IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE STUDENTS’ CHALLENGES

AND

TEACHERS’ PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES

by

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ABSTRACT

As Canada’s newcomer student population continues to rise and 42% of total new immigrants settle in Ontario (Canwest News Service, 2009), it becomes increasingly important to ensure that these students are adapting well and to their full potential within their host schools. The purpose of this project was two-fold: first, to review the existing literature on immigrant and refugee students’ challenges in the classroom and school community and second, to develop a teacher’s manual based on the documented challenges specific to newcomer students in the classroom, so that these teachers can be aware of these possible challenges, as well as use suggested pedagogical strategies to address these challenges. For the purposes of my project, I first investigated the challenges specific to immigrant students, followed by the challenges experienced by refugee students in the classroom and community. I then surveyed the literature to identify what the research classifies as pedagogical strategies directed towards classroom teachers who are working with these students. Findings from my review of the literature indicated that trauma, grief, and loss; learning the English language; and the intercultural experience are the three main areas of challenge for both immigrant and refugee students. Overarching educational policies, school wide practices, classroom strategies, school-community relations, and professional development among teachers are the main themes revealed in the development of strategies for helping immigrant and refugee students overcome their educational challenges.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

I was six years old when my family immigrated to Canada from former Yugoslavia. It was November of 1992. Within one week of arriving to our new country, I was placed into a Grade 1 classroom in the local elementary school. I had never attended school in our homeland and therefore did not have an understanding of the school system, let alone an education system in a country where I did not speak the language. I remember two things from my first day of school. I wish that I could say that they are fond memories, but they are not. I remember the principal introducing my parents and me to my teacher. This was the first time in my life that I heard my name so poorly mispronounced; I did not even realize that it was me to whom the principal was referring.

A couple of hours later, a bell sounded. I observed the other students in the class put on their coats, hats, and gloves, and head outside. It was home time – or so I thought. I walked to the edge of the field and waited where earlier that morning I was told that I would be getting picked up after school. I waited a long time, just wanting to go home and be with my family. Finally, a teacher approached me and motioned for me to come in. I started crying because I felt so lonely and was confused. After a while, the school principal brought a family friend to me who explained that that break was known as "recess", and home time was not for another few hours. That marked my first day in school -- a new but foreign school.

My interest in this project was sparked by that memory of my experience, along with similar experiences that I observed of co-immigrant students as they acculturated
into their new education system in the elementary school years. From a teaching perspective, after completing my Bachelor of Education program, I recognized the need for teachers to have access to a manual that could aid them on how to better interact with immigrant and refugee students. I believe, and I am delighted that my belief is supported by literature, that it is imperative that teachers follow an inclusive but consistent pedagogical framework in order to provide newcomer students with a supportive learning environment that will help them learn and develop to their full potential.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to develop a teacher’s manual that includes pedagogical strategies that are based on the documented factors that contribute to the challenges experienced by newcomer students as they must, of necessity, adapt to new, but foreign, education systems. Within this project, my first aim is to investigate the challenges specific to immigrant students, followed by the challenges experienced by refugee students. It is my hope that, through the identification of these documented challenges, I would be able to develop a manual of pedagogical strategies for teachers when dealing with some of these tribulations and working to develop an opportune learning environment for these students.

Defining Key Terms

The terminology that I use throughout this project relates to newcomer children’s experiences in the educational context. In this section, I define and explain what is meant by the four terms: acculturation, immigrant, refugee, and Canada as a host country.
**Acculturation**

Throughout this project, I refer to the challenges that immigrant and refugee students experience as they integrate into their new, but foreign, country. As these children adapt, within a multicultural country such as Canada, the desired accommodation goal is one of acculturation. Phinney, Berry, Vedder, and Liebkind (2006) define acculturation as a process by which individuals, whose culture differs from the dominant one, interact with people outside their cultural group, and the extent to which they wish to protect (or give up) their own cultural elements. Acculturation builds successful newcomer students by allowing these individuals to become a part of the mainstream community to the extent that they wish without abandoning their own culture and beliefs (Kopala & Esquivel, 1994).

**Immigrant**

Within this project, I refer to two different types of newcomer students. The first is immigrant. For the purposes of the research conducted for this project, the term can be used to describe anyone who lives in a country (either permanently or temporarily) where he or she was not born (UNESCO, 2005). Immigrants are set apart from refugee newcomers because they have a choice of when and where to migrate (although this choice can often be constrained) (UNESCO, 2005). Throughout this paper, I am referring to immigrant children in educational contexts.

**Refugee**

The second major group of newcomer students to which I refer are refugees. To fully understand the experiences of refugee students, it is important to understand the
status that defines a refugee’s citizenship. The internationally approved definition of refugee states that a refugee is

A person who is outside his/her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable to or unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country, or to return there for fear of persecution.

(United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 1993)

Canada as a Host Country

Throughout this document, I refer to immigrant and refugee students integrating and acculturating within their host country. For the purposes of this project, I identify Canada as the host country to the many immigrant and refugee families from around the world. Fantino and Colak (2001) said that Canada has one in five persons living who were born outside the country, with 11.2% who identify themselves as being a visible minority. Of the 1.8 million immigrants who have immigrated to Canada in the 1990s, almost 310,000 were school-aged children between the ages of 5 and 16 (Statistics Canada, 2001). With most of these immigrants settling in large urban centres in the provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec, and Alberta (Fantino & Colak, 2001) but mainly in Toronto and Vancouver, local schools in these cities are challenged as they attend to the learning needs of such a culturally and linguistically diverse population. To display this diversity visually, below I present Figure 1, with data from Statistics Canada (2001) displaying the large and increasing proportions of school-aged (ages 5-24) immigrant children in Canada’s major urban areas.
Figure 1. Proportion of school-aged (ages 5-24) immigrant children in Canada’s major urban centres; 1991, 1996, 2001.


Overview of the Paper

In this first chapter, I provide a rationale for conducting this project, the purpose of the project, as well as the meaning of some of the key terms used throughout the project. In the following chapter, I present a review of the literature. The literature review does two things. One, it identifies the challenges experienced by immigrant and refugee students in the educational context. Two, it provides a critical review of the strategies for educators in general and teachers specifically to meet the needs of the newcomers. In particular, I review pedagogical strategies that are identified as creating or contributing to an accommodating, respectful, and culturally sensitive environment in which students can prosper academically and transition smoothly into their new cross-
cultural identities. In the third chapter, I explain my methodology on how I carried out my library research and analysis and how I identified the pedagogical needs of immigrant and refugee students in Ontario. Next, in chapter four, I bring together the findings of the literature on both the challenges facing immigrant and refugee students and how teachers can proactively address some of those challenges. In the final chapter, chapter five, I specify the significance of the study, articulate some of the shortcomings of my project, and suggest next steps to consider for future studies. I conclude with some final thoughts and recommendations. I end my paper with a handbook dedicated to teachers. It contains pedagogical strategies that are intended to facilitate the accommodation of newcomer students into their classrooms.

The following chapter provides the literature review, which has two aims: one, to identify, within the educational context, the challenges specific first to immigrant students and then specific to refugee students; and two, to tease out suggestions from the literature for educators regarding how they and their school communities can accommodate their teaching practices to appropriately meet the needs of newcomer students.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

An escalation in global mobility has led to an increase in the number of students from minority cultures in Canadian classrooms. The result is the formation of a culturally diverse population, all attempting to live and learn together within one society’s school. Most of these migrants are settling in large urban centres in the provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec, and Alberta (Fantino & Colak, 2001). These students face challenges to classroom learning as they enter a new school (and some for the first time), learn a new language, cope with disruption of family life, and adjust to a new culture whose norms and values may differ (and sometimes substantially) from their own (Gonzalez-Ramos & Sanchez-Nester, 2001; Kirova, 2001).

As individuals migrate, they are labelled as refugees or immigrants. Both immigrant and refugee children share many of the same migration characteristics: they often wish to be accepted by peers in the education system; many experience role reversal in the home as they become translators and informants of dominant cultural knowledge for their parents; they experience stress as they attempt to bridge intercultural barriers (Fantino & Colak, 2001). Most notable in these two groups of migrant children however is the difference in motivation for leaving their home country. Unlike immigrants, refugees hold the status of escaping to freedom and are often referred to as involuntary newcomers (McBrien, 2003; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Consequently, refugee children often struggle with traumatic experiences that have pushed them to
escape from their home countries such as war and religious, ethnic, and political persecution.

I believe that teachers must have an understanding of the backgrounds and experiences of immigrant and refugee students in order to suitably accommodate and teach these students in an appropriate setting. Immigrant and refugee children have particular needs that teachers must consider in addition to the routine challenges occurring throughout their childhood development (Fantino & Colak, 2001). Not only are these students learning, but they are adjusting to a new school system in a new culture in a new country. Teachers must understand the challenges that this group of students face generally and in the classroom specifically so that these students can be successful in both the classroom and school.

Accordingly, this paper is a literature review on immigrant and refugee students. The purpose of this literature review is twofold. First, it is to identify, within the educational context, the challenges specific to immigrant students, followed by the challenges specific to refugee children. The second aspect of this literature review is to identify suggestions from the literature for educators regarding how they can accommodate their teaching practice and school environments to better meet the needs of these students.

Challenges to Newcomer Students

The following section documents specific challenges that newcomer students face in the educational context of their new, but foreign, host country. First, I present what the literature identifies as challenges specific to immigrant students, followed by identified challenges experienced by refugee children in the school and classroom.
Challenges Specific to Immigrant Students

As the number of immigrant students in Canadian classrooms increases, educators must make choices that will aid these students as they face unique classroom challenges. Immigrant students are affected by the educational supports available to them as they adjust into a host country. As well, schools are largely impacted by these new students. Schools may (or may not) alter their pedagogy to account for the needs of all learners. The following sections document these challenges confronting immigrant and refugee students and display the importance of schools taking into account the unique learning needs of immigrant students so that students can accommodate positively into the new learning environments. The main challenges that immigrant students face in a foreign education system that are identified in this literature review include issues that come with learning a new language and the intercultural issues that they face as they live within two cultures (the home and school culture).

Learning a New Language in a Foreign Education System

This section describes the literature identifying the challenges that immigrant students face as they learn a new language in a foreign education system. I describe literature about the cultural value behind maintaining the home language (Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997). As Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) believe, second language acquisition is not simply a matter of learning a new language, but is a factor that relates to a person’s identity.

Learning a new language in a foreign education system is an important initial factor for immigrant students in the classroom. Proponents of the assimilation ideology (Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997) believe that students arriving from non-English
speaking countries are often at a disadvantage because the lack of English at home is seen to be the agent of many school-related problems experienced by immigrant students. Gonzalez and Darling-Hammond say that schools that align themselves with this assimilation theory measure educational success among immigrant students by the rate at which they are able to master the English language; these educators consider learning the English language as a means to acculturation and assimilation. However, Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) regard language as more than just a means of communication; they view it as a means of identity for these students. Gonzalez and Darling-Hammond (1997) contend that educators, by recognizing that there is value in maintaining the language being spoken at home, may contribute to students’ development of healthy perceptions about themselves and their cultural background. They believe that this recognition will in turn help students to succeed in school. The welcoming nature of school, they say, and specifically the immigrant students’ teacher, helps to contribute to a welcoming and respectful climate for all students.

