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Nesreen Elkord  
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ARAB IMMIGRANT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR HIGH  
SCHOOL EXPERIENCES IN CANADA: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

by

Nesreen Elkord

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Faculty of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2017

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Arab Immigrant High School Students' Perceptions of Their High School Experiences in  
Canada: A Narrative Inquiry

by

Nesreen Elkord

APPROVED BY:

---

F. Elbaz-Luwisch, External Examiner  
Academic College of Education, University of Haifa

---

T. Najem  
Department of Political Science

---

D. Ciuffetelli Parker  
Department of Teacher Education – Brock University

---

G. Zhou  
Faculty of Education

---

S. Xu, Advisor  
Faculty of Education

September 11, 2017

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication.

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of 4 Arab immigrant high school students in the Windsor, Ontario area. Student participants' time spent in Canada varied from 1 to 5 years; three had attended grade school in Canada prior to enrolling in high school while 1 enrolled in high school immediately upon arrival. Allowing for a broader perspective of Arab immigrant high school students' experiences in Canadian high schools, narratives of another 3 Arab student supplementary informants are used to enhance the interpretations and discussions. Participants' and informants' families emigrated from a number of Arab countries (Somalia, Syria, Kuwait, Iraq, Palestine, and Jordan) seeking better life and educational opportunities, to join family and relatives, or to flee war traumas. Student participants identified as either Christian or Muslim and attended Windsor-area Catholic or public high schools. Discussions with student participants and research informants (parents, teachers, and school officials) encompassed multifaceted topics such as home and school life; school environment and climate; stereotypes; school relations; engagement and sense of belonging; and influences both in and out of school that encourage or hinder students' education, learning, and integration. Using narrative research approach participants' stories are considered within social, cultural, and historical contexts based on the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Stemming from this theoretical framework, in-depth individual interviews with participants and participatory observation within their lived proximities afforded a better understanding of Arab immigrant high school students' lived conditions and environments. Individual narratives of students, parents, and teachers provide insight into student participants' schooling experiences as well as those of Arab immigrant high school students in general. Findings reveal that Arab students' experiences in Canadian high schools are influenced by their past lived experiences within their home countries and initial immigration experiences; ideologies and beliefs they continue to maintain in Canadian society; family lives and circumstances; and the support (or lack thereof) that students receive in their schools and communities upon their arrival in Canada. The study particularly found issues related to Arab immigrant high school students' common behavioural trends at school, challenges initially faced at school, coping strategies Arab immigrant students use in their ever-evolving lives, the significant roles of schools in easing immigration-related challenges, and a non-

negligible relationship between home and schooling experiences. These individual, family, and societal factors then translate into their schooling experiences in their Canadian high schools and the degree of interaction within their environments. Based on the findings of the study, implications for school and education policy makers are made to enhance the experiences of this segment of Canadian high schools' populations. Finally, recommendations for further study are made.

## DEDICATION

*“At times, our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.”*

~ Albert Schweitzer<sup>1</sup>

I dedicate my accomplishments and work first and foremost to my husband, Wessam Haggag, and my children, Faris, Sufyan, and Samia. They have stood by my side patiently and supportively as I learned and wrote each day throughout this journey.

Second, I lovingly dedicate my work to my mother, Samia, and my father, Mohamed, who were always there for me and for my family every step of the way, when I made my decision to invest years of my life for this cause.

Finally, I dedicate this work to all Arab immigrant high school students and their families whom I can strongly identify with as they make their way through the daunting challenges of immigration, and whose dedication and success is an inspiration for us all.

---

<sup>1</sup> Rud, A. G. (2010). *Albert Schweitzer's legacy for education: Reverence for life*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Prologue

#### What Does It Mean to Become “Canadian”?

*The air was getting cooler as I took my morning walk after dropping off my children at school on an October morning in 2012. I had resolved to walk for an hour each morning before going to the university to prepare for my graduate assistantship work in order to sharpen my physical and mental capabilities as I began my doctoral journey. I knew from the outset that it was not going to be easy, but what I did not realize then was how difficult it would be to make educational meaning of it all and to be of the greatest service for the upcoming generation of new Canadians. I felt a rising tension as the fall 2012 semester was winding up and time to declare my research topic was fast approaching. I always knew I wanted to make myself and my research useful for my Canadian community, yet determining the exact venue and means through which I would do so was something I had to grapple with.*

*On that morning, I reached into my shoulder bag for my water bottle only to discover that I had forgotten to pack it before leaving home earlier that day. I decided to make a quick stop to buy a new bottle from a local Dollarama store that I passed each day on my morning walks. I grabbed a bottle from the front fridge and as I approached the cashier, a middle-aged Arabic-speaking woman greeted me and said in Arabic, “May I ask you a question?” I paused to listen as she introduced herself as a newly arrived Arab immigrant and she then asked me, “What does it mean to become Canadian?”*

*I listened to her as she recounted an argument she had had with her husband regarding their family’s decision on whether to decorate their front yard for Halloween. She explained, “My children are excited for Halloween. They see front yards decorated as we walk around the neighbourhood and they ask if we will do the same. They have been introduced to Halloween at school as a fun and exciting occasion filled with decorations, adventures, candies, and treats.” She justified her point of view: “We have been through a lot and I think it’s finally time for my children to be happy and they need to feel like they belong. My husband insists they do not need to do the same as everyone in order to be happy. I understand he is afraid of them losing their identities and forgetting their heritage and Arabic traditions, but I argued they do not need to be different in order to keep their Arab connections.”*

*As the woman told me of the Halloween argument with her husband, she said that her spouse had challenged her with the following question: “How Canadian do you want them to become?” The woman said she did not have a ready answer for his question, nor was she even sure what it meant to “become Canadian.” (Diary excerpts—September 27, 2012)*

I reflected on this brief encounter during my morning walks in the days that followed, and the woman’s questions resonated with me and brought to mind topics that had long puzzled me. I thought about my early days in Canada as a high school student. Such memories began to shape my thoughts about research as I recalled my early

immigration experience, and how impressed I was by the beautiful fall days followed by spectacular Christmas lights during winter, as well as other “Canadian” occasions that made learning about Canada fun and exciting. I continued to reflect on my school days as I recalled how I felt during my first few years in Canada. I recalled Ms. Sandra, my English as a Second Language teacher, who greeted me and my fellow newcomer classmates with the widest smile every day. She used to place a bowl of candies on her desk and she would tell us a little about the connection between the types of candies in the bowl and any given seasonal festivities. She would then let us sample the candies and sometimes we would share something traditional from our own cultures as well. These memories made me appreciate the effort Ms. Sandra put into preparing these classroom ice-breaker activities. Recalling these memories while thinking of the woman’s argument with her husband about Halloween, I realized that well-intentioned gestures like Ms. Sandra’s may have led to similar arguments in the homes of some newcomers. And then, I was struck by the thought of how such sincere efforts by educators who are passionate and caring may not necessarily be in the best interest of all involved, if such classroom practices were not based on a solid ground of cultural knowledge and practical planning.

Pondering this woman’s dilemma about Halloween, it struck me that I too had experienced similar challenges in my childhood home and some had continued into my adulthood as a parent. Yet, although I now had been in Canada for two decades, did I have the answers to the woman’s questions? As an immigrant, a former Canadian public-school student, and now a parent living in Canada with my own children attending public schools, did I know how to resolve such conflicts in my own home? Such thoughts provoked my interest in exploring the experiences and perceptions of Arab immigrant students. And at that point, I was convinced that I needed to find the answers by learning more about the different stories of other Arab immigrants. I thought to myself, “How much do we know about what these newcomer immigrant students experience? How effective can our efforts, as educators, be without knowing what these students themselves feel and think?” I wondered what approaches could be used to incorporate the well-intentioned efforts of such dedicated educators, and how these educators could best be informed to help them assist newcomer students. (Diary excerpts—Research text, December 16, 2012)

## **The Study**

### **Context of the Study**

Reflecting on the questions the woman at the Dollarama store posed during our encounter, I realized that I could identify with her uncertainty. Having immigrated from the United Arab Emirates—a rapidly growing and advancing country in terms of its academic and economic resources and its diversified culture—to Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada in the early 1990s, I was not sure I understood what the woman meant when she also had told me that “we have been through a lot.” Her testimony reminded me of how little I knew about the experiences of Arab immigrants and/or refugees from different countries prior to their arrival in Canada. I thought to myself, if I knew so little about the lives of Arab students, how could mainstream Canadian teachers, from other cultures, know anything at all on the subject if they are even less informed than I? My parents immigrated to Canada in search of better educational opportunities for myself and my siblings, but we had a good life back in the UAE. As I thought more about the topic, I came to realize that not all Arabs leave their home countries for the same reasons and that there is so much for me to learn about from different Arab immigrant students.

In fact, while drafting my research proposal a few days after my encounter with the newcomer Arab woman at Dollarama, I recalled my parents arguing about similar issues during the first few years of our family’s quest to “become Canadian”. My father was always occupied with providing ways to keep me and my younger siblings connected to our Arabic roots and traditions, though he knew little about our schooling and the completely different lives we were living while at school. Upon my family’s immigration to Canada, I attended a public high school for 3 years, during which time I had multiple experiences that gave me mixed feelings about my Canadian schooling. The high school I attended was in downtown Halifax and at the time

immigration to Eastern Canada had been newly introduced to the area, which was met by different forms of resistance in the city. As an adolescent, I arrived with my own mixed feelings of excitement and worries about the unknown, and I was not prepared for the challenges that I would soon face on so many levels. My excitement quickly dissipated within the first few months as I tried to cope with my new life circumstances as an Arab immigrant girl. Later, as I moved on to resume higher education after earning a bachelor's degree in mathematics; years after I completed my high school, I witnessed the increased media portrayal of Arabs as extremists and terrorists after the surge of collective emotion following the traumatic events of 9/11 in the USA. As a consequence, Arabs in North America reported suffering tremendously from issues related to labeling and discrimination. Arab students at the high school level were always in my thoughts as I learned about the difficulties many encountered in the years that followed. Research at the time also indicated that students of this age group are generally met with more challenges in coping with their new school environments than younger newcomers (e.g., Janzen & Ochocka, 2003; Lee, 2005; Manavathu & Zhou, 2012). I also came to know that studies also report academic and social struggles which may be natural risks to students during adolescence in general (e.g., Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008; Suárez-Orozco, Bang, & Onaga, 2010). I therefore, decided to make Arab immigrant high school students the focus of my study with the hope of helping to ease their transition into their new Canadian high schools.

Having become a member in the education field, and as an educator, I consequently thought of how my research could inform teachers as they strive to help Arab newcomers transition into their new lives in Canada. I realized then that people like myself are directly responsible for helping create bridges between school communities and Arab Canadians, and I

thus set out in my doctoral work to add to the knowledge base on this subject with the goal of facilitating and improving educators' ability to lessen the challenges faced in this transition.

Having realized my obligation to contribute to the building of bridges between passionate school communities and newcomer immigrant families and their children, I started drafting my research proposal in late 2012. Following much thought, reflections, and advice from colleagues and professors, *Arab Immigrant High School Students' Perceptions of Their High School Experiences in Canada: A Narrative Inquiry* has been the title of my doctoral thesis inquiry since February 2013, when I began talking to and leading an inquiry into the lived experiences of Arab Immigrant high school students in the Windsor, Ontario area. I particularly decided to use Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) framework of narrative inquiry, where Arab immigrant student narratives and stories are both the methodology and phenomenon of the study. Moreover, I had been inspired by Schwab's (1973) theorizing of the significance of teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu, as the four commonplaces of curriculum making. I thus began thinking of ways to borrow from his work in framing implications for education and policy makers once the inquiry is concluded. Further explanation of the research methodology and procedures follow in Chapter 3.

In this light, with the focus of my research study on the high schooling experiences of children from the Arab community, it is necessary to begin by briefly defining who Arabs are.

**Who are Arabs?** In general, the word "Arab" is used throughout popular and so-called official media—such as Wikipedia's entry for "Arab World" (2016) and Statistics Canada's (2007) *The Arab Community in Canada*—to refer to persons from the 22 North African and

Middle Eastern member states of the Arab League<sup>2</sup>, a world that has common traditions, customs and a single unifying language with a total population of 359 million people as of July 2013 (Wikipedia, 2017). While Arabs hold beliefs from three major faiths—Islam, Christianity, and Judaism—the majority are Muslims, and although 90% of the Arabs are Muslims today they represent less than 20% of the Muslims of the world (The Arabic tapestry, 2008).

While this can serve as a unifying definition of Arabs for the purposes of this study, it is important to highlight the huge diversity within the countries of the Arab League; given that the Arab League member states cover over 13 million km<sup>2</sup> and straddle two continents, Africa and Asia. The Arab league countries stretch from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Arabian Sea in the east, and from the Mediterranean Sea in the north to the Horn of Africa and the Indian Ocean in the southeast (Wikipedia’s entry for “Arabs”, 2017). While people of the Arab world are bound by ethnic, linguistic, cultural, historical, identical, nationalist, geographical and political ties (al-bab, 2015; El-Shamy, 1995), they constitute vastly diverse communities with an estimated total population of 450 million, 150 million of whom are in the global diaspora (Nydell, 2005).

Writers in modern times use two identifying terms to identify people of the Arab world: (a) Arabians to identify people of the Arabian Peninsula, consisting of Yemen, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and parts of Jordan and Iraq (Rowmann & Lanham, 2003), (b) Arabs to identify Lebanese, Syrians, Iraqis, Palestinians, Egyptians, and North Africans. An alternative is to call all people of the Arab league member states Arabic speaking people, while keeping in mind that although the official language of the

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<sup>2</sup> Arab league member states: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, UAE, Qatar, Algeria, Iraq, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Libya, Sudan, Tunisia, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Jordan, Bahrain, Palestine, Mauritania, Somalia, Djibouti, Comoros (Wikipedia, 2017).

Arab League is Arabic, however, a number of Arab League member states have other co-official or national languages, such as Somali, Berber, Kurdish, Assyrian, Chaldean, and Nubian. While most Arabs are followers of three major faiths (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism) the majority—“well in excess of 90%” (Hayani, 2014, Religious Affiliation and Diversity section, para. 1)—are Muslims. Moreover, an estimated 15 million Christians combined live in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan and Syria, in addition to smaller but significant numbers of Druze, Yazidis, Shabaks, and Mandaeans (Religious Diversity around the World – Pew Research Center, 2014).

According to Statistics Canada (2007), in 2001, 44% of Canadians of Arab origins indicated that they were Muslim, while 44% reported that they belonged to a Christian faith group. Wingfield (2006) also introduces an interesting description or definition of Arabs:

Arabs, like Hispanics, are a linguistic and cultural community, not a racial or religious group. Arabs are those who speak Arabic as their primary language and share in the culture and history of the Arab world, which stretches from Morocco to the Arabian Peninsula. (p. 254)

In short, although it would be difficult (and somewhat inaccurate) to say that Arabs have a singular overarching tradition or share a commonly held belief, it is easier to identify some of the more popular beliefs and values among Arabs of different faiths. Al-Hazza and Bucher (2010) begin by defining the word “Arab” and classifying Arabs into their geographic demographics; however, they note that within the Pan-Arabic culture, “despite the rich array of traditions and diversity of customs, all Arabs are held together by the common identity of being Arab” (p. 6).

