THE BRIDGE ACROSS: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO

THE EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL ESL STUDENTS

IN NOVA SCOTIA

THESIS

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KATHI R. THOMPSON

APPROVED BY

ADVISOR _____

INTERNAL EXAMINER _____

EXTERNAL EXAMINER _____

EXAMINER'S

INSTITUTION _____

DEPARTMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION

ST. FRANCIS XAVIER UNIVERSITY
ANTIGONISH, NOVA SCOTIA

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ABSTRACT

Currently thousands of international students traverse the globe to enter programmes of higher education in English speaking countries. A smaller group of sojourners lacking the proficiency in English to enter directly into university are accepted "conditionally," on the proviso they successfully complete English second language training. As an ESL teacher, I have witnessed firsthand, language learners struggle to adapt to a new educational system, at the same time they are learning a language and trying to understand an unfamiliar culture. In this thesis, I explore what it means to be an international ESL sojourner who comes to Nova Scotia to study. My research was meant to look at this question from the sojourners' point of view, offering them an opportunity to share their stories.

My research used the three dimensions of narrative space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as a framework for six international ESL learners to tell their stories. In-depth interviews offered a comfortable venue for them to reflect, *experiencing the experience* again in the re-telling of their stories. At the same time this allowed me to *reach across a narrative space* to make meaning of their *fragments of storied moments*. Through a process of reflecting on their interviews I was able to see patterns of the shared experience they described. Further, using thematic analysis I grouped my findings into topic areas. My research found that my initial hunch was accurate. The beginning phase of adjustment for ESL sojourners is a complex web of challenges for which there is little support. The research question of what it means to experience this transition helped to reveal four aspects related to their adjustment: adult education, second language acquisition, cultural adaptation, and intercultural competence.

Through the research process I also gained insight into ways these four fields intersect, confirming the second hunch I began with.

By affirming the multi-faceted adaptation issues facing international ESL sojourners my research expands upon largely unrecognized aspects of the internationalization process. The research affirms the transition ESL sojourners make during the initial stage combines language acquisition and cultural adaptation needs. I conclude the responsibility for support rests on the shoulders of the institutions benefiting from their enrolment. Further, I recognize this support is part of a much larger need for institutions to systematically examine what internationalizing education means to them. Through this critical self-reflexive process I conclude it is possible to create infrastructures to provide the support international ESL sojourners need and deserve.

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CHAPTER I

BLUEPRINT OF THE INQUIRY

I live my life in pictures. I roll from image after image of metaphors that give voice to the feelings and experiences that touch my soul and awaken my heart to the magic of my blessed life. (Undated journal entry)

In my role as an English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor, before, during, and after class, I have witnessed firsthand, students who regale me with personal tales of adjusting to their new life in Nova Scotia. Frequently, these narratives are intertwined with shame, confusion, and embarrassment. In their effort to learn English, ESL learners face a multitude of difficulties that may begin long before leaving their homeland to embark on their journey, and continue throughout the adaptation to their new learning environment. My research arises out of my practice as an adult educator in the field of ESL instruction.

I have chosen the analogy of crossing a bridge as a way to understand what it means to be an international ESL student who comes to Nova Scotia to study English and subsequently enter an academic course of study in higher education. It is my hope that this will help the reader understand the multi-dimensional challenge of this undertaking, and the courageous effort needed to find success.

Background

Adult education plays a pivotal role in the lives of millions of today's adults and young adults, who are faced with living and working in a fast-paced global economy. Boundaries that used to exist, no longer prevent international business from being done in every corner of the globe. International and domestic companies continue to spring up around the world, providing a multitude of new job opportunities. Young adults in many countries now seek educational opportunities in English language environments that will set

them apart from their peers, by developing themselves within these competitive climates. It is in this context that English language mastery has become the stepping stone to future study. It is, in fact, the primary doorway through which many international sojourners must pass, in order to reach future goals in the academic world. The term *sojourner* in this paper refers to individuals enrolled in ESL programmes who have not yet developed proficiency in English language skills (Thomas & Harrell, 1994).

English as a Second Language training is big business. Today there are hundreds of international sojourners coming to Nova Scotia, and to numerous other English-speaking environments, to learn English and further their educational goals in mainstream university programmes. Students, home stay families, and instructors are currently drawn together in ways that are meant to provide support and foster language acquisition.

In the abundance of literature written about international students across Canada, and indeed the English-speaking world, there is a gap in knowledge about international ESL sojourners, and specifically those in Nova Scotia. Little has been written about their initial experience, how they adjust to their new environment, what training they receive, what factors help or hinder them, and what institutions need to do to prepare for the burgeoning population of ESL sojourners coming to Nova Scotia to study. Richard-Amato (2003) notes that the affective domain, an inter-connected network of variables, is strongly influenced during the early acculturation process, and can either enhance or hinder language acquisition.

Altbach (2008) suggests that of the hundreds of institutions that make up the academic community serving international students studying in English-speaking environments, most lack the infrastructure to successfully provide sophisticated international

programmes and initiatives. Much has been written about mainstream students who enter directly into university programmes of study, while little research has addressed students who enter ESL programmes prior to acceptance into full-time university. These ESL institutions provide the critical initial-entry into Canadian culture and educational study for hundreds of students. Richard-Amato (2003) makes the argument that "the overall school environment and the students' relationships are of utmost importance" (p. 122) to future academic success.

Focus of the Inquiry

With this in mind, my thesis focuses on what international ESL students experience coming to Nova Scotia. Seeking to understand the adaptation process, I conducted a narrative inquiry that examines the retold stories and essential events within the initial ESL-student-experience. Through the telling and retelling of their stories it is possible to understand what their experience is. As a seasoned adult-educator and ESL instructor, the heart of my interest in these stories is in understanding the sojourner's reality, and to contribute to the literature on this topic.

Teachers and schools providing ESL training programmes need assistance to understand the magnitude of the challenges facing the ESL student population. However, there is little existing literature that addresses the primary needs of ESL learners. Therefore, this research aims to examine from the students' perspective what it means to adapt to a new culture and educational system, prior to entrance into a university.

Purpose of Research

Embarking on this research study, my main goal has been to take my instinctive, emotional observations of ESL students in their early phase of adjustment, clarify what their experience is, and translate that into data that might be useful to all of the stakeholders involved in their education. This research examines the stories told by international ESL sojourners who come to Nova Scotia to learn English, in order to gain insight into what it means to make this adaptation process. It is my intent to better understand what international ESL learners experience as they make a transition to study ESL in Nova Scotia, in order to ensure that appropriate support may be provided them by both public and private institutions of study. Providing an opportunity for international sojourners to tell their stories in their own words is a critical path to gaining insight into how they view their experience.

Further, adult education theory and practice provide a fundamental framework that is used in language-learning classrooms; however, this is seldom recognized as such by ESL practitioners. Intercultural training (ICT) and cultural adaptation embrace adult education principles as well, but do not necessarily see themselves as adult educators either. It is my intention that by highlighting the interconnection between these four fields international sojourners may be better supported in their efforts to learn English as a Second Language, and that each of these fields may gain rich new perspectives on their theory and practices. In addition, I hope to improve my practice as an adult educator and ESL teacher through an expanded understanding of ESL learners' experiences and with this in mind, assist in creating support materials for new ESL students during their initial adjustment phase.

Scope and Limitations

Within a qualitative research paradigm, this study took place over a period of one year (September 2008 to August 2009) and encompasses the preparation of the research proposal, collection of data through in-depth narrative interviews, analysis of the data, and writing the research report. Based on in-depth interviews of 2 hours, with six international ESL sojourners, I explore the narratives of their initial phase of study. Further follow-up interviews, for clarification, took place with all of the participants. The research study was comprised of participants currently enrolled in English Second Language studies or in full-time higher education programmes, following a programme of ESL study. All participants have been selected through a process of purposeful sampling.

Each of the participants is here on a student study visa, intending to return home upon completion of their university study. They are a mix of male and female and come from various countries of the world. The predominant culture groups who come to Nova Scotia to study are from Asia and the Middle East and are reflected in the final choice of participants in this study. The sample is small and I believe the research represents common perspectives shared by many international ESL sojourners. The small sample size made it possible for me to work with the methodology in a flexible and natural evolution, which in turn enabled me to explore the interconnection of concepts. This flexibility offered an opportunity to portray, in an organic fashion, the multi-layered experiences of ESL students as they perceived and interpreted them. In this way, I was able to examine the many ways that adult education might intersect with language learning and cultural adaptation.

Assumptions

As a seasoned ESL instructor, students tell me I am different, that I have respect for and understand them. I have a genuine rapport that creates a comfortable learning environment inside and outside the classroom. With this knowledge, I assumed that students would trust me enough to share their personal stories with me. I believed that they would speak candidly and without reservation about their experiences in the early stage of their sojourn. The students who had never been in my classes, I believed would feel at ease with me because I have a reputation for being a good teacher, one who students seek out when they have questions or difficulties, which I assumed they would know. Although unfamiliar to me, these students had a reputation of being good students, possessing a high degree of English speaking skill. My assumption was that they would also have a measure of confidence. In addition, I assumed that they felt glad to contribute to the research; certainly, they have all identified with the goals of the study.

Definition of Terms

Terms which may be open to interpretation are included in this section to clarify how they are used in the context of this thesis.

Academic Adjustment describes the process of learning to fit into an unfamiliar academic environment, and may include issues of educational background, culture, language proficiency, classroom participation, critical thinking, study habits, and learning styles.

Academic Achievement refers to evidence of learning, which may be measured by successful completion of course requirements, grade point average (GPA), satisfactory academic standing, or retention (Andrade, 2006).

Acquisition and *Learning:* In this paper the two terms are used interchangeably to explain the process of developing second language skills.

Adaptation refers to a process in which a person allows for a change in their self, as a response to adaptive demands from a different cultural environment. Adaptation at deep levels of self frequently involves changes in one's sense of identity (Shaules, 2007). Adapting behaviour is much easier than adapting deeper elements of the self.

Conditional Acceptance refers to a pre-requisite for entry into university programmes on condition of completing a recognized course of ESL study, or passing an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) Test.

ESL/EFL refers to English as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language by learners whose first language is not English. ESL and EFL are used interchangeably. A discussion of related definitions is expanded on in the literature review in chapter 2.

International Sojourner refers to non-native English speakers (NNES) enrolled in ESL study who do not yet have proficiency in English language skills (Thomas & Harrell, 1994).

International Student refers to individuals enrolled in institutions of higher education on temporary student visas and that are non-native English speakers (NNES).

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) refers generally to the learning of a language other than one's mother tongue; however, in this thesis SLA refers to the learning of English in particular.

The Research Methodology

Embarking on this research study, my main goal has been to take my initial emotional observations of ESL students in their early phase of adjustment, clarify what their experience is, and translate that into data that might be useful to stakeholders involved in their education. By examining their memories and past experiences, I have gained a better understanding of how their realities were constructed, within their social worlds during this time (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). The participants are successful students who have survived the rigors of parachuting into significantly different educational systems and unfamiliar socio-cultural environments (Brown, 2008), and who progressed to high-level academic-ESL study. These sojourner's experiences need to be examined so that future programmes will recognize the support that needs to be provided during this seminal period of adjustment. Of particular pertinence to the reader of this thesis is the multi-disciplinary context within which ESL students find themselves; the central hub of a wheel combining adult education, ESL learning, cultural adaptation, and intercultural training.

The fundamental principle of qualitative interviewing, which Merriam and Simpson emphasize, provides a framework within which I began designing the project. However, it was Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Rossiter and Clark (2007) who enabled me to plunge fully into the heart of what narrative inquiry means, within a qualitative research paradigm. Creswell describes narrative inquiry as both a method and the product of a study (2007).

Narrative inquiry is aligned with the foundational beliefs directly connecting lived experience and learning, and as Creswell explains is best for "capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of the lives of a small number of individuals (p.55). Riessman goes further to articulate key issues of narrative inquiry as "the central place of narrative when personal lives and social institutions intersect" (2008, p.3). In this way it is clear that narrative inquiry is the most appropriate methodology for examining the multi-disciplinary context of ESL sojourner's experience in their early days. By looking at the aspects of their lives where adult education, ESL learning, cultural adaptation, and intercultural training intersect we may be better able to understand what it means to be in their shoes I designed a set of questions with which to begin eliciting narratives from the participants. Although the research participants were studying at a high level of academic ESL, they are non-native English speakers for whom I provided a way for them to recount their narratives in progressive sections. My primary guiding questions are presented in Appendix A). Thinking about my study in narrative terms allowed me to "conceptualize the inquiry experience as a storied one on several levels" (Clandinin & Connelly, p.71). In the construction of narratives of ESL students the dynamic research experience required vigilance in negotiating relationships, re-evaluating my position as a researcher, and being flexible to the process. I hoped that the experience of retelling their story would validate their experiences and provide a process of self-reflection that would empower them.

Plan of Presentation

Following this introductory chapter, I provide a synthesis and critique of literature as it relates to the examination of international ESL sojourners who come to Nova Scotia to

learn English. The literature review in chapter 2 focuses on adult education, English second language learning, cultural adaptation, and intercultural training. Chapter 3 depicts my research process, from the early-planning stage through to compiling verbatim summaries of the narratives participants shared with me during interviews. In addition, I have included a detailed description of the narrative inquiry methodology used in this research which has been essential to gaining insight into the international sojourner's experience. Chapter 4 is comprised of an analysis of my research findings in relation to the literature reviewed, followed by my conclusions and recommendations. The implications for the future relate to my professional practice as an adult educator, and the larger field of adult education, which is essential to ESL teaching, cultural adaptation, and intercultural training.

CHAPTER 2

STRUCTURAL FOUNDATION: LITERATURE REVIEW

I feel I am now on a treasure hunt, searching for clues and connecting the dots of literature as I create my annotated bibliography. What has, until now, been shrouded in fog takes shape. I begin to see interconnected ideas and questions in the visual way I make flow chart drawings, in order to understand the big picture, with a birds-eye view. I feel excited by doing something everyday (another of my initial goals) or dare I say I'm addicted to the process! My fears have been replaced by joy and enthusiasm and I look forward to my hunt each day. I now believe I will find my way. (Journal entry, 30.May.08)

This chapter provides a synthesis and critique of English as a Second Language literature as it relates to the examination of international ESL sojourners who come to Nova Scotia to learn English as a prerequisite to study in higher education programmes. It is clear, however, that exclusively examining ESL literature would address only one facet of a multi-dimensional question. In order to gain insight into what it means to be an international ESL sojourner in the beginning of their stay, it is also necessary to delve deeply into cultural adaptation issues and intercultural training, both of which are integral to successful adjustment to a new environment. What is of particular relevance to my research is how these individual fields of study are germane to the broader field of adult education.

In attempts to understand the experiences of international students, researchers have categorized students' situations within a variety of frameworks. Bartram (2007) uses a seven-fold taxonomy of needs, including practical and emotional, cultural and linguistic, pedagogical and academic achievement, to compare staff and student views of sociocultural needs. Andrade (2006) examines adjustment challenges seen within English language proficiency and culture. Still others hone in on study-related stress and loneliness to grasp the realities international students face in the beginning stages of adjustment (Brown, 2008;

Brown & Holloway, 2008; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008). None of the three fields included (ESL, cultural adaptation, and intercultural training) view their perspectives as directly embracing adult education. What I propose is the principles and practices found in the field of adult education can act as a unifying framework with which to examine these challenges, thereby identifying gaps in the literature. It is my intention that this may be significant to international students and those institutions welcoming them. This does not mean creating a new domain of study, rather, to recognize the profound principles that are the underpinnings of adult education and their inherently connected approach to adult learning in the realm of ESL. By showing how these four perspectives intersect, I hope this research will move us further along the path to providing the critical support international sojourners greatly need and deserve from the institutions profiting from their enrolment.

Before beginning the main aspects of the review in which I explore and discuss literature related to international ESL students in higher education, I clarify key conceptual terms used throughout the paper, and explain the strategy I employed to locate literature. In the first section of this chapter, I provide an overview of literature related to the field of adult education, outlining the theoretical frameworks and philosophical approaches to the practice, as it pertains to the international ESL sojourner's learning experience. Literature concerned with ESL issues is addressed in the second section. Cultural adaptation considerations are examined in the third section. This is followed by a review of intercultural training in section four. Section five provides a brief review of data collection methodology, specifically narrative inquiry. The concluding section includes a summary of this review,

illustrating how the theory and practice of adult education are a unifying framework for examining the issues of international ESL students, and, finally, identifying gaps within the current literature.

Search Strategy

To identify relevant literature, I searched both educational and social sciences databases, including Educational Resources Information Centre and EBSCO Information Services. Except where a document is fundamental, placing a source into a historical context, I focused my search on publications, specifically journals and books from the past 10 years. The guiding parameters I set include identifying resources that link international students with ESL, cultural adaptation, intercultural training, and adult education. Initially, my search was primarily focused on North American literature. More recently, however, I have found a great deal of relevant literature currently coming from the UK and Australia which reflects the internationalization of higher education and the global world in which we now reside.

Adult Education

The evolution of adult education has a long and varied history that continues to grow and expand. This makes the task of setting forth an overview of adult education challenging and not distinctly relevant to issues of second language learning. According to Selman, Selman, Cooke, and Dampier (1998), there are many levels and perspectives from which this may be approached, with the most common typology of functions outweighing philosophical ideas. In this section, I specifically highlight the influences of contemporary

adult education, outlining how these are connected to the learning experiences of international ESL sojourners.

Beginning by examining the terminology describing adult education one finds several synonymously used terms running parallel. Andragogy, adopted in North America in the 1970s (Knowles, 1980) is now widely accepted in academic circles and refers specifically to how adults learn. The term also describes "a set of organized activities carried on by a wide variety of institutions for the accomplishment of specific educational objectives" (Knowles, p.25). Despite the frequent separation, in my view, ESL is a form of adult education. Adult learning practices are consistently implemented by effective ESL teachers. Continuing education, extension, community education, and lifelong learning each reflect a context predominately found in North American adult education activities. Among these, lifelong learning and lifelong education, currently popular, are associated with the philosophical view that embodies liberal-democratic values and "self-fulfillment" (Selman et al., 1998, p.22). Without taking sides with any one particular label, it is clear that the domain of adult learning/teaching is a major educational force worldwide today.

As in any field of social practice, the professional practice of adult education mirrors the social context in which it resides. It holds true that the changing times reflect developments and changes within the field. Writing in the context of Canada, Selman et al. (1998) demonstrate the relationship between the continuous growth of our immigrant populations and the prominent role of adult education. While Canadian adult education meets the unique needs of our vast country, regional differences, and federal-provincial cooperative responsibilities, its early roots may be found elsewhere around the world. Both

Great Britain and the United States have been influential to our educational programmes, and with the expansion of technology, so too has the larger international community. In many respects, Canada and the United States influenced each other in educational matters, as they shared similar immigrant populations and widespread territories.

When large numbers of immigrants arrived in Canada, they brought with them knowledge of and experience with community educational programmes such as the YMCA and university extension. The National Training Laboratory in Group Development (NLTGD) also had a large influence on many Canadians, who brought NTLGD techniques back across the border. One of the outgrowths of these influences was the Antigonish Movement, which was an extension programme in cooperative education through St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. "The co-operative movement is based on the idea that the membership of the organization should participate actively in management decisions" (Selman et al., 1998, p.45). Extending education to rural parts of the country, marginalized populations, and involving people in participatory decision making are hallmarks, still embraced today, of the early adult education field.