Obviously immigrant students need to develop fluency in the English language. But this is one more challenge to which they must adjust. The language we speak helps us to identify with who we are. Brilliant (2000) maintains that, as immigrant students begin to adjust into a new country, they and their parents often fear that the learning of a new language will result in their children’s loss in identity and culture. This fear of losing one’s self and his or her connection to the original culture, he says, may interfere with the motivation to learn the new host language. Furthermore, some immigrant students experience internal conflict as they acculturate into a new environment, another challenge that he says may affect the acquisition of a new language. Brilliant comments as well that
a painful immigration process often impedes second language learning. For example, because the choice to immigrate is not the child’s choice, the child may demonstrate passive resistance by not readily learning the language of the host country.

To circumvent these problems, Gonzalez and Darling-Hammond (1997) postulate that an optimal approach to English language development for immigrant children is one where students are allowed to use their home language freely in and out of the school setting, while acquiring the new language. However, they caution educational institutions to avoid segregation among students. Yet a limitation to this recommendation is that if every student is speaking her or his language of choice whenever he or she wants, then no sense of classroom community prevails. Inozu, Tuyan, and Surmeli (2007) say that immigrant students also need strong motivation and positive attitudes for language attainment and the feeling of success. Dewaele (2005) sums up these recommendations by acknowledging that, if educators account for the psychological and emotional needs of immigrant youth, then students will have greater motivation for language development.

The Intercultural Experience

The following section documents the literature about some of the experiences that immigrant children have had as they attempt to adapt to a new culture while still maintaining and respecting the values of their home culture. The section begins with a discussion of the acculturation process. Finally, the idea of mutual accommodation is presented as a way of working towards optimal integration within a dominant culture.

As immigrant children begin to adapt to a new society both in and out of the school system, their cultural identity begins to form in the context of two or more cultural frameworks (that of the new society and that of their home). These children go through
acculturation. Phinney, Berry, Vedder, and Liebkind (2006) define acculturation as a process by which individuals, whose culture differs from the dominant one, interact with people outside their cultural group, and the extent to which they wish to protect (or give up) their own cultural elements. Immigrant children entering the school system however are not necessarily free to determine the degree to which they acculturate. Phinney and her colleagues (2006) maintain that the design of the education system often defines the expected degrees of acculturation by setting out certain restrictions that limit the choices immigrant students and their parents can make. An example of these restrictions is a school that does not value the home language of the child. Immigrant youth experience uncertainty as to what degree they are to maintain their home culture while identifying with a new culture in formation of their cultural identity. Additionally, Tong, Huang, and McIntyre (2006) say that immigrant youth experience acculturation stress as they meet with challenges by peers from the dominant culture.

Phinney et al. (2006) contend that to prevent the challenges that present themselves within an intercultural environment and for optimal integration to occur, both parties must accommodate, i.e., mutual accommodation. This means that both the dominant and non-dominant cultural groups must show acceptance of each other by living as culturally different people interacting within the same society. The authors assert that through this mutual accommodation, immigrants are able to adopt the basic values of the country in which they are living, while the host nation adapts policies within national and provincial institutions (such as the education system) to meet the needs of all groups living in a multicultural society. Tong et al. (2006) add that this new cultural identity is a result of the integration of the beliefs, values, customs, and behavioural
patterns of both cultural groups so that the immigrant child can feel safer and more comfortable. Although mutual accommodation seems to be a contributing factor towards the solution for optimal integration, I advise teachers to be prepared to teach the value of acceptance to both immigrant and non-immigrant students in their classroom. In the home, students are taught a certain set of values and behaviours. It is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that, regardless of what values are being instilled in the home environment, the classroom environment is one in which all students (from both the dominant and non-dominant culture groups) are to show respect to each other. Only when this effort is made, I believe, can mutual accommodation be effective.

**Challenges Specific to Refugee Students**

This section discusses what the literature says about classroom challenges specific to refugee students as they go through three stages of migration and changing ecologies (pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration) (Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen, & Frater-Mathieson, 2004).

Refugee children share several common experiences that stem from this traumatic stage in their lives (Fantino & Colak, 2001). Anderson et al. (2001) and Gonzalez-Ramos and Sanchez-Nester (2001) indicate that refugee children experience loss and separation from all concepts of familiarity and their homeland, all of which contribute to a difficult resettlement process in their new country. Accordingly, to allow refugee students to maximize their potential, teachers must recognize these possible educational barriers.

**Model of Refugee Adaptation and Development**

The following section introduces an ecological model developed by Anderson and colleagues (2001) that has three stages of migration influencing a refugee child’s
adaptation into a host community. The model is used in this portion of the literature review within an educational context to guide educators to develop an understanding of a refugee child’s surrounding environment and some of the challenges that the child encounters at various stages of the migration process. Anderson and colleagues consider the factors within the refugee child’s pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration environments that affect his or her development within the host education system. It is important for educators to understand the challenges facing students at the three stages of migration, so as to understand and then accommodate to their experiences. Specifically, Hamilton and Moore (2001) state that, as the child graduates through these stages (from pre-migration to the period of trans-migration, finally reaching the point of post-migration), educators must facilitate this transition by incorporating the knowledge and experience from the previous stage in order to create an environment that is conducive to a healthy adaptation process for children. This three-phase ecological framework can be applied to significant parts of a refugee child’s adaptation experience into a host education system. Hamilton and Moore believe that the model can be applied when considering refugee trauma, grief, and loss, as well as second language concerns for refugee children within an educational context.

Experiences of Refugee Trauma, Grief, and Loss

The purpose of the following section is to document what the literature says about the nature of the trauma, grief, and loss that many refugee children experience throughout the migration process. With this understanding, educators will be better able to appreciate the child as a whole and be more likely to work towards meeting the child’s unique needs
resulting from the trauma faced at earlier points in the migration period. The section discusses trauma experiences at the pre-, trans-, and post-migration stages.

Individuals handle grief and loss due to traumatic events in different ways. Refugee children come to their host countries from a diversity of traumatic experiences. Pre-migration traumatic events may include repression, political persecution, and torture (Frater-Mathieson, 2001; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) put forward that refugee children may experience loss in the form of loss of family members, friends, or homes. Frater-Mathieson (2001) postulates that loss also comes in a non-physical form for these children and may include loss of trust, dignity, values, belonging, and self-identity. The child’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioural coping strategies in response to these life altering traumatic experiences at the pre-migration stage will vary depending on the developmental age of the child.

At the trans-migration stage, risk factors may increase or decrease depending on the length of time spent in transition. Anderson et al. (2001) present the example of a short transition that involves a plane ride from home to the host country as having less risk of trauma, grief, and loss, than a long transition that involves years spent hiding in refugee camps prior to arrival in the host country. Frater-Mathieson (2001) comments that children who spend more time in this form of transition camp are at risk for increased trauma since the continued disruption to stability, safety, and routine contributes to additional losses such as the loss of a way of life.

Several post-migration factors within the host country also are said to have an effect on how smoothly a refugee child transitions into his or her new home. Teachers must make efforts to understand the refugee child’s microsystem (which includes family)
since this is where a significant degree of trauma was experienced. Frater-Mathieson (2001) believes that the way in which the family grieves on a cultural and intrinsic degree will often correlate with how well the child handles grief. Common coping strategies among refugee families include denial of, minimizing, or silencing the experienced trauma (Frater-Mathieson, 2001; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). This style of coping is done to allegedly protect individual family members but unfortunately in the long-term is not a positive coping strategy. Instead, Frater-Mathieson suggests that a child should be encouraged to talk openly about the traumatic experiences while once more in a secure parent-child relationship.

Refugee children carry these losses with them to their school environments. Educators must recognize these traumatic experiences (often complemented by loss). Gonzales-Ramos and Sanchez-Nester (2001, p. 49) quote some refugee children to provide some indication of their feelings post-migration.

Back home I knew the language, I knew how to dress, and I had friends, here I am lost.

My religion is the only thing that has stayed the same from back home, everything else is new and I don’t know what to do.

My home was surrounded by trees, we were near the beach, we had a backyard.

Now all I see are dark, tall buildings. At first when I got here I used to run, thinking these brick buildings would fall on me.

In conclusion, Gonzales-Ramos and Sanchez-Nester recommend that educators take into account these psychological and social needs in order to make the transition process smoother for the child.
Second Language Acquisition for Refugee Children

This section presents what the literature says about refugee children acquiring a second language. Second language acquisition among refugee students is a difficult stage of the transition process whereby one adapts into a new community and new culture. I discuss pre-, trans-, and post-migration environments as they relate to the learning challenges with which refugee students may deal as they attempt to learn a language that differs from their first.

Refugee children must learn the language of the host country. Researchers Burnett (1998) and Loewen (2001) argue that, although refugee students share many similarities in language acquisition when compared to other second language learners including immigrant children, they experience unique learning challenges due to their varying histories prior to and throughout migration. Gonzalez-Ramos and Sanchez-Nester (2001) specify that refugee children will experience varying degrees of trauma prior to migrating to the host country; consequently, these pre-migration experiences will affect the settlement process. Loewen (2001) comments that increased trauma in pre-migration may put children at risk of mental health difficulties, which may cause academic dysfunction that will interfere with smooth second language acquisition. Furthermore, where many immigrant children are given the opportunity to prepare for their migration to a new country (often including language preparation), refugee children are unable to study the language beforehand, making this second language learning process a more challenging one.

The amount of prior education is another factor that affects the refugee student’s success in second language acquisition. Loewen (2001) observes that refugee children
coming from lower educational backgrounds with low literacy skills seem to struggle more with learning the host country’s official language.

Language learning issues may also arise in the trans-migration period for refugee students. Loewen (2001) states that the length of the transition period may have an effect on the education received/not received at that time, which in turn affects the rate of second language learning in the host country. If children are in transition for a long period of time, then he considers it important for them to receive some schooling, or at least opportunities to prepare for the language of the new host country. Realistically, however, these refugees may not know their final country of destination (the new host country) while in transition refugee camps. So this requisite cannot always be met. At the very least, however, the child should have some schooling in the child’s first language.

Acculturation is the social and psychological integration of the language learner into the target language group (Phinney et al., 1996). Acculturation emerges as a theme when educators deliberate on the effect of post-migration factors on refugee second language acquisition. The degree to which a refugee child acculturates into the host community often determines the degree of secondary language development. Cummins (2000) states that the spectrum of language proficiency varies from basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) to cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). He further suggests that at least five to seven years are needed for second language learners to reach academic proficiency. Within educational contexts, goals should be established for refugee children to reach second language proficiency to the academic (CALP) degree. Loewen(2001) proposes that these students will reach this level of academic language proficiency to the degree that they acculturate to the target society. Peirce
(1995) explains that, at the post-migration stage, if the refugee student is having trouble integrating with the target language group on a psychological and social scale, then it is likely that the time that it takes for this child to reach academic second language proficiency will be prolonged. However, although CALP development is the final goal for all students, I contend that teachers should realize that for refugee students to achieve this level may take quite some time. Therefore, during the orientation and initial adaptation stage for refugees, teachers should be focussing on helping these students build their basic communication skills.

Loewen (2001) states that other post-migration factors affecting second language acquisition amongst refugee students are those of age and social identity. A critical period exists in a child’s developmental life when he or she is likely to be most successful in learning a second language. Although adults and youth initially reach conversation proficiency (BICS) faster than children, when considering academic language proficiency (CALP), Loewen argues that the most efficient children tend to be those between the ages of 8 and 12 who have received some form of education in their first language prior to migration.

Social identity is another important variable in second language development among refugee students. Peirce (1995) explains that the stronger the identification between the refugee student with the target language group, the higher the learning rate of the second language. Thus, when social distance between the second language learner and the target language group is minimal, this closeness facilitates the above notion of acculturation and allows the learner to become language proficient at a faster rate. The degree of social identification between the refugee student and the host community often
depends on motivation, which often depends on the grief and loss that the individual is handling.