Moreover, I chose to conduct the study in Windsor because I hoped that Windsor’s longer history of immigration and that the region is considered an important immigrant destination site in Ontario, and its recognized efforts in supporting and welcoming immigrants and refugees

(Selimos, 2017), would give it precedence in the field of educating newcomer immigrant children.

In addition, I have identified Windsor's significant multiculturalism when compared to other parts of Canada, such as where I grew up in the Eastern provinces, given that Windsor-Essex region is the fourth most ethno-culturally diverse city in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2006), where one in four people is an immigrant and the newcomer population represents 21% of the total population (Windsor-Essex Immigration, 2014). According to Zhong and Zhou (2011), relatively mild winters, opportunities to commute to the United States, and the existence of large specific ethnic communities attract an increasing number of immigrants to settle in Windsor.

**Arab immigrants in the Windsor-Essex region.** In addition to Windsor's long history of immigration and significant multiculturalism, Windsor has a proportionately larger population of Arab immigrants; as Windsor's Arabic community represented 8.15% of the city's population in 2006 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010), and Arabic was reported to be the most common non-official-language mother tongue in Windsor in a 2011 census (Statistics Canada, 2016). Furthermore, experts in the field are skeptical of the preceding statistics and believe that people of Arab descent in the Windsor region are under-reported; due to a number of factors including the preference of some not to be identified as different from the majority, and/or the non-active participation of some in national surveys done for statistical data collection purposes. In fact, it is believed the population of Arab residents in the region may be considerably higher (Najem, personal communications 2017).

According to Arab historians and community members of Windsor, history of Arab immigration to the region dates back to late 1800s when early immigrants came predominantly from Lebanon in the late 1800's and were followed by immigrants from Egypt and Syria in the

early 1950's, mostly Christians. They had little education and little money but were hardworking young people, who worked in any available jobs and learned English on the job (Canadian Arab Community, 2008).

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century immigrants from other Middle Eastern countries came to the region due to socio-economic reasons, to escape war, famine, religious and/or political persecution, bringing Muslim Arabs in addition to Arabs of other religious denominations to the region (Hayani, 2014, Religious Affiliation and Diversity section). This is when a great diversity within Arab communities in Windsor began to take shape. There were those who arrived with little education and no money, hoping to start a new life in Canada. For example, like the wave of Somalis arriving between 1980s and 2000, “as a result of a long and ongoing civil war that started in Somalia in 1991, and major droughts that hit the country in recent years” (Ayoub & Zhou, 2016, p. 2), and mostly settling in Sandwich Town. Those immigrants and their children required supports in financial, healthcare, and language learning in addition to other areas. On the other hand, there were those arriving from the Arabian Peninsula, originally from other countries in the Middle East, such as Iraq, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon, as immigrant business investors or professionals (Canadian Arab Community, *Immigration to Windsor and Essex County*, 2008). The majorities of these immigrants were highly educated professionals or entrepreneurs and were better assisted by governmental organizations in finding jobs, housing, learning English and health care, compared to early Arab settlers, and mostly settled in South Windsor. They invested their wealth and professional expertise in the Windsor-Essex region and quickly flourished. These constitute the considerable percentage of working physicians of Arabic background as well as many other professionals, such as university instructors, business people, lawyers, real-estates people and skilled

individuals in the community. As Hayani documents “throughout the years, Arab immigrants and their descendants have entered all levels of the occupational hierarchy, some of them achieving renown in their respective fields” (Hayani, 2014, A Socio-Economic Profile of Arab Canadians section, para. 5). More details follow in the History of Arab immigration to Canada section of Chapter 2.

Diversity within the Arab communities in the region and the needs of their children within the education system continued to grow. For example, up until today, Maronite Lebanese who are considered to be among the most ancient Arab settlers in the region continued to bring family members from Lebanon through marriages and for family reunification. Many of those newcomer Maronite Lebanese are highly educated, have better socio-economic capabilities, and fluently speak English, and some, French as well. While their children speak the language, and may not require language learning supports, they may still require different types of supports within Canadian schools than non-English speaking newcomers. On the other hand, Arabs from other socio-economic and geopolitical backgrounds continue to settle in the region bringing various degrees of means and influence in the city, while requiring significantly varied needs within the education system (Conger, Conger, Lorenz, Simons, & Whitbeck, 1992). This, in addition to the most recent arrival of waves of Syrian refugees to the region, created an even larger diversity within the residing Arab communities. Arab descendants in the region vary between third and fourth generation Canadians to recent newcomers and between wealthy, well-established professionals to welfare assisted individuals and families. With such a growing diversity within the residing Arab community in the Windsor-Essex region, a number of religious and nationality-specific communities branched out and established several community centres, religious centres, and educational institutions. In addition, business investors managed to

make available culturally traditional goods and groceries for immigrants arriving from the Arab world and the Windsor-Essex community at large. For example, one can drive along a two-kilometer stretch of Wayndotte Street and find Arab stores on both sides of the street; Arabic restaurants serving Arabic cuisine, grocery stores whose shelves stock all kinds of Arabic food and other products, a number of bakeries that produce and sell hundreds of pita bread daily, confectionery/sweet shops similar to those found in the Arab world, and Arabic clothing stores as well.

For recent Arab immigrant and refugee newcomers, settling in the Windsor region during the past decade or so, meant coming into institutionally complete communities. Hayani (2014) asserts that “both the religious and secular ethnic institutions have provided a link with the ancestral land, ....., they have played an important adaptive role, encouraging acculturative change and integration with the host society” (Religious Affiliation and Diversity section, para. 6). Children of some of those newcomers may have different immigration experiences than earlier Arab community settlers. In this regard Hermansen (1991) in considering the influence of the region and specifically the community to which the Arab immigrant lands, argues that "large urban centers where Muslim and ethnic groups can constitute subcultures mean less pressure to acculturate" (p. 190).

Moreover, those considering themselves a religious or linguistic minority within their home countries may find it easier to adjust in such a highly diverse region. Chaldeans (1 million Chaldeans to approximately 22 million Iraqis in Iraq), for example, who make up a large percentage of Arab newcomers in the region may feel that Windsor’s population composition provides better adjustment opportunities (Chaldean news, 2009).

Schooling children of Arab immigrants with such diverse backgrounds, family circumstances, and socio-economic situations in Canada at large, and in Windsor in specific, all create such complex dynamics within Canadian schools. Such complexities in turn call for exploring different strategies and venues to address the various needs of this very diverse portion of school communities.

My aim as I began my inquiry was to find out about the schooling experiences of Arab immigrant students in city high schools. The majority of Arab immigrant students at the high school level in Windsor mainly attend schools of either the Public or Catholic school boards. Those with French as an additional language attend French schools, the majority of whom are children of well-established and wealthier Arab immigrant families. The rest mostly enroll in the mainstream English schools. Some schools are more populated with immigrant students than others because they offer specialized programs targeted at supporting immigrant students upon their arrival in Canada. While it is significant to explore the varied perceptions of Arab students of different socio-economic and geopolitical contexts within Canadian schools, more time and resources would need to be invested in this cause. With such a massive population of varied backgrounds, means and needs, I focused on the experiences of Arab immigrant high school students attending English public and Catholic schools in the city, within this inquiry. I was privileged to observe some of the participants of the study when visiting and volunteering at a number of different schools, which I discuss in greater detail in the methodology chapter of this dissertation.

### **Focus of the Study**

The focus of this study is to explore and understand the lived experiences of Arab immigrant high school students in Canada, using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) framework of

three-dimensional narrative inquiry as the research method and methodology. With the Arab immigrant high school students as the unit of analysis in this narrative inquiry, it is necessary to understand and learn about their past experiences in their home countries, their traditions and values, and the tensions they experience while aspiring to attain their goals as they adapt to their new homes in Canada; in order to adequately understand their current lived experiences. My study is a fluid inquiry (Xu & Connelly, 2010) that focuses on student participants' day-to-day lived experiences and that considers "the research site in dynamic, fluid terms and it means thinking of it simultaneously, all at once, in terms of its analytic structural dimensions" (p. 363). Further explanation on the fluidity of the study follows in the methodology chapter.

### **Purpose of the Study**

By focusing on the lived experiences and perceptions of Arab immigrant high school students, I trace the lives of the student participants back in their home countries as I seek to understand their current living circumstances during their transition into their Canadian high schools. I do this in an effort to bridge communication gaps in communicating cultural and educational values between school communities and Arab immigrant students, and their families, in Canada. My adoption of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative research methodology enables me to study student participants' past and current lived experiences, including the tensions and challenges they face while adapting to their new home environments, as well as the efforts made by school communities and policy makers to support them in this regard. It also allows me to address implications, while I emphasize the significance of the four commonplaces of curriculum within any educational situation (Schwab, 1973); that ultimately may enhance resources for supporting Arab immigrant students.

By examining students' narratives, I want to gain insights into the ways cultural and

educational values are and can be communicated within Canadian high school environments. It is my assumption that Canada—a nation built on generosity, acceptance, and tolerance of diversity—offers great opportunities and quality of life for immigrants of diverse backgrounds and for all Canadian citizens alike. Hence, the broad purpose and scope of this study is narrowed down to the following specific objectives:

1. Explore, understand, and make meaning of the lived experiences of Arab immigrant high school students in Canadian schools, through a better understanding of how these students perceive their school environments and the existing support systems designed to help them;
2. Present a view of some of the diversity of backgrounds of Arab immigrant students in an effort to familiarize educators and school communities in general with such students' cultural values and traditions;
3. Provide insights to help Arab immigrant youth and their parents better understand the immigration experience to succeed throughout the process. It is vitally important for parents to understand “in more profound ways how their children’s experiences [are] being shaped” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 37). This can happen by raising awareness among them about the federal and provincial policies and school programs implemented within the Canadian educational systems.
4. Provide insights aimed at informing schools, curricula developers, policy makers, and related stakeholders so they collectively could respond to immigrant students’ needs more effectively, thus enabling such students to succeed both academically as well as in other areas of their everyday lives.

### **Research Questions**

Given the purpose of the study and the nature of narrative research, instead of approaching

the research with certain assumptions and limiting the scope of the study to certain questions, student participants co-construct and lead the flow of their narratives and stories (Xu, Connelly, He, & Phillion, 2007). In doing a narrative inquiry research, I also think of the research questions as a collection of research puzzles, carrying with it a sense of searching for and re-searching (Clandinin, 2013; Xu, 2006) information that need to be explored, found, and put together to create a well-framed picture of what has shaped student participants' experiences, personalities, and lives. Nonetheless, the following main research questions frame the study:

1. How do Arab immigrant students experience and perceive their schooling in and out of their Canadian high schools?
2. How do Arab immigrant students perceive their high schools' climates and environments?
3. To what extent do Arab immigrant students benefit from their high schools' support systems and the programs designed to enhance immigrant students' learning experience, and how do they perceive the effectiveness of such programs/systems in helping them learn Canadian language(s) and culture(s)?
4. What recommendations can be made to best support Arab immigrant high school students' language, cultural learning, and integration?

### **Significance of the Research Study**

According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (1999, 2007, 2011, 2015), Canadian immigration rates have more than tripled over the last few decades (increasing from 89,377 immigrants in 1983 to 256,757 in 1993, 262,239 in 2005, 280,691 in 2010, and 260,404 in 2014) with Middle Eastern immigrants representing the third-largest group in 2001 and the second-largest group in 2010 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1999, 2007, 2011, 2015). According to Canadian Arab Institute (CAI, 2013) data,

in 2010, Arab immigration to Canada reached an all-time high, with the arrival of 34,657 citizens of Arab countries. Arab immigrants represented 12.4% of the total immigration to Canada, second only to the Philippines (13.0%) and, for the first time, ahead of China and India (at 10.8% each), long the top two source countries of immigrants to Canada. In 2011, Arab immigration dropped slightly to 12.25% of total immigration, remaining in second place behind the Philippines. (para. 1)

According to the CAI's (2014) *Reports on Immigration and Refugee Data*, the Canadian Arab community increased 33.25% in 2011, more than doubling the 368,530 Canadian Arab populations of 2001; moreover, one in every five refugees to Canada between 2008 and 2012 has come from an Arab country. These statistics alone clearly indicate the need for a better understanding of the cultural values and traditions of Arab Canadian immigrants and their children's schooling experiences.

While in Canadian statistics cited here, as well as for the purposes of my research both immigrant and refugee Arabs are referred to as immigrants, it is worth noting that a distinction has been made by researchers between the coping abilities of immigrant and refugee students. Ayoub and Zhou (2016) conducted a study in one of Windsor's public elementary schools, investigating the challenges experienced by Somali refugee students, where they made a clear distinction between the pre-and post-immigration experiences of refugee versus immigrant students. Such differences manifest mainly in their reasons for immigration, academic experience prior to immigration, and post-immigration social and emotional adjustment.

In addition, Canada's rich cultural heritage was foregrounded in Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's address on election night in 2015: "We believe in our hearts that this country's unique diversity is a blessing bestowed upon us by previous generations of Canadians, Canadians who stared down prejudice and fought discrimination in all its forms" ("Justin Trudeau, for the Record," 2015, para. 28). I share the Prime Minister's vision and hope that Canada will continue to be a country that is recognized for its inclusivity and friendliness across all aspects of

Canadian society, including schools. I also agree with Prime Minister Trudeau's remarks that Canada's "enviable, inclusive society didn't happen by accident and won't continue without effort" ("Justin Trudeau, for the Record," 2015, para. 28). Indeed, given the influx of new Syrian refugees in Canada in late 2015 and early 2016 ("Syrian Refugees," 2015), understanding the backgrounds, life circumstances, values, traditions, and types of tensions such newcomer youth bring into Canadian culture becomes a necessity.

With extensive research on education-related matters guiding the practice of education stakeholders, curricula developers, and policy makers, a gap remains unfilled with regards to Arab immigrant students' education. As Wannas-Jones (2003), Eid (2007), and Khouri (2016) clearly emphasize, despite Arab Canadians' contributions to Canadian society since the late 19th century, there remains very little research on this apparently homogeneous yet diverse segment of society, particularly the education of their children. I therefore ask: Are Arab students' needs any different from those of immigrant students of diverse ethnic backgrounds? Do teachers and school communities know enough to assist newcomer students of Arab backgrounds as they enroll in Canadian schools? These are all questions worth researching and investigating.

Furthermore, while several Canadian studies have shed some light on issues related to Arab immigrants' integration in society (e.g., Abu-Laban, 1980; Abu-Laban & Abu-Laban, 1999; Abu-Rabia, 2006; Nassar-McMillan & Hakim-Larson, 2003; Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001), few have focused on Arab immigrant students' perspectives on school integration; as Eid (2007) indicates, "The paucity of literature on this group is hardly consistent with the important size of the Arab-Canadian population" (p. 16). In addition, with a growing diversity within Arab immigrant communities in Canada, familiarizing school

communities with the diverse backgrounds and circumstances of their children is of ultimate significance.

Consequently, further research is needed so that Canadian schools can remain vigilant and provide particular support systems that address the unique needs of their immigrant student populations. Also, given that five in six Arab immigrants settle in Ontario or Quebec (El-Assal, 2014), it is important to explore Arab immigrant students' perceptions of existing high school programs in Ontario schools in order to efficiently put these resources to best use.

