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# **Adult Refugees and Newcomers in the Inner City of Winnipeg: Promising Pathways for Transformative Learning**

**Karen Magro, Associate Professor,  
Faculty of Education, University of Winnipeg**

**Parvin Ghorayshi, Professor,  
Department of Sociology, University of Winnipeg**

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## About the Authors

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Dr. Karen Magro is an Associate Professor of Education at the University of Winnipeg. Her teaching, research and writing interests are in literacy education, transformative learning theory, adult learning, and applied psychology. She completed her doctorate degree at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. She taught English and EAL for 22 years with the Winnipeg School Division. Dr. Magro is also the editor of *English Quarterly* (Canadian Council of Teachers of English Language Arts).

Parvin Ghorayshi is professor of sociology at the University of Winnipeg. Her research areas are multidisciplinary and include: Human rights, social justice, migration, feminist and post-colonial issues. She is currently working on a number of projects including, globalization and migration; identity, citizenship and gender; multi-ethnic cities and democratic urban governance; and development by and for inner city communities.

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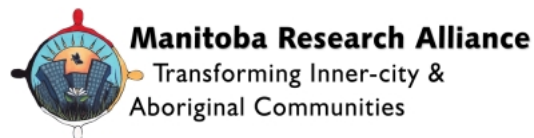
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# Adult Refugees and Newcomers in the Inner City of Winnipeg: Promising Pathways for Transformative Learning

## Introduction

More and more people are on the move today and migration is recognized as one of the defining global issues of the twenty-first century. Available information suggests that there are about 194 million people living outside their place of birth (International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2010). There is growing recognition that migration is an essential and inevitable component for the economic and social life of every state (Annan 2004). The number of immigrants and refugees is on the rise in Canada and Manitoba is in the forefront of this trend and is the destination for a growing number of international migrants (Table One and Table Two). In 2007, immigration to Manitoba increased by 9 percent, reaching 10,955 immigrants—the highest level in fifty years—and by the year 2016 Manitoba

is aiming to increase this number to 20,000. Since 1999, Manitoba has accepted 6,500 refugees. Manitoba's population growth of 2.6 percent is largely attributable to immigration. The colour and source countries of the immigrants are changing (Government of Manitoba 2007). The top three countries of birth of immigrants to Winnipeg prior to 1986 were the UK, the Philippines and Germany; today the majority of immigrants destined for Manitoba arrive from non-Western European countries and settle in Winnipeg (Figure One, next page).

Immigrants and refugees from around the globe are trying to build their lives in Manitoba and, in 2007, 76.5 percent of immigrants and refugees to Manitoba settled in the city of

**Table One: Canada Immigrant Status 1991–2006**

Census Year	Immigrants	Non-Immigrants	Non-Permanent Residents	Total Population of Canada
1991	4,342,890	22,427,745	223,410	26,994,045
2001	5,448,480	23,991,910	198,640	29,639,030
2006	6,186,950	24,788,720	265,360	31,241,030

Source: Statistics Canada 2007

**Table Two: Immigration Levels, Manitoba**

	1991		2001		2006	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Family Class	1,116	1.8	1,192	1.9	1,332	1.9
Economic Class	952	0.7	1,106	0.7	714	0.6
Provincial. Nominees*	4,048	64.8	4,619	57.4	6,661	49.9
Refugees	1,252	3.8	1,094	3.1	1,241	3.8
Other**	59	0.1	86	0.1	103	1.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7,427</b>	<b>3.1%</b>	<b>8,097</b>	<b>3.1%</b>	<b>10,051</b>	<b>4.0%</b>
Difference	935	14.4%	670	9.0%	1,954	24.1%

\*Provincial Nominees are a subcategory of the Economic Class

\*\* Other includes Missing and Unknown

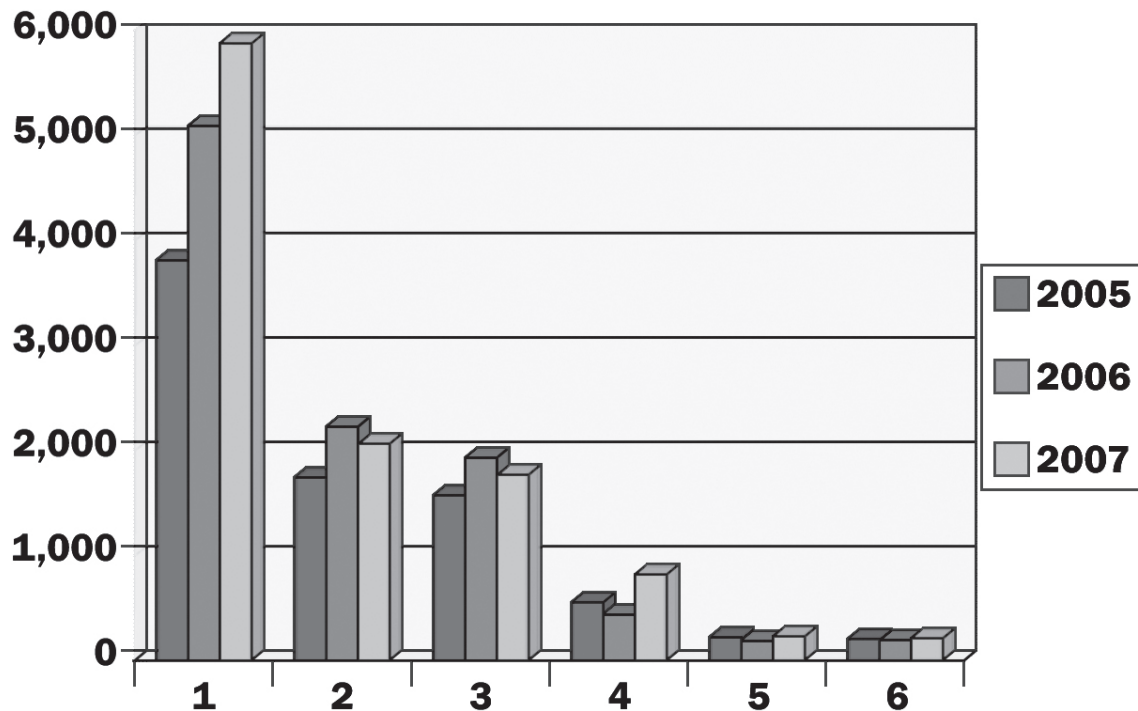
Source: Government of Manitoba 2007

Winnipeg (Government of Manitoba 2007: 15). The number of visible minority groups, apart from Aboriginal people, has increased from close to 24,000 to over 28,000 people in Winnipeg's inner city (Statistics Canada 2007). Winnipeg's inner city, the focus of this study, is home to a large number of refugees and immigrants, especially visible minorities. With growing immigration comes diversity that is both creating challenges and possibilities in various institutions, especially in educational sectors. There is an increasing demand at all levels of education, including adult education, to create programs and policies that will enable immigrants to participate more fully in Canadian society. There are forty-five adult learning centres in Manitoba with over eight thousand adults taking courses that lead to a secondary education certificate. The presence of these centres for educational upgrading reflects the province's recognition of the need for literacy and building bridges to post-secondary education.

Many immigrants and refugees are enrolled in adult educational programs to learn a new language and new skills that would help them meet unfamiliar cultural, social, legal, and educational challenges in Canada. Learning and cultural integration can be a lifelong process that involves conflict, loss, negotiation, and transformation (Li 2003; Tettey and Puplampu 2005). Navigating a new culture requires the ability to learn new emotional, social, cultural, academic and work related skills in a short period of time. Educational institutions, at all levels, can play a major role in promoting social cohesion (Jenson 1998). Educational contexts can provide a restorative antidote to the "rootlessness and transitoriness" that, as O'Sullivan (2002: 9) notes are a consequence of globalization.