Summary of Educational Challenges to Newcomer Students

The literature has identified many challenges that immigrant and refugee students experience in the host country’s foreign education system. Ample research states that immigrant students struggle in the classroom when learning a second language. In addition to the communication problems that this challenge presents, additional adjustment issues such as identity conflict arise. Furthermore, immigrant students are faced with the challenge of acculturation when they experience two cultures (the school culture and the home culture). Refugee students pass through three phases of migration and at each stage deal with a certain degree of trauma and, loss which often affects their psychological and social presence in the classroom. Their second language acquisition is also greatly affected by their experiences during pre-, trans-, and post-migration.

The literature outlines the challenges that immigrant and refugee children face as they accommodate into their new school and education system but fails to mention how the degree of receptiveness from the dominant student culture may impact how well newcomer students adapt in the classroom. Furthermore, the literature fails to mention how the multiplicity of moves may compound the problems and challenges experienced as well as the number of levels of change that these students face.

Educational Interventions for Newcomer Students

The following section documents what the literature presents as effective educational interventions directed towards newcomer students. First, I present what the
literature states are effective strategies for addressing the challenges experienced by immigrant students, followed by strategies that aim to respond to the challenges experienced by refugee students in the school and classroom community.

_Educational Interventions for Immigrant Students_

Since schools are where a large portion of an immigrant child’s day is spent, it is important to ensure that these students are provided with a safe learning environment that helps them in their adaptation into a new community (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Tong, Huang, & McIntyre, 2006). In this literature review, I define a safe learning environment as one where effective teaching strategies are implemented at the classroom and school-wide level, as well as brought up through professional development practice. The following section provides a description of the pedagogical recommendations for teachers that focus on meeting the diverse needs of immigrant students. All came from a review of the extant literature. I have structured the strategies into the categories of classroom-based instruction (focus on individuality, home language preservation, and representation in the curriculum), school-wide pedagogical approaches (implementing family and community involvement, and activities and support services), and professional development.

Classroom-Based Strategies

This section reviews what existing literature says about how educators can support the learning of immigrant students through classroom-based strategies. The subsections review the importance of responding to students as individuals, preserving the home language, and representing student culture and values in the classroom.
Within each subsection, a critical review of the teaching strategies is presented.

*Importance of responding to students as individuals.* There is not one ‘immigrant experience’. When teaching and interacting with immigrant students in the classroom, teachers must bear in mind that each student brings a unique set of experiences that affects her or his life post-migration. Gonzalez and Darling-Hammond (1997) say that immigrant students certainly face a lot of the same challenges in the school; however, teachers must view the immigrant child as a unique member of his or her school community, as well as an individual member of his or her own cultural group. Researchers Dunn and Adkins (2003) and Gonzalez and Darling-Hammond (1997) underscore that educators must avoid making generalizations and assumptions about the needs of a student; when considering solutions and supports with which to provide the student, the teacher must consider the student independently of everyone else. Schooling prior to migration, degree of trauma, and degree of difference between the home culture and the dominant culture are some of the factors they say that must be taken into consideration with each immigrant child. Dunn and Adkins (2003) suggest that an appropriate way of discovering some of this specific personal information is through conversation with the child’s parent(s), with the aid of an interpreter. Although this strategy of communication with parents may be useful in both obtaining information about the child and building a relationship with the parents, some parents may not feel comfortable discussing personal matters such as the child’s degree of trauma with someone whom they hardly know.
Additionally, Igoa (1995) says that people from each culture have a unique way of viewing the world and a distinct set of expectations and behaviours. These factors will all have an impact on the child’s academic, psychological, and cultural adaptation into a new community. Accordingly, Gonzalez and Darling-Hammond (1997) advise teachers to be prepared to adapt their teaching styles to all the ways there are to be an immigrant. What they mean by this statement is that immigrant students come into classrooms at varying stages of the adaptation continuum, with variations in personal histories and life experiences, all of which contribute to their experience as immigrants in a foreign education system. Thus, the way in which individual children respond in the classroom and school environment is a result of the interaction of their cultural norms, their individual history, and their degree of adaptation—i.e., their background and past experiences.

When considering the uniqueness of each immigrant student in the classroom, the educator must be prepared to learn about the child (Dunn & Adkins, 2003; Tong, Huang, & McIntyre, 2006). Learning involves teachers familiarizing themselves with the student’s culture and getting a deep understanding of what it means to be a part of that cultural group. The teacher can acquire this knowledge through cultural informants or community agencies that may have settled the immigrant family (Dunn & Adkins, 2003; Tong, Huang, & McIntyre, 2006). Dunn and Adkins propose that teachers seek cultural informants, which may include teachers or paraprofessionals of that heritage or ethnic group, other members of that cultural community who have adapted into the host community, or community activists. Tong, Huang, and McIntyre state that these individuals should be sought out for consultation, staff development sessions, and input at
Individualized Education Plan team meetings for the immigrant child. They explain that awareness of these values and practices will promote not only acceptance in the classroom, but will allow the educator to teach around each student’s centre. Also, by taking the time to get to know each student, the teacher will avoid simply grouping students into one immigrant group. Tong, Huang, and McIntyre say that talking with students (through an interpreter if one is needed) about their past schooling experiences and their life pre-migration, will allow the educator to both hear each student’s potential concerns such as feelings of anxiety and fear of the unknown, as well as provide emotional support if needed. This open communication is the first step towards building a trusting, accepting, and safe learning environment. Open communication is not limited merely to students who speak English, but can be established through an interpreter or informant just as well in situations where a language barrier exists. These are just a few suggestions presented by researchers intended to aid educators in viewing their immigrant students as individuals with unique histories having a distinct set of needs.

The literature presents methods by which teachers can familiarize themselves with the culture, values, and histories of all of their students so as to respond to students as individuals. This process, I believe, can be a challenging one for the educator as limited time, resources, and energy often act as constraints. However, if teachers prepare themselves through orientation and professional development, managing their time and resources within the classroom so as to meet the needs of individual students will prove to be more realistic.

*Home language.* This section describes the ways that the literature says teachers can create opportunities for immigrant students to use their native language in the
classroom as an aid towards developing second language fluency. Educators should promote a bilingual environment where immigrant students are encouraged and allowed to maintain their first language skills, while at the same time learning the English language. Gonzalez and Darling-Hammond (1997) recommend that teachers encourage students to use their native language as this use will allow them to share and acquire information in the classroom during the course of their academic work. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) say that the best predictor of successful second language acquisition is the mastery of vocabulary and linguistic skills of the first language. A language must be used regularly and properly to be maintained and, if immigrant students are to maintain the mastery of their first language, which will aid them in the development of the second language, they should be given ample opportunity to practice. However, Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orosco’s spelling and language suggestions are limiting in that the suggestions refer only to students who already possess native language proficiency. Conversely, when the child’s proficiency in the first language is not advanced and therefore cannot act as an aiding factor in second language acquisition, steps must be made to ensure that the child is given opportunities to develop her or his native language skills in the presence of a native speaker.

Walqui (2000) says that teachers should encourage students to use their native language to assist (and potentially tutor) each other inside and outside of class, in their writing for class assignments, and in their social interaction. He also recommends that teachers and assistant interpreters use the native language as a way to check for comprehension, to explain activities and to provide instruction, and to interact socially with the students. He is not the first to suggest working in the student’s ‘mother’
language. I caution that some resource constraints must be taken into account. Two constraints come to mind: the time and attention working taken up by the one classroom teacher with the only student in his or her own language; and the fact that the student is not involved in group work or in full class participation. But I would recommend that, certainly for the period of orientation for the new immigrant and/or refugee student, this practice be carried out. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the teacher to make the bilingual language experience positive for immigrant students. Just as there is value in learning English, there is value in teachers helping immigrant students maintain their home language.

Torres-Guzmán (2008) documents the case of a classroom teacher who promotes the enrichment of more than one language of instruction in her classroom through a Read Aloud program. The program is set up in a manner in which the teacher does the reading aloud while the students share in pairs before, during, and after the reading. As the students share, the teacher gives cues on standards of appropriateness for grammatical structure and content. The teacher moves the conversation and asks for clarification from students, without dominating the entire conversation. By means of this strategy, students practice in pairs and display in a group setting a response that is appropriate not only in content, but grammatically as well. The result is a student-centred classroom in which students are important contributors of a learning community.

What the literature does not put forth in regards to this form of bilingual education instruction is the threat that many individuals from the dominant language group (English) may feel if minority languages become more prevalent than the host language. Specifically, if minority languages are being encouraged in the classroom, workplace,
and general community, then this receptiveness may result in the prevalence of foreign languages throughout society that may alienate citizens of the host country.

*Representation in the curriculum.* The following section discusses the reasons in the literature as to why it is important for teachers to represent all of their students in the classroom curriculum. It is vital that all students in the classroom, including those coming from minority backgrounds, see themselves represented in the curriculum both on a visual degree and a knowledge base degree (Campey, 2002; Dei, James, Karumanchery, James-Wilson, & Zine, 2000; Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997). Learning flourishes when content is relatable. Campey (2002) maintains that educators should ensure that reading and teaching materials are representative of the range of cultures present in the classroom. This inclusive representation creates a climate of respect for the home language of the immigrant students in the classroom. Furthermore, Gonzalez and Darling-Hammond explain that teachers should recognize and include all cultures in the curriculum as this recognition and inclusion leads to an increase in class participation from immigrant students. They recommend that teachers use information and ideas from the immigrant students’ own experiences and home cultures as a way of promoting engagement in instructional tasks and creating a feeling of belonging. Dei et al. (2000) believe that teachers can represent minority immigrant students by incorporating them and their culture into the visual landscape of the classroom through books, posters, artwork, and other visual media. The authors worry that European cultural knowledge often dominates the content of the North American school curriculum. They state that teachers can also incorporate immigrant students in the classroom through knowledge representation by teaching non-European cultural knowledge through alternative
literature and films. In this form, teaching materials and activities that engage the multicultural nature of the class also help the teacher assist individual students who experience challenges from adjusting to a new environment and life (Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Students learn best by building on previous knowledge and understanding. Walqui (2000) postulates that if immigrant students realize that their existing knowledge is being represented and valued in class, a sense of both trust and competence is established that will motivate them in the classroom. Furthermore, teachings and resources that fail to be contextualized to the student’s centre can be hard to grasp and understand. Walqui suggests that teachers should perform simple adjustments such as adding images to which immigrant students can relate so as to help them understand the written text.

The literature emphasizes the importance of making classroom curriculum relatable to students through visual and knowledge representation. Teachers should adopt in their practice of teaching immigrant students the effective strategy of validating students’ knowledge by representing it in the classroom and using it as a base for further knowledge. However, the literature does not go into detail about how teachers can represent all the cultures in their classrooms. This process could develop into a timely and unfeasible one, due to resource constraints. One suggestion I have is that teachers should deliver culturally representative knowledge by using their students as teaching resources in the classroom – e.g., by having the students share and teach about their own culture through pictures, stories, or words. Several other strategies exist to help make classroom curriculum relatable to students; teachers must make sure that they use them.
**School-Wide Pedagogical Strategies**

When immigrant students enter a foreign education system, they not only walk into a classroom but they enter an entire new school community. Therefore, a school-wide approach must be developed to meet the needs of this diverse population (Schoorman & Jean-Jacques, 2003). School-wide initiatives are particularly useful at a time when teachers are experiencing time and resource demands. A solution to these demands thus is to utilize strategies that involve the whole school and still have a particular benefit for immigrant children. The following sections present the idea that schools must implement pedagogical strategies that will prove effective for the adaptation and academic growth of these children. The literature reveals that schools should facilitate community involvement as well as provide activities and support services for immigrant students and their families.