As an Arab Canadian mother and academic, I also hope that this inquiry can help improve pedagogical practices and societal relations through its dissemination of information to all pertinent stakeholders in our communities. Although the study focuses on four student participants, it is intended to shed light on a larger population's experiences, perceptions, and attitudes. This study could contribute to the growing body of literature on the immigrant educational experience and is of particular importance given the paucity of literature corresponding to Middle Eastern immigrants' schooling experiences in comparison to studies addressing those of Asian, African, and European immigrants and other ethnic groups.

### **Definition of Terms**

While a detailed definition of who the term Arab refers to is provided in the Who Are Arabs section earlier in the chapter, the following terms are used throughout the study and have the meanings set forth below, as used in the context of this study:

- Arab immigrant high school students: First generation immigrant or refugee students enrolled in a Canadian public or Catholic high school, and who have come to Canada, from one of the 22 Arab league countries.

- Refugee students: children of refugee families, who are hosted in Canada as refugees due to war and/or severe conflicts in their countries of origin. For the purposes of my research both immigrant and refugee Arabs are referred to as immigrants.
- Newcomer students: students who have arrived in Canada less than five years ago as immigrants or refugees.
- Hijab: Head veil worn by Muslim girls and women starting at age of puberty as part of their religious dress code.
- Hijabi: A girl or a woman observing hijab as part of practicing Islamic teachings.
- Muslim: A person who believes in the Islamic religion, despite their ethnicity, nationality, colour, or place of origin. Note that not all Muslims are Arabs, and vice versa.

The aforementioned definitions are provided to ensure uniformity and understanding of these terms throughout the study.

## **A Road Map Through the Thesis Inquiry**

### **Mapping of the Thesis**

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study, which introduces the context, focus, and purpose of the study; the primary research questions of the study; the significance of the study; and a definition of terms used throughout the study. Chapter 2 contains a literature review of the previous research related to the phenomenon being explored. The chapter provides contextual information on Arab immigration to Canada, examines literature pertaining explicitly to Arab populations and their challenges in adapting to their new environments, most notably Arab students' tensions with acculturation in new school systems. Chapter 3 discusses narrative inquiry as my chosen research method and methodology, and the procedures I use to gather and interpret data (i.e., research texts) for the study. Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 present the core data

chapters in the form of participants' life stories; and chapters 8 and 9 contain the discussion and conclusion of the thesis.

### **Core Student Participant Stories**

The core thesis chapters (4, 5, 6, and 7) contain the stories of the main Arab newcomer student participants of the study: four newcomer Arab immigrant high school students comprising two students recruited from Arab community relations both attending public high schools; one student recruited from a public high school; and one student recruited from a Catholic high school, in Windsor. Additional research supplementary informants, who were interviewed for their perspectives on Arab immigrant student experiences in high school, include: three Arab students, three mothers; an English literature teacher from a public school; and a guidance counselor from a Catholic school.

The main student participants are: Safa (in grade 11), from Somalia attending a public school; Basel (in grade 9), from Syria also attending a public school; Lauren (in grade 12), from Iraq attending a Catholic school; and Deema (in grade 10), from Palestine attending a public school.

As a narrative inquirer, I see great value in presenting the stories of student participants in a chronicle manner to show the temporal continuums in the lives and experiences of the student participants whose current and ongoing experiences cannot be thought of as independent of past experiences, and because, as Connelly and Clandinin (2006) note, a story "is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which his or her experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful" (p. 477). It is through the telling and retelling of those stories that we make meaning and come to understand the stories of others. I also seek to make student participants' stories educative by presenting them in this manner to show the full complexity of

each student participant's life, because as Craig (2007) emphasizes, "the stories individuals tell illuminate their personal thoughts and actions at the same time as the individuals make sense of their relationships with others and their stance in the world" (p. 176).

### **Emergent Themes**

After presenting field texts (data) in the form of student participants' stories in the core chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7, several overarching themes are elucidated in chapter 8. I then "unpack" tensions experienced by student participants and interpret them within a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space—physical, social, and temporal (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)—with a focus on student participants' changing high school experiences, as "They are intended to engage audiences [i.e., school stakeholders] to rethink and reimagine the ways in which they practice and the ways in which they relate to others" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 51).

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The developers of narrative inquiry as a research methodology, Clandinin and Connelly (1988, 1992, and 2000) consider teachers as curriculum makers rather than curriculum implementers while drawing on Schwab's (1973) curricular model of the four commonplaces of curriculum making. As I explain further in the Conceptual Framework section of Chapter 3, in the conclusion of my study presented in chapter 9, I discuss implications and make recommendations for schools and stakeholders based on the findings of the study. I draw on Clandinin and Connelly's (1992) theorizing to emphasize the importance of teachers' support for Arab immigrant high school students as I also borrow from the elements of Schwab's four commonplaces of curriculum making—teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu—as equally important elements in the making of curriculum; to make educational meaning of student narratives and to offer practical recommendations for policy and school curriculum. By doing so,

I hope to produce educationally meaningful insights that can be disseminated to all school stakeholders (Craig, 2013).

### **Why Student Participants From Certain Countries?**

Narrative researchers enter the lives of participants, essentially “entering into, and working within, the life flow of their [participant] students” (Xu & Connelly, 2009, p. 225). As the participants in this study were regularly occupied with life commitments encompassing their school, personal, and family lives, I followed the flow of life within the research context of student participants’ family and school lives.

In addition, within the narrative research approach the purpose of my study is to gain a deep understanding of the lived experiences of student participants. Therefore, it is beyond the scope of this study to have participants from all the world’s 22 Arab countries. It was not my intention to select student participants from any particular country amongst the 22 Arab nations, yet I ended up presenting a diverse collection of valuable data encompassing the life stories of four main participants and 3 additional supplementary informants; all of whom have emigrated from Arab countries including: Somalia, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Kuwait, and Jordan.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### History of Arab Immigration to Canada

As mentioned earlier in the Context of Study, immigration to Canada from the Arab world began in the late-18th century (Aboud, 2000; Abu-Laban, 1980; Hayani, 2014). Aboud's (2000) study suggests that Arabs immigrated to Canada largely due to economic reasons, whether to gain status as workers or as investors. Abu-Laban (1991) further explains that postwar Arab immigration "comprised a broader mixture of Christian groups and a substantial number of Muslims and Druze who were motivated by the desire to escape unfavourable social, economic, and political conditions in their homelands" (p. 17). Abraham's (1994) study of Arab immigration provided a more comprehensive survey:

The third wave [after 1980] included many professionals, entrepreneurs, and unskilled and semi-skilled laborers. These immigrants often fled political instability and wars engulfing their home countries. They included Lebanese Shiites from southern Lebanon, Palestinians from the Israeli-occupied West Bank, and Iraqis of all political persuasions. But many professionals from these and other countries like Syria, Egypt, and Jordan, and unskilled workers from Yemen also emigrated in search of better economic opportunities. Had conditions been more hospitable in their home countries, it is doubtful that many of these immigrants would have left their native countries. (p. 1)

Arab immigration to Canada has risen significantly in the last 25 years. As the Canadian Arab Institute (2013) reports,

high numbers of Arab immigrants marked the 1990-1993 period, with a heavy influx of immigrants fleeing the war in Lebanon, augmented by large numbers fleeing Somalia following the collapse of the government in 1991 (close to 6,000 Somalis arrived in 1992). In 1990 Arab immigration represented over 10% of total immigration to Canada (24,160). (para. 5)

Despite a slight drop reported in 2011, it is predicted that Arab immigration and refugee rates will increase again over the next few years. According to Statistics Canada's (2010) Projections of the Diversity of the Canadian Population study, "By 2031 ... between 25% and 28% of the population could be foreign-born" (paras. 2-3), while "Arab and West Asian

groups could more than triple, the fastest growth among all groups” (Visible Minorities section, para. 5).

According to Paterson and Hakim-Larson (2012), Arab youth comprise a significant percentage of the immigrant youth population in Canada, while a December 2015 news report indicates there could be as many as 50,000 Syrian refugees in Canada in 2016 (“Syrian Refugees,” 2015). Still, despite such data, Arabs in Canada are considered to be a visible minority. The *Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.” Categories in the Visible minority variable include South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean, Japanese, Visible minority, n.i.e. (“n.i.e.” means “not included elsewhere”), Multiple visible minorities, and Not a visible minority (Statistics Canada, 2015, Definitions and Concepts section, para. 2).

### **Why Arabs Choose to Immigrate to Canada**

Although this study focuses on Arab immigrant students, it is also worth looking at reasons that may influence Arab immigrant parents’ decision to choose Canada as their destination over other countries. In addition to the reasons cited earlier in this chapter, Canada in particular attracts immigrants from different parts of the world due to other factors such as educational opportunities and the fact that Canadians embrace multiculturalism, human rights, and diversity as fundamental values, as expressed by the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME, 2011). In fact, Canada is one of very few countries with an official multicultural policy (established in 1971 and ratified in 1988) that intended to promote all cultures, religions, and languages equally (Parekh, 2000), and such multiculturalism represents an essential element in the country’s educational system. According to Ford and Grantham (1996), multicultural education is a philosophy

positing that all people must be respected, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, physical ability, sexuality identity, and mental ability. Banks and McGee Banks (2007) in turn define multicultural education as an idea, a reform movement in educational institutions that aims to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to achieve academically regardless of their social identity.

Research on immigrants of various ethnic groups indicates that educational success is one of the main goals many immigrant parents seek for their children when coming to Canada (e.g., Zhong & Zhou, 2011). Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006) indicate that immigrant parents often encourage their children to hold values consistent with their inherited culture, and as Lavenda (2011) found, “Arab parents ... value education as a key component for future success, therefore making more efforts to promote the younger generation's education” (p. 933). Abu-Saad (1999), Ajrouch (2000), and Simmons and Simmons (1994) similarly found that education is highly valued in Arab culture for both genders and that its value is derived from its significance in ensuring economic success for families and individuals, as well as enhancing the transmission of religious knowledge. Al-Khatib (1999) also emphasizes that for Muslims, the Qur’an (Holy Scripture) strongly stresses the importance of education.

Empirical data corresponding to Arab immigrants’ views on education emphasize its importance in the Arab community. Statistics Canada (2007) data show that

Canadians of Arab origin are twice as likely as other Canadians to have a university degree. In 2001, 30% of Canadians of Arab origin ... had either a bachelor’s or post-graduate degree, compared with 15% of the overall adult population. Canadian adults of Arab origin are also more than twice as likely as their counterparts in the overall population to have a post-graduate degree. (“Education,” para. 1)

Similarly, Statistics Canada (2007) also reports that

Young people of Arab origin are also considerably more likely than other young Canadians to be attending school. In 2001, 74% of young people of Arab origin aged 15 to 24 were

enrolled in a full-time educational program, compared with 57% of all Canadians in this age group. (“Education,” para. 3)

Such data underscore the value that Arabs place on education for the general success of one’s life, and this may also explain why many Arabs choose to immigrate to Canada in particular. In terms of educational opportunities in Canada, Borzykowski (2009) found that, proportionally, more Canadians have a university education than do citizens in any other developed nation, which may be one of the influencing factors that encourage some families to choose Canada over other countries; indeed, only five countries have a higher percentage of high school graduates than Canada.

### **Immigrant Students of Arab Origins in Canadian Schools**

#### **Challenges for Arab Immigrant Students**

According to Eid (2007), Isik-Ercan (2015), Khouri (2016), and Zine (2000), students of Arab descent face challenges similar to those amongst immigrant students of different ethnic minorities as they enroll in host country schools, examples of which are discussed further below.

The literature on the education of immigrant children of different ethnic backgrounds reveals that the process of educating children of immigrant families in Canadian schools (as well as those in other host countries) has faced many challenges, including immigrant students’ emotional problems, lower socioeconomic status, and lack of English language skills and its consequences, all of which can be aggravated by school climate and curriculum-related issues. For instance, Gollnick and Chinn’s (2009) *Multicultural Education in a Pluralistic Society*, which addresses social and educational issues of the multicultural education classroom and provides an overview of the diversity of students in the United States, highlights the fact that immigrant students tend to be unnoticed by their teachers and other officials, particularly in high schools. Gollnick and Chinn note that teachers’ inability to perceive the common challenges facing new immigrant students can

hinder students' and teachers' success alike.

Similarly, Kaufman and Payne (1994) compared self-esteem in immigrant female high school students to that of their mainstream female peers in U.S. schools and found that many immigrant students tend to associate their self-image with the judgments and impressions their peers hold about them. Ruck and Wortley (2002) in turn examined perceptions of differential treatment relating to school disciplinary practices in a racially and ethnically diverse sample of high school students. They found that racial/ethnic minority students are much more likely to perceive discrimination with respect to teacher treatment and school suspension than their White peers. Ruck and Wortley emphasize that "Some of the negative outcomes associated with schooling which minority children face ... include lower test scores, poor grades, low attendance, grade retention, and early school leaving" (2002, p. 185).

Cummins' (1980, 1991, 2001, 2008, 2011, 2012) extensive research on second language acquisition amongst second language learners within mainstream schools demonstrates that immigrant students' academic success is more likely when their languages and cultures are incorporated into school programs. According to Cummins (1991) and Gollnick and Chin (2009), academic success can be attained if students feel included within their educational communities, and this can happen when their languages and cultures are incorporated into schools' programs.

Manavathu and Zhou's (2012) study on the impact of differentiated instructional materials on second language learners' task comprehension found that immigrant students may need added attention and professional help from teachers to better enable them to succeed academically, though any such additional assistance should be offered judiciously in a way that does not expose the students to further "disenfranchisement, embarrassment, loneliness, rejection, fear,

and stigmatization” (p. 339). Joshi’s (2006) research examining the experiences of Indian American students found that immigrant students face many challenges when they first join their schools, including discrimination and alienation, that can be exacerbated by language, cultural, and educational differences, stereotyping, invisibility, distortion, isolation, and internalized oppression. Midobuche’s (1999) reflections on her experiences as a Mexican-American career educator in U.S. classrooms at different grade levels noted similar challenges amongst second language learners.

While the above-mentioned sample of the literature can aid in understanding the challenges experienced by newcomer immigrant high school students, some of the challenges facing Arab immigrant students are uniquely linked to their cultures and identities, such as: identity-related dress code challenges, racism and discrimination due to negative stereotypes, and home versus school conflicts (Khouri, 2016; Zine, 2000, 2006). The following sections provide further details on such challenges as discussed in the literature.

**Arab students’ identity-related dress codes.** Following much research in the field of immigrant students’ education, policies have been implemented in Canadian schools in an effort to provide equity and better opportunities for all students (OME, 2012). Still, Arab students continue to face certain challenges which may be alleviated if understood more clearly through learning about their experiences (Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2010; Shaheen, 2001; Zine, 2006). Often, self-expression takes the form of clothing and symbols, or moral values and beliefs that students may not, or must not, be able to separate from their educational experiences due to their religious or cultural beliefs. This could include different forms of religious or cultural identity clothing such as turbans, hijabs, yarmakahs, kirpans, and niqabs (Mansouri & Trembath, 2005).

