

**A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO REFUGEE STUDENTS'
HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCES**

A Thesis Submitted to the College of
Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Education
in the Department of Curriculum Studies
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

By

Arlene J. Fedorchuk

© Copyright Arlene J. Fedorchuk, December 2008. All rights reserved.

PERMISSION TO USE

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

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

Head of the Department of Curriculum Studies

University of Saskatchewan

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 0X1

DEDICATION

In honour of my parents

Sarah and Karl Seemann

and

In memory of

Aunt Betty

who touched many lives

through her benevolent spirit

and selfless work.

ABSTRACT

The increasing numbers of refugee students in our schools present under-prepared and under-resourced schools with particular challenges because of the students' diverse cultural and educational backgrounds, language acquisition processes, and ways of knowing and learning. Refugee students' stories are unique in their texture and context compared to other stories, with their themes of oppressive governments, war trauma, loss of home and family, loss of cultural identity, and diaspora. These narratives shape the stories they live by (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999, p. 4). According to Clandinin & Connelly's (2000) notion of "four directions" (p. 50) when researching experiences, this narrative inquiry involved looking inward and outward, and backward and forward into students' lived experiences. Listening to the refugee students' narratives of their past lives, their present experiences in high school and in the community, as well as their hopes for the future provides educators, administrators and policy makers with a clearer picture of their complex lives. The students' narratives in this research give educators an opportunity to reflect on the ways we inspire and give hope to refugee students in our classrooms.

As the researcher, I have interwoven my personal experiences with war as a daughter and a mother along with my "personal practical knowledge" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 3) as the students' EAL (English as Additional Language) teacher together with the students' narratives. The goal of this study is to provide participants with an opportunity to have their voices heard and attended to, especially in light of current teaching practices and proposed school transformation in their high school. This narrative inquiry identifies ways in which refugee students exist on the borderlands in

high school and areas in schools that require attention. At the same time, it contributes an understanding of what needs to change to provide responsive educational practices in high school.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am thankful for the support and assistance from many others who walked with me on this journey. Without your guidance and care I could not have accomplished what I set out to do. I would like to acknowledge and express my heartfelt appreciation to:

***Jima, Bareshna, and Francis** – for taking my hand, walking me through your lives, courageously sharing your stories, and telling the importance of listening closely and seeing carefully. You inspire and humble me.*

***Dr. Debbie Pushor** – for being my thesis supervisor and kindred spirit, accompanying me every step of the way, and sharing tears and laughter. Your expertise, insight, and sensitivity enriched my learning process. You're simply the best!*

***Dr. Yi Li** – for being my external examiner, creating a comfortable atmosphere at my defense, and for your close reading of and thoughtful response to my work.*

***Dr. Angela Ward and Dr. Shaun Murphy** – for being committee members and posing those tough questions at the beginning that made me think about directions and pathways I might never have explored.*

***Dr. Janet McVittie** – for being there at the beginning when I took my very first step into graduate studies and at the end when I finally arrived.*

***Saskatoon Public Schools** – for giving me the incredible gift of time to devote to this work.*

***Mom and Dad** – for always taking the road less traveled, instilling in me a passion for lifelong learning, and believing in me.*

***Maurice and Iva** – for your unwavering thoughtfulness and generosity, and always putting family first.*

***Jessica** – for being stronger than I ever could be.*

***Mark** – for helping me to see the importance of crossing borders.*

***Steven** – for embracing the prairie winds and landscapes and dreaming big.*

***Andrea** – for your beautiful, caring spirit, still joining me in our story time, and being such a good listener.*

***Rick** – for being my soul mate, never cutting corners, encouraging me to walk ahead ... and for loving me extravagantly!*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Permission to Use	i
Dedication	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi

CHAPTER ONE

My Train of Thought	1
Spaces of Difference.....	6
People Who Don't Know How It Is.....	10
I Want a Bed	14
My Only Teacher	18
Walking Alone.....	25
Braided Lives.....	26
Braided Life Stories: Weaving the Research Puzzle	27
Getting Our House in Order: Justification.....	33
Setting the Course: Research Design.....	36
Gathering Stories: Field Text.....	37
Embarking on the Narrative Journey: Methodology	39
Walking Forward	41

CHAPTER TWO

The Participants – In Their Voice.....	44
Jima's Story – In Her Voice.....	48
Bareshna's Story – In Her Voice	53
Francis' Story – In His Voice	58
Researcher as a Father's Daughter.....	62
Researcher as the Mother of a Soldier	67
Researcher as a Teacher.....	75
Researcher as a Researcher.....	78

CHAPTER THREE

Tensions in the Narrative Inquiry Process.....	85
Creating a Framework for the Research Text.....	87
Creating a Form for the Research Text.....	87
A Casual Conversation with Students About School Experiences.....	89
Intersections Between Past and Present Lives	114
Imbalances Among the Common Places	116
Jima: Life in a Chrysalis	117
Bareshna: A Beacon for Hope	121
Francis: Blending In.....	124
Researcher: On the Front Lines	127

CHAPTER FOUR

What it Means to be a Soldier	130
Communications Squadron	131
Communication Agents in School	131
Cracking the Code.....	134
Language Barriers	137
Border Protectors	140
Border Crossers.....	141
Borderlands in High School.....	142
Safe and Unsafe Places	143
Discovering Travelers and Journeyers on the High School Landscape.....	145
Travelers on the High School Landscape	148
Jima	149
Bareshna.....	149
Francis.....	151
Journeyers on the High School Landscape	152
Teachers as Border Crossers.....	153
Seeing With Different Kinds of Vision	153
Re-envisioning Classrooms	154
Seeing Jima With Culture Vision	155
Seeing Bareshna With Culture Vision	155
Seeing Francis With Culture Vision	156

CHAPTER FIVE

Educators as Keepers of the Winds	158
Walking Toward School Transformation	159
Future Paths to Explore.....	160
Importance of Listening.....	161
Researcher Walking Through the Narrative Inquiry	161
Walking With Students Through the Narrative Inquiry	162
Standing at the Fork in the Road.....	163
Parting Voices	165
Researcher.....	165
Jima	166
Bareshna.....	166
Francis.....	166

REFERENCES.....	167
------------------------	------------

CHAPTER ONE

Make a Whistle From My Throat

~ Anonymous, 2005 ~

*I do not know
what will happen after I die.
I do not want to know.
But I would like the Potter to make a whistle
from the clay of my throat.
May this whistle fall into the hands
of a cheeky and naughty child
and the child to blow hard on the whistle continuously
with the suppressed and silent air of his lungs
and disrupt the sleep
of those who seem dead
to my cries.*

My Train of Thought

Once again I am sitting at my computer struggling with how to begin writing the research text of this narrative inquiry into refugee students' experiences in the high school where I am their English as an Additional Language (EAL) teacher. I am having difficulty starting because these students are very near and dear to me, and I want to make sure my words do their experiences justice. I feel pressure from self-imposed deadlines, managing my roles of wife, mother, and teacher, and from lack of sleep with our move into this new house. Out of desperation and frustration at my inability to begin, I put on my sunglasses and walking shoes and head toward the berm that runs along the railroad tracks behind my house. As the dry prairie wind whirls around my head it eventually whips away my scrambled thoughts, and I can begin, finally, to unravel what I want to say. My thoughts are clearer as I walk alone, away from the distractions in my house: the perpetual dust on the hardwood floor, the kitchen scattered with breakfast dishes and coffee cups, the water marks on the bathroom mirror, the stacks of research

books surrounding my work space lined neatly in rows like soldiers awaiting inspection. The question is how do I capture those thoughts and words blowing in the wind? How do I collect them before they are wafted away, clutch them in my fists long enough to carry them home and give them up to my computer?

I am walking face into a wind so strong it blows sandy soil in my eyes and blocks out the sounds in my periphery. I feel the train as a rumble in my chest before I actually hear it, and even though the engine is coming up right beside me, I cannot hear it until I turn my head away from the wind. The noise from the train as it rattles alongside me interferes with my chain of thoughts, and my mind begins to flit back and forth through the childhood memories it evokes. My immigrant father lived through WWII in Nazi Germany. When he first arrived in Canada as a young man, he worked in the eastern provinces as a lumberjack, later getting work with the Canadian National Railway. It was his job on a train that brought him West where he put down roots. I do not recall my father sharing stories of his experiences during the war when I was a little girl. Those stories came out only after he was a grandfather. But, I learned about the atrocities of that war in school as I perused the grainy photos of emaciated men, gaunt women, and wasted children. However, it was not until my own son went to war in Afghanistan with the Canadian Armed Forces in 2007 that I understood completely that the “real essence of war is terror” (St. Thomas & Johnson, 2001, p. 33). Now my refugee students’ voices begin echoing through my mind, and images of their earnest faces roll on through as the train reaches a crossing and startles me as it whistles a lament. I recall my siblings and me riding in our station wagon on family trips, entertaining ourselves by counting the train cars as we sped past. I try this now, but I lose count at seven, distracted by the spray

painted graffiti and the various foreign brand names on the train cars as they chug along ahead of me. I think how connected we are in this world through words, like the words on the train cars being carried away to complete part of a journey that winds around the globe. My thoughts travel back to my refugee students' powerful stories and the tremendous impression they have left on me, and I feel certain about the power in words.

Reaching the end of the berm, I stop in my tracks, pivot on my heel and retrace my steps homeward, relieved to have the tension of the wind at my back now. I fill my lungs with air and am conscious of how energized I feel when I walk. Then, my thoughts of how to start my writing overwhelm me once again. I begin to admonish myself then think about what my thesis supervisor, Debbie Pushor, would say to me now. It is as if she is walking beside me, and I can hear her encouraging voice, "*Your writing should answer: So what? What is important about your research puzzle? And, think about how your writing informs others.*" So, I collect my thoughts and think about what *is* important about my work. Refugee students' stories are unique in their texture and context, compared to other stories, with their themes of political oppression, war trauma, diaspora, and loss of family, home and identity. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (2007-08) clarifies that "migrants ... *choose* to move in order to improve the future prospects of themselves and their families. Refugees *have* to move if they are to save their lives or preserve their freedom" (p. 7). I wanted to explore how refugee students' past and present experiences intersect and how they position the students on the high school landscape in their city of refuge. I believe it is important for teachers to get to know all of the students in their classes, yet refugee students' voices are often suppressed, seldom represented, and rarely taken seriously, and I wondered why. The EAL classroom

is a refuge of sorts on the high school landscape for students. In this inviting, relaxed environment, students often shared their stories with me, stories about their past lives, but also stories about their hopes and dreams for the future. They also shared with me the immense challenges they faced in school, but they seldom shared these experiences with their subject area teachers because often the teachers' expectations of them were the source of their stress. Nader (2008) points out that sometimes students "are able to 'hold it together' in the classroom so that difficulties are not obvious" (p. 322). This might explain why certain teachers are neither aware of the barriers these students face nor the critical role they play in the students' success. I knew the issues were deeper and more complex than this; I also knew I needed the students' voices to articulate them.

Bringing forward these silenced voices challenges us as educators to know the students in our classrooms in meaningful ways and to ensure our educational practices address all students' needs. It is critical to invite refugee students' narratives because "voice reveals the deeper meanings and perspectives of individuals and reflects learners' personal realities" (Dahl, 1995, p. 124). It is the insights we educators gain about them as individuals from listening to their stories that can lead us to develop more thoughtful and responsive teaching practices, "expand and enrich our sense of what it means to teach" (Dahl, p. 130), and enrich their lives as students and as citizens in our community. Bateson (1994) writes that "*insight* ... refers to that depth of understanding that comes by setting experiences, yours and mine, familiar and exotic, new and old, side by side, learning by letting them speak to one another (p. 14). Therefore, it was important for me as the researcher to walk alongside my students throughout this narrative journey and lay my personal experiences next to theirs.

The wind has suddenly shifted, indiscriminately stirring up all around me now, and I just want to get home. Something must have aggravated Aeolus, the Keeper of the Winds, to blast his fury in all directions at the same time. This wind makes me think about Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) term "four directions" (p. 50) they use when referring to how carrying out research into an experience is to experience it simultaneously in four ways. This narrative inquiry I embarked on with my refugee students was to be such a journey that brought us to look in four directions: *inward* at "internal conditions such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions," and *outward* at "existential conditions, that is, the environment" (p. 50). Like the unpredictable prairie wind, our journey took sudden twists and turns and changes of direction, transporting us *backward* and *forward* in time, place, and space, as we addressed "temporal issues by looking not only to the event but to its past and to its future" (p. 50). Consequently, hearing the students' stories of their lives in war affected countries played an integral part in understanding how they describe their present experiences and how they perceive their futures. I believe this because I know how war changes everything.

As I round the corner on the block to my house, there is a sudden quiet as I am out of the wind now and my steps become lighter. The recitations in my mind dissolve and drift away like the particles of dust in my hair and on my shoes that dance up into the breeze and trip behind me with every step. I concentrate to contain my thoughts then I realize the problem is not about what *I* will say. The problem is not even giving the refugee students a voice because their words captured on paper are powerful. The problem will be getting others to stop, turn away from wind, and listen, really listen.

“As I sit here I wonder if you, my teacher, are able to tell when I am sinking in spirit and ready to quit this incredible task. I walked a thousand miles, dear teacher, before I met you” (EAL/ESD Student, 2005, p. 4).

Spaces of Difference

As I unlock my front door and step over the threshold, I pause for a moment, listening to the quiet emptiness. Even though we just moved into this new house a few weeks ago, signs of us settling into this different space are evident. I am greeted by clutter as I pan across the living room and think of all the chores I could be doing on this Saturday morning. I decide to avoid them by making a cup of coffee. But, once in the kitchen I get lost in my train of thought as I begin clearing away dishes and wiping counters as the microwave hums beside me. That is when I realize I am not alone and that my students’ voices have trailed back into the house with me. I think how my career working with immigrant and refugee students has evolved from that of English language facilitator and advocate to include nurse, confidante, mother figure, social worker, counselor, job coach, birth coach, and much more. The transformation in my role did not happen suddenly; rather it occurred gradually over the years in an attempt to meet the needs of our ever-increasing refugee student population.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (2007-08) states the world refugee population has increased from 8.7 million to 9.9 million or +14% with Canada resettling the third largest refugee population of 10,700 persons. All indicators show that this number will continue to grow (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2007). Other disturbing trends reveal that refugees today have been in exile for an average of 17 years (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2007). Moreover, our rapidly increasing refugee population is putting pressure on our unprepared education system as it is apparent that

our schools do not have the physical, educational, and organizational structures in place to meet the needs of these students who represent unique challenges to high school educators around the country in terms of their English language acquisition, academic achievement, assessment, and acculturation issues. Acculturation refers to broadening one's competencies to line up with the cultural expectations of the host country through productively incorporating cultural differences. "Deficiencies in attaining acculturation competence have an adverse effect on school achievement in general or on achievement in specific subject areas" (Adams & Kirova, 2006, p. 14).

I first felt the tension around physical space when I transferred to my current high school several years ago. Making the transition into a new building was harder than I anticipated, especially when I saw the room I was to take over. I was dismayed to find the space almost unusable for the 22 EAL students in the program. It was formerly a computer classroom, so instead of tables and chairs or desks, it contained long stretches of fixed computer stations that did not allow the students adequate work space, me to sit beside them, or for us to sit together as a group. The room had only one old computer, which ironically had been donated by a former EAL student. As I threw out unusable remnants left by my predecessor, I planned out how to redesign the classroom space. I met with the principal, talked to the students about their visions for the space, and had electrical and computer technicians assess the requirements to reconfigure the room. In the end, I was told it would be too expensive to make the changes and that nothing could be done. I did not even have the choice of moving to another classroom because the school was at full capacity.

The students were curious about why I wanted to make the space different and began questioning me after overhearing my frustrations at the principal's remarks. It was the voice of Abeni¹, an 18 year old refugee student, who stopped me short when she asked why I was bothering to change the classroom anyway. This young woman was cautious and untrusting of strangers after suffering the chaos of civil war in her homeland. It took months for her to even acknowledge my presence as the new teacher, and then it was only to say she was going to quit school because she needed to help support her family. I felt I was slowly gaining her trust, but she was still very suspicious of my motives and remained pleasant but aloof with me. When I explained I thought students could learn better in a more comfortable work space, she retorted that they were *only* EAL students. They were not like the *other* students. They did not expect anything more, and that what we had was good enough for them. I recall pausing to choose my words carefully before replying that it was precisely *because* they were EAL students that they needed an improved working space. After all, I thought to myself, many of these students had lost family members, homes, and every meaningful possession; they had experienced life in refugee camps so dangerous aid agencies hesitated to visit, and they continued to lead marginalized lives in this city despite its booming economy. Did not they, of all people, deserve the best space we could provide?

The following year a change in principalship resulted in my requested renovations being carried out. I could feel the change in the students as they tried out the new classroom when they returned in the fall, and I was sorry Abeni was not there to

¹To protect the anonymity and confidentiality of students, pseudonyms have been given to the characters in these composite biographies. Events, stories, and personal information attached to these individuals have been created from actual events to give a sense of the broad range of experiences and challenges refugee students encounter on a daily basis. Actual names have been used for my family members.

experience it with us. We experimented with different ways to use the space, finally agreeing on a combination of tables in pods and singles. After successfully lobbying to replace the one and only computer in the classroom with a fleet of used, but in working condition computers, the students began feeling the difference in the space. Now they had a place where they could study comfortably, use computers, access up-to-date resources, play table games, or simply regroup from the hustle and bustle of the hallways. I took pictures of each student, and they wrote a short biography about themselves underneath. Other students and teachers still pop in just to read these stories on my walls or to marvel at the forms of the word *welcome* on our bulletin board written in dozens of languages.

Raheem, a 21 year old student, surveyed the classroom transformation with interest. He had begun high school the previous year with a grade three education from his home country and no English skills. It took him a long time to feel comfortable in high school, and he was slow in acquiring English language because of his hearing deficit. He shared with me he had spent the first semester worrying I would beat him because of his difficulties with English language. You see when he was seven years old, his teacher in his country beat him about his head and ears as he stumbled on words he was learning to read. This assault caused profound hearing loss in his right ear. As he gradually began to feel comfortable in the school and community, he told me he felt that Canada and the school had open doors of opportunity for him. Now he tells me, “I so sad, I no school 22” (personal communication, September 2006). Now that he is finally settled and making progress in high school because he is turning 22 years old he must discontinue, according to our provincial education policy. This day, though, Raheem invited his Canadian born friend into the classroom, an event that seldom occurred. As

the students snacked on leftovers from our lunch time potluck, the friend commented on what a cool classroom we had and he wished *he* could take EAL! I realized that together the students and I had created a “*space of difference*,” a space “in which hope is nourished in spite of impoverished material circumstances” (Fine, Weis, Centrie & Roberts, 2000, pp. 131 & 133). This space offered “recuperation” and a sense of “home, one that is safer and more nurturing than the ones they come from or the ones in which they grew up or currently live” (p. 132). Those days seem far away now because less than four years later our EAL student population has more than tripled, and my once cozy space is bursting at the seams with students representing 28 countries and 84 native languages.

People Who Don't Know How It Is

Caught up in my thoughts, I forget my coffee cup and begin moving automatically around the house collecting laundry in baskets and loading the washing machine in the basement. I survey the stacks of unpacked boxes and extra furniture. Between work, family and graduate studies, I have not had time to completely unpack. Not knowing where to start anyway, I take a package of frozen meat out of the freezer and head upstairs where I see my coffee getting cold. I am not ready to face my computer yet, so I pick up my coffee cup, turn on the television and start to surf the channels mindlessly. I see an advertisement for a book to commemorate fallen Canadian soldiers in honour of upcoming Remembrance Day. Since our son, Mark, participated in the war in Afghanistan, Remembrance Day has taken on a whole new meaning for me. I no longer see this day as simply a ceremony or a holiday; I see it as a national funeral service. I have volunteered to organize the service at school with another teacher this year. We

have invited local veterans, including Mark, who will lay the wreath. I have been particularly emotional lately thinking about the significance of this day and wondering how I will manage to control myself sitting with my husband Rick, Mark, and both sets of his grandparents at the service this year.

My colleague and I have decided to create cards with the photo and biographical information of fallen Canadian soldiers from WWI, WWII, the Korean War, and the Afghanistan War. Our plan is to have each member of the audience experience symbolically carrying in a deceased soldier, and after the service laying the card to rest in the wicker baskets provided at the exits. Our purpose is to help students better understand the consequence of war.

I have asked Sadika to help out by typing and cutting some of the 1,700 cards. I enjoy working with Sadika, a lovely, composed 17 year old who is not yet aware of her own potential. She and I have a close relationship, having spent many hours together talking about her experiences in her home country before and during the war. Through an assignment requiring her to recall a childhood memory, she wrote how she feels she lost her childhood having to raise her baby sister because her parents divorced prior to the war, and her mother traveled to Canada without her children to make a new start for them all. What was supposed to be only two months at the most turned into five years, and Sadika was put in charge of managing a household and protecting her siblings from their abusive father. She recalled feeling overwhelmed being solely responsible for her siblings and unable to rely on either parent. As if the war in her family was not enough, she also endured the war in her country, which she described as a war against civilians where they were burned and massacred. Now years later living in her city of refuge, reunited with

her mother yet still the primary caregiver for her sister, she confided in me that she continued to struggle with her opposing feelings of resentment and admiration for her mother. I could feel her despair, and I was astounded by the resiliency of someone so young navigating the long, lonely walk that brought her to my classroom.

As we sat around the table after school one day, she cutting the cards for Remembrance Day with the paper cutter and me counting enough for each class and banding the cards with elastics, we talked about life in the EAL classroom. I told her that our school division is undergoing something called Collegiate Renewal (Saskatoon Public Schools, 2008), and we are looking at ways to improve schools and engage students in learning. I wondered if this made sense to this girl who at one time had said to me, “But, Mrs. Fedorchuk, you must understand. For us this school is perfect already” (personal journal entry, October 2006). Even before the war had begun in her home country, she was just happy when her teachers showed up to teach. She said that no one complained when her gym teacher did not teach for two and a half months. The boys just played soccer out in the field, and the other girls did not want to do gym anyway. It seemed only Sadika was upset because she missed playing sports as all of her free time was spent caring for her baby sister.

Sadika has gained confidence during the years she has been here. I see her rising above her experiences with oppression in her home country and her complex family life. She does not hesitate now to tell me she needs my help, whereas last year she would struggle with her school work in silence. Unfortunately, because of my overcrowded classroom, I seldom have enough time to devote to each student, yet she waits patiently. As we continue our work with the cards, I can see that she, too, now detects that EAL

“students are not being well served by the delivery of supports meant to facilitate their development of English language acquisition and to participate with their classmates in the mainstream” (Roessingh, 2004, p. 611).

I see leadership qualities in this young woman as we discuss ways to help the decision-makers in the school system to understand the importance of improving programs for EAL students. I told her administrators need to hear the words out of the mouths of those who have lived the experience. She told me she was afraid to speak out because she feared the repercussions not only for herself, but also for me as her teacher. I tell her that here we encourage students to speak up and that she will not get in trouble. Sadika is a wise teenager and a thoughtful observer of life around her, and I was enlightened when in this “safe space” (Weis, 2003, p. 103) she felt comfortable to voice her thoughts. Her rejoinder was so astute that I grabbed a piece of the scrap card stock and wrote down her words. Without looking up from her cutting, she said in a gentle and measured voice, “I am an EAL student. If I don’t get help when I need it, why would I want to help others when they need it? People who don’t know how it is don’t know what needs changing. The one making the decisions needs to come and see the EAL classroom” (personal communication, November 2007). The power in her words lies in their honesty. I show her what I have written down and tell her I will find a way to share her words with someone who has the authority to make changes. As I collect the last of the cards, I stop as I see on the top card the face of a young soldier from a small town outside of our city killed in Afghanistan only weeks after my son’s safe return home ... and I lose control.

I Want a Bed

The commercial on the television has changed and I find nothing of interest to watch, so I walk into the dining room and flip through the pages of the newspaper. I turn to the Crossword Puzzle and Cryptoquip and pick up my pencil. My daughter, Andrea, and I share a love of words, and I leave the Wonderword for her because this is her puzzle, but not before checking the answer that stumped us both yesterday. My eyes begin to wander to the classified ad section. I must remember to ask my son, Steven, if he would use his truck and help move a bed to Suhrab's house. I still shake my head that after living in our city and attending my classroom for 10 months, I did not know Suhrab needed a bed.

One day at school, we were talking about life in his refugee camp, and the conversation led to their house in our city. I do not think he meant to say it. The words just slipped out, "I have no bed. I want a bed" (personal communication, March 2008). We were discussing his household concerns. They did not know how to use the dishwasher. He wanted to know where to buy the spray to clean the "glasses," meaning the windows, and the powdered soap for the washing machine, and the power would go out in the entire house when his sister plugged in the heater in her bedroom. A well-meaning person advised him to buy a computer, complete with desk and chair that was now rendered useless because the family could not afford the monthly Internet payments. Suhrab paid for the computer by saving money from his night time cleaning job; the cost of the purchase would have paid two months rent for this family. The sofa well-meaning people had given them had been retrieved, he said, from the garbage. One of the legs was broken, he laughed, so when they sat on it, the sofa fell at one corner. They wanted to

throw it back into the garbage because he did not know how to fix it. That is when he said, “I want a bed.” Apparently, his mother and sisters slept on sofas or shared beds, but he had been sleeping on the floor because there was no place else for him to sleep. So, I told him, “I have a bed. I will bring it to your house.”

His history teacher recently wrote me a note saying how poorly Suhrab was doing in his class. He was not keeping up, and his poor English skills were hampering his progress. He had irregular attendance, was not handing in his assignments on time, and when he was in class he appeared tired and disengaged. If this behaviour continued, he was sure to fail. I imagined Suhrab sleeping fitfully on the hard surface, and I thought of all of my students, this boy in particular should not be sleeping on the floor. The image I have of him when he first walked into my class still haunts me – skin almost yellow, dull sunken eyes, clothes hanging on a scarecrow frame, a hollow voice that sapped his energy with each word, the recent cloud of war hovering around him.

The words I wanted to say in my response to the history teacher’s note go like this:

You need to know, first of all, that Suhrab suffers from a life threatening disease. Although he is in remission for the time being, his poor attendance is due to his many trips to the clinic because of his compromised immune system. His mother worries about him and insists he stays at home when it is cold outside. She cannot afford to take any chances because she has already lost her husband and adult sons. Suhrab as the oldest son now is responsible for his mother, his sisters, and their home. Because he has the best English skills, he is the one who must stay home to talk to the landlord when their toilet is broken; he is the one who is responsible for money matters, and the one who

talks to his mother's doctors about her medications. Suhrab's mother is anxious and often complains of illness, but the doctors can never diagnose what ails her, and she wants Suhrab by her side at these times because he brings her comfort. I believe she is suffering from trauma because I've listened to their story.

I remember swallowing the lump in my throat that threatened to turn into tears as I listened to Ara, Suhrab's older sister, tell me about the carnage inflicted upon their father and brothers in their country. I wanted to reach over and hug her, but I knew this was not enough. I wondered how I could protect Suhrab and his sister, who sat calmly beside me, dressed in a peacock blue jacket, and a black *hijab* that accented her small, doll-like face. Her exotic eyes appeared larger than usual, but she did not cry. I saw, though, that she was holding her hands in her lap to stop them from trembling. I had to clear my throat before I could respond to her. And then all I could manage to say was, "You must have been very frightened."

I was preparing to assist Ara with an English language arts assignment about Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. She failed this course twice already, so she felt under pressure to understand these words written in the incomprehensible English dialect of the Deep South in the 1930s. I wanted to draw her attention to the parallels between the Whites persecuting the Blacks and the terrorists persecuting her people. Instead, we focused on her assignment. We began to discuss the lines, and I imagined including in my response to Suhrab's teacher Paulo Freire's (2003) observation that education is afflicted by "narration sickness" when teachers see their task as being to "fill" (p. 57) the students with the contents of their narration – contents which are alien to the existential experience of the students. I also wanted to include the passage from *To Kill a*

Mockingbird spoken by Atticus: ““You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view ... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it”” (Lee, 1960, p. 30) to impress upon him the importance of coming to know the students we teach. If he could be receptive to this, I wanted to let him know, together we might look for ways to unlock the silent voices of the refugee students in his classes to hear the untold stories that pictures in history books fail to tell.

I still berate myself at my inadequate attempts to advocate for Suhrab. It is a fine balance I walk as an advocate for students because teachers’ sense of professional integrity can be a double edged sword. When I tried to share parts of Suhrab’s story with the teacher, he made it clear he did not want to listen. I was told that everybody has problems and why are Suhrab’s any different? The teacher’s demands for silencing signify what Fine (1987) calls “a terror of words, a fear of talk” (p. 157). Dei (2003) brings to our attention “if one is privileged through race, the avoidance of any discussion may occur through discomfort, neglect or unacknowledgement” (p. 248). The teacher went on to say that if our country lets these people in, it had better provide them with help. He saw his job as that of a teacher, not a social worker, and he had to “get through” the curriculum. Furthermore, he felt if Suhrab could not keep up with the pace in the classroom, he would just have to repeat the course next year ... and he did.

I remember I want to wash the bedding I am giving Suhrab along with the bed, so I run downstairs to search through the boxes for the one marked Extra Linens, and I load the washer once again.

My Only Teacher

The first thing I notice as I am putting away the folded laundry is the paper lying on my dresser with the list of contact numbers I had given Edwina before she went into labour, the paper now folded and crumpled from being in the bag I packed to take to the hospital. In the end, things happened so fast and the cell phone batteries died anyway, so we never did call anyone on the list. As I move toward the closet, I see leaning against the lamp on my bedside table the photo the nurse took of Edwina and me holding the baby only minutes after he was born. When I began my teaching career years ago, I never dreamed I would help a student through the adoption process, let alone be her labour coach. When I think how closely Edwina and I walked over the last three years, I could not have dreamed of being any where else the night the baby was born.

Edwina arrived in my classroom as an orphaned fourteen year old refugee. Her adult brother, older sister, and she sought refuge here after their parents were killed by rebels. Prior to arriving, she had never been to school and was pre-literate, meaning her native language has no writing system (Florenz & Terrill 2003). Her older sister had attended school intermittently in their home country, and had an understanding of the written English alphabet, but she had difficulties learning because of what appeared to be short-term memory loss. Her stutter belied her experiences in a country affected by war, “fractures and powerful collisions deep down” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 290) inside her that manifested in this verbal tremor. As we worked through the alphabet, her hands shook, and she perspired profusely to the point where her papers were so soggy my pen could not write on them. Edwina, I saw, was feisty and bright, but she would need some

socializing as we tried to figure out where to begin with these refugees who were both obviously traumatized and had no solid foundation on which to build English language.

Edwina proved to be more than a handful as she would often lie on the tables in the classroom to indicate her boredom, write on the chalk board in permanent marker or in my best dictionary with pen, as she attempted to imitate some of the behaviours she saw around her. She reminded me of Helen Keller as she explored her world touching all of the paraphernalia surrounding my work space in my office, often breaking things, and snooping through my desk drawers. At one point she started coming to school with red lipstick smeared under her eyes, apparently understanding makeup as part of our culture, but not understanding how to use it. I laugh as I recall the day the cafeteria staff got up in arms because she had somehow walked through the line, without speaking a word of English indicated she wanted an order of poutine, and walked out without paying. They were particularly frustrated because when a worker chased her down, Edwina did not understand the words flying out of the worker's mouth so made no reply to her reprimands, just kept on eating. They saw her action as almost criminal; I saw it as resourceful.

Edwina and her sister are examples of the refugee students schools are seeing more and more of who represent unique challenges to educators around the country. It is challenging for both the students and the educators who serve them to find ways for these learners to be successful in school because of their diverse language acquisition processes, cultural backgrounds, and ways of knowing and learning. No or sporadic first language education, no or low first language literacy, and no English language skills contribute to this dilemma. Roessingh (2006a) adapted the iceberg metaphor to explain

the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) continuum of English language acquisition. BICS includes “the language of ‘here and now’ and ‘my lived experiences’” (p. 94). This language includes simple grammar forms and high frequency vocabulary such as family, clothes, food, money, and face-to-face interactions. Language learners at the BICS stage advance to initial reading skills, writing for personal needs, common vocabulary such as sports, hobbies, and celebrations, and begin to integrate grammar and vocabulary (p. 93). Generally, BICS can be acquired in approximately two years for all ages on arrival and various first language level skills (Roessingh & Kover, 2003).