This paper focuses on EAL for adult newcomers and draws from the experiences and voices of 118 adult refugees and immigrant learners,

**Figure One: Manitoba Immigration-source Area, 2005–2007**



1-Asia, Australasia and Pacific; 2-Europe (except UK); 3-Africa and the Middle East; 4-Latin America, Greenland, some Islands of the Atlantic and Pacific; 5-United Kingdom; 6-United States

Source: Government of Manitoba 2007: 17

settlement service providers, adult educators, and administrators who work either in school divisions or community agencies. We use ethnographic and narrative research methods (Smith 1986, 1987) to better understand the pre, trans, and post immigration experiences which influence the process of acculturation and learning for newcomer adults who have settled in the inner city of Winnipeg. Transformative learning theory (Cranton 2006; Mezirow 1981; Mezirow and Associates 2000; Taylor 2006) is used as interpretive lens to understand the challenges of newcomers and the specific teaching approaches used to help them succeed in Canadian society.

Transformative teaching and learning is holistic and draws upon the emotional, cognitive, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions of learning. Learning is not compartmentalized, and educational programs are rooted in the aspirations and needs of adult learners (Freire 1997; Mezirow 1981; Miller 2002; O'Sullivan 2002; Taylor 2006). Factors such as the teacher's personality, the mission of the educational institution, learner readiness, and resources all play a role in working toward transformative teaching and learning (Cranton 2006; King 2005). Carolyn Clark writes that:

Transformational learning produces more far-reaching changes in the learners than does learning in general, and that these changes have a significant impact on the learner's subsequent experiences. In short, transformational learning shapes people; they are different afterward, in ways both they and others can recognize. (1993: 47)

This research joins the small number of studies that have examined transformative learning theory in an urban context. Leong-Kappel and Daley (2004) note that urban centres present a host of difficulties to adults who are already experiencing stress. Factors such as unsafe neighbourhoods, a lack of daycare facilities for parents who are working, inad-

equately housing, and lack of access to culturally sensitive medical and counselling facilities in urban centres can adversely impact learning. Alienation and loneliness are also more common in urban centers (Martin 2004). There is a gap in our understanding of the experiences and views of adult learners, educators and service providers in the urban context of Winnipeg. The present study aims to take a small step in filling this gap. We show that newcomers in the inner city of Winnipeg encounter a host of social, economic and psychological problems that create a tension between opportunities and barriers (Ghorayshi 2010b; Magro 2009a) in gaining access to education.

In this paper, first, we provide background information on the theoretical framework and the methodology that we have used. This section is followed by a discussion of barriers that face newcomer learners and impact their learning journey and the process of acculturation in their adopted country. In the third section, the settlement service providers and adult educators describe their approach to working with adult newcomers. The learners' voices and experiences provide insight into some of the strengths and limits of educational programs. We conclude that both at the individual and institutional levels, positive programs have been introduced, but significant changes at all levels of educational system are needed to better meet the needs of adult newcomer learners. Appendix one highlights some of the promising changes that have been implemented in the school system. The recommendations, drawn from the experiences and voices of the participants, are in Appendix two.

## **Theories of Transformative Education**

The framework of this study is based on theories of transformative learning that have been applied extensively in different educational

contexts such as literacy development, counselling, health education, environmental education, cultural adaptation and intercultural awareness, and professional development (O'Sullivan 2002; Taylor 2006).

"Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feeling, and action. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world" (O'Sullivan 2002: 11). Within this perspective the emphasis is on the critical thinking, the need for significant changes in educational systems at all levels and a major shift in the way people live their lives and understand their world (O'Sullivan 2002; Dei et al. 2010). This paradigm shift or "perspective transformation" is described by Mezirow as a process of becoming:

critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectations to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrating perspective; and finally, making choices or otherwise, acting upon these new understandings. (1991: 14)

Transformative approaches to educational changes build on an "asset" model of learning (O'Sullivan 2002). Rather than viewing adult learners (in this study, we refer to adult newcomers and refugees) from a "deficit" perspective (e.g. lack of Canadian work experience, English language barriers), the learners' prior educational and work experiences and cultural background are viewed as strengths or assets (Magro 2009a). Based on this assumption, education involves building on newcomers' knowledge. Education would help them draw on their strengths and to build the skills they need to function successfully in society (Mezirow and Associates 2000; Simich 2000). In writing about the importance of citizenship education, Shugurensky (2006:

68) asserts that while "status is about being a full member of a community, identity is about feeling like a member of a community" and "is rooted in factors such as a common history, language, religion, values, tradition, and culture, which seldom coincides with the artificial territory of a nation state." Within this perspective newcomers are not conceived of as "economic producers and consumers" but as informed and critically aware individuals. To this end, Shugurensky (2006: 72) argues that "an education for active citizenship [should aim] at nurturing community development initiatives that foster self-reliance, empowerment, grassroots democracy, and social transformation."

In transformative learning theory, the role of the adult educator is central to successful educational experiences of learners (Cranton 2006; Freire 1997; Mezirow and Associates 2000; Taylor 2006). Teachers need to be culturally aware and willing to take risks and use a range of experiential learning approaches that encourage personal empowerment and growth among learners. As Adamuti-Trache and Sweet (2010: 12) assert: "Lack of cultural awareness of the complex issues that affect immigrant learners during the transition into the host society may diminish learners' chances of achieving their educational goals." A challenge for adult education practitioners is to create an environment of trust that invites multiple dimensions of learning, acknowledges diversity, and respects learners' culture while assisting them new ways of seeing the world (Leong-Kappel and Daley 2004; Martin 2004; Tolliver and Tisdell 2006). Moreover, adult educators need to be able to create a safe climate where individuals can express their perceptions and misperceptions around complex and often controversial issues. Drawing from his early work in adult literacy education, Mezirow (1981) notes that teachers and counselors, in particular, can play a vital role in assisting adult learners to become more critically reflective and open to choice and

change. Mezirow's theory becomes particularly relevant in the context of understanding the way in which refugees and newcomers cope with the loss of their home country, language, customs, and professional standing, and begin to learn new skills to navigate new cultural, educational, legal, and social terrain.

Recognizing the shifts in immigration and growth in diversity, Shibao Guo (2009: 49) writes that "it is imperative for adult educators to be more inclusive and accept differences as valid and valuable expressions of the human experience." Adult educators need to see their role as more than knowledge experts; instead, they need to be able to "revitalize the progressive role of adult education in bringing about democracy and social change" (Guo 2009: 49). In addition, Martin and Rogers (2004) suggest that too often, adult education programs have been remedial in nature; adult educators need to become more involved in the federal, state, and metropolitan arenas where decisions are made regarding funding and the recognition of adult learners' prior experience.