Identity-related dress codes have caused a great deal of controversy in the past few years in some regions of Canada for Arab students. In 1994, a Montreal school's refusal to allow a teenage Muslim girl (Emilie Ouimet) to attend school while wearing a hijab sparked some of that controversy (Khan, 2013, para. 3). Although the Quebec Human Rights Commission ruled that Quebec schools did not have the right to prohibit any student from wearing religious attire (be it a Sikh turban, a Jewish yarmulke, a Christian cross, or Islamic hijab), the case was revisited 2 months later when another Muslim Arab girl (Dania Baali) was told she would have to transfer to another school if she wanted to observe hijab (Todd, 1998). Zine (2000) noted later incidents in which school officials refused to abide by board policies to prevent racism, such as when a principal declined to provide a prayer room or space for Muslim students to perform mandatory prayer on school grounds. More recently, Guo (2015) recounts a similar story in which a school principal in Calgary, Alberta refused to permit students to perform their mandatory noon-time prayer during school hours, claiming that school is not a place of worship.

Despite policy changes made in an effort to breach racial tolerance and acceptance, similar incidents continue to take place. For instance, in 2007, an "Ottawa-area soccer team pulled out of a Laval tournament when one of its players, 11-year-old Asmahan Mansour, was asked to remove her scarf" (Fedio, 2012, para. 5). In the same year, a martial arts team of Muslim girls were barred from taking part in a tournament with their hijabs (CBC news, 2007). Five years later, the controversy was again ignited when a 9-year-old Arab girl in Quebec was also pulled from a soccer tournament for wearing a hijab; following the latter incident, the International Football Association Board agreed to unanimously approve and lift the ban on the wearing of headscarves in soccer tournaments (Fedio, 2012). Still recently, an Arab student was barred from writing an exam in a Montreal college after refusing to remove her head-covering hijab when asked to do so

by a male instructor (Canadian Press, 2016). As noted in the next section, such challenges encountered by Arab immigrant students may be due partly to misrepresentation in the media.

**Portrayal of Arab immigrant students as outsiders.** For many years until the early 1990s, teachers in North American schools were poorly informed, if not altogether unaware, of Arabic cultures and traditions (Kumar, Warnke, & Karabenick, 2014; Naber, 2000; Nieto, 1992). Shaheen (2000, 2001) and Naber (2008) report that prior to the recent rise of Islamic extremism and the 9/11 terrorist events, most teachers had likely only a vague idea regarding Arabs, who more often than not were associated with camels in deserts, men wearing turbans (all probably involved in the oil trade), and veiled women dressed in black—attributes all largely based on so-called Hollywood movie representations of Middle Easterners. As a newly immigrated student in a Canadian public high school in the early 1990s, I myself along my other school friends of Arab origins were frequently asked rather banal and somewhat ignorant questions by students, teachers, and the general public regarding Arabs' social customs and traditions which demonstrated the lack of intercultural competence of many Canadians about such traditions. We were repeatedly asked questions like: Where is the country you came from on the map? Do you guys ride on camels for transportation in your home country? Are all Arab men married to four women? Do Arab ladies sleep with their veils on? Are all Arabs rich, and have servants in their homes? But as Wingfield (2006), Sirin and Fine (2008), Naber (2008), and Khouri (2016) argue, after the surge of post-9/11 characterizations in the Western media, Arabs' identities soon were linked to terrorism and radical ideologies by many North Americans, including educators. Such xenophobia not only can impede Arab immigrant and refugee students' well-being but also their educational success (Gollnick & Chinn, 2009; Isik-Ercan, 2015; Kumar et al., 2014; Zine, 2006).

**Stereotyping of Arabs in the media and its effects on Arab students.** The educational experiences of immigrant students in schools are highly influenced by images of people from the same or similar culture portrayed in the media (such as those noted in the previous section) and in their school environments. According to Joshi (2006) and Isik-Ercan (2015), Arab students—who are often mistakenly associated with the Islamic religion despite the fact that not all Arabs are Muslims—are often bullied and teased by other students and classmates about belonging to a “radical” culture since the word “Arab” and “Muslim” have often been used interchangeably, and the politics and tactics of terrorist movements and incidents are repeatedly described as “Islamic” by the popular media.

As Shaheen (1984, 2001), Ibish (2003), and Wray-Lake, Syvertsen, and Flanagan (2008) explain, politicians’ diatribes, coverage by the news media, and the caricatures that are filmmakers’ stock-in-trade all led to the common assumption that Muslims and Arabs are the enemy of the Western world. Most notably, numerous high-profile (i.e., Hollywood-type) films have presented Arabs and Muslims as menacing, violent figures; however, any violence perpetrated against Arabs and Muslim that followed the rise of such portrayals was inadequately reported, and Arabs and Muslims were almost never seen as “normal” people afterwards (Shaheen, 2001). Dahya and Jenson’s (2015) recent study of Muslim girls in Toronto documents how student participants pointed to incidents in which peers and teachers made discriminatory remarks or actions towards them in ways that demonstrate erroneous and often ignorant understanding about the religion and cultural practices due to common stereotypes. As Joshi (2006) succinctly states, “The popular media association of [Arabs] with terrorism is similar to the mindset that led to the internment of Japanese Americans during the Second World War” (p. 179). Joshi also argues that people who do not automatically fit within the norm of mainstream

groups tend to suffer different forms of discrimination, including threats of violence, stereotyping, invisibility, distortion, isolation, bullying and internalized oppression.

Among studies that investigated issues related to the education of Arab and other immigrant and refugee students in schools in different countries, Mansouri and Trembath's (2005) investigation of multicultural education and racism in Australia (which can also be applied to a Canadian context) indicates that media had contributed greatly to the negative stereotyping of Arab students which in turn affected the latter's schooling experiences. As Petrozza (2012) notes elsewhere, "Media is a major contributor to the propagation of racism, sexism and stereotypes in our pluralistic society" (para. 7). In Mansouri and Trembath's study, Arab student participants "frequently attributed their own disengagement from school and the processes of learning to: (a) perceptions of teacher disinterest in them as individuals, and as young Arab- and Muslim-Australians; (b) perceptions of teacher racism; and (c) low teacher expectations of their schooling achievements" (p. 523).

**Racism and discrimination.** Al-Hazza and Bucher (2010) note that as Arab immigrants relocate to their new countries of citizenship, they are not always able to free themselves completely from all forms of oppression and sociopolitical instability, because they may encounter inhospitable conditions in their host countries. Racism directed at Arabs in Canada has increased dramatically in the past two decades, due in part to the Canadian military involvement in Arab countries as well as the (post)traumatic events of 9/11 (Shaheen, 2000, 2001). Consequently, researchers in the field (e.g., Dahya & Jenson, 2015; Isik-Ercan, 2015; Mujahid, 2003) report that children of Arab immigrants and refugees have increasingly become targets of misunderstandings, racism, and discrimination. As Gollnick and Chinn (2009) argue, these children often experience racial and social tensions upon entering the school system due to their identities, and this has

definite implications for their academic and social experiences both in school and in life.

Aroian, Templin, Hough, Ramaswamy, and Katz's (2011) study of 240 Arab high school students in the United States found strong relationships among perceived discrimination, acculturative stress, and the mental health of Arab American adolescents. Aroian et al. (2011) concluded that adolescents in Arab Muslim immigrant families may be at risk for developing "anxiety, depression, hostility, delinquency, and other manifestations of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems . . . the result of the disparity between Euro-American values and Arab values and discrimination and bigotry against Arabs" (p. 996). The following sections provide further details on how Arab values can also add to the schooling challenges of Arab immigrant children.

**Home and school conflicting values.** Research indicates that parental support plays an important role in immigrant students' academic and social integration (e.g., Bang, 2011; Vaden-Kiernan & McManus, 2005). The success of Arab students at school, like those students of all other ethnic groups, is similarly affected by their parents' involvement with their schooling (Guo, 2015; Zine, 2000). Nonetheless, the conflict between values emphasized by parents of Arab immigrant and refugee students and those promoted at school can cause adverse effects; as Khouri (2016) suggests, struggles at school and lack of home support create hassles and micro stressors for Arab immigrant children.

**Family loyalty versus individual competency.** On the same issue, Al-Hazza and Bucher (2010) identify some difficulties that Arab children face as part of their educational experience, including the conflict between family loyalty and the Western emphasis on individual competency, as well as curriculum that fails to validate their heritage and culture in any meaningful way. Khouri (2016) stresses that the disparity between the family's cultural norms and that of the outside world

creates stress at home and interpersonal difficulties between parents and children. To understand how family loyalty in Arab families may cause conflicting pressures on Arab-Canadian students, it is important to mention more about the family structure in Arab traditions.

One of the predominant social goals of Arab immigrant youth is gaining family approval; Arab youth are socialized to follow their families' guidance and seek their acceptance, and they are perceived to be somewhat more interconnected with their families than some of their non-Arab counterparts (Aroian et al., 2011; Berry, 2006; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012; Rasmi, Chuang, & Safdar, 2012). Dwairy (2004) notes that Arab parents tend to be authoritarian, expecting complete obedience from their children in almost all life matters and adherence to family rules and traditions. In Aroian, Templin, and Hough's (2014) study, Arab high school students reported experiencing daily micro stressors from their parents and school, all of which contribute to behavioural problems and sometimes depression. Children in Arab families are expected to show responsibility towards their family members (Dwairy, 2004), whether in terms of social responsibility—such as taking care of their younger siblings, looking after their elders, and protecting and defending other family members—or in terms of financial responsibility in case of financial crisis. As discussed by a number of scholars (e.g., Bornstein & Cote, 2006; Rosenthal, 1987), relationships in Arab families have a predominant position in individuals' lives: parents' expectations of their children tend to be high, and family ties are expected to be strong and everlasting. Male youth are also thought of as protectors and providers (Kumar et al., 2014; Naber, 2008). Mackey (1991), as cited in Kivisto, also notes that it is customary for Arab men to contribute money to their extended family, regardless of where they live, even after they immigrate to other countries. Such is the case with many transnational immigrant families of other ethnic backgrounds today, who try to maintain transnational ties, building social networks

that “link together their country of origin and their country of settlement” (as cited in Kivisto, 2001, p. 552).

An example of why this relates to challenges of Arab students here is illustrated by Conger et al.’s (1992) finding that family financial challenges were linked to higher levels of adjustment difficulties. Such adjustment difficulties thus lead to greater behavioural problems among immigrant male youth, which in turn was linked back to tense parent–child relations caused by ineffective parenting styles. Arab immigrant parents experiencing financial hardships have to deal with such issues, in addition to other immigration and relocation challenges, which may deprive them of sufficient energy needed for more effective parenting methods.

Ultimately, interest in exploring the schooling experiences of immigrant students of Arab origins is rising among some Canadian educational researchers. Factors contributing to such increased interest include evidence in the literature (e.g., Abdul-Razzaq, 2008; Dakroury, 2006; Faragallah, Schumm, & Webb, 1997; Hamdan, 2007; Naff, 1983; Tavakoliyazdi, 1981) that suggests the majority of Arab immigrants and their children may have greater difficulty than other immigrants in acculturating to life in the United States, Canada, and other host countries.

### **Policy to Promote Equity and Inclusion of Arab Immigrant Students in Canada**

Gollnick and Chinn (2009) argue that educational equity and success can only be attained if students feel welcomed and safe within their educational environments. In this regard, the Ontario Ministry of Education’s (2012) Curriculum Council focuses on issues that consider “the integration of equity and inclusive education principles and bullying prevention across the curriculum” (para. 3). With an influx in student populations from Arab countries with diverse abilities and diverse needs, Canadian education systems have a dire need for more resources to help prepare teachers and schools to address inclusion and integration issues of these students

(Brown, 2015). According to the literature, equity connotes high achievement for all learners and seeks to make achievement gaps smaller and less visible (Cohen & Lotan, 1997) and to redistribute time and attention to students in need, making available different support mechanisms to ensure equitable outcomes (Haycock, 2001). To this end, Andrea Berg, an executive officer of the Alberta Teachers' Association's (ATA's) Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee, notes that "Teachers are really appealing for any kind of resources to help them understand the different cultural backgrounds of their [newcomer Syrian refugee] students" (as cited in Hare, 2016, para. 4).

Consequently, in an effort to aid teachers in the process of assisting Arab immigrant students, teachers' associations and ministries of education in a number of provinces proactively demonstrated leadership in ensuring the inclusion of Arab newcomers within their policy guides and implementations. For example, the Alberta Teachers' Association has taken the lead in familiarizing education stakeholders with the backgrounds, belief systems, and practices of its increasing populations of Arab origins. Indeed, it has published and distributed among its schools a booklet in 2016, entitled *Promoting Success with Arab Immigrant Students* which "provides background information on the beliefs and practices of Arab and Muslim people, outlines some myths and misconceptions, and provides suggestions for teachers and administrators" (Hare, 2016, para. 2).

In addition, the British Columbia Ministry of Education produced a guide for teachers and schools in October 2009, entitled *Students from Refugee Backgrounds*. The guide, which was revised in December 2015 upon receiving the incoming waves of Syrian refugees, was designed to help educators welcome and support students and families from refugee backgrounds (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015).

Similarly, in breaching responsive teaching practices, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2016) issued a framework for the successful integration of refugee students, a large percentage of whom come from Arab countries. The framework suggests that teachers and school staff become “Trauma informed” by learning about the three phases in the lives of their newcomer refugee students: pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration. It dictates that “Educators should make every effort to get to know their students so that they can make suggestions about specific programs and courses as well as co-curricular activities and additional community involvement, based on strengths, aspirations and experiences” (OME, 2016, Focus for Responsive Practice #6 section, para. 2).

In the same vein, I hope that further research in this area can help inform teachers and school administrators in Ontario and contribute to building bridges. Following this line of thought, I use Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space as the research method and phenomenon, both to learn about the lived experiences of Arab immigrant students as lived, as well as to analyze their stories into common themes. I then use Schwab’s (1973) elements of the four commonplaces of curriculum as a framework to provide recommendations for education and policy makers within Canadian school systems; to aid in making informed enhancements and/or modifications in this regard.

Furthermore, teachers might also consider Al-Hazza and Bucher’s (2010) brief synopsis of Arabic culture, which provides teachers in the United States with a brief glimpse of who Arabs are, in an effort to bridge a cultural divide (one that could easily be applied to a Canadian context). Moreover, learning about the political systems and the international relations of the Middle Eastern region outlined by Fawcett (2009), Andersen, Seibert, and Wagner, (2009), and Amore (2016), and areas of conflict within the Middle Eastern region outlined by Najem (2012),

Najem, Soderlund, Briggs, and Cipkar, (2016), and Briggs, Soderlund, and Najem (2017) and other scholars in the field of Middle Eastern political science can also aid in understanding the backgrounds of some Arab immigrant high school students.

### **Approaches for Schooling Immigrant Students in Ontario, Canada**

Furthermore, Since the schooling experiences of Arab high school students is under study in Windsor, Ontario, and because almost 50% of newcomers to Canada settle in Ontario (People for Education, 2008); I find it necessary to give a brief overview of some of what Ontario has done up to date in terms of ensuring the integration and success of immigrant students in general.