Critical analysis of the habitual patterns of education systems that numb what is in fact "real" learning is first attributed to John Dewey (Barnes, 1954) at a time when traditional education was paramount. His questions were inspired by profound beliefs that theory and practice in education, and personal experience is inherently connected (Dewey, 1938). Similarly, a pioneering conceptual belief that student needs and situations come before curriculum reflected the groundbreaking ideas catapulting teachers into a new role: no longer the expert filling empty vessels (Lindeman, 1956). Influence for change came from outside

North America, around the same time, with Freire's (1972) treatise on creating a system of participatory education that no longer perpetrates a culture of silence. The concept of action-reflection (praxis) attempted to reconcile the teacher-centred system by actively involving students. Each of these men contributed to reformulating the educational system, shaping the early foundations of adult education in Canada. They have, and continue to be, profoundly influential in our professional practice today. Around the same time, participatory language teaching was an emergent force shaping a new style of actively engaging ESL learners (Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Pennycook, 1996).

With its origin embedded in liberal-progressive and behaviourist-humanistic approaches, adult education shares the traditional educational values of the U.S., placing high importance on "the acquisition of knowledge, the development of rational perspective, and the ability to analyze critically" (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, p.33). Seen by many as the foundation for human resource development and adult training, Elias and Merriam (2005) raise concerns shared by those engaged in a critical perspective of adult education. They openly state that "Behaviourism has been discharged as cold, inhumane, devoid of feeling, and ignorant of the subject and the creative and intuitive dimension of human behaviour" (p.109). More often than not, narratives expressed by my research participants portray feelings of being isolated and alone which indicates the above quotation may not stray far from the truth. An integrated approach to developing language skills in a second language environment has also begun to recognize the influence of affective domain on the learning process (Richard-Amato, 2010). However, a more recent examination of the concept of training (Holst, 2009) sets forth the argument that training in the radical tradition is not

narrowly defined, but portrays both training and education at the heart of the democratic

and participatory form of education espoused within the field of adult education. What is

critical to a language learning environment are the underlying cultural values driving a

democratic participatory education system. For international students who do not come

from such a background, questions arise about the training they receive that helps them

understand the expectations and practices of this new system. It is important to ask what

supports are in place to assist their transition into this unfamiliar method of learning.

Alternatively, the humanistic perspective is the substructure that has supported a

number of seminal adult education theories, such as andragogy championed by Malcolm

Knowles, and transformational learning (Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Mezirow, 2000).

Regardless of the contributions Knowles' (1980) theories have made to the field of adult

education, serious critique has been directed at his perceptions of andragogy. For example,

Knowles' assumption that becoming adult means to simultaneously be self-directed is a view

that is widely rejected (Reischmann, 2005). Further examining the underlying values and

beliefs upon which andragogy is found leads to ideals of individualism and entrepreneurial

democracy. Pratt (1993) substantiates the notion that there can be no value-neutral position

with regards to adult learning. Brookfield (2000) probes even deeper with his investigation

of the concept of critical reflection, highlighting its connections to Eurocentric rationality,

which may in fact lead to intellectual colonialism. This is significant for my research,

suggesting an examination of the North American-centred values and beliefs on which

andragogy is based, which subsequently raise questions about the cultural diversity inherent

within an ESL environment. What is the impact that diverse values and beliefs have on ESL learning/teaching and programme building?

Factors Central to ESL Learning

Integral to the examination of the learning domain in which ESL sojourners sit, cultural, political and social factors must also be central in the process. Indeed, Mezirow (2000) recognizes that assumptions, values, beliefs, and perspectives are the frame of reference a person uses to make meaning of their world. When bumping into something unfamiliar, a person either rejects the new information, or begins to question previously held beliefs which may potentially be a transformative experience, opening a person to learning. However, this may not be the response international sojourners have to the profusion of unfamiliar situations they encounter. More likely they may experience feelings of inadequacy, fear, and confusion (Andrade, 2006; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Shaules, 2007). What is essential to Mezirow's transformative-learning theory is critical self-reflection (Cranton, 2005), found almost exclusively entrenched in North America's heuristic culture. The level of cognitive thinking and critical discourse needed to enter this transformational development raises many questions. How can this theory possibly serve the thousands of international ESL students who reflect educational, cultural, and political systems that do not espouse self-reflection and critical thinking skills?

New insights focus on factors that shape the transformative experience (critical reflection, holistic approaches, and relationships) (Taylor, 2008). "The importance of engaging learners in classroom practices that assist in the development of critical reflection, through the use of reflective journaling, classroom dialogue, and critical questioning" (p.11)

are essential to providing international ESL sojourners with opportunities for developing

their identity within a new language and culture, and thereby increasing confidence. Dirkx

(2006) goes further to suggest that transformational learning is "about inviting 'the whole

person' into the classroom environment, [where] we mean the person in fullness of being: as

an affective, intuitive, thinking, physical, spiritual self" (p.46). Both Taylor and Dirkx

present a culturally relevant approach to transformative-learning theory that may be

appropriate in an ESL environment, fostering a kind of narrative transformation.

Reflected in the un/making of the *International Encyclopedia of Adult Education* (English,

2005), the ambiguity which constitutes the framework of adult education practice invites, in

fact, embraces challenging simplistic labelling and categorizing. By scrutinizing the personal

beliefs, occupational and institutional cultures in which adult educators work, and the

historical-societal forces at play, we provide a contextual framework for exploring adult

education. This could be expanded to include the fluid imbrications and interconnected

borders that exist between ESL and adult education. Clearly, the context in which education

takes place is a critical influence to the learning process.

Contextualizing Learning in Adult Education

While defining theories and philosophical approaches to adult education may provide

a systematic schema from which to view the field, it is crucial to recognize the contextual

influences that contribute to adult learning. Admittedly, it is assumed that the concept of

learning is universally understood. How simple, if this were indeed true. Learning often

defies easy definitions, and becomes more complex when coupled with other concepts, such

as transformative learning, situational learning, or reflexive learning. Seeking clarity in

theoretical frameworks may be a comfortable approach; however, there are implications for using epistemological and situational viewpoints that are more relevant to the study of international ESL sojourners (Taylor, 2005). Learning and knowing in adult education and second language acquisition reflect deep roots shaped in Western paradigms. "Embedded in this perspective are the cultural values of privileging the *individual* learner over the collective, and promoting *autonomy* and *independence* of thought and action over community and interdependence (Merriam & Associates, 2007, p.1). Merriam et al. continue to point out the problems of categorizing epistemological systems by grouping them into Western and Non-Western, as dichotomy itself is a particularly Western concept (p. 2). Nevertheless, by examining what knowledge is and what it means to know, we are led to an understanding that knowledge is constructed and holistic, sometimes embracing multiple layers of reality. For language learners and those crossing cultures, the ability to learn to classify or categorize is not as important as "the fact that language is a symbolic system which represents our social reality" (Shaules, 2007, p.43). Certainly, individual truth is culturally rooted. Therefore, by exploring the complicated transitions that ESL sojourners are navigating as they make-meaning of their social reality, new academic environment and unfamiliar language we can understand "*the truths* of their narrative accounts" (Riessman, 2002, p.40) as they move between the past, present and future of their adaptation.

Shifting from individual learning to a situational context, we see that the arena in which learning takes place plays an important role. This implies that the specific site may influence the nature, meaning, and/or process of learning (Taylor, 2005). The immense situational change in learning environments for international students causes profound

questions about the impact this may have on their learning process. Examining the idea of situated learning, Lave and Wenger (1991) propose that it involves a process of engagement in a "community of practice." Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour (Smith, 2003, 2009). What is relevant for ESL sojourners in light of the concept of community of practice is the process necessary to become part of such a community. Built on relationships of trust and constructing identities in relation to these communities, individuals move from peripheral into full participation. Learning in this way is not the acquisition of knowledge by individuals but more a process of social participation. Thereby, the nature of the situation is a critical influence on the process. "This social process, includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills" (Lave & Wenger, p. 29). The ideas of situated learning and communities of practice raise questions about how international ESL sojourners move from peripheral to full participation. What safeguards or supports exist within programmes and institutions to ensure this will indeed happen?

Diving deeper into contexts of learning, some believe that alienation and disconnect from the process comes from a lack of relational development. If we embrace the common belief that humans learn from within relationships--with self, fellow learners, teachers, and mentors; with ideas and the content being studied; and with the larger community--developing sensitivity to these relationships becomes essential (English, 2000; Rossiter, 2005). The ability to develop these seminal relationships plays a pivotal role in sustaining longer-term motivation, as pointed out by Guilloteaux and Dornyei (2008), and, from an adult education perspective, Vella (2002) sees this as one of the 12 tenets of successful adult

education practice. For international ESL sojourners who have parachuted into unfamiliar situations, leaving behind their intimate familial ties, friendships, and support networks, relational learning may be a threat before it becomes a solution. Learning environments that are built upon sound adult education principles, reflecting empathy for learners' experiences is indispensable (Vella). However, in situations as diverse as an ESL classroom, creating culturally relevant educational strategies, processes, and practices has far reaching implications for success (Guy, 1999).

Adult Education and Second Language Learning

Adult education is firmly rooted in the North American values and belief systems that espouse individual thinking and entrepreneurial democracy (Pratt, 1998). Educational practices are influenced by contextual factors that cannot be ignored. The gravity of creating ESL classroom cultures that extend our understanding of what constitutes knowledge and at the same time engender dialectical relationships between student and teacher is vital (Orem, 2005). Within the diverse culture groups found in second language learning environments, it is evident that the beliefs embedded in a learner's frame of reference are based upon "entirely different cultural values and epistemological systems, some of which pre-date Western perspectives by thousands of years and encompass most of the world's peoples" (Merriam & Associates, 2007, p.2). The link between culture and language cannot be separated as they are inextricably intertwined. In order to deeply understand what it means to be an international ESL sojourner in Nova Scotia, this link becomes primary, and is discussed at length in the next section.

ESL

English as a Second Language acquisition is part of a 200 year continuum of language learning and teaching in Canada, and holds a significant place in the field of adult education. For the past 25 years, second language learning has come to be viewed as a series of stages in a developmental process, moving learners from a place of little knowledge through to being able to communicate, understand, and be understood (Sharwood-Smith & Truscott, 2005). Initially, the ESL classroom was the domain of a somewhat-marginalized population of immigrants and refugees (Auerbach, 2005; Egan, 2005; Orem, 2000). In fact, 42% of participants taking adult education classes in the United States between 2000 and 2001, comprising the largest group of adult learners, were registered in ESL training programmes (Auerbach).

More recently, the burgeoning population of international ESL students seeking academic degrees in English, places these second language learners in a significant position in the sphere of higher education. The United Kingdom Council for International Education (UKCOSA) reflects that the recent growth of international students not only contributes to the economic health of higher education institutions, and communities at large, but also to enriching the cultural environment (Burslem, 2004). In fact, 16% of the total student population in the UK higher education sector can be attributed to international student sojourners (MacLeod, 2006), bolstering universities' sagging budgets by a third. According to the 2007 report of the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada (AUCC), visa students represent approximately 7% of full-time undergraduate students and almost 20% of students at the graduate level in Canada, making a significant contribution to

both academic culture and financial support. Further, *University Affairs* reports the approximate amount that international students contributed to the Canadian economy in 2008 was a staggering $6.5 billion; a figure that may in fact get the attention of the federal government (Fine, 2009).

Certainly, the process of internationalizing higher education may be viewed by some as a panacea for ailing university budgets and institutions competing for increased student enrolment. However, in a current publication examining the internationalization of education in Canada, Trilokekar, Jones, and Shubert (2006, 2009) investigate the complex practice, and how it varies from institution to institution. The unique position in which Canada's universities are situated reflects a lack of national strategy, and a decentralized policy approach to higher education, leaving institutions much to their own devices. The meaning of the term itself is contested, and the pressures pushing internationalization forward also stem from a variety of areas. For the purposes of this research the definition put forth by Knight (1994), a process "of integrating an intercultural dimension into the teaching, research, and service elements of an institution" closely embrace my ideal.

Equally important, international students come to English-speaking countries for short periods of time, fully intending to return home upon completion of their studies, unlike their immigrant counterparts (Lacina, 2002; Sakurako, 2000). Within our continually expanding global economic network, English is seen as the language of business, indeed, arguably the international language (Matsuda, 2003). What once were higher education institutions for young adults of Canadian origin have now become intercultural campuses hosting thousands of international students seeking degrees (Bartram, 2007). The coveted

diploma, however, is out of reach for students who have not yet developed English language skills enabling them to fully function in an academic programme. Institutions needing to increase enrolments, accept these students "conditionally." This proviso ensures that upon successful completion of English language training, there will, indeed, be a place for them in the hallowed halls of academia, placing them in the unique position of neither long-term immigrant, nor full-time international student, but rather on an isolated island of transition, with few of the skills at hand needed to cross the great divide. This critical period of transition is the prime focus of my research.

In seeking relevant literature on international ESL sojourners, it is apparent that there is a gap in the literature. The literature focuses predominantly on international students already in mainstream programmes. This is a significant point for my research, as I am particularly interested in the early stages that ESL sojourners must pass through. With this in mind I have surveyed several related disciplines that illuminate the story of the international ESL sojourner as they pass through the gate of their English language acquisition. I have drawn from the work of Richard-Amato (2010) who focuses on theoretical approaches to second language acquisition, exploring their evolution over the past number of years, and their role in the development of methodologies used in the ESL classroom. From an extensive examination of the literature, Richard-Amato delineates the elements and issues that define second language learning. She delves deeply into the evolution of participatory language teaching and learning, exploring the influence that sociocultural and cognitive perspectives have had on this process. Of particular relevance for my research is the place that affective factors play in second language acquisition.

Further, I examine the inextricable link between language learning and culture, which is especially critical in the early stages of English language acquisition.

Terminology in Second Language Acquisition

English as a second language (ESL), the most prevalent term used to describe students over the past 25 years, reflects the process of learning to understand and use English. Other terms commonly utilized include SLA (Second Language Acquisition), EFL (English as a Foreign Language), TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language), or TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), which indicate the variety of perspectives referring either to the student learners, teachers, or the organization representing teaching professionals (Orem, 2005). In many cases students learning English are, in fact, learning it as a second, third, or even fourth language. In this thesis I refer to second language learning that may in fact embrace multiple languages learned. More recently, these particular terms have been criticized for inherent assumptions which reflect underlying differences about how these language learners may be perceived (Auerbach, 2005). Terms such as ELLS (English Language Learners) or EAL (English as an Additional Language), are less restrictive in reference to students and programmes, and have found their way into language acquisition discourse (Orem, 2005). English as an International Language (EIL) is seen as a doorway to international opportunities previously unavailable to many learners (Matsuda, 2003). The myriad of terms used in the context of second language teaching mirrors the diversity in political stance, philosophical approach, and methodology of practice within the field.

The acronym of SLA can be interpreted in a number of ways, showing tension between the humanistic and social science approaches to academic knowledge. This tension described by Ortega "is often at the heart of disciplinary conflicts between ESL/TESOL orientation and a foreign language orientation within applied linguistics" (2005, p.322). Further, critical examination of TESOL raises issues between learner and teacher, bringing power issues into the discourse (Pennycook, 1999). Indeed, the position of power held by the English language raises questions connecting language, power relationships, and cultural politics (Merriam & Associates, 2007; Shaules, 2007). As the world moves increasingly closer to a global economy, it is crucial that self-reflection remains integral to the continued growth of the profession. By so doing we will continue to embrace the rich cultural beliefs and epistemological systems of language learning that respect global diversity.

Theoretical Underpinnings of ESL

Second language learning has been around as long as contact with different cultures has occurred. The need or desire to communicate, to learn a second language is a complex process that involves cognitive as well as sociocultural elements. Simply placing yourself in the context of a new language does not necessarily constitute language learning. Variations in the process of language teaching reflect not only the variety and experience of ESL teachers, but also the rich diversity among language learners. Each will follow their own individual and unique path. Adult ESL learning now represents a large field, addressing the needs of immigrants and refugees, and more recently highly educated professionals and young people wanting to carve out a place for themselves in an extremely competitive economic environment. While firmly rooted in adult education principles and practice, the

theoretical approaches to ESL teaching and learning are built on a modernist foundation (Richard-Amato, 2010), and a rather colonial idea of homogeneity. Psychologists and sociologists see language learning as an ongoing process of development, moving the learner from little to more complete knowledge of the target language, through, what they deem to be, ill-defined phases (Sharwood-Smith & Truscott, 2005). The assumed goal, the achievement of native-like proficiency, raises many questions about whether there is one "standard" model of English (Widdowson, 1996).

Looking at second language acquisition from a modernist point of view has been heavily criticized for being Western ethnocentric, and not recognizing the diversity of non-Western experiences in learning (Makoni, 2005; Merriam, & Associates, 2007). A further criticism of SLA based on modernism, and one that is particularly relevant to my research, is its failure to examine the important role that environment and relationship play in the learning process (Richard-Amato, 2010). Even with its many faults, second language acquisition based on modernistic foundations has provided important psycholinguistic knowledge of how language learning actually happens.

Moving to critical pedagogy and post-modernist theory takes us beyond the foundations of humanistic educational perspectives of Dewey (1938) and Knowles (1987). With roots entwined in beliefs that learners are not empty vessels to be filled with information, but are sources of their own knowledge, and responsible for their own learning (Freire, 1972), critical pedagogy has contributed greatly to second language learning in multilevel ESL classrooms (Auerbach, 2005). Building on Hofstede's (1980) analysis of a cultural framework, critical reflection can be explored by examining the diverse values and

beliefs found within an ESL classroom (Orem, 2005). Another area that has a special bearing on ESL sojourners in the classroom is that of power relations and critical discourse that questions political and personal empowerment (Johnson, 1999; Richard-Amato, 2010). There are, however, many contentions surrounding critical pedagogy, some of which question the very power that teachers wield within a classroom setting (Brookfield, 2000). Richard-Amato points out that it is possible to share power with language learners in the classroom, develop respectful relationships, and value their individual cultures, while at the same time building second language knowledge. Interestingly, this mirrors the foundational principles used in teaching both adult and ESL learners (Brookfield, 2000; Vella, 2002). However, Brookfield's investigation on critical reflection within the field of adult learning and education takes this further and emphasizes the need to examine the ESL environment more deeply.

Methodologies and Practices in ESL Teaching/Learning

For many years, grammar-based approaches promoted language structure as the key to language learning. By exposing students to a systematic introduction to isolated aspects of grammar, it was believed this would build the steps to knowledge of the target language (Larson-Freeman, 1986; Richard-Amato, 2010). The methods are not new, but experienced by second language learners around the world: translation, memorization, reading comprehension, cognitive-coding using a content-based syllabus. The main purpose of teaching was to demonstrate the use of specific grammar-structure, without recognizing its place in a larger environment. In fact, it was seen to be connected to an innate ability (Cook, 1988). However, Chomsky's contributions to language learning raise many questions about

how the brain functions and if, indeed, there are basic principles shared by all languages. There was much criticism of Chomsky's thinking (Halliday, 1979), for failing to address the ability to understand meaning within social contexts and behavioural settings of language.

