
- American Psychological Association. (2003). Guidelines for multicultural education, training, research, practice, and organizational change for psychologists. *American Psychologist*, 58 (5), 377- 402. Doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.58.5.377
- Andrade, M. S. (2006). International students in English Speaking universities: Adjustment factors. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 5(2), 131-154.  
Doi10.1177/1475240906065589
- Angelou, M. (1969). *I know why the caged bird sings*. UK. Heinemann.
- Aristotle. (1994). *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. Richard McKeon (Ed.). New York: Random House.
- Ary, D., Cheser-Jacobs & Razavieh, A. (2006). *Introduction to research in education* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thompson Wadsworth.
- Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada [AUCC]. (2014). *International Study*. Retrieved from <http://www.aucc.ca/policy-issues/global-connections/international-study/>
- Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada [AUCC]. (2011). *Trends in higher education*. Ottawa, Canada. Retrieved from [http://www.aucc.ca/\\_pdf/english/publications/trends-2011-vol1-enrolment-e.pdf](http://www.aucc.ca/_pdf/english/publications/trends-2011-vol1-enrolment-e.pdf)
- Bailey, M. (2002). *The typical Jamaican family*. Retrieved from [http://www.jamaicans.com/culture/intro/typical\\_family.shtml](http://www.jamaicans.com/culture/intro/typical_family.shtml)
- Bakhtin, M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination*. (17th ed.). M. Holquist (Ed.). C. Emerson & M. Holquist (Trans.). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bamford, J. K. (2008). *Improving international students' experiences of studying in the UK*. Retrieved from [www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/showcase/bramford\\_international](http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/showcase/bramford_international)

- Bannerji, H. (1995). *Thinking through: Essays on feminism, Marxism and anti-racism*. Canada: Women's Press
- Barba, D. (2013, September, 12). Purge of 'Canadian experience' barrier brings hope to skilled immigrants. *The Sheaf*, p.2.
- Barrie, J. M. (1950). *Peter Pan*. New York: Charles Scribner.
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 1, 5-68.
- Berry, J. W. (1992). Acculturation and adaptation in a new society. *International Migration*, 30, 69-85.
- Bhandari, R. & Blumenthal, P. (2011). Global student mobility and the twenty-first century silk road: National trends and new directions. In R. Bhandari & P. Blumenthal (Eds.), *International students and global mobility in higher education: National trends and new directions* (pp. 1-23). New York, NY: Palgrave: Macmillan.
- Blaut, J. M. (1993). *The colonizers model of the world: Geographic diffusionism and Eurocentric history*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Bochner, S., McLeod, B. & Lin, A. (1977). Friendship patterns of overseas students: A functional model. *International Journal of Psychology*, 12, 277-294.
- Bogdan, R. C. & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. Bourdieu, P. (1986) In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood.
- Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J. C. (1990). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. London: Sage Publications.
- Bretag, T. (2007). The emperor's new clothes: Yes, there is a link between English language competence and academic standards. *People and Place*, 15 (1), 13-21.
- Broido, E. M. & Manning, K. (2002). Philosophical foundations and current theoretical perspectives in qualitative research. *Journal of College Student Development*, 43(4), 434-445.
- Brown, L. & Holloway, I. (2008). The initial stage of the international student sojourn: excitement or culture shock? *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 36(1), 33-49.

- Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. United States of America: Harvard College.
- Brym, R. J., Lie, J. & Rytina, S. (2007). *Sociology: Your compass for a new world*. (2nd ed.). Canada: Thomson Nelson.
- Cahnmann, M. (2003). The craft, practice, and possibility of poetry in educational research. *Educational Research*, 32, 29-36.
- Camus, A. (1988). *The stranger*. New York: Vintage International, Vintage Books.
- Canadian Bureau for International Education, CBIE. (2014). *Canada's performance in international education, 2012*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbie-bcei.ca/about-ie/facts-and-figures/>
- Canadian Bureau for International Education, CBIE. (2009). *Canada first: The 2009 survey of international students*. Retrieved from [http://gostudy.ca/images/documents/download/SurveyInternationalStudents\\_e.pdf](http://gostudy.ca/images/documents/download/SurveyInternationalStudents_e.pdf)
- Canagarajah, A. S. (2006). The place of world Englishes in composition: Pluralization continued. *College Composition and Communication*, 57 (4), 586-619.
- Cavan, J. S. (2006). *A cross-cultural narrative into language, culture, and identity development of three high school female immigrant students and their mainstream schooling experience in Atlanta Georgia* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from <http://dspaceprod.georgiasouthern.edu:8080/xmlui/handle/10518/1778>
- Chen, C. P. (1999). Common stressors among international college students: Research and counselling implications. *Journal of College Counselling*, 2, 49-65.
- Chen, L. (2007). Choosing Canadian graduate schools from afar: East Asian students' perspectives. *Higher Education*, 54(5), 759-780.
- Cheng, L., Myles, J. & Curtis, A. (2004). Testing language support for non-native English-speaking graduate students at a Canadian university. *TESL Journal Canada*, 21(2), 50-71.
- Choudaha, R. & Chang, L. (2012). *Trends in international student mobility: Research report 01*. World Education Services. Retrieved from <http://www.wes.org/ras/>
- Christie, F. (Ed.). (1990). *Literacy for a changing world: A fresh look at the basics*. Melbourne: Australian Council of Educational Research.
- Cicognani, E., Menzes, I., & Gil, N. (2011). University students sense of belonging to the home town: The role of residential mobility. *Social Indicator Research* 104, 33-45.