*Community involvement.* This section focuses on Schoorman and Jean-Jacques’ (2003) work which contends that educators ensure involvement of parents and members from the immigrant community both in the classroom and in the wider school system. They believe that it is important for educators to build a broad based community network; this network facilitates the bridging of the home-school gap. This gap presents itself at times when the parents of the immigrant student are unfamiliar with the host country’s education system and language. Schoorman and Jean-Jacques suggest that the most effective way in incorporating the community is for the school (as well as other agencies such as churches, health clinics, migrant resource centres) to form after-school tutoring programs. The school’s role is to provide tutors for these students from community volunteers or paid tutors. Schoorman and Jean-Jacques say that this approach builds a
strong sense of community and understanding among teachers, parents, and their children.

Parents are valued participants in their children’s education and, consequently, the school must make strong efforts to ensure that proper communication and understanding are taking place between the educator and the parent. Campey (2002) took this idea to mean that the school must hire an interpreter or translator who is present for parent-teacher interviews, and one who is able to translate important school documents. But often large differences exist between immigrant parents and teachers regarding parental involvement in the student’s schooling; teachers express that they are not getting the support and involvement that they would like from the parents of their immigrant students (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). These teachers’ comments, I believe, could be culture-specific and should not be generalized to all ethnic groups. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, however, contradict my comment, saying that this general belief is not specific to Haitians and Chinese, but is commonly seen among a broad range of immigrant parents. They add that, beyond this cultural difference in the approach to education, many parents do not have the time to be involved because of their work, or because they believe that they do not have the education or language skills to be able to play as active of a role as the teacher in the child’s education. Consequently, to avoid such misunderstandings of expectations, Campey puts forth that the school should use translators to communicate to the parents. In communicating with parents, educators must understand the academic expectations parents have for their children and convey the school’s expectations. Open communication between educators and parents of immigrant students is crucial to successful adaptation of students into the school.
A number of these school-wide pedagogical suggestions point to schools providing translating services for their teachers and parents of immigrant students. I identify again the issue of money to pay for translators, and even the availability of translators. I suggest that schools recruit other family members who live in the host community and who are familiar with the language to assist in translation, at least in the student’s beginning stages of adaptation.

Activities and support services. This section introduces what the literature describes as a range of activities and support service programs that the school must implement on a school-wide level to enable the successful adaptation of immigrant students into the school system. Campey (2002) says that it is essential that the school recognizes and celebrates the cultures representative of their students, provides translation for school documents, and hires teachers, support staff, and administrative staff who reflect the languages and cultures of the student population. These school initiatives will provide immigrant students and their parents with a welcoming and optimal learning environment. Furthermore, he contends that, in order to demonstrate their respect of the cultural and religious values of some immigrant groups, schools should accommodate to students’ specific dietary requirements, ensure that the school dress code accommodates religious attire, and provide a space for prayer and other religious practices. Tong, Huang, and McIntyre (2006) recommend that the school initiate a buddy system whereby newly arrived immigrants are paired with another student with whom they can relate. They say that this form of school-wide practice fosters a positive education environment. Unfortunately, some of these strategies can prove difficult to implement. If for example a school has 40 different cultures and nationalities,
representing all of the cultures equally and finding staff who reflect all 40 cultures is challenging. Also, schools need to be prepared for that notion that some of the accommodations made for the diverse range of cultures in the school may affect other school practices. For example, a dress code may impact certain groups’ participation in physical education.

Schools can take another step towards the accommodation of immigrant students by setting up student outreach centres that provide counselling, tutoring, and other support services (Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997; Tong, Huang, & McIntyre, 2006). Multicultural awareness through active promotion and enforcement of policies (Campey, 2002), and by formation of culture clubs that promote student awareness, tolerance, and celebration of cultural and linguistic differences (Tong, Huang, & McIntyre, 2006), are critical in providing an inclusive learning environment. The literature does provide many possibilities by which a school can work together to create an environment of opportunity for success, growth, and adaptation for immigrant children. Some of these recommendations may prove unfeasible; but all should be at least considered at the school level.

Professional Development

This section focuses on what the literature says about the professional development of its educators in meeting the pedagogical needs of immigrant children. I suggest that, under the provincial legislation, part of the professional development of educators must focus on training teachers of immigrant students to embrace an ‘asset-recognition’ approach. Gonzalez and Darling-Hammond (1997) define an ‘asset-recognition’ teaching approach as one that recognizes immigrant students for the
strengths in skills and diversity that they bring into the classroom, as opposed to focusing on their lack of the English language or misunderstanding of the dominant culture.

Professional development activities should be more than simple exposure to artefacts representative of the diverse student body but should also focus on self-knowledge by having teachers evaluate and potentially redevelop their own meanings of effective education of immigrant students. Gonzalez and Darling-Hammond present the notion that educators are often unaware of their misconceptions and own lack of self-knowledge, that act as impediments for their diverse student body. They suggest that professional development for teachers should include discussion of: approaches in developing student competency in the English language; forming knowledge of the cultures and backgrounds of students; developing and teaching a curriculum that is representative of the students in the class; and establishing a caring, welcome, and open environment for immigrant students that works toward optimal academic success, and social and cultural adaptation.

I acknowledge that making teachers culturally aware and sensitive is quite broad and all encompassing, and could take years to accomplish, particularly with staff turnover. So, what I recommend is to present these professional development criteria as part of a long-term goal aimed at the development of a pedagogy that is responsive to the needs of immigrant students.

Finally, Gonzalez and Darling-Hammond (1997) say that professional development workshops should aim to promote collegial communication and collaboration. This form of discourse allows for team-teaching through the sharing of strategies and peer review of practice. It allows for the formation of educational
partnerships with schools and professional community agencies in the neighbourhood, with everyone working towards the same goal.

**Educational Interventions Specifically Designed for Refugee Students**

Refugee children come to their host country with a feeling of anticipation of the unknown (Gonzalez-Ramos & Sanchez-Nester, 2001; Tong, Huang, & McIntyre, 2006). Many refugee children arrive carrying some form of traumatic experience and loss, hoping for a second chance. With the consideration of pre-, trans-, and post-migration factors that affect the refugee child’s adaptation into a new country, educators can and should design a school learning environment that supports the education of refugee children. The diverse origins of these children must be recognized and supported.

This upcoming section reviews the literature on effective pedagogical practice for refugee students. First, I discuss the importance of creating a safe and therapeutic learning environment for refugee children with connection to an existing bio-dimensional acculturation program. Then, I write about some appropriate refugee teaching practices within the five teaching domains of overarching educational policies and initiatives, school structure and policy, school-family-community interface, classroom environment and instruction, and staff leadership and professional development.

**Safe and Therapeutic Learning Environment**

Within this section, I document what the literature says about appropriate teaching strategies for teachers of refugee students, all leading to a safe and therapeutic learning environment. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) describe some pedagogical practices appropriate for the teaching of refugee students. Appropriate practices that schools and teachers must implement to create opportunity for refugee children include:
positive leadership and staff morale, high academic expectations for all students regardless of their background, high recognition and respect placed on students’ language and culture, and a safe and orderly school environment. Hamilton and Moore (2001) emphasize that teachers must create a safe environment; this is particularly important when considering the loss and trauma with which many of these children come into contact.

Pawliuk et al. (1996) maintain that teaching mechanisms that validate the refugee students’ cultures and values while still recognizing that of the host country need to be applied. This validation takes the form of a bio-dimensional model on acculturation in which increasing knowledge and identification with the host culture does not mean a simultaneous decrease in identification with the homeland culture and values. Project Mi Tierra/My Country (Gonzalez-Ramos & Sanchez-Nester, 2001) is indicative of this acculturation model. The researchers indicated that the project aimed to help immigrant youth to connect to their new country and its educational system, particularly through the following components: short-term groups for immigrant children, weekly mentoring program for immigrant children, field trips to the university collaborating in the project, and workshops for immigrant parents. Through these components, the bio-dimensional nature of this model addressed immigrant and refugee children’s mental health needs by promoting hope through educational opportunities, mentoring, and awareness of and respect for cultural diversity all while encouraging a connection with the host school. Although designed for immigrant students in a particular region in the United States, the researchers believe that this program could be beneficial when applied to any immigrant population, including refugee students. Project Mi Tierra/My Country is a response to
the mental health needs of the immigrant student population, which works towards the creation of a therapeutic classroom environment.

**Targeting Five Educational Domains**

Hamilton and Moore (2001) suggest pedagogical practices that target five levels within the educational domain: overarching educational policies and initiatives, school structure and policy, school-family-community interface, classroom environment and instruction, and staff leadership and professional development. They contend that each level of the educational system should focus on some specific groups of strategies in order to collectively create compatible learning environments for refugee students. Hamilton and Moore are not the first to recommend various strategies at each of these levels of the educational system. However, I include Hamilton and Moore’s five educational domains in this literature review because they remind us that, while the educational system does contain a hierarchy, much control lies in the hands of teachers and their pedagogical practices (which are hopefully inclusive). I address each subsystem or level within the educational system below.

*Overarching education policies and initiatives.* First, I discuss what Hamilton and Moore (2001) say about the need for overarching educational policies to include refugee students. The implementation of a refugee educational policy at a federal level they say will guide individual school boards towards successful intervention for the education of refugee students. This federal level policy (proposed by the researchers for Australia’s education system) can be adopted in Ontario by means of a provincial policy that addresses two key areas: one, providing educational support for the refugee children and two, providing support and professional development opportunities for the educators of
this population. At the student level, provincial policy must provide language support for the target refugee groups. Language support should be in the form of personnel fluent in the native language (if possible), and instructional materials (e.g., dictionaries and reading material) in the refugee child’s native language. As well, provincial policy should address community collaboration for services that individuals need when they arrive in the host country such as employment services, language training, and counselling services. These services are particularly useful for the parents of the refugee children and will help in their adjustment to the new country. Educators must develop a provincial policy in collaboration with school boards that will streamline the delivery of education for refugee students and ensure consistency.

School structure and policy. The second level is that of the school: Hamilton and Moore (2001) articulate the need for the school to create a culture that is safe and therapeutic for the refugee student population. This process can be achieved by creating an environment that recognizes and is appreciative of all cultures. Specifically, they say that schools can create opportunities for cross-cultural curricular projects. These projects will lead to a greater body of knowledge, mutual understanding, and respect across the school. Hamilton and Moore document that this type of learning environment is effective in minimizing new students’ learning difficulties and behaviour problems, as individuals are able to connect and respond through the familiarity of their own culture. This inclusion of all cultures contributes to the diversity and multicultural education of the school in that it also allows students who are native to the host country to expand their own knowledge base. Hamilton and Moore also maintain that a safe and therapeutic environment can also be achieved by an educator who attends to the emotional needs of
the refugee children. Moreover, they say that educators should promote social interaction through peer support programs as another means of generating a nurturing, caring, and supportive atmosphere.

*School-community interface.* The third subsystem, or level, introduced by Hamilton and Moore (2001) consists of the partnerships between parents and teachers, i.e., actively building collaboration with the family and community. Boethel (2003) suggests that, by schools employing community members from the refugee community to provide helping services in schools, a sense of trust will be created. Hamilton and Moore conclude that schools can further facilitate the development of social networks by creating events and gatherings in which parents, students, teachers, and community members can all participate and find a sense of social belonging.