Over the past two decades, Ontario has witnessed a huge shift towards providing better educational opportunities for its immigrant students. In the late 20th century, there continued to be inequities in terms of potential academic achievement for minority students (Rosignano & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). Seeking to eliminate discriminatory circumstances and to provide equitable achievement opportunities, the Toronto District School Board (2000) claimed that:

The Board recognizes however, that certain groups in our society are treated inequitably because of individual and systemic biases related to race, colour, culture, ethnicity, linguistic origin, disability, socio-economic class, age, ancestry, nationality, place of origin, religion, faith, sex, gender, sexual orientation, family status, and marital status. Similar biases have also impacted on Canada's aboriginal population. We also acknowledge that such biases exist within our school system. (para. 2)

On the same issue, Cummins (2001) notes that the linguistic, cultural, and racial diversity in Canadian schools had been treated as a problem and a challenge rather than a benefit or a resource. In fact, according to some critics (e.g., Gutmann, 2003; Miller, 1996; Van den Berghe, 2002), diversity historically has been considered a threat to democratic societies, although in recent years, calls for equitable and inclusive education have caused a change in the mindset of most educational policy makers. For example, Frisken and Wallace (2000) describe how the City of Toronto has adopted an overall strategy to provide services to immigrants in general. Many

programs have been implemented by the city's Access and Equity Centre that address issues such as employment equity, human rights, anti-harassment, and anti-hate policies, and such programs helped city agencies establish training, translation, and interpretation programs. All such programs may have positively influenced the quality of the educational experiences of Arab immigrant youth, and those of different ethnic backgrounds in one way or another.

Similarly, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2005) had strongly encouraged school staff and personnel to take serious measures to actively support newcomer students of all backgrounds in adjusting to their new schooling lives in Canadian schools. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2005) also emphasized the positive effects of the success of such students for all:

Creating a welcoming and inclusive school environment for English language learners and their families is a whole-school activity requiring the commitment of the principal and vice-principal, teachers, support staff, and other leaders within the school community. The reward for this committed effort is a dynamic and vibrant school environment that celebrates diversity as an asset and enriches the learning experience for all students. (p. 36)

Ontario, in fact, is continuously taking important steps forward to reduce discrimination and embrace diversity in its schools to improve overall student achievement and reduce achievement gaps (OME, 2009). In 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education launched *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* which aimed to help the education community identify and remove discriminatory biases and systemic barriers in order to support the achievement and well-being of all students. The strategy built on successful ministry, school board, and school policies and practices, and set out a phased-in implementation plan.

In addition, the Ontario Ministry of Education's (2010) *Education Amendment Act (Keeping Our Kids Safe at School Act)* came into effect in 2010. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) also noted in its *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* that

An equitable and inclusive education system is fundamental to achieving high levels of student achievement. It is recognized internationally as critical to delivering a high-quality

education for all learners (UNESCO, 2008). Equitable, inclusive education is also central to creating a cohesive society and a strong economy that will secure Ontario's future prosperity. (p. 1)

Moreover, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2008) stated that "Organizations [including educational institutions] have a responsibility to take proactive steps to make sure that they are not taking part in, condoning or allowing racial discrimination or harassment to occur" ("Identifying and Addressing Racial Discrimination," para. 1). Consequently, the Ontario Ministry of Education's (2011) *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*'s vision was stated as,

To achieve an equitable and inclusive school climate, school boards and schools will strive to ensure that all members of the school community feel safe, comfortable, and accepted. We want all staff and students to value diversity and to demonstrate respect for others and a commitment to establishing a just, caring society. ("Vision," para. 2)

Furthermore, the Ontario Ministry of Education's (2014) *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* underscored the fact that the ministry "believe[s] that Ontario's diversity can be its greatest asset" (p. 6). Therefore, tremendous efforts have been made to enhance the learning and achievement of immigrant students, including Arab immigrant high school students. Similarly, through this research I hope to provide insights for policy makers on the effectiveness of such efforts by shedding some light on the perspectives of Arab immigrant high school students themselves and through learning about their first-hand experiences with available programs.

In addition, and on a smaller scale, I have most recently participated in a project funded by the public-school board in Windsor, Ontario, to enhance students' mathematical learning. During my involvement in the project I have witnessed educators' passion and efforts to ensure newcomers' learning conditions, among mainstream students, are well taken into consideration while planning and revising existing programs. Similarly, I have also been introduced to a number of endeavors in the region by different local settlement agencies, in effort to create a

welcoming community for newcomer immigrant families and individuals, led by Windsor Essex Local Immigration Partnership.

### **Joining the Discussion**

Research on immigrants and their acculturation-related issues is extensive and thorough. A well-developed body of literature has expanded interpretations and understandings of some of the most common challenges facing immigrant students of varied cultural and ethnical backgrounds as they try to integrate within school society in their new countries. While many studies have explored different schooling issues of such students—like Hoover and Collier’s (1985) study on the emotional/behavioural challenges of immigrant school children, Altinyelken’s (2009) study of immigrant students in Turkey, Mosselson’s (2002) study on Bosnian adolescent female refugees in the United States, and Faircloth and Hamm’s (2005) research investigating issues of belonging relevant to motivation and achievement among high school students of four different ethnic groups. Similarly, Anderman’s (2003) and Ma’s (2003) studies explored belonging issues, and Olsen (1988, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2010; Olsen & Mullen, 1990) has done extensive work on ethnic minorities in U.S. schools. Furthermore, others have focused on particular ethnic immigrant student groups. For example, much research has been undertaken on Chinese immigrant educational issues, including: Sung’s study (1987) of Chinese immigrant children’s schooling in New York City; Zhou and Kim’s (2006) exploration of education in Chinese and Korean immigrant communities; Xu’s (2006) study of the cross-cultural schooling experiences of Chinese newcomers; and Zhong and Zhou’s (2011) investigation of Chinese immigrant parents’ involvement in their children’s schooling.

Likewise, other studies have focused on minority students of various other international backgrounds. Joshi’s (2006) research examined the experiences of Indian Americans, of different

faiths; Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. Similarly, Mendez, Bauman, and Guillory (2012) examined Mexican immigrant students' experience with bullying, while Tapia (2000) focused on such students' schooling and learning. Additionally, Valdés (1996, 2001) has written a book focusing on Mexican American family life, parental attitudes toward school, and efforts to increase student achievement, and another on the experience of Latino children in learning the English language. Renzaho, McCabe, and Swinburn (2012) studied schooling issues of immigrants of African descent, as did Dlamini, Wolfe, Anucha, and Yan (2009) who examined the lives of immigrant youth of African descent and ways they formulate friendships. In addition, Alidou (2000) explored the emotional, linguistic and cultural issues facing new immigrants from Africa, and Ogbu (2003) studied reasons behind the academic disengagement of Black American students.

In addition, numerous studies conducted in the United States and other countries have considered the experiences of Arab and Muslim immigrant families and their children, particularly after the events of 9/11. Examples include: Samhan's (1999) examination of race classification policy and its impact on the Arab American experience; Moosa, Karabenick, and Adams's (2001) study exploring teachers' perceptions of Arab parent involvement in elementary schools in the U. S.; Sarroub's (2002) study of the high schooling experiences of Yemeni American girls in the U.S.; Sabry and Bruna's (2007) study of the challenges faced by Muslim youth in U.S. schools; Abu El-Haj's (2007) study on how Palestinian American high school youth understand themselves as members of the U.S. community; Audi's (2008) study focusing on challenges facing the Arab American community from a legal perspective; Majumdar's (2010) case study examining how the competing discourses of family, religion, and language impact the identities of Arab Muslim adolescent English language learners; Kumar et al.'s (2014) study examining how male adolescents of Arab descent relate to the current contexts of negative

fallout from recent ethnicity-related political events; Isik-Ercan's (2015) study examining religious identities of Turkish-Muslim children in American schools; and Khouri's (2016) work with male students from Arab descent illustrating the stressors this population faces.

Although such studies have been very informative and can be applied in a Canadian context, Canada is to a large extent a much more multicultural country, having the largest foreign-born population (20.6%) among G8 countries in 2010, second only to Australia (Statistics Canada, 2013). Such data underscore the need for a more in-depth look at the Canadian educational system and issues related to groups of Arab immigrant students. Only a few studies in Canada have looked into issues particularly pertaining to Arab students in Canadian schools in recent years. Collet (2007) has discussed the complex identities of Somali Muslim youth in Canada, while Zine (2000, 2006) has examined issues and forms of resistance shown by Arab and Muslim students toward dominating norms and values of secular education in Canadian schools, notably in relation to Muslim girls' experiences and challenges wearing the hijab.

Still, in comparison to immigrants from other geopolitical regions, limited research has been undertaken that investigates how Arab immigrant high school students' experiences may act as possible informing tools and venues for their general success as citizens of Canada. In fact, literature suggests that more research needs to be done to inform educators of Arab immigrant student challenges (Eid, 2007; Isik-Ercan, 2015; Khouri, 2016) as adolescents of Arab descent have not been the target of research or public policy efforts, because the majority do not often face failure in schools (Tabbah, Halselliranda, & Wheaton, 2012).

In this light, I encourage researchers in the education field, and myself, to join in the discussion by focusing on the schooling experiences of Arab students in Canadian high schools, affiliated with different religious faiths.

In this chapter, I have explained my rationale for focusing on Arab immigrant high school students' schooling experiences. The chapter provided a brief description of who Arabs are, as defined in the literature, followed by a brief history of their immigration to Canada, their reasons for choosing Canada as their new home, and a literature overview of the tensions that Arab immigrant children continue to face in Canadian schools. The chapter highlighted a brief summary of the Ontario Ministry of Education's efforts to address the needs of immigrant students in general. The next chapter outlines the research methodology and procedures that I have used to conduct this research inquiry.

## CHAPTER 3: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY/PROCEDURES

### **Narrative Inquiry Methodology and Mode of Thinking and Knowing**

#### **Why Narrative Inquiry?**

Research methodology involving narratives has a long intellectual history that goes across such disciplines as theology (e.g., Crites, 1971), women's studies (e.g., Gilligan, 1982), history (e.g., Carr, 1986), psychology (e.g., Coles, 1989), philosophy (e.g., Taylor, 1992), anthropology (e.g., Bateson, 1994), and geography (e.g., Sack, 1997). Within the field of education, many scholars employ narrative inquiry as their chosen research methodology. In fact, in mapping the narrative inquiry terrain a handbook of narrative inquiry has been published (Clandinin, 2007) establishing the basis for narrative inquiry as a research methodology in the education field. While narrative inquiry at one point had been considered to be a relatively new and novel research methodology (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), it has since become a valuable interdisciplinary research method (Riessman & Speedy, 2007).

For this research, I have adopted narrative inquiry as my research methodology. Dewey's (1938) seminal writings about experience and education provided the basis for narrative inquiry. He advanced the notion of experiential knowledge and that knowledge is both personally and socially developed. Drawing on Dewey's theory of knowledge, Schwab (1973) focused on the practicality in education, later Clandinin and Connelly (1988, 1992, 2000) followed in their footsteps and developed narrative inquiry, a fluid form of investigation that is best understood as a human lived experience methodology and a way of understanding experiences through stories. They point out that people's value and meaning of education is created in relation to their own experiences, both past and current beliefs, needs and future goals and hopes. Clandinin and Connelly's work in narrative inquiry has since become "a rapidly developing social sciences and

humanities research methodology” (Xu & Connelly, 2010; p. 349). In fact, Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) narrative inquiry framework has since been employed in research studies by a number of researchers, particularly in school-based research (e.g. Craig, 2002; Huber, 1999; He, 2003; Xu, 2006; and Ciuffetelli-Parker, 2004, Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007), and as Elbaz-Luwisch (2007) explains in the *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry*, “The field has progressed significantly” since the early days of its development (p. 375).

Following the lead of narrative scholars and researchers, I also use narrative inquiry throughout my research with Arab immigrant high school students in Windsor, Ontario, in Canada. As a narrative researcher, I think narratively (Xu & Connelly, 2009) as I realize that understanding the educational values of student participants properly can only happen through learning about their particular experiences, both past, in their home countries, and present, in Canada, and within the particular schooling situations they find themselves in. This form of inquiry is based largely on the assumption that stories are a form of social action and the telling of stories is one way that humans experience life (Bruner, 1991; Chase, 2005; Conle, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Lal, Suto, & Ungar, 2012; Riessman, 2008) and reflect on their own beliefs and assumptions (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013). Since narrative inquiry is not only about telling stories, it is “a way of thinking about life” (Xu & Connelly, 2009, p. 221; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2005), I try to understand students’ experiences through the use of storytelling and narratives because according to Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), “narrative inquiry begins in experience as expressed in lived and told stories” (p. 5), I then retell these stories to transfer this type of learning to my research audiences (Clandinin, 2013).

Consequently, student narratives and stories are both the methodology and phenomenon (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of my inquiry. It is phenomenon because it is what is studied (high

schooling experiences of my student participants in narratives), and it is a methodology because it can be thought of as *thinking narratively* (Xu & Connelly, 2010). For this study, the narrative approach is a frame of reference, a way of reflecting during the entire inquiry process, a research method, and a mode for representing the research study. What is meant by the phrase “thinking narratively” is a way of thinking in which the narrative inquirer does not jump to conclusions or translate the narratives into “solvable problems” (Xu & Connelly, 2010, p. 359), but rather thinks about and studies people’s experiences, “nothing more and nothing less” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 38). In this light, I approach my student participants with the purpose of learning from their stories, without judgment or promise to solve their problems. As a narrative inquirer, I highly value the stories of the Arab immigrant student participants in my study because “life is a story that we live” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994, p. 149) and it is through the telling and retelling of those stories that we make meaning and come to understand the stories of others. As Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) point that in narrative research “both parties [researcher and participants] will learn and change in the encounter” (p. 9), and this is what makes stories of Arab immigrant student participants in this study educative to myself and my research audiences. As Xu and Connelly (2009) explain narrative inquiry is “a conception of the phenomenal world in which experience is mediated by story” (p. 221) and story “is a gateway, a portal, for narrative inquiry into meaning and significance” (Xu & Connelly, 2010, p. 356).

Exploring the lived experiences of Arab immigrant high school students in my study meant digging deep into their pasts, learning about their embedded beliefs and educational values. As I explained in the *Introduction* chapter, my interest in learning more about Arab immigrant high school students’ experiences stemmed from my similar background and experiences some years ago. The stories I have heard and come across during the years I spent in the education field in

Canada evoked strong interest and emotions for me, and I decided to choose narrative inquiry for my study because it is “a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and experience” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 17). I decided to bring to light the lived experiences of Arab immigrant high school students because my ultimate goal is to help create bridges between such students’ marginalized communities and those of their more heterogeneous school communities. Through the use of narrative inquiry, I hope that school-based researchers, like myself, may continue to pay attention to “experience as a source of knowledge in school-based research” (Grenville & Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013, p. 7), and in turn disseminate information which can make educational contexts in Canada more socially inclusive to all, through educational practices.

### **Research Boundaries**

As Xu and Connelly (2010) point out, “the growth of narrative inquiry amidst the growth of qualitative inquiry has given rise to abstract boundaries” (p. 359). As a novice researcher employing narrative inquiry as my chosen research methodology, I frequently bumped into boundaries— “the intellectual territory of another way of thinking” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 21)—as I thought of, planned, and conducted my work. I was frequently challenged to justify the methods and procedures I used to collect and present my research texts (data), as well as absence of certain terminology usually used in other qualitative and/or quantitative research methods. As Craig (2010b) explains, using narrative inquiry as a research methodology is using an “against-the-grain method” (p. 123) because it challenges the top-down rationalists’ view, and avoids “strategies, tactics, rules and techniques that flow out of other theoretical considerations” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 188). This makes narrative inquiry “a complex research approach to enact and an even more complicated method to explain” (Craig, 2010b, p. 123). Keeping this in

mind, I address in this chapter the criteria generally used to show rigor of qualitative research, yet from a narrative inquiry research methodology perspective, in an effort to explain my thinking and approaches as a narrative inquirer.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In this study, I retell the stories of Arab immigrant high school students through a narrative framework design based on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework of sociality, temporality, and place, and I explain this further in the following section. I use narrative inquiry because it is "a research methodology used to study lived experiences—that is, lives lived and how they are lived" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxii). Furthermore, my inquiry builds on Dewey's (1938) work on experiential learning, and I finally make implications for school practice as I make educational meaning of the findings of this research study while borrowing from Schwab's (1973) theorizing on the practicality of education.