The next level, CALP, includes the academic forms of language used in subject area classes, which is more difficult to reach. Roessingh & Kover (2003) suggest that quality and duration of EAL programming are crucial factors in the students’ rate and ability to acquire this level of language acquisition, which takes anywhere from between five to ten years to acquire (Booth Olson & Land, 2007; Brown, 2007; Meyers, 1993; Roessingh & Kover, 2003). Refugee students’ difficulties with language acquisition combined with their traumatic experiences in war affected countries manifest themselves in learning and socialization difficulties in and outside of school, yet “success in developing English language proficiency and completing high school is critical to their participation in Canadian society and economy” (Watt & Roessingh, 2001, p. 204). The gaps and ineffectiveness in our education programs are exposed when schools that are under-prepared to meet the needs of the refugee student population fail to respond to these critical issues.

Soon after their arrival it became clear that Edwina required a personalized program of instruction, which provided one-on-one attention because of her nonexistent prior education and first language literacy, and her deportment. I felt overwhelmed by the task ahead of me. I worried about how to find the time and resources to attend to this orphaned child who was plunked in the midst of all my other students, students who were working from beginner to advanced levels of English and others who were receiving support for a variety of academic subject areas. How could I begin to teach her the language and skills she needed to know to be successful in our school and in the community? Having worked with few pre-literate students in my career, I was not sure where to begin. I tried starting Edwina on the large, lined papers that primary students use to form their alphabet, but she had never held a pencil before, so she had enormous difficulty controlling her letters. I realized these symbols were meaningless to her any way, and I had to find ways to make connections between these symbols and the objects they belonged to. We moved on to more tactile exercises such as sampling food, identifying colours of candies, looking at catalogues, and cutting out pictures. Because she had never used scissors or glue, what is considered a kindergarten level activity, was onerous for her. I was concerned when her first crayon drawing revealed a woman with an axe stuck in her head, and I realized we needed help.

My request to our division office for assistance resulted in a tutor whom we could employ for a total of 12 hours for one semester. The tutor was only minimally beneficial because she had no EAL training, Edwina was confused by yet another person working with her and, in the end, the tutor was not there long enough to make a lasting impression. It also was suggested that we place Edwina in classes for mentally challenged

students since we did not have adequate time or resources to work with her; after all she would learn basic life skills there. I disagreed with this idea because I knew she had potential, for I had seen the dazzling light in her eyes (Nieto, 1999) when she became engaged in learning.

Unfortunately, her brother was uncooperative in exploring the matter of post-traumatic stress. He told me in their culture they just forget and move on. I knew from the stories their brother told me the children had witnessed atrocities during civil unrest in their country. When looking closely at Edwina's face, I could see myriad scars, but no one will say how she got them or the scar in the middle of her chest or the large burn marks on her legs, all indicators of an untold past life. I wondered why my professional and personal observances of these students were not enough to warrant extra educational assistance. I was frustrated by a system so closed that it did not take seriously the needs of these children. I felt I was walking alone into the unknown. Edwina acquired spoken English quickly and in her second year, she coined her own term when she said she wanted her "only teacher," an eloquent expression indicating she knew exactly what she needed in order to be a successful student!

Eventually we called in social services because of abuse and neglect she was experiencing at the hands of family members, and she was taken from their home and placed in a series of group homes and foster care homes but not before being placed alone in a hotel in the inner city. Her identification indicates her birth date is several years older than she is, so social services believed she was too old for the group home and placed her, a child who could not read her own name, let alone a menu, in a hotel by herself for two nights. Despite many concerted efforts with all levels of government, her birth date

remains unchanged, and she continues to carry identification that does not represent who she is.

After Edwina's abandonment, I could not bear to see this child walk the long journey ahead of her by herself, so I assumed the role of surrogate mother. When she was in a car accident late one Friday night, I was called and stayed with her in the hospital. I recall her lying on the stretcher when I arrived, in a fetal position and unresponsive even though she was awake and not seriously injured. A year later, I was with her in the hospital because of an illness, and I saw the same behaviour; I realized then how easily traumatized people are re-traumatized. Edwina lived the experiences outlined in Fazel & Stein's (2002) three stages of traumatic experiences particular to refugee children:

(1) In their native countries many refugees have experienced considerable trauma.

They have often been forced to flee their homes because of exposure to war or combat and hence witnessed violence, torture, and losses of close family and friends. Refugee children might have no memory of a period of stability; their school education, if any, is likely to have been disrupted; and parental distress and general insecurity are common experiences.

(2) The journey to a country of refuge can also be a time of further stress. It can

take many months and expose the refugees to more life threatening dangers.

Refugee children at these times can experience separation from parents, either by accident or as a strategy to ensure their safety....

(3) The final stage of finding respite in another country can be a time of additional

difficulty as many have to prove their asylum claims and also try to integrate in a new society. This period is being increasingly referred to as a period of

‘secondary trauma’ to high-light the problems encountered. On arriving, a refugee child will need to settle into a new school and find a peer group. Children might have to prematurely assume adult roles; for example, as a vital language link with the outside world. (pp. 366-377)

As I look into Edwina’s eyes in the photo with the baby and me, I see vulnerability that was never there before. When she first arrived at school, her eyes told the story of one who is a fierce survivor, as she squinted through the trauma she experienced having to flee from hostilities in her country, likely the victim of violence, and being orphaned. Later, her eyes were guarded as she shared her anxiety traveling alone into the unknown on the airplane in the “big sky” for many days. Her eyes were deep wounded pools streaked with fear as she struggled to acculturate to her new community and school at the same time abuse and abandonment threatened her security to its core. Now, though, I see a softening, a certain vulnerability in her eyes, and I also see hope.

When Edwina returned to school pregnant this fall, I observed a shift in her demeanor and maturity. This was her third year in our EAL classroom and during this time I had watched her develop into a delightful, spirited teenager. This leg of her journey was not without pitfalls and winding paths, but she was emerging with so many fine qualities. For the first time, I could see her feeling attached to our EAL student group. The school had essentially become her “stable social support” (Fazel & Stein, 2002, p. 368), and she wanted to reach out to others. On her own initiative she asked an intern teacher to help her write me a thank-you card. Edwina dictated to the intern what she wanted to say and then recopied her writing into the card. She shyly presented me

with the card one day, and I could see the intern's eyes tearing up along with mine as I read it. The words she chose for the card emit love, care, and appreciation – words from a strong young girl who has endured the worst life can dish out. I was aware that her act of gratitude had rippled its way around the circle of interns in our school, and I was impressed that what might be mistaken for an illiterate refugee on the outside was really a great teacher.

The baby came a week earlier than his due date, right over the mid-term break. The experience of birthing this baby and giving him up for adoption has affected Edwina profoundly. Throughout the pregnancy she remained assertive in her desire for her baby to have a good life, a life she knew she could not yet provide him with. She made that decision out of love for her baby, but she continues to wrestle with conflicting emotions. I listened to her doubts and fears, rocked her sobbing body, and picked her up in the middle of the night. She reached the bottom of despair, for not only was she giving up a baby, she was also giving up her chance to have a family. Only a week after the baby's birth, Edwina was back in school because she knew this to be her place of safety, support, and refuge.

Walking Alone

I drop the laundry basket on the floor and lie down on my bed, staring at the ceiling, seeing the baby's fist wrapped around my little finger. Reliving my numerous intense experiences with refugee students like Edwina is exhausting at times because these relationships are so complex and emotional. Sometimes I wonder what would have happened to Edwina if she walked the most recent leg of her journey by herself. It saddens me to think how lonely she would have felt navigating the hallways of the

school, the streets in the city, and the wards in the hospitals. I continue to worry about her future in this city orphaned, abandoned, and without proper identification. Several refugee students in my program, like Edwina, ask for assistance when filling out forms. When they have to ask me whose name they should write on blank spaces requiring *Next of Kin* or *Person to Contact in Case of Emergency*, the degree of their aloneness is brought home. Most days it is overwhelming for me as a teacher to look into their faces and “see the light in students’ eyes when they become excited about learning” (Nieto, 1999, p. xix), and at the same time feel incapable of helping them blossom because I feel constrained by a system that is under-resourced, under-staffed, and under-prepared to meet their personal, social, and educational needs.

Braided Lives

I sit on the edge of the bed, both feet planted on the floor. The computer in the other room continues its soft humming sounds. I know when I am ready the words will come. For now, though, I pick up the laundry basket and head for Steven’s room. The tassel from his mortarboard from his college graduation is hanging from his desk lamp. I run my fingers through the silky black and silver threads, and they easily fall away. I sit at his desk and mindlessly start to braid it thinking about a book I recently read, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini (2007), where the happy young bride smiles “shyly behind a veiled green gown ... her hair parted with silver dust, the braids held together by tree sap” (p. 9). Coming to the end of the tassel I have no way of tying the strands together, so I let the braid fall and it unravels before my eyes. I remember the braids I wore as a young girl – at times two separate plaits fastened with matching elastic

bands but on special occasions an intricate French braid wound around my head like a crown, with no beginning and no end.

I am a daughter of a father who emigrated from Nazi Germany. I am the mother of a son in the Canadian Armed Forces who recently returned from the war in Afghanistan. I am a high school EAL teacher of immigrant and refugee students. Those childhood braids are just a distant memory now, but they have rematerialized to symbolize the intersections among the components of this narrative inquiry: the refugee students' experiences, my experiences, and diverse fields of interdisciplinary research and literature. As in braiding, the strands are intertwined in this narrative inquiry, woven together by alternately carrying the outside strands over and around the others, moving back and forth, from outside to inside. As this narrative inquiry unfolds, it moves toward a weaving of personal relationships, narratives, methodology, field text, and interpretation "all embedded in a tale" (Lather & Smithies, 1997, p. xvi). Our braided life stories in this narrative inquiry, however, are not tied together with an elastic band; rather they are joined together through a bond of shared experiences of life, of school, and of war.

Braided Life Stories: Weaving the Research Puzzle

A story, once told, no longer belongs solely to the storyteller. It has existence independently of his will, intentions, or analysis. It is an object accessible to others. Others may see in it what the storyteller does not. Story is not narcissism or subjectivity, but its opposite: the making of an independent object. (Novack, as cited in Connelly & Clandinin, 1989, p. 19)

I move into Andrea's room with the laundry basket, stepping around the clutter to place her folded clothes on top of her dresser. Library books lie scattered on the floor beside her bed, and I read a few titles and flip through the pages. I see all of the books are

fiction. Over the years, my EAL colleagues and I have often remarked that we should write a book about our experiences with our students. We joke we would have to publish it as fiction, though, because no one would believe it ... and this is true. Some of the most profound moments in my personal and professional life have been working with refugee students, young people who have come from countries with decades of civil war and no functioning state, who have embarked on an unknown future in Canada. Their stories of lives in war affected countries reveal, what are to most people, unfathomable experiences with persecution, violence, escape, and dislocation. However, their stories also reveal unbelievably complex, multilayered circumstances in their present lives in school and in our community. These young people have responsibilities for ailing parents and younger siblings, work nearly full-time hours at night to support their families here and in their home countries, deal with complex medical, social, and government systems, and desperately search for affordable housing. These stories are laid alongside their experiences as high school students learning in a foreign country, in a foreign culture, in a foreign language. I believe these stories are the defining moments in students' lives that affect their positioning on the "educational landscapes" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19). Dahl (1995) writes that "to understand and learn from students' voices is to see the relationships between [their] perspectives and the distinctive meanings they express" (p. 124). Yet, these are the stories from the voices that are not attended to at school, and I wonder why.

We live in a world where media and technology have the capability of bringing massacres, terrorist attacks, abuses, and annihilation into our homes on a daily basis, but we can easily remove ourselves from these news stories by pushing the off button.

However, if we resist the off button, media can help us construct the nature of the problems we face and can be powerful mobilizing tools, too (Apple, 2005). The stories we hear via the media parallel the refugee students' lived experiences, experiences they carry with them as they walk in our schools and community. A few months ago Raheem was using the Internet in our classroom when he called me over to see the CNN report of his uncle's murder in his country. His mother's brother was a priest in this Muslim country and was murdered along with hundreds of his parishioners by members of a terrorist group. Raheem looked me in the eyes as he said, "You don't know my country, very bad" (personal communication, October 2007). I assume his teachers want to hear this story, and I want them to understand why he may appear inattentive and depressed in their classes. I think it is important for us to support him as he grieves the loss of a family member, the loss of his country. This is an international event making headlines around the world, but here in our school there is no observance of the event or of Raheem's family's loss.

I am perplexed by the disengaged look in some educators' eyes when I attempt to share students' circumstances with them. Without having time and space set aside in my teaching schedule to consult with subject area teachers about the EAL students in their classrooms, I take advantage of our brief encounters passing through the hallways, in the photocopy room, in the parking lot, and other places to discuss the students' progress. Perhaps time and space constraints do not allow educators to fully attend to these stories, but I sense it is also that refugee students' diverse experiences challenge Eurocentric beliefs and assumptions. Not too long ago a staffroom conversation turned to the high price of gas. I was sharing Suhrab's story about not having a bed, and I commented on

the taken-for-grantedness of luxury items, like vehicles, while some of our school families do not even have beds. My colleague turned to me and explained that being poor was easier for refugee families than for us because they are used to having nothing, while we are not. And, he questioned, don't they know about birth control? If they don't want to live poor in this country, why do they have a dozen children? (personal communication, February 2008). His comments are indicative of an attitude Abeni was already aware of that suggests a division between "us" and "them," what Madrid (1988) refers to as "othering." It is justifiable for "them" to be marginalized, but not for "us" because, after all, "they" are "only" EAL students. Unfortunately for foreign students, "being 'the other' can result in a lifetime struggle to understand the denial of a voice or visibility ... in ... society and its institutions" (p. 54). I want to give my colleague the gift of time and space to walk alongside his students, hear how important education is to them, and come to understand ways he can help them overcome the obstacles in their pathways. I want to encourage him to understand how his attitudes and beliefs walk with him into his classroom and infiltrate his teaching practices. The bell rings, and before my colleague leaves for his next class, he comments that I will burn out doing so much for my students. I realize this is part of the problem. The students are seen as "my" students, not "our" students.

As an EAL teacher, one of my roles is to support students in their subject area classes, which provides me with a perspective of the academic and social expectations their teachers have of them and how these correspond with the students' English language ability, skill level, and "cultural capital," a term Bourdieu (as cited in Caines, 2005) coined to address educational inequality. Cultural capital describes the differences

in the amounts and types of cultural advantages that people possess that favor them within a particular social context, such as school, which encompass a variety of traits, “including ethnicity, language, appearance, wealth and access to resources and education” (p. 23). Such inequalities are created when educators view refugee students through a single, dominant culture lens. The complete picture will come into focus when we “challenge the prevailing assumption that it is only students from marginalized groups and their families – those who are ethnically, racially, linguistically, socioeconomically, and in other ways different from what is considered the ‘mainstream’ – who should always conform in order to be successful in school” (Nieto, 1999, p. 72). In Fine’s (1987, 2003) work with minority, low-income students in high schools she coined the term “white noise” to describe the silencing promoted by administrators who would not name, and therefore not problematize the issues of “social contradictions” and “social inequities” in their schools. This “silencing resounded in words and in their absence” (1987, p. 157).

Research by Watt and Roessingh (2001) speaks to the overrepresentation of minority student dropout levels. Their work reveals an alarming 74% drop out rate among EAL high school learners. Moreover, these researchers have investigated the reasons EAL students drop out of school and have refined the notion of ‘drop out’ as “*fallout*, *push out*, and *drop-out*” (p. 209). If students like Edwina, who have no other support systems outside of school, are not attended to, they “do not make visible progress and quietly disappear or ‘fall out’ of the system, possibly for lack of programming alternatives, a phenomenon seen largely among beginner intake students” (p. 209). Students like Raheem or Ara, who begin high school in their new countries at over 18

years of age with a low level of English, encounter an age cap in our province of 22 years old and are ‘pushed out’ because they do not have enough time to develop the BICS and CALP language levels necessary to complete grade level classes required for graduation. ‘Drop-outs’ are those students, like Abeni, who choose to leave school “for a variety of personal reasons” (p. 209), reasons like the need to earn money for her family.

My queries about the notion of *practice* with refugee students are always tempered by the role their experiences in war affected countries play and how these experiences embedded in the students’ narratives remain unvoiced and unattended to. Fine (1987) uses the term “silencing” in her research as she examines “what doesn’t get talked about in schools and how ‘undesirable’ talk is subverted, appropriated, and exported” (p. 157). Fine maintains that “both the process of inquiry into students’ lived experience, and the content to be unearthed are assumed to be, a priori, unsafe territory” (p. 158). The consequences of silencing in schools permeate

life so primitively as to make irrelevant the lived experiences, passions, concerns, communities, and biographies of low-income, minority students. In the process the very voices of students and their communities that public education claims to nurture, shut down. (p. 158)

Teachers play key roles in the success of students when they engender a sense of trust, which is essential to EAL learners benefitting from educational programs (Roessingh, 2006b). Developing a trusting relationship with refugee students requires more than knowing something about their culture. While this is important and useful, “it is not sufficient to produce positive relationships” (Noddings, 1992, p. 113). It is not viable for educators to work with refugee students if they do not take time to “learn about

their lives outside of school, including their families and cultures, how they see the world, what is important to them, and their values and dreams for the future” (Nieto, 1999, p. 145). I find “learning about their lives” never occurs in a linear fashion. Rather, the stories are shared at various times and places, sometimes in very public places, but always in “safe corners’ within larger ones” (Fine & Weis, 2003, p. 4), perhaps as we are redesigning a classroom, preparing for Remembrance Day, working on assignments in the EAL classroom, or birthing a baby in the hospital. Noddings and Shore (1984) speak about educational caritas, “a force that can be the most powerful agent in the classroom, leave the most lasting impressions, and touch lives most deeply” (p. 157). Educational caritas emphasizes educators’ “desire to come into direct, undiluted contact with the human partner of the educational enterprise, to go beyond superficialities and become involved with the other person” (p. 157). Educators who have “desire” to enter into such trusting relationships with refugee students create the opportunity to get to know students, and at the same time, to get to know what the students can teach them about their desires. These educators “work with what is presently seen and felt to build a stronger position for each student” (Noddings, 1992, p. 107) in the educational system and in society.

Getting our House in Order: Justification

I put the laundry basket away and take out the cleaning supplies. I want to get my house in order for the company who is coming tonight. My family has a running joke about how I clean the house just for company, but I think it is important to let guests know that their presence in our home is valued and welcome. I start with the spotty bathroom mirror. I pause as I catch my reflection as I wipe away the streaks. This

research has personal significance to me. My own lived experiences with war through my relationship with my father and son create a special understanding between my refugee students and me. Having witnessed my father struggle for a lifetime with stigma associated with being an immigrant from Nazi Germany makes me sensitive to the importance of addressing pervasive dominant attitudes toward newcomers. Feeling terrified and out of control as my son completed his tour of duty in Afghanistan, the very country from which many of my refugee families fled, helped me to understand the debilitating devastation you feel when everything you believe in is stripped away. These personal experiences had a profound impact on my beliefs about what is important and necessary in education. It is through these lenses that I approach this narrative inquiry – sometimes a researcher, sometimes a daughter, sometimes a mother, and sometimes a teacher.

In my perusal through the university library’s databases for literature pertaining to *refugees*, I discovered on certain databases the search word for this topic is *aliens*, which conjures up for me xenophobic images of hostile creatures from uninhabitable planets threatening innocent and unsuspecting earthlings. Perhaps we do not see refugees in quite the same way aliens are portrayed in science fiction movies; however, the connotation of the word suggests we see them as intruders. When we approach refugee students as “culturally disadvantaged and in need of fixing” (Bartolomé, 2003, p. 414), we do them a disservice by discounting the complexities of their prior experiences, and we do ourselves a disservice by missing out on “the gift of stretching academically and emotionally to understand the lives of others” (Lyons & Kubler LaBoskey, 2002, p. 85). I like to imagine what the students’ experiences in our school might be like if we educators got

our house in order and welcomed them as invited guests. I marvel at the students' resiliency as they persevere through the challenges of studying in schools that expect so much from them, yet often fall short of understanding and attending to their needs.

This research has practical and social significance as well. According to Pinson & Arnot (2007), research into refugee children's experiences in education "is still relatively underdeveloped" (p. 399), calling for further research with this particular student group. It is through refugee students' stories, lived and told, that we can begin to educate ourselves and others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is their stories that necessitate humanizing education at a system level. It is stories like Ara's who witnessed the massacre of her father and brothers that make me wonder how students persevere at school despite the trauma that threatens to consume them. It is stories like Edwina's, orphaned and abandoned here in her country of refuge, that make me wonder how we as educators and as a society can protect these children from social injustices. It is stories like Suhrab's, the boy without a bed, that make me wonder how educators can put curriculum deadlines before attending to students' emotional, personal, and social needs. It is stories like Sadika's, the girl who understands that helping others is contagious, that make me wonder at the lack of an ethic of care in our programs. It is stories like these that make me wonder what we would see if we looked at our high schools through the eyes of refugee students. It is stories like these that make me wonder what they would teach us about being responsive and attentive to their needs if they were given the voice. And, that is my purpose.

Setting the Course: Research Design

Satisfied with the sparkle in the bathroom mirror, I carry my glass cleaner with me into the hallway where portraits of our three children hang. As I carefully wipe each frame, I reflect on my journey with each of my children and the course I set off on through this research with my students.... I invited three refugee students with whom I have worked intimately within the last three years to walk with me on this narrative journey. I focused on refugee EAL students, as opposed to immigrant students, because they have a certain breadth and complexity of experiences and because of our shared connections with war. I thought extensively about which of my students to invite into this process, and it was not easy to settle on only three individuals as each student's story is a powerful expression of their lives before arriving in our city, their experiences at high school, and their perceptions of their futures. All participants were asked to choose a pseudonym and identifying information was masked or deleted throughout my writing in order to protect their anonymity and confidentiality.

I invited two girls and one boy, ranging in age from 17 to 19 years of age, to take part in this narrative inquiry. My selection of participants was not intended to be representative or to generalize this student group. Students were invited to participate, not necessarily by country of origin; rather they were those students with a wide enough range of experiences to provide a variety of insights into their high school experiences. Each participant possessed sufficient ability with oral English and comprehension skills to participate in the conversations. All participants are fully functioning young adults who wanted to share their past and present experiences with me.

Clandinin & Connelly (2000) say the researcher's relationship with participants in narrative inquiry is "concerned with intimacy" (p. 79), and true to this notion all of the participants were students of mine when I was their teacher at their high school, and we had already developed a strong relationship where trust was established through working intimately together. Narrative inquiry is relational research; it arises out of, and it makes explicit, the nature and multiplicity of the relationships from which the inquiry unfolds. Thus, my role in the high school helped me as a researcher to better understand the context and setting of the students' school experiences. My personal experiences provided me with a particular background being mother to a son who went to war and daughter of a father who grew up during World War II in Germany.

I met with the participants individually to have conversations on at least four or five occasions at places and times convenient for them that were "safe, storytelling places" (Lyons & Kubler LaBoskey, 2002, p. 116) between August and November 2008. Each participant was asked where he or she felt most comfortable having the conversations and each preferred to meet in his or her home.

Gathering Stories: Field Text

Having made sure each of my children's portraits hangs straight on the wall, I walk down the stairs and begin picking up newspapers, dusting furniture, and rearranging ornaments. Seeing the DVD we watched last night lying on the coffee table makes me wonder when the documentary of Raheem will be complete. A local documentary company is gathering stories about newcomers to Canada, and I suggested they speak with Raheem. Observing the documentary process, I saw the similarities between my research and the documentarist's work because in both cases field text is primarily

collected through face-to-face “authentic conversations” (Florio-Ruane & Clark, as cited in Lyons & Kubler LaBoskey, 2002, p. 176). However, in this case the conversations were captured on a digital voice recorder only. Like the documentarist, I did not follow a set of pre-planned interview questions; instead we had informal conversations, which captured the participants’ spontaneous reflections about their experiences in high school.

At the outset I wondered if the students might feel hesitant to share negative perceptions of their school experiences with me because they would not want to appear disrespectful by criticizing the school or teachers, so I tried to create an atmosphere in which students felt confident to answer in an uninhibited manner. Our meetings were carried out “in a situation of mutual trust, listening, and caring for the experience described by the other” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 109). In all cases, I omitted or purposely did not mention the names of countries or languages as a means of protecting the students’ privacy and anonymity and to make every effort they would be unidentifiable.

Field text was collected through recorded conversations in which participants shared narratives about their lived experiences, my written accounts of what I heard, saw, experienced, and thought during these sessions, my own personal journal writing, and my and the participants’ retrospective thinking about their experiences at high school. After the conversations were transcribed, I took them back to each participant, and I read the transcriptions with them to ensure their intended meaning from our conversations was captured. This was a good opportunity for participants to respond to the texts and make revisions as they wished. These transcribed conversations were compiled with other field notes and together they were read and reread for themes, patterns, and common threads

among the students' high school experiences, which inform how we as educators can make shifts or changes to the school landscape to create responsive educative and integral spaces for refugee students at high school.

Embarking on the Narrative Journey: Methodology

I put the DVD back in its case and place it on the bench by the front door, hoping I will remember to return it later. I am glad Raheem agreed to share his story on film. I believe his story will be educational and inspirational for viewers. Considering the poignant experiences of my students, I know I have made the right decision to use qualitative research design in this narrative inquiry for, as Polkinghorne (2005) explains, its primary purpose “is to describe and clarify experience as it is lived and constituted in awareness” (p. 138). Narrative inquiry is essentially “stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). However, narrative inquiry is more than simply story telling. It is an important and legitimate way of knowing as powerful as scientific knowing but different from it, which can advance the knowledge of teaching (Bruner, as cited in Lyons & Kubler LaBoskey, 2002, p. viii). Furthermore, “storying the person contextualizes him or her, makes that person present to us in all his or her humanity” (p. 4). This methodology was particularly useful to capture the situated complexities of refugee students' experiences in high school because “the meaning individuals make of their experience is entwined with an individual's conception of themselves” (Lyons & Kubler LaBoskey, 2002, p. 77). The participants' voices are the essence of this research, and their “narratives [provided] extraordinary witness to the emotional demands” (p. 57) of being a refugee student in a Euro-centric high school.

Narrative inquiry also “highlights the importance of acknowledging the centrality of the researcher’s own experience – the researcher’s own livings, tellings, retellings, and relivings” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 70). My role as researcher is framed by my reflections on my personal experiences with war, as well as my relationship with the students as their teacher. My narrative experiences were laid alongside those of the participants, and our four narratives became, “in part, a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through the inquiry” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989, p. 13).

For the participants, this was an opportunity for this “silent group that [is] easily overlooked” (Fazel & Stein, 2002, p. 369) to share their stories and experiences, giving them “voice, hope, and a place in the world” (McLeod, 2007, p. 70). Bruner’s (1996) narrative tenet contends that story making is needed for “the mode of thinking and feeling that helps ... people generally create a version of the world in which, psychologically, they can envisage a place for themselves – a personal world” (p. 39). We see this in Igoa’s (1995) research exploring her young refugee students’ personal filmstrip stories, which indicated a turning point in the students’ lives by marking their emergence from the silent period in which students deal with accepting that their lives have changed forever. Furthermore, engaging the participants in conversations unleashed the flow of dialogue, which allowed for voices to emerge and new narratives to develop.

Interpreting our world and those in it requires understanding, and one of our principal means for understanding “is through narrative: by telling a story of what something is ‘about’” (Bruner, 1996, p. 90). Many current accounts of refugees’ personal experiences with war address the benefits of sharing their stories with others. As Michel Lwamba, a young man who fled from the dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko in the

Democratic Republic of Congo to this small prairie city, puts it, “‘It’s good to talk. It releases the tension and frees you, somehow. Otherwise, you keep stuffing everything down inside all the time’” (Polachic, 2002, p. 195). Much has been publicized recently about Ishmael Beah a child warrior in Sierra Leone. His autobiography entitled *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007) outlines his traumatic experiences and how sharing his story has aided in his rehabilitation. Immaculée Ilibagiza’s experience with genocide in her country of Rwanda is an astounding story of how she and several other women hid in a bathroom for three months before fleeing to safety. She states that she wrote her autobiography, *Left to Tell: Discovering God amidst the Rwandan holocaust* (2006), to inspire and give others hope. She believes that “our lives are interconnected, that we’re meant to learn from one another’s experiences” (p. xvii).

Walking Forward

I stand near the front door beside the bench and survey the hardwood floor that runs throughout the main floor of this house. From my vantage point, the light shining through the windows on the floor highlights the dust and sand the west wind blows through this new neighbourhood still under construction. I can see every mark and every footprint in the dust, and I contemplate how to begin.... I approach writing this research text as an EAL teacher, a daughter, a mother, and an advocate of Nel Nodding’s (1992) ethic of care, which “counsels us to meet each living other in a caring relation” (p. 111). I recall an incident in the hospital with Edwina where in her painfully fevered state she whimpered repeatedly to the doctor, “Be careful with my body.” The refugee students’ cries for our care and support in school will seldom be heard this tangibly, yet, as the poet

(Anonymous, 2005) writes, their silent voices choked by the clay in their throats may be crying out loud.

I have observed how experiences in war affected countries can silence voices like my father's. Whereas the immigrant father in Guy Vanderhaeghe's *What I Learned From Caesar* "never allowed himself to remember that he was a foreigner" (1990, p. 303), my father never allowed himself to forget. He arrived in Canada in the early 1950s at a time when the federal government had a "desire to define Canadians as different from the intolerant Nazis" (Joshee, 2004, p. 132). Having emerged out of the atrocities of Nazi Germany, his heritage defined him as "other" (Madrid, 1988), and he worked hard to blend in by replacing his mother tongue with English. As a mother of a young soldier committed to a far away country of strangers in Afghanistan, my constant tears and my desire to support my son choked out my voice. I was terrified by the unspeakable horrors he might encounter there, a fear that almost consumed me.

Maxine Greene (2003), renowned educator and social activist, writes that "we live, after all, in dark times" (p. 108). For many westerners, the reality of war was remote and softened by a sense of national security until the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (St. Thomas & Johnson, 2001). But, for refugee students in our schools war is not remote; they carry with them deeply ingrained, lived experiences with war. How do we as educators respond to these students who are victims of these "dark times"? We give students a place in our schools, but do we acknowledge the places they have come from? What will it take for us to acknowledge "there is little sense of agency ... there is little capacity to look at things as if they could be otherwise" (Greene, 2003, p. 108). We cannot attend to their needs if we plod into the strong headwind without turning our eyes

to see them and our ears to hear them. How can we give them hope, inspire them, and engage them in school if we seem dead to their cries?

I stand back to scrutinize my cleaning job on the wooden floor. Finally satisfied with its luster, I put the cleaning supplies away in the closet next to my computer room. Now that I have put my house in order, I feel ready to sit at my computer. I rest my fingers on the keyboard as the students' voices echo in the background, the cursor blinking on the blank white screen.

CHAPTER TWO

The Participants – In Their Voice

One of the women at the sports wind-up on the weekend, I will call her *Laura*, made some comments that are still rumbling in my head as I drive to campus this Monday morning. The men were swimming in the pool with the children and the women were sitting around the fire pit at our get-together when talk of work led to her saying things like: “Man, there’s a lot of immigrants in the city. We’ve got piles of them at work and they can’t even speak English. They just better not bring their war and terrorism over here!” (personal communication, June 2008). My interjections, unfortunately, fell on deaf ears. I felt as if she were talking about my students and their families as if they were a “threat to the dominant ideal of Canadianism” (Joshee, 2004, p. 137). I liked to think that her narrow focus would change if she heard their stories portraying them within the educational, cultural, and “sociopolitical context” (Nieto, 2000, p. 246) of their lives.

Laura’s distancing of the people she works with troubled me, but it also emphasized the importance of ensuring the students’ voices are heard in this work. In the course of my research, Thiessen (2007) brought to my attention the limitations of some current research where students are often invisible in the work. Even though the “studies may centre on students, [they] do not necessarily capture their experiences of school” (p. 5). He notes “insights from ... studies about the experiences of children as students in school are based on inferences or applications argued as implications of the findings of the study” (p. 4). Furthermore, Erickson and Shultz (as cited in Thiessen, 2007) make similar conclusions about education studies in the 1980s-1990s:

In this research, students are shown as *doing* in the classroom rather than as *thinking, intending, and caring*.... In sum, virtually no research has been done that places student experience at the center of attention.... If the student is visible at all in a research study she is usually viewed from the perspective of adult educator's interests and ways of seeing, that is, as failing, succeeding, motivated, mastering, unmotivated, responding, or having a misconception. Rarely is the perspective of the student herself explored. (pp. 4-5)

From van Manen, McClelland, and Plihal (2007) I discovered that certain methodology used in a study "may unwittingly lead researchers to speak on behalf of the students, rather than letting students speak for themselves.... It matters less what we, as educators, say that children experience; more crucial is what students themselves say" (pp. 88, 92). Their words verified for me the importance of letting the students' voices in this narrative inquiry speak for themselves.