- Citizenship and Immigration Canada, (2014). *Notice – New regulations for international students finalized*. Retrieved from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/notices/2014-02-12.asp>
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (2013). *News Release: Canada welcomes record number of international students in 2012*. Retrieved from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/releases/2013/2013-02-26.asp>
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (2012). *Preliminary tables: Permanent and temporary residents, 2011*. Retrieved from [www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2011-preliminary/06.asp](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2011-preliminary/06.asp)
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada. *News release: Canada welcomes record number of immigrants through Canadian experience class: retaining the best and brightest around the world*. Retrieved from [www.cic.gc.ca/English/department/mediarelease/2012-09-14.asp](http://www.cic.gc.ca/English/department/mediarelease/2012-09-14.asp).
- Clarke-Oropeza, B., Fitzgibbon, M., & Baron, A. Jr., (1991). In the field: managing mental health crises of foreign students. *Journal of Counselling and Development*, 69, 280-284.
- Cohen, M. Z., Kahn, D. L., & Steeves, R. H. (2000). *Hermeneutic phenomenological research: A practical guide for nurse researchers*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Cooper, M. (2007). Creating universities for a multiethnic and cultural world: A utopia? *Journal of Studies in International Education* 11, 522-530.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Boston: Pearson.
- Creswell, J. & Miller, D. L. (2010). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124-130.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundation of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: Sage Publications.
- Cudmore, G. (2005). Globalization, internationalization and the recruitment of international students. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, XXXV (1), 37-60.
- Cummins, J. (1997). Cultural and linguistic diversity in education: A mainstream issue? *Educational Review*, 4(2), 105-114.
- Curry, M. J. (2004). UCLA community college review: Academic literacy for English language learners. *Community College Review*, 32, 51-68.

- Dahlberg, K. (2006). The essence of essences – the search for meaning structures in phenomenological analysis of lifeworld phenomena. *International Journal of qualitative Studies on Health and Wellbeing*, 1, 11-19.
- Dao, T. K. & Lee, D. (2007). Acculturation level, perceived English fluency, perceived social support level and depression among Taiwanese international students. *College Student Journal*, 41 (2), 287-295.
- Davies, M. & Devlin, M. (2010). Interdisciplinary in higher education. In M. Davies, M. Devlin & M. Tight (Eds.), *Interdisciplinarity higher education: Perspectives and practicalities*, 3-28. United Kingdom: Emerald Books.
- Davis, M., Dias-Bowie, Y., Greenberg, K., Klukken, G., Pollio, H. R., Thomas, S. P., & Thompson, C. L. (2004). “A fly in the buttermilk”: Descriptions of university life by successful black undergraduate students at a predominantly white southeastern university. *Journal of Higher Education*, 75(4), 420-445.
- Dednick, R. F. & Watson, F. (2002). Mentoring needs of female, minority and international graduate students: A content analysis of academic research guides and related print material. *Mentoring and Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 10(3), 275-289.
- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.). *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 1-17). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications
- Dei, G. J. S. (1992). The social reality of international post-secondary students in Canada. *CBIE Research*, 3, 1 -15. ISSN 1183-4404.
- Delpit, L. (2002). No kinda sense. In L. Delpit & J. K. Dowdy (Eds.), *The skin that we speak: Thoughts on language and culture in the classroom* (pp. 31 – 48). New York: The New Press.
- Dewey, J. (1997). *Experience and education*. New York: Touchstone.
- Diaz-Rico, L. & Weed, K. (2002). The cross cultural, language, and academic development handbook. A complete K-12 handbook. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Dilthey, W. & Jameson, F. (1972). The rise of hermeneutics. *New literary History*, 3(2), 229-244.
- Drew, N. (2004). Creating a synthesis of intentionality: The role of the bracketing facilitator. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 27 (3), 215-223.

- Dubois, C. (1956). *Foreign students and higher education in the United States*. Washington DC: American Council on Education.
- Dutro, S. & Moran, C. (2003). Rethinking English language instruction: An architectural approach. In G. Garcia. (Ed.), *English learners: Reaching the highest level of literacy* (pp.22-258). Newark, NJ: international Reading Association.
- Egbo, B. (2008). *Teaching for diversity in Canadian schools*. Toronto: Pearson.
- El-Saghir, K. (2010). *Code-switching in sociolinguistics studies: Review and analysis*. Retrieved from <http://www.arabguide.net/t2k/wsu/docs/2010-2-code-switching.pdf>
- Ellison, R. (1982). *The invisible man*. New York: Random House.
- Erkan, S. (2013). *Perceptions and experiences of fairness amongst Muslim post-secondary students in Canada* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from [ecommons.usask.ca](http://ecommons.usask.ca)
- Fais, M. R. (2012). *Gender influence of women international who pursue employment and permanent immigration to Canada*. Available from Pro Quest Dissertations and Theses. (MR 88260).
- Faulkner, S. L. (2007). Concern with craft: using Ars poetica as a criteria for reading research poetry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13, 218-234.
- Fiddler, C. (2014). *Examining the influence of Aboriginal literature on Aboriginal students' resilience at the University of Saskatchewan*. Available at [ecommons.usask.ca](http://ecommons.usask.ca)
- Finlay, L. (2009). Debating phenomenological research methods. *Phenomenology & Practice*, 1, 6-25.
- Finlay, L. (2008). A dance between the reduction and reflexivity: Explicating the “phenomenological psychological attitude.” *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 39, 1-32.
- Finnerman, W., Tisch, S., Starkey, S., & Newirth, C. (Producers) & Zemeckis, R. (Director). (1994). *Forrest Gump* [Motion Picture]. USA: Paramount Pictures
- Finnie, R. & Usher, A. (2007). *Room at the top: Strategies for increasing number of graduate students in Canada*. Toronto: C. D. Howe Institute Commentary No. 245. ISSN 0824-8001
- Fiske, S. T. & Lee, T. L. (2012). Xenophobia and how to fight it: Immigrants as the quintessential other. In S. Wiley, G. Philogene and T. A. Revenson (Eds.), *Social*

- categories in everyday experience* (pp. 151-164). Washington D.C: American Psychological Association.
- Flemming-May, R. & Yuro, L. (2009). From student to scholar: The academic library and social sciences PhD students' transformation. *Librarians and the Academy*, 9(2), 199-221.
- Florida, R. (2002). *The rise of the creative class and how its transferring work, leisure, community and everyday life*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Foley, W. A. (1997). *Anthropological linguistics: An introduction*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing Inc.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Fraser, M., Richman, J. M. & Galinsky, M. J. (1990). Risk protection and resilience: Toward a conceptual framework for social work practice. *Social Work Research*, 23(3), 131-143.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Freshwater, D. (2003). *Counselling skills for nurses, midwives and health visitors*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Freshwater, D. & Avis, M. (2004). Analysing interpretation and reinterpreting analysis: Exploring the logic of critical reflection. *Nursing Philosophy*, 5, 4-11.
- Freshwater, D. & Rolfe, G. (2001). Critical reflexivity: A politically and ethnically engaged research method for nursing. *Nursing Times Research*, 6, 526-537.
- Friedrich, P. (1989). Language, identity, and political economy. *American Anthropologist*, 91(2), 295-312.
- Frost, R. (1992). The road not taken. In R. Frost (Ed.), *Robert Frost Selected Poems* (p. 163). New York: Gramercy.
- Fu, Q. (2013). *Surviving as an international student: Chinese graduate students' participation in Canadian classrooms*. (Masters Project Report). University of Saskatchewan. Unpublished Report.
- Furnham, A. (2004). Foreign students: Education and culture shock. *The Psychologist*, 17(1), 16-19.
- Furnham, A. & Bochner, S. (1986). *Culture shock: Psychological reactions to unfamiliar environments*. London: Methuen.

- Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2011). *Applying educational research* (6th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Gadamer, H. (2004). *Truth and method*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Gebhard, J. G. (2010). *What do international students think and feel?: Adapting to U.S. college life and culture*. United States: Michigan University Press.
- Ghosh, R. A. & Abdi, A. A. (2004). *Education and the politics of difference: Canadian perspectives*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Gilliver-Brown, K. & Johnson, E. M. (2009). Academic literacy development: Multiple perspectives approach to blended learning. *Ascilite Proceedings*. Retrieved from <http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/auckland09/procs/gilliver-brown.pdf>
- Gilman, R. (2000). *Spinning into butter*. New York: Faber and Faber Inc.
- Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (2nd ed.). New York: Langman.
- Greene, M. (1978). *Landscapes of leaning*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(1), 1-26.
- Guba, E. G. & Lincoln, S. Y. (1999). Naturalistic and rationalistic enquiry. In J. P. Keeves & G. Lakomski (Eds.), *Issues in educational research* (pp.141-172). Oxford: Pergamon
- Gunawardena, H. & Wilson, R. (2012). *International students at university: Understanding the student experience*. Bern: Switzerland: Peter Lang.
- Guo, S. & Zenobia, J. (2007). Nurturing cultural diversity in higher education: A critical review of selected models. *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 37(3), 27-49.
- Gürüz, K. (2011). *Higher education and international student mobility in the global knowledge economy* (2nd ed.). Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.
- Gusfield, J. R. (1975). *Community: A critical response*. Oxford: B. Blackwell.
- Hamill, C. & Sinclair, H. (2010). Bracketing – practical considerations in Husserlian phenomenological research. *Nurse Researcher*, 17(2), 16-17.
- Hausman, L. R. M., Ye, F., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2009). Sense of belonging and persistence in white and African American first-year students. *Research in Higher Education*, 50, 649-669.

- Heffner, C. (2003). Charlie's Road. Retrieved from <http://www.lib.ru/POEZIQ/HEFFNER/poetry.txt>
- Hegel, W. F. (1977). *Phenomenology of spirit*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hoffman, M., Richmond, J., Morrow, J., & Salomone, K. (2002). Investigating sense of belonging in first year college students. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 4(3): 227-256.
- Hoffman, E. (1990). *Lost in translation: A life in a new language*: New York: Penguin.
- Hofstede, G. H. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Holland, D. Lachiotte, W., Skinner, D., & Caine, C. (1998). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. London, England: Harvard University Press.
- hooks, b. (1988). *Talking back*. Toronto, Ontario: Between the Lines.
- Hu, G. (2002). Potential cultural resistance to pedagogical imports: The case of communicative language teaching in China. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 15(2), 93-105.
- Huntley, H. S. (1993). *Adult international students: Problems of adjustment*. Athens: Ohio State University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED355886).
- Hurtado, S. & Carter, F. C. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education*, 70(4): 324-345.
- Hymes, D. (2006). Ethno-poetics. *Theory, culture and society*. Retrieved from <http://tcs.sagepub.com>
- Ige, B. (2010). Identity and language choice: 'I equals we'. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 42, 3047-3054.
- In Conversation. (2011). Student engagement: a leadership priority: An interview with Douglas Willms. *In Conversation*, III, 2. ISSN 1922 2394(PDF). Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/Summer2011.pdf>
- Jenkins, J. (2011). Accommodating (to) ELF in the international university. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43, 926-936.
- Jensen, D. (2005). Developing resilience. *Science Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org>

- Jessen Williamson, K. (2014). Uumasuusissuaq: Spirit and Indigenous writing. *In Education*, 20(2), 135-146.
- Johnson, D., Soldner, M., Leonard, J. B., Alvarez, P., Inkelas, K. K., Rowan-Kenyon, H., & Longerbeam, S. (2007). Examining sense of belonging among first-year undergraduates from different racial/ethnic groups. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(5): 525-542.
- Kang, T. S. (1971). Name change and acculturation: Chinese students on an American campus. *The Pacific Sociological Review*, 14(4), 403-412.
- Kaplan, H. B. (1999). Towards an understanding of resilience: A critical review of definitions and models. In M. D. Glantz & J. L. Johnson (Eds.), *Resilience and development: Positive life adaptations* (pp. 17-84). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- Kapusta, S. & Roadevin, C. (2011). *PhD studies in Canada: A dilemma for international students*. Retrieved from <http://www.universityaffairs.ca/phd-studies-in-canada-a-dilemma-for-international-students.aspx>
- Kawulich, B. B. (2005). Participant Observation as a data collection method. Forum: *Qualitative Social Research*, 6(2), 1-22.
- Khawaja, N. G. & Stallman, H. M. (2011). Understanding the coping strategies of international students: A qualitative approach. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 21, 203- 224.
- Kim, Y. Y. (1994). Adapting a new culture. In L. A. Samovar & R. E. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (7th ed.), (pp. 392-405). Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Kim, Y. Y. (2006). From ethnic to interethnic: The case of identity adaptation and transformation. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 25, 283-292.
- Kim, Y. Y. (2008). Intercultural personhood: Globalization and a way of being. *Intercultural Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 32, 359-368.
- Knight, J. (2006). Commercial cross-border education: Implications for financing higher education. *Higher Education in the World*, 103-112.