Teaching from a transformative perspective is aimed at helping students "gain a crucial sense of agency" over themselves and their world (Mezirow and Associates 2000: 20). Paulo Freire (1997) emphasizes the importance of cooperation between teachers and students as a critical factor in evaluating the world in a reflexive manner. Michell (2006: 42) writes that "teachers of critical literacy seek to create learning environments that support personal transformation." The teachers' own philosophy and teaching approach can facilitate reflective thinking and meaningful change by reducing the polarity between the roles of the student and teacher (Freire 1997). The teacher moves from being an expert and manager to an advocate, co-learner, provocateur, challenger, and facilitator. "Fostering transformative learning in the classroom depends to a large extent on establishing mean-

ingful, genuine relationships with students" (Cranton 2006: 5). In presenting a new model for transformative learning, Tolliver and Tisdell (2006) emphasize the importance of: the authenticity of teachers and students; multiple forms of knowledge production; an integration of cognitive and affective domains of learning; readings that reflect the cultures of the member of the class and the larger community; an exploration of individual and communal dimension of identity; collaborative work; learning for change; celebration of learning and a provision for closure to the course; and a recognition of the limitations of education and that transformation is an ongoing process that takes time (40-41).

Transformative learning theory in adult education addresses issues related to the curriculum as well as structures of educational delivery. How would a transformative curricula look? What changes must teachers and educational systems make? (Dei 2008; Lee 2002; Steele 2003). Theorists like George Dei (2009) and Claude Steele (1997) emphasize that there is a powerful need to develop a more transformative approach to curriculum development and educational structures to meet the contemporary challenges of educating learners, especially for minority youth and adults.

## **Methodology**

This study is based on the voluntary participation of 118 adult refugees and immigrant learners, settlement service providers, adult educators, and administrators who work either in school divisions or community agencies who shared their experiences with us. We have used both primary and secondary data and the concept of "triangulation" best defines our approach in drawing from different sources, theories and methods (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Merriam and Associates 2004). We have consulted both academic and non-academic literature, government and NGO publications, and electronic resources on issues

that are relevant to adult learners, especially refugees and immigrants. We discussed our project with academics, members of government and non-governmental organizations, school division administrators, teachers, and knowledgeable, prominent immigrants and refugees. With the help of various individuals and organizations such as educational institutions, churches, community groups, immigrant and refugee centres we advertised our project and invited adult educators, service providers and newcomer immigrant and refugees to contact us. Transformative learning theory has been applied to interpret the issues that face newcomer adult learners; the role and responsibilities of settlement and service providers; the role of adult educators and their approach to teaching, learning, and assessment; their views of the barriers and challenges that face their learners; and their perspectives on ways that educational systems need to change to help newcomers adapt more successfully to their new lives in Canada.

While not exclusive, many of the adult learners in this study were either completing or had completed their secondary education at an adult learning centre (ALC) in Winnipeg. Some were enrolled in professional programs at a university or technical college while others were already working. The adult learners came from diverse cultural, educational, socio-economic, and experiential backgrounds. The common thread that linked them was their experience living in Winnipeg's inner city and their desire to fulfil their personal, educational, and career goals and become "successful" in Canadian society. Among the participants there are thirty nine adult refugees, twenty eight immigrants, nineteen teachers, and thirty two service providers. Only four out of nineteen teachers are men and two are non-white. The high proportion of female teachers interviewed reflects the demographic and historical reality of teaching English as an Additional Language. One senior administrator in Manitoba's largest school division

commented that with better salaries, pension benefits, more full time work, and policies designed to give immigrant teachers greater employment opportunities, the racial and gender profile of teaching EAL will become more balanced in the future. In addition, we had access to 139 autobiographies of immigrant and refugee young adults who have been in Manitoba less than five years and were under the age of thirty. Our sample of newcomers, refugees and immigrants is limited to those who have been in Winnipeg less than ten years. However, the majority of participants were in Winnipeg less than five years. We sought, as much as possible, to have a diverse sampling that included country of origin, single and married people with children, as well as families and people without children. We were mindful of gender, age, racial/cultural and economic background in selecting participants. The teachers we interviewed taught adult learners in programs ranging from basic (English as an Additional Language) to secondary and college preparatory English. In addition to teaching English, some taught history, psychology, and basic mathematics. Service providers worked in various areas that included personal counselling, settlement services, employment services, apprenticeship and mentoring programs. Some worked in conjunction with the adult learning centres and others had their own independent agencies.

### Participants

	Male	Female	Total
Total Interviewed	47	71	118
Refugees	18	21	39
Immigrants	11	17	28
Teachers	4	15	19
Service providers	14	18	32

We applied narrative methods of inquiry in this study (Smith 1986, 1987). Semi-structured interview guidelines were used to record and detail the experiences of participants (Van



Manen 1997). The importance of narrative research is widely acknowledged by the scholars of adult education (Dominice 2000; Kouritzin 2000). Through narrative inquiry, the subjective realities and the social contexts that influence them are reflected. Themes such as immigration, uprootedness, and identity lend themselves to narrative analysis and have become an important way of involving all stakeholders in a collaborative inquiry process (Dominice 2000). Studying narrative and biographical accounts can be viewed as “a necessary addition to EAL research methodology, one powerful enough to gesture toward recognizing the complexity caused by the intersection of race, class, language, history, and culture” (Kouritzin 2000: 31). Within this approach there is not a rigid dichotomy between a subject and object (Creswell 1998: 53) and the goal is to uncover and describe the lived experience of individual participants (Van Manen 1997: 10). We found that interviewing the participants gave us an opportunity to meet people face to face, use more extensive probes and ask complex questions. This is something we would not have been able to do with a written structured survey.

The questions for the adult immigrants and refugees centred around their pre, trans, and post immigration experiences, the expectations that they had of Canada and their subsequent adjustment to life in Canada, motivation for continuing their education, barriers

or challenges that most interfered with their ability to pursue and fulfil their academic and career goals, and the strategies that they used to reduce the barriers they experienced. Following Pratt and Associates (1998) and Cranton (2006), the teachers were asked questions related to the way they viewed the process of learning and their own roles and responsibilities. They were asked questions related to their teaching style, philosophy of education, and approach to curriculum planning. The immigrant and refugee service and settlement workers were asked questions concerning the purpose of their program and the way it helped refugees and newcomers. What changes have they seen in the past ten years in immigration patterns and in the barriers and challenges that newcomers face? Overall, we also wanted to hear the participants’ proposals for improving adult refugees and immigrants access to education.

We conducted the interviews between November 2007 and January 2009. Before starting the interviews, participants were fully informed about the goal and purpose of the project and were aware of the general topics of the questions and their rights to withdraw from specific questions or from the interview. They signed a consent form and were assured that the result of the interview would be kept in a secure place, their real names will not be used, and their anonymity respected.<sup>1</sup>

**1** Newcomer refugees and immigrants were offered an honorarium of \$25 to cover their transportation costs and their time.

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## Multiple Barriers Impede Learning

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All learners in this study valued education and were highly motivated to succeed in a profession; however, dispositional, situational, and institutional obstacles and barriers impeded their progress. For many adult newcomers, survival in an unfamiliar culture took precedence over educational and career goals. They stated that some of the obstacles that influenced and exacerbated their problems were related to a number of factors such as: difficulties receiving accreditation for their prior education and work experience, financial hardship, a lack of affordable and safe housing, changing relations within their families, racism, and a lack of social and community networks that would help them gain access to information about various services available to them.

### Credential Recognition

While most educational institutions acknowledge that they have a prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) protocol in place, the process of credential recognition is difficult, especially for those individuals who have lost documents in their homeland. Challenges, problems and issues related to accreditation are widely acknowledged and documented (Khan 2007; Simich 2000; Guo 2007; Shan 2009). What shattered many newcomers is the fact that they find their skills and education are not valued. The narratives of the participants show that there exists an incongruity between the credit they are given when interviewed for immigration and the reality of finding a job that matches the person's credentials. In the words of one immigrant:

In the Embassies actually they ask of your credentials and education and everything. So those things give you points. So now you are excited that when you get in Canada you will be immediately wanted.