I feel a deep sense of responsibility and a motherly protectiveness toward these students and their personal stories they have so willingly and openly entrusted me with, yet I pondered my role in this research. Each of them placed faith in me as we set off on this journey, none of us really knowing where the path would lead us or where we might end up. As the researcher, I took the role of being the conduit to convey the students' stories, but I also took the role of participant as I lay my personal stories alongside theirs. Because of our shared experiences, we, teacher and students, were "in the middle of a nested set of stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63). This interconnectedness blurred the distinctions between researcher and researched (Lather & Smithies, 1997). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to this blurring as ever present "tensions of how to

experience the experience as a narrative inquirer” (p. 81). As the inquirer I “must become fully involved ... ‘fall in love’ with [my] participants, yet [I] must also step back and see [my] stories in the inquiry, the stories of the participants, as well as the larger landscape on which [we] all live” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 81). It meant that in my attempts as researcher to give voice to the stories of others, I tried to get out of the way, yet at the same time I acknowledge I was in the way (Lather & Smithies, 1997). It makes sense, then, as I introduce the three student participants in my research that I also introduce myself as a participant.

As participants we all tucked away certain inhibitions and fears as we walked together, vulnerable to the risks involved when exposing intimate stories. I walked a fine line between abusing my “existent relationship with them for my own agenda ... [and] between helping them and researching them” (Lather & Smithies, 1997, pp. 3-4). I troubled about the notion of cultural voyeurism, for the last thing I wanted to do was intrude, exploit, sensationalize or make a spectacle as I contemplated how to respectfully share their emotionally charged stories. I am forever conscious of how typing our words on these pages, placing them on public display, may inadvertently lead to stereotypical racial or ethnic interpretations by others who may read along. As I was also a learner throughout this process, I make no claim to be an expert “about how people make sense of their lives and what searching for meaning means” (Lather & Smithies, 1997, p. xvi).

Through each participant’s introduction – in their own words, in their own voice – readers may come to know the participants not only as they are situated in the research, but also as people who live multilayered and complicated lives. Each participant’s introduction attends to the concepts of temporality, the personal and social, and place,

keeping in mind the “*metaphorical three dimensional narrative inquiry space*” (p. 50) that is central to Clandinin & Connelly’s (2000) notion of narrative inquiry.

As I crossed the thresholds into the students’ homes to have our conversations, I observed how each family had put their house in order for my visits. Each time I was met with a warm, welcoming embrace and a show of hospitality that was humbling. Students selflessly shared their stories, often voicing them for the first time. Because their stories are the foundation of this narrative inquiry and to honour the courage it took to voice them, I introduce the students first. I have typed the students’ stories in bold italics for added emphasis, to amplify their voices, so to speak. I took liberties to take quotes from field text transcripts out of the order they were originally spoken to create a sequence of events that creates a cohesive narrative. However, I was ever conscious that “this work ... made a claim on [me] to not drown the poem of the other with the sound of [my] own voice” (Lather & Smithies, 1997, p. xvi). I kept in mind that English is not their language of emotion as I made effort to honor each student’s individuality, personality, and the spirit in which their words were spoken. I did not “clean up” the students’ grammar, as an English teacher is wont to do. For all of the students, English is a third or fourth language, so they express themselves in ways that characterize their fluid position as English language learners. I incorporated bracketed words to fill in the gaps, to fill in words inferred by body language, such as a nod or hand gestures, to fill in words unspoken but indicated in our face-to-face encounters, to keep the tense consistent, or to mask third party identities.

Jima's Story – In Her Voice

My country had big problems. There was too much trouble, everyday problems. If you go out, there is trouble somewhere. They ask too many questions, the [military], because if you don't have a passport it's trouble. You can't go anywhere. You can't have [a passport] before 18. They know you young, but still they ask ... trouble. I had to stay at home with my mom, with my dad. I can't go anywhere because I don't have passport. I'm young. Sometimes people come to young people and steal everything, like burglars. There were no police. [The people in my village] didn't have a gun or anything. They had to get out of their house. They can see police in the day time. They have sometimes police everywhere, but at night they can't see police and they don't have a phone. [We] were scared by [those] people. They would come at night with guns.

There was too much trouble, so I needed to leave. I was 15. I packed my clothes. [I didn't tell my parents.] I went with my cousin and her boyfriend. We went to the border to get to the next country. We walked five or six hours. At that time I was okay. But when I got there, I was sad [because I missed] my mom and my dad and five brothers. I am the oldest.

The police from my country came and caught me at the border. They wanted to take me back to my country. But when they first caught me, my stuff, her stuff, his stuff, they took it. It was night time, very dark. They had no light. All mountains, no people. I went behind the border. I ran away at night from the police. They didn't see me. They thought I went this way, but I went the other way. I didn't want to go back to my country. I was afraid. I had no food, no water. But my cousin and her boyfriend, [the police] took them back to our country. The boy was three years in jail in our

country. My cousin only six months in jail because they tried to run away from our country.

I walked half an hour. It was all big mountain. People can't go there, only animals like deer, lion, tigers. I walked but I can't go. It was too dark. I was sitting because I can't go. It [was] all mountain and mountain and dark. I can't see anything. There was a tiger. He came to me. He sometimes comes to me. Sometimes he go away, sometimes he comes. He might eat me, I don't know ... very scary. After he [went], I slept on the ground because before [that] night I walked all night. I didn't sleep for two nights. I slept until morning.

In the morning I walked. No water, no river because it was all mountains. No food. It's cool in the mountains. It was dark, a light rain. I walked and walked before I left the mountain. If I see people in a house, I asked for help. Typical city. You come, people they help you, take you to another city, give you to the government office. For the first city and the next city I speak their language because [they were] just over the border [from my home country]. For the first city they speak my first language. For the next city they speak my second language. But in the third city they speak [a language] I don't speak. Wherever you go, you have to go to the office, say why you come here, what happened, why you come to this country. I didn't [say] anything because I didn't speak the language. [But] they know my country had problems. They help you and everything. They take you to the refugee camp.

My mom's family was there. They went before me. I didn't know them. They don't know me. But I heard about them. I asked for them. In the camp [our] house was made of wood and hay. [Everyday in the camp] stay home, visit some friends. They give

one month 15 kilos of wheat. I had to take it to a machine to grind it. They gave you oil, two cups for one month, and one kilo of beans for each person. If you have money, you can buy everything. [You got money] from your family in Canada or America. Some people played cards [for money]. For a full day of work you could make \$1.00. You do like breaking the ground, or with cement ... very hard, very hot.

[My family] knew [I was there] but phones are no good in this country. We can phone to America and Canada, but I can't phone to my country. I had no job, no anything, very hot. Life was hard. I got sick. I got malaria. I was in the hospital for three months. They have school but I didn't go. The people because no job, nothing, they don't care about school because they [think] too much [about getting out]. In the refugee camp [some people] drink. Some people do no good thing.

I met [my husband] in the refugee camp. Somebody asked me to meet him because I have only one clothes. I couldn't buy anything [in the refugee camp]. He has money and he give me clothes. He asked another people [if he can] marry me. I was 15. I don't know him. If you are not married, very hard. If you get out you're okay, but [if] you live there, it's very hard.

After I was there for two months, the Americans came to people underage. They looking for young people. They look at all underage people like 15 or 16 years. They look at my paper, my name and my age. They asked me, "How did you come here? Do you have family here?" They ask me [if I want] I go to Canada. I don't know if they coming back.... [After many months] they came back. They had a paper. They took my name. They said, "You can come tomorrow at ten o'clock." At that time I'm married. I went there, that time me and my husband. They need only me because before they have

only my name. They didn't know my husband. I asked them, "I'm married. Can I take him?" They said, "Why are you married because you're only 15?" I told them, "I stay here, it's very hard." They know also those things. If you are married at 15, you have many problems. "You're going to Canada next year this time," they told me. Everybody get five years, four years, two years. They told me, "I know you have trouble if you're married at 15 and you have no family. I hope next year this time you will be in Canada." It was very fast. Usually you have to wait. I made my birthday up [older]. If you're 15, you can't go without your family. You have to make your birthday up.

To get to the airport, I have to go three day, four days almost [by] bus. [I brought] just only one my clothes [and] pictures of the camp. The UN give me money from the refugee camp to the big city and [when] I come to the big city they give me hotel or food or whatever. [It was] nice to walk around big city, so nice. They have nice food, nice things. They have lots of jobs. I was walking [around] the city and you walk and walk because I think three or four million people in the city.

I see men fighting. [I see them] come from far away. It looked like fighting, but two friends still. If they see you have money, they look like [they are] fighting, then run, run, run. One man is like [bumping into] me, one is like running away. Look like fight, but just two friends. I have money [in my pocket and the man took it out when he bumped into me]. Two men they do like, "Aaahhh sorry, sorry, sorry" [while he put his hand in my pocket and took out all of my money]. And I didn't see it.

I heard there would be snow [in Canada]. I saw on the TV, but when I come it was very nice. It was not too bad. When I come here because [I came from the] really big city, it's very, very small. It's like a village. [Someone] from a settlement agency

was at the airport, took us to a hotel. [Later we] got an apartment. I was very happy, but I don't speak English. I don't understand anything. [After six months] I left [to go to another province] for my husband's job. I stay home. I was tired because [I was pregnant]. I didn't go a lot outside. [My husband went away]. I come back [to this city] myself and my baby. I don't know anybody there.

I have the paper [refugee transportation loan²]. This is what I have to pay. Last [year] it was cheaper. Before it was \$3,700 but now it adds interest. It's \$3,933.80. I haven't started [to pay it back]. [I feel] bad. [By] next June, [if] I'm not finished [paying], becomes very high, they told me. This is [for] two people, [my ex-husband and me]. I don't know [why I must pay for him too]. [Immigration] say you have to because before you signed, so everything under your name. I don't know where [my ex-husband] is. [He knew] first time I have to pay together, he and me. I don't know where he is. I have to find him and ask him because Immigration says [they can't help]. Yea, it's a problem because I have to go to school and those things. And every year getting more interest I have to pay.

² The term refugee transportation loan refers to the Canadian Federal Government Immigration Loans Program (ILP). Loans are approved according to the immigrant/refugee applicant's needs and ability to repay. The loans are used to pay for costs of medical examinations abroad, travel documents, and transportation to Canada. Interest, at rates set each January, is charged on ILP loans (CIC, 2005). Refugees are expected to pay back these loans within six years. Controversy exists over ILP loans as they are seen as counter-productive, unnecessary burdens particularly for marginalized groups, like refugees, who have suffered trauma in war affected countries. Without the loan, they can not financially afford to leave their country. They arrive with few possessions, have difficulty learning language and finding employment, live below the poverty line, and have no means to repay the debt. The issue is compounded because impoverished refugees rely on federal assistance payments that are tied to provincial assistance payment rates, which have not increased for over a decade (First Call, 2008).

[I was happy in my country] because I had so much people around. [My job at home was] get water from the stream or [pump]. Water all the time, run, run. It was [far away]. I help my mom. I was too young, I don't know how to cook. My brothers were all younger [than me] so no work. [Life] was hard for girls, but it was still nice.

[I try to send] a little bit [of money home to my family]. In refugee camp people say Canada welcome you [with] ten million dollars. They say, "Why my family not send more money?" Yea, it's not true. I would [go back] to my country, to the big city not in the village, if [it was safe]. But now it's not safe. I am happy [here] sometimes.

Everything is safe. I have school, daycare.

* * * * *

Bareshna's Story – In Her Voice

We moved [around] because my mom was a teacher and at that time it was a terrorist regime [and women were not allowed to be educated or teach]. When the [terrorists] first came to my country, we were all watching from upstairs looking down from the window. I couldn't even look because I was not tall enough, so my mom was holding me up. Their eyes had black [eyeliner]. [They wore] dirty clothes. But, my mom was not afraid. My mom thought these people don't understand and they're just uneducated and I'm not going to listen to them. I'm just going to go and keep teaching.

[When] the terrorists came to my country there was a big change in life. The time they were forcing women was this terrorist regime. One time I remember I was going to school and I couldn't cross the street because there were no traffic lights, so I had to call for the teacher from the other side to come and get me. The terrorists came, crazy people with big cars. It was very cold and I was wearing a very big scarf and I

didn't have a burka like my mom. They were telling me, "Why aren't you wearing a burka? You have to wear a burka." I was only five years old. I don't know how they could do that. They started beating me up until the teacher came. I was in the hospital for three weeks. All my jacket was stuck on my skin. There was a lot of blood. They beat me with a cable. Nobody could stop them. No way. The teacher came and said, "Can't you see how old is she? She's only five, she can't even walk properly. How could you do that?" They said, "She needs to wear the burka."

One day they came straight to our home to try to find a reason to ask for weapons. My mom said we didn't have weapons. They were really pushing me hard. My dad was in trouble because he was a businessman and he wasn't home. They kept asking, "Where are the weapons, where are the weapons?" My mom didn't listen. She pointed to my older brothers and said, "They are my weapons." After that the terrorists started shooting at my two older brothers, nine and twelve years old. My mom fell down and, after, me and my younger brother went to a neighbour. They started firing from our house through the window to our neighbour's house. It was three or four in the morning.

Our neighbours said they would help us with everything to move to the next country because it was only a three hour drive. We were going to go there with nothing, no money, no clothes, nothing. We lost everything. When we went there, none of our family knew where we were. The next day they looked everywhere. They thought the terrorists killed everybody, all of us. I saw all of that happen. I can remember only the room where I lost my brothers, but I can't remember anything else around the

house. I have very bad memories. Bad memories always stay in your mind. You can't forget about it.

The first night we stayed in a church and then after a while we found people and ask them for a job. But we had nothing. My mom couldn't teach because she didn't have her papers saying she had a degree, so she started sewing clothes in a company. [My mom had to] sew like 200 skirts in one day. My mom was used to working with papers, so it was hard for her. [Sometimes] she said, "I can't" because she got hurt a lot. Her arms were all black because when the terrorists came to our home, they beat my mom with their weapons a lot. I tried to help my mom [by putting] the thread through the needle because we had to give it to them all the time. So that's how we started our life [there].

After one year my mom said, "I can't handle this any more. You need to go to school." And we started school. Most of the classes are similar to here, but the problem is most of the students didn't have tables and chairs and they had to sit on the floor. The school couldn't provide these things. Most of the teachers had to teach in [old shipping] containers. But, still the students wanted to go.

At that time when the terrorists came to my country it was a big effect on [our] people who were living in other countries because when people tried to run away from their country, most of the countries didn't want refugees to come there. When I went to school they were [taunting me], "Oh, you, you come from war." And you were thinking how come they could say that to you? A lot of things were happening. It was so hard for us. We didn't speak the language. My mom went to school and told them this is who

I was, and she was a teacher. Everybody comes from war. We should have respect for each other, especially because we are neighbours.

My mom when she was working for that company, sometimes she had to go pick up some stuff. When she was coming back there was a lady [who said,] “You know here is the United Nations. You have education. You can write notes. Can you write the letter for me?” And my mom is like, ‘The UN is here?’ She didn’t know. And my mom was like, “Okay, I can write a letter for you.” My mom got a lot of ideas from there and she was helping a lot of people at that time. [Then] my mom started writing a letter about our life, and after one year they called my mom to come for interview. After three or four months, they said, “You got accepted, but we don’t know when you will go.” My mom, even though we got accepted, still she wasn’t very sure, 100%, because this world is changed right now.

We were excited to go to Canada, what we saw in the movies mostly. And we saw from the airplane all is flat. There is nothing here, no mountains. [In the first city where the plane landed], there were people we knew. They said, “How could you go to that province? It’s cold, it’s freezing. Please stay here.” We said, “No, they accept us to go there. It’s not a good idea to stay here.” They said, “No don’t, please, don’t accept it. Don’t go. I’m telling you. You will come back!” They give us a little bit stress, a little bit scared.

[The first thing I remember seeing here is] snow. And when we came here I felt lost because in the other country there’s a lot of people. It’s very busy, the streets and all that, but when we came here it was flat, it’s nothing, no buildings. We went to the hotel, it was good. When we went to the hotel we couldn’t even speak English. We had

to act or we had to draw something. It was very funny. After the hotel [we moved to an apartment]. [We were] scared because there was nobody walking the street. Everyday our sponsor family take us outside and around and show us things. That was helping a lot.

I try to understand it. I say okay, I lost only two brothers. Most others lost their parents, they lost their whole family. They don't have anyone. We had neighbours that lost their parents. There were three sisters. One was only one month, another was six years, and the other was thirteen years old. They were just babies. Now they grow up and they stand by themselves. I think I should be strong, think about something more important. Think about this: If this is going to be happening in my country now, how are we going to solve the problem?

Now when I watch the news or whenever I hear about my country or when I talk to my family [there], I still have bad memories. And when I see in the news something horrible, I wonder what will happen next because my dad is still there. They've attacked my dad a few times, but he ran away. And whenever I talk to him sometimes he can't answer because there can be many problems there. Then I can't fall asleep at night. [Now] I feel like in this country I have somebody to support me. I have somebody to look after me. I have somebody to stand for me, and nobody is like forcing me to do something. [But I'm always] thinking about my dad. What's going on? What's wrong with him right now? Is he thinking about us?

I try to be more open with people and talk to them to see what I should learn from them. I volunteer a lot. I want to do that because it gives you lessons. I always try to go out and learn something. I am interested in movies and dancing. Dancing is part

of my fun thing. I can dance any kind of dance. When I see it once, I don't have to see it a second time. I can follow all the things. Sewing is also kind of fun for me. I love to do fashion. Fashion most of the time shows what kind of person you are, the way you look, the way you dress up. If I'm wearing clothes from my culture, I'm proud enough to be who I am.

* * * * *

Francis' Story – In His Voice

I don't really remember much about the country I was born in because I lived there for [only] four years before we moved to another country. I consider my first country as my home, but the place that I grew up, that's my second home. There was too much violence, and my mom couldn't take it any more. The house would get broken in. People would ask for money for no reason, and every single day there was gun shots, war, violence, too much violence. It's all about safety. My grandpa that's how he died too because of violence. I was only three years old when he died. He got shot. My mom didn't want me to experience that kind of life, and she couldn't take that kind of life. She decided we'd just randomly run away. She just wanted a better place.

I remember we went in a big truck and they took us to a camp, a refugee camp. The country was beautiful. It was really nice living there, but the problem is just the money, being poor and stuff. I grew up with no food, that's how I grew up. Sometimes I had to go to my auntie's to eat because we didn't have food at home. My house was a building out of sticks. It wasn't that small. It was good enough for the family.

[The refugee camp] had a school, but it wasn't just a normal school. It doesn't have grades. The whole thing is you learn Arabic. It was built with sticks and grasses

and we'd love it when it rains there because every time it rains, we don't have school because the water comes in the roof and you can't really do anything. [Students sat] on the dirt floor. [The teacher is] always a man. The whole class, it's one big room. It was so noisy because everybody had to practice what they're reading. Usually memorizing, reading, and you have to read to the teacher so everybody was practicing. And, when you go up to him, you can't make a mistake, you'd get whipped. A good memory is when I actually read my Sura [verses in the Koran] without a mistake. That was my best memory because usually you get whipped or you make a mistake. That's the only good memory that I have is when I actually read it without a mistake. That was actually once. [If you got it right] he said, "Good job." He was really proud and stuff. It's a really good thing. So [when] he whips you and everything, it's not like he hates you. It's just to get you better, to make you study more, not go play, to stick with your religion, study hard, memorize it, make sure you got it right and everything.

I remember one time I couldn't sleep, like I had to stay up all night 'cause I didn't memorize and I had to finish the whole Sura. I'm just panicking. I hadn't memorized it. I remember I didn't go to school that day and the teacher came to get me. The teacher knows where everybody lives. He doesn't need a phone number or anything. He knows when students don't want to come to school usually it's because they didn't finish what they were supposed to do. So he came to get me and I got whipped anyway.

The days that I usually [had] fun is when the beach, the water is all there, like usually the water is not full. That day, when it's full, that's when everybody goes swimming. And, then there's times we'd have a soccer tournament. Everybody would

put in money. After, whoever won got to keep the money, and I remember we had a celebration. We won one time and everybody was getting carried home. Whoever is next to go home, you get carried on their shoulders. So, we had fun too.

After we were in the camp [for five years], the UN decided everybody had to move away from that camp. We stayed in another big refugee camp for a bit, maybe five months, to get things organized and stuff. It was hot, like really, really hot. It's like a desert. Here they don't beat you up [in school]. Sometimes I'd never go because the teacher wouldn't come to my house. And, when I heard it was food time [at school], then I'd go and then I'd eat. Then we went to [a big city]. We lived there for a couple of months or so and then the flight was from [the big city] to Canada. We lived in a big building and a lot of people lived there. The food it was free. Everything for us is supplied, breakfast, we'd go eat [in the restaurant] and lunch time, we'd go eat there. It was free, supplied, everything.

They picked [Canada] for us. We didn't even care where we were going to go. We just wanted to get out of there. So we go on a plane. I got locked in the washroom. I didn't know how to open the door. I was just kicking the door and then my mom came and she didn't know either, so one of the people came and helped. After we land, they give us jackets. So, I'm like, "Why we wearing jackets?" We haven't seen outside yet ... then we seen the snow coming down, you know, like wow!

[The war in my country] it's still going still. I remember one time my mom was talking to my auntie on the phone and she said, "Oh, there's a gun shot and there's people fighting." My mom cries [when] something happens that is bad. I get worried you know. There's times that people hold a person [for ransom]. Then they say that

person owes us money and they don't even owe the money. They just want to find a reason to get money. I remember one time they did that to my cousin and then [my relatives] called here. They were like we need the money and my mom was crying. They were going to do this to him ... they will hurt him unless you give us that money. We don't have a way to get them the money. It's a lot of money, like thousands.

When I was a little kid I was in so much trouble. I'd drive my mom crazy. Every time I'd get in trouble, my mom would always tell me like some drama stuff that makes you really want to cry. Like it tells you look where we are right now and look what we've been through in the past. After grade six I just wanted to do something to get away from the trouble. In high school I became more focused because it's very hard.

My mom she's been through a lot. She's done a lot for me. She always supports me. It's my turn to show her that I do care, show her all the stuff that I can do. Like I can't pay back all the stuff that she's done for me in the past, but I can still do tiny things to show her. I'm only working because of my mom. I don't want to buy clothes, this and that, that's not my reason. My mom comes first before anything. I gotta work to send money to my country and give money to her. Pretty soon she wants to go to see her mom and her family. So that's the least I can do, make her happy.

I appreciate life. I appreciate my family. There's some people who don't have a life like I do. There are some people living on their own, some people dropping out of school. I feel lucky being here 'cause I have everything right now. I have an education, good life, school. I have clothes. I have TV, everything. I'm lucky that I am here and I'm living life like how Canadian people live. I'm in a different religion, but you know

we're still living the life ... we have stuff that we never ever expected to have. Back home we never had half of this stuff we have right now. I am lucky to be here.

* * * * *

The Researcher as a Father's Daughter

My first memories begin in a 640 square foot bungalow on a street in an old part of this city on the prairies, divided by a boulevard and lined by towering elm trees. After more than 40 years, my five siblings and I all still nostalgically refer to it as *The House on Main Street*. I recall spending many summer days playing in spaces alive with the spirit of hope and goodness as I observed the life in the neighbourhood. I remember long summer nights, too hot to sleep even on the front porch, peering into the night sky, straining to see inside the darkness, thinking and wondering where it ended. Funny, but I feel like I could see life with more precision then, without the vague edges I sometimes see now. Those days are a long way gone now, and I have moved ten times since then, but my memories from *The House on Main Street* remain sharp and certain. A short story stays with me called *Head* written by Saskatchewan writer Edna Alford (1990) in which the nameless narrator thinks about his childhood home on the prairies as the one place “in the world where [he] could see things clear and from a long way off, like stars, . . . or trees along the coulee hill, things like that and maybe more” (p. 13). He believed “that if you could see one kind of thing clear and from far off – real things, natural things, trees and stars and such – then you could probably see the other kinds of things too, things you couldn’t touch, ideas and feelings and who knows what, clear and from a long way off” (p. 13). This is the clarity of vision I had growing up in *The House on Main Street*.

When I was very young, we had milk delivered to our house in glass bottles by a milkman who drove two enormous Clydesdales pulling a green wagon filled with ice and milk. My two older sisters, three years older than me less a day, were twins and they broke the uncharted territory of school, a place I longed to go mostly because I was lonely when they were away. Occasionally, my sisters would catch a ride to school with the milkman. This probably did not occur very often, but when it did it was a momentous occasion so it has stayed in my memory. The horses that pulled the wagon fascinated and terrified me at the same time. The wagon and the giant beasts made a clanging commotion of clomping hooves, metal against metal, and wheels rumbling on the rough road. The horses wore blinders, which troubled me because I realized they wore them as a distraction from seeing the noisy life around them as they plodded through the streets. I wondered what might happen if they lost their blinders. Would they run away out of control? Would they chase me if they could see me? If I got too close would they not see me and crush me?

In many ways, these broad shouldered work horses reminded me of my father. He had emigrated from Germany just after WWII, trained as a blacksmith, full of *Wanderlust*, a young, proud immigrant ready to work hard to start anew in Canada. Like the Clydesdales with blinders that pulled the milk wagon, my father, too, seemed to have blinders that essentially kept him from seeing behind or beside him and kept him focused only on what was straight ahead, so driven was he to make a life for himself and his family. Not long after his arrival, though, he perceived his new land was unwelcoming, condescending even. My father had stepped into the anti-Nazi tensions in Canada following World War II, with an undeniably *deutscher Akzent* that betrayed his roots, at a

time when the government had implemented a set of initiatives “designed to develop a sense of Canadianism among members of the so-called ‘foreign born’ population” (Joshee, 1995b as cited in Joshee, 2004, p. 138). The underlying hostilities against the “foreign born” population were accentuated by the corresponding “set of initiatives meant to educate ‘old stock’ Canadians about the threat that prejudicial attitudes posed to national unity” (p. 138). My father often talked about this dissonance and the affect it had on his position on the landscape of his new country. He told me how shortly after his arrival he felt as if he were the only person in the entire city that was charged to walk on the city sidewalks. He had interpreted the poll tax charged to all citizens as being charged solely to him because he was a foreigner, creating conflicting emotions for him simultaneously being singled out and unaccepted. His misinterpretation was not far-fetched considering that my mother’s father, who had emigrated from Prussia in the late 1920s to begin farming here, had his rifle impounded during WWII because he was seen as a potential threat, for after all he was foreign looking and “foreign born.”

As a little girl, I never recalled my father speaking German in public or at home, outside of his occasional lapses when driven to frustration or for his endearment for me, *Schnickelfritz*. While my mother searched diligently in a German-English dictionary for words as she wrote on his behalf to his mother, he would often feign ignorance or become suddenly hard of hearing. He never talked about his past life in Germany; he lived in the moment and every moment was filled with work. No task was too big for him, and he expected the same work ethic from his children. For one year when I was eight years old, he worked both nights on the railway and days at the university until he got hired there permanently. In his spare time he built large things with his hands: houses,

furniture, concrete patios, and a motor home. He converted an entire dairy farm into a farrow-to-finish hog operation while working at his full-time day job; he even dug the basement of an addition on one of our later houses, by hand.

As a little girl I recall him always at some sort of labor, impatient to finish and move on to the next job, and so focused on the task at hand that he would knock me over as I watched him at his work bench because he simply did not see me standing quietly next to him. As children we learned to see him coming and to get out of his way. Somehow I always knew, though, that my father's inability to see me was not because of vision problems.

Many years later, just after he retired, my father was diagnosed with a degenerative eye disease, causing him to lose his central vision completely and to rely solely on his peripheral vision. Losing his vision was traumatic for him because it essentially meant losing his independence. He could no longer drive a vehicle or continue to work on his beloved farm. Nevertheless, I have watched him make remarkable adjustments and develop inordinate patience over the years as he struggled to maintain control over his life. He purchased a computer that reads newspapers and articles aloud to him, and he keeps abreast of current affairs by listening closely to the radio and television news. He drives all over town, not in his car, but on his bicycle. He built himself a workshop in his backyard and has become a self-taught wood turner. Understandably, his tenacious spirit makes some people doubt his vision problems, although he is legally blind.

Ironically, despite his degenerating vision, my father has embraced the opportunity to see things in a completely different way now, somehow broader, clearer

almost. Bateson (1994) states that “*to attend* means to be present, sometimes with companionship, sometimes with patience” (p. 109). Perhaps my father has begun to see clearer because his willingness “*to attend*” more carefully to people and objects around him “is rooted in attention to what is” (p. 109). He now takes the time to use his peripheral vision to examine things carefully, “mindfully” (Langer, 1989). A tree outside his front window, which may have gone unnoticed in the past, is now a measure for his continuous visual degeneration. He takes time to “attend” to a finger print on a glass table top, to meticulously sand the wood fibers on a bird’s eye maple bowl to a luster, to patiently search with his hands for a dropped nail in the sawdust, and to spend hours enticing blue jays to his deck and have them eventually eat out of his hand.

I have often wondered how losing his vision has at the same time improved his ability to see. A quote from Helen Keller helped me to understand these feelings. She once said, “The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision” (ThinkExist.Com, n.d.). Now that his central vision has failed him, my father has been forced to shed his “blindness” and to rely solely on his peripheral vision. Bateson (1994) contends “there are many reasons why less narrow attention, more peripheral vision, offers richer and more responsible living ... [for] too narrow an attention to the obvious ... can make one miss something essential going on at the periphery” (p. 100). I believe my father has developed what Langer (1989) terms as “mindfulness” or what Bateson refers to as a deeper noticing of the world around him, which is “the basis of effective concern” (p. 109). And, through his concern, he has in so many ways allowed me to see him, the refugee students with whom I work, and the world around me with greater clarity. It’s only since I began working with refugee students that I’ve come to recognize

how influential my early experiences are in shaping the evolving life story I live by as a daughter, a mother, and a teacher.

* * * * *

The Researcher as the Mother of a Soldier

*“I dream of giving birth to a child who will ask, ‘Mother, what was war?’”
~ Eve Merriam, American poet, 1916-1992 ~*

I spent the majority of my life knowing little about Afghanistan or even where it was on the map. It wasn't a destination my husband, Rick, and I included on our list of far away places to see, so I never studied or researched it from all directions like I might have had we planned to journey there. I never dreamed this land-locked country in the centre of Asia would end up on our family's large laminated map with a flag pin stuck in it, indicating one of us had been there. After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, when the war in Afghanistan had become a daily feature in the newspapers and on the television news, I started to pay some attention to the country, with as much interest as someone so distanced from it does, not realizing the role it would eventually play in our family. When I started working closely with refugee students who had fled from this Islamic republic, I listened to their awful war stories, cried as I read their journals revealing inexcusable treatment of human beings, and began researching the country and its history. But, when our oldest son, Mark, informed us he was going to Afghanistan with the Canadian Armed Forces, I began to eat, sleep, and breathe all that was Afghanistan, to the point I felt I might choke on that country's contaminated dust, which no measure of my tears could wash away.

It is interesting how life stories ebb and flow like the waves that undulate and course back on themselves, making you wonder where they begin and if they end. When

we try to piece stories together, we are forced to look closely to see the streams of connections that ripple through them. Often it is only when the tide ebbs that the life lying on the ocean floor is exposed. Writing this story has forced me to sift through the grains of my past experiences that previously only drifted in and out of my consciousness but now have become so integral to its whole.

When our oldest son, Mark, joined the Canadian Armed Forces we always knew his goal was to do a tour of duty, euphemistically referred to as peacekeeping duty. But, I have to back up here because even though I never realized it at the time, it is important to this story to return to the day he was born. In those pre-baby days, as we mulled over possible names, the number one contender was the name Mark, which means warlike one. Shortly after Mark was born, a family friend commented that because so many male babies had been born around the same time that year, it meant that there would be a war when they became young men. I scoffed at the implications of this, as if some fantastical being could manipulate the occurrence of future war. I tried to dismiss the comment as a silly old wives' tale, yet I was disturbed by it. As a new mother, I felt very protective of my firstborn. I could hardly trust the nurses to watch over him when they took him away to the nursery, let alone even think about the possibility of having to protect him from war. It was then that I understood why the cat I had as a little girl, who had recently borne a litter of kittens, flew out of the open door and attacked the newspaper boy's poor, unsuspecting dog – hissing, spitting, clawing – in an attempt to protect her kittens.