- Kubota, R. (2001). Discursive construction of the images of U.S. classrooms. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35(1), 9-38
- Lacina, J. G. (2002). Preparing international students for a successful social experience in higher education. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 117, 21-27.
- Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lasanowski, V. (2011). Can speak, will travel. In R. Bhandari & P. Blumenthal (Eds.). *International students and global mobility in higher education: Global trends and new directions* (pp. 193-210). New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lattuca, L. R. (2003). Creating Interdisciplinarity: Grounded definitions from college and university faculty. *History of Intellectual Culture*, 3, 1, 1-20.
- Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Leary, T. A. (2011). *Supporting international students with first year transition into Canadian universities: Recommendations from Atlantic Canada* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database. (NR 83445)
- Lee, K. H. (2005). *A traveller's tale: The experience of study in a foreign language* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Canada). Alberta, Canada: University of Alberta.
- Leon, A. C., Davis, L. L., & Kraemer, H. C. (2011). The role of interpretations of pilot studies in clinical research. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 45(5), 626-629.
- Lev-Ari, S. & Keysar, B. (2010). Why don't we believe non-native speakers?: The influence of accent on credibility. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 46, 1093-1096.
- Lin, F. (2008). *Faculty perceptions and experiences with Taiwanese graduate students at a university in the United States: Implications for cross cultural teaching and learning*. Retrieved from <http://etd.ohiolink.edu.rws>
- Lin, S., & Scherz, S. D., (2014). Challenges facing Asian international graduate students in the US: Pedagogical considerations in higher education. *Journal of International Students*, 4(1), 16-33.
- Light, R. L., Xu, M., & Massop, J. (1987) English proficiency and academic performance of international students. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21, 251-261.



- Luszki, M. B. (1958). *Interdisciplinary Team Research: Methods and problems*. New York: New York University Press.
- Luzio-Lockett, A. (1998). The Squeezing effect: The cross-cultural experience of international students. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 26(2), 209-223.
- Madgett, P. J & Belanger, C. (2008). The international student: The Canadian experience. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 14(3), 191-207.
- Maguire, M. H. (2011). *A missing dimension in multiculturalism in higher education: The marginalization of international students' voices and writing identities*. Retrieved from [www.acs-aec.ca/CanadianIssues\\_diversity-education-for-liberation-realities-possibilities-problemspdf.pdf](http://www.acs-aec.ca/CanadianIssues_diversity-education-for-liberation-realities-possibilities-problemspdf.pdf)
- Mandela, N. (1995). *Long walk to freedom: An autobiography of Nelson Mandela*. New York: Little Brown and Company.
- Mamiseishvili, K. (2011). International student persistence in US post-secondary institutions. *Higher Education*, 64, 1 -17. DOI:10.1007/s10734-011-9477-0.
- Maravelias, J. (2010). *Study abroad dynamics: Anthropological perspectives*. Eastern Michigan University: DigitalCommon@EMU
- Margison, S. (2012). Including the other: regulation of the human rights of mobile students in a nation bound world. *Higher Education*, 63, 497-512.
- Maslow, A. H. (1968). *Toward a Psychology of being*. Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand
- Maxwell, J. A. (2006). Literature reviews of, and for educational research: "Scholars before researchers." *Educational Researcher*, 35 (9), 28-31.
- Maynard, K. & Cahnmann-Taylor. (2010). Anthropology at the edge of words: Where poetry and ethnography meet. *Anthropology and Humanism*, 1, 2-19.
- Maynes, M. J., Pierce, J. L., & Laslett, B. (2008). *Telling stories: The use of personal narratives in the social sciences and history*. Idaho & London: Cornell University Press.
- McHale, P. (2011). Structural incentives to attract foreign students to Canada's postsecondary educational system: a comparative analysis. In R. Bhandari & P. Blumenthal (Eds.), *International students and global mobility in higher education: National trends and new directions* (pp. 167-191). New York, NY: Palgrave: Macmillan.

- McLure, J. W. (2007). International graduates cross-cultural adjustment: Experiences, coping strategies and suggested programmatic responses. *Teaching in Higher Education, 12*(2), 199-217.
- McMillan, D.W. & Chavis, D.M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 14*(1), 6-23.
- McMullen, K. & Elias, A. (2012). A changing portrait of the international students in Canadian universities. Retrieved from [www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-x2010006/article/11405-eng.htm](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-x2010006/article/11405-eng.htm)
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception*. (C. Smith, Trans.). London: Routledge.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2012). *Phenomenology of perception* (D. A. Landes, Trans.). London: Routledge.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: a guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons.
- Ministry of Education Youth and Culture [MOEYC]. (2004). *The development of education: National report of Jamaica*. Retrieved from <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/worldwide/unesco-regions/latin-america-and-the-caribbean/jamaica/national-reports.html>
- Ministry of Education. (2014). *The Ministry of Education story*. Retrieved from <http://www.moe.gov.jm/node/16>
- Mischler, E. G. (1986). *Research Interviewing*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge Massachusetts.
- Molinsky, A. (2007). Cross cultural code switching: The psychological challenges of adapting behavior in foreign cultural interactions. *Academy of Management Review, 2*, 622-640.
- Monture-Angus, P. (1995). *Thunder in my soul: A Mohawk woman speaks*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing.
- Morgan, M. (2012). The context of learning in higher education. In M. Morgan (Ed.). *Improving the student experience: A practical guide for universities and colleges* (pp.1-14). London: Routledge.
- Mori, S. (2000). Addressing the mental health concerns of international students. *Journal of Counselling and Development, 78*(2), 137-144.
- Morrison, T. (1993). *The bluest eye*. New York: Knopf.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Murray, D. M. (1985). *A writer teaches writing* (2nd ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Myles, J. & Cheng, L. (2003). The social and cultural life of non-native English speaking international graduate students at a Canadian university. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 2, 247-263.
- Net Industries (2011). *Jamaica-History & background*. Retrieved from <http://www.education.stateuniversity.com/pages/725/Jamaica-History-Background>
- Nilep, C. (2006). "Code switching" in sociocultural linguistics. *Colorado Research in Linguistics*, 19.
- Olivas, M. & Li, C. (2006). Understanding stressors of international students in higher education: What college counsellors and personnel need to know? *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 33(3), 217-222.
- Özlem, S. & DiAngelo, R. (2012). *Is everyone really equal? An introduction to key concepts in social justice education*. New York: Teachers' College Press.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Peterson, E. & Coltrane, B. (2003). *Culture in second language teaching*. Retrieved from <http://www.cal.org/resources/Digest/0309peterson.html>.
- Peterson, L. (2013). *Meeting the needs of international students*. Retrieved from [www.cgu.edu/pages/948.asp](http://www.cgu.edu/pages/948.asp)
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2005). Language and meaning: Data collection in qualitative research. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 52(2), 137-145.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany, New York: State University of New York.
- Ponterotto, J. G. & Grieger, I. (2007). Effectively communicating qualitative research. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 35, 404-431.
- Popadiuk, N. & Arthur, N. (2004). Counselling international students in Canadian schools. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 26(2), 125- 145.
- Poyrazli, S. & Grahame, K. M. (2007). Barriers to Adjustment: Needs of International Students within a Semi-Urban Campus Community. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 34, 1-28.