Questioning grammar-based teaching led to the development of an interactive approach from a cognitive point of view, dependent on an interactional process using prompting and modeling in order to negotiate meaning. The process of interlanguage development reflects the systematic progression the language learner goes through to develop syntax, semantics, and pragmatics of the second language (Ellis, 2006). Interlanguage may be described as the middle language that a person develops somewhere between the first and second language. Critical to adult education practice, negotiating meaning is the key to identity and self-discovery (Auerbach, 2005), both of which are fundamental to ESL sojourners on their journey to language mastery. Much of ESL teaching today is based on a cognitive perspective using a dialectic approach.

Out of grammar-based teaching and a cognitive approach grew the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, initially founded on the belief that learners need to be able to perform in relation to their goals: a notional-functional approach to learning language (Richard-Amato, 2010). An effective communicative approach implies a shared knowledge exploration, involving negotiation of potential meanings in the new language and process of socialization (Breen & Candlin, 1979). Criticisms associated with CLT suggest learner's expectations of becoming proficient may not be met through its use (Johnson, 1999). Of great benefit to second language teachers, however, is the fact that CLT propelled them out of the grammar-based structure in which they were held in the past (Richard-

Amato, 2010). By letting go of the perspective of language teaching as a static set of rules enabled teachers to focus their teaching on the students, not on language as the end goal (Larsen-Freeman, 2003).

Critical in ESL classrooms is participatory language teaching, which integrates elements of interaction and negotiated meaning, while focussing on the individuals' places in their environment (Ellis, 2006). In a similar way that communicative teaching regards language learning as a social, cultural, and cognitive process (Vygotsky, 1978) participatory teaching takes it further, incorporating how teachers and students relate to each other, and how the entire classroom culture influences transformational processes to meet students' needs by integrating culture-specific knowledge (Guy, 1999; Auerbach, 2000). Fundamental to adult education practices, and complementary to Vygotsky's work, Freire recognized that transformative discourse must include praxis, the combination of action/reflection. While still critically interested in what students learn and understand, ESL teachers work to create transformative discourse relevant to student learning. Freire articulated the critical difference between two approaches to education: banking (transmission of/depositing content) and libertarian (transformational). Participatory language teaching is not simply an approach or methodology, but embraces the essence of a dialectical relationship between student and teacher, which in turn influences content (Freire, 1972; Orem, 2005; Richard-Amato, 2010; Vella, 2002). Ellsworth (1989), in the examination of her "liberatory" classroom, maintains that the discourse of critical pedagogy does not live up to what it purports; in fact, she claims critical pedagogy perpetrates oppressive myths that "actually exacerbated the very conditions we were trying to work against" (p. 298). Parallel to this, it

is suggested that "ideal participatory classrooms probably do not actually exist; they are always in the process of becoming" (Auerbach, 2000, p. 149), indicating an ongoing search for the ideal.

Criticisms of participatory teaching arise out of misunderstandings of the practice. It is simply not expected that teachers must give up all traditional practices in order to create a participatory environment. What may be essential is a modification of the traditional teacher-centred role into a sharing of power, reflective of the level of proficiency language learners have (Richard-Amato, 2010). Secondly, teachers need not completely relinquish their authority to students, but need to embrace inclusivity and issues relevant to students (Larsen-Freeman, 2003; Pennycook, 1996). Teachers still need to teach and at the same time share this role with learners wherein everyone becomes a learner (Freire, 1972; Johnson, 1999). Once again, what is critical to effective participatory ESL teaching is echoed in adult education theory and practice (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005; Orem, 2005; Vella, 2002).

Factors Influencing ESL Sojourners

If language learning was based solely on cognitive or sociocultural considerations, perhaps the most crucial elements of human learning would be overlooked. Affective elements have an impact on second language acquisition by integrating a meaningful dimension to the language learning process and can be seen as either a positive or negative influence (Richard-Amato, 2010). Subtle aspects of behaviour, difficult to isolate, make study of the affective dimensions challenging, at best. At the same time, it is important to recognize the role that examining one's own language or culture has on bringing students

together, and further contributing to acculturation and self-understanding. Combinations of interconnected factors related to attitude, motivation, and anxiety level are critical elements of the affective domain (Brown, 2008; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Richard-Amato, 2010). Here, I review their influence, which consistently arises in second language classrooms, either enhancing or diminishing the language learning process. These three factors have a critical influence on ESL sojourners, and international students alike--for the duration of their academic life.

Attitude

Attitude is heavily affected by our external, as well as internal, environment, combining influences from parents, teachers, and peers who all have an affect on learning. Central to the affective domain, attitude "develops as a result of experience, both direct and vicarious" (Richard-Amato, 2010, p.153) and is closely linked to self-esteem issues. While an overall high level of self-esteem may exist in a student, they may simultaneously experience low self-esteem within a second language classroom (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992), indicating that self-esteem may be looked at globally, situationally, and or within a task (Richard-Amato, p.153). Therefore, a low level of self-esteem may lead to a lack of confidence and is reported to hinder a student's interaction with native speakers, classmates, and in classroom activities (Andrade, 2006). The disparity that may exist between staff assumptions that international students should have the self-confidence to fully participate in the academic environment and student expectations of receiving more support and understanding during their transition illustrates a profound tension between them. Having the self-esteem and

confidence to become self-reliant within the classroom community simply may not be a realistic expectation (Bartram, 2007; Brown, 2008; Brown & Holloway, 2008).

Motivation

Integrative motivation (intrinsic) is loosely defined as a desire to integrate and identify with the target language group. Instrumental motivation (extrinsic) which is acquiring the target language for practical goals, like employment or workplace use, is the lesser force of the two (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). By examining the effects of intrinsic motivation on adult learning, Wlodkowski (1999) clarifies a culturally responsive approach. This pedagogical means is meant to empower learners intellectually, to achieve equality and social justice in a democratic America. However, Wlodkowski recognizes this approach may be irrelevant in an intercultural classroom, "where most of the students are from countries other than the one represented by the teacher" (p.xiv). Whatever the goal or personal gain that encourages learning, it remains evident that motivation is a critical factor in the process of language learning (Andrade, 2006; Brown, 2008; Richard-Amato, 2010). Teachers play a pivotal role in motivation, establishing good relationships with students and, further, sustaining longer-term motivation (Guilloteaux & Dornyei, 2008; Vella, 2002). In addition, the important role teachers play as a learning companion brings to the fore the critical link they may be with international ESL students in an adult learning environment (Cranton & Wright, 2007; Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005; Vella, 2002).

Level of Anxiety

Another core factor related to affective domain is level of anxiety which may be found either as a predisposition toward feeling anxious as in *trait anxiety*, or in reaction to a

specific situation as in *state anxiety* (Richard-Amato, 2010, p.159). ESL study generally

produces anxiety that can either be a help or a hindrance in the process of learning,

depending on its intensity. Anxiety level is not a static element; it can increase, or decrease

through the support of a kind of "family" network of teachers or peers (Andrade, 2006;

Lacina, 2002; Richard-Amato, 2010). Creating a safe, relaxed, and non-threatening

environment, reducing competition, and planning activities that reflect multiple learning

styles are ways of lowering the level of anxiety among language learners (Bartram, 2007;

Currie, 2003; Vella, 2002). By involving learners in the process of goal setting, as much as

may be feasible, ensures success in a participatory classroom, which may in turn lessen the

levels of anxiety (Richard-Amato, Vella). Unfortunately, teachers, staff, and professors may

not recognize the complex emotional and psychological problems experienced by

international ESL sojourners, such as stress, homesickness, isolation, and finances (Andrade;

Auerbach, 2005; Brown, 2008), which may have a detrimental impact on language learning.

By investigating the complex process of adjustment from their point of view, it is my

intention to outline what support may be needed to create success in a Canadian academic

environment.

Language Learning and Culture

International ESL sojourners are not acquiring a language in their familiar home

community, but by moving to an English-speaking environment for the specific purpose of

academic study, although many have begun this lengthy process at home (Bartram, 2007). It

is not new to say that each individual looks at the world with their own eyes, using filters

from their values, perceptions of the world, and past experiences--their culture. The

implication this has on ESL language teaching and learning, however, is significant, as we recognize that language expresses and embodies cultural reality (Kramsch, 2009; Orem, 2005; Shaules, 2007). The acculturation process is closely related to target language acquisition. Learning takes place through a process of interacting within environments not fully understood by short-term visitors or long-term sojourners alike (Shaules). Learning experiences such as these change some people in fundamental ways. While it is apparent there is a need for further research related to the experiences of ESL sojourners, it is clear that learning English is steeped in cultural perceptions and potential misperceptions.

Early studies of language revealed that the language a person uses influences the way they think and behave, which developed into the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Kramsch, 2009). Whorf's view is that language filters the perception and categorization of experience, and even though language may be translatable, there will always be a part of untranslatable culture associated with linguistic language structures (Kramsch). Hugely controversial, this linguistic relativity principle proposes that the language a person speaks affects their cognitive processes (Shaules, 2009). Seen to ultimately lead to racism and prejudice, Whorf's hypothesis is heavily criticized (Kramsch). The outcome of this thinking, however, leads to recognising that language constrains the way people think, and mirrors their cultural perceptions. It further suggests that social reality is critically important to understanding the meanings and symbolic systems in language (Kramsch; Shaules).

There is no doubt that the process of English language learning is closely linked to cultural understanding, and that language proficiency is connected to cultural learning (Andrade, 2006; Bartram, 2007; Kramsch, 2009; Shaules, 2009). In the next section I will

examine the literature concerned with cultural adaptation and outline its influence on language learning.

Cultural Adaptation

Although ESL teachers may create a non-threatening, dialectic atmosphere in the classroom, what students may be going through in their personal adaptation may have an even more profound impact on them. Moving to a new country, and leaving behind familiar social support networks, may be one of the most traumatic experiences in a person's life (Andrade, 2006; Berry, 2004), placing international students in a challenging situation from the very beginning of their stay. In addition, understanding the adaptation issues of international ESL sojourners has deep implications for institutions of higher education and private language schools (Andrade; Bartram, 2006). Academic achievement is directly related to cultural adjustment, indicating support to international ESL sojourners is not only beneficial to students' success, but cost effective for institutions in the long run (Cushner & Karim, 2004; Lacina, 2002), and perhaps a moral obligation of the institutions who benefit financially. In order to put adaptation issues into perspective, initially, I depict what is meant by the term *culture*. Subsequently, I set forth the problems facing institutions that host ESL sojourners. In order to clarify the complexities of this relationship, it is important to examine the tensions that exist between international ESL students and the teachers, staff, and administrators of the programmes they attend (Bartram, 2007; Brown, 2008; Brown & Holloway, 2008). Further on, I describe the adaptation issues facing ESL sojourners, and look at problems that arise within this process.

Recognizing that there is little written specifically about ESL sojourners, the literature I draw from concentrates on international students who travel abroad to enter directly into institutions of higher education. These students are vastly different from those in my research, who travel to Nova Scotia to learn English as a condition for entry into mainstream academic programmes. There is a broad gap within the scope of the literature, which does not include international ESL sojourners. The distinction lies in the limited language proficiency they have at this early stage, which magnifies the common adaptation challenges anyone crossing cultures may face, placing them in an extremely vulnerable and unique position. Indeed, the literature reports that international students make valuable contributions to institutions, not only supplying economic benefits to wavering university-budgets, but that they also enrich the academic culture, creating a microcosm of the global world in which we presently reside (Brown, 2008). For these benefits to continue, both public and private institutions must become better informed about the challenges facing this group of students, and take responsibility for providing the appropriate support necessary for them to meet success (Andrade, 2006; Bartram, 2007; Westrick, 2005).

Defining Culture

Since the late 17th century when the term culture was first used, it has been linked to human development (Hofstede, 1980; Shaules, 2007). Social scientists have used culture as a way of exploring their own specialized field of study, contributing to our growing understanding of its many dimensions. Linguists explore the role of language, claiming it is inextricably linked to culture (Whorf, 1956; Kramsch, 2009). In the mid-50s, anthropologists began probing what happens when people from differing cultures come

together with each other, developing the idea of intercultural communication (Hall, 1959, 1969, 1979).

Of course, culture is not something that controls us, but rather acts as a vehicle for us to make sense of our world. Often, the term culture is used to refer to immediately visible products that represent a group of people. With increased contact between peoples of the world, over the past number of years, the term culture has become broader, now including everyday customs, values, and beliefs. The word culture plays an important role in the current discussions about diversity, multicultural issues, the effects of globalization, and cultural identity (Orem, 2005; Shaules, 2007).

Thus, recent development toward global understanding has caused the use of the word culture to come into question. Political sensitivity to making generalizations about groups of people may be linked to negative stereotyping, while post-modern thinking raises questions about globalization, culture, and issues of gender and ethnicity (Shaules, 2007). The concept of a deep cultural framework is a more recent interpretation of objective (products and artifacts) and subjective (values and beliefs) culture (Terreni & McCallum, in Shaules, 2007, Diagram 3.1., p.40). In fact, taxonomies of this nature help us to remember the many hidden aspects of culture we may often forget. On the other hand, they do not provide a systematic schema for comparing more than one culture, and may, therefore, cause some frustration (Shaules). Even with a lack of consensus about which elements of the *cultural iceberg* make up the framework of deep culture, a great deal of research has been done which builds on the early work of Hall (1959, 1969, 1979).

fine arts literature

drama classical music popular music

folk dancing games cooking dress

Primarily in awareness

notions of modesty conception of beauty

ideals governing child-raising rules of descent

cosmology relationships to animals

patterns of superior/subordinate relationships definitions of sin

courtship practices conceptions of justice incentives to work

notions of leadership tempo of work patterns of group decision-making

conception of cleanliness attitudes towards the dependent theory of disease

approaches to problem-solving conception of status mobility eye contact

roles in relation to status by age, sex, class, occupation, kinship and so forth

conversational patterns in various social contexts conception of past and future

definition of insanity nature of friendship ordering of time conception of 'self'

patterns of visual perception preference for competition or cooperation body language

social interaction rate notions of adolescence

notions about logic and validity patterns of handling emotions

facial expressions arrangement of space

Primarily out of awareness

...and much more...

Figure 1 The Cultural Iceberg (Terreni & McCallum, in Shaules, 2007, p.40)

It is commonly believed that everyone who experiences intercultural situations learns something new about their environment and, arguably, about themselves. Particularly pertinent for an ESL sojourner is their learning may be influenced by situations in which their interactions may be either a negative or positive encounter (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004). As reflected in Figure 1, understanding and adjusting the deepest parts of our selves, those related to deep culture, is neither comfortable nor easy (Kohls, 2001). It is within the interactions with people who have deep cultural differences that ambiguity and discomfort

lie (p.92). Few sojourners recognize that their initial responses to deep cultural differences

are heavily influenced by their own deep cultural frame of reference, which may lead to over-

generalized stereotyping of people with deep differences or negative learning outcomes

(DeCapua & Wintergerst). As sojourners come in contact with deep differences, their

reactions may be a key to the valuable cultural learning process. These insights may offer

institutions important information for creating intercultural campuses.

Problems Arising for Institutions

Along with the pressures of a growing global economy and increasing interaction

between people of worldwide cultures, intercultural competence could possibly be

considered a requirement for becoming a successful global citizen of the 21st century. In

today's world, the effects of globalization are creating opportunities in higher education for

international students, simultaneously putting pressure on those institutions who host them

(Andrade, 2006; Brown, 2008). In the early days of intercultural communication, Edward

Hall (1959, 1969, 1979) explored and recognized that combining people of diverse cultures

reflects the complexities integral to human communication. His examination of culture and

its influence on the multi-levels of communication always at play are still relevant for

institutions facing these challenges today. Althen (1994), an early leader of intercultural

training, years later analyzed the impact foreign students have on universities in America, and

how intercultural clashes develop. Intercultural conflicts reflect deep cultural approaches to

daily behaviour, contributing to ethnocentric reactions between sojourners and domestic

students alike (deNooy & Hanna, 2003; Shaules, 2007). Institutions now manage

intercultural community, yet "lack the infrastructures to successfully engage in sophisticated international programmes and initiatives" (Altbach, 2008, p.2).

Clearly, expectations and perceptions placed on international students by professors and staff, demonstrate misunderstanding between them (Althen, 1994; Bartram, 2007; DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004; Hall, 1969). Professors often view lack of involvement in class and segregation of international and domestic students as cultural, rather than linguistic (Andrade, 2006). Failure to communicate within and comprehend a new culture often creates academic challenges, arising from this obstacle (Brown, 2008). Concerns are frequently raised about students' increased reliance on staff, thereby increasing an individual's work load, and further dependency (Bartram).

Internationalized campuses have become commonplace, and in Canada, international student enrolments are "viewed as an important--even essential--source of revenue by post-secondary institutions" (Lee & Wesche, 2000, p. 638). Given the financial dependence of institutions on fees generated by foreign students, institutions should not simply accept foreign students and expect them to adjust to their life in a new country and within an unfamiliar educational system without appropriate support and programming (Brown, 2008; Westrick, 2005). The tension between the expectations of international sojourners looking for support, and institutions hosting them who are hoping for student self-sufficiency, make this a critical dilemma with underlying moral and ethical implications well beyond the practical concerns.

Adaptation Issues Facing ESL Sojourners

Cultural adaptation is a process that happens over time, unique to each person travelling on their own journey. There are, however, adjustment issues commonly facing international students, which may be divided into three main areas. Language proficiency is essential to comprehending the intricacies of a new environment, sociocultural needs promote integration, and, lastly, pedagogical understanding leads to academic success (Bartram, 2007; Brown & Holloway, 2008).

The initial phase of sojourn is characterized by stress rather than the euphoria described by Lysgaard (1955), Oberg (1960), and Brown (1980), pointing to a diverse understanding of what adjustment means (Brown & Holloway, 2008). Problems have been identified with these adjustment models not supporting their claims with empirical data. In fact, numerous studies contradict their findings (Thomas & Harrell, 1994; Brown & Holloway). Of particular interest to me in looking at the experience of ESL sojourners is the multiple stresses created by their commitment to achieving educational goals quickly. Compounding their stress is the transition into an unfamiliar academic environment with a minimum level of language skill, while lacking their ordinary social support networks (Bartram, 2007; Cushner & Karim, 2004; Lacina, 2002). Herein lays the crux of the problem facing international sojourners.

Language Proficiency

Language proficiency is the greatest challenge, magnifying social isolation and inhibiting students' ability to participate (Andrade, 2006). Lack of participation is linked to lack of confidence in language ability and a fear of making mistakes, which in turn inhibits

class participation (Bartram, 2007; Cushner & Karim, 2004). Despite feelings of inadequacy and insecurity, international students seldom seek outside help (Andrade).

Reporting on the dilemma facing a group of 14 Chinese students currently attending NSCAD University's Master of Design programme, Lee (2009) highlights their ongoing misunderstanding of educational expectations. In addition she points to difficulties arising from the students' limited language skills and as such, is a perfect example of the hurdles sojourners encounter. The solution to the conundrum was to create a one-year certificate programme as a prerequisite to entering the full Master of Design degree programme. Several of the original Master of Design students are presently in this new certificate programme where there is less emphasis on academic writing, but now a requirement for re-entry into master's level study. Solutions of this nature raise many questions about the ability of institutions to provide the infrastructure necessary to support sophisticated international programming (Altbach, 2008).

Building on Sakurako's (2000) scholarship on misunderstanding in language and communication skills, Lacina (2002) portrays language discrimination as hindering international students in their quest to adapt to a new environment. An international student's accent or use of an unknown expression contributes to communication difficulties with both domestic students and professors. Meeting the demands of an academic course, with limited linguistic competence has been continually confirmed as one of the greatest stressors of international students (Andrade, 2006; Brown, 2008; Brown & Holloway, 2008).