I Didn't Raise My Boy to be a Soldier (Chorus)
~ Alfred Bryan, Lyricist; Al Piantadosi, Composer (1915) ~

*I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier,
I brought him up to be my pride and joy,
Who dares to put a musket on his shoulder,
To shoot another mother's darling boy?
Let nations arbitrate their future troubles,
It's time to lay the sword and gun away,
There would be no war today,
If all mothers would say,
I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier.*

It still surprises me that we have a son in the military at all, for I was the mother who tried to keep guns and violence away from my children. I was the mother who threw out plastic guns and army toys when our boys received them as gifts from well-meaning friends. I was the mother who was prepared to fight the government if it ever imposed a military draft for our young men. I was the mother who would give her own life to protect her children from all of the dangers I could imagine. Maybe this fervent motherly instinct explains how I came to know Mark was going to Afghanistan, perhaps even before he did, certainly it was weeks before he told us.

I learned Mark was going to war when Rick and I were in Bali, Indonesia celebrating our 25th wedding anniversary. After passing our days as tourists in heat and humidity that forced us to take life at a slower pace, I slept heavily at night, the kind of sleep that caused me to dream the type of dreams that I could remember vividly the next day. Even as I read my book by the Indian Ocean days later, the dream replayed itself in my mind. In fact, this dream is still so vivid to me two years later that I have no trouble recalling it here.

I'm in the back seat of a non-descript taxi. It's dark outside. The driver's face is blacked out and he does not talk. Mark is sitting in the front seat looking over his left shoulder at me. I am sobbing uncontrollably. At first I am confused. I don't know why I am crying, but when I realize Mark is wearing his desert camouflage uniform, I panic, understanding that we are driving him to the airport. The look on his face tells me there is no turning back.

When I woke up I was crying and my pajamas were soaked, despite the air conditioner blasting on high. And, that is when I knew with certainty our son was going to war.

Bali is known for its peaceful, friendly people, rich culture, and devotion to Hinduism. This island paradise was a destination we had planned to visit for several years; however, because of the Bali bombings of October 12, 2002 and October 1, 2005 our plans were postponed several times. When we did journey there in April 2006, it was evident how these terrorist attacks had destroyed their economy and devastated their lives, yet the gentle, ever smiling Balinese openly shared their stories and their hope for the future with us.

Despite the vestiges of terrorism, some of their most prevalent cultural icons, *umble-umbles* or *lelontek*, which lined the roads in villages and paths to even the humblest home, gave a festive feeling wherever we went. *Umbles* are slender, towering bamboo poles anchored into the earth that start out tall and straight, but eventually droop toward the ground, often draped with billowing white, yellow, or other colorful cloth, depending on the nature of the celebration. They symbolize humility and respect for the earth and harmony between man and nature. I was moved when a Balinese

man told us they also honour the stages of life; we start as babies on the ground, later walking straight and tall, and eventually bending over in old age.

It was against this lush, tropical landscape dotted by these symbols of life that I shared my dream with Rick as we drove through exotic vistas, up through the verdant, terraced rice fields. In this country bursting with life we were both able to tuck the dream away, for it seemed impossible that our son could be going to war, especially when he was at that very moment stationed in the remote reaches of Canada, protecting the sovereignty of the frigid North. That night I was reminded of how far away we were from each of our three children, who were scattered across Canada under a blanket of snow.

We returned home mid-April, re-energized with a feeling that we had put the tail-end of the long winter behind us. The snow was gone; the trees were budding, and water was flowing down the gutter on our street corner; the air smelled like spring with all the hope and new life that it brings. It was against this backdrop that Mark also arrived home to tell us he had volunteered for a tour of duty in Kandahar, Afghanistan and had received his orders. In June he would begin special training with the Provincial Reconstruction Team for six months, and he would deploy the beginning of February 2007. I responded by immediately breaking down crying. I did not need time to mull over the news, turn it around in my head or to think about it from all angles before reacting. I had already done that. Mark was uncomfortable with my reaction. I could tell he wanted me to take the news in stride and put away my unwarranted fears, even to be happy for him, but I did not have the strength to pretend.

The next six months while Mark prepared to deploy were the most difficult times I have experienced as a parent. When I walked the dog in the open field I cried, talked

aloud to myself, screamed into the wind, and deliberated how I could stop him from going. Shopping for groceries, I would walk myself through his anticipated funeral and catch myself voicing words under my breath. I felt frantic, like I was watching my little boy walk away with the very stranger I had been protecting him from since birth, and there I was, his mother, not even stopping him. My tears, either pent up or released, and the ache in my throat gave me a perpetual headache. The barrage of news out of Afghanistan haunted me as I kept track of the death toll. Even as it included soldiers from our city, I selfishly tried to see a pattern, perhaps some sign to ensure Mark's name would never be among them. Terms like terrorists, extremists, jihad, Taliban, weapons of mass destruction, suicide bombers, RPGs, IEDs, and ramp ceremonies became common vocabulary in our conversations around the dinner table.

I sought some kind solace by retracing his life. I pored over his baby book where I had recorded every first: his first smile, first tooth, first word, first haircut, even his first bruise. Every photo in albums devoted to him marked the stages of a precious life. Mark was a wise child, a model child, an obedient child that understood logic and reason. I thought then about pleading with him not to go, or even demanding that he not go.

A turning point was when Rick and I were out for dinner with Mark and his partner, Jessica, shortly before his deployment. The conversation turned to Afghanistan as was the norm then. I was beginning to see how my inability to cope was putting a strain on my relationship with my son. Mark told us he knew we didn't understand why he felt compelled to go, but he also didn't want to be the old man who looked at himself in the mirror with regrets. That was the moment I finally tried to come to terms with his leaving. I realized then that his side of this story was all together different than mine.

There he was 24 years old; he stood a man, a man who was brave and sure about his volunteering to take part in reconstructing a country devastated by war. Mark is the kind of young man who means everything he says, and like the kite runner, Hassan, he thinks “everyone else does too” (Hosseini, 2003, p. 70). I knew I had to let him go because if I didn’t, he would listen to me, and I would never forgive myself.

In a journal I kept at that time I wrote:

I am scared to death for Mark as he prepares to do a tour of duty in the war in Afghanistan. I am obsessed with the possibility of death – his and the other mothers’ boys’. How would he react at that moment, for only two choices exist . . . fight or flight? I’ve studied the stories, poems, and novels portraying the futility of war, with their common themes of invincible young men and heartbroken mothers.

And then later . . .

Despite my absorption with Mark and my own feelings, I see my experience is connected to those of the refugee students I teach. They have first-hand experience living in war torn countries, traumatized having witnessed death, violence, their goals and dreams put on hold, living in refugee camps, unable to attend school. There is a strange irony with Mark leaving home, in a sense also putting his life on hold, to fight for peace (this oxymoron grates on me every time I hear it) in the very country from which many of my students have fled. I am drowning in fear but at the same time anxious to see how this year will unfold.

It was Jessica’s idea to put together a book for Mark, a book with photos and letters from family and friends, a part of us he could take with him. It was a project that

took on a life of its own as Jessica and I contacted people, gathered their writing, and worked hard to keep it a secret from him. I was glad to have something to do, something meaningful, purposeful. I chose my words carefully, writing as if they might be my last to him, and attached my page under a picture of Rick and me in a rice paddy in Bali. We presented the book to him at the airport, swaddled in a brown envelope, to be sure he carried it with him. He was instructed not to open it until he got there.

Another entry in my journal reads:

*Mark left today. My composure surprises me. I read in the Family Handbook the military sent us in preparation for his deployment that there is actually a psychological theory called *The Emotional Cycle of Deployment*. The first stage is called *Anticipation of Loss*. I have moved on to the second stage called *Detachment and Withdrawal*. I am glad to read that what I am feeling is “normal.” It was strange letting go of my overwhelming emotions, always on the verge of losing control. I have spent most of the last six months wanting to scream and scream and scream to stop the insanity of war. I had an image of Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*, set against that blood red skyline, tattooed on my brain for a long, long time. Now, I feel nothing. The good-byes at the airport weren’t even as bad as I had dreamed. It is a relief to finally be able to talk about Mark without suffocating. Perhaps this is my body’s way of protecting me from the contaminated dust that continues to choke out life in Afghanistan.*

As I write this now, Mark has been safely home for six months. He did not endure physical injury; he shows no signs of suffering from psychological trauma, even though he saw death and survived the bombings at his camp. He appears to have seamlessly

readjusted to life at home, although I imagine after living in the microculture of an army base it was difficult to leave it behind. He did get sick while he was there, as most soldiers do, from inhaling the dust containing dehydrated particles from the filthy open sewers carried by the 120 Day Winds in the savagely hot summer temperatures reaching over 50°C.

I often think about how Mark’s experiences have become part of his life story and my life story. Mark continues to share his stories of war with family and friends, although we hear them less and less often as time goes on. He gives me the version he thinks I can handle, trying to protect me from certain truths. I feel like nothing can hurt me now because I have faced my greatest fear.

* * * * *

Researcher as Teacher

As a teacher I live my life as an educator working with refugee students who also live their lives in school (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). “Living my life” in the context of school allowed me to situate my “narrative histories” (p. 30) as a daughter, mother, and teacher in relation to the context of the “narrative histories” of my refugee student participants. In my early career as an EAL teacher I had, in some ways, kept the connection between refugee students’ past experiences and present experiences in high school out of my field of vision. Although I worked closely with my students, and I was definitely concerned about their well-being, I saw them through a lens of Eurocentrically formed values, something Frye (1983, as cited in Lugones, 1987) calls “‘arrogant perception,’” (p. 4) a failure to identify deeply with others. My experiences as a daughter showed me how war marks people with feelings of being foreign on their new

landscapes, but this alone did not help me identify with my students. My experiences as a mother of a soldier, though, brought me face-to-face with my “arrogant perception” that prevented me from moving forward in relation to understanding refugee students’ experiences. Now I had a personal framework that helped me to identify with my refugee students and grasp the significance of understanding their past lives in relation to their present lives. My experiences as a teacher working intimately with refugee students eventually brought me to a place where I could see commonalities in the life journeys we had taken, which facilitated bringing down the barriers of tension set up by my “arrogant perception.” My experiences with my son taught me how war breaks people down, incapacitating them through fear. My relationships with refugee students taught me how the students, through the hardest of life experiences, built up courage, resiliency, and survival.

Behnam was one such student who helped me to see the bigger picture my “arrogant perception” allowed me to keep tucked away in my “peripheral vision” (Bateson, 1994). He struck me as much older than his 20 years of age when I first met him with his jet black hair showing signs of graying and dark eyes hooded by heavy brows that gave him a stern look. He characterized Tortajada’s (2004) moving description of the Afghan people she met with their “perpetual sadness pouring from dry, unflinching eyes” (p. 6). Behnam’s first encounter with me as his EAL teacher was when I hosted my annual noon hour Valentine’s Day bingo party, his serious face in the midst of the merriment, trying to figure out the game, eventually grinning as he relaxed. But, it was when I read his response to the prompt for his English language arts assignment, *Who do you consider a hero?* that I began to see behind the mask of his grave demeanor

and glimpse into the past that he kept so close to him. Behnam's hero is his uncle, a well-known general in the Afghan army, who risked his life by rescuing Behnam and his family, amid rockets and bombs blasting overhead, and giving them safe passage to a neighbouring country in his old station wagon. Behnam was just ten years old then, but it was clear through his writing that he well-remembered his family's terror as the tensions built up to the night of the rescue. Behnam and I spent much time discussing his experiences and how the state of his homeland had changed his and thousands of other Afghan families' lives, some of whom sought refuge in our city. I sensed his "profound and sober sadness of a paradise lost, the nostalgia of the country that [he] ardently love[d]" (Tortajada, 2004, p. 6). This single encounter redefined our relationship as student and teacher. I became conscious of the strength required of him to cover up the deep scars from his sense of loss at the same time he was expected to embrace his new life in his country of refuge.

When Behnam learned that Mark was going to Afghanistan, our connection strengthened. Our conversations became a source of hope that helped me understand the positive side of Mark's participation in Afghanistan. Behnam's stories about his country allowed me to put a human face on the hostilities there. He confirmed that what I had assumed in my naïve western world view was strictly fictional in novels such as Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), and Khadra's (2005) *The Swallows of Kabul* was indeed real. His insights allowed me to see Mark's participation with the Provincial Reconstruction Team as noble, honorable, and a move toward social justice. Listening to Behnam's stories also made me conscious of what it means to be a survivor of war. His courage challenged me to see him and other refugee

students in ways I had not considered before. On the surface, it looked like he was functioning well in school, but I started to see that if we just scratched the surface, we would see how delicately his world was hanging in the balance. I began to imagine how we might envision our practices with refugee students in high school if we saw them through a lens that looked beneath the surface and brought their past experiences into focus.

* * * * *

Researcher as Researcher

As a researcher who is also a daughter, mother, and teacher my “narrative histories” intricately braid with the “narrative histories” of the refugee students with whom I work. Reflecting on my stories as a little girl took me backward in time to a place where I recalled experiences as a daughter of an immigrant father and forward to my current position as researcher working with refugee students. I pulled to the fore the naïveté I recognized in my early understanding of my father’s experiences as an immigrant to inform my present understanding of the students’ stories of their refugee experiences. I remembered the moment I realized my father had roots in a country other than Canada. I was about eight years old and I was looking through my parents’ photo album containing photographs of their younger years. I distinctly recall being mesmerized by a black and white postcard from my father’s village in post-war Germany with picture-book, thatched roofed houses and quaint shops set against a pastoral backdrop. This moment stayed in my mind because the postcard represented a life that was foreign to me, yet one that I was connected to since it encompassed the culture my father grew up in. This led me to wonder about myself, my father, and my two seemingly

different cultures. I remember proudly boasting about my new-found identity to my classmates as I presented the postcard as “proof” of my multiculturalism. With my limited knowledge of the world, I felt almost “exotic” knowing that I came from a culturally diverse background because there were no visible minority students in my school, and I assumed my peers and I were all “Canadian” children with similar backgrounds. My father’s negative experiences as an immigrant quickly cast a shadow on my enthusiasm, and I learned it was better never to mention my heritage in public places or in our home. My romanticized interpretation of the postcard marked my first awareness of my naïveté about the impact of war. This naïveté stayed with me, developing “arrogant perception” of my refugee students’ past experiences.

In recalling the time and place of this memory, I see its influence in shaping my work as a researcher. Through looking backward at “old memories, especially of events that were ambiguous, mysterious, incomplete” (Bateson, 1994, p. 30), I see that is when I awakened to an understanding of “the immigrant” experience, but in my personal narrative no story existed to help me understand “the refugee” experience. Looking at my present relationship with refugee students as I researched the broad questions of how they experience school, I was struck by how “silencing” (Fine, 1987) refugee students’ voices perpetuates our naïve understanding of their experiences. If we do not hear their stories, we have no opportunity to see them except through a lens of “arrogant perception.”

Looking inward and outward throughout the narrative process, I was conscious of how my past experiences with my father, son, and students traveled forward with me into the present and intertwined with my role as researcher of refugee students. Jima’s, Bareshna’s, and Francis’ self-introductions reflected how each student carries “with them

hidden but enduring scars that influence all aspects of their educational experiences” (Feuerverger & Richards, 2007, p. 555). As I read and reread my own stories, I could also trace in them a line of “hidden but enduring scars.” I was challenged to narratively illustrate how these vestiges of past experiences, whether psychological, emotional, or physically tangible, had become part of the students lived stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20) of their past and present narratives within the context of this work.

When Mark returned from Afghanistan, he accepted an invitation from our high school to speak to some of our history classes. Mark had attended this high school as a student and because of my position there as a teacher, several staff members are aware he is a soldier. After his first presentation, he was invited by other high schools and elementary schools around the city to talk with their students too, but not only in history classes. He also spoke to classes such as English language arts, lifestyles, career work education, and classes for remedial students. Soon he was approached by teachers out-of-town to present to their schools as well. Perhaps teachers saw his presentation as an opportunity to bring those of us separated by distances of land, sea, and circumstances that much closer to current events. Perhaps they saw a connection between his experiences and the curriculum in their particular subject areas.

When Mark first presented at our high school to a group of history students, I invited several of my refugee students, including Behnam, to attend. I remember marveling at how engaged all of the students were in Mark’s presentation. The presentation was interactive and the students had one question after another that reflected their interest in his experiences, the role of the Canadian military there, and the plight of the Afghan people. Even though Mark’s presentation went well over the one hour class

period, none of the students made a move to leave, even though the bell had rung indicating class periods had changed, so engaged were the students in his talk.

I observed my refugee students throughout the presentation and wondered what was going through their minds as they listened to Mark's perspective as a soldier. None of the refugee students participated in the group discussion. After Mark's presentation was finished, he stayed behind in my classroom to visit with my students. In this space, they were comfortable to engage in conversation with him and each other. A lively dialogue took place that covered topics of politics, history, and government in Canada and on distant shores.

As a researcher, traveling back in time to this event substantiates the importance of creating "meaningful spaces for authentic sharing" (Whelan, 1999, p. 30). It is significant here to consider why Mark had become a popular presenter to so many educators. It is also significant to consider what we might learn about our refugee students' experiences if we invited and welcomed them with the same enthusiasm Mark received. When my students and I joined the history students at Mark's presentation, we sat in a row at the back of the room, apart from the rest of the students. I wondered if the history students realized some of the students sitting behind them were refugees who were directly connected in so many ways to Mark's experiences. This is perhaps symbolic of the ways in which we as educators often keep students in our "peripheral vision" (Bateson, 1994). We may be aware of their presence, but we seldom turn to really see them or really hear them. Clandinin and Connelly's (1988) belief that teachers' "personal knowledge" ... determines all matters of significance relative to the planned

conduct of classrooms” (p. 4) brought home, once again for me, the central role educators play in the quality of students’ school experiences.

My son going to war has changed my life story forever. It has given me personal knowledge and deep understanding of experiences of war and shaped who I am and what I do. In so many ways, this occurred according to the stages represented by the Balinese *umble-umbles*. I started out on this journey like a wobbly baby learning to walk, having to plant my feet firmly to withstand the tensions of my motherly instinct’s attempts to push me forward when I knew I needed to stand back to allow Mark to follow his own path. Eventually, I was able to stand straight and tall with pride for my son and his conviction for doing what he knew to be right and just in a land of oppression. Now, I will try to share the weight placed on Mark’s shoulders as he continues his military career and deploys to locations around the world as we walk alongside each other in our work with refugee families.

My work with refugee students has also changed my life story forever, again paralleled by the stages represented in the Balinese *umble-umbles*. I started out on this journey like a wobbly baby, learning to face up to the challenges my dominant culture views presented me with. Eventually, I was able to stand straight and tall with confidence, sure of the importance of listening to, understanding, and attending to refugee students’ experiences in high school. Now, as a researcher, I try to shoulder some of the burdens the students carry with them in school by giving them a means to share their experiences with a wider audience of educators through this narrative inquiry. As a teacher I continue to walk alongside each of them through the hallways and classrooms of our schools.

Like the tide that continues to ebb and flow, my personal stories have a beginning and middle, but no end. My father, Mark, Behnam, Jima, Bareshna, and Francis, and even the strangers I meet on my travels have stories that intertwine with mine – like my childhood braids – ties that bind us together. And so, my story will continue as the reverberations of stories from those around me join in and ripple outward in concentric circles that grow ever wider, inviting those in their path to become part of it.

I have lived my stories as daughter, mother, teacher, and researcher alongside my family members and my students, both on and off the school landscape. My stories have been braided together with the students' stories. The stories we told, as well as the meaning of what we told, was shaped by our relationship (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). From this place of relationship, I sensed in each student's self-introduction an "acquired flexibility" that Lugones (1987) writes about. I was struck by the impact of our dominant culture expectations of refugee students. Jima, Bareshna, and Francis traveled across many different lands searching for refuge. They did not have the luxury of choice or time to prepare for their travels. Just as it was necessary for them to leave their home countries to re-establish themselves in a foreign land, it was necessary for them to adopt "flexibility" to fit into their new environments, which Lugones says is "a particular feature of the outsider's existence" (p. 3). Now, however, the students do not seek only refuge; they seek a place in this foreign land to transform into home (Li, 2006). The students work hard at being flexible in acculturating to our expectations of them in the school and community, but seldom ask anything of us in return. Their "flexibility" masks the difficulties they are really having in school. They still operate in survival mode; they are still at risk. In their baby stages represented by the *umble-umbles*, the students need us

to walk with them to shoulder some of their burdens as they seek a place of belonging and acceptance on our school and community landscapes.

* * * * *

As I continued to reflect on my research puzzle, I struggled with the “So what?” question. I searched for a direction in the students’ narratives that pointed to pathways that would highlight the need to improve our educational practices with refugee students. I had many wonders: Does it help educators to know that Jima fled from her family and country in search of a safer place to live away from the injustices in her world? That she survived police interrogation at the border only to flee into the darkness risking starvation and coming face-to-face with a tiger? The courage it took her to survive a life of suppression in the refugee camp? That she took these risks out of desperation to improve her life? Does it help educators to know that Bareshna carries emotional scars from her experiences in her country? That she dreams of having her family reunited? That even though she lives here now, she sees herself as a foreigner? Does it help educators to know the level of deprivation Francis experienced in his home land? That his early schooling involved corporal punishment? That he feels deeply the emotional and psychological scars he endured from experiences in his country? Greene (1988) provides a response to my wonders and more to think about as we continue on this narrative journey, “The caring teacher tries to look through students’ eyes, to struggle *with* them as subjects in search of their own projects, their own ways of making sense of the world” (p. 120).

CHAPTER THREE

Tensions in the Narrative Inquiry Process

Reminiscing about the black and white postcard from my childhood helped me to think in different ways about *Laura's* voice reverberating in my head as I walked through the halls at university and into the library this morning. Fine and Weis (2003) would see these reverberations as “the persistent and uninterrupted echoes of damaging voices of privilege” that are part of the greater “systemic silencing ... that dominate and ‘other’” (p. 7). I recognized my bias with the students because of my emotional engagement with them, but I realized I had not always felt this way. I wondered if *the-Lauras-of-the-world* were given the opportunity to hear the students’ genuine voices, would they feel more connected to them? Would they come to understand how war has irrevocably changed their lives and created shifts and fractures in the stories they live by? (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999).

Her comments deepened my feelings around the tensions in the narrative inquiry process Clandinin & Connelly (2000) write about, as I pondered how to unpack the students’ stories to make their identities visible and their voices audible, and struggled with how to turn the stories they live by (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999) into research texts. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) describe this “tension-filled time”:

There is, on the one hand, tension associated with leaving the field and wondering what to do with masses of field texts. There is, on the other hand, tension as we consider our audience and whether or not, or in what way, our texts might speak to our readers. There is tension as we turn inward to think about issues of voice and about whether we can capture and represent the shared stories of ourselves

and our participants. There is tension as we turn outward to think about issues of audience and form. And there is tension as we consider how to represent the situatedness of the inquiry within place. (p. 139)

I was definitely feeling tension in each of these areas. But, for as much as I troubled about the tensions I was experiencing as a narrative inquirer, I heard the tensions expressed in the students' voices even more so. I returned to the students' stories to listen more closely to the underlying themes in these tensions. At this point, I troubled about the issues of voice and audience. On the one hand, I wondered how I could capture and present the participants' voices from the field texts to effectively reflect their experiences on the high school landscape in a way that they would resonate with an audience of educators. On the other hand, I did not want to infiltrate the research text with pedagogical jargon for fear of setting up barriers to the students' understanding of how the stories they live by position them on the educational landscape. This is when I realized another challenge I faced was to convey a balance between "voice and silence ... [and] a sense of the mood and feeling" (Feuerverger & Richards, 2007, p. 559) within the limitations of paper and ink. I shared Smyth's (2007) grappling between giving "the impression of over-determining the voices of students by laying too much interpretation on what they had to say" and not wanting "to over-romanticize what they said" (p. 646). I deliberated about what form, what shape this would all take. The only thing I was certain about was that the students' introductions of themselves had painted a picture of where they came from, and now it was time to take a look at the place they arrived.

Creating a Framework for the Research Text

Schwab (1978) invites us to inquire and reflect upon the fundamentals of general education, the place of curriculum, and the factors to be considered for its effectiveness. He states that the concept of education “itself is ... tentative” and the terms used in education are “shadowy and incomplete” (p. 278). As much as my instincts told me to concentrate on child-centered educational approaches with this vulnerable group of refugee students, both Schwab’s (1973, 1978) and Aoki’s (2005a, 2005b) work helped me to realize the risks involved when focusing on any single component of education whether it is the child, the teacher, the subject, or society. Aoki (2005b) believes

it [is] important to center curriculum thought on a broader frame, that of ‘man/world relationships,’ for it permits probing of the deeper meaning of what it is for persons (teachers and students) to be human, to become more human, and to act humanly in educational situations. (p. 95)

To expand on this, Aoki (2005a) suggests life in the classroom does not lie solely in any one of these centers, rather “life is lived in the spaces between and among” (p. 282). Aoki’s naming the existence of these intangible spaces was a moment of awakening for me. Intuitively, I knew these spaces existed, but they lay dormant in my peripheral vision because they lacked a tangible form. Now I understood, though, that these are the spaces that often go overlooked, undervalued, and unvoiced in the shadows, and they were the unattended murky places of tension for the students.

Creating a Form for the Research Text

Schwab (1973) maintains “defensible educational thought must take account of four commonplaces of *equal* rank: the learner, the teacher, the milieu, and the subject

matter. None of these can be committed without omitting a vital factor in educational thought and practice (pp. 508-509). I wanted to explore the relationships “between and among” (Aoki, 2005, p. 282) these four commonplaces in the students’ lived experiences in school to determine if they indeed were of “*equal rank*” and how the structures of school pushed up against them. But, I continued to trouble over the issue of form.

Nafisi’s (2003) writing pointed the way I needed to go. Her novel resonated with me as I read about her experiences secretly teaching Western literature in revolutionary Iran to a group of young women where their classes took “sojourns into personal and past lives [that] weren’t intended parts of class but they infiltrated [their] work and discussion” (p. 272), for these “sojourns” also play a big part in my classes with EAL students. I wondered how a conversation might unfold if all three of the participants had come together at the same time to talk about their experiences with me. I recalled the student forum conducted by our school division last year where a select group of students was invited to address an assembly of teachers and administrators about their high school experiences. I decided to create a similar platform where Jima, Bareshna, and Francis could also voice their school experiences. But, the setting here would not be in such an intimidating venue as a large auditorium in front of hundreds of teachers. Instead, it would be held in our EAL classroom, a safe place to make “secret stories public” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 62), around a table, at lunch time, with me as participant/facilitator. And, I wondered if I laid their voices alongside Schwab’s four commonplaces as a way to map out their school experiences, would this help us to identify those places of tension that played out in their voices?

A Casual Conversation With Students About School Experiences

With this sense of inquisitiveness, I created the following imagined conversation, using the participants' words from their individual field texts as the dialogue, along with my field notes and personal observations. The conversations are fictionalized here in that they did not actually occur with this group of three students at the same time, but they are characteristic of conversations that took place on a regular basis in the EAL classroom, and they are indicative of the conversations that compelled me to set off on this narrative inquiry journey in the first place. The conversations are composed using the students' actual spoken words. As in the participants' earlier introductions, I took liberties to take quotes from field text transcripts out of the order they were originally spoken and included bracketed words and phrases to create cohesive narratives. The students set the stage through their self-introductions and now those stories combined with the following conversations create a bigger picture of how they are positioned on the high school landscape.

The conversation begins in *medias res* with my explanation of Schwab's (1973) four commonplaces, as I try not to overwhelm these English language learners with technical language....

Mrs. F.: *(Sits at the table, holding a coffee cup with two hands, looks at each student while speaking)* There was a man named Joseph Schwab. He was from the United States. He believed that there were four things that were important in education. One is the learner, that's you guys. He said we should think about things like: How old are you? What do you already know? What will be easy or difficult for you? What are your goals and worries? Anything special about you. Things like that. The other three things are *(counts off on fingers)* the teacher, the milieu, and the subject matter, but I'll tell you about those later on in our conversation.

(Pushes back slightly on chair to open space up for students to speak) So, let's start by having each of you tell us a little bit about yourself. Tell us

anything about yourself that would help teachers to understand who you are, how you learn, what you think and feel. *(Turns to Jima)* Jima would you go first?

JIMA: *(Turns good ear to Mrs. F.) I never went to school in my country. [In my village] there was fighting, so the school is broken. I speak two other languages from [my country] but no read, no write.*

MRS. F.: When you arrived here two years ago, you were 17 years old, and you had never been to school before. How do you feel about school now?

JIMA: *When I came here I was very happy with school ... just happy. [School] is important. I learn reading and writing, talking English language. I need to read and write, but [at first] I just can't. I want to but I can't. [In] my first language, letter English, ABCDEF, look like same, no sound same. But, I didn't go to school in my first language.*

MRS. F.: It's difficult to learn a new language if you don't have reading and writing skills in your first languages, but you have learned so much language since I first met you! And because you didn't go to school before, you missed out on learning in the subject areas. What other things can you tell us about you as a learner?

JIMA: *[When] I was young, I fell down. I don't know when I started my headaches or my ear. I hear normal if I do like this (closes left ear with finger). If I have a headache, I can't see. I see something white [floaters] (flutters fingers across her line of vision). I have to wait two or one years to see my [doctor] to take a picture.*

MRS. F.: I was surprised when we had your hearing tested to learn you have a hearing loss. You and I have talked about your headaches before. I know those things make studying in a new language very difficult for you. I hope we can get you in to see that special doctor sooner than one year. What other things can you tell us about yourself?

JIMA: *I'm strong, brave. For myself I like to help some people. (Rubs forehead with hand) I want see my family. [Sometimes] I feel alone. It's still hard.*

MRS. F.: *(Nodding)* It must be very difficult for you. You are a single mom trying to be a student too. I imagine you miss your family a lot. What are your goals for the future, Jima? What do you want to do after high school?

JIMA: *I want good life in my future. I want a nice, good job, I'm working.*

MRS. F.: Thanks, Jima, for telling us about you as a learner. (*Faces Bareshna*) So, let's hear from Bareshna. What would you like to tell us about yourself as a learner?

BARESHNA: (*Sits with back straight in chair*) ***I study in [other countries before] I came here [four years ago]. I speak four languages, but the biggest problem in here for [me] is English. I have a problem with memorize [for tests]. I have a lot of experience and knew a lot of thing. Experience makes you like to more understand than to be educated.***

MRS. F.: Living in other countries does give you a wider view of the world around you. It sounds like the English language plays a big role in your success as a student, too. What do you do when you're not at school?

BARESHNA: ***I'm involved in a lot of community [work] for my country now already. We talk about them. I know I can't help them financially, but we can send our message to people who have the power to help.***

MRS. F.: You are doing such important volunteer work. You are helping many people. Bareshna, how would you describe yourself?

BARESHNA: (*Smiles shyly*) ***I guess I'm very strong for any kind of issues and patient, so strong that if any kind of problems come to me, I'm not going to be, 'I'm not going to do it.' I'm always helping, very honest. I'm friendly with everyone.***

MRS. F.: Can you tell us your thoughts on education? I see you want to be successful in school.

BARESHNA: (*Sits straighter and leans toward the table*) ***Education is very important to me. It's the biggest part of my life. And always I'm thinking through how I'm going to get it, and how to be more successful. When you graduate you feel like you've got something. If you don't have education, if you don't read, can't talk, you're like a blind person. We don't have a background here to build our home, so we need to improve our education for sure. When people [are educated], have a home, have food, they will stand for themselves one day. I told my mom, "I'm gonna stand by myself one day." Education will give you something you have all the time. [You] can never lose that. You can lose money, you can lose beauty, but you can't lose education. You can use it anytime, you can use it anywhere.***

MRS. F.: (*Nods head*) You've made some wise statements, Bareshna. When you compare lack of literacy with being blind I really understand how important education is to you. Thank you for sharing. (*Turns to Francis*) Okay, now Francis, could you describe yourself?

FRANCIS: *(Leans back in chair) I get along with people. I'm a good leader. I'm the quickest guy on my basketball team. I support the players, I encourage them. That's why I won MVP is because of my leadership. On the court and outside the court I'm doing my leadership.*

MRS. F.: *(Smiling)* Winning MVP is quite an accomplishment. We were all so proud of you! What other things can you share about you as a person?

FRANCIS: *(Shifts on chair to find a more comfortable position) I have a heart. What I mean by that is I'm a really nice person. People can hate on me, but I can never hate on a person. A person that hates me, I could never be like I'm going to hate you back or start a fight. Even if they're angry at me or like you can see that they don't like you, you still show the respect and then just let it go.*

MRS. F.: *(Smiles in acknowledgement)* That's a good attitude to take. You are a patient young man. I know how long you wait some days to get help in EAL! What are your thoughts on education?