- Prendergast, M. (2009). Poem is what?: Poetic inquiry in qualitative social science research. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 1, 4, 541-568.
- Putman, A. O. (1998). Being, becoming and belonging. *The Society for Descriptive Psychology*. Retrieved from [www.sdp.org](http://www.sdp.org)
- Repko, A. F. (2007). Integrating Interdisciplinarity: How the theories of common ground and cognitive interdisciplinarity are informing the debate on interdisciplinary integration. *Issues in Integration*, 25, 1-31.
- Richardson, M. (1998). Poetics in the field and on the page. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 4, 541-462.
- Rodriguez, R. (1982). *Hunger of memory: The education of Richard Rodriguez*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Sacre, S., Nash, R., & Lock, J. (2010). *Development of a resource to promote resilience in international students undertaking health courses*. Retrieved from <http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/sydney10/procs/Sacre-concise.pdf>
- Sandelowski, M. (1991). Telling Stories: Narrative approaches in qualitative research. *Image: Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 23(2), 161-166.
- Sanner, S., Wilson, A. H., & Samson, L. F. (2002). The experiences of international nursing students in a baccalaureate nursing program. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 18, 206-213.
- Sawir, E. (2005). Language difficulties of international students in Australia: The effects of prior learning experience. *International Education Journal*, 6(5), 567-580.
- Schwandt, T. A. (2000). Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: Interpretivism, hermeneutics and social construction. In N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln, (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 189- 213). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Secombe, K. (2002). "Beating the odds" versus "changing the odds": Poverty, resilience and family policy. *Journal of Marriages and Family*, 64(2), 384-394.
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and social sciences*. New York: Teachers' College Press.
- Seidman, S. (2008). *Contested knowledge: Social theory today*. (4th ed.). Malden, MA., USA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Sergiovanni, T. J. (1994). *Building community in schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Boss Publishers.

- Shabatay, V. (1991). The Stranger's story: Who calls and who answers? In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), *Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in Education* (pp. 136-152). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Silverman, D. (2010). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Singaravelu, H. D. (2007). *Preface*. In H. D. Singaravelu & M. Pope (Eds.). *A handbook for counseling international students in the United States* (pp. ix – xi). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Singh, K. & Armstrong, L. (2006). *International postgraduate student experience: How can we enhance transition management?* Edith Cowan University Online. Retrieved from <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1103&context=ceducom>
- Smith, R. A & Khawaja, N. G. (2011). A review of the acculturation experiences of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35, 699-713.
- Slavin, R. E. (2007). *Educational research in an age of accountability*. Boston: Pearson.
- Spack, R. (1997). The acquisition of academic literacy in a second language: A longitudinal case study. *Written Communication*, 14, 3-62.
- Stableton, M. J., Huesman JR., R. L., & Kuzhabekova, A. (2010). Do I belong here?: Exploring immigrant college student responses on the SERU survey sense of belonging/sense of satisfaction factor. *Center of Studies in Higher Education (CSHE) Research and Occasional Paper Series: CSHE 13.10*
- Starks, H. & Trinidad, S. (2007). Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research*, 17, 1372-1380.
- Starr, D. (2012). China and the Confucian education model. A position paper commissioned by Universitas 21.
- Statistical Institute of Jamaica. (2013). *Population and Housing Census 2012*. Retrieved from [http://statinja.gov.jm/Demo\\_SocialStats/population.aspx](http://statinja.gov.jm/Demo_SocialStats/population.aspx)
- Suominen, A. (2005). Stranger within. *The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education* 25, 15-44. Available from ProQuest Education Journals.
- Synder, I. & Beale, D. (2011). The role of English in international education. In I. Synder & J. Nieuwenhuysen (Eds.). *A home away from home?: International students in Australia and South African Higher Education*. Australia: Monash University Publishing.

- Tannis, D. (2010). *International students' lived experience seeking ICT assistance: Just click here*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database.
- The Critical thinking Community (2013). *Defining critical thinking*. Retrieved from <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766>
- Tillet, A. D. & Lesser, B. (1992). *International students and higher education: Canadian choices*. Ottawa: CBIE Research.
- Trice, A. G. (2003). Faculty perceptions of graduate international students: The benefits and challenges. *Journal of studies in International Education* 7, 379-403. DOI: 10.1177/102831503257120
- Trice, A. G. (2007). Faculty perspectives regarding graduate international students' isolation from host national students. *International Education Journal*, 8(1), 108-117.
- UNESCO Institute of Statistics. (2014). *Global flow of tertiary-level students*. Retrieved from <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx>
- UNESCO Institute of Statistics. (2011). *Global flow of tertiary-level students*. Retrieved from <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx>
- University of Saskatchewan. (2013). Report of the support Service transformation task force Retrieved from <http://words.usask.ca/transformus/files/2013/12/Support-Services-Report.pdf>
- University of Saskatchewan (2012). *Student head count and demographics*. Retrieved from <http://www.usask.ca/isa/statistics/students/headcount-demographics.php>
- University of Saskatchewan Student and Enrolment Services Division. (2012). *Enrolment report update: Winter term census day*. Retrieved from <http://www.usask.ca/isa/university-reports/enrolment/enrolment-report-winter--2012.pdf>
- University of Saskatchewan (2012). *Promise and potential*. Retrieved from (<http://www.usask.ca/plan/documents/Promise%20and%20Potential%20-%20Full%20Version.pdf> . P.3)
- University of Saskatchewan (2010). *University of Saskatchewan strategic directions – 2010: Renewing the dream*. Retrieved from [http://www.usask.ca/ipa/planning/strategic\\_directions.php](http://www.usask.ca/ipa/planning/strategic_directions.php)
- Van Den Hoonaard, D. (2012). *Qualitative research in action: A Canadian primer*. Canada: Oxford University Press.