But, It does not work here ... I found that my experience does not count.

Developing the skills needed in Canadian society assumes that newcomers have access to the social contexts that would facilitate this process. In reality, gaining entrance into this social arena is very limited, particularly in some professional fields. Gloria, a teacher from China, expresses her frustration:

I have studied and completed four degrees but I still cannot find work. I am a divided person. It is painful to be teacher in Canada. After eight years I am still seen as a foreigner ... I feel tired of pan-handling my skills and credentials. For a well educated person like myself, there is the loss of dignity that I deal with. There is no appreciation of the fact that I can teach Chemistry, Biology, Environmental Studies, and Math.

One of the service providers with fifteen years of experience states, "the credential for new immigrants is a huge issue ... they are made to believe they will find a job in their profession, but the immigrant officials are not telling them what is going to happen ..." Accreditation is particularly a problem when the applicant is a refugee and/or from a non-Western country.

A key theme in transformative learning theory is valuing the prior knowledge of learners (King 2005; Mezirow and Associates 2000), and yet, many of the participants in this study felt that their experience was negated. In general, the participants in this study felt that they have to prove themselves and excel beyond the normal expectations required from the Canadian born professionals. Candy Khan questions the power of the regulatory bodies and the fact that selection criteria do not place immigrant professionals in their fields. The

experiences of participants in this study support Khan's assertion that employers "are looking for employees with 'Canadian experience, culture, values, and rituals'" (2007: 65).

## **Financial Hardship**

Financial hardship was cited as one of the main barriers that stood in the way of attaining academic and career success. The overwhelming majority of participants in this study, similar to Canada as a whole (Shan 2009), are located in the "secondary sector." A number of participants who worked as medical doctors, engineers and teachers in different parts of the world were only able to secure work as a health care aid, teaching assistant and baker in Winnipeg. Some returned to university and college to retrain and pursue other degrees. By and large, newcomers in this study supported their education by working in low-paid, flexible, part-time jobs with unfavourable working conditions. The majority of participants in this study were forced to work in the secondary labour market characterized by low pay, low skill, temporary, part-time and undesirable working conditions. This study affirms the fact that "the segmented labour market constructed through social relations, such as race and perceived language differences, afford people differentiated access to various sectors and workplaces" (Shan 2009: 14).

Newcomer families often struggle to make ends meet. Ron, like many others, has to stretch his low income to pay for his family members who are here and send some to those he left behind. As many of them have stated, "It is bad here, but it is even worse back home." Refugees have to pay back the government loan that they received for coming to Canada. Moreover, women, in particular, find it difficult to fulfill their academic goals while at the same time being in charge of mothering and other domestic ac-

tivities. One young woman, a refugee from Liberia, explains:

As a mature student on low income, I rely on student loans to pay for my books and tuition. I also apply for child care subsidies. Some days you feel you will not make it. I cannot work full time, study, and take care of my four children. The money that comes from the student loan is not enough to sustain me or my family. I have to cut down on many things for myself in order to support my family and pay the bills.

The low-paid jobs that the overwhelming majority of participants do have do not give them the opportunity to develop their literacy skills. In particular, frequent layoffs, underemployment, and the stress of managing family responsibilities here in Winnipeg and abroad tend to erode feelings of competence and confidence.

## **Housing**

Lack of affordable and safe housing for marginalized and low-income families is widely acknowledged and documented (Carter 2001; Davidson 2009; Silver and MacKinnon 2009; Turegun 2008). Participants in this study, in various ways, were struggling to deal with the issues related to affordable and safe housing which affected their ability to focus on their educational aspirations. One of the counsellors clearly stated that "The inner city—where the overwhelming majority of low-income newcomers and refugees live—does not have affordable and safe housing." Marta, a settlement counsellor for twenty years, explains:

I think that the worst thing that can happen for people who are coming from a violent background is to place them in areas with a strong presence of violence and poverty. You are putting more stress on these families.

One participant, a single father with two school age daughters, expressed concerns when he remarked:

Why does the government give us housing in such a violent area of the city? We left one war only to find new problems in the city. I worry about my daughters and the gang members that live so close by.

Larry, an inner city resident himself, states:

Newcomers' families often have no choice because that's where the entire little rental places are. A lot of places are in bad shape and I've visited some friends and it's pretty sad. What makes it worse is that there is domestic violence and drugs and all the criminal stuff ... if you pick on one, they attack you, or you know, then you got the gang banging.

Afsal, like many other participants, complains about the lack of affordable and safe housing. He states:

I was getting \$570 per month and my rent inside there, it was \$63 for bus pass, so tell me, you can use this money to rent an apartment in Corydon or somewhere which costs about \$800, one bedroom for \$600 .... People are just forced to stay in cheap places ... it is what they can afford.

Farah describes the stress of her rental experience:

My stove was not working. It was giving me a shock ... Many times I complained to the caretaker ... the problem grew day by day, and on May 10th 2007, I was frying chicken and the stove gave me a shock. Oil spilt on the stove, and a fire started. I didn't know whom to call. My husband and me stopped the fire. The ceiling became dark and then the cupboard door got burned. My husband's hand got burned. A neighbour told me to call 911 ... the police came ... we were told to call

Tenants' Association .... We did not know what it is ... we do not have these organizations in my home country.

The above voices highlight the social, economic and psychological challenges that newcomers face. Research shows that such barriers do interfere with learning (Cranton 2006; Cross 1981; Leong-Kappel and Daley 2004). Simich, Hamilton, and Baya (2006) further note that too often, many important challenges that refugees experience remain hidden and are often inadequately addressed by settlement services.

### **Isolation and Changing Relations within Families**

Added to the above difficulties are the isolation and exclusion that many participants expressed that they experience. David, a refugee from Sierra Leone, comments on the difficulties he has in finding friends and establishing social networks:

Here in Canada, you live in an apartment or a house and never meet your neighbour. These are some of the things that shocked me. In my town in Sierra Leone, we always came together as a community. You could talk to your neighbour. The community life is so rich. In Canada, there is more loneliness; the buildings and the workplace are structured in a way that makes people more isolated. It is harder to make new friends. When you work all day and study at night, your life is very lonely.

David's situation highlights the important role that context plays in creating physical, psychological, and socio-cultural distance between individuals and the opportunities to realize their goals.

The participants in our study also expressed a deep concern that their families are under stress. Their roles as parents and spouses are

undergoing changes and in some cases, the families face fragmentation. Some parents describe losing their authority; in other situations, men and women are renegotiating gender relations of power. John, an immigrant himself, works as a refugee counselor in a large high school in downtown Winnipeg. He eloquently describes the dilemmas that some African families he counsels experience:

I see teens today who are alienated from their parents. They are living in two worlds ... Poverty can drive young people from refugee backgrounds to a life of crime. One teen I tried to help was working at a gas station. He was lured by drug dealers to quit his job and start working as a dealer. The African Mafia and Mad Cowz gangs stem, in part, from family problems and a society that negates the source of problems that some refugees have—cultural misunderstandings, poverty, unsafe neighborhoods, and discrimination. Worlds and communities collide and the results can be devastating.

Zaynab, like other mothers, states with worry, “I do not know the school system and I do not know what my son is doing”; Sabah is not happy with her situation and wonders how to cope on her own: “I am here, but my husband’s paper work has been delayed ...”; Mehran is worried and states:

We are witnessing a high rate of divorce and separation in the immigrant communities, especially African ... people break down and cannot take it anymore ... they separate to find a job in another province ... they fight over little resources they have...