### **Experiential Learning and Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space**

Connecting education with experience and inquiry, Dewey's analysis of experience is based on two key dimensions: temporality (past, present, future) and personal-social. For Dewey, experiential learning meant connecting past and present experiences over time and across contexts and "taking into account what humans 'enjoy or suffer' as a consequence of their acting in, and being acted on, educational situations" (Craig, 2010a, p. 424). Yet Clandinin and Connelly (2000) made an addition to the two Deweyian dimensions, place, to generate what they call a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, "i.e., the life space" (Xu & Connelly, 2010, p. 361).

This three-dimensional life space—corresponding to interaction (personal-social), continuity (past, present, and future), and situation (place)—overlaps "the four directions in any inquiry: inward and outward, backward and forward" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). In my

study, inward refers to internal factors in the experiences of student participants, including feelings, hopes, thoughts, values or morality, while outward refers to external surrounding conditions such as school, home, or communities in which a student participant exists and interacts; backward and forward, on the other hand, focus on the notion of temporality, past, present and future experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that when studying an experience, a narrative inquirer should take into consideration all four directions at the same time. Similarly, Xu and Connelly (2009) stress that “the concepts are simple. But bringing these concepts to life in actual research ... is difficult. They must all be taken into account at the same time” (p. 223).

The following sections expand upon the four directions and show how they were applied to my study. Although all the research student participants in my inquiry were of Arab descent, each had his/her own unique experiences that were greatly influenced by many factors, including the internal and external conditions he/she is exposed to, as well as by past experiences, present situations, and future ambitions.

**Temporal continuums.** According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), current and ongoing experiences cannot be studied independently of past experiences, because current experiences are often influenced by earlier experiences; and similarly, will influence any future experiences. As no experience can stand alone in time, stories of Arab immigrant student participants reflect not only current experiences at their high schools at the time of narration but also evoke past experiences in their home countries and expectations for their future lives in Canada. As Xu and Connelly (2009) explain: “everything in the life space, all the time, is in temporal motion” (p. 360) and “thinking narratively means that everything needs to be seen in temporal flow” (p. 223). Therefore, any story told by any of my Arab immigrant student participants is considered within a temporal continuum, unpacking the factors in the past, and the future ambitions that may have

shaped a current experience and perception in order to see change over time of the lived and storied experiences of each participant student. In writing and retelling the stories of student participants, I keep in mind what Welty (1979) points out, that time and place are the two points of reference by which any novel grasps experience.

For instance, the current high schooling experience of an Arab student participant, whose family migrated from their home country fleeing a war-torn zone and in search for peace in Canada, is likely to be influenced by past war-related experiences and the lifelong effects of post-war psychological adjustment.

**Personal–social continuums.** Dewey’s (1938) second criterion of experience is that of interaction. In my study, stories narrated by Arab immigrant student participants reflect the quality of social relations they had in the past and continue to have with their communities and amongst family members, because the experiences they have are a result of combinations of their norms, beliefs, and behaviours, which have been directly or indirectly influenced by their interactions with other peoples in the different societies in which they have lived. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), “In essence, narrative inquiry involves the reconstruction of a person’s experience in relationship both to the other and to a social milieu” (p. 125). In this regard, Xu and Connelly (2009) explain: “narrative inquirers are required, when thinking of a life space, to think about persons in both personal and social dimensions; to think of them as persons with feelings, emotional and aesthetic reactions, and who are always interacting with other people and things in a larger environment” (p. 224).

Different backgrounds lead to different experiences, and require different understandings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). For example, considering the current schooling experience of an Arab immigrant student who comes from a lower-income family, with less-educated parents, and

possibly less support at home is considered and unpacked differently from the experience of a student who comes from a wealthy family, whose parents are better equipped to support him/her academically and financially, because it entails different life experiences and perceptions, and it entails different personal and social interactions with people and situations. Furthermore, the nature of relationships and interactions between the Arab immigrant student participant and his/her schoolmates, teachers and peers, is also considered as part of the interaction continuum and is considered a factor in making educational meaning of the student participants' stories.

**Continuums of place.** This dimension focuses on the importance of physical place in relation to experience. The term *place* entails different living situations or environments such as at school, at home, among school classmates or among friends in community centres, and/or in-home countries versus in Canada. In doing school-based research, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) affirm the importance “To describe seating arrangements, pictures, and layouts on classroom walls in a way that helps tell the narrative and enhance its explanatory capability” (p. 8). While emphasizing the importance of the characters and physical environment, Connelly and Clandinin also remind that these “need, in the writing of narrative, to work in harmony with a third feature of scene, namely, context” (p. 8)

When learning about Arab student participant experiences, I keep in mind that people behave or experience life situations differently in different places, and that “Where things take place always makes a difference to how one may understand a life space” (Xu & Connelly, 2010, p. 361). In other words, experiences can differ to a large extent depending on the situation, formality, culture, and place where these experiences occur. As Xu and Connelly (2009) note,

the specific places where phenomena unfold make a difference. A person may be one kind of person in the classroom, another kind of person in the staffroom with other teachers, still another kind of person in the principal's office, and yet another kind of person meeting with parents during parent/teacher interviews. (p. 224)

For instance, in my inquiry, an Arab immigrant student participant experiencing a conflict with a classmate in his/her home country is not likely to perceive it and react to it the same as one experienced by the same student participant in a Canadian high school context. Considering the contexts of different places in which student participants live helps in concretizing the narratives of each (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

In the core chapters of the study (chapters 4, 5, 6, 7) I re-story student participants' lived experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), in which I describe the schooling experiences including the tensions Arab immigrant students encounter in Canadian high schools, both public and Catholic. In the following four chapters student participants take readers *backward, forward, inwards, and outwards* within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). They travel *backward* in the past as they retell stories of their backgrounds in their home countries, prior to enrolling in Canadian high schools, and their initial experiences as high school students in Canada. They continue to tell their current stories by describing additional encounters within their schools and help me understand how such encounters have shaped their identities and thinking *forward*. Throughout the study, Arab immigrant student participants' pre- and post-immigration experiences are examined with a particular focus on family and school contexts, because no experience is independent of the past, the social contexts within which it occurs, or the place where it happens (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In the process, family, school, and individual contextual factors associated with personal perceptions within the personal and social dimensions are explored in the evolving lives of participants. In the following chapters, I look *inwards* to unpack how these tensions have shaped the student participants' knowledge of the world and their perceptions of their experiences. I then look

*outwards* and examine how the tensions they experience as Arab high school students have taken them to their present situations in relation to their world, both academically and socially.

Following in the footsteps of the founders of narrative inquiry like Connelly and Clandinin (2000), and their academic offspring who continue on the same path like Craig (2002; 2007); Huber (Clandinin & Huber, 2010); He (2002), Ciuffetelli- Parker (2004), Xu (2006) and many others; I retell candid and explicit details about the stories of my student/family participants for the benefit of readers, most notably stakeholders in the education sector, who otherwise may not discover such information through other means. As I present the retold stories, I also remind readers that the majority of these stories have been told to me in Arabic, and I in turn translated them in English and verified them with the participants, as further details specific to each student participant are reported in the story chapters.

### **Schwab's Theory of Practice—Commonplaces of Curriculum**

As a narrative inquirer and educator, I have been inspired by Clandinin and Connelly's (1992, 1996, 2000) and Connelly and Clandinin's (1988, 2006) foregrounding of the significance of experience in education, while drawing on Dewey's (1938) philosophy of education. I have also been influenced by Schwab's (1971, 1973) emphasis on the significance of informed decision-making in practical educational settings and the notion of teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu as all equally important commonplaces that are integral to any educational situation. Schwab (1978) considers teachers as "agents of education" (as cited in Craig 2010b, p. 424) and emphasizes the role they could play in informing teaching policy and practice as doers, deliberators, and debaters. Schwab's commonplaces of curriculum, particularly the teacher, gained special interest and attention in the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1988) and Clandinin and Connelly (1992, 1995) who similarly thought teachers are curriculum makers and not only

act as curriculum implementers. Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) notion of curriculum is that it is "one's life course of action" (p. 1) and that the *curriculum of lives*, is created through the experiences of individuals living in relation (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2014).

In addition, Schwab (1978) argues the existence of both scientific and interpretive forms of truth, and that subject matter needs to place emphasis on "tentative formulations—not facts, but interpretation of facts" (as cited in Craig 2008, p. 1995). Discussing the learner as an essential commonplace to any curricular situation, he argues they are not only minds or knowers, but also "bundles of affect, individual personalities, and earners of livings" (Schwab, 1970, p. 9). In short, Schwab, like Dewey, honored human individuality and personal experience of the learner in any learning situation. To Schwab, milieu is also an integral component of curriculum, including local, state, and national policies governing such educational settings.

Borrowing from Schwab's theorizing, several scholars (e.g., Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 2001; Han & Weiss, 2005; Ozer, 2006) stress that the successful implementation of evidence-based programs in schools, such as efforts to integrate Arab immigrant students, requires a level of cooperation and coordination in both individual and organizational contexts, which encompasses the role of all four commonplaces of curriculum making.

In my research, following Schwab (1973, 1983), I also recognize the centrality of teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu as the four commonplaces in curriculum-making situations, and I enter into discussions of making educational meaning of student participants' stories as I make practical implications, in the conclusion chapter, for school policy makers based on the research findings regarding these four commonplaces. Within the conceptual framework of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) used throughout the study, I draw on Schwab's commonplaces as I illustrate the curricular significance of

participants' narratives, to sketch and discuss implications that I hope, could aid in supporting the adjustment of Arab immigrant students in their transition in different curricular situations

### **Criteria of Narrative Research Rigour**

As Clandinin and Connelly (1990) began the development of narrative inquiry as a qualitative research methodology, the language and criteria for narrative inquiry were still under development, and they then made the suggestion that each researcher must seek and defend the criteria that best apply to her or his work. Later in their more developed conception of narrative inquiry and as they pondered questions of quality in narrative study they mentioned that the criteria “apparency, verisimilitude and transferability,” with which to assess the narrative inquiry’s quality, “continue to be developed” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; p. 188). As narrative inquiry progressed and continued to attract the interest of researchers in the field, the criteria with which quality of narrative research is assessed continued to take shape. In continuing the discussion of such criteria Riessman (2008) concluded that in narrative inquiry, many issues remain to be settled. Yet she emphasized that the validity of narrative research lies in the ability of narrative inquirers to inform future studies and contribute to social change by empowering participants.

Although “Narrative inquiry does not heavily rely on social science terms such as validity, reliability and generalizability for research authenticity” (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2004, p. 27), nonetheless it is well encouraged within narrative research communities for researchers to justify criteria that apply to their inquiries. As Morgan-Fleming (2007) emphasizes in the *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry*, as she discusses principles and practicalities in conducting narrative inquiry, “the narrative inquirer must work to create ‘forms that come closest to the essence of our understandings and present them in trustworthy ways’” (p. 535).

While other forms of research use a set of criteria to gauge the quality of research rigour, narrative researchers use a set that uniquely address the nature of the inquiry's procedures, data collection, and interpretation. While validity, reliability, and generalizability are criteria used within the positivistic research paradigm, "trustworthiness," is the alternative term Lincoln and Guba (1985), used in replacement for *Naturalistic Inquiry* methodologies such as narrative inquiry in which research takes place within natural settings. Qualitative research methodologies within the constructivist research paradigm have since used a set of criteria to establish trustworthiness of research. These criteria are: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Such terms do not necessarily always apply in a narrative inquiry context due to a number of factors:

Unlike other forms of qualitative research—which may be stable with a pre-set outline of methods and procedures—narrative inquiry is a fluid form of investigation (Xu & Connelly, 2010), which tolerates ambiguity (Craig, 2007) and is an against-the-grain method which challenges the logistic view underlying technical rationalist approaches to top-down research methodologies (Craig, 2010b). That is, while other forms of research defend *dependability* as a criterion for rigorous research, the method of narrative inquiry, as well as the form of storying and re-storying fluctuate and change as experiences of participants unfold in context over time, and inquiry takes different unpredicted turns and twists.

In short, in my study I approached participants with no presumed strict hypothesis to be tested and only guiding interview questions to be followed; in fact, student participants led the flow of their story narratives and research procedures took turns from initial plans several times as explained further in the A Fluid School-based Inquiry section.

**Trustworthiness and authenticity.** It is the norm in qualitative research to assume that researchers can bring certain biases or perspectives to their studies, particularly in narrative inquiry as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note that narrative inquirers “are not disembodied recorders of someone else’s experience, because they are also having an experience of the experience” (p. 81). In an effort to show that the results of this study could be confirmed or corroborated by others, and to affirm authenticity of research findings, which other forms of research refer to as *confirmability*, I document detailed procedures for field texts (data) collection through individual interviews, participatory observation, and supplementary data by research informants, in the Research Methods section. I subsequently show triangulation of methods, as described by Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999). In addition, in adherence with the narrative tradition, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasize: “good narrative as having authenticity, as having adequacy and plausibility” (p. 185); I describe steps taken for participants’ verification, checking and rechecking the data throughout the study, as described in the From Interim Research Texts to Research Texts section.

**Verisimilitude—true lifelikeness.** Verisimilitude is cited by Connelly and Clandinin (1990; 2000) as an important criterion with which to judge the value of narrative inquiries. The criterion referred to in other research as *credibility*. Therefore, I emphasize that the aim in narrative inquiry is not to ensure whether or not particular events have occurred; or the truth of narratives of participants; rather, the aim is to explore the meanings and forms of understanding that participants express through stories (Feldman, Skoldberg, Brown, & Homer, 2004; Coulter and Smith, 2009). As Spence (1982) explains that “truths” sought by narrative researchers are “narrative truths,” not “historical truths” (as cited in Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 479). As Polkinghorne (1995) emphasizes, a narrative inquirer does not seek a literal account of history, but rather the faithful

representations of the participants' lives as they see them. This is because, as Elbaz-Luwisch (2004) explains, "events deemed worthy of being remembered and retold in story form are likely to be meaningful to the teller, and to reveal something important about how she understands her life (Measor, 1985; Carter, 1993)" (p. 394).

In storying and restorying Clandinin (2013) points out that, "there is no final telling, no final story, and no one singular story we can tell. We realize that this is not going to be satisfying for those who want to see the truth, or accuracy and verifiability of data" (p. 205).

In addition, Olson and Craig (2005) add that,

Each telling offers a different lens through which to make sense of experience. Our overall purpose, however, is not to convey truth in a time-event correspondence way, as researchers in the historical tradition attempt to do (Spence, 1982); rather, our desire is to burrow into our research stories to seek out meanings that can, overtime, lead to more informed understandings of restorying on our parts and on those of our participants. (p. 165)

The ways I cross-examined field texts also ensured authenticity and trustworthiness of the findings in my research as participants' narrative truths were repeatedly confirmed by what I personally witnessed in the field, and what participants themselves verified as true representations of themselves and their stories. Nonetheless, it is the readers, as Craig (2013) suggests, who determine the trustworthiness of the research, and the trustworthiness of narrative research has to do with its "lifelikeness" and what appears to be "true" (p. 29).