FRANCIS: *Education is very important to me. It's just part of life and to get a better life you gotta have an education. I have a chance to go to school and I have a chance to impress my mom, my parents. They want me to go to university and get a better job. (Readjusts hat) What I'm afraid about university is like there's no help there. I'm afraid I'm not gonna become anything because of that.*

MRS. F.: *(Makes eye contact with Francis)* You're telling us that you and your parents value high school education and education after high school. I hear a lot of other students worrying about university too. University does require students to be more independent than they are in high school, but they do offer students lots of support, too. What else can you tell us about you as a learner?

FRANCIS: *(Sips drink before speaking) Me, myself, I speak perfect English with no trouble or anything, but when it comes to [school] work it's much different. I don't understand some of the stuff in school, like every time we do an assignment sometime I don't do it in class. I take it to EAL.*

MRS. F.: So, Francis, what would help you understand the school work?

FRANCIS: *(Moves chair closer to the table) [I need] more help in [my] classes. I need time and somebody to break it down for me, explain it for me. After [the teacher] is done the class, I [need to be able to] ask how does this work and how do you do this [and for teachers] to explain it better after they're done talking. There's classes that I don't feel like I can do this. I*

think about it, like I can't do this. There's no way I can do this. It's too hard.

MRS. F.: Can you explain what makes it hard for you?

FRANCIS: *(Looks away from the group) It's the language. [And] I don't want to ask questions 'cause I'm shy, but at the same time I don't know what to do. I can take regular classes as long as I get help, as long as somebody is there to explain it a little bit better. (Turns back to Mrs. F.) I don't want to do anything wrong. I don't want to be like, 'Oh, I kind of know this.' I just want to be for sure 'cause, you know, I want to do everything right.*

MRS. F.: *(Addresses the group) We've talked before in EAL about the difference between learning English and learning in English. There is a big difference between conversational English and the English you need to be successful in your academic classes, like the English you need to read text books, isn't there? (Turns to Francis) It sounds to me like you feel frustrated because you want to do well, but you're finding school difficult because of the language. Francis, in the EAL classroom when we take time to discuss and explain your assignments, I see that you can do the work. And, I see that you want to do everything right.*

(Turns back to speak to group) All of the things you have said about yourselves as learners help teachers to understand who you are as students in their classrooms. Knowing these things about you can help teachers teach you in ways that will help you to be successful.

So, let's go back to the man Joseph Schwab. Remember he talked about four things that are important in schools. *(Begins to count on fingers)* One of the things is the learner, and the second thing is milieus. This word is actually a French word that we use in English. The word means things like the environments students are in like the school, *(sweeps hand around the room)* the classroom, your relationships with teachers and others in the school, the community, your family, your religion things like that. It's difficult to keep each milieu separate. *(Turns to point to nesting boxes on shelf)* Joseph Schwab says our milieus are like the boxes Daniel gave me. See how they sit inside each other? We call that nesting. *(Faces Jima)* Jima, could you tell us about the milieu of your family?

JIMA: *(Tucks a stray hair under scarf) [My family] didn't know [I was leaving the refugee camp].*

MRS. F.: So, your entire family is still in your home country. Are you able to contact them? Do they know where you are?

JIMA: *[When] I come here, I don't have their phone number. [My friend] come last year. He gave me phone numbers. [When I phoned them] they were very happy [to hear I got out of the refugee camp]. [My family] would like to come here. They can't come here. They're not sending people out. (Looks at hands in lap) They have to run away first to a refugee camp before they could leave. I have to be strong. God helps me be strong.*

MRS. F.: *(Leans closer to Jima)* It must be difficult for you to manage here on your own. You are a strong woman! What do your parents think about you going to school?

JIMA: *[My parents] wanted me to go school [in our country], but school is broken. In my country my dad he teach me at home. But after that I left. I went to the other country [to the refugee camp].*

MRS. F.: I remember you told me once that the school in the refugee camp was like a small, one room school house. What did you think when you first came to this school?

JIMA: *(Gestures with hands in circular motions to show big) School very big, many classes, many students. I get lost. I don't remember. I ask somebody, some teacher. I don't speak English. I show room number, my schedule. [The teacher] help me.*

MRS. F.: This school is one of the biggest schools in the city. *(Laughs)* I remember getting lost many times, too, when I started teaching here! Jima, can you tell us about when you and your husband first moved here? How did you get settled? There must have been so many new things for you to understand. I remember you moved a lot.

JIMA: *(Nods in agreement) I was on the [other] side of the city first, then I [moved to this side]. I couldn't speak English. I was a bit scared. [I] stay home. I didn't go a lot outside. (Grimaces) [The bus made me feel sick when I was pregnant], so I walked to school. The first time I don't know [any] people here. [Snow] was very hard. Other people [from my country] helped me. Only [a few others] speak my language here.*

MRS. F.: You had so many things to get used to, didn't you? You were in a foreign country; you had to learn how to dress for the cold weather; you didn't speak the language; you were pregnant, and trying to be a student for the first time. When did you start school?

JIMA: *I start school here in June [when I first came]. Then I left [to go to another province] in December for my husband's job. [In school there] we had to do something with beads, making a ball or something. (Uses hand gestures to indicate stringing beads) The same like art. I didn't even go*

the full two months because [I was pregnant]. I didn't go a lot outside. (Pauses) [My husband went away.] I come back Saskatoon myself and my baby [in June].

MRS. F.: It sounds like you attended a school for adult English learners in that province. It must have been lonely there. Now you have a baby. She's walking now, isn't she? *(Smiles)* She keeps you very busy. You had a lot of different experiences in one year. How did you get settled when you moved back here?

JIMA: *My sponsor is [my hero] for me. I got here very fast and when I come here she helped me right away. When I came from [the other province] she helped with furniture. [Some teachers] from school help me too.*

MRS. F.: It's good you had people to help you get settled. So, what is a typical day like for you?

JIMA: *(Takes a quiet breath) [Everyday] I have to go to school and I have to look after [the baby]. [I get up at] 7 or 6 o'clock. [If] my alarm doesn't go, I sleep, I late. Take [baby] on bus to [daycare]. One day I went downtown [by mistake because I couldn't see where to get off the bus]. The bus is full. I'm standing [on the bus holding the baby], can't see out window [foggy]. I get off downtown. I saw a lady walking. I told her I couldn't find [the daycare]. I walked with her to her church. She looked in phone book and she take me [and the baby to the daycare] in her car.*

MRS. F.: *(Shakes head in wonder)* You were lucky that lady helped you. The people on the bus should give you a seat, especially since you were carrying the baby, a diaper bag, and your backpack. You have so many responsibilities outside of school. Are you able to do some school work at home?

JIMA: *(Shakes head no) I support myself. I don't have time to study [at] night. I have to cook. The baby goes to bed at 9:00 or 10:00 p.m. I need sleep, I have a baby. [The baby] sick many times. [When] baby gets sick, no, no school. I miss four days of school [when school started this year]. Daycare no open 'til Friday [two days after the first day of school]. Then the baby sick, no daycare, no school. After school I go daycare, [buy] groceries, home, pay bills, doctor appointment....*

MRS. F.: I remember you and the baby had many, many doctor's appointments last year. And I know how it is when babies get sick, mothers get sick too. I hope she is healthier this year. It's hard for you to miss so much school, isn't it? And, it's really not helpful if the daycare opens two days later than the first day of school.

JIMA: *[It would help to] have daycare at my school.*

- MRS. F.: That sounds like a good idea, Jima. It would make your life easier if our school had a daycare. What other things are you responsible for?
- JIMA: *I can understand [read] some letters, like my rent increase. I pay more soon.*
- MRS. F.: *(Shakes head in disgust)* I hope your landlord fixes your leaking kitchen tap and replaces your carpet if he is going to increase your rent. Sorry for interrupting ... go on.
- JIMA: *I help friends too with [reading] letters like transportation [loan], phone bill, lights. I do banking. I have debit card. I take money with my card at bank.*
- MRS. F.: Hmmm. Banking, there's a lot of important information to learn for the first time, isn't it? I know you are worried about paying back the transportation loan to the government, too. *(Frowns)* It's pretty hard for you to get the money to pay them back when the money you get from Social Services hardly covers your living expenses and things like diapers for the baby. And what happened with your cell phone? I remember you had a big problem with the phone company.
- JIMA: *(Nods agreement) First time I have big problem [with the phone company]. I see they have sign, some say \$40, some say \$100, some say dollar sign and zero, \$0. The first time I asked him how much? He told me if you sign to me, three years, this phone is free. (Shrugs shoulders and shows open hands) [So] I think is free. I still have to pay every month \$30 this phone. He told me pay \$400 deposit. I gave him. He said Monday, Sunday, Saturday after 7 o'clock long distance Canada and United States is free. I phoned here, sometimes United States long distance. After that my phone the line is cut. I used too much long distance.*
- MRS. F.: That man knew you didn't understand you had to pay \$400 when you signed the contract. It's good that a teacher was able to talk to his manager and get your \$400 back. Nothing is free, is it?
- JIMA: *Yea, it wasn't free. That's not true, yea. (Laughs) The man, he no nice.*
- MRS. F.: I remember there was a problem with your birth date being incorrect on your passport because you had to make yourself older, so you could get out of the refugee camp. We were all worried that you wouldn't be able to stay in school very much longer because your documents said you were already 21 years old. What happened with that?

JIMA: *[Because] I made my birthday up now it's a big problem. They say I'm too old [to stay in school]. [My birth date] they told me ... it's a big problem [to correct it]. I had to contact my family in my country. They sent my birth certificate here. [It cost] \$600. Very few send thing to my country. You can't throw [mail] in the tower. (Uses hands to outline shape of mailbox) You have to do it secret. If you put it in the mailbox, the government will open it, you have big trouble. They have to ask, "Where is she? Why did she go?" My birthday is still wrong. Now my paper [shows] the year is okay. The day [of the month] is five days [earlier].*

MRS. F.: *(Shakes head in frustration) You had to pay a lot of money for that. And Immigration says it will be impossible to change the day of your birthday now. Well, at least they got your year of birth correct so you can stay in school longer. (Shifts body in chair) So, let's talk about school life here. Are you making some friends in the school?*

JIMA: *[There] are lots of [EAL students]. I didn't see [any from my country]. I don't know some Canadian students.*

MRS. F.: Jima, thanks for telling us about the milieus you live in. *(Turns to Bareshna)* Bareshna, it's your turn. Could you tell us about the different milieus you are in? Remember it means the different environments you are in inside and outside of school. Start anywhere you feel like.

BARESHNA: *(Clears throat before speaking) When we [left our country], we tried to be strong, to stand by ourselves. Here we [have] everything around us, but still the thing is if you don't know the language, language is a big problem. I had a lot of problems in school. Nobody could understand me. It make very hard because you like starting [again]. If I was in a country that I knew the language, you go to the school, you're learning. If it was my language, it [would be] easy, too, for me.*

MRS. F.: *(Addresses the group) All of you must feel frustrated because if you were in a place where you understood the language, you would be more successful. (Faces Bareshna) Bareshna, you've told me before you won many prizes at school in your home country for doing well. Sometimes we don't understand how important language is in everything we do, but also how long it takes to learn the language to be successful in classes.*

BARESHNA: *(Takes a deep breath) [I also have responsibility] to look after my family. [My mother] is educated but what can she do? [She] doesn't have a job [because Canada doesn't recognize her degree]. [She] can't do anything. So I have to stand by myself.*

MRS. F.: You are working hard to get settled here, but language is a barrier, a barrier is something that stops you from going forward. And, you have many responsibilities at home, like Jima does.

BARESHNA: *(Exhales deeply) It's complicated for me because I have a problem with my dad and the other thing is my mom, she is sick. I have a younger brother. Sometimes I need to look after him. We're trying to work hard. How are we going to fix our problems? Everything is going slowly, slowly because it's so hard to start at once for a person who had a life for twenty years to start again.*

MRS. F.: What you say reminds me of my father. *(Moves coffee cup and folds hands on table)* He came to Canada from Germany after WWII. He had a very difficult time starting over too. *(To Bareshna)* You have a complex life inside and outside of school. It sounds like you and your family are working very hard to get settled here. How is your mom doing?

BARESHNA: *(Smiles proudly) She's very strong. She stand for us. She had a lot of stress in war and still she's not giving up. She have a good mind. People can go crazy with this kind of thing. My mom is my hero. [I'm] proud of her.*

MRS. F.: How does your mom support your education now if she can't speak English?

BARESHNA: *When I was in the school before, I used to come to my Mom [and ask], "What does it mean? How to say? How to write?" and she was helping me. [Now] she's working [with] us like Sundays or Saturdays. She made us write the essay in our language. She say, "Don't forget your language, start writing, do your work, reading."*

MRS. F.: That is good advice, Bareshna. *(Addresses group)* It is important for all of you to keep your first languages. Did you know some researchers say it helps to learn a second language if you have strong first language skills? When my father came to Canada, he wanted to forget his first language. Now he can hardly speak it. *(Turns back to Bareshna)* Bareshna, can you tell us something about your life at school? How are things going?

BARESHNA: *I got trouble with one student at school. We were talking about terrorism, so there was a discussion in the class. She said, "Well they should kill all the Middle East people." I didn't say anything to her. I just came out from the class thinking. (Voice starts to shake) I couldn't stop crying.*

MRS. F.: *(Reaches over and places a hand on Bareshna's arm)* Oh, Bareshna, I'm so sorry that happened. That girl is showing her ignorance. She has a small

view of the world and other people. (*Softens her voice*) What would you have liked to say to her?

BARESHNA: (*Raises a trembling hand to wipe her mouth before speaking*) ***I [wanted to say,] “Well, what do you think if I tell you let’s go kill all the Western [people]? Are you gonna stand for yourself, for your parents, for your brother, for your sister, for your relatives?” (Voice gains strength and volume) She’s telling in front of myself to go and kill my dad and innocents, a hundred, thousand, million innocent people living there, not only my dad. There’s other people in there, innocent, and they don’t have any problem with the government or politicians. They’re not responsible for this. They can’t even have a job to provide food for their family, how they gonna think about killing or something?***

MRS. F.: (*Addresses the group*) What Bareshna says makes me think of my father. When he came to Canada, many people were against Germans because of the Nazis in WWII. Of course he wasn’t a Nazi, but people assumed he was just because he was German. I think he heard many hurtful words, similar to what you heard in that class. (*To Bareshna*) Did you talk to the teacher about this?

BARESHNA: (*Nods*) ***I talked to the teacher. The teacher didn’t say anything ... said, “Oh don’t worry. She’s just grumpy today, a little bit grumpy. She’s have a headache, she’s tired or something.”***

MRS. F.: (*Shakes head in disbelief*) That teacher lost a valuable opportunity to teach the whole class about how we can live together, about stereotypes, assumptions, hurtful words. I’m so sorry Bareshna.... (*Turns to Francis*) Okay, now Francis, what would you like to share with us about your milieus?

FRANCIS: ***Family to me is very, very important. [Like Jima and Bareshna said], I get worried, [because] there is war [in my country] and then [my family] is over there. It makes me worried something might happen to them too.***

MRS. F.: How does that affect you when you are at school?

FRANCIS: ***When I’m worried about my family, if a teacher tells [me] you need to focus, obviously you’re not gonna be like, ‘No.’ You’ll be like, ‘Okay I will,’ but at the same time you’re still thinking about what is going on.***

BARESHNA: (*Turns in Francis’ direction*) ***That’s how I feel when I’m thinking about my dad in my country....***

FRANCIS: (*Addresses the group*) ***When I hear stuff going on, how like they need money and they don’t have this, something bad is happening, when I go***

to school I'm just a quiet guy. (Laughs at himself) 'Cause in school, me I'm the one that talks the most in classes. I'm talking, I'm excited, I'm happy, I'm hyper. (Begins to lower voice) But when it comes to that, everything changes. I'm just really quiet, don't do nothing. I'm like whatever, you know, it really comes to me.

MRS. F.: (To Francis) I haven't had that exact experience, but I can understand your worries and fears. (Faces group) Remember when my son went to Afghanistan last year? I worried about him all the time. Sometimes I couldn't focus in the classroom either, and sometimes I would start crying when I talked about him. Those are big worries for all of you to have. I can only imagine how difficult it is to concentrate in class when you are so anxious about your families' safety.

FRANCIS: (Removes hat and places it in lap) *And sometimes it affects my sports. [In] sports you have to pay money, but then there is money that you need to pay to help [family in my country], so we gotta focus [on our family in our country]. There's family and then there's sports. That's the most thing that comes first before everything, it comes first.*

MRS. F.: From what you've all said, it sounds like there is nothing more important than family. (Turns to Francis) What else can you tell us about your family here?

FRANCIS: *My parents can't help me with my subjects [because they don't speak English], but they tell me, "Stay in school, go to school." [They] wake me up every morning, drive me to school when I was in gr. 9, 10, 11. Now I can drive by myself, (pats car keys in pocket) but they used to drive me to school. And I tell [them] a lot, how I'm doing in school, am I failing, am I passing. (Pauses) I love making my mom happy, making her proud of me, doing all the things she wants me to do, just be thankful for my mom. She's my hero. [My mom] supports me in school, gives me the courage to stay in school. Everything that I've done, she's been there. I'm only working because of my mom. I quit soccer because of my work. My mom comes first before anything.*

MRS. F.: Your parents support you in school in many important ways. They show you they want you to do well in school, don't they? How often do you work, Francis?

FRANCIS: *I'm working everyday after school [except Sunday].*

MRS. F.: You are incredibly busy with work, school, and helping your family, and you are only 17 years old. You will be very involved in basketball at school when the season starts, won't you? How does your family feel about that?

FRANCIS: *[My mom] always supports [me] and everything like in sports. She didn't want me to play basketball. (Chuckles) She's scared [I'll get hurt]. She seen how basketball players are so big. But she knew in my heart that I did want to play so she still supported me. She was really happy how I got that award. Sometimes I'd be in the paper. And she'll just give me advice. I remember one time last year, we lost a game by one and we had a chance to come in first place for [a tournament], and I came home and I was tearing and she's like, "You can't always win a game, you know. You have to lose first before you win so you have to experience that." She just told me that and it really made me happy.*

MRS. F.: Your mom gives you great advice. I remember when we brought your mom to see you play basketball for the first time last year. *(Makes eye contact with Francis)* She was so proud of you. I still have those newspaper articles about you, too. *(Points to articles hanging on bulletin board)* Remember I had you autograph them before I had them laminated?

FRANCIS: *She's always been there for me every time I lose a game or every time I'm doing bad in school.*

MRS. F.: So how are you doing in school? Can you talk about how you got settled in school?

FRANCIS: *(Rolls eyes) [It was frustrating] learning a new language. I don't understand what the students are saying, and I want to talk to somebody but I can't. I'm scared I'm going to make a mistake, be embarrassed about it.*

MRS. F.: I remember when I lived in Germany when I was your age. I was learning German and it was difficult for me to pronounce. One day my cousin brought her friends home to meet me. Later I learned she charged them money to listen to me speak German. They thought I had a funny accent. *(Makes a face)* I was so embarrassed. Sometimes it's hard to be brave when you're learning a new language. It changes how you see yourself, doesn't it? Language is so important.

FRANCIS: *(Nods head in agreement) English language is very important. You're learning the language and you know how to speak it, but when it come to doing it, reading or essays, it's very difficult. When the teacher is up in the class, he'll use big words I don't even know about. I'd even sometimes ask a student what does that mean. Even the [other] students wouldn't even know.*

MRS. F.: Your troubles with language sound similar *(indicates Jima and Bareshna with hand)* to Jima's and Bareshna's experience. It's one thing to speak the

language, but it's more difficult to understand the vocabulary in the subject area and reading and writing at higher levels.

FRANCIS: *I know myself, I'm coming from another country and I'm learning a new language, I don't get that, right? It's not just me, there's other people who are Canadian that, they don't even get it either. (Voice sounds incredulous) I mean if they don't get it then what about me, you know?*

MRS. F.: Well, that's true Francis. There are many English speaking students who have difficulty with reading and writing, too. That's surprises you, doesn't it? Does the teacher know you are an EAL student?

FRANCIS: *[At first teachers assumed I wasn't an EAL student, and] it made me feel bad because some of the immigrant people, the people who just came to Canada, they can't speak English, so the teacher would go and help them. (Points to himself) I need that help too. If I'd been here longer, if I was like Canadian, if English wasn't hard for me, I'd be doing like good in school.*

MRS. F.: *(Turns in Bareshna's direction)* That sounds similar to what Bareshna shared with us earlier.

FRANCIS: *I see a lot of people whose average is like 80s, 90s. I know I'm using that as an excuse but they have more experience than us, you know. (Voice sounds earnest) Myself I try really hard. I don't give up at school. I don't say, 'Oh my average is down [so] I'm going to give up.' I'm going to show up in classes, I'm not going to be late, I still try. I still end up with 70s, 80s. That's still good and everything, but I just wish sometimes I could get better mark so I can get a scholarship.*

MRS. F.: I see how hard you work. *(Pauses)* You talked about Canadian students who have more experience than you. They have been brought up in this culture, so they do understand certain things just because they were raised here. The way teachers teach and what they teach is based on this cultural knowledge. And, those cultural things are hard to teach. Francis, what do teachers need to know about you to understand who you are in their classrooms?

FRANCIS: *[Teachers need to know] what I experienced, about my life, we come from another country where we didn't know English, and now we're learning a new language. They need to understand that it's hard [to study in] this language. (Eyes lower, voice trails off)*

MRS. F.: Why is that important for teachers to know that about you?

FRANCIS: *(Speaks passionately) I want the teacher to know I'm struggling [on] this assignment and know that I'm struggling learning this language. I mean I'm speaking English right now, but it's not like I could understand everything. I don't understand that when teachers see you speaking good English, they assume, 'Oh this guy doesn't need help or anything.'* *(Throws hands up in air) The teacher's going to assume you're one of them, that you don't have any problem.*

MRS. F: There's that word *assume* again. *(Puckers brow)* It sounds like teachers make a lot of assumptions about you.

FRANCIS: *[I had a teacher] in grade nine that thought I was a whole different person, that type that's going to be bad because [of] my dress code and the way I was talking too much, excited and stuff. But then [later the teacher] told me, "I was wrong. I thought you were different, but I guess you are the right student" [because] I'm in sports, I'm athletic.*

MRS. F. How did those assumptions make you feel?

FRANCIS: *It made me feel happy and sad. [In grade nine] he never told me, but in his mind he thought I was gonna do this and do that. So then in grade eleven he comes up to me and tells me the truth. (Pauses) Some teachers assume that if you're dumb, you're a disrespectful person. Just because you don't know the answer or anything doesn't make you like a different person. There are some people who don't know the answers, but they're still nice persons inside, right? (Voice picks up speed as he talks) Usually [teachers] go for the students that are going to university, the smart ones. The teacher, if he sees you as a smart person, he will give you the respect that you deserve. So, okay, I'm always going to smile with him, joke with him. There's the person who can't answer the question, and he's not going to get much attention.*

MRS. F.: It sounds like it's hard to just be yourself. That would be a difficult situation to be in. I see you with lots of friends in the hallway. Can you tell us about your circle of friends?

FRANCIS: *To make friends you have to do that yourself. [I've made friends] from sports, just being that happy guy at school, a very nice person, smiling, and joking around. If you know a lot of people, it makes you feel good inside. If you don't know anybody, you'll be like you don't want to go to school.*

MRS. F.: Do other students know about you and where you came from?

FRANCIS: *[Most students] don't know about [countries at war]. No, you have to tell them about it.*

MRS. F.: I experienced a similar situation when my son went to Afghanistan. Most other people didn't know anything about the war there. When I explained that the soldiers were trying to help the Afghan people, they still didn't really understand. Sometimes I could see they didn't understand and they didn't want to talk about it.

FRANCIS: *Half the people that I know don't really know about it. [I] tell them the story. They're your friends, you know, they have to care. (Voice becomes animated) They go, 'Oh that must be really hard for you and that, that must have been bad.' And then they just tell you, "Oh well ... that's good now you're in Canada now," you know?*

MRS. F.: It sounds like they don't really understand that your life is still difficult here, especially when you are worried about your family's safety in your country. Are there some things that confuse you here at school or other places here?

FRANCIS: *(Voice sounds dry, clears his throat before speaking) At school I see food fights. I've seen people throwing sandwiches on the ground. Sometime I even make a joke and everybody would laugh. I'd be like in [my country] we don't have that. Kids there they want that, and they start laughing. I don't want to say, "In [in my country] we don't" (Pauses). I don't want to think about it, so I'm trying to make it so I can laugh too and like everybody can laugh. I don't want to be like all sad, 'Oh in [my country] we never had food.' It's gonna make me think about [when] I didn't have food.*

MRS. F.: So, that's something you struggle with too. It's hard to understand how people take something like food for granted when there are people in the world who don't have enough.

FRANCIS: *(Voice has new resolve) But sometimes when I'm walking in the hall and I see like food lying around like apples not even eaten, food in a bag, sometimes it makes me want to pick it up and throw it in the garbage.*

MRS. F.: *(Turns to Bareshna and Jima)* I see you both nodding, Bareshna and Jima. That bothers me, too, to see food lying on the floor in the hallways.

FRANCIS: *Some people step on the food [too]; it makes me crazy. (Grimaces) It's kind of disrespectful. Like sometimes with the apple, I want to pick it up and throw it in the garbage but I'm thinking about the students. They're gonna say something you know, something stupid, but sometimes I do it, I do it anyways, I pick it up. Sometimes I think about it you know here in Canada, people wasting food, and then there's [people] all over the world people who need those food.*

MRS. F.: It is hard to understand that. That's a complicated thing for you to deal with, too. You want to fit in with the other guys in school, but then you want to do what you think is right.

(Addresses the group) So, we've talked about you students as learners, and we've talked about your milieus. Let's go back to Joseph Schwab ... another one of his ideas, *(holds up three fingers)* the third idea, is about teachers and the role they play in school. Joseph Schwab talks about the personalities and characteristics of teachers, how they relate to their students, how they teach, how they learn, how they feel about themselves, what their backgrounds are, things like that.

(Turns toward Jima) Jima, can we start with you again? What would you like to say about your experiences with teachers?

JIMA: ***[Teachers help me] to write and read. Sometimes teacher works with me.***

MRS. F.: You usually work in the EAL classroom, don't you, Jima? It's very busy in there, and I see you waiting and waiting for a teacher to come.

JIMA: ***I ask her. I put my hand (raises hand). Sometimes I have to go ask her many times. Sometimes I wait. [School work] is difficult. [Need to] have helpers sometimes to work with me. She tells it again to me, slower to me.***

MRS. F.: We really do need more EAL teachers. It's good when we have volunteer helpers in our classroom. Then someone can work *(points to self then to Jima)* one-on-one with you. What is important for your teachers to know about you?

JIMA: ***(Speaks slowly) Teachers need to know ... my story. How I didn't have school before, I don't understand. If [teachers] no understand, [they] don't know I don't speak English. [They] don't know.***

MRS. F.: Have you told your story to your teachers? I mean other teachers, not EAL teachers?

JIMA: ***[One teacher] asked me. No other teachers.***

MRS. F.: Would you like to tell your teachers about your life?

JIMA: ***[I would like to] tell teachers my story.***

MRS. F.: *(Turns in Bareshna's direction)* So Bareshna, let's hear from you. What would you say about the teachers you work with?

BARESHNA: *I want the teacher to know what kind of students, first of all, they have. But they're busy. (Pauses) They say, "We understand you. We want you to be okay. We want to help with your studies." But still it was very hard for them to understand me as a person, as a refugee who came blind into this country. I try to tell teachers, but they [have a hard time understanding].*

MRS. F.: Why do you think it's difficult for some teachers to understand you?

BARESHNA: *Maybe because right now in [this province] they are just getting refugees, they don't understand or maybe they had a good life, so it's hard for them to understand about others. If they don't see, they don't understand. I talked to one professor at the university. He was a good person for understanding. (Pauses to reflect) There are some people, even if they didn't see the war, they can understand, they can feel.*

MRS. F.: His understanding without having the experience is called empathy. *(Writes word on pad on table) You write it like this e-m-p-a-t-h-y. (Turns paper for students to see) If we don't have empathy for others it is difficult for us to understand each other. Maybe your teachers don't know about your life story and your responsibilities outside of school.*

BARESHNA: *If you tell [teachers], it's so hard for them to understand you. They said, "You need to focus on your studies." (Wrinkles brow) [But] I'm always thinking about my family in [my country] and my mother here. I can't even find a way to bring my dad here [from my country]. When I call [him] and he doesn't answer, they say, "That's okay. He will answer you next time."*

MRS. F.: Your teachers might not even know about your dad and why he is still in your country.

BARESHNA: *But they don't really understand inside [me] what's going on. (Points finger to her chest) When I'm thinking about calling my dad, I'm thinking I have good food here, a good home, it's safe, I have good health care, I'm going to school. (Lays back of right hand on open left palm with each word) Now anytime I'm eating, drinking tea, walking, or anything, I'm thinking about my dad.*

MRS. F.: *(Nods head) I can understand that Bareshna. When my son was in Afghanistan we couldn't contact him either, so we had to wait for him to email or phone. And then when he did contact us, he couldn't say very much because of security. I was never really sure how he was, and I worried about him all the time because I saw what was happening on the TV and in the newspaper.*

I can hear in your voice that your worries over your dad overwhelm you. (Turns to Francis and Jima) Francis, you shared earlier about your worries about your family, too. Jima you told us once you didn't want your government to know you are here because it would cause problems for your family there. That's a lot to think about.

BARESHNA: *All the time if something is in front of you, you can't even cancel it. You can't forget about this. I could tell [my teacher], "Yea, I'm going to focus on my studies." But who is going to help me? I'm telling you, yes, I'm going to focus, but in my mind you can't change that. (Lays right hand across her heart) You can't change my heart.*

MRS. F.: It's interesting that you chose those words, Bareshna, because Joseph Schwab (1973) wrote about the importance of teachers knowing about learners' "present state of mind and heart" (p. 503). It sounds like you feel alone with your worries. That's how I felt sometimes about my son, too. I felt like I was carrying a big weight.... So what do your teachers do when you are feeling this way?

BARESHNA: *Some teachers say, "You know Bareshna, the thing you need to focus on your study, you need to [do] what you have to [do]." (Voice rises slightly) [But] I'm gonna start thinking the teacher is mad at me. If I don't finish the homework, she's gonna give me zero and plus it kind of it makes two problems.*

MRS. F.: (Crosses arms on table and leans forward) I wonder what teachers would say if they knew they were making more problems for you instead of helping you.

BARESHNA: *They [should] think [about] who we are and what happened to us today. They think we don't understand anything. (Glares) We understand.*

MRS. F.: (Turns to Francis) Francis, you look like you want to say something. Go ahead.

FRANCIS: (Addresses Bareshna and Jima) *Teachers are higher because they're teachers. They have more power than you. There's nothing you can do. Sometimes you gotta act like you like the teacher 'cause then the teacher will respect you, gives you good mark, or like help you get that good mark. (Turns to Mrs. F.) I never want teachers to be mad at me. I never want teachers to hate me 'cause it all depends on the teacher. If the teacher likes you then you might get a good mark and he might treat you good. [I try to be] nice to the teachers. We just started school and I don't want a teacher to be mad at me and then when it comes to marks then*

he's like, 'Oh this student is bad.' And then he's gonna treat me different.

MRS. F.: Bareshna and Francis, it sounds like you feel powerless in the classroom. And, I understand how difficult it is for you to voice your opinion when you have to use a foreign language. It's hard to express emotion, what you feel, in a second, well in your case, a third or fourth language.

BARESHNA: *[In another class I] remember the [assignment] was very, very hard. I got some help from the [EAL] teacher because it was very hard.*

MRS. F.: I think I remember helping you with that assignment. You had to write an essay about Chaucer, wasn't it?

BARESHNA: *(Nods head) Yea, I really need to learn this language, so I use the dictionary, mostly because my mom she doesn't speak English [and can't help me with my homework].*

MRS. F.: You're right, Bareshna. Often students do get some help on their assignments from their parents, or brothers and sisters. I remember helping my children when they were in school. It helped them to have someone to talk to about their work. That puts you at a disadvantage, I'd say.

BARESHNA: *I told [the teacher], too, I use dictionary and she said, "Well you got help and there is no way you [should have had] help. (Points to a dictionary on bookshelf) Why did you use a dictionary?" I said, "This is not my language. I'm sorry." (Addresses Mrs. F.) Even if is my language you can see like everybody doesn't even speak their own language very properly. She said, "I will give you zero." There was a few other Canadian students sitting right there. They said, "How come she's being very mean to you?" I said, "What can I do?" I'm not like some students that can stand for themselves. (Voice begins to quiver) They can defend very easy but I am so scared of everything because I've been in a war.*

MRS. F.: *(Frowns and shakes head)* I don't understand why the teacher wouldn't let you use a dictionary. I refer to the dictionary all the time when I'm writing ... and English is my first language. Hmmmm – and for you to get zero on the assignment doesn't seem right to me.