The lack of social connectedness and belonging is known to be a primary barrier to well being, and contribute to high levels of stress and feelings of vulnerability (Government of Canada, Health Canada 2003; Galabuzi

2009). These, in turn, can adversely impact learning and participation in educational and workplace contexts (Leong-Kappel and Daley 2004).

## **Racism**

Racism is a daily experience of many participants. Nazanin, a female immigrant, states, “I have to compensate for wearing hijab ... I feel I am not accepted the way I am ... I see this as a form of racism and exclusion.” Zaman, a male refugee, says “I try not to take discrimination personally ... but there are lots of stereotypes about Muslims.” Shirley, a service provider, believes “the darker your skin, the more racism you experience.” Camille expresses the views of many: “I see a lot of racism especially by police ... Aboriginals and people of colour are over-policed. Police is biased towards Aboriginals and black people.” Anan, a refugee, thinks “police takes advantage of newcomers and their lack of the knowledge of the place.” The literature is very clear that stereotyping and racism can be powerful enough to shape the intellectual achievement and academic performance of entire groups of people (Steele 2003). Ghorayshi (2010a, 2010b) documents in detail how these inter-related multiple barriers affect mental and physical health of newcomers.

Earlier on, Patricia Cross (1981) shows that the complex interplay of opportunities and barriers influence an adult’s decision to participate and persist in educational endeavours. Dispositional or psychological, situational, and institutional barriers can interact with one another adding to more challenges and stress. For Cross (1981), educational participation can be viewed as a dynamic interplay of social and psychological factors that include: a) self-esteem; b) attitudes toward education; c) importance of goals and the expectation that educational participation will meet goals; d) life transitions (e.g. a move, job loss, and trauma);

e) opportunities and barriers; and f) information. Cross identified three major categories of barriers that can interfere with learning and participation. These include: dispositional or psychological barriers (e.g. fear, low self-esteem); situational barriers (e.g. financial problems, lack of adequate day care); and institutional barriers (e.g. curriculum, course requirement, location of educational institution, entrance requirements, time tabling). The barriers can interact with one another adding to more challenges and stress. In the context of immigration, research undertaken by Hamilton and Moore (2004) provide further insight into the complex dynamic that opportunities, skills, and barriers play in the process of acculturation. The process of immigration is influenced by a range of pre, trans, and post migration factors.<sup>2</sup>

Kanu's (2009: 117) research with African youth suggests that when psychological stresses associated with migration challenges are "compounded by perceived attitudes of racism from peers and teachers, refugee students' confidence and self-concept are challenged and the stage is set for feelings of rejection, inadequacy, frustration, and dropout."

The teachers and settlement workers interviewed in this study are aware of the barriers that stand in the way of their students' success. Building confidence, the need for more time, mentoring, and the opportunity to demonstrate their own expertise were cited as ways that some of the barriers could be reduced. Sharon, an EAL teacher and counsel-

lor for twenty five years, explains that barriers are often complex and multi-layered that pose numerous challenges requiring resources at different points of intersection. Another counsellor critically adds, "Newcomers have minimal support. Government drops them into our city and then expects everything will fall into place." They all pointed out that the existing settlement services are not capable of responding to the needs of the growing numbers of newcomers.

## **Resilience and Hope**

Despite the setbacks that many of the newcomers in this study experienced in re-establishing their lives in Winnipeg, they have shown courage, optimism, patience, openness to new experiences, and a willingness to help others. In spite of their difficult life, the overwhelming majority of newcomers who participated in this study actively work to improve the conditions for family and friends left behind. In Winnipeg, a large number of participants have taken positive steps to improve their lives and that of others through their community work. They have redirected their energy in positive and proactive ways and have become what Freire (1997) refers to as an "agent of change". For instance, Yvette escaped civil war in her country of birth, is finishing her university degree and hopes to be able to work as a counsellor with newcomers. She is also active in the African community in Winnipeg and has organized events to encourage her community's engagement in Winnipeg. Yvette describes her participation in the

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**2** The age when the individual settles in a new country; gender, culture, and social standing; previous education and qualifications; early childhood experiences; financial resources; knowledge of official languages of the destination country; personality factors such as resiliency; hardiness, and openness to new experience; degree of family separation; extent of trauma; mental health; attitudes toward migration; degree of family reunification; community based factors that include availability of good housing, medical and educational services; presence of ethnic-like community; a lack of information and knowledge about the new community; cultural incongruities in education, religion, parenting styles, and life values; attitude of host country toward immigrants and newcomers; quality of education and courses available; government policies and programs to help newcomers adapt; coordinated interagency support of programs; educational structure and policies; employment opportunities (Hamilton and Moore 2004: 108).

inner city central park market as an attempt to “reclaim” a violent part of the inner city and transform it into a safe and welcoming place. Yvette believes that the freedom that she experienced as a refugee in Winnipeg combined with the new skills and insights that she gained through years of education empowered her to make a difference in her life. Similarly, despite his own personal and financial hardships, David cherishes his freedom and is motivated to help victims of war in his native country. He notes:

When the war was at its peak in 1998 I was a teenager working in the diamond mines I saw horrible things. There was no respect for humanity. Since I have been here ... I saw the respect for humanity in Canada and this has motivated me to help my people back home ... They are victims of the war and their lives changed in a second. They all deserve to have help and have their dignity restored. I would like to help build a health facility for the disabled – similar to ones I have seen in Canada....

David recounts numerous “disorienting dilemmas” that challenged him to think of the world in a different way. His own experience of war, a move to Canada, the realization of the suffering of his people, loneliness and the assistance of his teacher gave him occasions for new insights into life and learning. David’s insights above reflect some of the stages in Mezirow’s (1981) transformative learning theory. Self-examination, exploring new roles, planning a course of action, and acquiring the skills and knowledge for realizing one’s plan requires time, resources, and support. However, it is important to note that transformative learning is not a linear process, but complex

and unique to each person (Taylor 2006). Patricia Cranton writes that:

transformative learning is often incremental than epochal... even the epochal experience is not one of sudden illumination, the light bulb appearing over the person’s head. Even if the precipitating event is abrupt, it seems followed by a process of unfolding, including critical reflection, discourse, and a conscious revision of assumptions. (2006: 71-77)

A successful resettlement agency director, an immigrant herself, draws our attention to her own personal efforts:

My career progression has been that of a teacher in my country of origin to a garment worker in Winnipeg. I progressed because I am a high energy person. Personality, creativity and a desire to take risks play a pivotal role in settlement. I moved from an immigrant counsellor to a facilitator, program designer, coordinator, and now director.

The voices of the participants in this study shed lights on the vital role that courage, faith, and inner strength have played in the acculturation process. However, the resilience that individuals demonstrate is not a permanent guarantee of future resilience (Anderson 2004: 59). Without the proper programs, opportunities to gain confidence, competence, and meaningful employment, resilience can be eroded. Indeed, the first few years of resettlement may have a greater impact on successful adaptation than pre migration experience ( Al-Issa and Tousignant 1997). Knowing this, mentoring, educational, and counselling services built around skills associated with resilience would help improve social and cultural integration.