Moreover, the findings of this study examining the experiences of Arab immigrant high school students will hopefully serve as the foundation of subsequent more empirical studies. While it is not presumed that the findings within narrative inquiry can be generalized to a larger group of individuals within the field, the findings are presented with my hope that they will contribute to the broader knowledge of educational experiences of minority group students in Canadian schools. As is the case with narrative inquiry that research is not intended to be

generalized, like the case with other forms of research defending *transferability*, but instead is intended to have “an explanatory, invitational quality” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, as cited in Pushor & Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013, p. 169). In my inquiry, I extrapolate or make modest speculations on the likely applicability of the data to other situations under similar though not identical conditions (Cronbach, 1980, as cited in Patton, 1990).

For the purposes of my study, then, extrapolations are made only to contribute to the specified field by providing findings that may likely serve to aide qualitative and/or quantitative research. As Olson (1995) notes, “narrative of experience can be used to confirm what we already know or to lead to new insights” (p. 124).

**Utility of research study.** Furthermore, coming to understand narrative inquiry, and to address what Eisner (1998) referred to as the utility of the study, I continually asked myself questions like: How do I know that my inquiry is educative and not simply a personal account of narratives; How do I know that anyone in the field of education will be interested in the findings of my research; will my study make a difference; what does narrative inquiry add about the phenomenon of lived experiences of my Arab immigrant student participants that other forms of research do not offer (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)?

In response, I wrote detailed research texts which give meaning and social significance to my use of narrative inquiry as a research methodology in studying lived experiences of Arab immigrant high school students in the opening section of this chapter, Why Narrative Inquiry? I also unpack and discuss the research texts, in chapter 8, in hope of showing potential impact for school programs. in chapter 9; as teachers and school staff all come to know about the details not known or brought forward in other forms of research. Furthermore, in adherence to the criteria used to gauge the intellectual rigour of narrative research, to ensure authenticity, trustworthiness

and to show defensibility, I pay close attention to and document in details, in the Narrative Framework Design section, the research procedures followed throughout the study.

### **Narrative Framework Design**

#### **Negotiation of Entry Into Research Field—Participatory Involvement**

Due to the nature of narrative inquiry and my constant participatory involvement as an inquirer into the lives of Arab immigrant student participants, building rapport was the first step towards getting my participants to feel comfortable enough to share details of their life stories. Consistent with Craig and Huber's (2007) argument in their *Relational Reverberations* chapter in the *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry*, as a narrative inquirer, I considered myself in relationship with other people, places, and things, particularly those with whom I worked closely in the field. As Conle (1999) observes that "When we tell our experiential stories to one another, we tend to get drawn in and become deeply engaged. The distances between tellers and listeners shrink" (p. 12). Just like the dual and multiple roles Dr. Xu adopted in her study with Chinese immigrant families (Xu, 2006; Xu et al., 2007), and the participatory role Dr. Ciuffetelli Parker played along with her participants as they created their *literacy narratives* (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2004), my role as an insider, given that I also am an Arab Canadian, helped break the ice with participants during our initial meetings and interactions. I routinely shared stories with the participants of the study about my schooling experiences that occurred more than 20 years ago, when I arrived in Canada, which is aligned with Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) observation that "Narrative inquiry is ... a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and restorying as the research proceeds" (p. 4).

As I inquired about the lived experiences of my student participants, I made every effort to spend sustained time with participants, and at times with their families depending on the

nature of the latter's participation and ethical boundaries mandated by ethics boards (Clandinin, 2013). I continually tried to make myself useful for those generous Arab immigrant student participants who chose to sacrifice their time to add richness to the study through the telling of their stories. I always kept in mind Conle's (2006) view of narrative inquiry research participants as "co-inquirers and co-learners" (p. 226) in a relational inquiry. As I mentioned earlier, and as I give further details in subsequent chapters, my interaction with the student participants in my study involved more than just listening to their stories as "Narrative research consists of obtaining and then reflecting on people's lived experience and, unlike objectifying and aggregating forms of research, is inherently a relational inquiry" (Josselson, 2007, p. 537). I repeatedly and in different contexts offered academic and social support through tutoring and/or providing advice to student participants as needed. As Clandinin (2013) emphasizes, "Narrative inquirers also negotiate ways they can be helpful to participant(s) both in and following the research" (p. 51).

**A fluid school-based inquiry.** As a narrative researcher (Xu & Connelly, 2010), I came into my inquiry while keeping in mind that as much as I come to this research in the midst of my own life, being in the middle of my career, doctoral studies, and family life, I also come in the midst of my student participants' lives, and in the midst of institutional, social, educational, and familial narratives. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain that

one of the methodological principles we were taught in quantitative analysis was to specify the hypothesis to be tested in research. It does not work like that in narrative inquiry. The purpose and what one is exploring, and finds puzzling, changes as the research progresses. This happens from day to day and week to week, and it happens over the long haul as narratives are retold, puzzles shift, and purposes change. (p. 73)

Thus, while I had a broad sense of the experiences I aimed to examine using narratives of stories, I did not predetermine, nor was I able to predetermine, which unfolding events and experiences

would constitute stories of educative meaning and social significance for the Arab immigrant student participants with whom I would work collaboratively (Craig, 2007).

Therefore, as explained in the Criteria of Narrative Research Rigour section, design and procedures took turns and twists. While my initial intent as I negotiated entry into school sites for the purpose of my inquiry was to exclusively recruit student participants from within schools, and to eventually invite interested parents to join, things did not go precisely as planned. Given the complexity of research situations and factors associated with cultural issues of Arab people, I had to make changes accordingly as detailed in the following section titled School Settings. Furthermore, given the narrative approach adopted in my study, my fieldwork consisted primarily of visits to participating family homes, as well as, visits to three high schools in the city, three to five times per week from November 2013 to June 2014, and ongoing follow-up visits with student participants outside of school during this time and after June 2014. School visits involved observing and volunteering in a number of classrooms, including mathematics and English literature classes, library classes, and mostly in English Language Learning (ELL) related classes. In addition, I interviewed students, teachers, school administrators, and parents, some in and some out of schools.

In late 2013, I began to negotiate my entry into the two school boards in Windsor to enter schools in the city for the purpose of my inquiry. I was granted permission to arrange entry into Catholic schools with principals of the latter schools in December of 2013, while permission from the public-school board was granted to me later in March 2014.

For the purpose of confidentiality, the principals' and all participants' names and certain demographic information including school names are not revealed; all names appearing in the narrative chapters of this document are pseudonyms.

Upon obtaining permission from the Catholic school board in November 2013, I directly visited St. Mary's Catholic High School (pseudonym), which is well known for its effective ELL program offered to newcomer students and for its largely ethnically-diverse population. I had a pleasant meeting with the school principal who welcomed my entry and supported my interest and passion. She carefully read and signed consent forms to allow me access to school premises (see Appendix F). Nonetheless, she asked me to delay my recruitment for participants pending the resolution of certain administrative matters, and I eventually entered the school as a researcher in March 2014.

After obtaining permission from the public-school board in March 2014, I was permitted to visit the principals of two particular public schools in the city upon the condition of concluding my field visits by the end of the school year, and to only interview student participants on school premises. I negotiated entry with the principal of one of the two schools who was very kind and welcoming and who also signed consent forms to allow me access to school premises (see Appendix F), and I immediately started my fieldwork at the school.

### **School Settings**

My inquiry's main school settings involved three different schools in Windsor—two public schools and one Catholic school.

**Windsor public high school.**<sup>3</sup> I entered a public high school in Windsor for the first time in November 2013, only as a volunteer, as Dr. Xu, my research advisor helped me make the connection with one of the schools involved in her Partnership Grant Project entitled, "Reciprocal Learning in Teacher Education and School Education between Canada and China" funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). I was in

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<sup>3</sup> Pseudonyms are used for names of all schools and participants.

the school for 3 days each week for a couple of months, mostly in one of the school's ELL classes to help newcomer students of different backgrounds, including a number of Arab students. Two students (Safa and Basel) from the school eventually volunteered to participate in my study, which is described in greater detail in chapters 4 and 5.

**St. Mary's Catholic high school.** In March 2014, I first met with Mrs. Palmer, the head of the ELL department at St. Mary's, after exchanging several emails in which I expressed my interest in conducting my inquiry in the school. I was given a tour of the school, introduced to several running programs, with particular emphasis on support elements provided for newcomer students. Mrs. Palmer sent out an email to all the English teachers at the school introducing my study and soliciting teachers' participation as research informants, and/or permission to allow me to observe and possibly assist in their classrooms. Fortunately, Ms. Diaz, an ELL teacher, was excited to have me join her class as an observing researcher while I assisted with newcomer students, a large percentage of whom were Arabs. She expressed interest in introducing me to her students as an example of a former immigrant student who had been able to overcome language difficulties and pursue higher education. She described the challenges her students face as newcomers to a Canadian high school and she too was passionate about helping them to succeed and to overcome these challenges.

I was privileged to be in two of Ms. Diaz's classrooms three times each week for the remainder of the school year. I was able to meet many newcomer students in her class and to get a feeling of the school climate as I followed her students to some working areas and computer lab rooms in the school. I discovered that newcomer students, regardless of their religious affiliation, are usually directed to this school due to the availability of the ELL and other support

programs offered to them. This has resulted in an increased number of newcomer students in the school, including those of Arab backgrounds affiliated with different religious denominations.

Mrs. Palmer, the head of the English Department at St. Mary's, permitted me to use a support room for the purpose of student interviews. The support room was a quiet and private room designated for assisting students who require special attention or extra time during testing. Mrs. Palmer asked her English teachers to make a class announcement in each of their classrooms about my study and to ask interested students to contact me via email. I eventually received emails from two Christian female students of Arab backgrounds (Lauren and Bana), and they agreed to join my inquiry after reviewing the consent forms (Appendix A) and having their parents complete parental consent forms granting them permission to participate (Appendix B).

As I interviewed Lauren and Bana individually on several days, they often referred to one of the school's guidance counselors during their stories. I emailed the guidance counselor, Ms. White, and I explained the purpose and objectives of my study and asked if she would be interested in adding her perspective through an individual interview. Ms. White expressed interest and asked me to visit her in her office. I obtained her written consent (see Appendix E) and spent a couple of hours with her on May 24, 2014, during which time she shared several stories about the experiences she had had with Arab newcomer students over the years.

**Queen Elizabeth public high school (QEHS).** Also in March 2014, I visited Mr. McCarthy, the principal of QEHS, to negotiate my entry into his school upon the direction of the public-school board. He showed great interest and cooperation right away as he called a number of teachers into his office to introduce me and to request their cooperation. The teachers were equally welcoming and supportive as they invited me to observe in some classrooms and nominated a number of students to join the study. I was provided with a list of students of Arab backgrounds

along with their contact information; such students represented a very small minority of the school's student population. I contacted the students privately and two of them expressed interest in my study. I met with each of the two students (Labeeb and Deema) several times in the school library at the end of the school day, as individual interviews were held in the same area where academic extra help is provided to all students on a regular basis.

I made arrangements with two teachers to observe occasionally in a number of English classrooms, and obtained permission to visit the school premises for the purpose of individual interviews with student participants as well as with interested teachers. I visited the school twice each week until the end of June. I also approached and explained the research objectives to an English teacher, Ms. Hopper, and asked her if she would be interested in joining the study as a research informant. Ms. Hopper agreed and I obtained her written consent (see Appendix E). I also was privileged to have frequent informal conversations with a number of school staff and teachers who added great value to my inquiry by providing broader perspectives on Arab immigrant students' experiences.

### **Research Participants**

In spite of initial plans to only recruit student participants through school sites, and to recruit five to eight student participants and their parents to add to the richness of my inquiry, eventually the participants and informants of the study comprised seven Arab immigrant high school students (five females and two males, five of whom are Muslims and two Christians) from the Windsor area in Ontario. Four comprised the main student participants of the research study, while three provided insights and supplementary information as research informants. Four of the participating students joined the study through schools' recruitment, while three joined through community relations, more details provided in the core story chapters. The relatively

small number of participants allowed me to gather a breadth of data, including attitudinal and behavioural detailed narrative field texts (i.e., data). All student participants and their parents had immigrated to Canada and therefore student participants are first-generation Canadians. As such, their lived experiences in their respective countries of origin as well as current challenges in adapting to Canadian living are considered central issues to their Canadian high schooling experience.

In addition to the seven students noted above, three parents and three school staff members also were main research informants; some were formally interviewed while others participated in a number of informal conversations and their responses provided important background information to the high schooling experiences of the student participants. I initially invited a larger number of students' family members to participate in the study due to the fluidity of people's lives and keeping in mind the possibility of participants withdrawing from the study at any stage, or losing contact with any of them due to any other reasons (Xu, 2006; Xu & Connelly, 2010).

In conclusion, I intentionally selected and accepted the voluntary participation of those who volunteered from the research population, similar to purposive sampling, and more particularly homogeneous sampling, employed in other qualitative research methodologies. As Creswell (2011) describes, in purposive sampling "researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (p. 206). The main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest to help answer research questions (research puzzles in my study), rather than making generalizations (Creswell, 2011). My purposive selection process resulted in main student participants (four

students), research informants (three students, three parents and two school teachers/staff), and schools for observation (two schools in the city).

Participants' recruitment and inquiry process had to undergo certain ethical measures and reviews in order to protect the rights of all participants while producing educationally meaningful narratives. As Josselson (2007) notes in the *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry*, "narrative researcher is in a dual role – in an intimate relationship with the participant and in a professionally responsible role in the scholarly community" (p. 538).

I applied to the university's Research Ethics Board (REB) to obtain clearance to recruit participants for the research. I initially was only permitted to recruit participants from schools in Windsor; however, due to a number of factors including the timelines predicted at the outset of my research and the lengthy wait period for school boards' clearance, as well as my perception that families of Arab backgrounds may be reluctant to let their children participate in formal studies organized or advertised for through schools, I felt the need to expand my potential participants' population beyond schools. As discussed by Andrews (2007) in the *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry* about issues of cross-cultural boundaries in research studies, "We as [narrative] researchers are influenced by our culture not only in our expectations of the conditions under which people might feel most inclined to give an account of their lives but also in ways in which we are taught to go about gathering this information" (p. 496). Although I too am an Arab immigrant, my access to Arab students through school recruitment was not easy, since a sense of skepticism and cynicism has developed even toward the closest friends. Being familiar with political persecution by different governments in the Middle East, I realized that Arab parents tend to fear the involvement of their children in any organized investigations that, in their perceptions, may lead to their identities being exposed. Building rapport with the families

and allowing them to feel safe and comfortable with the involvement of their children in the study may have been necessary in some cases. I therefore submitted a request to the REB to recruit participants from Arab communities in Windsor as well.

After obtaining approval for the amendment to the recruitment process, I initially posted posters and brochures requesting volunteer students/families to come forward for participation in various community markets and community centres. Through my acquaintances and ongoing volunteering and involvement within the community, several people contacted me and expressed an interest in joining the study. Ultimately, members of only three of the seven participating students' families joined the study through Arab communities' relations. Also, though I had initially planned to accept volunteer students who had been in Canada for no longer than 5 years, I later expanded the pool to include student participants who had resided in Canada for longer periods of time.