BARESHNA: *If [a person] was starting our language, how you would know how to say, 'What's my name?' You have to go to dictionary and find out what does it mean. If you don't look at it, you don't learn and I want to learn. (Pauses) It makes me afraid a lot of time.*

MRS. F.: Did you try to explain all of this to the teacher? How you feel afraid in the class?

BARESHNA: (*Shakes head no*) ***I couldn't even tell her, explain to her.*** (*Voice gets higher and louder as she speaks*) ***But she said, "Well, you know what? You can't do that. This is a cheat you did. Did you [use the dictionary] on the other assignment too?"*** (*Speaks in a level, measured tone*) ***I said, "I can't lie to you. I did, yes. If I'm doing something I will tell you. I don't want to hide something from you. I don't want to cheated on you. I'm telling you the truth and you don't accept."***

MRS. F.: Bareshna, this just isn't right. (*Shakes head in disbelief*) School should not be this way. I remember how frustrated you felt that day.

BARESHNA: (*Speaks quickly*) ***[Students with English] language can start arguing with the teacher. I couldn't say it because I couldn't talk because I thought maybe I'm gonna get in trouble. Maybe I did something bad, maybe it was my fault. She have the power and I can't do anything. Now I come to Canada, I'm getting the rules. She can't do that to me, but still it makes you afraid.*** (*Slows down speech*) ***For me it takes a lot of time to stand for myself and start arguing.***

MRS. F.: I sure hope you haven't had this kind of experience with other teachers. Have you had positive experiences with teachers here?

BARESHNA: ***[I had a teacher who] understand me.*** (*Voice become markedly lighter*) ***He told me, "Yes Bareshna, you need to finish your homework [even if] you have all this problem." Beside that he told me, "If you're gonna do this, I'm gonna help you with this. Don't worry."***

MRS. F.: You must have felt happy to hear that. How did the teacher help you exactly?

BARESHNA: ***He gave me a lot of extra time.***

MRS. F.: I hear most EAL students saying they need more time to complete assignments.

BARESHNA: ***And when I told him, "I have a problem with memorize the stuff and like how can I do that like every week we have two or three test? How I'm gonna do it? Please I need help."*** (*Sounds surprised*) ***Suddenly he gave me a help. He said, "If you need explanation a little bit, [you] can ask me. You [can] use your notes and do what you have to do. You just go and do your work and give me anytime, but you have to finish for me."***

MRS. F.: It sounds like the teacher understood why you needed more time. I know it is difficult to memorize for tests if you are worried about your family and

especially when you are memorizing new information in a new language. What other ways did the teacher show you he understood you?

BARESHNA: *[When] I told [my teacher], because that time was the flood water [the sewage backup in our basement and we had to live in the hotel for months], I told him this is what's going on right now. He said, "I can understand you. I believe you. I trust you. I know what you saying. But still this is a class. This is the rules I need to follow." I'm not telling him to change the rules for me because someday you feel bad for yourself, like why he should change for you, but we need [it] sometimes.*

MRS. F.: Well, *(looks at each group member)* I think everybody has things in their life they can't control, like having a sewer backup in your basement. It must have been difficult to live in a hotel for five months.

BARESHNA: *And it was Ramadan, too, and I couldn't even eat that much. I couldn't even focus that much. If language wasn't any problem, it was not then as hard.*

MRS. F.: So, *(takes a deep breath)* I'm hearing about problems with language again. *(Nods in Francis' direction)* Francis what experiences would you like to share about teachers?

FRANCIS: *There are some teachers anybody would know [who] don't care about you and do care about you. 'Cause the teachers that do care about you they look at you and smile and talk to you and help you and laughs with you. If you tell them stories, what's happened, they do care. You tell them about your life and they understand and they tell you about life here and they tell you just to keep your head up. So yea, teachers actually do help you. (Smiles) I trust in [those] teachers.*

MRS. F.: *(Smiles in acknowledgement)* Oh, that's good to hear.

FRANCIS: *Some teachers are different, (clears throat before continuing) like you're not into a relationship with [them]. They don't even care about you. They just want to teach and get it over with. It makes me feel like I don't even want to go to school, like I don't even want to learn, (looks at hat in his hand) like I don't even care.*

MRS. F.: What can you do if the teacher doesn't care about students?

FRANCIS: *Me, I know if the teacher doesn't care about you and doesn't want to say anything to you. I just go and try to pay attention in the class and try to learn whatever he teaches. If you don't get it, like sometimes, me I don't even ask a question. This class that I am in, since school started and*

since I've had him last year too, I've never asked a question, not one question in his class ever, ever.

MRS. F.: Francis, can you tell us about what happens in a classroom, just generally. How do teachers support you?

FRANCIS: *After the [teacher] is done, [they] tell us the assignment. [The teacher] sits in [their] desk. [They] tell us though, "If you need help just put up your hand and then I'll come." [But] sometimes I'd sit in the front of the class. I'd be like, "Miss, Miss ..." and [the teacher] would talk, talk, talk, and (begins to raise hand) I first put up my hand once, twice, I don't know a lot of times. [Then the teacher] would be like, "Okay, that's a lot of questions now." But teachers tell you if you need help just put up your hand and we'll help you. So I was like okay, I'm going to get help. (Crosses arms over chest) So I did it a couple of times, and then they told me I was asking too much questions.*

MRS. F.: (Looks at Bareshna) Bareshna, what would you like to say?

BARESHNA: *[A teacher] was saying [to] me, "Always you need a help, just ask me." I ask her so many times questions. I was asking and just waiting for while and while and while. She was forgetting about me. [And I thought] what can I do right now? I have no choice. A few students they say, "You should change your class. She's not gonna pass you for sure."*

MRS. F.: And did you pass the class?

BARESHNA: *No, I didn't.*

MRS. F.: Well, what can you do then? How do you get help?

FRANCIS: *For me after the class is done, I don't even bother to ask the teacher how you do this. I've been with a lot of teachers and some teachers are like, "You should have paid attention", and I was paying attention. So I don't even bother because me, myself, I think okay I'm going to do this in EAL.*

MRS. F.: Subject matter, that's Joseph Schwab's other point. (Holds up four fingers) It's hard to keep all four points separate, and that's okay. I just wanted you to know that we can talk about teachers and subject matter at the same time. (Turns back to Francis) Francis, tell us more about EAL.

FRANCIS: *I still need help for my subjects, like I'm not that professional. Like I mean my English is perfect, but all I took EAL for is doing my homework and getting it done. The only reason I took EAL is 'cause I wasn't getting a lot of help in classes. The teacher all he would do is*

teach and after that is on your own. Sometime I don't even bother asking the teacher 'cause I know the EAL is just gonna help me better 'cause they have more understanding for EAL students. So, that's the reason I took EAL and I actually got success.

MRS. F.: I'm glad to hear you experience success. I know you can do anything if you have time and support!

FRANCIS: *The thing about EAL is there's teachers that want to help. You can just go and ask the teacher to help you and then the teacher spends time and helps you. That's where you're supposed to get help right?*

MRS. F.: Well, *(laughing)* actually I like to think that you get help in all of your classes. Can you give us an example of how EAL supports you?

FRANCIS: *Just a couple of days ago I had an [English language arts] assignment. The teacher read the whole story to us.*

MRS. F.: Did you have a copy in front of you?

FRANCIS: *No, the teacher didn't give us one, so I went to EAL and I told the teacher I didn't understand and stuff. She gave me the book and she took it home and I took one home and read it and the next day we came and we discussed it together. I mean perfect understanding. We both knew where we were coming from and then I did the questions just like *(snaps fingers)* that.*

BARESHNA: *I always come to [EAL with] my problem, [too]. [It's] a good support 'cause [the EAL teacher is] listening to me always and [says], "Let's do the homework" and plus doing that makes you a little bit forget about your problems.*

FRANCIS: *[But] sometimes I don't [get enough help] because there's new students [that need the EAL teacher's attention]. *(Speeds up voice to indicate intensity)* I'm like, 'Oh I really got to do this [math], I really got to do this.' But you can't go to the teacher. She's helping [other] students. You need help and you can't do it and you can't skip because tomorrow the [math] teacher's going to check it....*

MRS. F.: *(Chuckles)* Well, yea, of course you won't skip! Francis, you've been here the longest. Do you remember when you came in grade nine? We had only 22 EAL students. *(Points to student biographies on bulletin board)* Now we have more than three times as many students, but not three times as many teachers! We teachers are frustrated, too, because we don't have enough time to help students. That's one of the reasons why we have to work together to find ways to improve our school.

(Turns to face Jima) Jima, we haven't heard from you for a while. Can you tell us about the subjects you are taking this year?

JIMA: *[This year I] start new all classes: EAL, then another EAL, reading, science and math and ethical living. Good, all new classes, but I don't know about science. We learn about food chain and animals, like what animal eat what animal.*

MRS. F.: (Voices surprise) Wow, you're learning about the food chain already?

JIMA: *I like science. It's interesting. I have to do test, but [it's difficult] because they have different words like food chain, like bacteria, ecosystems.*

MRS. F.: You said earlier you missed the first four days of class this year because the daycare wasn't open and the baby was sick. That makes it even more difficult for you to keep up. How are your other classes?

JIMA: *Ethical is okay. We talk alcohol, drugs, health. The words aren't hard, but science they have different words but ethical not much. In ethical we look at our life. (Pauses) I do math [in] EAL. I don't go there [math class] now because I didn't do last year enough for grade 9 math. They give me something bracket or sometimes hard y, x like words not number. Number go okay but letters hard. Word problems sometime difficult, sometime okay, but more difficult the x, y. I don't know x, y means. (Laughs while shaking head) They do other letters like $b + c = I$ don't know.*

MRS. F.: (Laughs along with Jima) It's understandable that word problems and x, y are difficult for you. After all, you just started addition and subtraction last year. I think it's great, though, that you have the math skills you need to do your banking and manage your household budget. That is math too!

MRS. F.: (Turns toward Bareshna) Bareshna, what were you about to say?

BARESHNA: *When I start learning English, I forget about what did I learn back home. So even if I know about the science, about the math I'm gonna forget about all of them because I'm gonna try and to focus on language.*

MRS. F.: That's a good point, Bareshna. I know two languages, (turns to look at all students) but I don't know how all of you can keep three or four languages straight, let alone study in the newest language. It must be very confusing. Bareshna, can you tell us about some of your classes.

BARESHNA: *I'm thinking about history class. (Adjusts jacket) I need to know more about history class. If I'm gonna study in Canada, for sure I need to know about the history, for sure I need to know English. And biology class I'm learning because it helps you with your own body. [If] it's something you're interested [in] you just want to learn. The teacher doesn't [need] to push you [then]. It just like if you have your goals [for] what you want to be, you will try your hardest on the subject you need.*

MRS. F.: That's what we call relevancy. (*Writes the word on the paper beside the word empathy*) When a subject is relevant for students, it means it is important to them and they will study it because they want to. (*Looks up at clock on wall*) I think the bell is going to ring soon, so Francis let's give you the last word. What can you share about your subjects this year?

FRANCIS: (*Places hat on his head*) *Teachers like for history and English they have to know that I'm learning a language here still. In [grade nine] in Romeo and Juliet I had like 80s and 90s because the teacher would read a scene and read a couple of lines and then she'll stop and tell the whole class this was going on, Romeo was this and you know you get it. But then when it come to like other books, like normal books, they're just gonna go, you know read, read, read, read ... maybe they will explain, but not as much as they did for Romeo and Juliet. (Pauses) Exactly, tell teachers to teach like you teach Shakespeare.*

MRS. F.: Hmmmm, teach like you teach Shakespeare ... Let's remember that. (*Stands and picks up coffee cup while students pack up their things to go*) So, there's the bell you guys. Thanks so much for sharing today. Think about other things you'd like to talk about and we'll continue with this next week. I guess you'd better run to your next class. See you later....

Intersections Between Past and Present Lives

Smyth's (2007) position regarding the need to "honor the voices of the young" by re-thinking the issue of school reform "from the vantage point of schools being places in which students want to be" (p. 646) helped me to see that this is where I needed to begin to unpack the students' narratives. Jima, Bareshna, and Francis voiced they valued education, they wanted to be in school, but so many complexities and ambiguities in their experiences were causing tensions in all aspects of their lives. I returned to the literature where Feuerverger and Richards (2007) write, "Our implicit or even tacit cultural and

historical life experiences have a tremendous impact on ... learning experiences” (p. 557). This was especially evident in the students’ voices, for their stories revealed they carried their past experiences with them into the classrooms. As Bareshna says, “*Bad memories always stay in your mind.... All the time if something is in front of you, you can’t even cancel it.*” I perused the dialogues from our conversations and looked back again at my own life stories. The students’ voices prompted me to rummage into their lives “in the spaces between and among” (Aoki, 2005, p. 282), poke into the murky shadows, and I realized I did not really know how to bring them to light, or release the tensions held there. Looking for a new perspective, I walked along the riverbank accompanied by the students’ voices as the fall foliage whirled around my feet.

My search for patterns and narrative threads resulted in the discovery of a dominant theme that exposed a deep sense of being on the margins (Madrid, 1988, p. 56) in the context of school, a concept which Feuerverger & Richards (2007) refer to as “outsiderness” (p. 555). Turner-Vorbeck & Marsh (2007) maintain being “the *other*” has deeper implications than simply lack of inclusion, and “*there is a highly personal cost to be paid for othering*” (p. 2), a personal cost that each student voiced in his or her own way. The students’ feelings of “outsiderness” (Feuerverger & Richards, 2007, p. 555) were reminiscent of the tensions my father felt 57 years ago fueled by the escalating North American “anti-immigrant sentiment” (Ramirez, 2007, p. 29). Madrid (1988) provides a snapshot of the dynamics of being the outsider, which helped me to see more clearly each student’s life as lived as an outsider:

Being *the other* means feeling different; is awareness of being distinct; is consciousness of being dissimilar. It means being outside the game, outside the

circle, outside the set. It means being on the edges, on the margins, on the periphery. Otherness means feeling excluded, closed out, precluded, even disdained and scorned. It produces a sense of isolation, of apartness, or disconnectedness, of alienation. (p. 56)

Imbalances Among the Commonplaces

Keeping in mind the notion of “outsiderness” (Feuerverger & Richards, 2007), I revisited Schwab’s (1973) words “*equal rank*” (p. 508) among the four commonplaces for understanding educational situations. The tensions in the students’ narratives pointed to imbalances among these commonplaces, what Nieto (2005) calls a “culture clash” (p. 3). The balance was heavily weighted on the milieu and teacher commonplaces where the multifaceted environments in which the students moved bumped up against teachers’ interactions with them. In terms of the participants as learners, an imbalance was created when teachers did not so much as skim the emotional surface of who they are. Subject matter for the students was not identified as problematic; rather academics in general presented the students with issues, mostly because of relationships with the teachers who taught the subjects and the barriers and boundaries created by learning in a foreign language. I wanted to portray the students’ experiences within each of the four commonplaces, and I realized this would not be as straightforward as I imagined. It was difficult to sort out the commonplaces because in the end they overlapped and were so enmeshed that it became something of a tangle. To begin to untangle it all, I borrowed Clandinin and Connelly’s (1988) use of metaphor as “an experiential term” (p. 70) to explore the students’ lived experience. Bateson (1994) believes “our species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories” (p. 11). Thinking in metaphors was a way for me

to explore the milieus in which the students and I move. I emerged with contextualized metaphors for each participant.

Jima: Life in a Chrysalis

I see Jima's life story being that of a butterfly-in-the-making. The butterfly is the symbol for change and joy, and I thought this particularly suited her. At the chrysalis stage of a butterfly's development, it appears dormant and unmoving, but structural changes and growth are taking place inside which enable it to emerge from the chrysalis as a free-flying butterfly (Gomm, 2001). Jima must have had some sort of protective covering for her to survive as a young girl in a lawless country where it was safer for her to stay indoors in the day time to avoid military interrogation, yet at night time live in fear of thieves and the "*people who would come ... with guns,*" a fear that even her parents could not shield her from. I envisioned some sort of invisible wrapping protecting her when she ran from the border police, risking jail time and all it implies, into the inhospitable mountainside, where she spent a night with no food, water or shelter, stalked by a tiger. A tough outer covering safeguarded her from her experiences in the refugee camp where she endured abject poverty in an environment where "*people do no good thing.*" This is where she had no say in marrying an older man. Jima's only comment about this time – "*If you are married at 15, you have many problems*" – speaks for itself.

I like to think she survived her incredible journey to our city, so that she could break out of her cocoon and blossom into her full potential. Instead, I see Jima at a stage where she is caught in a space between her past life and her present life, a place that keeps her from fully engaging in school. I remember very well the day she arrived in my

classroom. Often refugee students are hesitant and fearful at first, but not Jima. Her beaming smile and her openness to her new surroundings conveyed everything she did not yet have the words to express. She was relieved that her prolonged exploit out of her country was over, and she was delighted to finally realize her dream of going to school. Now she has the language to tell me that when she first came she “*was very happy with school ... just happy.*” However, even though she does not say it in so many words, throughout our conversations she began to share with me her frustration at being unable to move forward with her education as quickly as she would like.

More than two years have elapsed since her arrival, and the complex set of milieus in which she moves continues to hold her in the chrysalis state. When she arrived, Jima was caught up in a whirlwind of change such as acculturating to a new community with no English skills, relying on only the handful of people who speak her first language, living as a married woman in a foreign land, moving several times, becoming a mother at 17 years of age, ending up as sole provider for her child, all while attending school for the first time in her life. She has been vulnerable to preying salesmen, greedy landlords, a government system that demands she pays back the transportation loan, which for her is an unattainable sum of money, and a school system that does not have the resources to provide for her personal, social, or educational needs. These experiences are set against feelings of loneliness and missing her family whom she will likely never be reunited with because as Jima says, “*They can’t come here. They’re not sending people out.*”

Staff in the EAL program give of their own resources to assist Jima. They have taken particular concern for her well-being, helping by accompanying her to doctor’s

appointments, assisting with the baby, providing household goods, visiting on a regular basis, communicating with her landlord, and explaining confusing government documents. Jima's multifaceted milieus create a set of needs that disconnects her from many of her school peers. These students have the benefit of support systems at home that enables them to live their lives with teenage rather than adult responsibilities. School programs are typically designed for those students rather than for students like Jima. Although Jima is making progress acquiring conversational English language, she is not completely aware of her absence from the larger school academic and social life because, besides her life as a student and all of the other roles she plays, she is preoccupied with merely surviving on government assistance about which she acknowledges, "***In my country lots money, but here not enough.***"

She shared with me that before she came here, she had no prior knowledge of our education system and assumed school was "***just English language, English reading and writing.***" When she was in my EAL classroom her desire to learn as much as she could as quickly as she could was always evident. Now that she is aware of classes such as math, science, and social studies, she is just as eager to pursue studies in these areas.

Unfortunately, our school does not have EAL programs in place for students like Jima who are considered "non-literate" (Florenz & Terrill, 2003), meaning her first languages have a written form but she cannot read or write in either of them. Her curiosity over the nuances of language surprised me, considering she had never studied in any language before. When I discovered her hearing problems and severe headaches last year, I realized just how hard she had to work to compensate for these losses and how much she had accomplished despite them. Unfortunately, she is now faced with our over-burdened

health care system, and she must “*wait two or one years to see [her doctor] to take a picture.*” And yet, she does not despair; she does not give up hope ... so we must not either.

I wondered if she would break out of her chrysalis when she returned as a single parent from her time with her ex-husband in the neighbouring province, for this was an opportunity for her to start again and the prospect was almost liberating for her. Her tenacious pursuit of education is apparent because upon her return to our city, her first action was to register in school. But when she tried to register at the high school next door to her apartment, a counselor there advised her to stay at home with her baby. Jima has a window of only two years in which she may attend high school before she reaches our provincial age cap, and she had risked too much and come too far to lose this opportunity for education. When she contacted us, we were happy to have her return to our school. Jima was adamant about attending school full-time, despite the inconveniences of taking her baby by bus to a daycare in another school division before bussing to our school, which is located in a neighbourhood outside of the area of her apartment.

I see that she is determined to break out of the chrysalis that encloses her now, but I also see she continues to live only in the open spaces on the school landscape, in the cracks created between the EAL classroom, which is essentially her protective cocoon, and the outside world of her milieus. Although there are happy moments in her life, I wonder what her chances are for a happy ending in terms of her education despite her putting forth her best efforts. Our education system will need to acknowledge, attend to, and accommodate her complex milieus before Jima can fully engage in the environment

of school. If it does not, she will remain an outsider “different ... on the edges, on the margins, on the periphery” (Madrid, 1988, p. 56).

Bareshna: A Beacon for Hope

When Bareshna told me her pseudonym means shining star, the metaphor of a lighthouse came to mind. A lighthouse is a tower of sturdy construction built on a rock solid foundation, designed to withstand local environmental conditions. Lighthouses are strategically positioned along the shore or sometimes in the middle of the ocean to guide ship captains. Light is projected at night to help mariners navigate the coastal waters and illuminate danger zones. In the daylight, they serve as markers for ship captains seeking to identify their position on the coastline (Hyland, 2008). Like the lighthouse, Bareshna sees herself as sturdy and solid, noted when she describes herself as “***very strong for any kind of issues.***” She takes her responsibilities for her family, both here and in her home country, very seriously. She has set a purpose for her life, which includes a solid conviction in her pursuit of education about which Bareshna commented, “***Always I’m thinking through how I’m going to get it, and how to be more successful.***” But, to me, she seems most happy when she helps others through her volunteer work.

As a student, Bareshna is strategically situated and her voice as the bright light that sits atop the lighthouse illuminates her position on the coastal waters of the high school landscape. Like the lighthouse’s rotating beam, Bareshna’s voice shed light in all directions of her life. Her narratives brought to light the systematic violation of human rights in her home land that set her off on a course that brought her here. It is readily apparent that her past experiences have tremendous influence on her present circumstances in school. Bareshna acknowledged she’s “***so scared of everything because***

[she's] been in a war." She also says she is "*always thinking about [her] family in [her country] and [her] mother here,*" which makes it difficult for her to concentrate and focus in school.

Like the lighthouse that illuminates the danger zones in the sea, Bareshna's voice sheds light on the danger zones for her as a refugee student in high school. The tensions in her narratives expose the clashes among the milieus in which she moves. Her experiences at school depict her vulnerability to the rough waters in the educational ocean that thwart her engagement in high school. I clearly recall the day she came to my class furious and frustrated because her teacher accused her of cheating on her essay by getting help from me in EAL and by using a dictionary. In the safety of the EAL classroom, Bareshna could tell me about this incident uninhibited, but despite her best efforts she could not communicate these feelings to the teacher. Even after I met with the teacher, I do not think that teacher ever fully understood how her actions affected Bareshna's entire being. Essentially, she validated Bareshna's awareness of being "precluded, even disdained and scorned" that Madrid (1988, p. 56) associates with the personal costs of being the "other."

The incident with the student in her class verbally annihilating all the people in the Middle East is yet another instance that makes Bareshna acutely aware of "being distinct ... excluded, closed out" (Madrid, 1988, p. 56). "When we listen, we learn many things, not all of which we may find appealing" (Weis, 2003b, p. 69). The teacher's response to Bareshna's revulsion at the girl's comments was more than inexcusable. However, if Bareshna had not shared that story here, who would know these are the sorts of discussions taking place in our classrooms? And, yet, even under these circumstances

Bareshna shows tolerance. When she and I discussed the incident further, she said, *“I’m not saying to all the teacher should be nice because teacher have some problems in their own house.”*

Yet, despite these experiences, this young woman lives her life passionately. She understands the “power of possibility” (Greene, 2003, p. 97), perhaps better than most. But the spaces in which she feels most alive, most accepted, most wanted are not even on the educational landscape, for that is where she feels alienated, where she knows it is hard for teachers *“to understand [her] as a person.”* The places where she is fervent about life are where she does her charitable work toward humanitarian causes, perhaps because these are the places where she is respected and welcomed.

Lighthouses must be built on a solid foundation to withstand the buffeting winds and waves. However, at the moment Bareshna is positioned on fairly shaky, uneven ground in terms of her school experience. Her past experiences in a country at war understandably overwhelm her. She can find no resolution to bring her father to safety or to ever be reunited with him and, at the same time, she is responsible for her mother and brother who also suffer the effects of war. On the days she felt overcome by these worries, when she entered my classroom her physical bearing revealed her inner turmoil. Her slight frame appeared shrunken, her skin pale, and eyes dull. If a teacher did not know her story, they might assume she was physically ill. To add to this, she mourns the loss of family members, her country, and also her reputation as a student who excelled in previous schools where she spoke the language. She acknowledges if she were living in a country where she knew the language, school would be easier for her. These experiences bump up against the milieus of the high school and make evident the turbulent waters that

threaten her very foundation. Similar to the lighthouse that stands in isolation, Bareshna, too, feels isolated and alone on the educational landscape as voiced in her oft spoken phrase, “*I have to stand by myself.*”

Lighthouses in certain parts of the world today are threatened with destruction because of modern automation technology. After reading Bareshna’s narratives, I wondered if she might also suffer similar prospects in terms of being a high school student. However, the astuteness and wisdom with which she spoke in our conversations is the beacon in the “dark times” Green (2003, p. 108) writes about. As a beacon of hope, her voice calls for educators to acknowledge her precarious position on the educational coastline, but we will need to respond with empathy, respect, and acceptance in order to calm the tempestuous seas which surround her and guide her into gentler waters.

Francis: Blending In

Like many people, I mistakenly thought chameleons change their colour to match their surroundings as camouflage from predators. However, in the course of my reading I discovered chameleons are naturally coloured to blend in with their surroundings, but they change colour as an expression of their physical and psychological condition, and as a form of communication. A distinctive feature of chameleons is their independently moveable eyes, which gives them the ability to survey the world with nearly 360 degree vision (Raxworthy, n.d.). As I read through Francis’ narratives and reflected on our three year student-teacher relationship, I realized he had become chameleon-like as a way to manage the tensions resulting from his regularly colliding milieus.

Francis spoke with more candor than I had heard before about the milieus of his family, sports, friends, work, and school. At first glance it may seem as though he

effortlessly moves among his diverse environments because of his easy smile and affable manner. However, unlike the chameleon that changes colour in reaction to its mood, Francis works hard to disguise the tensions he experiences in the school milieu and the extreme pressure he feels to maintain his tentative position there. Like the chameleon whose eyes orbit its surroundings, I see that with Francis' maturing over the years has come a heightened awareness of the world around him and his place in it. In reaction to this awareness, Francis has developed the ability to quickly size up situations at school, behave in a manner teachers expect of him, and conceal his agitation and frustration over his circumstances there.

To Francis his family, both here and abroad, is “*very, very important.*” Francis' lived experiences as a member of a family from a war affected country intersect with his experiences as a high school student. He worries about the ongoing war in his country, that something might happen to his family there, and the effect this would have on his family here. Because Francis is an expert at blending in, the only way a teacher would know if something happened at home would be if they listened to the silence around him. He would no longer be talking, excited, happy or hyper. When “*something bad is happening, when I go to school I'm just a quiet guy.... when it comes to that, everything changes.... You know, it really comes to me,*” Francis shared.

Francis has been in this city for nine years, so teachers often assume he possesses the prior knowledge and language skills of students who were born here. However, like the assumptions many of us make about the chameleons' change of colour, the teachers' assumptions are not correct either. The truth is being a student does not come naturally to him. Francis is well-aware he does not have the language skills and cultural capital his

teachers assume he has. To protect his reputation and to compensate for these feelings of inadequacy, Francis never lets his guard down. He shared, ***“I just want to be for sure ‘cause, you know, I want to do everything right.”*** There is a connection between his describing himself as ***“a really nice person”*** and his sharing concerns about how teachers perceive him. The confusion he feels around this was reflected in his question, ***“There are some people who don’t know the answers, but they’re still nice persons inside, right?”*** And the chameleon surfaces again when he acknowledges that ***“sometimes you gotta act like you like the teacher ‘cause then the teacher will respect you, gives you good mark, or like helps you get that good mark.”***

Francis also works hard to blend in with the milieu of his peers. He has a large circle of friends because he attended several different elementary schools prior to enrolling in high school and because of his involvement in sports. His story about walking in the school hallways with his friends and seeing uneaten food lying on the floor revealed their contrasting value systems. The wasted food reminded Francis of when he did not have food in the refugee camp. He thought it was disrespectful to step on the food, yet he was torn between fitting in with his peers and doing what he felt is right. His way of handling this was to pick up the food in his friends’ absence. Although he may look like he feels completely comfortable with his buddies as they walk through the hallways, Francis is aware his past experiences set him apart from his peer group.

Francis’ natural skill and accomplishments as an athlete have won him recognition with coaches and others in sports circles. This is where he shines. I have noticed the place in school where he feels most comfortable in his own skin is in the gym and on the sports fields. As he says, ***“On the court and outside the court I’m doing my***

leadership.” I detect a discrepancy, though, between his confidence, passion, and fluidity of motion as he works the court and the tensions that play out in his stories about life in the classroom. I find it interesting that in the milieu of sports it is acceptable for him to get angry, be exasperated, show his frustration, but these are not acceptable emotions for him to express in the classroom. “The price of [Francis’] ‘success’ may have been muting [his] own voice” (Fine, 1987, p. 164). He understands clearly the implicit threat that if he does not fit the teachers’ expectations of him, he will be “outside the game, outside the circle, outside the set” (Madrid, 1988, p. 56). Francis as the chameleon has learned to look like he naturally blends in with his environments; however, his narratives reveal a young man in anguish behind the camouflage.

Researcher: On the Front Lines

I worked with an administrator once whose standard greeting as we passed in the hallways was, “Are we winning the war yet?” I recall always feeling uncomfortable by his words but in the course of those busy school days I never took time to ponder them, until now. His metaphor of school as a war zone is a loaded statement. The connotations of school as a battlefield do not appeal to my sensibilities as a compassionate teacher. First of all, there is an explicit dichotomy between “we” as teachers and “they” as students. It did not sit well with me to think that we teachers were in battle against students. What did this say about the importance of our relationships? Then there was the word “winning” as if there could be a final outcome, like on the sports field where there were definite winners and definite losers and nothing in between. And, what about the outcome of the battle? I envisioned battered, ragged students limping away in defeat, while teachers basked in the glory of the winners’ circle – and I envisioned this image in

the reverse. A ridiculous image? Of course. Finally, the word “yet” implied that we as teachers were seeking a date to complete this battle, as if a timeline existed, as if we were looking for the end to be near. Reflecting on these words now, after hearing the students’ stories and having them evoke my own, I understand the borders in my administrator’s metaphoric battlefield much more intimately and with greater particularity.

In many ways his metaphor captures aptly my “narrative beginnings” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 70) as a daughter, a mother, and a teacher. I was raised by my father who after growing up during WWII in Germany immigrated to Canada, thinking he had left the vestiges of war behind him, only to cross the border into another sort of battlefield. The scars my father incurred through feelings of “otherness” (Feuerverger & Richards, 2007) in this new land spread into his very being and into our family life. Canada’s focus then was on assimilating new immigrants as a means of nation building. However, failure to assimilate was seen as “the greatest threat to national unity, and any group that resisted assimilation was to be viewed with fear and suspicion” (Joshee, 2004, p. 136). Through my relationship with my father I learned about borders, places “where two worlds merge creating ... a frontline, a war zone” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 33). I learned how “othering” (Madrid, 1988, p. 56) delineates borders that determine who gets in and who stays out, how a no-man’s land is formed where there is no going back and no going forward, how borders demarcate places that are vague and undetermined, places created by the emotional residue of outsidersness (Anzaldúa, 1999; Feuerverger & Richards, 2007).

I troubled over my son becoming a soldier, yet I have become one too, a soldier working on the front lines of school. I have become my son, or perhaps my son became

me. I needed to go back to Clandinin & Connelly (2000) to understand that telling stories of my past framed my present standpoint. Now I could appreciate the congruence between Mark's situation and mine. We are soldiers, albeit on different landscapes, certainly with opposing levels of danger, nevertheless both fighting to better the lives of refugees. Mark's job as a soldier calls on him to protect the safety and human rights of victims of terrorist regimes on their soil, whereas my job as a teacher calls on me to protect the well-being and educational rights of the refugee students when they arrive at my school.