Sociocultural Adjustment

Social adjustment remains at the top of the list of challenges facing international students, and far greater than their domestic counterparts (Andrade, 2006). Unsettled feelings of nervousness, disorientation, and deficiency have been cited during the initial phase, and can continue to crop up for years, at any given time when sojourners are faced with new or ambiguous situations (Bartram, 2007; Brown & Holloway, 2008). Self-doubt and feelings of low self-esteem haunt international sojourners, causing continued anxiety and confusion.

Events that may be taken for granted by domestic students, such as daily functions related to dietary changes and dealing with weather differences, can exacerbate feelings of discomfort or incompetence in international students (Brown & Holloway, 2008). A feeling of homesickness and a longing for the familiarity of food and familiar faces is common. Loneliness is a common challenge, especially in their early transition phase, and may account for the instant creation of conational friendships, providing much needed interpersonal support (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Lacina, 2002; Sawir et al., 2008). Meeting domestic students and creating meaningful friendships is a product of time passing, and does not happen quickly. International students frequently find campus social life far different than their own cultures, particularly in relation to alcohol consumption (Bartram, 2007; Brown & Holloway), making it more difficult to develop meaningful friendships.

Pedagogical Understanding

Aspects of stress are further compounded by entry into academic programmes, resulting in pressure to keep up with course work and the demands of an unfamiliar

education system, at the same time as adjusting to a new home and learning a new language (Andrade, 2006). Technology plays a critical role in higher education systems today, and often places another stressor on already burdened international students. Learning to access electronic data, typing in English with unfamiliar keyboards, and the emphasis on self-directed learning is central to academic success (Brown, 2008). Again, the tension between international students who are in a vulnerable transition, the institutions who are increasingly wanting to keep their "customers" satisfied, and the role expected of teaching staff in supporting students may be escalating rather than subsiding (Bartram, 2007). Descriptions of the culture shock process described by Hall (1959) may well be extended to include pedagogical shock, including (a) the loss of familiar cues, (b) the breakdown of interpersonal communication, and (c) an identity crisis (Shaules, 2007). Information-gathering strategies among Australian students studying in a French university highlight the expectations of (a) approaches to the circulation of information, (b) relative importance of task versus relationship during interaction, and (c) extent to which information and rules vary according to the situation (deNooy & Hanna, 2003, p.69).

Indeed, what is critical to recognize is not the specifics of this situation, but the underlying concept that what works in the context of one academic environment does not necessarily work in another (Shaules, 2007). Understanding and developing new strategies is a transition process that takes time and patience, and needs to be promoted through comprehensive orientation and ongoing support. This support is addressed in the next section examining intercultural training.

Intercultural Training

Beginning some 75 years ago, intercultural training came on our radar screen during the time Dewey (1938), Barnes (1954), and Lindeman (1956) began to unsettle the field of education with their questions, and when Americans were beginning to see an increase in cross-cultural exchanges. Since 1932, the Experiment in Intercultural Living has continued to provide transformational learning experiences to foster cross-cultural understanding for thousands of American youth going abroad (Batchelder & Warner, 1977). The debut of intercultural training that examines the challenges of communication in a cross-cultural setting inspired thinking within a number of domains (Hall, 1956, 1969, 1979). Hall's work is still relevant and inspires researchers in many disciplines connected to global perspectives today. Closely related to intercultural training is intercultural relations (ICR), which can be described as an interdisciplinary field, drawing on anthropology, communication, psychology, and sociology (Berry, 2004). Derived from cross-cultural and social psychology research, Berry telescopes in on psychological universals, acculturation research, and intergroup research to examine the roots of culture, and the influence these three areas have on the practice of intercultural competence training. Building on the early explorations of ICT for military and Peace Corps workers travelling overseas to work, Gudykunst and Hammer (1983) identify the differences between training and education, developing four distinct approaches to training. They propose a training model that would alleviate interpersonal conflicts arising from intercultural communication. This three-stage approach includes perspective training, interaction training, and context-specific training (PIC). What is significant in relating this model to current international ESL sojourners is the four- to six-

month training time frame outlined by Gudykunst and Hammer, which indicates the seriousness and complexity from which intercultural training must be viewed.

Intercultural relations did not become a common focus on most university campuses until the 1990s, when foreign students began arriving in significant numbers in North America to study (Althen, 1994). Going further, Bennett and Bennett (1994) take a hard look at the apparent rift between the multicultural perspective and international educators on campuses. They carefully explore cultural diversity and the important role international educators play in the cultural adaptation process of international students. By blending intercultural theory and practice, they suggest that an intercultural approach could strengthen orientation and counseling for foreign students, engendering future success in the academic environment. Further, this approach could enhance a climate of appreciation for cultural diversity on both foreign and domestic campuses, thereby achieving institutional goals for harmony.

Similarly, corporations at that same time were investing large amounts of money and time to prepare employees entering foreign environments for work. Copeland (1987), an early leader in corporate cross-cultural training uses a self-reflection model, common in adult education practice, whereby the trainee reflects on their own culture, and, subsequently, similarities and differences in the new. Placing language acquisition at the gate, he claims understanding the expectations, norms, and values of the host culture is critical to developing an ability to communicate interculturally, which Shaules (2007) builds on in his later work. With corporations placing such value on training employees, investing money and time (6 months for short term; in excess of 2 years for long-term), one could wonder

why the expectations are so vastly different for international students to adapt. If the investment in training results in significantly increased benefit to a multinational corporation, as Copeland portrays, is it possible this could be so for academic institutions with substantial international populations?

Intercultural training has grown to include a patchwork of professionals in the field, and a broad spectrum of perspectives from which they draw. While the work of diversity trainers, on the surface, responds to a global community, Bennett and Bennett (1994, 2004) outline how cultural insensitivity was built into corporate training, and grew to embrace intercultural competence. They define intercultural competence as the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and relate appropriately in a multitude of cultural contexts, which is additionally common to others in the field of ESL and intercultural training (Byram, 2008; Orem, 2005). Their summary of culture, diversity, race, stereotypes, and generalizations builds on earlier work, and lays the groundwork for introducing the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), which is further developed by Westrick (2005) in her examination of intercultural sensitivity among international students. By exploring a variety of developmental models, Westrick provides an explanation of why and how resistance happens at different stages of individual and organizational development.

The DMIS model (Bennett & Bennett, 1994) has been used extensively by those in both education and business to understand the stages and levels of a person's intercultural sensitivity (Shaules, 2007; Westrick, 2005; Ziegahn, 2000). Ziegahn describes communication within the global context, identifying stress as being crucial to the stages of

cultural adaptation living in an unfamiliar foreign environment. Examining service-learning programmes, Westrick (2005) utilizes the DMIS as a stage model of cognitive development, which necessitates meaning to be made from experiences, concluding that a range of student life factors influence the development of their intercultural sensitivity. The values and cultural norms Stewart (1991) speaks of barely reflect the current complex body of research and thinking around intercultural communication in the vastly different global environment of which we are a part. However, what is still relevant is that he highlights the importance of self-reflection and cultural awareness, both intrinsic elements of intercultural competence today.

One of the critical questions related to Bennett's DMIS (1994) is whether it functions equally well for people from different cultural backgrounds (Shaules, 2007). This brings to centre stage the issues of identity and intercultural learning of particular significance for an international ESL sojourner. Bennett is criticized for his fundamental assumption that an increased ability to understand cultural differences is the foundation to the intercultural learning process. Sojourners are perceived as having the ability to move up the scale to achieve greater levels of intercultural sensitivity, a process that happens separately from understanding their own intercultural learning.

In fact, Shaules (2007) goes beyond Bennett's (1994) intercultural experience, trying to explain the "experiential engine that drives that learning" (p. 129), not simply satisfied with describing the exact point at which the sojourner is, along the continuum to overall intercultural sensitivity. In this way, he depicts intercultural learners' reactions as an ongoing process of responding to particular adaptive demands of a new culture, accepting that

reactions may contradict one another. Shaules' deep culture model (fig. 1, p.32) recognizes that cultural understanding is embedded in the subtle and challenging aspects of intercultural learning that exist at the hidden level of belief, values, norms, and assumptions. This mirrors the cultural adaptation issues examined in the previous section (Andrade, 2006; Bartram, 2007; Brown & Holloway, 2008). Ting-Toomey (1999) further supports the perception that cultural values and beliefs have a critical influence on language usage, and communication styles, thoughts, feelings, perceptions, skills, and behaviours. Both positive and negative outcomes may be found in the process of intercultural learning (Shaules). With the patterns of migration today, multicultural social environments, and corporations that operate globally with international workforces, there is no doubt that intercultural competence is a fundamental precept of today's world (Rathje, 2007). What is significant to ask is how the differing perspectives influence intercultural learning, and whether appropriate applications for intercultural competence can, indeed be taught.

Furthermore, education for citizenship, a current term that promotes participation individually and collectively, strives to shape an intercultural future, through English as a global language training-vehicle (Guilherme, 2007). Byram (2008) further supports the concept of education for intercultural citizenship through foreign language education. He proposing it is easier for learners to understand what is useful in communication is the ability and skill to interact. The challenge lays in understanding the complex beliefs, values, and daily behaviours of other people through this exchange. In addition, he sees foreign language teaching (FLT) as contributing to education for (democratic) citizenship. The notion that Byram is linking the concept of intercultural communicative competence with

education for citizenship, and that FLT teachers have a responsibility to engender engagement in this globalized world is particularly germane to my research. Shaules (2007) argues that deep intercultural competence and sensitivity are rare, and, in actual fact, seldom achieved--certainly a sobering perspective from which to view the future. I propose that adult education may play a significant role in building bridges between the world of language learning, adaptation issues, and intercultural competence. Within the deep roots of adult education principles and practices there may be a way forward, creating strong links interculturally, and forging a brighter future.

Developing a deep understanding of what it means to be an international ESL sojourner cannot be found in articles and books, as they are seldom represented in current literature. The courageous journey these students embark upon is isolated, arduous, and each one a unique experience. For those who are a part of the infrastructure of programmes, it is critically important to understand the rich stories of sojourner experiences. These will be discussed in the next section on methodology.

Narrative Inquiry and Methodology

From a theoretical point of view, one of the main tenets on which qualitative research rests is the "view that reality is constructed by individuals in interaction with their social worlds" (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p.97), reflecting an epistemological context of learning. Indeed, the notion of experience as a critical element in the learning environment could not be more salient than during the initial phase of adjustment an international ESL sojourner faces. Looking at the process of learning and cultural adjustment without embracing a students' life experience negates much of what is known about how the cultural adaptation

process affects the whole person. Clandinin and Connelly, (2000) describe the quest to explore "continuity and wholeness" within a person's lived experience. Building on Dewey's (1938) view of experience, especially situation, continuity, and interaction, they set forth a foundational frame of reference called the three dimensional narrative inquiry space. Using this narrative space I examine three main thematic paths: (a) interaction, the individual and social interactions that characteristically shape the adult and ESL learning process; (b) continuity, the contextualization of ESL student learning reflecting continuity, which links their past, present, and future; and (c) place, the tensions arising within the institutions in which international ESL sojourners place themselves in preparation for future academic study .

Although data collection may be approached in a number of ways, such as documentation, observation, and interviewing, given my desire to understand the early stages of ESL learners' experiences, interviews offered the natural choice to provide an appropriate venue for them to express their own voice. Critical in the qualitative research process are "the rich, thick descriptions, the words that persuade the reader of the trustworthiness of your findings" (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p.101). Still, it is narrative inquiry that "allows us to conceptualize the inquiry experience as a storied one, on several levels," which creates a "reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.71). My intent was to create an experience with the sojourners that might engender growth and transformation for us all. I believed that narrative would provide a way to construct knowledge in the "everyday world through an ordinary communicative act -- storytelling" (Riessman, 2008, p.14) and by so

doing would illuminate what it means to be an international ESL sojourner. While Rossiter and Clark's (2007) work builds on the thinking of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), it was Clandinin and Connelly (2000) who struck a chord with me, in my quest to reflect those "fragments of storied moments of time and space" (Clandinin & Connelly, p.17). By so doing, I believe I have developed a deep understanding of what the sojourner experience is and better understand the context in which their challenges lay.

Synopsis of the Literature

In my role as an ESL instructor, I have witnessed firsthand, students who, before, during, and after class, regale me with personal tales of experiences adjusting to their new life in Nova Scotia. These narratives are frequently intertwined with shame, confusion, and embarrassment. ESL learners, in their effort to learn English, face a multitude of difficulties that may begin long before leaving their homeland to embark on their academic journey, and continue throughout the lengthy adaptation to their new learning environment. Seeking to understand what their experience is, I have explored and examined the literature relevant to their story.

In an attempt to understand the experiences of international ESL sojourners, I have taken a multidisciplinary approach that links language acquisition to cultural adaptation, and intercultural training. Of particular relevance to the reader is that none of the three fields included (ESL, cultural adaptation, and intercultural training) view their perspectives as directly embracing adult education. Within this literature review it becomes clear that the principles and practices of the field of adult education can act as a unifying framework from which to investigate these challenges. These same principles and practices are reflected in

each of the individual domains examined, revealing obvious linkage. By recognizing this connection, it is hoped that each domain will gain strength, both individually and collectively.

Hundreds of international ESL sojourners face the difficult task of learning English, riddled with its complex rules and puzzling exceptions to those rules. Competent ESL instructors recognize this daunting task, and break it down into manageable elements. Actually, successful ESL classroom practice reflects long standing principles closely embraced within the foundations of adult education. One of the profoundly important principles of language learning necessitates a safe, non-threatening, participatory environment (Bartram, 2007). Adult education recognizes the need for learners to actively participate in the process of learning in that kind of environment (Knowles, 1980; Vella, 2002), and which Vella cites as one of the 12 essential principles in adult education practice. As well, breaking down fear of an unfamiliar North American learning environment requires developing a significant relationship between learner and teacher (Orem, 2005). Adult education shares the common belief that humans learn within relationships: with self, fellow learners, teachers, and mentors (English, 2000; Rossiter, 2005), and a dialectical relationship between learner and teacher is another of the 12 tenets of adult education espoused by Vella, reflecting further cross-over.

Cultural adaptation issues are at the core of an international ESL sojourner's path. Understanding this challenging struggle has deep implications not only for students, but the teachers, administrators, and institutions that welcome them (Brown, 2008; Cushner & Karim, 2004). Academic achievement, grade point average (GPA), retention rates, and

financial benefits to institutions can and are affected by students who have unsupported

difficulties (Andrade, 2006; Bartram, 2006). The importance of delivering relevant adult

education has raised many questions about programmes addressing culturally diverse

learning environments (Guy, 1999). In fact, current discourse in the field of adult education

proposes that language and culture are inextricably linked, and questions the roots that are

firmly embedded in North American "Western" values and belief systems (Brookfield, 2000;

Merriam & Associates, 2007; Pratt, 1998). Further, within the praxis is ongoing dialogue

focused on what it actually means to know, exploring the multiple layers of reality from

where an individual perceives their life experience. This could not be more salient than in

the experiences that international ESL sojourners face in their quest for language

proficiency.

Along with pressures created by a growing global economy and interaction between

people of different cultures, intercultural competence could possibly be considered a

requirement for becoming a successful global citizen in the 21st century. In today's world,

the effects of globalization are creating opportunities in higher education for international

students, simultaneously putting pressure on those institutions who host them (Andrade,

2006; Brown, 2008). The current dialogue among adult educators reflects that the frame of

reference of many learners is an "entirely different [set of] cultural values and

epistemological systems" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 2). Intercultural competence, defined as

the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and relate appropriately in a

multitude of cultural contexts (Bennett & Bennett, 1994, 2004), is not only necessary for

international ESL sojourners, but the vast number of teachers and administrators within the institutions who invite their entry.

Teachers and institutions providing ESL training programmes need assistance to understand the magnitude of the challenges facing the ESL student population. However, there is little existing literature that addresses the primary needs of ESL learners. Therefore, this research aims to explore the experience from the students' perspective, to understand what it means to adapt to a new culture and educational system, in order to enter higher education. Providing programmes that reflect the grave challenges and diversity in values and belief systems of ESL learners, and indeed among the faculty and administration of institutions will ensure success is met from all sides of the quandary.

Adult education principles provide a fundamental foundation to ESL practices in the language-learning classroom; however, they are seldom recognized as such by instructors. Intercultural training embraces adult education theory and practice but does not necessarily see itself as adult education. It is my intent that by revealing the interconnection between these fields that the international ESL sojourners may be better supported in their efforts to learn English, and that each of these fields may gain rich new perspectives on their theory and practice.

This literature review has covered the span of literature that encompasses four theoretical frameworks: adult education, second language acquisition, cultural adaptation, and intercultural training, which are integral to examining what it means to be an international ESL sojourner in Nova Scotia. Each of these domains has produced a prolific amount of literature that reflects its field of specialization, although, seldom does the

literature make references to ESL sojourners. Finally, what is of particular applicability to

my research is how these individual fields of study are, in essence, germane to the broader

field of adult education.

CHAPTER 3

A VAST SPAN: DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

Reading *Narrative Inquiry* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) on this luxurious Saturday morning
laid out before me, I am overwhelmed by the serious, all-encompassing responsibility of how
I will ever capture the essence of interviews with my participants. As conversations go, they
move at a continuous pace and happen on many different levels simultaneously. How will it
be possible to "record" and be "aware of" the multi-faceted dimensions AND my own
perspective and point of view, of experiencing the experience, all, at the same time?
(Journal entry, 9.Nov.08)

This research project, in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Adult

Education degree, St. Francis Xavier University, was undertaken over a period of one year

(September 2008 to August 2009). The thesis includes the journey undertaken during this

study, from the planning stage to the collection and analysis of data, an experience of

collaboration between myself and those interviewed, through to the writing of the initial

research report. Outlined here is the process of how participants were selected.

Subsequently, I conducted six 2-hour-long interviews with international ESL students

between the months of February and April 2009 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. To give the

document more credence, I have included, where possible, direct comments from the

participants' narratives. In this chapter I chronicle the process and findings in four sections:

(a) drafting a sketch of preparatory planning, (b) building a framework by conducting

interviews and analysing data, (c) framing the findings related to individual learners, and (d)

creating a clear picture of my discoveries related to the contextual factors. Following this

path, I am able to examine what it means to be an ESL sojourner in Nova Scotia.

Drafting a Sketch: Preparatory Planning

Embarking on this research study, my main goal was to take my emotional

observations of ESL students in their initial phase of adjustment, clarify their experiences,

and translate that into data that might be useful to all stakeholders involved in their education. What does it mean to be an international sojourner who comes to Nova Scotia to study? Of particular relevance to the reader of this thesis is the multi-disciplinary environment in which ESL students are situated and within this context it is possible to understand the influences and challenges in their lives.