- van Manen, M. (1984). Practicing phenomenological writing. *Phenomenology and Pedagogy*, 2(1), 36-69.
- van Manen, M. (1997a). From meaning to method. *Qualitative Health Research*, 7, 345-369.
- van Manen, M. (1997b). *Researching lived experiences: Human Science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Ontario, Canada: The Althouse Press.
- van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning giving in phenomenological research and writing*. California: Left Coast Press Inc.
- Villanueva Jr., V. (1993). *Bootstraps: From an American academic of color*. United States of America: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1988). *Thought and language*. Alex Kozulin (Trans.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Wagner, K. & Magistrale, T. (1995). *Writing across cultures: an introduction to study abroad and the writing process*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Wang, J. (2008). A study of resiliency characteristics in the adjustment of international graduate students at American universities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13(1), 22-45.
- Wang, Y. (2004). Pursuing cross-cultural graduate education: A multifaceted investigation. *International Education*, 33(2), 52-72.
- Wason-Ellam, L. (2001). Living against the wind: Pathways chosen by Chinese immigrants. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 33(1), 1-39.
- Water, J. L. (2008). *Education, migration and cultural capital in the Chinese diaspora: Transnational students between Hong Kong and Canada*. Amherst, New York: Cambria Press.
- Waye, L. (2010). *Learning how to work with instructors of international EAL graduate students to better support their students' development of academic writing skills*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Wells, G & Chang, G. L. (1990). From speech to writing: Some evidence on the relationship between oracy and literacy. In A. Wilkinson (Ed.). *The writing of writing*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.

- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, E. (2000). Communities of practice and social learning systems. *Organization*, 7(2), 225-246.
- Wiercinski, A. (2009). *Hans-Georg Gadamer and the truth of hermeneutic experience*. Retrieved from <http://journals.library.mun.ca/ojs/index.php/analecta/article/view/2/1>
- Wilcock, A. (1999). Reflections on doing being and becoming. *Australian Occupational Therapy*, 46, 1-11.
- Wilson, C. (2001). *The outsider*. New York: A Delta Book.
- Wu, Q., Tsang, B., & Ming, H. (2012). Social capital, family support, resilience and educational outcome of Chinese migrant children. *British Journal of Social Work*, 1-21.
- Xu, M. (1991). The impact of English-language proficiency on international students' perceived academic difficulty. *Research in Higher Education*, 32(5) 557-570.
- Zhang, X. (2011). *Choices and challenges: Chinese graduate students' transitional issues at a Canadian University*. Doctoral Dissertation. University of Saskatchewan.
- Zhou, L. (2004). *Improving international students' experience of studying in the UK*. Retrieved from [www.thecrimson.com/article](http://www.thecrimson.com/article)
- Zhou, Y., Jindal-Snape, D., Toppping, K., & Todman, J. (2008). Theoretical models of culture shock and adaptation in international students in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(1), 63-75.
- Zhou, Y. (2012). *Listening to voices: Understanding Chinese students' journey at a Canadian university*. (Master's thesis), University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan, Canada. Available at [ecommons.usask.ca](http://ecommons.usask.ca).
- Zyuzin, A. (2012). *How assessment practices influence the academic acculturation process of international graduate students*. (Master's Thesis) Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.
- Zwiers, J. (2008). *Building academic language: Essential practices for content classrooms*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.



**APPENDIX A -  
Information and Invitation Letter**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear International Graduate Student:

My name is Yolanda Palmer and I am currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Saskatchewan in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies. I am conducting research for my dissertation that will be titled *Student abroad: Stories of the experiences of international graduate students studying in a new academic culture*. I will be collecting data for the study in the first term of the academic year 2013/2014. The study will provide you with an opportunity to share your experiences in the university as an international graduate student. This study is a chance to give you a voice within this academic setting and may motivate positive changes in the recruitment and delivery of content across borders at the University of Saskatchewan. Adding your voice to this study is one way that you can impact the lives of other international graduate students enrolled in graduate studies in the institution.

I am interested in interviewing you to hear about your experiences at the university, how these experiences impact your learning and the essence you ascribe to these experiences. I realize that you may have a busy schedule but would be grateful if you can provide your time for the interview at a place, time and date that is most convenient to you. Participation in the research will require an estimated three hours of your time over the data collection period. Data collection will consist of three interview sessions, spanning approximately 60 minutes each. I might also need to shadow you for a month during regular sessions. In shadowing you I will be observing your interactions in different settings on campus. Therefore, I will observe you in select classes, on library visits, in group meetings for assigned tasks and in some social events into which you partake on campus. You will also be encouraged to present two journal entries describing your experiences as an international graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan. This activity will be required at the initial and final stages of the research.

Your email and personal details will be kept in the strictest confidence. To maintain your privacy and to assure confidentiality in the study, you will be identified by a pseudonym in data collection and analysis documents (Ex. James, Roxie, etc.). As well, any information you supply will be treated with the strictest confidence.

Once the interview has been transcribed, you will be asked to review the transcript and to add, delete, or alter information as you see fit. An individual meeting for debriefing will be arranged with you at a time and date convenient to you. A brief written report that summarizes the findings will be made available to you and any other person or agency interested in the study. This report will group the findings so individual participants are not identified. You will also have access to an electronic copy of the final study if you so desire.

A copy of the interview questions is included for your perusal. Providing that you consent to participate in the study, a consent form is provided for your signature. To confirm you are willing to participate, please contact me through email by \_\_\_\_\_. Please be aware that signing the consent form does not mean that you are bound to participate in the study, as you are free to withdraw your consent at any time with no repercussions or negative consequences.