As a soldier on the front lines, I have won some battles and lost others. I have won seemingly small, yet extremely important, battles over classroom space and computers. I have crusaded to bring awareness to refugee students' situations in our high schools. In doing so, I have lost more battles than I have won particularly about the ways in which I believe we have yet to make responsive accommodations in our school for refugee students. An ongoing battle is against a system that is driven by numbers instead of needs, which leads to under-funded programs and inadequate support for refugee students. Refugee students have crossed the geographical borders of many countries before arriving here in our city only to find the last border to be another insurmountable hurdle. Like my father, they, too, are experiencing life as the other, on the borders, on the margins. My father, my son, Jima, Bareshna, and Francis are only some of the reasons why I believe improving our educational spaces is a battle worth fighting for.

CHAPTER FOUR

What it Means to be a Soldier

I am back in my computer room sitting at my desk in the middle of a battleground of sorts. My ever growing pile of research books and papers are no longer lined up neatly in rows. They have met with my countless inspections and now they have disbanded to shelves, the floor, and my desk. I have been struck with my personal metaphor as that of soldier, and now I am trying to understand what it *means* for me to be a soldier in education. It took me years to come to terms with Mark choosing his military career path partly because I did not understand what it entailed. When he first joined, I envisioned soldiers on the black and white battlefields in face-to-face combat, and it felt surreal to superimpose my son's image onto those historic photographs. How could I release him into a place captured in Sylvia Plath's (2000) vernacular - Luftwaffe, Auschwitz, Panzer ... Meinkampf – an unknown world to me, but not so to my father? I could not fathom why my son would choose this career any more than I could ever have imagined leaving the-mother-gazing-into-her-firstborn-son's-eyes behind and arriving at the place I am now. Ruddick (1989, as cited in Noddings, 1995) explains “the logic of motherhood includes ... ‘preservative love’” (p. 371). Noddings' (1995) notion that “world protection – particularly protection from war – is a natural extension of maternal work” (p. 371) helped me to begin to make sense of my “personal practical knowledge” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988, p. 25) as a teacher. Clandinin & Connelly (1988) see one's life course of action as “curriculum,” which encompasses “the paths we have followed and the paths we intend to follow” (p. 1). Through this narrative inquiry, I followed a path that led me to establish intimate relationships with my students, to study our situations, and to come

face-to-face with myself (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 88). Arriving at this point in my personal journey, I came “to learn to read [my] own ‘text,’ [my] own narrative, ... [my] own curriculum as a way of gaining some understanding of [my] students’ curriculum” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988, p. 59). I learned that I compose my life stories and approach relationships through a maternal framework, regardless if in a given moment I am a daughter, a mother, a teacher, a narrative inquirer, or a soldier.

Communications Squadron

When Mark left for Afghanistan one of my concerns was how we would communicate with him. I spoke to him as if he were going off to summer camp, telling him as he prepared to board the plane not to leave us waiting and wondering and that he should call home as soon as he got there. Over the course of his tour, he did phone home or email occasionally. However, his communication was always cryptic, did not include enough information to satisfy a mother’s inquisitiveness, and for security reasons it was replete with military terminology, acronyms and/or code words. One of Mark’s duties there was as a communicator, and he was stationed in the communications hub as a go-between of sorts. In this capacity, he was privy to every incident on the land and in the air, and he was responsible for decoding, relaying, and transmitting critical information to the appropriate parties.

Communication Agents in School

This is one area where I see Mark’s and my work intersecting. As an EAL teacher, I am also a go-between, between the students and the larger school community, and between the students and their subject-area teachers. A significant part of my job is decoding subject area teachers’ assignments and expectations for EAL students, and

relaying and transmitting information on behalf of students to teachers and from teachers to students. The students seem to have a sixth sense regarding the tensions surrounding language barriers and general communication with certain teachers, and they quickly “[learn] the dangers of talk, the codes of participating and not, and they [learn], in more nuanced ways, which conversations [are] never to be initiated” (Fine, 1987, p. 167). Perhaps teachers are unsure of the students’ language competence; they feel they do not have the time to figure it out. Or, as Raible and Nieto (2003) observe, “Many teachers, particularly those at the secondary level, would rather focus on the content they teach than on the emotional and social concerns of their students” (p. 159). Regardless of the reason, in these circumstances, both the students and teachers turn to EAL teachers to bridge the communication gap.

Another significant role in my position as communicator is as advocate for students, what Guo and Jamal (2007) term as a “broker” (p. 6) or what Stanton-Salazar (1997) refers to as an “institutional agent” (p. 1). According to Stanton-Salazar, institutional agents are associated with “key forms of social support that function to help ... adolescents become effective participants within mainstream institutional spheres, particularly the school system” (p. 10). Institutional agents in schools are usually teachers and counselors, “those individuals who have the capacity and commitment to transmit directly, or negotiate the transmission of, institutional resources and opportunities” (p. 6).

The students’ conversations about their milieus indicated they do not have family members or “significant others” (p. 2) in their lives whose traits are congruent with the local educational standards to help them negotiate the academic norms and values which are associated with “institutional promotion and individual mobility” (p. 2). In fact, it is

often the case that the students act as “brokers” for their parents and other family members, rather than the reverse. While both Bareshna and Francis acknowledged the supports they receive from their families at home, these supports differ from the support associated with institutional agents in that their parents are not able to help them negotiate institutional resources and opportunities to develop the *social capital* (Bourdieu, 1986 as cited in Nieto, 1999, p. 97) required for academic success. For Jima, who has no parents or family members here, this is especially poignant.

Jima, Bareshna, and Francis recognized their reliance on EAL teachers as institutional agents to assist them in navigating the complexities of school life and re-communicating subject area teachers’ expectations of them. The students’ narratives told of communication and comprehension issues specifically outside of the EAL classroom, indicating they inherently knew not to expect support from certain teachers or from their peers. Jima shared with me her recent experiences in her first modified academic course where she was paired with an educational assistant for the first few weeks of the semester, but since then the assistant has been placed elsewhere. The classroom teacher is too busy with other students to help her, so Jima relies on the EAL teachers to re-teach the course content to her. Jima recognizes her need for in-class assistance. She explained the educational assistant was helpful, “*She tells it again to me, slower to me.*” Jima would not know about the politics behind the lack of in-class support she requires to be successful in her first academic class. She would not understand that the educational assistant was able to work with her for that short period of time only because she was waiting for her placement with a designated student to be determined. In our school system, educational assistance is provided for students who are “designated” because of a

learning disability or mental health concern. Like most EAL students, Jima does not fall under these categories. Despite her lack of first language literacy and prior education, despite her hearing damage and health concerns, under our current policy Jima does not qualify for educational assistance. To me, there seems to be such inequities in the system. While Jima's needs are different from, but just as great as, those of a student with a learning disability or mental health concern, she is not able to be designated. While some students receive one-on-one assistance, Jima is one of an ever increasing EAL student population drawing on the resources of a limited number of EAL teachers.

Bareshna talked about the supports she received in EAL, "***I always come to [EAL with] my problem. [It's] a good support 'cause [the EAL teacher is] listening to me always and [says], 'Let's do the homework too,' and plus doing that makes you a little bit forget about your problems.***" Bareshna sees the EAL classroom as providing more than academic support; she looks to the teachers there for personal and emotional support too. Francis spoke of his frustration in classes and how he does not "***even bother to ask the teacher how do you do [the work].***" He shared that he has been with a lot of teachers and some teachers tell him he should have paid attention even though he was paying attention. At these times he says, "***So I don't even bother because me, myself, I think okay I'm going to do this in EAL.***" As Francis put it, "***The thing about EAL is there's teachers that want to help. That's where you're supposed to get help right?***"

Cracking the Code

If Jima, Bareshna, and Francis are not selected for sponsorship by *all* teachers, not only EAL teachers, they will indisputably have problems accumulating "*social capital*" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 1), and therefore, academic success will remain an unattainable

dream. According to Stanton-Salazar, “personal and reliable access to committed institutional agents does not ... [transcend] all social classes” (p. 7). He suggests the “evaluation and recruitment processes by which school-based agents evaluate and select minority students for sponsorship ... largely entail perceptions of the student’s ability and willingness to adopt the *cultural capital* and standards of the dominant group” (p. 7). I was curious about this statement. I wondered by what measure school-based agents perceive students’ “willingness” to adopt the dominant culture and standards. I thought about Francis in particular because he has been here for almost half of his life. He is charismatic, popular, and his achievements in high profile sports give his identity in school tremendous credulity in the eyes of staff and students. Stanton-Salazar explains that school success is not a matter of simply learning and competently performing skills; rather it is “a matter of learning how to *decode the system*” (p. 13). On the one hand, I see Francis is aware of the existence of cultural codes in school, and he has a strong desire to adopt the cultural capital Stanton-Salazar writes about. On the other hand, I see that despite his efforts, Francis is unable to crack the code in terms of his academic success. Francis described the effort he puts forth, “***I try really hard. I don’t give up at school. I don’t say, ‘Oh my average is down [so] I’m going to give up.’ I’m going to show up in classes, I’m not going to be late, I still try.***” He sees that students who were born in this country “***have more experience than us***” and they do better than he does academically. He knows that for him to be a successful student, he requires support from his teachers. He is confused, though, by teachers who tell students to put up their hand if they need help, yet when he tried this himself, he was told he was “***asking too much questions*** [and] ***that’s a lot of questions now.***” Without the attention and support Francis requires

from his teachers, academic success will remain out of reach for him. For Francis, this confusion makes “claiming his identity” (Raible & Nieto, 2003, p. 158) as both a successful athlete and a struggling refugee EAL student confusing.

Bareshna is also aware that her academic success is tied to “*decoding the system*” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 13). Her prior educational history shows a series of starts, stops, and interruptions. Yet in her previous country she attained academic success. She continues to see herself now as the successful student that she was, yet this image is incongruent with her present experiences as a student. She has a keen desire to pursue education, although managing her multiple roles often takes her focus away from her studies. Circumstances in her country at war continue to spill over into her present life, and she has familial responsibilities that she is sensitive to. When teachers do not acknowledge her worries or understand why she has difficulty focusing in school, Bareshna thinks the teacher is mad at her. Bareshna feels “*if [she doesn’t] finish the homework [the teacher is] gonna give [her] zero and plus it kind of it makes two problems.*” She has two problems because now she adds school failure to her list of worries. Although teachers may say they understand her situation, Bareshna says, “*But still it was very hard for them to understand me as a person, as a refugee who came blind into this country. They don’t really understand inside [me] what’s going on.*” Her story about an EAL teacher listening to her troubles before helping her move forward with her assignments demonstrates that with an empathetic ear Bareshna is able to put her worries away long enough to engage in her studies.

Jima had no prior experience with any school environment; she is a high beginner level language learner, and at this early stage in her academic career, she is just starting to

verbalize her experiences with school codes. Because communication barriers for Jima are significant, she relies heavily on assistance from EAL staff to negotiate her way through high school. Jima and I discussed the support provided in the EAL classroom and she shared, “*Sometimes I have to go ask [the teacher] many times. Sometimes I wait. [School work] is difficult. [I need to] have helpers sometimes to work with me.*” The student population in our EAL program has tripled over the years; unfortunately, our staffing ratio has not kept pace. In fact, we do not offer a program of language instruction for beginner, or any other level, students. I believe the resource model we follow does a disservice for beginner students because they never receive direct instruction on the foundations of English language that more advanced levels of English build on. EAL teachers recognize the problem, but at the moment we do not have adequate staff or funding to offer programs with direct language instruction targeted at students at particular language ability levels. In response to this dilemma, beginner students, like Jima, are often placed in prescribed remedial reading classes designed for first, not additional, language learners. Jima’s goal is to study in the academic subject areas, particularly in math. If the EAL program continues to operate under-staffed and under-funded, if Jima is not selected for sponsorship by her subject area teachers, and if she is not given educational assistance support, school success will be unattainable for her.

Language Barriers

Learning a new language plays a significant role in the occurrence and quality of communication between EAL students and their teachers and peers, and of course, with their academic achievement. Unless one has learned a foreign language or taught language learners, it is difficult to convey the complexities associated with not only

conversing in the language, but also studying in it. Whether an EAL student is confused by figurative, idiomatic, or colloquial language, or simply has an accent, sometimes their English-only peers and teachers do not have the patience or skills to converse with “foreign-sounding” students. I outlined earlier the distinctions between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Roessingh, 2006a). It is important to consider students’ language learning histories and to distinguish between the language competence in BICS and CALP when working with language learners in an academic setting. Language learners acquire BICS first, language used in day-to-day social interactions, and even though it may seem difficult to communicate in English with beginner students, it is possible. EAL teachers are not required or expected to know the languages spoken by their students. However, they use strategies that all teachers can use to communicate with the English language learners in their classes, but these strategies require teachers to have an intimate understanding of their students’ abilities. Krashen’s (1988) theory on second language acquisition recommends the use of “teacher talk” or “caretaker speech” (p. 34), which is comparable to “motherese” used with first language learners. This should not be confused with “baby talk.” Rather, teachers use simplified codes when conversing with language learners by adjusting their speaking register according to the individual’s comprehension level. Its principal goal is to facilitate communication and comprehension, not necessarily language teaching.

As I mentioned before, English is the students’ third or fourth language. For Jima one of her first languages has no written system, and she is illiterate in her other language that does have a Roman alphabet. Bareshna learned two languages in her home country,

but when the family fled to a neighbouring country, she was schooled in a third language. Now that she is here, she is studying in English, her fourth language. Francis has two native languages and he studied in one of them for one or two years when he was very young, but he is not fully literate in either of them. Research (Meyers, 1993) reveals that a learner's first language plays a central role in all aspects of the learner's emotional well-being and educational development. Meyers contends that development of the learner's first language "must be seen as a high, if not the highest, priority in the early years of schooling" (p.13). Given that Jima, Bareshna, and Francis are beyond the age of early schooling and living in a small prairie city with a relatively small culturally diverse community, finding teachers to instruct them in their first languages is nearly impossible.

Work by Roessingh and Kover (2003) with bilingual students shows that impoverished levels of learners' first and second languages means that proficiencies we assume all first language learners possess have not transferred to the new language. Also "the high-order thinking skills of reasoning, integrating, synthesizing, hypothesizing, analyzing, and imagining ... are left under developed" (pp. 6-7). Francis, for example, is a student whose facility with conversational English, combined with his early age of arrival, led teachers to assume he possesses a higher language competence than he actually does. Francis is very aware of this himself, "***Me, myself, I speak perfect English with no trouble or anything, but when it comes to [school] work it's much different... When it come to doing it, reading or essays, it's very difficult.***" In Francis' situation as a young arrival, sounding good only compounded his problems in school. Teachers assume he has a higher level of CALP than he does, and because they also assume he was born here, they do not provide him with the supports that would benefit him. In some cases,

teachers attribute students' academic failure to a cognitive impediment. These assumptions about language can lead to detrimental consequences for EAL students. Jima, for example, is one of the "disproportionate numbers of students of this profile [who] find themselves (often wrongly) relegated to nonacademic track studies in high school, special education placements, failure and dropout (Oaks, 1993 as cited in Roessing & Kover, 2003, p. 7).

Border Protectors

Another area where Mark's and my job intersect has to do with borders. From a military perspective, one of the most vital tasks for soldiers is the protection of borders. I learned from Mark that during war few advancements or improvements to the lives of the citizens in the country occur without military escort or protection of those areas. For example, boundaries created around reconstruction sites for building roads, irrigation systems, schools, and hospitals must be under constant military protection to provide the workers with a safe environment against insurgent attacks. Without ongoing military surveillance and defense measures, demarcation lines negotiated as part of a ceasefire are in jeopardy. The borders in high school may not be as tangible as those in a war zone, but they do exist.

The students' stories help us to see the often invisible and yet highly protected demarcation lines in high school such as those between academic subject area classrooms and EAL classrooms; between students who are privileged and those who are not; between students who qualify for educational assistance and those who do not; between teachers who see EAL students as their responsibility and those who do not; between teachers who believe in building relationships and those who do not; between those who

make assumptions about students and those who do not; between those who embrace diversity and those who do not. It seems that the borders in high schools are highly protected, just like they are in war zones – by funding policies, strategic plans, facility issues, and inclusion guidelines.

The difference between the borders protected by the military and the borders in high school is that on the school landscapes we want to open up the borders or eliminate them all together so *all* students can have safe passage. The three students' narratives suggest this is not the case with borders in their school experiences. It seems that in school, we establish and protect borders around physical space, human and financial resources, teaching philosophies, personal beliefs, and relationships. We patrol the borders by allowing in only those who “fit” into our spaces and by keeping out those who do not. Jima, Bareshna, and Francis are students with “complex identities ... who do not fit into tidy boxes” (Raible & Nieto, 2003, p. 160). Their stories reveal few teachers understand who they are, where they came from, or what they need. It is not surprising, then, that refugee students often end up existing on the edges of the highly protected borders surrounding the mainstream life in school.

Border Crossers

Border crossing for Jima, Bareshna, and Francis is not simply a metaphor; it is an expression of their lived experiences. They fled their country of nationality and crossed several geographical borders because of “a well-founded fear of persecution” (United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2007-08, p. 10), and in crossing those borders they were met with hostilities, treated as undesirables, and suffered deprivation. Now they face another set of barriers as they try to traverse the border crossing into high

school, which “as the meeting place, becomes the borderland where cultures collide and intersect in ... complicated ways” (Feuerverger & Richards, 2007, p. 555). Adjusting to a new way of life has been an arduous and complex process for the students, which is compounded by having to reconcile the images they had of the promised land and what they faced when they stepped into their new world (Nieto, 1999). The stress of leaving behind their past lives, families, and homes is juxtaposed against learning a new language, becoming accustomed to confusing new cultural codes, experiencing ongoing economic struggles, being students in a school system that does not acknowledge their lived experiences, or provide open and welcoming places of learning for them. Li (2006) likens such experiences to traveling “a long distance physically, mentally, and emotionally ...” (p. 20). Each of the students at one point during our conversations shared they would love to return to their homeland, if it were safe. I was struck with the image of the students precariously straddling two continents, one foot tenuously planted in their home countries and one foot tenuously placed on the soil of their new land.

Borderlands in High School

Nelson (2003) defines the borderlands as “a space a person enters when one boundary has been crossed and before a new boundary is encountered or created” (p. 11). Anzaldúa (1999) characterizes this space as the place where “the lifeblood of two worlds merge to form a third country – a border culture” (p. 25). The issues Jima, Bareshna, and Francis face in the borderlands are not particular to any country. Rather they are the personal, social, cultural, and psychological borders they encounter on the high school landscape. These borders “define the places that are safe and unsafe [and] distinguish *us* from *them* ... vague and undetermined place[s] created by the emotional residue of an

unnatural boundary” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 25). The conditions of who crosses safely over the border and who remains in the gaps between the borderlands, a space Anzaldúa terms a “closed country” (p. 33), are determined, as my father learned, by “the only ‘legitimate’ inhabitants” (p. 25) – those who are in power.

Watt and Roessingh’s (2001) research, cited earlier, around the excessive drop out rates for EAL high school students is only one part of the research puzzle exploring reasons why these students exist in the borderlands of high school; Jima’s, Bareshna’s, and Francis’ school experiences are the other important parts of the puzzle that need to be studied, for their lived experiences are the ones that statistics fail to account for.

Feuerverger and Richards (2007) assert that the sense of “outsiderness” associated with life in the borderlands “cannot be viewed as being peripheral to mainstream schooling” (p. 555). I wanted to explore the tensions that gripped the students in the borderlands, as Anzaldúa (1999) puts it, “like a virus” (p. 26) by looking at the safe and unsafe places these students live in. In attending to making education work for *all* students, our challenge becomes imagining ways to make our schools and classrooms safe places of learning for *all* students, not only *some* students. Until we do so, Jima, Bareshna, and Francis will be left “hovering above as ... outsider[s] looking in and wondering if [they] will ever belong” (Li, 2006, p. 211).

Safe and Unsafe Places

Jima’s safe place is in the EAL classroom. This room represents her “closed country” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 33), the space between her life outside of school and her life in the larger school community. She spends the majority of her school day there, so she is most familiar with this physical space and the people in it. It is, in a way, a place of

respite where she can re-focus and re-energize. She can attend to learning English language, and possibly get one-on-one support with her other subject areas. She can take a break from her responsibilities for her child and the problems in her dilapidated apartment. A teacher can help her decipher the perplexing documents she receives in the mail and get updated on her health issues. The EAL classroom is the place where Jima is most relaxed because there she is a member of a border culture where others understand and accept her situation. Jima has just begun to branch out into academic courses at high school, and to do so she leaves the safety of the EAL classroom. Without the benefit of an educational assistant or a teacher who has time to work with her, though, Jima sits in the class alone not understanding much. As her teachers, we can learn from the atmosphere in Jima's safe space and imagine ways to recreate it in places of learning for her on the mainstream high school landscape.

Bareshna's safe place is not in the school. She is involved with a number of charitable organizations in the city where she works passionately to improve the welfare of others. These are the places where she feels accepted and that she has a purpose. She is listened to; her voice and opinion are respected, unlike in those places in school where she struggles to belong. When she is doing her volunteer work, she can be herself because she is involved with a network of supportive, like-minded people. Her role is strictly voluntary, unlike the demanding responsibilities of being a student, daughter, and sister who carries the weight of her family's concerns on her shoulders. When Bareshna talked about her volunteer work, she was animated, assertive, and even happy. Bareshna is not a confident learner in school, but when she is involved in volunteer work she is an engaged learner. She talked about being open with people to see what she could learn

from them. She shared, “*I volunteer a lot. I want to do that because it gives you lessons. I always try to go out and learn something.*” As her teachers, we can learn from her engagement in volunteer work and imagine ways to help her bring the qualities of an engaged learner across the border and into our classrooms.

Francis’ safe place is in the gym. Here he is away from the tensions of meeting teachers’ expectations for academics and language and their assumptions of him. He can, at least for a while, put away his worries about his family and his job. This is his place of release. The gym is perhaps the only place where he can show his true emotions without feeling judged. He can let out his pent up tensions by running, jumping, shouting, and scoring. He can show his authentic self in the gym because this is where he dominates in skill, ability, and leadership. As a top-scorer in the league, his strategies to put the ball in the basket work for him, whereas outside of the gym his strategies to be the student his teachers assume he is do not. Francis holds his coaches in high regard. He talked about how they support him in all aspects of playing the game. As his teachers, we can learn from the principles of coaching and use them to imagine the raw potential in students, take them from where they are, and accept them for who they are, rather than focusing on who they are not.

Discovering Travelers and Journeys on the High School Landscape

Over the course of writing my thesis, Debbie and I met weekly to discuss my work. On this particular afternoon, as usual I began by reading my writing aloud before talking about all of the things I wanted to say on paper but could not find the words to express....

I am concerned by the tensions in their stories; there is nothing carefree about their experiences in school. I have seen moments of joy in their lives, but this doesn't come across in their stories. Why is high school a carefree time of life that goes by all too fast for some students and not for Jima, Bareshna, and Francis? I don't feel I am clearly conveying the reasons I am sure high school IS the right place for refugee students. They are age appropriate for high school and where else can they learn the language of their peers and of school that is crucial to their success inside and outside of school? I don't mean to suggest that only EAL teachers know how to work with these students ... or to focus on the negative... or to point fingers. Many teachers go to great lengths to accommodate the students in their classes, and I'm not mentioning them. I don't think the problem is rooted in racism. It is more likely that teachers don't understand who the students are, what they need, or how to give it to them. They have little or no experience with refugee students and EAL students in general and because of their misconceptions about the function of the EAL program, they see the education of refugee students falling in the laps of EAL teachers. In other cases, teachers just don't take the time to converse on an intimate level with their students. In fact, the students are up against barriers that most administrators, school personnel, as well as their peers, are unaware exist. The barriers the students face are partly attributable to systemic issues, politics, and economics. Teachers don't have enough time built into their schedules; their pre-service training doesn't prepare them to work with culturally diverse students; EAL programs are chronically under-resourced. I'm puzzling over the irony of our school system spending so much time and so many

resources on programs for certain students, yet here we have students who are almost desperate to learn, and we are not attending to them. Do educators realize these issues relegate refugee students to the “closed country,” a place safely outside of the mainstream life of the school? Or that some students don’t even have a safe place in the school? I don’t mean to suggest only refugee students struggle in high school. Where refugee students dealt with war in their homelands, many Canadian students deal with other kinds of wars on their home fronts. Jima, Bareshna, and Francis have already lived a thousand life times; they are weary travelers. We shouldn’t be talking about them in the future; the present is more important. It is urgent that we attend to them in the here and now.

Learning about their backgrounds is so important to our understanding of how they see themselves at school. Each of the student’s remarkable stories reveal they have come so far and risked too much for us to deny them schools where they feel a sense of acceptance and belonging in each and every classroom. We just have to make school work for them!

Debbie is an active listener and whenever I read or spoke, I could sense her interaction through a nod or a softly spoken word of acknowledgement. When I ended my diatribe, she concisely articulated what my emotions prevented me from doing, the essence of which went like this, “Arlene, you are helping me to see an important distinction. In schools some students are ‘travelers’ just trying to get from one place to the next as quickly and easily as possible and others are ‘journeyers’ slowing down the moments and savoring the experiences along the way.” And so this distinction was borne.

Travelers on the High School Landscape

Jima, Bareshna, and Francis live their lives as “travelers.” They traveled from one country to another, fleeing unrest in their homeland in search of safety and freedom, making occasional stops on the trip but always just passing through. On their travels, a particular purpose and arriving at a destination were more important than sightseeing along the way. Since they started high school here, they continue on as travelers, with their destination being the goal of completing high school. The saying: “Life’s a journey, not a destination” (Tyler, n.d.) does not apply to them. The tensions expressed in their narratives seem to override any sense of wonder or adventure they might enjoy along their travels through high school. They reside in the “closed country” at school, and when they are required to spend time in those “unsafe” places, places such as classes where they are not attended to or expected to “fit” in, they view these places as obligatory stops along the way, ones they prefer not to revisit.

I knew Jimma’s, Bareshna’s, and Francis’ experiences were far different from those of my own three children when they were teenagers in high school and from those of many other students whom I worked with over the years. A significant disparity between their experiences is revealed in the participants’ narratives of lives lived without the advantage of choice. They and their families were forced from their homes in their native lands and are left without hope of ever returning to them. Because of the urgency of finding safe places to live, they had no say in choosing their country of refuge. Since arriving here, the demands of their lives again limit their opportunity to make choices both on and off the high school landscape. Their voices tell of lives consumed with adult responsibilities: working nearly full-time; caring for children, parents and siblings; and

managing households. Noticeable in their narratives is the absence of significant experiences with the “mundane rituals of daily living” (Fine, Weis, Weseen & Wong, 2000, p. 118) characteristic of many of their high school peers.

Jima.

One Thursday evening I called Jima for a quick clarification of something I had written in my field notes. It took her a while to answer the phone and when she picked up she was breathless. Immediately I realized I had caught her at a busy time. I was reminded of her description of her typical day. She began with the words, “*I support myself.*” I pictured a young single mother trying to put her baby to bed, cleaning up the supper dishes, doing laundry, preparing bottles, and packing the baby’s bag for the next day, as she also prepared herself for school the next day. And that is exactly what she was doing.

When I asked her about her day, she told me she had stopped at the store after school to buy groceries before walking home with a crying baby in the stroller. I imagined her walking against the cold wind, trying to manage the flimsy stroller, heavy milk jugs, diaper bag, and her school knapsack. She thought the baby was getting sick again because she felt very hot. After she hung up the phone she was going to check her temperature, but she did not have Tylenol in the house. It sounded like her daughter was in for a restless night, and I wondered if Jima would be able to attend school the next day.

Bareshna.

On my last meeting at Bareshna’s house the degree of her responsibilities at home hit me. When I arrived mid-morning, Bareshna answered the door looking tired and pale. I was surprised to see her mother standing, leaning on a walker in the front room in

obvious pain, for this was not the same person I met on my previous visits. Bareshna explained that her mother had been sick for weeks. She was in such pain she could not walk up the stairs to her bedroom, and so the living room had been turned into a bedroom, where she slept fitfully on the sofa with Bareshna on the loveseat next to her. The doctor had prescribed pain killers, but they were not curing what ailed her and were causing side effects. When her mother was ready to sit down on the sofa, she called for Bareshna to help her. Her mother cried out because of the excruciating pain, and I felt alarmed as I arranged pillows behind her back. To compound this crisis, a group of young men had beaten up Bareshna's brother the night before. The siblings tried to keep this a secret from their mother because they did not want to add to her distress. Bareshna was solely in charge of consulting with her mother's doctors, shopping, cooking, cleaning, doing the laundry, and nursing her mother and brother.

I wanted to excuse myself for coming at such an inopportune time, but Bareshna would not hear of it. She insisted it comforted her mother to listen to us talk. In fact, her mother was adamant that Bareshna serve me tea. While Bareshna was in the kitchen, her mother turned her drained face to me and said, "We come here, my children safe, very safe, school good. But look me, what they do for me?" as she pointed to herself (personal communication, October, 2008). As a mother I shared her anguish at putting her children in a situation out of her control.

When Bareshna returned with a tray of tea, I told her the least I could do was drive her to school later that afternoon. She needed only two more classes to complete her grade 12, and she was now attending an alternative school in the afternoons to accomplish this. She told me she could not leave her mother, plus she wanted to wait for

her brother to return home because she felt remorseful because she had not had time to pay attention to his injuries last night. After settling her mother and coming to sit beside me, I saw weariness washed over her. It was clear she would not be going to school that day. Bareshna pointed to her sleeping mother and said, ***“This is what teachers don’t see. This is why I can’t go to school sometimes.”***

Francis.

Francis had a chance to play on an elite sports team one summer. This was an opportunity of a lifetime for athletic boys his age. Scouts would be at the training camp scrutinizing gifted players, like Francis, for university scholarships. The summer camp would end with a tournament in a prestigious location in the United States. The coach knew the cost would be prohibitive for Francis’ family, but he also knew Francis’ potential and did not want him to miss this chance to play or to receive a scholarship.

The coach asked if I would help Francis write letters requesting funding assistance, and I agreed to do this. When I spoke with Francis, though, I learned that even with financial assistance, his participating in the camp would be a luxury his family could never afford, despite the potential payoff of a university scholarship. He explained that it was not just about money for the expenses of the camp and traveling. It was more than that. It would take him away from his summer job, a job his family depended on. It was also around the time when his relative in their home country was held for ransom and his family was pressured to pay for his release, so it was even more crucial for Francis to earn money. When Francis and I discussed this, he said he was regretful at having lost the opportunity to join the team, but he was sure he had done the right thing for his family

and that was most important to him. As Francis said, ***“There’s family and then there’s sports. [Family is] the most thing that comes first before everything, it comes first.”***

Journeyers on the High School Landscape

In contrast to Jima’s, Bareshna’s, and Francis’ experiences as “travelers” in high school, many high school students are “journeyers.” Journeyers move freely about the open spaces in school, spaces that only occasionally push up against the “closed country.” Journeyers experience high school differently than travelers in part because of the presence of “significant others” and “institutional agents” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 1) in their lives who help them navigate the bumpy parts of their high school experience. This support allows them the freedom to enjoy journeying through high school and to get on with the business of being a teenager. The saying: “Life’s a journey, not a destination” (Tyler, n.d.) *does* apply to them. For journeyers, high school offers more than academics; it is also a time for socializing, developing relationships, and experimenting with their identities. Journeyers have not had to grow up as fast as Jima, Bareshna, and Francis. They typically will not have adult responsibilities until they become adults. They are the young people contemporary song lyrics refer to as having the time of their lives (Armstrong, 1997, track 17).

Journeyers can take in the sights during their high school years because high school is designed particularly for their cultural ways of knowing and learning. Educators direct their teaching to these students’ backgrounds. English is their first language so figurative, idiomatic, and colloquial language is not as confusing for them. They can focus, instead, on learning new concepts in their academic courses. Journeyers are privileged because they have been born into the cultural and social capital Stanton-

Salazar (1997) associates with school success. Often journeyers are reluctant to leave the safe place where they know they fit in, and move on to a life with more responsibilities and expectations.

Teachers as Border-Crossers

I imagined how we teachers might see ourselves in relation to Jima, Bareshna, and Francis if we understood life as the students do as travelers on the high school landscape in the “closed country” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 33). Bateson (1994) explains that when we educators learn a “deeper noticing of the world” (p. 109) and use “broader vision” (p. 110) to illuminate what lies in our peripheral vision, we will see the worlds our students live in and learn about their diverse experiences and the systemic and institutional barriers they contend with (Dei, 2003). I wondered what would be illuminated using this broader vision. Would we see that the pathways we, teachers and students, follow in schools run parallel, but separate, from each other? Would we see places where our paths intersect – or not?