Designing the Project

Three main texts were critical to the design phase of the project and illuminated the path that I explored: Merriam and Simpson (2000), Clandinin and Connelly (2000), and Rossiter and Clark (2007). Later, Riessman (2008) offered a deeper understanding of narrative analysis. The fundamental principle of qualitative interviewing, which Merriam and Simpson emphasize, provided a framework within which I began designing the project. However, it was Clandinin and Connelly, and Rossiter and Clark, who enabled me to plunge fully into the heart of what narrative inquiry means within a qualitative research paradigm. With these two texts close at hand, I continued to refer to them as though they were "supportive co-researchers" on my journey. Narrative inquiry is aligned with the foundational beliefs directly connecting lived experience with learning, which is fundamental to both fields of adult education and ESL learning. Still, the term narrative means different things to different people, is used in a variety of disciplines, and for some is an approach that is seriously contested (Creswell, 2007; Riessman, 2008). What is essential in using narrative is to understand that although *story* is a part of everyday life, it becomes a complex social interaction when used for research study, wherein "two active *participants* [who] jointly construct narrative and meaning" (Riessman, 2008, p.23). At the same time, I was aware I

could not truly "know" their experiences, and that I would be dealing with memories of events the participants shared with me, or what Riessman refers to as the "messy talk" (p.28) that I had to transform into research data. The time and access limitations in gathering the stories, and the space limitations in writing a thesis make it difficult to include all of the complete rich narratives my research participants shared with me.

Stories highlight the most important occurrences and events that rise above others in our memories of a situation. Embracing Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) belief that "Experience happens narratively…therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively," (p.19) I encouraged participants to tell stories that had a significant impact on them and which, I believed, were noteworthy in their memory bank of experiences. "In qualitative research it is the rich, thick descriptions, the words that persuade the reader of the trustworthiness of the findings" (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p.109). By examining these experiences as retold in students' stories, I believe I have a better understanding of what it means to be an international ESL sojourner.

Thinking about my inquiry in narrative terms allowed me to consider the interview process as experiencing the stories of ESL students through their retelling and sharing. I believed that the experience of retelling their stories would validate the experiences they went through, and provide a process of self-reflection that would empower them. In this way, I designed a set of questions with which to elicit narratives from the participants. (My primary guiding questions are presented in Appendix A.) The topics were initially generated by the questions I posed; however, the areas of interest and critical events they described

were driven by the interviewees themselves. I chose an informal, conversational style of interview, and allowed for a secondary follow-up meeting if questions arose during the initial conversations. Finally, the questions used in my interviews were designed to elicit a broad spectrum of student experience in Nova Scotia, including both positive and negative. To ensure valid interpretation of the transcripts, I was careful to ask semi-structured questions, which enabled the participants to provide rich data through their shared stories (Maxwell, 1996). In retrospect I might have asked stronger questions that would get to the heart of their experience. I might have asked them to reflect on what experiences made the greatest impression on them or had the greatest impact on them in the early days? Or I might have asked if they remembered their initial feelings when they first arrived being a factor in their participation in their ESL classes? Nevertheless, most of the interviewees used stories, narratives, and anecdotes that reflected difficulties. In addition, I have included anomalies that represent those stories that do not follow the trends of most other interviews.

The significance and purpose of my project frequently arose as I picked my way through the maze of a narrative inquiry. Who were the characters in my study? What was I trying to convey? Would the stories have over-reaching significance in the final research text? It was my foundation in adult education and strong interest in the real experiences of international ESL sojourners that continually propelled me to shape this study in terms of narrative inquiry. The intimate storied experiences that participants revealed continued to fuel my desire to place the significance of these experiences within the context of adult education and ESL learning.

Credibility

Within the process of interviewing, transcribing the interviews and transforming them into data to be analyzed, we play an active role filtering our understanding, values, and personal interpretations of the "story" that is told. By so doing we define boundaries of the narratives and create grounds for our point of view, thereby constructing our meaning which may offer only one interpretation (Riessman, 2008). To ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the research I used measures that included description, interpretation, and theoretical modelling that is situated within the paradigms and discourse of the four disciplines found in the study (adult education, ESL, cultural adaptation, and intercultural training), even though I recognize that Riessman claims that "narrative truths are always partial -- committed and incomplete" (p.186). Inherent within any research are the values and contexts in which it is undertaken, and those of the researcher and the participants. From an axiological point of view, I attempted to recognize the Eurocentric ideals upon which my own values are situated, and those of the institutions within this study, unlike those of the participants in this study. In an attempt to clearly understand *what* the participants said, I used audio recordings of interviews, which were then transcribed verbatim. Subsequently, I used "thematic analysis" (p.54) to analyze interviews with international ESL sojourners about the early stages of their stay in Nova Scotia, focussing on *what* was said by each participant. By examining participant memories of past experiences, I came to have a better understanding of how their individual realities were constructed during this time within their social worlds (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). The participants' narratives, while individually unique, were all "plausible, reasonable and convincing" (Riessman, p.191)

representations of the experiences of students who had survived the rigors of parachuting into significantly different educational systems and unfamiliar socio-cultural environments (Brown, 2008), and progressed to a high-level of academic-ESL study.

Identifying the Participants

As an ESL instructor, I am in direct contact with students, everyday. While teaching the lower levels of ESL, I maintain contact with former students as they proceed through the higher levels of academic-preparatory programmes and their continuing adaptation cycles. Through this ongoing interaction, I was able to contact some of my former students who fit my criteria to ask for their participation. I also received suggested participants' names from colleagues I respect and trust. In this way, my sample was both purposeful and convenient. Following an explanation of the research project, I gave them copies of the letter of invitation, the consent form, and the questions, all of which had been approved by the Research Ethics Board at St. Francis Xavier University (see Appendices A and B).

The participants who were international ESL students were here on student visas to study English, and upon successful completion of ESL training will subsequently enter a mainstream university-academic-programme. They were a mix of male and female and came from various countries of the world. The predominant student population of Asian and Middle Eastern cultures is reflected in the choice of participants. I distributed eight invitations to participate, and obtained permission to interview six. One student agreed to participate but returned home on vacation prior to the interview process and was unavailable during the interview period.

The criteria for participants was that they had been or were currently enrolled in

English Second Language studies, Level 400, 500, or 600, or presently enrolled in full-time

academic programmes of higher education, following an ESL programme of study (standard

levels set by ESL Canada). I have created a fictitious name—Atlantic Language Learning

Institute (ALLI)—to refer to the schools from which students had been selected. Various

aspects of ESL training at ALLI are representative of ESL facilities, within the private

domain and public institutions, and reflect the experience that ESL students have in their

initial adjustment to study in Canada. Participation was voluntary, and all pseudonyms used

were chosen by me to help preserve anonymity. As it turned out, 3 interviewees were male

and 3 were female, all were between 18 and 37 years old. I present the student participants'

profiles in Table 1.

Participant	Gender	Age	Country of Origin	Intended Study
Albert	Male	18	Saudi Arabia	Commerce
Bradley	Male	37	Iraq	PhD. Microbiology
Don	Male	19	China	Commerce
Marcia	Female	21	China	Undecided
Rachel	Female	29	Iraq	Master of Finance
Rejeanne	Female	26	Saudi Arabia	Master of Finance

Table 1. Student Participants' Profiles

Participant Profiles

Albert

The youngest of the participants, Albert, came to Halifax when he was just 17 years old. He had never before travelled without his family, nor been on his own for an extended period of time. This, coupled with his extremely low-level English skills, caused many difficulties for him in the early days. To say coming to Canada by himself was an enormous challenge would be a gross understatement. On many occasions he wandered into a maze of confusion, embarrassment, and feelings of making huge mistakes. Although he faced periods of serious depression and discouragement, his determination and resilience are a fundamental part of his make-up.

Bradley

Although the oldest of the participants, Bradley faced more barriers to success than his colleagues. Getting out of Iraq in 2008 was, in itself, a testament to his determination. A microbiologist, Bradley had been conditionally accepted into a PhD programme in Halifax. He had worked for 7 years in the State Company for Drug Industry and Medical Appliances, Research and Development Department for the Iraqi government when he applied. Bradley's English skills were very low, and his early days were tremendously difficult. Everything was challenging for him, and he had difficulty expressing himself or forming questions that might help him solve some of his challenges.

Don

Don is an exuberant young man from China. Following his high-school graduation in Beijing, his parents felt that he would have more opportunities to secure a good job in an

international company if he had a university education from an English-speaking country. At the time of the interview, Don had been in Halifax only 7 months and had already achieved Level 600 (the highest level before entering a full-time academic programme). He will enter an undergraduate programme in business, even though his dream is to be an NBA basketball player. His enthusiasm and confidence were unique, and reflected his approach to achieving his goal in such a short period of time.

Marcia

Marcia is a young, 19 year old high school graduate from Beijing. Her parents decided she would study abroad even before going to high school, because the Chinese education system for university, in their opinion, is not good. She is unclear about what she will major in when she enters university, but possibly business. She now lives with two girls from Beijing, who attended the same high school as she did. Her support network of friends from her high school has helped her adjust to the rigors of English language training.

Rachel

Rachel is a woman of 29 years who describes herself as half-Iraqi and half-Saudi. She married a Saudi man who was working in Baghdad several years ago, and moved back to Saudi Arabia with him. They came to Canada with their two young children in August 2008 to complete English language training. Rachel worked in a bank in Saudi Arabia for a number of years, before applying for the Master of Finance programme. Traveling with a young family to live in another country has been a monumental challenge, which she faces with determination, and a modicum of frustration.

Rejeanne

Rejeanne, a petite woman, from Saudi Arabia, has been married for 4 years. The couple has a 3-year-old daughter, and have both been studying English as a Second Language in Halifax for the past year. They selected two different schools, to give themselves some space. Prior to coming to Canada, Rejeanne was an instructor in a women's university. She recognized that other colleagues with less experience who had English language skills were getting promoted above her and decided to further her education by learning English and completing a Master of Finance programme.

Building a Framework: Interviews and Data

Moving from the planning stage into the field helped me understand the many layered narratives in the inquiry space making the experience come to life.

Conducting the Interviews

Although each participant was given a set of questions, the project description, and the consent form prior to the interview, none of the documents were brought to the interview. I provided a second consent form for them to sign, and explained that they could withdraw at any time, should they so wish. The interviews were done either in the participant's home, or in my apartment. Both of these provided a quiet space that was conducive to uninterrupted conversation and recording the interviews, in a relaxed environment. The purpose of the first interview was to gather information in story form, which included memories and examples of events. Participants were, further, encouraged to share memories about specific situations or incidents in the early part of their sojourn being an ESL student.

Using narrative inquiry as my research methodology, the first interviews engaged the participants in telling their stories. The fundamental principle of qualitative interviewing, Merriam and Simpson (2000) emphasize, is to provide a framework within which "reality is constructed by individuals in interaction with their social worlds" (p.97). This also provided what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to as the many, layered narratives at work in the three-dimensional inquiry space.

The participants differed in their styles of delivery. Some were articulate and self-reflective, while others, I felt, were searching for a *right answer*. Without making stereotyped generalizations, there may have been cultural differences at play, which created a desire to show strength, present a positive attitude, or to *pass* the interview. This attitude may also have been reflective of the relatively young age of three of the participants, which ranged from 18 to 21 years. Although the interviews were each tape recorded, I made notes on comments that seemed significant or particularly important to them. During this time I also made notations about the participant's body language, demeanour, and comfort level with the process, and further questions I wanted to explore. These notes were added to my research journal, along with my own perceptions and reflections about the interview process.

Assumptions

As an experienced ESL instructor, I have been told by students I am different, that I have respect for and understand them. I have a genuine rapport that creates a comfortable learning environment inside and outside the classroom. With this knowledge, I assumed that students would trust me to tell their personal stories. I believed that they would speak candidly about their experiences in the early stage of their sojourn without reservation. I

have a relationship with half (3) of the participants by virtue of them being previous students of mine when they first arrived. I am presently not teaching them. I knew they would be comfortable, based on our continued friendly encounters at school. Even though students are no longer in my classes, I make time to speak with them informally, as they progress through their language-learning journey. I have a reputation for being open and approachable. The students who had never been in my classes I believed would feel at ease with me. They had a reputation for being good students, hard working, and possessing a high degree of English-speaking skill.   My assumption was that they would also have a measure of confidence. I have a reputation for being a good teacher, who students seek out when they have questions or difficulties, which I assumed they would know.

What I had not considered was the residual effect the teacher/student role might have on them. For many international sojourners, teachers are held in great esteem and highly respected. Even though I was presently not teaching any of the participants, I still held a perceived position of power. Could this colour the participants' responses? At times, I felt they were searching for the *right answer*, or perhaps not wanting to speak about personal difficulties that may have been perceived as *failure*. With many non-Western cultures, maintaining a positive outlook, under any circumstance, is regarded as optimum behaviour. I wondered if there may have been a hesitation to share anecdotes that might reflect critically on their ESL school, their Canadian host-family, or their new-found Canadian culture. However, I was careful to make certain participants understood that they were in no way being judged as right or wrong, good or bad. I thoughtfully formed questions about the stories they relayed that described difficulties, and explained why I was asking the questions.

This seemed to engender honest sharing of their stories, and to put them at ease.

Analysing Data

The experiences of an individual learner are those that influence a person's ability to learn in an ESL setting. In the context of international sojourners, circumstances affecting their ability to undertake ESL study may be divided into two broad time frames: (a) circumstances confronted during the process of successfully getting to Canada and (b) constraints encountered during the initial phase of ESL study. A wide range of factors are, in part, not within their control, and often due to international communication, government bureaucracy, legal constraints, or technological limitations. In addressing the hurdles in their countries, each individual is commonly left to their own devices, or is at the mercy of an agent who acts on their behalf to assist them through the maze. There is no pre-arrival support provided any student prior to arriving at the school with whom they have registered. However, the greater difficulties they encounter once they disembark in Canada are reflected in a series of personal barriers. After the completion of all interviews I telescoped in on the recordings. From the participants' full narrative transcriptions I constructed each account as a whole, unique story. Then, working with each individual narrative I identified underlying issues and subjects that were mentioned, and named them. Subsequently, I examined each account, in light of the group as a whole and identified four general categories consistently mentioned across the narratives. These include expectations, cultural adaptation, support networks (trust), and resilience which I depict in order in this section.

Expectations

Each participant interviewed expressed barriers they encountered getting to Canada

to embark on their ESL learning journey. For some, these hurdles clearly began at the point of their initial decision to enter into an ESL/academic study programme in a Maritime university, and continued until their settling in phase was completed. The legal ramifications of attaining study permits and entry visas present varying degrees of difficulty, depending on the culture or country of origin. For many Asian students and some Middle East students, agents have become a part of the economy of the internationalization of education. They provide administration services for legal requirements, booking airline tickets, communicating with potential ESL schools and universities, and becoming the voice for non-English speakers embarking on this path, for which a fee is often rendered. Other countries newer to the English language sojourn, leave the intricacies of administration to individual participants, thrusting them into unfamiliar bureaucratic-processes in a language they have yet to learn. Understanding the flight plan and arrival information are incumbent upon each student's personal resources and experience with international travel. When asked about what expectations they had of being in Canada, few students had thought of the realities of what it would be like for them to actually be in Nova Scotia. As Bradley, the 37 year old from Iraq, recounts his challenges getting a visa to come to Canada, it is evident that the process can be wrought with difficulties. Canada is often looked upon as a kind of paradise. For some the dream of study in Canada has been held for many years, and one for which they have worked very hard to achieve. "As any student or person from Middle East area they dream to come to USA/Canada/Europe. They thought that's like paradise. They don't know how difficult."

Lack of travel experience outside of their own cities/countries is common among

international ESL students, and this may be their first trip abroad. Many students have only travelled with their parents, but never ventured on a similar journey alone. Bradley had been accepted into a PhD programme, on condition of completing English language training. However, the stumbling blocks simply getting a Canadian visa were formidable. His focus remained on the goal of obtaining his documents, with little emphasis beyond that point. His frustrations, he remembers, lasted for many months trying to get approvals to leave a government post in Iraq to travel to Halifax: "I didn't think about the moment that I will step on Canada land. Just think in that moment. I couldn't think ahead."

In contrast, a few participants have more travel experience, and had a real sense of excitement about their arrival. However, overnight they are thrust into facing cultural adjustment challenges on their own, at the same time they are learning a new language. They are left to their own ingenuity and survival skills to find there way in an unfamiliar setting, with limited language-skills. Rejeanne, the former teacher from Saudi Arabia, reiterated the expectation she had was surprisingly different from the reality she found, once she arrived. The length of time it takes to achieve competence in English is seldom understood by my research participants. This perception often creates harsh pressures to achieve their goals within an unrealistic period of time. Also, families who are paying the full cost of academic education in Canada may be contributing to the drive to complete a programme quickly. My research participants confirmed that their expectations were frequently not met, as Rejeanne points out: "I thought it's, ah, better, and I will get my English faster. But when I came here, totally different. I thought I just took 6 months and I will speak English." The overall experience is often a shock and seldom matches what their expectations may be.

Questions arise as to how an international ESL sojourner might gain more realistic

goals for their study without the involvement of the institutions in which they are registered.

Rachel, a mother of two from Saudi Arabia, explains how their arrival affected her during

the initial transition period. She remembers back to when she arrived 6 months ago eager to

learn the language: "Even if you know the language, you can't understand all the first time.

Here they speak so fast and they expect that you understand everything they say. It is hard."

Orientations that provide intercultural competence training, goal setting, and an examination

of expectations seldom happen.

Pre-Arrival Challenges

Students with little or limited English-language skills embarking on international

travel found challenges throughout the duration of their trip to Canada. Frequently, research

participants told stories of their challenges just to get to Nova Scotia, what to them was only

a dot on an unfamiliar map. Seldom did they have accurate addresses of the schools they

would attend, someone meeting them at their destination, or even know where they were

going to sleep the first night. This frightening dilemma was faced at the end of lengthy

international flights, often requiring airline or terminal changes. Unfamiliar airport travel,

lack of communication skills, and minimal layover times often created hardship and

pressures, as Albert, the youngest research participant in the study, explains: "London was

the most terrible time because I wasn't speaking English. I had my ticket, so I had to show

anyone, excuse me, excuse me."

Students who study abroad as a family have the support of being together in facing

their obstacles, and yet travel with children presents its own obstacles. There are added

pressures of taking care of children on top of the lengthy bureaucratic processing following

their flight. Dealing with the entry process often created confusion and fear about being

sent back without the correct papers, as Rachel reflects on:

> It was so hard. At the end of the trip the children are so tired. One of them crying in
> my lap, I'm crying and the other in his seat and they are fighting and I am so tired.
> Oh my God, they will let me go back, yeah because I'm here with no, no papers. The
> immigration office say your registration is cancelled, so I was shocked.

Having someone to assist in the lengthy process of passing through immigration might

lessen the compounded stressors individuals and families face. Participants frequently

expressed fear, exhaustion and confusion when dealing with this process alone.

Cultural Adaptation Process

Cultural adaptation is at the heart of an international ESL student's experience.

Leaving behind everything that is known, familiar and trusted, to enter into a foreign

environment may be one of the most disorienting experiences a person may ever face.

Compound the challenge of the transition with the study of a language you may have only a

rudimentary grounding in, and you set the stage for a tremendously difficult passage. In

close examination of my research findings, I determined that each learner repeatedly

described the process they went through, from confusion to feelings of isolation, to mistakes

made and problems encountered, all of which they reported compounded their levels of

stress. This, in turn, increased barriers to focusing on the English language learning they

came to undertake. Nonetheless, my findings also revealed that all of the research

participants exhibited resilience, determination, creativity and a trusting spirit, in light of the

challenges they faced. The manifestations of their journey will be discussed in this section.

Fear & Confusion.