*Classroom environment and instruction.* The fourth subsection is that of the immediate classroom environment where instruction for refugee students should be designed in a way that supports their learning and development best. Here is where language issues should be addressed. Hamilton and Moore (2001) say that increasing exposure to the host language should be a goal while providing encouragement for the maintenance of the native language. Educators must address these language concerns because students’ acquisition of the host language is such an important part in the socialization and acculturation process into the new country. Furthermore, educators must implement peer mentorship and tutoring programs between refugee students and host students so as to effectively enable the refugee child to practice using the host language as well as to create lasting friendships (Hamilton & Moore, 2001; Loewen, 2001). Loewen suggests that teachers should pair refugee students with students who speak the
same language as them to allow for a form of cooperative learning that will make it possible for the refugee student to become familiarized with the educational system and classroom expectations and norms more quickly. Although Loewen’s suggestion is useful, I believe that this pairing may not always be possible within one classroom or school, so perhaps integrating different aged pairs is an alternative.

*School staff professional development.* Fifth and last, is the individual level, where educators must continually develop professionally in the ways identified earlier to accommodate refugee students. The role of the principal is to provide mentorship and guidance to teachers. Hamilton and Moore (2001) insist that principals should include teachers in decisions regarding how best to teach refugee students in their classrooms and should also act as facilitators in the collaboration of school, family, and community supports. They say that, as teachers are in constant contact with the refugee students, they, teachers, play an important role. Hamilton and Moore contend that teachers must have a firm knowledge base about the cultures of their refugee students and also skills in dealing with traumatized children; they must view the child as a whole and understand her or his background and all the pre-, trans-, and post-migration factors that may influence the way the child learns; and they must be culturally receptive and continually adopt a pedagogy that is responsive to the diverse needs of the refugee student. Based on this suggestion, I maintain that teachers are hired to do more than just teach classroom material to their students. Thus, professional development should incorporate all of the skills that teachers need to teach and reach their students. Specifically, teachers need to be trained to communicate and relate with traumatized children, and if this training is not
available, then the appropriate professional (e.g., a school psychologist) must be recruited to help with the job.

Summary of Educational and Pedagogical Strategies for Newcomer Students

The literature has identified several pedagogical strategies for educators and schools to implement when addressing the challenges that immigrant and refugee students experience in a host country’s foreign education system. The strategies presented for immigrant students are divided into the three levels of classroom strategies, school wide pedagogy, and professional development for those teachers. All are designed in such a way to meet the learning and accommodation needs of immigrant students. The strategies that the literature suggests for educators working with refugee students target five educational domains through which the goal is to develop not only a safe and therapeutic environment for refugee students, but one that meets the particular needs of these students.

Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review was to identify the specific challenges that immigrant and refugee students have when coming to a school in their new and foreign country. As discussed, immigrant students struggle on a cultural degree as they live between two cultures with varying beliefs and value systems. They also struggle with all the classroom challenges that present themselves with learning a new language. Refugee students in addition to these cultural and language challenges have a unique set of needs as they struggle with traumatic experiences that have pushed them to escape from their home countries due to war and religious, ethnic, and political persecution. The school is
one place where these children spend a large amount of time and where much adaptation takes place.

This identification of newcomers’ classroom challenges marked the second purpose of the literature review, which was to identify suggestions for education policy makers, those who govern schools, and classroom educators to create an accommodating, respectful, and culturally sensitive environment in which students can prosper academically and transition smoothly into their new cross-cultural identity. The pedagogical suggestions that the literature presents for educators are certainly useful. However, the literature omits some of what I perceive to be negative effects to accommodations that are being made for immigrant and refugee students: segregation of newly-arrived students from full-time classroom participation, and time and other resource constraints placed on educators as they attempt to account for the specified needs of all their students. Furthermore, no research referred to classrooms where there were large numbers of immigrant students representing a diverse number of ethnic and/or racial groups. For example, one of our local elementary schools prides itself on having students (many newly arrived) from 43 different countries. How do these suggestions apply when the majority of the classroom is comprised of recent arrivals, many of whom do not speak English fluently? Finally, the literature failed to introduce the variable of age when discussing pedagogical strategies. The experience that immigrant and refugee students have in their new but foreign education system would certainly be affected at least slightly by their age. Thus, perhaps pedagogical strategies should be tailored to different age groups as what works for one age group may not be effective for another.
Immigrant and refugee students are a special population that brings increased diversity and character into the classroom and school. Throughout this literature review, I have identified the documented challenges experienced by newcomer students in the classroom and recognized what the literature suggests teachers can do to facilitate accommodation. While recommendations were put forth for teachers, I do acknowledge that other factors in the educational hierarchy can either impede or facilitate the process of newcomer student accommodation. Accommodating for students should be both a bottom-up and top-down approach that involves all parties of the educational hierarchy working consistently towards the same goal (Fullan, 1994). The creation of supportive learning environments and effective pedagogical practices for immigrant and refugee students should help ensure that these students become fully contributing members of a diverse society.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology that I engaged in when conducting this research project. I review my strategy for carrying out the literature review and for separating the pedagogical needs of newcomer immigrant from those of refugee students, and then I state limitations to my library research.

Why the Study of Immigrant and Refugee Students?

My interest in the study of immigrant and refugee students is personal. As mentioned earlier in Chapter One, I myself am an immigrant student. I have experienced and witnessed the many challenges that newcomer students encounter when in a new and foreign school and community.

I wanted to study immigrant and refugee students separately from one another because I assumed that the most notable difference between these two groups of migrant children might contribute to the challenges that they might experience in the classroom. The most substantial difference between these two groups of children is, in my opinion, the motivation for leaving their home country. Unlike immigrants, refugees hold the status of escaping to freedom. Indeed, they are often referred to as involuntary newcomers (McBrien, 2003; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Consequently, refugee children struggle with traumatic experiences that have induced them to leave their home countries – experiences such as war and religious, ethnic, and political persecution (McBrien, 2003; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001).
Here I discuss the methodology that I adopted to determine the pedagogical needs of newcomer immigrant and refugee students. I first surveyed the literature for topics related to newcomer immigrant and refugee students, beginning with a scan of the diversity literature in education. Focusing on the writing and research of George Sefa Dei, I realized that the theme of accessible and inclusive education as a need for all students had emerged. Dei (2008) spoke of schooling as a community in which schools build strong ties to the community and work towards the development of a more effective method of teaching diverse youth. Dei (2003) stated that inclusive education and schooling with community involvement was one way in which youth disengagement in the classroom could be prevented. Furthermore, an extensive amount of Dei’s (2003) writing, based upon empirical research, focused on anti-racism education and specifically how youth from so many different backgrounds could gain a sense of belonging in the school and school community.

James A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks are two other researchers whose work I investigated for their perspectives on multicultural education. They present multicultural education as being comprised of five dimensions: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture (Banks & McGee Banks, 2001). Taking these five dimensions into consideration, I developed a better understanding of some of the concepts that schools and more specifically educators must address in order to sustain effective multicultural
education. This conducted research and new-found understanding marked the end of my first stage of the literature review.

After acquiring an understanding of the common themes in multicultural education, as my next step in the literature review process, I narrowed the multicultural education research field to newcomer immigrant and refugee education. I broke down the research on newcomer students into two separate groups (immigrant students and refugee students) because I believe that their classroom experiences would substantively differ due to their varying degrees of pre-migration trauma. I considered what Dei (2000, 2003) had stated about the need to revise the education system so that classroom teaching is more inclusive and engaging of minority youth. This consideration led me to examine the existing literature in order to identify previous research that has been conducted in the area of immigrant students’ classroom experiences. I specifically focused on literature that documented their needs related to their lives in school. I then identified what the research says are the most common challenges that refugee students experience within their host country’s educational system. Finally, I reviewed the literature and carefully identified teaching strategies for immigrant students, and from that a subset for refugee students.

With all of this information, I realized that the strategies that I identified should be useful for educators. Accordingly, I decided to develop a handbook that identifies the pedagogical needs of immigrant and refugee students along with corresponding teaching strategies for meeting these needs for classroom educators. It is my hope that this handbook will be a practical resource that will inform teachers on how to make the newcomer students’ transition easier into their new classroom and school community.
Moreover, teachers, the literature found, are often overwhelmed with the need to learn new content. Accordingly, by putting the information into one place, I hope to make it easier for teachers to access and hence use this information. This handbook is dedicated to teachers; however, I am aware that their realm of influence is mainly within their one classroom. Others within the education system need to be supportive, but in different ways. My handbook is focussed on and for practising classroom teachers.

Limitations to My Research

The aim of my research is to identify the many challenges that immigrant and refugee students face in the classroom context so that teachers can have a better understanding of how to meet these challenges. However, a limitation exists that can be addressed with future empirically-based research. My research findings were limited to existing literature in the field of immigrant and refugee student education. I did not conduct any onsite empirical research to identify more or validate existing challenges by speaking with immigrant and refugee students. Neither did I conduct research to identify more or to validate that these literature-based ameliorative strategies remain current, are useful, and are even feasible within today’s educational and economic situation.

I believe that it is important to carry out empirical research to validate the extant literature and move forward. This is particularly important because I found that, of the literature that I reviewed and used in this project, not all of it was based on empirical research.

Furthermore, as I mentioned above, others and not only teachers contribute to the education system. Further work needs to be undertaken to focus on what the people at
different levels within the educational hierarchy can and should do to help ease the transition of these immigrant and refugee students and their parents. I contend that the move toward accommodation of students must be made on many fronts and simultaneously.

In the next chapter, I summarize my findings from the literature on the pedagogical needs of immigrant and refugee students and complementary teaching strategies for meeting these needs. I display the findings in table format.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I analyze my findings from my review of literature and present them visually in table format. First, I visually represent the major challenges that I uncovered that immigrant and refugee students face in the classroom. I present this general representation of challenges in three separate tables (Tables 1, 2, 3). Then, I present general teaching strategies intended to overcome these challenges in Tables 4 and 5. Following that, I provide a visual representation of the specific challenges that these students encounter in their schools and classrooms, and opposite each also what the literature identifies as appropriate teaching strategies that can be applied in order to overcome some of these challenges (Tables 6 and 7). This order that I present and communicate my findings is the same order in which I presented information in my literature review in Chapter Two; I start with a broad theme and then delineate the components within each theme. The main themes among immigrant and refugee challenges that I reveal in my findings are: the intercultural experience, refugee trauma, and learning the English language. Overarching educational policies, school-wide practices, classroom strategies, school-community relations, and professional development among teachers are the main themes revealed in the development of strategies for helping immigrant and refugee students overcome their educational challenges.

Migrant Students Living the Intercultural Experience

In this section, I document how I unpacked my broad theme of immigrant students living the intercultural experience and then I analyze some of the concepts
underlying this experience. When I first began the analysis of my findings, I struggled to structure the data in a logical manner. Accordingly, I set out to identify the main challenges experienced by immigrant students in the classroom, and then those challenges experienced by refugee students. After reading over my literature review several times, I noticed a recurring theme among the challenges experienced by immigrant students; all challenges for both groups were related to one theme that I label as the “migrant intercultural experience” (where I have collapsed two groups -- immigrants and its subset of refugee students-- into one group). In Table 1, I present this theme because, in my opinion, the main challenge to migrant students in the classroom and school community is the obstacles associated with the whole intercultural experience. Table 1 includes the challenges that migrant students experience as they live in two cultures (their school culture and their home culture) and reflects their uncertainty about their desired degree of acculturation. All these I found from the literature review.