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## Adult Educators and Counsellors Make Changes within their Limits

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As we have discussed in the section on theory, adult educators play a key role in establishing a positive learning climate that would provide a foundation for transformative learning. The skills and personality traits of teachers as individuals can make a difference in the classroom and in the lives of adult learners (Cranton 2006; Magro 2002; Pratt and Associates 1998; Taylor 2006; Pratt and Associates 1998). The important role that teachers play in learners' lives is stressed by many newcomers in this study. They commented on their teachers' optimism, empathy, and willingness to go "beyond the basics" in linking the curriculum to their own lives. In the words of one learner:

I have learned a lot since being in Canada. I have significantly changed from being pessimistic to being more optimistic and open minded. I am now thinking of Canada as a place of hope and future success whereas before I felt hopeless. My teachers helped me change my thoughts and perceptions about Canada. They were willing to listen to the problems of new immigrants like myself.

The narrative above affirms the critical role of the educator as a mentor and facilitator who is there to help guide, support, and challenge the adult learner as they "risk new territory" and work toward realizing their aspirations (Daloz 1986, 2000).

A number of the teachers explore socio-cultural and political issues through biography, autobiography, non-fiction, poetry, story telling and art. They use texts to encourage discussion, critical thinking, and problem solving. The effectiveness of creative teaching approaches is well documented in the literature on transformative teaching and

learning (Jarvis 2006; Karpiak 2003; Magro 2010; Taylor 2006). For instance, Max uses story telling as a power tool to build intercultural connections. He states, "story telling is very powerful ... when students learnt each others' stories ... they made strong connections." When students got to know each other's stories, culture, and history, he was overjoyed to see "meaningful learning and teaching started to happen."

Consistent with this approach, research in this area shows that the potential of using literary texts as a way to encourage critical reflection and transformative learning , and allows students to " explore the conflicts between their own perspectives on issues such as marriage, immigration, or feminism, and the perspective in the texts they encountered" (Jarvis 2006: 71). In this way, teachers can cross cultural boundaries and gives students opportunities to examine universal themes. Weber further emphasizes that:

the very act of writing invites reflection by both students and teachers, which can take place in journals, letters, poems, speeches, formal essays, or more informal personal essays. Whatever the form used, students should see writing as a means of thinking through changes and dilemmas that they and others face. (2006: 26-27)

Bruce, an inner city teacher, mentor, and anti-poverty activist aims to empower learners. He introduces them to creative writing that will build on their experiences and hidden talents:

As an English teacher, you are in a position to teach skills for living. Writing is an act of seeing. I want my students to articulate their experiences and in the process heal in some way. I want my students to read from a range of writers and historical



periods. Then I believe it is vital for the students to develop their own literature and enter into the literary journey. I guide them through this process.

Another experienced educator uses art to create positive environment and tap into the adult learners' interests, knowledge, and creative abilities:

I try to create a positive environment where they can develop a love for learning and personal creativity ... I ask my students to take poems and short stories and create an art form that expresses the theme or message they take away from the text ... We do not use art enough in teaching English ... The greatest barriers I feel are psychological. I have students who are twenty and feel too old or have low self-esteem. I try to challenge their views and help them see possibilities in life ...

Creative writing gives students the space to think differently and imagine possibilities. A number of educators in this study focus on context specific daily issues to generate critical dialogue in the classroom.

Gillian's approach to teaching is to promote justice and help newcomers to have a better understanding of Canada:

As a teacher you also influence the way your students see Canadian society. I also try to teach anti-racist education through art and poetry. I am teaching my students to look at the human race and not an individual race .... They are amazing, yet their gifts are not always seen or appreciated.

Marika, an EAL teacher with over twenty years of experience, tries to train students for real life situations. She explained:

The new focus on multiple literacies in the workplace is important for our language learners. Our curriculum now has to factor

in document use, computers, interpersonal communication, problem solving, and oral communication. English language learners will now be on a more level playing field with other workers.

One of the teachers addresses the importance of creating curricula that is relevant to adult learners:

Adults who missed out on school desperately want the Canadian experience of education and the opportunity to learn about Canadian culture. Our students want adult themed topics – relationships, family and parenting, psychology, and world issues. You have to be a cultural guide in many ways. Students will quickly become bored if you just focus on workplace or essential skills that do not seem to have a connection with the events they see around them on a daily basis.

Isabelle, an experienced service provider, wants teachers to have flexible and evolving programs that prepare learners for real life responsibilities:

The framework of settlement and employment programs has to be ever evolving. You have to know what it is you are aiming for. The reality is that jobs are demanding and require multiple skill sets in multiple areas. I continually reflect on my own work and see ways that I can improve. I try to provide our clients with a simulated work environment. They are learning about accountability, conflict resolution, responsibility, and interpersonal communities ... Over the years, I have made personal contacts with many people in the professions—I try to help people make these connections with their skill and interest areas.

Many theorists highlight the value of designing a curriculum that is flexible, creative, and reflective of the diverse groups of learners

(Carey-Webb 2001; Christensen 2000; Edelsky 1999). From the lens of transformative learning theory, the participants' voices in this study suggest that the educator share more similarities with an effective counsellor and mentor (Brookfield 2000; Cranton 2006; Daloz 1986,

2000; King 2005; Magro 2002). As a co-learner, challenger, and advocate, these teachers are able to draw upon their students' talents by providing them with authentic and experiential learning opportunities.

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## Working Towards Transformative Teaching/Learning

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The educators and service providers in this study are aware of the complexities and the changing nature of their occupations. They acknowledged that, over the years, their roles and responsibilities had increased and become more complex. They emphasized the need for further opportunities to expand their knowledge. The literature suggests that professional workshops and specialized courses should be provided for educators who wish to learn more about transformative teaching/learning methods that are helpful in fostering dialogue, critical reflection and personal change (Robertson 1996). Taylor cautions that:

transformative learning is much more than implementing a series of instructional strategies (e.g. small group activities, experiential learning); it involves an acute awareness of student attitudes, personalities, and preference over time, and as signs of change and instability begin to emerge, educators can respond accordingly. (2000: 187)

Like the inner city of Winnipeg, the growing diversity in the adult education centres are posing possibilities and challenges. Both service providers and teachers commented on the importance of intercultural understanding: “Canadians understand so little about other cultures ... they need to be educated.” Intercultural competence is an adaptive capacity that enables an individual to move beyond the parameters of one culture to integrating, understanding, and appreciating the qualities of multiple cultures and contexts (Bennett 2007). Edward Taylor (1994: 156-57) describes intercultural competence as “a transformative process whereby the individual develops an adaptive capacity, altering his or her perspective to effectively understand and accommodate to the demands of the host culture; he or she is able to actively negotiate purpose and

meaning.” However, intercultural competence should not be viewed as a one way process of newcomers “fitting” into the dominant culture of the host country. Both newcomers and the host country have to be educated and learn to develop an adaptive capacity (Ghorayshi 2010b). Marta, a refugee counsellor, believes that through intercultural learning and connections “we can break down barriers like racism that is based on ignorance and lack of knowledge.”

The teachers emphasized that over the years more effective needs assessment and language programs have been developed. However, some of the experienced teachers and service providers acknowledge the fact that existing programs and services are not sufficient and have some shortcomings.

Barb, the director of a large EAL centre, explains the unique needs of adult learners and complexities that face adult educators:

Adult students are more restless and there is a sense of impatience if things do not work out right away. They need more access to personal and career counselling and the teachers here need more resources in terms of literacy support. There is also the need for the larger community in Winnipeg to understand the English language learner and their socio-cultural needs better ... As a teacher you have to have many skills. Some days you are doing more counselling and advocacy work, trying to help a student sponsor a family member to immigrate or find a job.

Max, who applies a holistic and transformative approach to his teaching states, “There are pockets of changes in the system because of the efforts of individual teachers, but the structure has not undergone meaningful changes.” Like teachers, service providers

appreciated positive changes and improvements in both the quality and quantities of services that are available for newcomers.