Each of the learners interviewed expressed many difficulties in making meaning of their new culture during their initial adjustment phase and showed creativity and determination in solving problems on their own. Assumptions, beliefs, and personal perspectives provide the frame of reference Mezirow (1978) describes as a way to understand our experiences. Several of the participants admitted that their experience from home caused feelings of fear and confusion in their new environment. Initially, these feelings are manifest in practical situations, and later are reflected in the affective domain. As in the case of Bradley, his fears of using elevators to locate his residence room stem from his frame of reference and experience of being in Iraq where there are frequent power outages. "I stayed alone, thinking what to do. Wow! I went also to the basement by ladder [stairs] because I was afraid to use the elevator. You know the electricity is a problem, so, we may [get] stuck!" The number of lifestyle differences learners are bombarded with in the initial weeks in Halifax is tremendous. Technology remains at the top of the list of difficulties, reflecting how mundane mechanical interactions have become in our daily lives. This is not so for many of the international students, such as Bradley who shares his scepticism and mistrust of a new system: "I don't take the adventure of new technology or new skill without someone familiar with this beside me, showing me. I am used to this style, someone show me, 'cause I am afraid to make some mistake, big mistake."

The challenge of being in a different-style classroom than they are used to causes many fears for the learners in an ESL setting (especially the females). Student-centred learning and participatory education is the norm in language acquisition and new to most

ESL sojourners. Without an understanding of this new approach, students find themselves

feeling afraid and uncomfortable, as Rejean points out: "I feel strange. You know I didn't

let anybody sit beside me. I thought I would be careful because we are used to just work

with women in the class." Bennett (2004) points out that examining cultural differences and

expectations of the academic environment are critical elements to the adaptation process.

In many cases students find themselves confused about what is going on. With limited

English-language skills, they are shuffled through a labyrinth of formalities to get registered

in their classes. Marcia remembers receiving the school contract and schedule: "Almost I

can't read it. I can understand English only [policy] and schedule. Actually, no I didn't

understand it. [Receiving] it didn't change my mind from Chinese to English!" Participants

frequently suggest they are operating on blind trust. Being bombarded by large amounts of

printed materials was often accompanied by the need to sign things of which they had no

understanding, as Albert explains: "Yah, so she said--do you understand? Sometimes I said

no, even I didn't understand the question. She repeat the same, so I figure out, that mean, if

you say no, she will repeat the same. So then I said yes. So I had to sign, that's all. I didn't

understand."

Problems & Mistakes

Several participants comment on being left to their own devices to ferret out the

everyday systems of daily life, with feelings of fear and scepticism underpinning each step.

Instead of a comprehensive cultural orientation to Canada, learning by making mistakes is

the common process by which international students come to understand Canadian

culture/systems, and how to function in the context of daily life. Loss of dignity, shame and

embarrassment are common feelings expressed by participants referring to experiences dealing with native Canadians, as Albert describes of his interaction within a home-stay family: "So Muslims have to pray 5 times a day, before we pray we have to wash our hands, face, and feet. I didn't organize [understand] that the floor must be clean [dry]. And then the shower, it is the same thing. And my house in Saudi Arabia, we have the floor, it's ceramic [tiles] so wet is ok. I didn't know….Sometimes, you know I feel like if I had trouble with anything, I feel I'm stupid," Their 'lesson' experiences frequently produce feelings of being stupid or being treated like a child, when they are adults within their own cultures, and simply unfamiliar with Canadian living.

The financial system that is the norm in Canada operates in a substantially different way than in the home countries of many international ESL students. Most of their countries still operate in a cash economy, where value added tax (HST) and interest on unpaid bills do not exist. People rarely use credit cards, debit cards, cheques, or pay monthly bills. It is no surprise that many students are mystified by money systems that are intricately tied to our trust of technology. Bradley expresses his surprise at our system of payment:

> I didn't realize that university ID could be charged with enter money to account or charge account. Scotia Bank explained me [debit], but I didn't know how it work, or maybe someone can steal this money, or know the password. So, I am still sceptical.

If their parents incur expenses and bills, they are rarely privy to how they are managed. In particular, they do not understand that the cost of long distance telephone use is considerably more than in their homeland and which most participants discovered from the initial period in Halifax when they felt terribly homesick. Using telephone calls for support created huge problems with home stay families and cell phone companies who expected that

participants understood the high cost and subsequent interest charges on unpaid bills, prior to moving to Nova Scotia.

Stress

A myriad of factors may influence stress levels among international sojourners, and subsequently impact their ability to cope with and succeed in their educational goals. International students are frequently at higher risk than domestic students of facing various psychological problems (Andrade, 2006). Stress and loneliness can increase when confusion with unfamiliar academic expectations are placed upon them and Lacina (2002) points out cultural misunderstandings take place, and interpersonal relationships with other students are difficult to make. Leaving a home environment in which sojourners have support networks and long-standing friendships is a difficult transition, wrought with fear and an expectation that people would come to their aid as new students. Brown and Holloway (2008) suggest loneliness and isolation contribute to increased stresses, compounding integration challenges that most research participants identified. Rachel describes her loneliness in the beginning of her ESL study:

> But even if you are in a foreign country and you see people from your country, you don't get to them right away because they are not your friends. We are friendly, but we don't have, you know there is some kind of bond, like Chinese people, they make groups. They really help each other.

Bradley goes on to portray how he feels during his first weeks in Halifax: "I am walking on the cement but I feel I am not walking by my own feet on something solid. I was alone."

The administration of ESL study programmes often do not take into account the personal adjustment through which students must pass, in order to be ready to focus fully on the task of language learning. Trying to meet the demands of school, and settle into a new

lifestyle Andrade (2006) links to frequently generating a high degree of stress. Concerns expressed by research participants were not for learning English, but for more personal issues, of communicating with their family and simple daily life functions of settling in. Bradley's vivid account of reaching a breaking point is a graphic example of the level of participants' stress: "Uh, a man should not cry, but from high pressure and stress, I found myself, I couldn't stand anything. It make me angry and more confused!"

Being overwhelmed by being immersed in a totally English environment is a tremendously difficult transition, which causes feelings of inadequacy and unrealistic expectations, which seem not to be addressed through a suitably comprehensive orientation-programme. Albert had great difficulty coping with understanding English, and experienced high levels of stress. Rachel's stress was compounded by the pressure for her and her husband to set up a home for their family of four in a short period of time prior to the start of her ESL study programme. This entailed finding a suitable school for their two children, renting an apartment, buying furniture, stocking her kitchen, and beginning their new life, all in English, without any kind of support, in the space of about 3 weeks.

Support Networks (Trust)

It is often said that the kindness of strangers is a remarkable thing. I would add that the trust international ESL sojourners exhibit in the creation of support networks is a testament to their dedication to achieving their goal. Rambling around a foreign environment, speaking limited English at best, is a daunting experience, which they approach with tenacity. Their orientation to a new culture, for the most part, consists of random acts of kindness and the good fortune that individual students may have. Unfortunately, the

support students receive from their programme is sadly lacking, especially in the early stages.

When one examines the average age of international ESL students, their lack of travel

experience, inexperience with independent living away from their parents and extended

families, and limited life experience, it is easy to see how stress increases and trust must

become a daily factor in their adjustment phase.

Informal Guides

Students who speak little English often engender the help of total strangers to guide

them through the mysteries of their new culture, as Marcia explains that she learned about

long-distance telephone cards from "A person I met on the airplane gave me a long-distance

card, and I use this as a model at the store." When arriving in Canada, there is seldom

anyone arranged to meet incoming students. The first encounter with Canadians is with

customs officials. Traversing this bureaucratic process, with very limited English skills is a

mark of the trust placed in the hands of these officials, as Albert recounts his encounter with

immigration upon arrival: "So, they asked me to sign the paper. What? Please sign. What,

sorry? I couldn't speak English so he had to use sign language to explain it to me." He

admitted he had no idea what he was signing, and later discovered it was a temporary study

permit. After an initial encounter with customs officials, taxi drivers are often the next

contact sojourners have with Canadian culture, as Rejean explains: "Nobody meet us. It's

weird because we took the taxi, he's Arab, Lebanon. He can speak Arabic. And we took his

number if we need anything. Most of the participants described similar encounters with

strangers that eased their fears. Bradley also had arrival encounters that got him safely to his

initial accommodation. He had no idea of where he was going, not even the complete,

correct address. Through sheer coincidence going through customs he met a Dalhousie

student who recognized the residence number of Howe Hall: "We took taxi together, and

he told taxi driver where is the residency and Howe Hall." Research participants consistently

report meeting strangers in Canada, often immigrants or foreign students, who help them

learn the intricacies of the new systems of daily life. A month or two later, overcoming his

fears, Bradley spoke to a women he met at a bus stop on his first attempt on public

transportation in Halifax. He had no idea how to navigate the system, nor where he was

going but remembers the kindness of a helper:

> So, I went to the bus stop that [is] opposite to Howe Hall, residency of university,
> and I met there, by accidently a Chinese student, she had her baby. I trust myself to
> dare to speak with her, to ask her to explain me the way to ride the bus. She
> explained me that the main process is to pull the rope when you want to get off. She
> explained me, like, you are new here and you will see every neighbourhood alike--
> every house like each other, just the painting different.

Although these types of encounters are lucky coincidences, they mirror the importance of

relational learning that Bartram (2007) emphasizes as being crucial for building confidence.

Peer Support

For some students who have compatriots from their home town or country, they

may have a certain amount of peer support for guidance, as they adjust to a new home

environment. Marcia explained that she received support from her new Chinese friends in

Halifax. When asked how long they had been here, she confided they had come 3 days

before her. Certain culture groups organize themselves to provide the necessary support to

newcomers to Canada which Rejean portrays of the Saudi community. Other culture groups

seem to make connections with co-nationals very quickly. Unlike students who seek support

from peers, during the language learning process, Don was a pillar of strength who offered

support to many of his cohorts in the programme. He was an anomaly among my

participants, with his over-reaching optimism and enthusiasm for learning ESL.

> I think the problem is sometimes they [his peers] feel hopeless. And I always tell
> them you are not hopeless and helpless. Just don't give up, keep studying, keep
> going. Actually, we can't help them, it depends on themselves. If you feel hopeless,
> and you've given up, then you're nothing. We can encourage, provide tools, support,
> and some suggestions.

Intercultural Interaction

Interaction with people from different cultures and native Canadians is one of the

benefits of cross-cultural ESL education. In the early stages of adjustment, meeting people,

either from your own culture, other cultures, or native speakers, is one of the most difficult

challenges. While it takes getting used to, it seems important to most sojourners, and they

often find support from intercultural relationships. My findings mirror what Lave and

Wenger (1991) refer to communities of practice, which have a critical influence on the

process of learning. Mostly, participants develop intercultural relationships with peers over

time, as confidence in their language skills grow. However, it is also clear that some culture

groups have a significantly different experience. Especially, women from the Middle East

find cross-cultural classes very difficult to get used to. Rejeanne describes her early

perceptions of this experience: "In the beginning it's difficult, there are many cultures in the

class and it's difficult when you feel you don't have enough [English]." A perception

commonly shared by ESL students is that they will not learn English speaking with other

students who are also learning. They don't see the value of struggling in conversation with

someone who is also a language learner, struggling as well. Other students may also have an

accent that is unfamiliar to them and difficult to understand. While most students want to

meet native speakers research participants all confided that they had not developed

relationships or friendships with any. The ability to connect with native Canadians and

integrate into the community at large may be, in part, reflective of a student's age and the

fact that they are in ESL language classes. It is commonly a goal, but one that they find

frustratingly difficult to achieve as Rachel describes: "I wanted to mix with the community

with people here, like the culture, knowing the culture. To live here, I have to know the

culture and I have to speak clearly but my problem is my talking." Again, Don portrays his

ease with meeting native speakers, which seems to be an anomaly. He is an inveterate

smoker, and is able to meet guys while having a smoke. Nor is he shy about playing

basketball with Canadian guys who play much more aggressively than his Chinese friends.

Resilience

Many times over, the stories shared by the participants in my research showed an

amazing amount of resilience and creativity in surviving the rigors of a difficult transition in

Nova Scotia. They each seemed to have an abundance of determination, even in light of

many difficult challenges, never giving up on their end goal of academic success.

Determination & Optimism

My research findings are consistent with the research Andrade (2006), Bartram

(2007), and Brown (2008), report of the experience of international students. I knew that

ESL sojourners are faced with challenges every day, and need to learn to problem solve,

overcome depression, discouragement, and loneliness. I didn't, however, understand the

degree of seriousness until I navigated through their narratives. Strategies for dealing with

difficulties are usually self-directed which indicates a need for institutions to carefully

examine the expectations placed upon these students. Unfailing optimism, an anomaly for most ESL students, is what helped Don through the ESL journey with unusual speed. Tenacity, a positive outlook, and unflinching focus are reflected in his account of how he stayed on track.

> A bad result can only give me the power, to let me study more and more. I will get it one day. I'm not afraid to speak. Just speak more, don't be shy. Don't be shy…that is very important. You make mistakes, and you just go fix the mistake, then you will never make it like that again, next time.

Self-Directed Support

For those with access to technology and the knowledge of the Internet, searching for information about life in their new culture was only a click away. However, internet access is limited to a small percentage of more mature students with life experience in the work force, from countries where the Internet is readily available. Rachel explained she and her husband prepared to come to Canada, using the Internet and further, once they were here: "Thank you Bill Gates. You know because technology, there is a forum, you know it works like a blog." In place of a comprehensive orientation programme, the internet provided the much needed information for adapting to Nova Scotia and answering many questions anyone crossing cultures might have. As well, students recognize ways of using on-line courses to support the challenges of their ESL programmes. Not only does this increase the burden of costs to learn English, it creates increased stress to study all day in school, and then continue to study on-line at night, as Albert undertook. The pressure to complete their ESL training as quickly as possible comes from both their families, and their high expectations of themselves.

Again, Don seems to have a source of resilience and personal confidence that is unusual in an international ESL student. He recounts his poetic talks with himself to mitigate his discouragement.

> You need to have conversations with your heart, your soul. You need to have a belief in your heart. Like my belief is myself. The world is beautiful. The opportunity is yours, the chance is yours; it's in your hands. Don't let it pass. The opportunity is just like the sand in your hand. If you can't catch that, the sand will go out.

Other

Students face unexpected situations which they are often ill prepared to deal with. Marcia, whose first experience outside of living with her parents while attending high school in Beijing, recounts experiencing racism for the first time in her life. Searching for a suitable apartment with her friend, she found herself in an unfamiliar setting: She remembers clearly feeling very bad hearing the man renting the apartment who told her: "It's because it's a new apartment. Before Chinese people live there, it's messy, dirty, [and] bugs in the house so now [we have] rebuilt it, but not for renting to Chinese."

Embracing a research view rooted in social constructivism, narrative inquiry and the interaction with participants is essential to creating a place where "the participants can construct the meaning of a situation" (Creswell, 2007, p.21). To further describe the essence of narrative "it is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time…an inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.20). As Riessman also describes, "many investigators are now turning to narrative because the stories

reveal truths about human experience" (2008, p.10). It is clear from these narratives that the

challenges confronting international ESL sojourners in the early part of their journey are

many and complex. These challenges intersect with others to present multiple barriers to

language learning and adaptation to a new culture. In the next chapter I discuss these issues

at length, and the implications for international sojourners, teachers, and administrators in

institutions who host them.

CHAPTER 4

FUTURE CONSTRUCTION: ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

I see now that the dialogue is a back and forth process that is more organic for me than
linear. I will shape the process as I see fit for myself, moving from the general to specific
and back again to the general. Perhaps it is a little like a telescope or binoculars, as the focus
changes depending on what one is looking at.
(Journal entry, 28.Sept.08)

English second language training is big business today. Currently there are thousands

of international students traversing the globe to enter programmes of higher education in

English-speaking countries. Successful completion of this academic training in English may

set them apart from hundreds of others competing for a place in our fast-paced global

economy. Nova Scotia, with its numerous public and private institutions, is no stranger to

the burgeoning international-student-population, and, indeed, to ESL sojourners who do not

yet have proficient language skills to enter directly into academic study. When I embarked

upon narrative inquiry as my research methodology, I was following two intuitive hunches:

first, from my role as an ESL instructor, I felt that international ESL sojourners have a

unique story to tell, that no one is listening to; second, I had a hunch that there exists a

substantial link between adult education and the domains of second language acquisition,

cultural adaptation, and intercultural training.

The findings of my research reveal thick, rich data, as well as intimate details of the

tremendously difficult transition crossing two cultures, and moving into an unfamiliar

academic world, with miles in between. The narrative inquiry process helped me illuminate

many ways adult education intersects these individual fields, creating an overreaching

framework from where this transition may be examined. This research has identified a

complex multifaceted process that affects international ESL sojourners throughout their initial language learning and ongoing academic study. Narrative inquiry was a natural way to explore, from the participants' point of view, what this complex process is. Using the tripartite framework of narrative inquiry set forth by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), I have examined participant narratives, delving deeply into the three-dimensional space of their journey. By looking into their retold stories, I recognize how the dimensions of the narrative space--interaction, continuity, and situation--contribute to the experiences they are subjected to. In this chapter, I discuss the relevance of the findings of my research, which follow these three main thematic paths: (a) interaction, the individual and social interactions that characteristically shape the adult and ESL learning process; (b) continuity, the contextualization of ESL student learning reflecting continuity, which links their past, present, and future; and (c) place, the tensions arising within the institutions in which international ESL sojourners place themselves in preparation for future academic study. I outline my perceptions and provide conclusions regarding the myriad of ways in which ESL training, cultural adaptation, and intercultural training intersect with adult education. In the next section, I set forth implications for the field of adult education, building on the literature in chapter 2, and suggest recommendations for the future.

Characteristics That Shape Learning

Educational practices in ESL and adult learning environments share many principles. One of these is the foundational concept of self-directed learning, which espouses a belief that adult learners take responsibility for their own learning needs by formulating goals, developing appropriate strategies, and evaluating their outcomes. In recent years, it has been

suggested that this thinking may, indeed, be unfounded. Examining the values and beliefs upon which this principle rests, one sees that the underlying values and beliefs are rooted in North American/Eurocentric rationality, which Brookfield (2000) suggests may in fact lead to intellectual colonialism. Participants in my research reflect deep-seated beliefs around education, which come from their diverse, non-Western cultures. Their stories imply that this rich cultural-diversity is not being systematically recognized as creating barriers that students must cross to reach successful integration.

Transformative learning theory, as put forth by Mezirow (2000), recognizes that assumptions, values, and perceptions are the framework we use to make meaning, as we search for an understanding of our individual worlds. This theory is based upon the important process of critical self-reflection, which Cranton (2005) claims is entrenched in North America's heuristic culture. During the narrative process, participants in my study portrayed their new learning environment as fundamentally different from the style of teaching/learning they were familiar with. They pointed out that especially in the early stages they felt fear of speaking English or making mistakes. Simply being in a mixed, student-centred classroom is also frightening for many women from Middle Eastern cultures. The literature demonstrates that adult learning and language acquisition both take place within the context of relationships: with self, fellow learners, teachers; with ideas and the content being studied; and with the larger community (English, 2000). Investigating the stories retold by the participants reinforces their learning has been shaped in crucial ways within the realm of their interactions.

Interaction

Three main areas of interaction have emerged from this study and these include language proficiency, socio-cultural adjustment, and pedagogical understanding.