Specifically, many migrant students fear that they will lose their identity and culture as they accommodate to a new culture. They also are said to experience a certain degree of internal conflict about the degree to which they acculturate. These individuals are in a quandry between accepting their host culture while still maintaining their new culture. The literature had mentioned some conflict about the desirable degree of acculturation; students experience pressure to acculturate into the host society because individuals around them are living within this host culture and its values and traditions. Finally, a large part of the migrant intercultural experience is the struggle of learning the English language at school while speaking the first language at home.
Table 1

The Stress Experienced By Immigrant Students Living Within Two Different Cultures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Migrant Intercultural Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Fear of loss of identity and culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Internal conflict about their own acculturation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• External conflict (imposed by others) about their own acculturation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning English at school while still maintaining/speaking first language at home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Refugee Students’ Challenges in the Classroom

This next section presents the general themes gathered from the literature on the observed challenges in classroom and school communities among refugee students. After reviewing the extant literature, I contend that two kinds of challenges affect refugee students in the classroom and school community: one, the challenges associated with refugee trauma; and two, the challenges associated with their learning the English language. Table 2 displays the relationship between some of the challenges that refugee students face in relation to their experienced trauma. All of the characteristics in Table 2 relate to the degree of trauma experienced by the child and to how well the child handles and grieves this trauma. In particular, refugee children who have a physical loss (e.g., family, friends, home, and possessions) experience a great deal of trauma. Also, through the experiences of war and often political or religious persecution, many children lose their feelings of trust, dignity, and self-worth, all of which compound the degree of trauma. As the length of time spent in transition increases and refugee children and their families move throughout various places and countries of transition, then this instability and constant searching for a stable place of residence are said to contribute to the degree
of refugee trauma that one may undergo. Finally, the age at which child refugees migrate
to their host country and the period of migration when they enter a new school are said to
impact their trauma.

Table 2

*Trauma Induced Challenges Among Refugee Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Factors Affecting Refugee Trauma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Loss of family, friends, home, and possessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Loss of trust, dignity, and self-worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Length of time and place(s) in transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developmental age and stage of refugee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 attempts to display some of the challenges that refugee students
eperience in their attempt to learn the English language. All of the factors identified in
the table were found in the literature as either facilitating or impeding the rate at which
these students develop their English language skills. First, the greater degree of trauma
that refugee children experience, the more likely they are said to have mental health
problems that may affect their readiness to learn a new language. Second, the amount of
schooling and the quality of schooling prior to migration will further determine the rate at
which a child acquires a second language. Third, the degree to which refugee children
have acculturated into their host culture will influence the degree to which they are
readily able to learn the English language. If difficulties are experienced throughout the
acculturation process, then the child will be more likely to face challenges learning the
host language. Finally, if refugee students are communicating in the first language at
home, their opportunities to practice the English language and engage in English
conversation are, obviously, limited.
Table 3

*Challenges Experienced by Refugee Students Learning the English Language*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Challenges to English Language Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Trauma impacting mental health and academic ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quality and type of prior academic schooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Degree of acculturation into mainstream culture and target society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of communication in English language at home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, Tables 1, 2, and 3 have depicted the themes of challenges said in the literature to impact immigrant and refugee students as they accommodate into their new classrooms and communities. Immigrant students struggle with the general concept of an intercultural experience as they adapt to a way of life between two cultures; refugee students struggle with factors that compound their degree of trauma, as well as factors that contribute to their difficulties of learning a new language.

The next section illustrates what the literature has identified as areas of educational intervention for immigrant and refugee students. I begin with educational interventions directed towards teaching immigrant students, followed by interventions for refugee students.

**Areas of Educational Intervention for Immigrant Students**

The present section displays the general themes in the education system through which interventions can be made to help immigrant students overcome the challenges that they are exhibiting in the classroom and school. Although the ultimate purpose of this project is to present classroom teachers with strategies for teaching newcomer students, I want first to put forth the suggestions that the literature says that the education system as a whole should implement in order to meet the needs of these students. Table 4 displays
a breakdown of ways in which one school as a whole education system can work to meet the needs of its immigrant students. Specifically, in the classroom, teachers are recommended to focus on each student individually, independent of cultural group. Also, teachers are recommended to provide students with opportunities to use their home language and incorporate their cultures and experiences into the content of their learning. Strategies for the whole school can be directed at creating positive home-school connections and providing students and their families with the supports they need to succeed in their new community. Finally, professional development should be designed to make teachers more aware of the needs of the immigrant and refugee students, and also how to diversify the content and process of the learning all the while ensuring that the classroom is a safe and welcoming place for every student.

Table 4

Areas for Educational Intervention when Teaching Immigrant Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Interventions for Teaching Immigrant Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom-Based Strategies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focus on individuality of each student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Creating opportunities for students to use their first language in the classroom as an aid in the development of second language fluency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Curriculum representation on a visual degree and knowledge degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School-Wide Pedagogical Approaches</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Family and community involvement to facilitate the bridging of the home-school gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Activities and support services to students and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional Development</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Training for communicating with, relating to, and teaching students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Areas of Educational Intervention for Refugee Students

The following section displays five general parts of the education system in which a safe and therapeutic learning environment can be established for refugee students. Again, although this project aims to identify practices for teachers when teaching immigrant and refugee students, in this section, I focus on how the education system as a whole can aim for effective instruction of refugee students. Table 5 presents the five key levels in Ontario education and how they can work together towards the goal of meeting the needs of refugee students. In particular, an overarching provincial educational policy would help facilitate the development of standard practices for teaching refugee students throughout Ontario. Furthermore, individual schools should have policies that work towards building a safe school and community that is appreciative all of its cultures. On a school level, connections should be established among the school, family, and community. Classroom instruction needs to be structured so it best supports the learning and development of each refugee student. Finally, educators must be provided with training so as to develop professionally and be aware of the ways in which they can accommodate each one of their refugee students.
### Table 5

**Areas for Educational Intervention when Teaching Refugee Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Interventions for Teaching Refugee Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overarching Educational Policy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To provide educational support for the refugee children and provide support and professional development opportunities for the educators of this population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Structure and Policy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reflective of a welcome and safe environment that is appreciative of all cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School-family-community Interface</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Positive collaboration with family and community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom Environment and Instruction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To best support learning and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff Leadership and Professional Development</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Opportunities for educators to develop professionally to accommodate a diverse student population and in particular refugee students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, Tables 4 and 5 display the levels of education through which educational interventions can be implemented to meet the needs of both immigrant and refugee students. In order to meet the needs of this newcomer group, changes can be made in the educational system anywhere from the individual teacher level to the larger overarching educational policy level. The next section reviews the specific findings of immigrant and refugee challenges in the classroom and school community.

**Specific Challenges of Immigrant and Refugee Children in School**

After reviewing the findings from my literature review and categorizing a few broad themes among immigrant and refugee classroom challenges and educational
strategies for addressing these challenges, I decided to be even more specific about what types of problems can be observed in the classroom among this group of students and what types of steps teachers can take to help students overcome their difficulties. This section identifies specific challenges that a teacher might observe in immigrant students (Table 6) and refugee students (Table 7) in a classroom.

Each table provides corresponding strategies for classroom teachers to assist their students in overcoming these challenges. In the left columns of both tables, I list the various challenges that immigrant and refugee students face as they adapt into a new school and community. In Table 6, the challenges faced by immigrant students are categorized into two groups: one, English language learning challenges; and two, the challenges of acculturation. The strategies provided in the right column of the table are said to alleviate some of these difficulties if implemented appropriately. When considering the challenges experienced by refugee students in Table 7, I grouped the challenges in the order that I thought they would be experienced by the students from the time that they migrate into their host country. The right column of Table 7 suggests teaching strategies at the classroom level that might alleviate some of the challenges that refugee students face. I arranged the pairing of challenges with appropriate strategies based on my own background of a teacher and graduate student in Education, about what I deem to be effective for addressing some immigrant and refugee classroom issues. The strategies listed in the right column of Table 7 are cumulative; all of the strategies mentioned for previous challenges can be applied to the given challenge. For example, the strategies to address challenge 5 would include strategies A-D and challenge 5 can only fully be addressed if you apply all the strategies before it.
Table 6

Challenges Faced by Immigrant Students and Teachers’ Classroom Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges Faced by Immigrant Students</th>
<th>Teachers’ Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>English Language Challenges and Strategies</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Lack communication in English at home.</td>
<td>A. Recognize the value in the language spoken at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Provide cues for standards of appropriateness for grammatical structure and content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fear learning a new language will result in identity loss.</td>
<td>C. Allow students to use home language at school as they gradually acquire English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Lack motivation to learn a new language.</td>
<td>D. Encourage students for the period of orientation to use the home language to check for comprehension and to provide instructions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Are affected by the upheaval of the entire migration process and are therefore not ready to learn a new language.</td>
<td>E. Account for emotional and psychological needs in order to build motivation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F. Create a mutually accommodating classroom environment by having both dominant and minority cultures show acceptance and respect of each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G. View the child as a unique member of the school community and of his or her own cultural group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acculturation Challenges</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Feel a lack of choice in schools and classrooms regarding how much they are to adopt a new culture versus protecting their home culture.</td>
<td>H. Develop a culturally representative curriculum by using ideas and information from the immigrant students’ own experiences and home cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I. Incorporate students into visual landscape of classroom through books, posters, artwork, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Experience cultural stress being imposed by others including both educators and classmates.</td>
<td>J. Learn about students’ schooling prior to migration, degree of trauma, degree of difference between home culture and dominant culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>K. Engage in conversation with parent(s)/guardian(s) with the aid of an interpreter.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

Challenges Faced by Refugee Students and Teachers’ Classroom Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges Faced by Refugee Students</th>
<th>Teachers’ Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Experienced trauma prior to migration.</td>
<td>A. Attend PD sessions re: communicating with and relating to traumatized children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lost family, friends, homes, and possessions.</td>
<td>B. Learn about the child’s background. <em>Learning about the child includes an understanding of her or his background and all the pre-, trans-, and post-migration factors that may influence the way the child learns. Also, teachers must learn about the child’s culture.</em> Also refer to strategy A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Lost trust, dignity, and self-worth.</td>
<td>C. Create a welcoming and safe classroom environment. D. Create peer support programs. Also refer to strategies A-B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Trauma depending on length of time and type of transition.</td>
<td>Refer to strategies A-D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Struggle depending on student’s age and developmental stage.</td>
<td>Refer to strategies A-D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Have no (or low) educational backgrounds and no (or low) literacy skills prior to migration.</td>
<td>E. Offer weekly mentoring programs. F. Use curriculum projects that have a cross-cultural component. G. Develop opportunities for parents to become actively involved and part of the classroom. Also refer to strategies A-D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Experience academic dysfunction as a result of mental health difficulties.</td>
<td>H. Incorporate learning in home language and then gradually increase use of host language. Also refer to strategies A-G.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Feel lost in the midst of unfamiliar people, culture, language, etc.</td>
<td>I. Ensure availability of learning materials in the home language. Also refer to strategies A-H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Are socially distant from classmates due to trouble integrating with target language group on a psychological and social scale.</td>
<td>J. Incorporate events and activities in which students and parents can actively participate. Also refer to strategies A-I.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

In this chapter, I visually presented what the literature identifies as the most common challenges that immigrant and refugee students face in the classroom and school community when they move into a new host country. The tables outline both general themes regarding areas of challenges (stress of acculturation, English language learning, and trauma induced challenges), as well as specific challenges in the classroom (Tables 1, 2, and 3). Additionally, I presented pedagogical strategies that the literature suggests will help meet the learning needs of these newcomer students (Tables 4, 5, 6, and 7).

I end with a handbook document that I intend for teachers as a resource tool for working with immigrant and refugee students in their classrooms. Although immigrant and refugee students are diverse in their cultural backgrounds and histories, this handbook is not directed for immigrant or refugee students from any one specific world region or cultural background. Rather, my intention is to present classroom educators with a more generic manual for recognizing certain challenges facing most immigrant and refugee students when in their classrooms and, accordingly, a variety of appropriate teaching strategies to apply in order to address those challenges.