Seeing With Different Kinds of Vision

Bateson’s (1994) metaphor of vision – clarity of vision, peripheral vision – in education resonated with me because of its pertinence to my interest in the ways we “see” and “listen” to culturally diverse students. She muses, “What would it be like to have not only color vision but culture vision, the ability to see the multiple worlds of others?” (p. 53). I want to distinguish here between the notions of “culture vision” and “colourblindness” (Fine, Weis & Powell, 1999; Guo & Jamal, 2007; Irvine, 2003). Colourblindness is an approach which when applied to the context of education sees race, culture, and ethnicity “as irrelevant, and assumes that treating all individuals the same

will erase issues of inequity and injustice (Solomon & Levine-Rasky as cited in Guo & Jamal, 2007, p. 14). “Although this view is superficially appealing, because it seems to value all individuals equally, it negates the histories, backgrounds, and experiences of diverse cultural groups, and ignores the ways in which these affect their experiences in the learning environment” (Guo & Jamal, p. 14). Instead, Guo and Jamal (2007) suggest “educators must be colour sensitive to affirm and validate difference rather than minimize it, striving to gain a fuller understanding of their students” (p. 14).

Re-envisioning Classrooms

Re-envisioning classrooms can seem like a daunting task. The question is this: How do we begin to see things as other than they are and how they could be? Calkins and Harwayne (1991) contribute another viewpoint to partner with Bateson’s (1994) concept of “culture vision” to help address this question. They suggest that before teachers can teach, they must “establish a School for Children in each classroom” (p. 11). In other words, make schools places where classrooms are filled with students’ lives, where students can live fully as themselves. The authors’ work focuses on younger children in a different situation; however, their ideas transfer to any educational setting concerned with teacher-student relationships, student engagement, and students’ sense of belonging. I wanted to incorporate Calkins and Harwayne’s concept of “Schools for Children,” and because my work centers around young adults, I took the liberty of adapting this term to suit my purposes and changed their words to “Schools for *Students*.” I imagined how we teachers might re-envision students like Jima, Bareshna, and Francis in “Schools for Students” in our classrooms if we saw them with “culture vision.”

Seeing Jima With Culture Vision

Once we teachers can listen to Jima's soft spoken voice, watch as she turns her head away and closes her eyes while we speak, and at the same time know she has lots to say if we just listen, that she needs to turn her good ear to our voice to hear us, and her inability to focus is related to her headaches, then it is easy to be patient when working with her. When teachers can appreciate she comes from a family, who like ours, wants the best for their daughter, that in her home country it was unsafe for her to go to school, that she has written in permanent marker on her living room wall "Welcome to my house," and that she would like to tell teachers her story, then it is easy to work toward providing her with a sense of belonging in school. When teachers can see she is capable of learning, how thrilled she was to make the connection between the food chain lesson in her science class and the food chain lesson she learned by spending a night on the mountain with a tiger, then it is easy for teachers to see how to engage her in learning. When teachers can see how math is important in her daily life with paying bills, banking, household budgeting, and sending money to her family in her home land, then it is easy to see how to bring relevancy into her subject area classes. When teachers see Jima with "culture vision" it is easy to sense the urgency of providing her with responsive education before the system pushes her out because in a "School for Students" we want her to find that all spaces in school are safe places of learning for her.

Seeing Bareshna With Culture Vision

Once we teachers can look at Bareshna's trouble concentrating and memorizing and her difficulties keeping up in class, and at the same time know just beneath the surface is an earnest, fragile, proud young woman who cannot forget the horrors she has

experienced, that she sometimes feels afraid in school, but having a teacher make eye contact with her and smile at her assures her everything will be all right, and that she has a contagious laugh that she seldom has reason to use, then it is easy to approach her with empathy. When teachers can see how important education is to her, that she is studying in a new language so she needs to use every resource available to her, that she is trying to stand by herself, that she does not know what to do when teachers fail to respond to her raised hand, and that domineering teachers have the same affect on her as the terrorists in her country, then it is easy to work toward providing her with a sense of belonging in school. When teachers can see that she can attend to her school work if we talk through her worries with her first, that she can do the work if she is given more time, that she feels guilty when teachers have to make concessions for her, that she loves to discuss world affairs, and that she wants to work for the United Nations, then it is easy to see how to engage her in learning. When teachers can see how biology, history, and law are important for her in her daily life, that she takes racist remarks about her people seriously, and that she has a strong social consciousness, then it is easy to see how to bring relevancy into her subject areas. When teachers see Bareshna with “culture vision” it is easy to sense the urgency of providing her with responsive education before she falls out of the system because in a “School for Students” we want her to shut the door on the closed country and live in the mainstream on the school landscape.

Seeing Francis With Culture Vision

Once we teachers can hear Francis’ boisterous voice and how he struggles to comprehend what he reads, and at the same time know how his happy, hyper talk, and self-assurance on the sports court are a camouflage for his vulnerability and anxiety about

school, then it is easy to build up his confidence. When teachers can appreciate his frustration with the English language, that he tries really hard to be nice to teachers because they hold the key to his school success, that he appreciates teachers who want to get to know him, that even though it might not look like he is paying attention, he is, and that wastefulness in this country concerns him, then it is easy to work toward providing him with a sense of belonging in school. When teachers can see when they use scaffolding and slow things down in the classroom, he can be successful, that he waits for teachers to teach him after they have done “talking” to the class, that he knows teachers’ attending to only the “smart” students creates a sense of “otherness” in the classroom, that he is hurt by teachers’ assumptions about him, and that he would do anything for his mother, then it is easy for teachers to see how to engage him in learning. When teachers can see that he worries about not getting enough help at school, that he would love to return to his country to help his people there, and that the job he has now is the first job he actually enjoyed, then it is easy to see how to bring relevancy into his subject area classes. When teachers see Francis with “culture vision” it is easy to sense the urgency of providing him with responsive education before he drops out of the system because in a “School for Students” we all want him to become a journeyer in high school.

CHAPTER FIVE

Educators as Keepers of the Winds

The northwest wind for the past two days has been nerve wracking. It seems to be moving both backward and forward as if the Keeper of the Winds is inhaling deeply before exhaling blasts that send dry sand crackling against my office windows. Prairie writer Sinclair Ross' (1941) words capture its temperament, "Sometimes it sinks a little, as if spent and out of breath, then comes high, shrill and importunate again. Sometimes it's blustering and rough, sometimes silent and sustained" (p. 52). It is the kind of wind that is irritating and unsettling, so it has kept me indoors today feeling restless. But, it has also provided me with time to contemplate its place in this narrative inquiry.

During my many walks on the berm behind my house where I do my best thinking, I have witnessed the power of the wind as it shapes and reshapes the landscape. Winds know no boundaries as they erode, transport and deposit materials, and play a role in determining to what extent vegetation grows. Educators are like Keepers of the Winds who possess the power to shape and reshape students' experiences in school. And, like the wind, educators play a role in determining who stays, who goes, and to what extent students thrive and flourish. But, wind power without vision is a dangerous combination. Wind without vision pays no heed to what it carries in its path or where it gets deposited. Wind without vision puts little thought into whether "travelers" like Jima, Bareshna, and Francis walk with or against the wind in school or how it relegates them to the liminal spaces on the high school landscape. Wind without vision is not "mindful" (Langer, 1989) about whether they as "travelers" leave the "closed country" (Anzaldúa, 1999) and cross the borders into the land of "journeyers" or if they remain refugees forever,

carrying with them the distinction of being the “other” (Madrid, 1988, p. 56). But, with wind vision³, Keepers of the Winds imagine socially conscious and educationally responsive ways to attend to the diverse needs of their students. With wind vision, educators reflect on their own “flexibility” (Lugones, 1987, p. 3), or lack thereof, and its impact on their relationships with refugee students. With wind vision, educators seek out the untrodden pathways that lead to “spaces of public responsibility and intellect” by pushing “the boundaries of what ‘would be’” (Weis & Fine, 2003, p. 97).

Walking Toward School Transformation

This work will be useful “to make sense of life as lived” and “to figure out the taken-for-grantedness” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 78) in our current educational practices. The three refugee students’ narratives in this research voice a hope for finding spaces of acceptance and belonging in school, which is contrasted by the closed ones we confine them to. They voice a need for programs of learning that consider them in relation to the cultural and social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 1997) and the language requirements embedded in them. Their voices also speak to ongoing tensions when their backgrounds are not “reflected in the narratives of school” (Horst & Holmen, 2006, p. 18). As our school division proceeds with its Collegiate Renewal (Saskatoon Public Schools, 2008) initiative, consideration of its inclusion policies for refugee students must address “space for rethinking and reshaping an understanding of teaching and learning within culturally and linguistically diverse ... populations as a social phenomenon that is fundamentally linked to the lived experiences of those who have fled war, violence, and

³ I wish to acknowledge the source of the term “wind vision.” Originally, *Wind Vision* (Simpson, 2008) was the title of a report on wind power development cited in a newspaper article. I have taken this term out of its original context to use in my work.

economic instability” (Feuerverger & Richards, 2007, p. 319). Nieto (1999) advises educators pursuing school transformations to keep in mind that

learning begins when students begin to see themselves as competent, capable, and worthy of learning. One way that students begin to see themselves in this way is when their voices and perspectives are included in the transformation of schools.... Listening to students can reveal whether they perceive schools as responsive or unresponsive to them and why. (p. 123)

This research provides educators an opportunity to reflect on the significance of the students’ narratives, to consider the ways in which we inspire and give hope to the students in our classrooms, and to envision ways to make time, space, and place to develop responsive relationships with them.

Future Paths to Explore

This research points to possibilities for further research in which refugee students’ voices play a central role. Personally, I am interested in laying this work alongside future narrative inquiries that include the missing voices of the teachers and administrators who work with these students or make decisions on their behalf. What new insights could be gained and what possibilities imagined if educators’ voices were heard in a two-way conversation with refugee students, or in a three way conversation with refugee students and an EAL teacher/researcher? What might the teachers’ experiences with refugee students tell us? Would this awaken us to what could be included or done differently in our teacher education programs? Another research pathway would include narrative inquiries laying refugee students’ voices alongside system administrative voices guiding the Collegiate Renewal. How would these conversations inform us about the places and

spaces we make for refugee students in our system? How might the students' stories inform the work of system administrators as they strive to renew high schools in systemic and structural ways that reposition refugee students on the mainstream landscape?

Importance of Listening

The trains that run on the tracks near my house can be heard throughout the day and night. Now that we are accustomed to the muffled engine sounds and the whistles blown at the nearby crossing, we seldom notice them. However, this morning we were awakened by a succession of short, urgent whistles, unusual staccato sounds that made me sit up and listen. The train's sounds of alarm brought to mind the refugee poet's words about the "cheeky and naughty child / [blowing] hard on the whistle continuously / with the suppressed and silent air of his lungs" (Anonymous, 2005). Must the whistle be so urgent before we answer its call? And, when we do answer the call, do we know how to "prepare ourselves for the very demanding task that listening must be if it is to be anything?" (Andrews, 2007, p. 489).

Researcher Walking Through the Narrative Inquiry

Many reasons, personal and practical, compelled me to conduct this narrative inquiry with refugee students. As a daughter, some of my earliest memories are recalled through shadows of the tensions my father experienced as a newcomer to this country. I sensed them but never understood them as a little girl. The backward and forward, inward and outward process of self-reflection in this work awakened me to new understandings and other ways of knowing these feelings. As a mother, I have walked alongside each of my three children as they grew into young adults. Now they have chosen their own paths, and I have learned to take a step back to let them to make their way. As I worried over

Mark going to Afghanistan, he told me he would be as insignificant as a grain of sand over there. He did not know, of course, how erroneously his words rang in my ears. He did not know then how important his work is to the lives of refugees all over the world. He did not know the connection he would have to the students in this narrative inquiry through his relationship with me. As Mark continues with his military career, I will always feel a mother's apprehension. But, I have come to appreciate the work he does through a greater understanding of the lives he affects.

Walking With Students Through the Narrative Inquiry

The image of walking with students came to me partly because of the unimaginable photos I had seen via the media depicting thousands of refugee families walking barefoot on dusty roads taking them away from their homes and leading them to refugee camps. In my walks with students through the hallways of school or out in the community, I was struck by the nature of our conversations, for this is when those stories felt most deeply, the ones they tended to keep close, seemed to find a way out into the open. So, the concept of walking through this narrative inquiry seemed a natural extension of our relationship. As I reflect on our relationships now and how each of us has grown through seeing the other in different ways, I trouble even more about the students walking alone, keeping their stories locked inside, never getting the opportunity of coming to voice because "privilege empowers some students more than others, granting 'authority' to some voices more than others" (hooks, 2003, p. 147).

From my own solitary walks, I know sometimes it is necessary to walk alone, perhaps to clear one's foggy mind, or to get time and distance away from problems and worries. However, refugee students can walk alone only a short distance before being

overpowered by the culture shock that greets them the moment they step off the airplane and set foot in their places of refuge as they “find themselves trying to conform to the new rules, standards, myths and structures based on white Western European cultural values” (St. Thomas & Johnson, 2001, p. 34). The process of acculturation can seem overwhelming for students, leaving them “at the front edge ... [living] in the midst of ... uncertainty because there are no trodden paths or signposts to lead them the way” (Li, 2006, p. 211). These challenges are compounded for refugee students, however, because their experiences are filtered through the lens of war, fear, and distrust, and if we educators walk too far ahead of them, we will surely leave them in our dust.

Standing at the Fork in the Road

Eventually all walks come to an end. As the students and I stand at the fork in the road of this narrative inquiry, I see the students will take one path, and I know I have to take the other one. I am reluctant to leave them. I almost have the same maternal worries I had when Mark left. I am proud of them as young people who have emerged from the atrocities of war conscientious, earnest, and hopeful. As we walked together through this narrative inquiry, I heard their voices becoming stronger and observed them becoming more confident. They wanted to share their stories. They wanted their voices to be heard, and as we walked and talked, their voices became more articulate. But, I have concerns about their future. Who will walk with them? Will they be invited to come to voice? Who will listen to them? Who will see them with “culture vision?” (Bateson, 1994). Will they cross the borders of the closed country and participate fully in the mainstream life of school? And, where will they go if they are not in school?

They have taken the first steps to leave the fork in the road, so I must too. Before I go too far, I stop, turn, and take a look at the path we have traveled together and each student's footprints along it....

When I look back, I see on Jima's chrysalis a bit of crackling; it is as if I can almost see the tip of a yellow wing as she becomes more and more settled in our community. I see her becoming more self-confident in her role as a mother. She has learned so much about the "business" of adult life. Yet, I see the breeze begin to shake her chrysalis as it hangs tenuously from the tree branch, and the cracks in the chrysalis begin to seal up and hold her tight again. I see her becoming restless even in the EAL classroom with its lack of support directed to her needs. I see her hungry for education in a way that perhaps she herself does not yet see, but I also see the ways school keeps her in her cocoon. I hold onto the image of her in my mind as a beautiful free-flying butterfly.

When I look back, I see Bareshna's light still clearly illuminating the danger zones on the coastal waters of high school. I see the last two credits she needs to complete grade 12 starting to float out to sea with the rip tide that carries them ever further from her grasp. She seems so fragile, as if a breath of wind could blow her away. Yet, she stands strong when she is in her element helping other people. She has dreams for a future where her family is reunited; she completes high school, moves on to university, and continues to advocate for social justice around the world. But, I am worried for her because she is standing by herself on shaky ground in the middle of a roiling sea.

When I look back, I see Francis' engaging smile and happy talk covering for the anxiety in his eyes. He is a senior, an important year in his school career. I still hear the dryness in his mouth as he talks about the pressures of school. The university scholarship he dreams about may never come to be because he will never achieve the academic average he needs if teachers do not attend to his raised hand and questions in the classroom. And, if he does get that scholarship and goes to university, what about his family? He will not be able to work to help support them then. I can hear him bouncing the ball in the gym because as long as he is bouncing the ball things seem all right. Suddenly, the outside door to the gym blows open and the fall wind rushes in. I wonder if he will stop bouncing the ball long enough to close the door, or if he will walk through it and, if he does, where he will go from there.

Parting Voices

Researcher.

As they walk away from me, the wind continues to rustle. I see the dust beginning to stir and I feel the tension of the wind in my face. I wonder if the wind will pick up their voices. I wonder where the wind will carry them. As I begin to walk into the wind, I get caught up in my train of thought once again. A refugee student once told me, "We come from such desperate and miserable places" (personal communication, June 2008). I cannot forget the humility with which he spoke those powerful words. As a teacher witnessing on a very intimate level the inequities refugee students face in our schools and communities, I felt compelled to bring awareness to their circumstances to ensure we are never complicit in their experiencing "desperate and miserable places" on our high school landscapes. Now that I am walking alone, I wonder who will walk with me in the future.

Will other educators and system administrators hear the voices of refugee students and walk alongside the students and EAL teachers in the future? Awareness is only the first step toward change on the path leading students, educators, and administrators to understanding, acceptance, and belonging, and away from the closed country refugee students presently exist in at high school.

As I walk on I fill my lungs with air and I am conscious of how energized I feel when I walk. Then, I realize, once again, I am not alone and that the students' voices have followed me. Before they slip away, I ask them why it was important for them to participate in this research. I give them the last word...

Jima.

Teacher she don't know me, she tells me and the other students the same, but my English no good. If she know me maybe she will give me more help or maybe she gives me a helper. It makes school a little bit better for me if the teacher knows who I am.

Bareshna.

I'm struggling with these problems, but nobody knows it. I want [teachers] to learn about students. To know what needs to change for me, [teachers] need to hear it from me. It's important for us to know about each other.

Francis.

*Teachers just gotta know what it's like, how hard it is, how hard I'm trying...
Oh yea, and teach like you teach Shakespeare!*

REFERENCES

- Adams, L. & Kirova, A. (2006). Multiple global issues for immigrant children and the schools they attend. In L. Adams & A. Kirova (Eds.), *Global migration and education: Schools, children, and families* (pp. 13-16). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Alford, E. (1990). Head. In A. Forrie, P. O'Rourke, & G. Sorestad (Eds.), *The last map is the heart* (pp. 13-15). Saskatoon, SK: Thistle-down Press.
- Andrews, M. (2007). Exploring cross-cultural boundaries. In J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 489-511). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Anonymous. (2005). *Make a whistle from my throat*. Baxter Detention Centre, Villawood, Australia. Retrieved May 12, 2008 from <http://www.refugeeaction.org/rac/poem.htm>
- Anzaldúa, G. (1999). *Borderlands: The new mestiza = La frontera* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books. (Original work published 1987)
- Aoki, T. (2005a). The child-centered curriculum: Where is the social in pedocentrism? In W. Pinar & R. Irwin (Eds.), *Curriculum in a new key: The collected works of Ted T. Aoki* (pp. 279-290). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Aoki, T. (2005b). Toward curriculum inquiry in a new key (1978/1980). In W. Pinar & R. Irwin (Eds.), *Curriculum in a new key: The collected works of Ted T. Aoki* (pp. 89-106). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Apple, M. (2005). Patriotism, democracy, and the hidden effects of race. In C. McCarthy, W. Crichlow, G. Dimitriadis, & N. Dolby (Eds.), *Race, identity, and representation in education* (pp. 337-348). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Armstrong, B.J. (1997). Good riddance (Time of Your Life). [Recorded by Green Day]. On *Nimrod* [CD]. Burbank, CA: Reprise Records.
- Bartolomé, L.I. (2003). *Beyond the methods fetish: Toward a humanizing pedagogy*. In A. Darder, M. Baltodano, & R.D. Torres (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (pp. 408-429). New, York, NY: Routledge Falmer.
- Bateson, M.C. (1994). *Peripheral visions: Learning along the way*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc.
- Beah, I. (2007). *A long way gone: Memoirs of a boy soldier*. Vancouver, BC: Douglas & McIntyre.
- Booth Olson, C. & Land, R. (2007). A cognitive strategies approach to reading and writing instruction for English language learners in secondary school. *Research in the Teaching of English, 41*(3), 1-33. Retrieved from ProQuest Education Journals.
- Brown, C.L. (2007). Supporting English language learners in content-reading. *Reading Improvement, 44*(1), 1-10. Retrieved from ProQuest Education Journals.
- Bryan, A. & Piantadosi, A. (1915). I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier (chorus only). *History Matters*. Retrieved September 15, 2008 from <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4942/>
- Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education*. London, England: Harvard University Press.

- Caines, P. (2005). Rethinking parental participation in educational governance: Quality matters. *Principals Online*, 1(1), 22-25. Retrieved May 15, 2008 from <http://www.principalsonline.com/>
- Calkins, L. & Harwayne, S. (1991). *Living between the lines*. Toronto, ON: Irwin Publishing.
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (2005). *Immigration loans program*. Retrieved November 12, 2008 from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/outside/resettle-assist.asp>
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (2007) Backgrounder. *Refugees and Canada's refugee system*. Retrieved May 17, 2008 from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/departement/media/backgrounders/2007/2007-06-20.asp>
- Clandinin, D.J. & Connelly, F.M. (1988). *Teachers as curriculum planners*. Toronto, ON: OISE Press.
- Clandinin, D.J. & Connelly, F.M. (1989). *Narrative and story in practice and research*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED309681)
- Clandinin, D.J. & Connelly, F.M. (Eds.). (1999). *Shaping a professional identity*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Clandinin, D.J. & Connelly, F.M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Dahl, K.L. (1995). Challenges in understanding the learner's perspective. *Theory into Practice*, 34(2), 124-130.

- Dei, G.J.S. (2003). Schooling and the dilemma of youth disengagement. *McGill Journal of Education*, 38(2), 241-256. Retrieved from ProQuest Educational Journals.
- EAL/ESD Student. (2005). *Many roots, many voices: Supporting English language learners in every classroom: A practical guide for Ontario educators*. Retrieved from Ontario Education Web site:
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/manyroots/manyroots.pdf>
- Fazel, M. & Stein, A. (2002). The mental health of refugee children. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 87(5), 366-370. Retrieved from ProQuest Nursing & Allied Health Source.
- Feuerverger, G. & Richards, E. (2007). Finding their way: Refugee students in a Toronto high school. In D. Thiessen & A. Cook-Sather (Eds.), *International handbook of student experience in elementary and secondary school* (pp. 555-575). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.
- Fine, M. (1987). Silencing in public schools. *Language Arts*, 64(2), 157-174.
- Fine, M. & Weis, L. (2003). *Silenced voices and extraordinary conversations ...: Re-imagining schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Fine, M., Weis, L., Centrie, C., & Roberts, R., (2000). Educating beyond the borders of schooling. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 31(2), 131-151. Retrieved from ProQuest Educational Journals.
- Fine, M., Weis, L., & Powell, L. (1999). Communities of difference: A critical look at desegregated spaces created for and by youth. In R. Tai and M. Kenyatta (Eds.), *Critical ethnicity: Countering the waves of identity politics* (pp 21-64). New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

- Fine, M., Weis, L., Weseen, S. & Wong, L. (2000). For whom? Qualitative research, representation, and social responsibilities. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 107-131). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- First Call (2008). *Campaign to repeal refugee transportation loan requirement*. Retrieved from BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition Web site:
<http://www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/economicquality/3-refugee%20loans.pdf>
- Florenz, M.C. & Terrill, L. (2003). *Working with literacy-level adult English language learners*. Retrieved from National Center for EAL Literacy Education Web site:
http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/litQA.html
- Freire, P. (2003). From pedagogy of the oppressed. In A. Darder, M. Baltodano, & R. Torres (Eds.), *The Critical pedagogy reader* (pp. 57-68). New, York, NY: Routledge Falmer.
- Gomm, H. (2001). The chrysalids. *Penguin Readers Factsheets*. Retrieved from
<http://www.penguinreaders.com/downloads/0582419808.pdf>
- Greene, M. (1988). *The dialectic of freedom*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Greene, M. (2003). In search of a critical pedagogy. In A. Darder, M. Baltodano, & R. Torres (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (pp. 97-112). New, York, NY: Routledge Falmer.
- Guo, S. & Jamal, Z. (2007). *Cultural diversity and inclusive teaching*. London, ON: Society for Teaching and Learning in High Education.

- hooks, b. (2003). Confronting class in the classroom. In A. Darder, M. Baltodano, & R.D. Torres (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (pp. 142-150). New York, NY: Routledge Falmer.
- Horst, C. & Holmen, A. (2006). Bringing multicultural education into the mainstream: Developing schools for minority and majority students. In L.D. Adams & A. Kirova (Eds.), *Global migration and education: Schools, children, and families* (pp. 17-33). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hosseini, K. (2003). *The kite runner*. Toronto, ON: Seal Books.
- Hosseini, K. (2007). *A thousand splendid suns*. Toronto, ON: Penguin Group.
- Hyland, J.W. (2008). Lighthouse. *Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia*. Retrieved October 17, 2008 from http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761570849/lighthouse.html
- Igoa, C. (1995). *The inner world of the immigrant child*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Illibagiza, I. (2006). *Left to tell: Discovering God amidst the Rwandan holocaust*. Vancouver, BC: Hay House, Inc.
- Irvine, J. (2003). *Educating teachers for diversity: Seeing with a cultural eye*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Joshee, R. (2004). Citizenship and multicultural education in Canada. In J.A. Banks (Ed.), *Diversity and citizenship education: Global perspectives* (pp. 127-156). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Keller, H. (n.d.). ThinkExist.Com Quotations. Retrieved September 19, 2008 from http://thinkexist.com/quotes/Helen_Keller/

- Khadra, Y. (2005). *The swallows of Kabul*. (John Cullen, Trans.). New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Krashen, S. (1988). *The natural approach: Language acquisition in the classroom*. Toronto, ON: Prentice Hall.
- Langer, E. (1989). *Mindfulness*. Don Mills, ON: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc.
- Lather, P. & Smithies, C. (1997). *Troubling the angels: Women living with HIV/AIDS*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Li, Y. (2006). *Where is home: The lived experiences of three Chinese international students in Canada*. Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation & Theses: Full Text AAT NR14009
- Lee, H. (1960). *To kill a mockingbird*. New York, NY: Warner Books.
- Lyons, N. & Kubler LaBoskey, V. (2002). *Narrative inquiry in practice: Advancing the knowledge of teaching*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Madrid, A. (1988). Missing people and others. *Change*, 20(3), 54-59. Retrieved from ProQuest Educational Journals.
- McLeod, N. (2007). *Cree narrative memory: From treaties to contemporary times*. Saskatoon, SK: Purich Publishing Limited.
- Meyers, M. (1993). *Teaching to diversity: Teaching and learning in the multi-ethnic classroom*. Toronto, ON: Irwin Publishing.

- Nader, K. (2008). *Understanding and assessing trauma in children and adolescents: Measures, methods, and youth in context*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Nafisi, A. (2003). *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A memoir in books*. New York, N.Y.: Random House.
- Nelson, C. (2003). *"Stories to live by": A narrative inquiry into five teachers' shifting identities through the borderlands of cross-cultural professional development*. Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation & Theses: Full Text (AAT NQ82146)
- Nieto, S. (1999). *The light in their eyes: Creating multicultural learning communities*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Nieto, S. (2000). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education*. New York, NY: Longman.
- Nieto, S. (2005). Public education in the twentieth century and beyond: High hopes, broken promises, and an uncertain future. *Harvard Educational Review*, 75(1), 1-14. Retrieved from ProQuest Educational Journals.
- Noddings, N. (1992). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Noddings, N. (1995). The gender issue. In A. Ornstein & L. Behar (Eds.), *Contemporary issues in curriculum*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Noddings, N. & Shore, P.J. (1984). *Awakening the inner eye: Intuition in education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Pinson, H. & Arnot, M. (2007). Sociology of education and the wasteland of refugee education research. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 28(3), 399-407.

- Plath, S. (2000). Daddy. In M. Strand & E. Boland (Eds.), *The making of a poem: A Norton anthology of poetic forms* (p. 274). New York, NY: Norton.
- Polachic, D. (2002). *Keep on standing: The story of Krystaal*. Saskatoon, SK: Emmanuel Baptist Charitable Foundation.
- Polkinghorne, D.E. (2005). Language and meaning: Data collection in qualitative research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 137-145.
- Raible, J. & Nieto, S. (2003). Beyond categories: The complex identities of adolescents. In M. Sadowski (Ed.), *Adolescents at school: Perspectives on youth, identity, and education* (pp. 145-162). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Ramirez, A.Y. (2007). Immigrant families and schools: The need for a better relationship. In T.A. Turner-Vorbeck & M. Miller Marsh (Eds.), *Other kinds of families: Embracing diversity in schools* (pp. 28-45). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Raxworthy, C. (n.d.). A truly bizarre lizard. *The living Edens: Madagascar a world apart: Creature features*. Retrieved October 20, 2008 from <http://www.pbs.org/edens/madagascar/creature3.htm>
- Roessingh, H. (2004). Effective high school programs: A synthesis and meta-analysis. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 60(5), 611-636.
- Roessingh, H. (2006a). BICS-CALP: An introduction for some, a review for others. *TESL Canada Journal*, 23(2), 91-96.
- Roessingh, H. (2006b). The teacher is the key: Building trust in EAL high school programs. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 62(4), 563-590.

- Roessingh, H. & Kover, P. (2003). Variability of EAL learners' acquisition of cognitive academic language proficiency: What can we learn from achievement measures? *TESL Canada Journal*, 21(1), 1-21.
- Ross, S. (1957). *As for me and my house*. Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart Ltd.
(Original work published 1941)
- Saskatoon Public Schools. (2008). *Collegiate renewal: Progress report*. Retrieved September 12, 2008 from <http://www.sbe.saskatoon.sk.ca/files/collegiaterenewal/ProgressReportJune08.doc>
- Schwab, J.J. (1973). The practical 3: Translation into curriculum. *The School Review*, 81(4), 501-522.
- Schwab, J.J. (1978). *Science, curriculum, and liberal education*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Simpson, S. (2008, October 21). Canada lags in wind power development: report. *The StarPhoenix*, p. B8.
- Smyth, J. (2007). Toward the pedagogically engaged school: Listening to student voice as a positive response to disengagement and 'dropping out'? In D. Thiessen & A. Cook-Sather (Eds.), *International handbook of student experience in elementary and secondary school* (pp. 635-658). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.
- St. Thomas, B. & Johnson, G. (2001). Child as healer. *Migration world magazine*, 29(5), 33-39. Retrieved from ProQuest Educational Journals.
- Stanton-Salazar, R.D. (1997). A social capital framework for understanding the socialization of racial minority children and youth. *Harvard Educational Review*, 67(1), 1-40. Retrieved from ProQuest Education Journals.

- Thiessen, D. (2007). Researching student experiences in elementary and secondary school: An evolving field of study: Introduction to the handbook. In D. Thiessen & A. Cook-Sather (Eds.), *International handbook of student experience in elementary and secondary school* (pp. 1-76). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.
- Tortajada, A. (2004). *The silenced cry: One woman's diary of a journey to Afghanistan*. (Ezra E. Fitz, Trans.). New York, NY: Thomas Dunn Books.
- Turner-Vorbeck, T. & Miller Marsh, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Other kinds of families: Embracing diversity in schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Tyler, S. (n.d.). ThinkExist.Com Quotations. Retrieved October 31, 2008 from http://thinkexist.com/quotes/steven_tyler/
- United Nations High Commission for Refugees. (2007-08). *Protecting refugees and the role of UNHCR*. Retrieved May 22, 2008 from <http://www.unhcr.org/basics/BASICS/4034b6a34.pdf>
- van Manen, M., McClelland, J. & Plihal, J. (2007). Naming student experiences and experiencing student naming. In D. Thiessen & A. Cook-Sather (Eds.), *International handbook of student experience in elementary and secondary school* (pp. 85-98). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.
- Vanderhaeghe, G. (1990). What I learned from Caesar. In A. Forrie, P. O'Rourke, & G. Sorestad (Eds.), *The last map is the heart* (pp. 301-310). Saskatoon, SK: Thistledown Press.
- Watt, D. & Roessingh, H. (2001). The dynamics of EAL drop-out: Plus ça change ... *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 58(2), 203-222.

- Weis, L. (2003a). Acquiring white working-class identities: Legitimate and silenced discourse within the school. In M. Fine & L. Weis (Eds.), *Silenced voices and extraordinary conversations ...: Re-imagining schools* (pp. 88-109). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Weis, L. (2003b). Constructing the “other”: Discursive renditions of white working-class males in high school. In M. Fine & L. Weis (Eds.), *Silenced voices and extraordinary conversations ...: Re-imagining schools* (pp. 68-87). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Weis, L. & Fine, M. (2003). Extraordinary conversations in public schools. In G. Dimitriadis and D. Carlson (Eds.), *Promises to keep: Cultural studies, democratic education, and public life* (pp. 95-123). New York, NY: Routledge Falmer.
- Whelan, K. (1999). Traveler on a journey. In F.M. Connelly & D.J. Clandinin (Eds.), *Shaping a professional identity: Stories of educational practice* (pp. 20-31). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.