Language Proficiency

Learning often defies easy definition, and, as Taylor (2005) points out, by examining what it means to know, we are led to see that knowledge is constructed and holistic, and often reflects multiple layers of reality. My experience with the participants in my study is consistent with Taylor's point of view, and further mirrors data gathered by Brown (2008) and Brown and Holloway (2008), suggesting that a complex set of interconnected factors related to the affective domain shape the language learning process. Depending on the context in which they function, or whether they are positive or negative, the affective domain can be described as difficult to isolate and so subtle it is hardly visible. These are the mercurial concepts that interact with the situational context to develop patterns that usually rest within the subconscious. Richard-Amato (2010) notes that the affective domain is strongly influenced during the early acculturation process, and can either enhance or hinder language acquisition. The research participants shared deeply personal accounts that reinforce these perceptions, recounting ways that their limited language skills mostly hindered their ability to deal with simple daily-life-situations, as well as their overall language-learning.

In many cases, students found they were plunged into a labyrinth of systems foreign to their experience, and often with technology as the vehicle for entry. This new technology often engendered feelings of confusion and isolation, compounded by disappointment, as

they face a sea of challenges alone. What in Nova Scotia are common-place rituals like going to an ATM or paying bills on-line is not only a new occurrence but a frightening operation that presents serious risk. Bradley tells "I don't take the risk of new technology or new skill without someone familiar with this beside me, showing me. I am afraid to make some mistake, big mistake of loosing my money."

One of the critical elements of these early experiences is the number of transitions taking place simultaneously, which further complicate already enormous stress. Left mostly to their own devices, they need to ferret out how to live in a foreign cultural environment, at the same time they are unlocking the key to how their language classes differ from the more familiar educational paradigms of home. All of this understanding, of necessities, is required of them, out of their base of limited language skills. Even asking questions often generates more confusion rather than creating clarity. We live in a paper rich culture where important information is transmitted in document form. Months later, Bradley remembers "When you ask for help you get paper, paper, paper! ...just headache, headache, headache!" indicating an increased the level of stress which they are already coping with. This provides an example of sojourners who have limited language skills reflecting the concerns Elias and Merriam (2005) express around the behaviourist perspective, when they suggest it may be seen as "cold, inhumane, devoid of feeling, and ignorant of the subject and the creative and intuitive dimension of human behaviour" (p.109). Stories told by participants illustrate this similar perspective of their experiences in the early days.

Participants' reflections led me to believe that the initial phase of sojourn is a highly stressful time, unlike the early assumptions that Brown (1980) and Lysgaard (1955) set forth,

reporting that the initial phase is characterized by euphoria. This points to what Brown and Holloway (2008) suggest are the diverse perspectives on what adjustment means. All of the ESL sojourners interviewed felt that their limited language-proficiency affected their confidence and ability to participate within the classroom and in social interactions outside the classroom. Their experiences mirror the suggestion Bartram (2007), Cushner and Karim (2004), and Andrade (2006) put forth that language proficiency is the greatest challenge, magnifying social isolation and inhibiting students' ability to participate.

Sociocultural Adjustment

The past 20 years have seen a global transformation, inspiring the internationalization of education, fostering a need for English language acquisition. Sojourners from every corner of the world travel to English speaking countries to learn the language and enter post-secondary education programmes of study. Language learning plays an important role and must not be seen as merely a communication tool, rather, as a larger window opening into the cultural adaptation process. As an ever widening group of people face this challenge, it is important to understand the distinction between intercultural contact and intercultural adaptation. The continuum of intercultural contact has existed for millennia, changing from superficial to hostile acts, trade purposes, and currently more intimate engagement, such as educational aspirations. The theoretical model of individualism and collectivism is the basis of some intercultural training, which suggests that people from individualist cultures (e.g., North Americans of European descent, North and West Europeans, Australians, and New Zealanders) have a very different world view than their counterparts from collectivist cultures (e.g., East and South Asians, Southern Europeans,

Middle Easterners, and Latin Americans) (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2010; Shaules, 2007).

Although there are many models for understanding culture it is important to acknowledge

these two groups comprise the majority of ESL language teaching/learning, wherein their

cultural adaptation becomes a critical link to ensuring success.

The dimensions of successful cultural adaptation reveal a complex set of factors,

requiring an interdisciplinary understanding. Effective cultural adaptation combines cross-

cultural psychology with multicultural education and intercultural communication. Crossing

cultures requires learning to function psychologically and physically in unfamiliar

environments. What is missing in the literature is a profound lack of connection to

fundamental adult education principles, which are the underpinnings of each of the three

areas mentioned. Cultural adaptation models cognitive, affective, and behavioural

development much the same way as English language acquisition does. Not only do

language learners develop intercultural competence and effective cross-cultural interactions,

their language acquisition may counteract prejudice and racism, and have a profound impact

on their identity development. My study addresses these issues in part and thereby fills some

of this gap in the literature.

The disappointments and difficulty in meeting native speakers and understanding the

culture suggested to me that, for most participants, social adjustment remains high on the list

of impediments facing them. Far greater than their domestic counterparts, Andrade (2006)

reports that international students encounter magnified challenges. My findings support

both Bartram (2007) and Brown and Holloway's (2008) descriptions of unsettled feelings of

nervousness, disorientation, and deficiency during the initial phase, and suggest this can

continue to crop up for years when sojourners may face unexpected or ambiguous situations. Rachel recounts her disappointment: "I wanted to mix with the community, with people here, like to know the culture… I just felt that I am so stressed." Bradley remembers: "All of this scattered my thinking [confused him], so I'm afraid." The participants in my study relate many stories that reflect feelings of self-doubt causing lack of confidence and confusion. Most participants had expectations they would receive support from their institutions to help them integrate into Canadian life which supports what Andrade (2006) and Lacina (2002) suggest how expectations different from the institutions hosting them.

A number of experiences shared by the research participants reflect motivational challenges developing relationships outside the class, both with other ESL sojourners and native Canadians. My research findings are in line with what Andrade (2006) and Richard-Amato (2010) explain highlighting motivation as the critical factor in the process of language learning and influencing the ability to establish relationships both between teachers and students and those outside the classroom. Learning to communicate with other students, as Albert relays, represents the limitations most participants faced: "Sometimes I had a hard time, I just couldn't speak." All of the participants in my study looked to the institutions, and especially the teaching staff, to create the kind of safe, non-threatening, respectful learning-environment both Cranton and Wright (2007) and Vella (2002) outline as essential to relational learning. Intercultural relationships are challenging, at best, whether between domestic students and international students, or with other international sojourners. Unfortunately, my research participants' stories indicate this was not always the case. It is

not unusual for an element of competition to exist among students, and between cultures, which can become disrespectful, as Don portrays in one of his classes: "I did a presentation and when I was made stupid mistakes, baby mistakes, and this Turkish guy he laughed at me. That is the worst thing that can happen, for a student to laugh at another student when they speak or make a mistake." Unfortunately, teachers and staff may not recognize the complex emotional and psychological problems international ESL sojourners commonly experience. As Andrade (2006), Auerbach (2005), and Brown (2008) all point out, these may have a seriously detrimental impact on language learning. Andrade goes further to suggest that lack of involvement in a class or the segregation between international and domestic students is often viewed as cultural, rather than linguistic. Failure to comprehend and communicate within their new culture frequently creates academic challenges accompanied by high levels of stress, as the participants in my study reveal.

Pedagogical Understanding

Aspects of stress, Andrade (2006) points out, are further compounded by the pressures of sojourners' study programmes, in an unfamiliar education system, at the same time as adjusting to a new cultural environment and learning a new language. Multiple layers of stress are reported by the participants time and time again, providing examples which support Andrade's description. Marcia recalls her feelings at the beginning of her study programme: "We can understand, but it's a little difficult. I'm alone. No one will know you, and no one will help you."

The research participants bring to light the descriptions of culture-shock put forth by Hall (1959) many years ago, may well currently be extended to include pedagogical shock, as

Rejean explains: "In the beginning I feel strange, there are many cultures in the class and it's difficult, to share [with] the other culture. Student expectations for support and faculty and staff perspectives within institutions reflect pedagogical tensions, which Shaules (2007) suggests come from sojourners experience of a loss of familiar cues, a breakdown of inter-personal communication, and identity crises. The participants in this research provide much supporting evidence for Shaules' suggestions. Albert details this feeling of being lost, blaming himself because of his poor language skills: "Sometimes I feel I'm stupid." Students consistently blame themselves for the shortcomings they have in creating success in the early stages, and indeed as portrayed by Bartram (2007), throughout their academic-study programme.

Questions arise regarding respect for cultural diversity and how it is integrated into the classroom, as well as what expectations ESL programmes place on international sojourners. The role of critical thinking, as Brookfield (2000) has suggested, may be instrumental in creating a conflict between Eurocentric rationality and expectations that sojourners bring to the learning environment. Questions about power relations need to be examined regarding the privilege that globalization places on English, and what this means to cultures around the world. In the classroom, these power relations may be viewed on a micro-scale, but nonetheless are critical issues that teachers need to look at. Are we simply expecting sojourners to fit into our academic milieu and become like us? Even if this is the hope, what support is provided for them to cross this bridge? Examining how ESL learning is contextualized and rooted in deep cultural understanding

that privileges a certain group may further illuminate the path upon which international ESL sojourners must travel to reach success.

Contextualizing ESL Learning

Although theoretical and philosophical approaches to adult learning may provide a way to view adult education and language learning, contextual influences contribute profoundly. Especially for ESL sojourners, language learning is a complex process of making meaning of a social reality in a new environment. In order to make sense of a situation, meaning is constructed through the verbal actions and interactions between people. "In the construction of meaning, the interpretation of events is grounded in each person's experience and field of perception" (Kramsch, 2009, p.35). Institutions providing ESL instruction, therefore, play a central role in an environment that consists of students from many different cultures and worldviews. My findings show that participants feel it is somehow their inadequacy with language that creates barriers to understanding an unfamiliar academic culture or the cultural cues of their new environment. They place the responsibility for adaptation on their own shoulders and as Albert points out "Sometimes, you know, I feel like if I had trouble with anything with school, I feel I'm stupid". Clearly, a student's perception of an unknown new culture, and the current arena in which learning takes place plays an important role, and, as Taylor (2005) points out, may influence the nature, meaning, and/or process of learning. In this section I explore the second dimension of the inquiry space, continuity, and how context and situation influence learning experiences.

Continuity

As we explore the boundaries of situational learning and deep cultural understanding, we move back and forth between past, present, and future. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain that we think of events happening over time, having "a past, a present as it appears to us, and an implied future" (p.29). Examining the stories of international ESL sojourners we see the tensions that may exist on a number of levels over time. These accounts expose how the second dimension of the inquiry space is centered on temporality, a central feature of narrative thinking.

Situational Learning

Cultural adaptation and, further, how teachers and institutions shape the curriculum provided, are two fundamental transitions sojourner's face going from their homeland into a Canadian academic environment. This must be examined more deeply by looking into Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) four directions of the inquiry space: inward and outward conditions that probe inner feelings, hopes, and the outer environment; and the backward and forward temporality that includes the past, present, and future. Participants in my study depict deeply personal stories that mirror the complex layers of the inquiry space, showing that transition into ESL learning is neither simple, nor one-dimensional. Although many months earlier, Bradley remembers how the significant stresses he felt in the beginning phase of his sojourn affected his emotional life and sense of confidence: "It make me angry and more confused. Wow! uh, a man should not cry, but from high pressure and stress I found myself crying. I couldn't stand anything." The immense situational change in learning environments raises many questions about what impact these changes may have on an ESL

sojourner's learning process.

Several participants remember how difficult it was to develop close relationships with people, and move into full participation in what Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to as "communities of practice." Taking the concept of situated learning further, Smith (2003, 2009) suggests that a "community of practice is formed by people who engage in collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour. However, it is significant to clarify how a person enters such a community. Building relationships of trust and constructing identities in relation to these communities shows that a person moves from the peripheral edges to the centre of full participation, although my research findings indicate that this process is a very long one that likely won't happen early on. Rachel's story, similar to other participant memories, shares how difficult it was to develop trusting relationships: "But even if you are in a foreign country and you see people from your country, you don't get to them right away because they are not your friends. We are friendly, but we don't have, you know, some kind of bond." As Lave and Wenger (1991) point out, learning this way is not seen as the acquisition of knowledge by individuals, but more as a process of social participation. One must ask what safeguards exist within programmes and institutions to ensure this process will indeed happen?

Deep Cultural Understanding

It is not new to say that each individual looks at the world with their own eyes: using filters from their values, perceptions of the world, and past experiences--their culture. The implications this has, however, on international ESL sojourners acquiring a language in an unfamiliar community, far from home, is significant. We recognize that language expresses

and embodies cultural reality, as portrayed in detail by Kramsch (2009), Orem (2005), Shaules (2007), and many others. While it is apparent there is a need for further research related to the experiences of ESL sojourners, it is clear that language constrains the way people think and mirrors their cultural perceptions. Both Kramsch and Shaules suggest that social reality is critically important to understanding the meanings and symbolic systems in language, and cultural adaptation. Several of the research participants commented on how their cultural transition presents many challenges for them, as Rachel explains "Yeah, it is not that easy, when we fear going to [an] other country." The difficulty they have in making the transition into their new environment raises moral and ethical questions for those who are willing to enrol international students and accept ESL sojourners "conditionally". It may appear that the financial benefits from this enrolment, far outweighs the effort made to provide the necessary support needed for this transition.

There is a broad gap in the literature that does not include international ESL sojourners, but focuses on international students able to enter directly into higher education programmes. The vital distinction here lies in the limited language proficiency sojourners have at this early stage, which magnifies the common adaptation challenges anyone crossing cultures may face, placing them in an extremely vulnerable and unique position. Certainly all of the research participants portray vulnerability within their intensely personal accounts. Analysing my research findings, I realize that there are limits to this research, taking the participants word for the experiences they portray. There are a number of points of view that are not examined in this research, and need to be investigated in order to gain a picture of the other sides of the issue. What is salient is that international ESL sojourners have not

previously had a voice in the dialogue, whereas other points of view may have been well represented.

In spite of the fact that more and more people are coming into cultural contact, according to Shaules (2007), cultural interchanges do not always ensure deeper cultural understanding. In fact, he suggests they can reinforce negative value judgements and prejudice, and are part of an ongoing process of intercultural learning. DeCapua and Wintergest (2004) point out that few sojourners recognize that their initial responses to deep cultural differences are heavily influenced by their own frame of reference. This implies that a key to the valuable learning process that sojourners may greatly benefit from lies in gaining an awareness of their own and other's deep cultural differences. Standing back further from deep cultural understanding among international ESL sojourners, questions arise about the influence deep cultural understanding may have on faculty, administration, and institutions. How might their own deep intercultural understanding, or lack thereof, influence interactions, expectations, and curriculum provided to students?

ESL Learning within Institutions

Since Edward Hall (1959, 1969) recognized the complexities of combining people of diverse cultures, and discussions around multilevel intercultural-communication blossomed, we find ourselves today in a world with shrinking borders. Becoming a global citizen is no longer a fantasy, but now a necessity of our global economy. Training for intercultural competence could be considered the most valued ability needed for participation in the 21st century. The effects of globalization are creating widespread opportunities in higher education for international students. My findings are consistent with the observations that

Andrade (2006) and Brown (2008) claim are putting increased pressure on institutions who host them. As Andrade points out faculty often misinterpret the behaviours of international students and don't have a full understanding of the academic, social, emotional, and psychological challenges inherent in their adaptation process. Most of the research participants recounted a number of incidents in which teachers or administrators were unaware of their lack of understanding of classroom activities, or the way the school functions. Albert relates an exchange with an administrator during an orientation session where he was asked "Do you understand? Sometimes I didn't even understand the question. So I said no. She repeat the same, so I figured out, that means, if you say no, she will repeat the same. I said yes, even [if] I didn't understand." Bartram's qualitative case study examined the perceptions of higher education staff and international students and revealed tensions between the two groups. The narratives depicted by my research participants mirrored those of the students in Bartram's study who disclosed their need for greater support in the early stages of adjustment. Rachel illustrates an example of this, reporting on how the teacher gave out papers that she had no understanding of. "It was a form saying What is your level in the morning and your level in the afternoon? I don't know about the levels, nobody told me." In fact, Altbach (2008) claims that few institutions have adequate infrastructures to provide the appropriate supports needed to host the increasing international-student-populations. In the previous section I discussed the role that context plays in language learning and its frame of reference, linking the past, present, and future of a learner's experience. Telescoping further out, it is clear that the location in which learning happens plays a critical role.

Place

In order to understand the third dimension of narrative space, my research draws attention to three areas that relate to the place where sojourners and institutions intersect: (a) tension between staff and student expectations, (b) East-West pedagogical differences, and (c) ethical questions, all of which I address in this section.

Tensions Between Staff and Student Expectations

The term internationalization has been so broadly used in the recent past that it now has wildly different meanings to people, depending on the context or culture in which it is used. For the purposes of this thesis, I use Knight's (2004) definition of internationalization as "the process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into teaching, research, and service function of the institution" (p.7). It is critical to view the two concepts as interdependent, inseparable from one another. Nevertheless, what is in fact happening in the shadow of swelling international-student-populations reflects a different picture. My research findings reveal that institutions have taken little responsibility for the many international students they are happy to receive financial gain from, and yet provide virtually no support to them. They may be more comfortable letting the faculty deal with problems facing international students in each of their classes, thereby creating tension and frustration between the two groups. My research question did not include the examination of institutions, nor did I ask specific related questions of the participants in my study. Regardless, the data from the narratives reveals a number of events that indicated the participants' desire for support was not met, thereby increasing their stress. Within the narrative experience of the international ESL sojourners in the study, place provides a

pivotal influence that mirrors what the literature plainly identifies as tensions arising for international students in institutions, with faculty, staff and administrations.

If we go back to the roots of language learning, one of the profoundly important principles necessitates a safe, non-threatening, participatory environment. Undeniably, adult education portrays this as one of the essential principles of practice, competent language instructors understand the concept as seminal in an ESL environment, and intercultural trainers view this connection as indispensable. How is it then, that the literature consistently cites tension between international students and the faculty and administration of institutions? Andrade (2006), Bartram (2006), Brown (2008), and Cushner and Karim (2004) all report on the gap between sojourner expectations for support and faculty/administration expectations of international student performance. Participants in my research frequently express cultural-adaptation issues consistent with these tensions. By revisiting the definition of internationalization, we see that it clearly integrates aspects of both intercultural and international, which are seldom turned into practical support. Confusion and frustration were woven through the participants' stories, and illustrate the disparity between the divergent aspects of their expectations.

The usefulness of orientation packages or processes that are completely in English, and typically delivered on paper or power point, seem overwhelming and confusing. My research findings indicate a need for institutions to assess how effectively international ESL sojourners are introduced to Canadian culture and integrated into programmes of study. Several of the participants remember signing documents that they did not understand, nor know what they were for. With a limited ability in English, asking questions to clarify what

they were asked to sign was not a realistic possibility, as Albert describes of one of his encounters: "No, I didn't understand it, so I had to sign it, that's all." Without serious consideration, intentions on the part of institutions may not be engendering the sought after outcomes of support for sojourners in their initial phase of adjustment. In the long-run this may have detrimental effects on student retention, and the much needed financial gain that institutions are looking for.