Upon reviewing the classroom difficulties faced by newcomer students, I found that the challenges faced by both immigrant and refugee students are similar. Therefore, I would suggest that teaching strategies need to be developed with an awareness of these similarities rather than focusing on the challenges of each group in isolation. Thus, in the handbook, I present the challenges and corresponding strategies for newcomer students as one group; I do not differentiate between immigrant and refugee students.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Personal Statement

Like the immigrant and refugee students discussed in this project, I moved to Canada with my parents at a young age and encountered some challenges in school as an immigrant student. I was educated in the Ontario education system from Grade 1 and onwards; as a result of my family moving, I attended seven different schools in Southern Ontario prior to graduation. Each new neighbourhood and school community presented me with new challenges. Initially I struggled with the difficulties that came with learning a new language. Although my parents and I were both learning the English language, we spoke our first language at home in order to preserve it and be able to speak with our relatives back home. However, even after I learned English, I quickly became aware of differences between my home culture and my school culture.

When one is immersed into a school culture that differs from one’s home culture, opportunities will arise when, regardless of how familiar one is with the language, one will not be able to relate due to differences from mainstream culture. What is considered to be general knowledge for children in mainstream society and the Canadian culture may not be the case for someone who was not brought up in this context. Throughout my educational journey in Ontario, there have been instances when I was simply unable to relate to some of the discussions in class due to a lack of understanding of particular elements of Western culture. As two examples, my teachers referred to artists that “your parents grew up listening to” or to Canadian children’s authors. However, as my parents did not grow up in Canada and the language spoken at home was not English, I was
unfamiliar with, or more to the point, totally perplexed by a number of the “learning examples” used in class.

My story as an immigrant student set the stage for my research. Now, as an educator, 17 years after having immigrated to Canada, I am in a position where I want to make classroom learning experiences of immigrant and refugee students better than they were when I was a student. This marks the purpose of my project – to develop a handbook for classroom teachers that identifies the pedagogical needs of immigrant and refugee students and corresponding teaching strategies intended to help these students to better adapt into their new school community and education system.

I undertook several steps in order to develop the handbook that is in Appendix 1. I first conducted a review of the extant literature to discover the classroom and school challenges that immigrant and refugee students experience. As I reviewed the literature, I quickly recognized that the identified refugee and immigrant classroom challenges were not based on the perceptions of the teachers and students themselves. Nonetheless, I went on to study what the research identifies as effective pedagogical strategies directed towards classroom teachers working with these students. After a thorough review of this literature, I believe that I was able to develop a thorough representation of the specific challenges that immigrant and refugee students are said to face in the classroom, and opposite each challenge, a pedagogical strategy identified by the academic literature to be effective for overcoming the challenge and meeting the needs of the student. In the following section, I comment on a couple of constraints of the handbook and on how the handbook might be improved to be even more useful.
Constraints of the Handbook

The aim of my handbook was to develop a resource that teachers can easily access if they are in a situation in which they are teaching immigrant or refugee students in their classroom. I want them to be aware of the possible challenges affecting these students and provide them with some targeted pedagogical practices to address those specific challenges. However, the handbook is slightly limited as I do not prioritize the various pedagogical strategies in terms of which are perceived by the students as being the more successful. I simply present them as a list of suggestions. In order to prioritize the strategies, I would have to conduct research on the most prominent challenges experienced by immigrant and refugee students in the classroom. I would then have to determine, from the students’ perspective, which they perceive to be the more successful teaching strategies in helping them overcome these challenges. Both of these limitations offer further research possibilities that, I contend, would strengthen my product, the handbook.

In the second chapter of my project, I discussed the time and resources involved in the implementation of the various teaching strategies. However, I did not mention these issues when listing the strategies in the handbook itself. To address the issues of time and resources, I would first need to investigate those educators who have both successfully and unsuccessfully implemented some of these pedagogical approaches. This investigation would allow for a better understanding of how to apply some of these teaching strategies, and to determine the feasibility of each strategy.

The suggestions in the handbook would carry more clout if they were aligned with any existing but mandatory policy articulated by the Ministry of Education or by a
particular school board. If policy and hence the strategies were made mandatory, professional development exercises could then be designed accordingly: to provide teachers of immigrant and refugee students with the necessary tools for understanding and skills for teaching these students.

In the following section, I consider my research findings in order to explore implications of my project, as well as suggest next steps to be considered by future researchers.

Next Steps

The data that I collected throughout the research of this project may be useful for education policy makers, principals, and particularly classroom teachers of immigrant and refugee students. After reflecting on my own experiences and reviewing the existing research on challenges experienced by immigrant and refugee students and my own experiences, I realized that there is room for improvement in the education of these students. Since during the school day students spend the most time in the classroom, I, along with other researchers such as Mouzitchka (2006), believe that classroom teachers are the most influential players in helping these students overcome their challenges and making their transition into the school community more comfortable.

Future research would benefit from empirical data, both from interview and/or case study analysis of newcomer students’ experiences. I would first have to locate an area or school with a high number of immigrant and refugee students. Then, I would speak to the students directly (and in their first language) to hear what it is exactly that they find challenging in their classroom and school, and what it is that they wish to see changed in their education. I would then be able to describe the challenges from the
participants’ own perspectives (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Comparing their responses to the literature, I could then validate the existing literature (presented in Chapter 2). Onsite qualitative research would provide a deeper understanding of some of both the trials and triumphs that newcomer students face. Applying a descriptive and explorative method to discover immigrant and refugee student experiences should give further direction in understanding the issues that either support or impede their transition into the classroom and school community.

Another research area that would be beneficial to explore is the existing strategies that are being used in schools as educators work with high immigrant and refugee student populations. Specifically, I would suggest that a researcher observe the work of classroom teachers to see what pedagogical strategies are being used and also to talk to students to explore just how receptive students are to these teaching approaches. It would be useful to hear the voices of immigrant and refugee students who have successfully transitioned into their school and new community. Also, as mentioned above, research could be carried out to validate the recommended strategies found in the literature. These different research agendas would allow for a clarification of what the educators do that they consider appropriate; and how these strategies are being received and/or perceived by the students. Are they indeed “appropriate” pedagogical strategies? Furthermore, since many of the strategies focus on family, community, and school connections, it would be valuable to gain insight on the parents’ perceptions about the pedagogical strategies that are being used in the classroom and with them in their home.
Closing Comments

With 42% of Canada’s newcomer population settling in Ontario, the province has become the number one destination in the country for newcomers (Canwest News Service, 2009). Given the reality of Ontario’s growing newcomer population (including both refugee and immigrant children), researchers, policy makers, and particularly classroom teachers need to become aware of, assess, and develop solutions to the unique challenges of these students. This project attempted to identify many of these challenges, as well as provide what the literature recognizes as pedagogical strategies for addressing them. By understanding the classroom challenges of this group of newcomer students and applying the appropriate teaching strategies for these students, I contend that we will be building the base for enriching futures for this large and increasingly diverse Canadian generation.
REFERENCES


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Handbook for Teachers:

Immigrant & Refugee Students’ Challenges and Teachers’ Pedagogical Strategies

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Queen’s University
Kingston, Ontario
© 2009
Message to Teachers:

This document is intended as a resource tool for supporting immigrant and refugee students in your classrooms. It has been developed for you as a teacher not only to be aware of the possible challenges affecting this newcomer Canadian group but also to provide them with some targeted pedagogical practices to address these specific challenges.

Although immigrant and refugee students are diverse in their cultural backgrounds and histories, this handbook is not directed for immigrant or refugee students from any one specific world region or cultural background.

Immigrant and refugee children come into our schools with specific challenges; it is our job as teachers to try to meet those challenges in ways to make their adjustment to Canadian schools and classrooms non-threatening and as early as possible. We want to build the base for enriching futures for this large and increasingly diverse Canadian generation.

If you have successfully tried additional teaching strategies working with immigrant and/or refugee students, please send me an email so that I can constantly update this resource document. As well, if any of these strategies did not work for you, please let me know. All inquiries can be emailed to: jovana.janjusevic@gmail.com.

Jovana Janjusevic
The Importance of Meeting the Needs of Newcomer Students

We must be aware of the challenges of a culturally diverse newcomer student population all attempting to live and learn in one society’s school. This awareness will help teachers know how to aid newcomer students in overcoming their challenges so that the students are able to stay engaged and succeed in both their new school and the community.

In this handbook, you will find a description of the classroom challenges that many newcomer Canadians face, as well as pedagogical strategies and tools which the literature identifies for helping overcome some of these tribulations. Tables 1, 2, and 3 then summarize the specific challenges that teachers may observe among newcomer students in their classroom. Additionally, the tables provide steps that teachers are recommended to take in order to help their students overcome some of these challenges.

Canadian Newcomer Students

**Immigrant Student** – any student who comes into the classroom (either permanently or temporarily) and has been born in a country other than Canada (UNESCO, 2005).

**Refugee Student** – any student who is outside his/her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion and is unable to or unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country or to return there for fear of persecution (United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 1993).
Three Areas of Challenge Exist:

- Trauma, Grief, and Loss
- English Language Challenges
- Acculturation Challenges

1. Trauma, Grief, and Loss

The Challenges

Many newcomer Canadian students migrate to Canada after having experienced some traumatic experiences, with their grief and loss. Pre-migration traumatic events may include repression, political persecution, and torture.

In particular, newcomer children who undergo a physical loss (e.g., family, friends, home, and possessions) experience a great deal of trauma. Also, through the experiences of war and often political or religious persecution, many children lose their feelings of trust, dignity, and self-worth, all of which compound the degree of trauma. As the length of time spent in transition increases and children and their families are in transit in different places and even countries, they experience even more trauma.

The age at which child refugees migrate to their host country and the period of migration when they enter a new school also impact their trauma. For example, younger children who have not attended school in their home country (or have not had very much schooling) find it harder to adjust to a new education system than older students who have completed much of their education in their home country. Also, the child’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioural coping strategies in response to these life altering traumatic experiences at the pre-migration stage varies, depending on the developmental age of the child. Thus, older students may have developed coping strategies that will help them handle the challenges of a transition better than younger students who have not developed the coping strategies that could aid them through this transition. In this way, age and developmental stage become important factors in adaptation.
Teachers’ Strategies

In order to teach and even communicate with newcomer students, teachers are strongly encouraged to attend professional development (PD) sessions that will provide them with the skills to relate to these students. In these PD sessions, teachers should be encouraged to share resources and experiences with one another. By doing so, teachers should be able to determine which strategies and tools are most useful in their particular situations. Moreover, PD activities should be more than simple exposure to artifacts representative of the diverse student body, but should also focus on building teachers’ knowledge base about teaching toward diversity. PD for teachers should include discussion of: approaches in developing student competency in the English language; learning about the uniqueness of different ethnicities and cultures; developing and teaching a curriculum that is representative of the students in the class; and especially establishing a caring, welcome, and open environment for immigrant students that works toward optimal academic success, and social and cultural adaptation.

Also, teachers should make a concerted effort to get to know each of their newcomer students. By doing so, teachers begin to understand the child’s background and all the pre-, trans-, and post-migration factors that have affected the child. An appropriate way of discovering some of this specific personal information is through conversation with the child’s parent(s), using, if necessary, an interpreter.

Teachers should also strive to learn about the child’s culture and background. The teacher can acquire this knowledge through websites and libraries, as well as through cultural informants or community agencies that may have settled the immigrant family. Some cultural informants may include teachers or paraprofessionals of that heritage or ethnic group, other members of that cultural community who have adapted into the host community, or community activists. Teachers’ awareness of these values and practices will promote sensitivity and allow the educator to teach around each student’s ‘centre’ or background.