If you require further information you can contact me at any time at the email provided.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

---

Yolanda Palmer, Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Interdisciplinary Studies  
University of Saskatchewan  
C180 Administration Building  
105 Administration Place, Saskatoon, SK S7N 5A2

**Supervisors Contact Information:**

**karla.jwilliamson@usask.ca Tel.: (306) 966-5262**

**linda.wason-ellam@usask.ca Tele: (306) 966-7578**

## APPENDIX B –

### Letter of Consent and Consent Form

*This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board on June 24, 2013. Thank you for your participation.*

**RESEARCHER:** Yolanda Palmer, Doctoral Candidate

Department of Interdisciplinary Studies  
University of Saskatchewan  
C180 Administration Building  
105 Administration Place, Saskatoon, SK S7N 5A2  
EMAIL: ymp404@mail.usask.ca Tele. (306) 966-7571

**Purpose and Procedure:** You will be asked to describe your experiences as an international student at the university. The goal is to discover what it is like being an international graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan. You will be asked to reflect on your experiences as an international graduate student in a new academic culture and environment and its subjective meaning to you as an individual. Interviews will last approximately 1 hour each (totaling 2 hours) at a date (during the period December 7, 2013 and March 28, 2014), time, and place convenient to you. The interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed. After your interview, and prior to data analysis, you will be given an opportunity to review the transcript of your interviews. You are given the opportunity to add, alter, or delete information from the transcript as you see fit. You might also be asked to participate in an observational activity that requires my shadowing and observing your activities and reactions in varying situations on the campus of the University of Saskatchewan.

**The findings of this study will form the basis for my doctoral dissertation, a requirement for the completion of my degree. In addition, the information may be used as the basis for conference papers and journal articles.**

**Potential Benefits:** While there is no guarantee that you will receive personal benefits from participation in the study, you may experience greater awareness of your journey through post-secondary learning as an international graduate student. The study may also give voice to your individual experiences as an international graduate student at the university.

**Potential Risk:** There are no known risks to be anticipated from this research.

**Confidentiality:** Your email and personal details will be kept in the strictest confidence. To maintain your privacy and to assure confidentiality in the study, you will be identified by a pseudonym in data collection and analysis documents (Ex. James, Roxie, etc.). Nowhere in my

notes or in any other record will your name appear? As well, any information you supply will be treated with the strictest confidence.

**Right to Withdraw:** Your participation is voluntary, and you can choose to answer only those questions with which you are comfortable. There is no guarantee that you will personally benefit from your involvement. The information that is shared will be held in strict confidence and discussed only with the research team. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason without penalty. Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until data has been pooled, at which point it may be impossible to withdraw data.

**Questions:** If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact me at the email and number provided. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office [ethics.office@usask.ca](mailto:ethics.office@usask.ca) (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free 1(888) 966-2975.

**Follow-Up and Debriefing:** A brief written summary of the results will be available to participants and others interested in the experiences of participants. You will also be offered an electronic copy of the final research project.

**Consent to Participate:**

I have read and understood the description provided; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time up to the point that data is combined. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

---

Name of Participant

---

Date

---

Signature of Participant

---

Signature of Researcher

## APPENDIX C -

### International Graduate Student Interviews

#### Preliminaries

1. Into which department are you currently enrolled?
2. What is your current level of studies (Masters or Ph.D.)?
3. At what year of study are you in your program?
4. Into which of the following age range would you categorize yourself? 18-25, 33-44; Above 45 years old
5. What is your country of origin? What is the first language of your country?

#### Phase 1 –Building Rapport: How it all began

What was it like being a university student in your home country?

1. Tell me about your life as student in your home university.
2. Take me through a normal day (from start to the end of the day) for you as a student in your home country.
3. Tell me a story about a memorable occasion for you as a student in your home university.  
What led you to become an international graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan?
4. What led you to pursue studies as an international graduate student at this university?
5. Tell me about the experience of being an international student at the University?
6. Is there any other thing that you would like to tell me about how you became an international graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan and the processes involved?

#### Phase 2 –Exploring the experience: Talking about phenomenon

Before we begin is there anything you thought of regarding your experiences as a student that you would like to share?

1. Tell me about what it is like studying at the University of Saskatchewan.
2. What is a normal day like for you on campus for you as an international graduate student here at the University of Saskatchewan? Take me through a day (from beginning to end).
3. Describe an important event in your life as an international graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan.
4. Tell me a story about a memorable event for you at the campus of the University of Saskatchewan.

5. Is there any other thing that you would like to tell me about your experiences as an international graduate student on the campus of the University of Saskatchewan?

**Tying it all together: Reflection on meaning**

How do you interpret your experiences as an international graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan? What does the experience of being an international graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan mean to you?

Before we begin, is there any information you would like to add regarding your experiences as an international graduate student?

MAY ASK FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS HERE...

1. Given what you have said how what sense do your experiences as an international graduate student make to you?
2. What does the experience mean to and for you as an international graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan?
3. Given all you have shared where do you see yourself now in the future?
4. Is there any other thing that you would like to add at this point to the response you have given?







**APPENDIX E -  
Transcript Release Form**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Yolanda Palmer. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Yolanda Palmer to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant Date