East-West Pedagogical Differences

When considering the literature on international students studying in higher education institutions, certainly we find a multifaceted dilemma. The intricacy of language proficiency and deep cultural-understanding are carved into the framework of pedagogy, which reflects, as Brown (2008) suggests, an emphasis on self-directed learning and critical thinking. As in other areas of cultural adjustment, keeping up with coursework and the demands of an unfamiliar educational system, Andrade (2006) points out this places further stress on already burdened international students. Shaules (2007) goes further to propose that culture shock, described by Hall (1959), may be extended to include pedagogical shock, wherein there is a loss of familiar clues, a breakdown of interpersonal communication, and an identity crisis. Certainly, my research participants indicated overwhelming feelings of confusion and fear in their new learning environment. Marcia compares her experience of education in China and the new educational style: "In China the teacher put the important things on the black board, we copy it and use this to prepare [for] exam. When I first got here I don't understand English language school and what they talk about."

Probing deeper into the concept of critical thinking, Brookfield (2000) highlights a connection to Eurocentric rationality that may lead to intellectual colonialism. Further, Merriam and Associates (2007) critically examine the grave differences between Western and non-Western perspectives and what these differences may bring to adult learning. Although I had a hunch that international ESL sojourners faced many challenges that institutions seem relatively unaware of, I did not realize how profoundly difficult the transition into academic study was, in reality, for them. Albert recounts his confusion and limited understanding of the new pedagogical approach: "And I was shocked at first, because I didn't know. She [the teacher] wasn't thinking [didn't realize] that I didn't understand anything. So I had to study a lot, even if I didn't understand." Moreover, the intimate details of the research participants' stories underscore what the literature on international students describe, creating a picture of how deeply challenging their transition is. Therefore, it raises many questions for me about the ethical and moral issues for institutions who profit from their enrolment. The next section delves more into these matters, and the implications that arise for ESL sojourners.

Moral and Ethical Questions

Undeniably, the forces of globalization have an impact on every nation in the world. More specifically, the concept of internationalized higher-education will meet the needs of the youth who will propel globalization into the future. An examination of what internationalization means reveals more dilemmas than clarity, and raises many important questions. Inspired by the intimate accounts shared by my participants, it is important to ask what the purpose of internationalization is, who benefits from the process, what are the values on which the concept is based, and are there any negative implications?

The confusion, fear, and difficulties portrayed by the small number of research participants in my study demonstrate that the journey is often harsh and arduous. International sojourners who enter ESL training, as a "condition" of acceptance into mainstream academic study, are under tremendous stress to successfully complete ESL as quickly as possible, in order to move on to their undergraduate or graduate studies. As we have seen in the literature, and through the narratives gathered, this transition is not simply a language issue, but a complex process of cultural adaptation. A small percentage of students are lucky to have financial support from their governments. However, those who don't often have family members at home going to great effort to ensure their completion. We will never truly understand the personal sacrifice required to support a student for 4 or 5 years in a Canadian institution, with a salary from any of the countries that are home to our international students. What we can and need to look at, nevertheless, is how institutions hosting international students are supporting them toward their success.

In the previous section, I suggest an ideal definition of internationalized education that embraces intercultural competence within the teaching/learning, research, and service functions of a university (Knight, 2004). The implications of espousing such a balanced perspective will not be a quick fix for the complex, multi-dimensional problem that my participants' experiences represent; therefore, I suggest it is an ethical and moral responsibility of institutions to delve deeply into what internationalization means.

The inward/outward exploration used in the narrative inquiry space outlined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) may be a useful analogy from which a deep exploration of internationalization could begin. Inward examination requires looking at how knowledge

is transmitted in the teaching/learning paradigm, and includes critical self-reflection and involvement of faculty, staff, and administration. Clearly, the approach to faculty-development programmes, internationalizing curriculum, and teaching practices developed by Odgers and Giroux (2009) provide clear direction. A Band-Aid type approach, applying one-off solutions that individual departments may provide is simply not enough. If the goal is, in fact to prepare both international and domestic students with "international and intercultural knowledge, skills and worldviews" (Paige, 2003, p.56), then the entire campus needs an infusion of a more outward, shared vision. Nilsson (2000) takes this idea further integrating another level of complexity by including "a curriculum which gives international and intercultural knowledge and abilities, aimed at preparing students for performing (professionally, socially, emotionally) in an international and multicultural context" (p.21). The principles of self-reflection that are the foundations for adult education praxis may be the key that unlocks the door to the future for universities truly preparing all students for successfully navigating, indeed, steering the global world of today.

Implications for Adult Educators

The findings of my research suggest a number of implications for adult educators. The findings help to shed light on how the divergent aspects of internationalizing higher education are impacting the lives of international adult learners on their campuses. Equally important, they illuminate the number of ways adult education provides an overreaching structure that links ESL, cultural adaptation, and intercultural training. In addition, the findings point to several ways that the research process has provided a voice to those who may not otherwise have had a vehicle for expression.

Adult Education as an Over-Reaching Framework

My findings from research into what it means to be an international ESL sojourner in Nova Scotia have illuminated many ways adult education intersects with other fields, specifically, ESL, cultural adaptation, and intercultural training. It was clear from the beginning examining only the area of second language acquisition would limit the scope of a multi-dimensional dilemma. The field of adult education spans a much broader view than Knowles (1980) initially suggested of self-directed learning. Like many aspects of adult learning, defining its boundaries defies a simplistic explanation. This may similarly be said of understanding the complex transition international ESL sojourners make on their language learning journey. Thus, the important process of examining the four domains of cultural adaptation, intercultural training, as well as adult education and ESL, has provided a rich framework in which to situate the investigation. By taking this broad approach, we honour what Dirkx (2006) suggests "about inviting the whole person into the environment, we mean the person in fullness of being: as an

affective, intuitive, thinking, physical, spiritual self" (p.46). Taking a broad view

recognizes the complex nature of the challenges sojourners face.

Further, by looking at the role that adult education plays as a conduit intersecting

these domains suggests it is a unifying framework for them. That is not to propose a

new domain of study, but rather, in a modest way, to recognize the profound principles

that are the underpinnings of all four fields of practice.

Influence of Methodology on Educational Process

Examining the notion of lived experience as a way of entering the narrative space

of international ESL sojourners has critically important implications for adult educators.

From the theoretical point of view described by Merriam and Simpson (2000) we see that

reality is constructed by individuals in interaction with their social worlds" (p.97).

Standing back further, looking at institutions in which ESL sojourners are situated, it is

clear that academic achievement cannot be separated from cultural adjustment. Making

this transition in both areas at the same time may be one of the most traumatic

experiences in a person's life (Andrade, 2006; Cushner & Karim, 2004). In light of this,

the three-dimensional narrative-space has provided sojourners an opportunity to share

the deeply personal details of their journey.

The narratives they shared show inadequacies in the support provided for them, I

believe. By illuminating what their experiences have been, it is my hope that institutions

will gain deeper understanding of the overwhelming challenges facing sojourners,

thereby, instigating increased assistance during the initial phase of language learning and

throughout their academic journey. The power of narrative provides authentic stories

told from the participants' perspective as Clandinin and Connelly summarize "They are people in all their complexity. They are people living storied lives, on storied landscapes" (p.145). My research findings create a picture of this complexity of experiences and emotions, through the sometimes discouraging stories told by participants. Trusting the process of narrative allowed me to move from exploring "the experience as lived and told in stories" towards understanding the theoretical considerations and further to interpretive-analytical considerations. It is the participant responses that gave the meaning and significance that helped me shape the research text. I recognized that each and every comment held within it the seed of a critical idea and to a certain degree were valid. Within the structure of a thesis, nevertheless, I was limited in how I related the narratives. Moreover, Clandenin and Connelly point out that when narrative inquiry is overly personal it risks the "danger of narcissism and solipsism" (p. 181), which could render the research to be like a "Hollywood plot" (p.181), complete with a happy ending. I came to understand the many aspects of my role as "I, the critic" in the writing of the research text and the importance of the mindful state that Clandinin and Connelly refer to as "wakefulness." Proceeding with an alert awareness of the risks of narrative inquiry helped me be cognizant of the potential criticisms.

Stories from my research participants feature significant events during their early experiences and are the vehicle upon which the most important situations are carried. These narratives give voice to the many international ESL students who come to Nova Scotia to study. While much literature is available, little specifically includes the voices of ESL sojourners in Nova Scotia. There are broad ethical questions that arise for

institutions benefiting from hosting international students, as Odgers and Giroux (2009) point out, which in turn suggest many challenges for the future. Indeed, the implications for the field of adult education may be great. As institutions move toward the critical self-reflection necessary to internationalize education, once again, the framework of adult education practice may come to the fore with solutions.

Implications for Personal Practice

During this lengthy research journey, I have gained insight into my deeply passionate commitment to adult education, and specifically narrative inquiry. Through my learning struggle, I see how my background in language and cross-cultural training intersect with my adult education practice, enriching each of them. I now see there is no one right way in my personal theory of practice, rather an opening up to trust the process that reveals itself along the way.

> I now understand that in order to move forward I need to move back (somewhat like life sometimes!). My sense of being overwhelmed has subsided as I grapple with understanding the over-reaching concept of a theoretical model. Understanding where the methodology fits into the picture and its relationship to data collecting, analysis, and conclusions helps me see where I am in the push-pull dialogue that is my process. (Journal entry, 28.Sept.08)

Slowly, building trust in my process, I have gained confidence in my ideas and ability to express them. I now revel in words, ideas, concepts and dialogues with the participants and the literature that has become like a garden of delight.

A Bridge Between Two Worlds

As a seasoned adult-educator and experienced ESL teacher, I have a unique role as a bridge between international learners and the institutions in which their learning takes place. Much the way Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe the three dimensions

of narrative space, I have developed close relationships with sojourners, moving inward

with them, to observe the details of their struggle. Moving outward, I recognize the

continuum of challenges facing institutions who wish to keep up with the demands of

globalization. As an adult educator my empathy lies first with the sojourners. Leaving

behind family, friends, and a familiar support net, they parachute into an unfamiliar

culture to learn a new language. The changes they must manage in order to make this

passage are numerous. Many international students have little travel experience, and for

most, have never before been away from their family. I came to realize the stress is

greatly magnified for ESL learners who are struggling with multiple sociocultural

challenges at the same time as learning a language. Daily, I watched sojourners, as

Shaules (2007) suggests, strain to make sense of a new cultural reality.

Personal Insights into My Learning Journey

On the level of practice, the research has helped me reflect on my own learning

journey. As described by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997), I have

previously exhibited "an appropriately humble respect for the wisdom of others, but also

a cowardly reluctance to construct and communicate [my] own knowledge" (p.xvi). Over

the course of the months this research has taken, I now see how many layers of learning

have emerged. During the process of being a researcher, precious insights came from

the most challenging steps. My journal entry reflects some of the clarity I have gained.

> The beauty of a programme that is adult education, personified, has done what we as adult
> educators believe in. Developing a voice, gaining confidence and self-awareness, and
> empowering my self is not what I thought I would gain. Being in a programme that I trust,
> working with educators who engender diving into deep water, knowing I will surface and
> believing in me before I could believe in myself has been transformative.
> (Journal entry, 5.Sept.09)

Conclusion

This study has achieved the purpose of identifying the complex issues that affect international ESL sojourners in Nova Scotia. My research has led me from a personal intuitive response to struggling language learners, to the examination of the complex adaptation issues they face. In an attempt to synthesize the literature, I found a considerable body of materials related to international students who have entered directly into academic study. However, I discovered a gap in the literature that does not address the concerns of ESL sojourners. Their limited language proficiency, sociocultural adaptation ability and pedagogical understanding, therefore, magnify the challenges anyone crossing cultures may face.

My findings have proved to be widespread in nature and have addressed issues raised in the literature pertaining to adult education, ESL, cultural adaptation, and intercultural training. Moreover, the method of combining and comparing research on international students' perspectives, the point of view of institutions hosting them, and the narratives my research participants shared, has provided a balanced and insightful perspective. By investigating current literature in adult education, ESL, cultural adaptation, and intercultural training, I began to see how the adaptation process intersects these four fields. However, it is from the participants' telling and retelling of their stories that it is possible to understand their transition. Within a qualitative research paradigm, the essence of narrative inquiry provided a way of connecting the participants' lived experience and learning. While other methodology might have been a suitable choice from an institution or teacher-centred point of view, placing the international student experience at the forefront made narrative inquiry

the logical choice. No other methodology could address the continuity and wholeness that Clandinin & Connelly describe by letting the participants tell their stories.

Nevertheless, narrative inquiry may be seen as a methodology that is "overly personal and interpersonal" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.181) and does not seek to understand the underlying power structures and the complexity of systems which form the framework and context of ESL sojourner's study. The issues of power relations between teachers and students has been raised in this research but is not a major focus, implying a need for further research. There is indeed, a need for further study targeting institutions and policies that may be seen to be taking advantage of international students. This intricate and complex web of issues facing institutions struggling for survival is also not the main point of the study, and needs serious investigation in future research.

This research will serve to provide meaningful and current insights for the large number of ESL teachers, faculty, staff, and administration in institutions hosting international students, researchers, and programme planners. The narratives shared by my research findings confirm and reinforce my own initial hunches about ESL sojourners and the challenges they face. The accrued knowledge provides me with a broad understanding that will serve as a reference to use in my teaching practice and programme planning I may

In the early stages of this study I learned that there are many acronyms associated with learning a language and in particular the English language. Embedded in each of these acronyms is the theoretical framework and critical theory in which they are situated. My choice to use ESL throughout this paper is linked to the field of English teaching in Nova Scotia which I continue to do. Within this field of practice ESL is the most common term

used by practitioners. Through this research I have developed a deeper understanding of the broader implications inherent in using ESL. As discussed in my paper, students enrolling in English language programmes often speak more than one language which indicates this term is frequently a misrepresentation. Taking this into account I recommend the term be dropped and EFL be adopted by practitioners and institutions as a more accurate reflection of English language learners.

In addition, faculty and ESL teachers play a significant role in the learning arena of international students. This research highlights areas that are vital to increasing success for learners and those areas that may be directly influenced by their teachers. For teachers to expand their understanding of this profound relationship, my research suggests critical self-reflection and dialogue is needed to ensure the curriculum integrates aspects necessary to reduce barriers. This must take precedence over a perceived preference for content and academic development, at the cost of ignoring cultural adaptation needs. The broader implications reflect another aspect where adult education practices may provide a useful role for teachers wishing to engage in such dialogue.

Further, it is likely that the flood of international students seeking academic study in English speaking countries will continue to rise. The pressures of globalization will remain a widespread influence on young people seeking ways to improve their skills for the future in our global economy. Institutions in English speaking nations will, no doubt, play an enduring role in hosting these students. This research has useful implications for institutions benefiting from their enrolments. The moral and ethical responsibility that institutions bear needs to be examined closely and this research may provide insight into specific areas

needing investigation. It is my hope that by recognizing the complex elements of this

journey, institutions may be better able to provide the much-needed support sojourners

deserve.

Recommendations

In light of the findings arising out of this research, I offer recommendations in two areas: first, related to faculty teaching ESL sojourners and international students; and second, to administrators and staff in institutions providing programmes.

Recommendations Offered to Faculty

1. Close examination of teaching practice in the ESL classroom to ensure it recognizes the intercultural diversity among learners. This would require ongoing critical-self-reflection and dialogue between self and colleagues.

2. Critical examination of the commonly accepted term *ESL* which inaccurately describes many English language learners. *EFL* may be a more precise portrayal of these learners and therefore a more precise term to adopt by professionals in the field.

3. Involve learners in the development of learning goals and realistic expectations.

4. Create a classroom culture that embraces respect for diversity and building self-esteem among individual students, with an emphasis on the use of all aspects of language over one dimension of academic writing content.

5. Provide ongoing activities to engender an understanding of critical thinking skills, their purpose and application for use in all areas of education and life.

Recommendations Offered to Institutions

In general, reframing institutions into those that recognize the internationalization process will create cultures more sensitive to international students and sojourners alike. I would suggest this is a lengthy, multi-faceted process that involves an overview of the entire infrastructure, and an honest belief in its overall value for both institutions and students.

Successful internationalization must integrate a balance of "international and intercultural dimension into the teaching, research, and service function of the institution" (Knight, 2004, p.7).

1. Curriculum needs to remain central to the process, and integrate "international and intercultural knowledge, skills, and worldview" (Paige, 2003, p.56).

2. Faculty, staff, and administrators need to continue to play a central role, by leading self-reflection and dialogue about how internationalization may be integrated into all levels of campus culture.

3. Critical examination of the commonly accepted term *ESL* which inaccurately describes many English language learners and the programmes being offered them. *EFL* may be a more precise descriptor of both the learners and therefore the programmes being offered by institutions.

An Aside

I realize the recommendations are rather overreaching and idealistic. It was never my intention to examine the role institutions play within the process of internationalizing education. However, the deeply personal accounts shared by my research participants helped me realize the situation is indeed much larger than I first observed. In order to support sojourners struggling to cross the bridge to academic success in Nova Scotia, we must look at the challenges from a broad perspective. Using critical self-reflection, so fundamental to the practice of adult education, we may find a way forward.

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Appendix A

Sample Questions
The interview will be conversational in tone, and through these open-ended questions: I will invite you to tell me your stories and experiences of being an international ESL student.

1. How did you feel about coming to Canada to study? Can you describe your landing?

    - Tell me what the most memorable part of your arrival in Canada was?

    - Can you describe what it was like meeting your home stay family for the first time?

    - What it was like when you first moved to your home stay?

    - Can you describe one thing you didn't think you'd ever get used to?

    - Tell me what the best things were about living with a home stay family? The worst?

2. Describe how you enjoyed your orientation to your home stay experience?

    - Can you describe how your orientation helped prepare you for your home stay experience?

    - Can you describe one of the best experiences you had in the beginning of your stay? The worst?

    - Tell me about something you thought would be strange, but was ok?

    - Can you recount one thing that was strange at first, but you got used to after a while?

3. Can you tell me how you felt about your new school?

    - Can you describe how you enjoyed the orientation to your new school?

    - Can you explain how your orientation helped prepare you for studying? For living in Canada?

4. Tell me about how you felt during your adjustment to learning English in Canada? What were the difficulties in adjusting to learning English in Canada?

    - Can you describe how you feel your home stay family helped you overcome these difficulties?

    - Tell me how much you think your school helped you overcome these difficulties?

5. What made you feel safe? comfortable? discouraged? in the beginning.

6. Tell me what it means to "be yourself" living in a foreign country.

    - Tell me about a person/people who helped you understand things in the beginning.

Certificate of Ethics Approval

The Research Ethics Board
of

St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia

hereby acknowledges that

Kathi R. Thompson

has been granted ethics approval
to carry out a research project entitled

"The Bridge Across: A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of International ESL Students, in   the Maritimes

January 23, 2009

Date

Dan MacInnes, Ph.D.
Chair, Research Ethics Board

Appendix C

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used in this research study and are presented here for clarification purposes in the order they appear in the text.

ESL   English as a Second Language

ICT   Inter-Cultural Training

EFL   English as a Foreign Language

ELLS   English Language Learners

EAL   English as an Additional Language

EIL   English as and International Language

NES   Native English Speaker

NNES   Non-Native English Speaker

SLA   Second Language Acquisition

TESL   Teaching English as a Second Language

TESOL   Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

IELTS   International English Language Testing System

TOEFL   Test of English as a Foreign Language

AUCC   Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada

UKCOSA   United Kingdom Council for International Education

CLT   Communicative Language Teaching

ICR   Inter-Cultural Relations

DMIS   Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

FLT   Foreign Language Teaching