Overall, newcomer learners, as we saw in the previous sections, cherished the good teachers that they had, and how their education empowered them to enjoy their freedom in their adopted country. However, they also talked about the possibilities that are left unfulfilled. They were concerned about underrepresentation of diverse ethnic backgrounds among adult educators. In addition, they emphasized the need for more daycares and flexible course scheduling. The adult learners in this study were also aware that the issues that they raise cannot be addressed by the adult educational system alone; the intervention and cooperation of various levels of governance are needed.

Learners stressed the positive impact of being exposed to educators from diverse backgrounds. Many questioned the lack of representation of various ethnic groups among teachers. A number of them attributed their academic and personal achievements to having teachers who shared their ethnicity or race. In the words of Zaman, a young male refugee: "For me, it made a difference having a teacher from my part of the world. I felt, I could relate to him and he understood my background. He became my mentor." This view is expressed in the literature on teaching and cultural diversity (Dei 2004; Irvine 1999). Having a diverse teaching staff also comes with a diverse body of knowledge in the school system. Learners must be exposed to complexity and diversity of thought. There is a need for a multi-centric education and knowledge production.

Learners asked for better opportunities to pursue their education at the university level. A refugee participant in his early thirties states:

Education is like our parent. I wish I could

tell them (the Canadian government) that your help is not yet finished. I think: 'You bring me to Canada, and you have thrown me here and now you say, help yourself now. I say no, not yet. I need a house to live in. I can go to high school for free, but university is not free.'

Newcomers, especially refugees, spoke of the financial debt created when education is pursued. They identified a need for strengthening the links between different educational programs in order to facilitate their access to higher levels of education. They wanted to tell the decision makers at all levels that building competence and confidence are not easy when surviving in an unfamiliar culture takes precedence over one's motivation to become well educated.

Many learners are concerned that they do not have an adequate knowledge of English. In the words of one of the learners, "Some in my community still do not know how to speak English. I also need to continue my English studies to be able to get a better employment and become more engaged in various levels of life in Winnipeg." They mentioned that they needed more time and tutoring to master the language.

Women talked about the clashes between their multiple tasks as mother/ wife/ caregiver, what is expected of them and their desire to gain education and equal rights. Lack of childcare and gender inequality is cited as major impediments to their education. One of the learners clearly expresses women's dilemma:

When you are a woman ... life is more difficult .... Some of my friends ... have stayed inside most of the time, having more children and raising them. Daycare is not easily available and they do not have help .... These women are also afraid of their husbands. Some men become more

controlling when they are in Canada .... They are afraid that women will leave and become independent, so they put more pressure on them. There is a problem in my community with domestic abuse, alcoholism, and gambling .... This has caused many problems. These women need help.

A young single mother expresses her frustration:

I want to learn English, find a good job, and become independent ... I do not know anyone here and I have a one-year old daughter. I work part-time in a bakery shop ... I wished my school and my workplace had a place for my kid ... I have been here for two years, have taken language courses off and on ... I am stuck ... I know I need to get education...

Women suggested that the specialized needs of women need to be addressed more carefully through cross-cultural counselling services, parenting classes, a shelter and safe haven for women who may be threatened or abused, and flexible childcare services so that women who wish to continue their education have the opportunity to do so. Ron, a male learner, is concerned about gender inequality within his community and firmly believes that teaching gender equality should be a required component for the newcomer adults, men and women. He states, "We, especially men, need to learn about gender equality .... Equality between men and women is misunderstood .... Education and curriculum content can address this question."

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## Concluding Remarks

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Education is highly valued and is viewed as necessary in fulfilling personal and vocational goals by the adult refugees and immigrants interviewed for this study. However, the newcomers' narratives provide compelling evidence that there are a number of inter-related individual and structural barriers that impede learning and the process of acculturation. Educational systems do not function in isolation and are affected by the complex barriers that were identified by the participants in this study. Recognizing this, educational programs will need more resources and community connections if they are to be more proactive rather than reactive in responding to the needs of newcomer learners. As Shibao Guo writes:

It is morally and economically urgent for government organizations, professional associations, educational institutions, and prior learning assessment agencies to dismantle barriers and adopt an inclusive framework that fully embraces all human knowledge and experiences, no matter which ethnic and cultural backgrounds they emerge from. Otherwise, immigrants will be further alienated from becoming fully fledged and productive citizens of the receiving societies, regardless of the particularities of their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. (2007: 49)

For so many adult newcomers, adult learning centres continue to be a hub to attain needed skills and educational pre-requisites to gain entrance into professional and technical vocational programs. Working toward transformative educational change, as outlined in this study, requires a careful assessment of the needs of the adult learner, an ongoing dialogue with adult learners that would help them realize their aspirations and goals, and a dynamic educational system that prepares teachers to work with culturally diverse

students. Adult education centres could become more flexible by offering a greater variety of courses and programs that would enable the adult learner to work while completing their secondary education. A greater number of career counsellors would provide the adult learner with needed information about educational requirements, scholarships, and post-secondary programs. Greater collaboration between individuals, families, community groups, neighbourhoods, workplaces, and government services could increase educational participation and the successful transition of newcomers to the workplace. Access to financial resources and opportunities for newcomers to apply their academic skills and prior experiences in appropriate professions and trades are critical. Moreover, the needs of newcomers vary and must be assessed on a case by case basis. Workshops and specialized courses for pre and in-service teachers can help create greater awareness of the social and psychological dynamics of adult learning. This study shows that a transformative approach to educational change involves creativity, challenge, and an ongoing dialogue among all stakeholders. Longitudinal studies are needed to explore the emotional, social, and cultural adjustment of newcomers to Canadian society.

This report highlights the key components of transformative learning theory and its emphasis on providing a safe, culturally inclusive, and open learning environment. The current educational system requires teachers to be accountable for students' learning in terms of standardized tests and a narrow curriculum outline with predetermined learning goals and objectives. The teacher is viewed more as an expert, manager, and evaluation specialist rather than a facilitator, mentor, challenger, and co-learner. Storytelling, dance, music, personal narratives, and artistic representa-

tions can provide adult learners with imaginative ways of expressing thought and emotion. A number of the educators in this study who integrated transformative learning themes encouraged creative and artistic expression; they valued experiential and authentic forms of learning that would help their students see the connection between the content that they are learning in courses and the way it can be applied to their lives and the workplace. Many recognized the qualities of the “intercultural person” —empathy, openness to and appreciation for diverse cultures, a tolerance for ambiguity, and effective listening skills. They emphasized anti-racist education, knowledge of Canadian society, and the importance of connecting learners to their skills and interest areas. While not directly describing themselves as “transformative educators”, the teaching perspectives, approach to assessment, and views of learning reflected, in essence, key aspects of transformative learning theory highlighted in this study.

The ethical responsibilities associated with transformative learning must be explored further. As theorists like Cranton (2006), Robertson (1996), and Taylor (2006) emphasize, not all educators have the interest and or interpersonal skill in fostering a “deeper level” learning that encourages critical reflection and a change in psychological perspective. Further

research is needed to explore the meaning of an authentic practice, the essential aspects of a transformative classroom environment, and how texts can be used as a tool for transformation (Cranton 2006: 95).