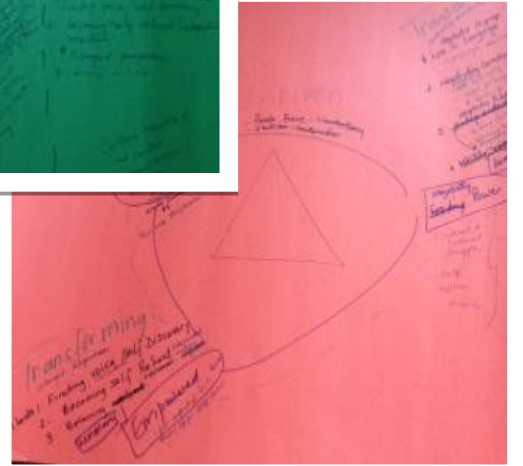
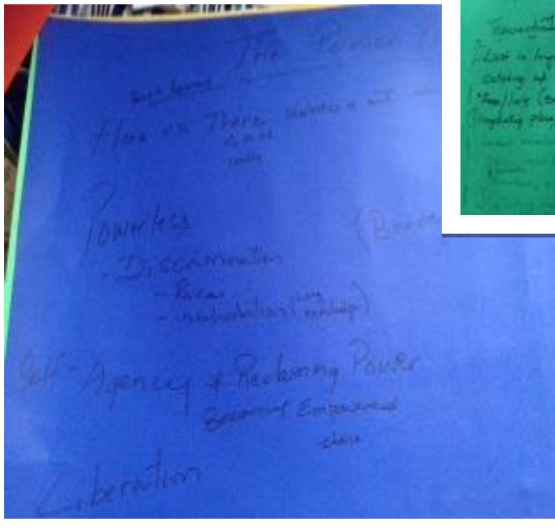
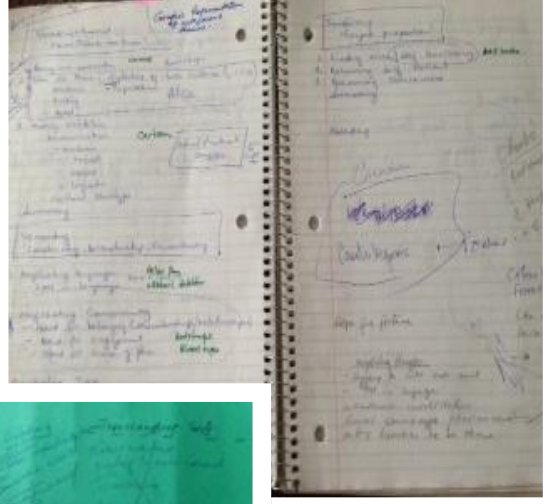
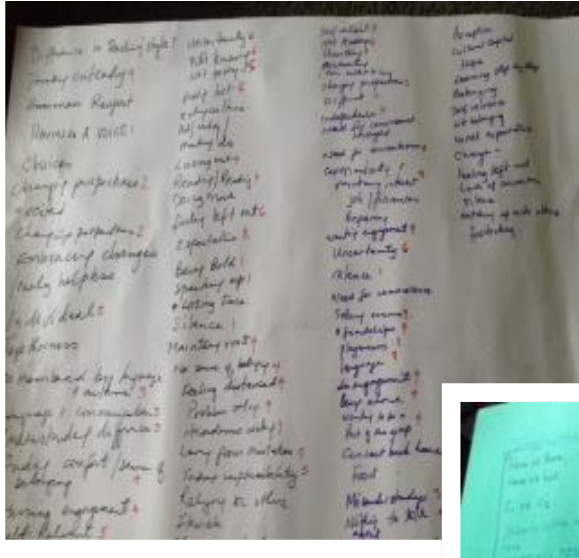
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant

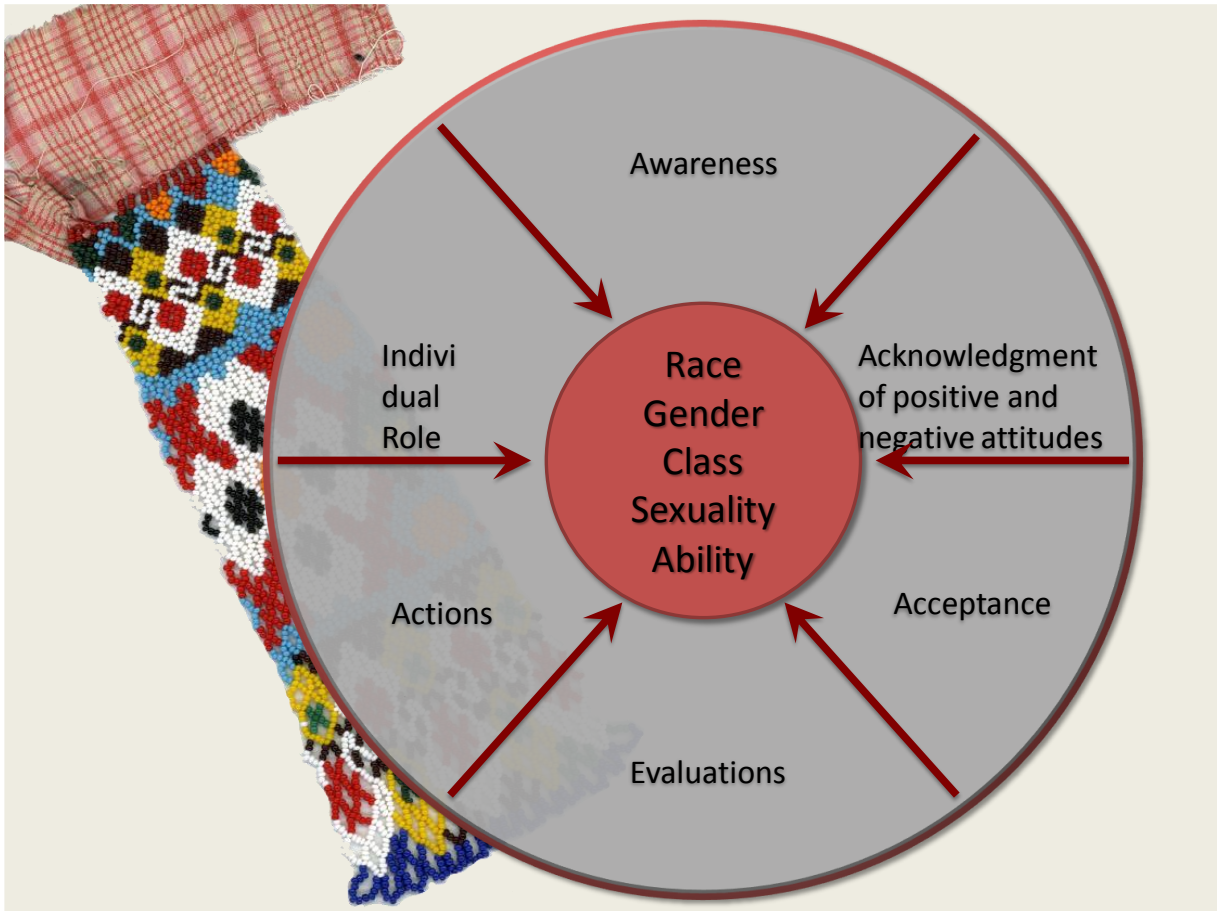
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher

# APPENDIX F – Concept Maps



**APPENDIX G –  
Reawakening Model**



Reawakening Model for Antiracist and Anti-oppressive Education @ Karla Jessen Williamson.