Teachers must create a welcoming and safe environment for their students. When an environment feels welcoming and safe, a child feels comfortable and is more ready to learn. This type of environment can be established by viewing all children as unique members of their school community, as well as individual members of their own cultural group. If
teachers make this attempt, they will avoid making inaccurate generalizations and assumptions about the children and their learning needs. Instead, the teacher will be able to develop the most appropriate solutions and supports to provide each individual student.

Many newcomer students have lost trust in others and experience a loss of self-worth; accordingly, teachers should make every effort to attend to their emotional needs. Attending to the children’s emotional needs can be done by developing peer support programs that generate a nurturing, caring, and supportive atmosphere. Peers in these programs can be students from the classroom or even other students from the school. Also, talking with students will allow the educator to both hear each student’s potential concerns such as feelings of anxiety and fear of the unknown, as well as provide emotional support if needed. This open communication is the first step towards building a trusting, accepting, and safe learning environment. Open communication is not limited merely to students who speak English, but can be established through an interpreter or informant (e.g., member of the child’s family) just as well in situations where a language barrier exists.

Table 1 displays the relationship between some of the challenges that newcomer students face in relation to their experienced trauma. All of the characteristics in Table 1 relate to the degree of trauma experienced by the child and to how well the child handles and grieves this trauma. The table provides two columns: one is challenges that immigrant and refugee students have, according to the literature; and two, is a list of the strategies to address the corresponding challenges.
Table 1

*Challenges Brought on by Trauma, Grief, and Loss among Newcomer Students and Teachers’ Classroom Strategies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges Faced by Newcomer Students</th>
<th>Teachers’ Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Experienced trauma prior to migration.</td>
<td>A. Attend PD sessions re: communicating with and relating to traumatized children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lost family, friends, homes, and possessions.</td>
<td>B. Learn about the child’s background. Also refer to strategy A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Lost trust, dignity, and self-worth.</td>
<td>C. Create a welcoming and safe classroom environment. D. Create peer support programs. Also refer to strategies A-B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Trauma depending on length of time and type of transition.</td>
<td>Refer to strategies A-D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. English Language

The Challenges

Second language acquisition among newcomer students is a difficult stage of the transition process. However, once the language is mastered, the student is able to better adapt into a new culture and community.

Newcomer students often view language development as more than just a means of communication, but it is something that they associate with their identity. As a result, many fear that learning a new language will result in abandonment of their identity and thus lack motivation to learn English.

Also, some newcomer students are simply not ready to learn a new language as they are still dealing with the upheaval of the entire immigration process. Often having experienced a high degree of stress prior to, during, and after migration, some suffer from mental health difficulties which facilitate academic dysfunction and impede the development of a second language.

Teachers’ Strategies

Several strategies are recommended for teachers aiming to help their newcomer students with English language development.

Most research encourages teachers to recognize and encourage their students to use their home language at school, at least during the orientation period, and then gradually increase their exposure to the English language. The home language can be used in cross-cultural curriculum projects, providing and clarifying instructions, and sharing and learning about the students’ backgrounds.

As a way of building motivation to learn English among newcomer students, teachers need to account for both the emotional and psychological needs of the child. This means that teachers should familiarize themselves with how well students are coping with their migration experience and consequently how ready they are to learn a new language. A child who is struggling with adaptation into a new culture and school community may need more motivation to learn the literacy and language skills of a second language than a child who is adapting quite well.
Furthermore, teachers should model appropriate grammar; newcomer students not only do not experience this modeling in the home, but some may end up teaching their parents the new language as well. An effective way of modeling grammar is to guide the students’ conversation in the classroom and ask for clarification from students (so that they expand their replies), without dominating the entire conversation. As well, teachers should give the students opportunities to talk in the classroom, for example, through think-pair-share activities. This way, teachers can listen in on conversations that newcomer students are having with others in the class and they can provide grammatical suggestions and cues in a non-threatening manner.

The literature also suggests that teachers offer weekly mentoring programs for students, which will give the students a chance to practice their English language skills with a peer. Mentoring programs can be established in the classroom or outside the classroom with other students in the school.

Furthermore, teachers should ensure the facilitation of a mutually accommodating classroom environment in which both the majority and minority cultures accommodate by showing respect and acceptance of each other by living as culturally different people interacting within the same society. This safe environment is optimal for second language development. Teachers should also teach both immigrant and non-immigrant students the value of accepting differences among each other. In the home, students are taught a certain set of values and behaviours. However, it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that, regardless of what values are being instilled in the home environment, the classroom environment is one in which all students (from both the dominant and non-dominant culture groups) are to show respect to each other. Only when this effort is made, I believe, can mutual accommodation be effective.

When students are ready to further develop their English language skills, teachers should employ a variety of literacy programs to help newcomer students further develop their language skills. One means is through a collaborative reading program. Using this method, students are placed into learning teams of four students with whom they work cooperatively on a variety of literacy exercises including creative writing, peer reading, identification of major elements in a story, summarizing of stories and storytelling, and activities that are geared toward the practice of basic
reading skills such as spelling and vocabulary. Another strategy is through guided reading, which allows students to develop the required reading skills as the teacher provides support for small groups of students as they learn to use various reading strategies. Finally, the use of multi-media has proven effective in helping newcomer students develop English reading skills. An example of this is when students watch television programs with closed-captioning. This form of media allows students to hear the words that are being spoken on the program, see the words in closed-captions, and experience all of this in a context by watching images on the television.

Table 2 displays some of the challenges that newcomer students experience in their attempt to learn the English language. Then, in the right column of the table is a summary of strategies for addressing these challenges.

Table 2

*English Language Challenges among Newcomer Students and Teachers’ Classroom Strategies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges Faced By Newcomer Students</th>
<th>Teachers’ Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Have no (or low) educational backgrounds and no (or low) literacy skills prior to migration. | A. Offer weekly mentoring programs.  
B. Use curriculum projects that have a cross-curricular component.  
C. Recognize the value in the language spoken at home.  
D. Provide cues for standards of appropriateness for grammatical structure and content.  
E. Develop opportunities for parent(s)/guardian(s) to become actively involved and part of the classroom. |
| 2. Lack communication in English at home. |  
3. Fear learning a new language will result in identity loss.  
4. Lack motivation to learn a new language. | F. Allow students to use home language at school as they gradually acquire English.  
G. Encourage students for the period of orientation to use the home language to check for comprehension and to provide instructions. |
5. Are affected by the upheaval of the entire migration process and are therefore not ready to learn a new language.

H. Account for emotional and psychological needs in order to build motivation.

I. Create a mutually accommodating classroom environment by having both dominant and minority cultures show acceptance and respect of each other.

J. View the child as a unique member of the school community and of his or her own cultural group.

K. Incorporate learning in home language and then gradually increase use of host language.

L. Employ a range of literacy programs.

6. Experience academic dysfunction as a result of mental health difficulties.

3. Acculturation

The Challenges

Another significant challenge to newcomer students in the classroom and school community is the obstacles associated with the entire intercultural experience. As students live between two cultures (their school culture and their home culture), they experience uncertainty about their desired degree of acculturation. Often when at school, newcomer students feel lost in the midst of unfamiliar people, culture, and language. With this feeling of unfamiliarity, they want to acculturate to a certain degree, but are often faced with the inability to choose the degree at which they will adopt a new culture versus protecting their own. This lack of choice comes from the notion that schools are often defining degrees of acculturation by setting out restrictions limiting choices that immigrant students can make. As a result, these students often experience cultural stress being imposed on them by other classmates and educators who are living within the host culture and its values and traditions.
As well, newcomer students are often socially distant from peers and members of the host culture group as they struggle to integrate on both psychological and social scales due to the language barriers. Newcomer students will experience acculturation stress in varying degrees depending on their age and developmental stage. For example, a younger student may have an easier experience integrating into the host education system than a student who has been educated in a foreign education system his or her whole life and has already established lifelong friendships. Also, in reference to developmental stage, older students are more likely to have reached the developmental stage that enables them to cope better with the degree of difference between their home culture and school culture in comparison to younger students.

**Teachers’ Strategies**

A variety of strategies exist for teachers who observe newcomer students in their class who are challenged by the stress of acculturation.

When a student is feeling lost within an unfamiliar environment, the literature suggests that teachers should ensure the availability of learning materials in the student’s home language (e.g. videos, books, audio CDs, vocabulary pages, toys). This step will add at least some degree of familiarity to the student’s world at school. If a culturally representative curriculum is developed, students are able to share and observe their own ideas, experiences, and culture being represented in the classroom. Furthermore, students will be given an active role in the classroom and will notice a higher degree of choice in how much they are able to protect their own culture while adopting some of the values and traditions of the host culture. Also, teachers should make every effort to incorporate their newcomer students into the visual landscape of the classroom, e.g., by putting up posters, art work, and artifacts that are reflective of all the cultures and nationalities in the class. This form of culturally diverse landscape will instil a sense of comfort among the students as they gradually integrate into their new host community.

Newcomer students experience cultural stress imposed by others as their cultural identity begins to form in the context of two or more cultural frameworks. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to learn about their students’ schooling prior to their migration, the degree of trauma they may have experienced, and the kinds of differences between the student’s
home culture and the dominant culture. Teachers should do this when
the student is willing to talk (through an interpreter), or teachers could
engage in conversation with parent(s)/guardian(s) with the aid of an
interpreter.

Finally, teachers should incorporate interactive social events in the
classroom in which all newcomer students can actively participate and
meet with each other and local students, e.g., movie nights, sport
tournaments, crafts, team building activities, etc. This feeling of
involvement will help many students to overcome the social distance that
they feel from the target language group.

Table 3 provides a summary of the aforementioned acculturation
challenges experienced among newcomer students and the strategies
that exist in helping these students overcome some of their challenges.

Table 3
**Acculturation Challenges among Newcomer Students and Teachers’
Classroom Strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges Faced By Newcomer Students</th>
<th>Teachers’ Strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Feel lost in the midst of</td>
<td>A. Ensure availability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unfamiliar people, culture,</td>
<td>of learning materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language, etc.</td>
<td>in the home language.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Feel a lack of choice in schools</td>
<td>B. Develop a culturally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and classrooms regarding how much</td>
<td>representative curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td>they are to adopt a new culture</td>
<td>by using ideas and</td>
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<td>versus protecting their home culture</td>
<td>information from the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>immigrant students’ own</td>
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<td></td>
<td>experiences and home</td>
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<td></td>
<td>cultures.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Incorporate students</td>
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<td></td>
<td>into visual landscape of</td>
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<td></td>
<td>classroom through books,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>posters, artwork, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Experience cultural stress</td>
<td>D. Learn about students’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being imposed by others including</td>
<td>schooling prior to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>both educators and classmates.</td>
<td>migration, degree of</td>
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<td></td>
<td>trauma, degree of</td>
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<td></td>
<td>difference between</td>
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<td>home culture and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>dominant culture.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E. Engage in conversation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>with parent(s)/guardian(s)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>with the aid of an</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Are socially distant from classmates due to trouble in integration with target language group on a psychological and social scale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.</td>
<td>Incorporate events and activities in which students can actively participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Struggle depending on student's age and developmental stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apply strategies A-F.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Concluding Comments:

It is my hope that this handbook can serve teachers as a guide to teaching, communicating, and relating with newcomer Canadian students. Hopefully by learning how to identify some of the aforementioned challenges among newcomer students and by adopting some of the recommended pedagogical practices, teachers will be able to better the transition of these students into their host school and community. From my first-hand experience as an immigrant student and now, 17 years later as a classroom teacher, I assert that students like myself would have greatly benefited by some of this newcomer sensitive classroom practice.
REFERENCES