The Manitoba government seems to be aware of the critical issues that face adult education and over the years has taken steps to address some of the problems. School divisions, technical colleges, adult learning centres, and universities are taking initiatives to develop assessment protocol and curricula that are culturally sensitive and that meet a greater range of literacy needs among adult learners (Appendix I). The educators that we have interviewed acknowledged substantial positive changes in many areas. However, a number of them believe that educational institutions as a whole are not flexible and have not faced the challenges of the growing number of newcomers to Winnipeg with the necessary resources. Yatta Kanu (2009: 117) asserts, “many teachers’ curricula, instructional assessment, and interaction patterns were not being adapted to this changing population.” The growing number of immigrants and refugees in Manitoba will continue to impact educational systems. Finally, this study sheds light on the complexities of acculturation and the specific ways adult education can help better meet the needs of newcomers.

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## Appendix 1: Promising Practices

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This research stresses the importance of what we have termed as holistic and transformative approach. In what follows we look at a number of promising programs that have been able to address some of the complex barriers that face learners and educators in at individual and structural levels. The common theme in many of these promising practices of is individualized attention and prevention of drop out by addressing barriers before they threaten the individual's ability to succeed academically. Too often, though, these innovative programs are "islands of transformative change"; a greater effort is needed to ensure that more educational institutions and individual teachers are maximizing adult learners' potential.

**1. Career Trek and programs like Pathways to Education** that have adopted a holistic approach and have been successful in helping adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds succeed academically and vocationally, could be applied to adult learning contexts. Consistent with this holistic focus, the Pathways to Education program provides help in the following areas:

**Academic Support:** Students have access to regular tutoring in core academic subjects. The tutoring takes place in the community and is individualized to meet the needs of the student.

**Social Support:** The students participate in a mentoring program aimed at helping individuals identify and clarify their personal, academic, and career goals.

**Advocacy and Counselling:** Each student has access to support workers and counsellors that help students address issues and problems that may arise. The support worker also meets with the student biweekly to discuss their progress.

**Financial Support:** Every year that students participate in the Pathways to Education program, money is placed in a scholarship fund for their post-secondary education (\$1,000). Pathways also provide other funds to reduce day-to-day financial barriers (e.g. cost of transportation, money for food, etc.).

For adult learners, more guidance is needed in terms of parenting classes, language support, financial management, help in dealing with trauma or stress, and courses that can help adult learners cope with life transitions (e.g. divorce, a career change, moving, etc.).

Both Career Trek and Pathways to Education highlight the value of authentic learning, apprenticeship programs, and mentoring as effective ways for individuals to learn more about the skills that are needed to enter different careers and vocational pathways. In particular, adult refugees and immigrants who are unaware of the diverse careers options that may be open to them would benefit from specialized internships and apprenticeships in professional and technical occupational contexts. These valuable learning experiences would provide an opportunity for adult learners to assess the skills they have or the skills that they would need to embark on a course of study and a specific occupation.

Educational documents like *Building Hope: Appropriate Programming for Adolescent and Young Adult Newcomers of War-Affected Backgrounds in Manitoba Schools* (MacKay and Tavares 2005) provides valuable information for teachers working with learners whose lives have been interrupted by conflict and war. A number of the colleges and adult learning centres in Winnipeg have developed innovative mentoring and apprenticeship programs that open up new career possibilities for individuals.



**2. The Met School.** After gaining community support and funding, the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (known informally as 'the Met') in Providence, Rhode Island, developed a personalized curriculum based upon the students' interests and learning through internship. Short and long term goals are identified and students have an opportunity to reflect on their work and learning. In the Met school, each student is part of a small 12-16 person advisory group. Community service, collaborative learning, and self-directed learning are emphasized. The teacher-advisor works together with the student on planning school and work activities. Self-direction, career exploration, experiential learning, and reflective dialogue are core aspects of the Met program. The link between academic and work related contexts is highlighted and the internships provide the adults with valuable learning experiences that enable them to reflect upon the merits and limits of a particular vocation.

The Seven Oaks School Division has been piloting a new Met School within Garden City Collegiate. It has at its base experiential and authentic learning to enhance motivation and

participation. The inclusive educational philosophy of the Met school also attempts to help students understand and appreciate cultural, religious, ethnic, and gender differences.

**3. Red River College of the Applied Arts and Sciences** in Winnipeg has an effective mentoring program specifically aimed at helping adults from different cultural backgrounds succeed in various professions like Nursing, Social Work, and Engineering. Adult students are paired with mentor professionals from similar cultural backgrounds. Mentors provide mentees with valuable social and employment networks. In addition, they provide a common ground for adult learners to discuss the challenges they may be facing.

**4. The Louis Riel School Division** has a comprehensive program aimed at helping newcomer families make a transition to Canadian society. Daycare is offered to single parents who need to develop their English language skills in the day and their approach to assessment involves personal, academic, and career counselling. Their adult learning centre offers a range of academic programs for adults needing to complete their secondary education.

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## Appendix II: Recommendations

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1. Adopt a holistic, transformative, model of adult literacy education that provides individuals with a strong foundation for becoming an engaged citizen at all levels of Canadian society.
2. Improve cultural diversity and representation in curricula, hiring, and evaluation to reduce systemic barriers of racism and discrimination.
3. Educational programs should tap into the rich reservoir of newcomers' knowledge and experiences.
4. Develop positive and culturally appropriate alliances between schools and families that include programs for parents to participate in school events to foster cultural awareness and inclusion.
5. Educational institutions and service providers need to be more aware of the way poverty, poor housing, under or unemployment, racism, etc. impede learning and negatively impacts learners' mental and physical health.
6. The schools and adult learning centres should have specific contact information for adults regarding counselling, mentoring, and employment information.
7. Improve resources for adults with more specialized learning needs or disabilities. This would help these individuals from feeling isolated and marginalized.
8. Provide internships and apprenticeships for newcomers to explore different careers and vocations and understand the specific skill sets various professions require. Flexible time-tabling and financial help would also ease the stress for many newcomers without financial resources.
9. Assess learner needs and interests in different areas—academic, linguistic, socio-cultural, career, etc. Help learners find the information necessary to realize their goals.
10. Create a climate conducive to adult learning—an environment that balances structure and creativity and that gives adults an opportunity to feel valued and included. Build on the learners' strengths and prior experience; give students the opportunity to share their own expertise.
11. Provide “safe places” within school or college where learners can go if they find classes overwhelming.
12. Provide opportunities for adult learners to set short and long term goals; provide information for adult learners to explore a variety of educational and career alternatives.
13. Provide daycare facilities for women so that they can pursue their education.
14. Provide ongoing professional development workshops for all educators with an opportunity to learn more about the background of diverse immigrant and refugee groups to break down stereotypes and discrimination.
15. Provide opportunities for educators to learn more about the dynamics of transformative learning and specific strategies designed to foster transformative learning.
16. Increase educators' skills for working with adults who may have been traumatized by events in their lives. Increase educators' knowledge of the nature of forced migration and its influence on refugees.
17. Provide opportunities for more community based, intercultural learning/education that involves all citizens, including newcomers, to help develop intercultural understanding and cooperation. This can help in building bridges

between various groups and reducing intercultural tensions and conflicts.

18. Assessment of counselling needs should be inclusive and culturally specific so that symptoms are not misdiagnosed or unrecognized. Acknowledgment of pre- migration and post-migration factors are important. School-based, family, social and individual therapeutic interventions need to be interconnected to ensure that individuals begin to feel a sense of trust and belonging.

19. Establish better coordination and collaboration between different sectors that work with newcomers. This would help improve the chances of success for newcomer adults and families.

20. Waive the federal government loans for refugee resettlement and help reduce economic hardship.

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