In outlining ethical considerations in narrative research Josselson (2007) explains, "ethics demand responsibility to the dignity, privacy, and well-being of those who are studied" (p. 538). In my research, I clearly stated in consent forms and explained in person my role as a researcher, the purpose of the study, the freedom of participants to choose to participate or not, and their right to withdraw before the end of the interview/observation stage. In protecting the privacy of participants and to ensure their safety and confidentiality, all data collected were retained and stored in a secure location and in a confidential manner. I assured participants that their participation and interview answers would remain anonymous in my dissertation report as well as any future publications, with absolutely no personally identifiable information remaining in the final study. Thus, their identities were never revealed to teachers, schoolmates, school community, or the public and pseudonyms were used for participants' names, schools' names,

and any other demographic information to ensure anonymity. It should be noted that I used Arab names for Arab participants to remain close to the context of the research.

## **Research Methods**

**Collecting field texts through participatory observation.** The term “field texts” is used in narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000) instead of the term data “to signal that the texts we compose in narrative inquiry are experiential, intersubjective texts rather than objective texts” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 46). I began by meeting student participants’ family members and gradually started observing student participants in different community and school settings. I observed them in and out of school to see how they interacted with members of their families, communities, classmates, and teachers and how they coped with different challenges. I began by engaging in broad observations with family members, teachers and school staff, and later focused on the study participants themselves.

As I observed student participants out of school, I constantly took descriptive and reflective fieldnotes of their home settings, as well as interactions with members in the community and family members. I also recorded a chronology of events, and verbal quotes of individuals and personal reactions during my home visits (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). I thus followed my advisor’s recommendation: “This is the point of taking fieldnotes in the research field whether you do observations or interviews so that you understand people’s perceptions in their lived experience from the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework” (S. Xu, personal communication, 2014). As I wrote field texts, I made sure to use pseudonyms for any participants observed.

Additionally, volunteering at schools and community activities afforded me a better understanding of the Arab student participants’ lives while I lived along their sides. This

enhanced my understanding of the Arab immigrant student participants' in-school and after-school lives, as Connelly and Clandinin (2006) remark, "a more difficult, time-consuming, intensive, and yet, more profound method is to begin with participants' living because in the end, narrative inquiry is about life and living" (p. 478).

**Collecting field texts through individual interviews.** I eventually arranged meetings with student participants both outside and inside schools (depending on school boards' restrictions) to collect their narratives about their schooling experiences in informal, conversational, and open-ended interviews. Thinking of my research as an ongoing inquiry with pieces to be collected through the use of different methods, I engaged with each student participant in a series of interviews and conversations shaped by my overall research questions, or rather research puzzles (Clandinin, 2013; Xu, 2006). Interviews are usually employed in narrative inquiry as a method of collecting field texts, as described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), and is one of the most common formats in narrative inquiry; "field texts are created, neither found nor discovered" (p. 92). I had originally drafted research questions and interview protocol instruments to use as guiding questions during interviews with participants, as mandated by different ethics boards, yet I deviated from these significantly as student participants led their narratives and directed the flow of discussions. This clearly illustrates Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) observation that researchers may find their research questions and "purposes, and what one is exploring and finds puzzling, change as the research progresses" (p. 69).

Through interviews, I tried to understand how student participants' lives and pasts shaped their immigration experiences, and how their immigration experiences shaped their current lives and educational experiences. The in-depth interviews are what make narrative inquiry interviews a valuable source of collecting field texts. I tried to be flexible in terms of locations to conduct

interviews based on participants' personal preferences, comfort, and convenience. For participants who had been recruited in community settings, I visited family homes several times before I initiated private conversations with student or parent participants; more details on each individual student participant are provided in chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7.

I also invited parents of student participants to voluntarily participate in conversational and semi-structured, open-ended interviews to add their perspectives, and three parents volunteered to do so. Each interview with students or parents lasted 1 to 2 hours, and was conducted either in Arabic (both my and the participants' first language) or a combination of English and Arabic. Student participants were interviewed one to three times each, while parents each were formally interviewed once or twice. In addition, I had a number of informal chats with parents to add greater detail to the content of the interviews and related field texts. Two school staff members—as explained in the Research Participants' section—were also formally interviewed to tell about their experiences with Arab newcomer students.

Parent and teacher participants were all provided with information letters and were asked to sign consent forms if they chose to participate (see Appendices D and E). Parent and teacher interview protocols (Appendices G and H) were only meant to serve as guiding questions and were reviewed and approved by my advisor, the dissertation research committee, as well as REB personnel. Parent and teacher participants were asked to share their stories and perspectives on the schooling experiences of their children/students. Interviews were also audiotaped with their consent.

All interviews began with preliminary questions to get conversations started; however, interviews remained very open-ended to encourage participants to share stories that provided significant and meaningful perceptions of their experiences (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991). In preparation for the interviews, the list of possible interview questions was provided to each

participant student, teacher, and parent at time of consent, and I explained that they had the choice to refrain from answering questions that they did not feel comfortable answering or that they found objectionable. I explained that such questions were only guiding interview questions and that they were encouraged to speak openly about their experiences. During interviews, student participants were urged to speak about their childhood memories, opinions, school and/or family lives, and to comment on any part-time jobs, future plans and ambitions, and/or immediate concerns and fears. In short, they told me their stories in their own ways and on their own terms as per Xu's (2006), Xu and Connelly's (2010), and Clandinin's (2013) principles in collecting field texts. Conversations were audiotaped, with parent/guardians' and students' consent.

In-depth interviews provided rich details concerning the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2009), because participants are mainly viewed as collaborators and knowers (Clandinin, 2013). Therefore, field texts created from interviews were all in the three-dimensional life space, which clearly reflect the "complexity of the life space" (Xu & Connelly, 2010, p. 363). As interviews took place, I continued to jot down personal notes (about details difficult to capture on tape recordings, such as facial expressions, body language, dress codes, and so on) as field texts.

**From field texts to research texts.** In my study, the field texts are the narratives of student participants and research informants derived from formal interviews and informal conversations, as well as additional fieldnotes created through observation and supplementary data from the supplementary informants of the study and presented in chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7; all of which form a set of storied experiences—that is, *narrative accounts*. The research texts are then represented by the discussion and educational meanings derived from the narratives, as presented in chapters 8 and 9.

Elbaz-Luwisch (2010) describes Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) approach to writing research texts:

Their unique approach is to story the research process as one of writing texts, beginning with field texts that are close to the experience of the researcher in the field, moving on to the writing of interim texts that gradually take a distance from the specifics of experience, engage more and more with the formulations of relevant theory, and thus progressing in roughly defined phases towards a final research text. (p. 271)

Following the tradition of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), I examined narratives of student participants as well as an extensive number of fieldnote sets taken during fieldwork observation. I cross-examined field texts within a three-dimensional framework by considering and observing the life events of my student participants at home, at different community events, and at school while taking into consideration the narratives told during interviews. I thus met the criteria pertaining to triangulation, as described by Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999) when referring to how other forms of research check consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods.

While collecting fieldnotes was an ongoing process throughout the whole process of collecting field texts, once narratives of student, parent, and teacher participants were collected through the first set of open-ended interviews, I started transcribing the raw data as I listened to the taped conversations with participants, and interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim then translated into English to facilitate presentation.

The second or third interviews were built upon what was found in the first set of interviews and what I had observed in the different settings, such as points that needed to be revisited (e.g., ELL classes, or homework help programs) or tensions that needed to be identified (e.g., academic struggles), and in some cases I attended to the multiple places where participants were composing their lives, such as home, school, and community centres (Clandinin, 2013). I mostly

began the conversations during the second and third interviews by catching up a bit before moving on.

I did a second, third, and sometimes subsequent round of transcribing, reading, rereading and making notes after every interview, as I was awakened to the importance of certain members in each student participant's life, such as parents or certain siblings, and issues that were uniquely emphasized. I then began to examine transcribed data along with fieldnotes in the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space and I made notes along the margins of the hard copy, which I printed and used to read and reread the transcripts. I paid particular attention to what I was noticing about place, temporality, and sociality. I tried to be attentive to all the characters in the stories of my student participants including parents, siblings, friends, schoolmates, teachers, school staff, and community members in combination with all field texts, identified elements of a story in them, sequenced and organized the story elements in a temporal chronological sense, and then presented a retold story that conveyed the individual experiences. Much like Elbaz-Luwisch (2010) describes, the process of understanding and making meaning of the collected field texts and data, involved synthesizing the data into an explanation that require going back and forth to the data collected and the emerging plot, in an effort to test the stories and their consistency. I finally began to draft a narrative account of each student participant and me in relation.

In exploring the lived experiences of Arab immigrant students in my study, I listened to stories of student participants who came from different parts of the world, experienced different forms of political unrest, and attended different school systems prior to their enrolment in the Canadian education system. I decided in this dissertation to re-tell a number of these stories because I value every single one told and like Olson (2000), I believe that "narrative inquiry opens up new story lines to pursue and new research issues to address" (p. 350), and I wish to

extend such newfound knowledge to stakeholders in the education system who may share my passion for making bridges and easing challenges.

Intellectually, it had been my intention to present a broad picture of the diversity and the dynamics of school life in which Arab immigrant students are not homogeneous but diverse. However, during my fieldwork at the schools and the different observation arrangements in and out of school settings, with student participants and some family members, I was privileged to work with some students more so than others and to observe some students in more unique settings. To ensure presenting a broader perspective in the study, I chose to present the stories of the most representative student participants with whom I spent more time and learned more about their lived experiences; due to the inquiry's fluidity. Also, given the big volume of participants' stories, I decided to trim down the stories of three of the student participants whom I felt resonated to a large degree with the stories of other participants. In the next four chapters, I present the stories of four newcomer Arab immigrant high school students. What is common for all the four core story chapters is that the stories are all about the lived experiences of these students within Canadian high schools as they cope with immigration transitions. However, each of the four chapters also features different characters, plots, settings, and life experiences making each student participant unique. The next four chapters feature the stories of Safa who represents a typical newcomer female returnee to Canada, and Basel whose story represents a lived experience of an Arab immigrant student fleeing a war-torn zone, both of whom I observed in their public school and within family and community settings. The core story chapters also present the stories of Lauren whose narrative account represents a lived experience of a Christian Arab immigrant girl in a Canadian Catholic high school, and Deema who represents a lived experience of a minority newcomer Arab student in a mainly mainstream public school, both of

whom I only met and observed within school settings.

**From interim research texts to research texts.** Because the purpose of narrative inquiry is honouring the experiences of participants and learning from their stories, participants are highly respected and their input is valued. Moreover, because the tradition in narrative inquiry is to ensure that retold stories truly reflect the participants' own voices and narratives the way they meant them to be, and since the schooling experiences of the Arab immigrant students is the phenomenon under study, the student participants are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the interpretations and findings. Therefore, in the later stage of writing research texts and for verification - member checking, I invited student participants for a second stage of individual interviews to negotiate "interim research texts" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 47), through which participants were given the opportunity to review field texts and verify their stories for correction of any factual errors as well as my interpretations because "the trustworthiness of the narrative research lies in the confirmation by the participants of their reported stories of experience" (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 99) and because "Negotiating research texts creates a space where participants' narrative authority is honored" (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 15). In sum, as Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note, the process of writing research texts in narrative inquiry involves the following steps: "Interviews are conducted between researcher and participant, transcripts are made, the meetings are made available for further discussion, and they become part of the ongoing narrative record" (p. 5).

In March 2015, I made contact with all student participants for the purpose of co-composing and negotiating interim research texts that I have worked on; for their input and feedback. As expected, due to the fluidity in peoples' lives (Xu, 2006), I was able to meet in person with only three of the four student participants after I emailed each a tentative narrative

account of their stories, and we met after each had an opportunity to read and think about their accounts. In each meeting, I asked if any of the student participants wanted anything added or changed in her/his story. I was only able to communicate with the remaining student participant via email. Two of the student participants requested some changes be made to their stories or the corresponding analysis, while all were excited and thankful for the opportunity and a couple asked for a copy of the final draft of their stories for them to keep. One student participant asked if she could share her narrative account with friends and family, and she expressed feelings of satisfaction due to her experiences being appreciated.

As I worked through the feedback provided by the student participants after the verification meetings, I realized that their responses helped deepen the ways I composed the research texts in many ways. Fortunately, while my thesis advisor worked with me throughout the process patiently, I was later privileged to have the feedback of my dissertation committee members prior to completing my research texts. This has represented an interdisciplinary “response community” which I believe enriched my inquiry (Clandinin, 2013, p. 210). My response community helped me awaken to methodological and theoretical possibilities as I learned how to listen again and again, and to “retell and relive what it means to be, and become, a narrative inquirer” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 211).

### **Traveling Through Multiple Narrative Accounts—Emergent Themes**

The narrative interpretations in my inquiry were done in two levels, as described by Clandinin (2013). In the first level, narrative accounts were composed of my experiences with the Arab immigrant high school student participants. I was attentive to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space of sociality, temporality, and space. Fieldnotes were examined, read and reread, and analyzed using three tools of analysis: broadening, burrowing, and storying and re-

storying. I drafted narrative accounts and negotiated them with each of the student participants until each was comfortable that the account represented him/her accurately.

Borrowing from the work of narrative researchers in the field (Ciuffetelli Parker & McQuirter Scott, 2010; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Craig, 2013), broadening situates the research texts in the social, historical trajectory of events that took place in Canada and in the home countries of student participants prior to the immigration of the participants. In my study, this brings to light such contextual considerations as the years during which immigration of Arabs started to take place, and the years that followed with all the resulting policy changes concerning their rights and obligations within Canadian society, and all the circumstances that came along in the education sector. Burrowing, on the other hand, involves a deeper look at the tensions the student participants experienced while coping with the immigration challenges. In my study, this was the reconstructing of events from the point of view of the student participants involved in the study, supported by the perspectives of those research informants who immediately surround those participants. Finally, storying and restorying captures transitions in the student participants' social and personal lives as they made sense of their lived experiences in a way that make them visible to research audience. Storying and re-storying does not provide answers; instead, it offers a means of deeper thinking about the cross-cultural lived experiences of Arab immigrant students in transition

In the second level, themes were then formulated on the basis of resonant and repetitive patterns in the narrative accounts of student participants, as I looked across the four individual narrative accounts “to inquire into resonant threads or patterns that [I] could discern” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 132). I did this to offer a deeper and broader meaning of educational contexts in Canadian high schools, in part to help show how to shape schools in ways that may be more

responsive to the different life situations of all Arab immigrant youths. Within the three dimensions of narrative life space, I identified three major threads of— lived experiences in transition from past, to present and future; lived social experiences in relation to family members and school community members; and lived experiences from place to place, in and out of school—as the major dimensions of lived experiences of Arab immigrant high school student participants.

As I looked for emergent themes within the threads in narrative accounts of student participants, I identified two major themes: A Transitional Journey Through Social and Cultural Integration, and Academic Achievement: A Major Life-long Goal. Later, to help me judge if the evidence is strong enough to characterize a recurring, unifying idea as a theme, I used narrative inquiry approaches of transferring field texts into research texts. Upon revisiting the narrative accounts of my student participants, I found that the selected themes matched the five criteria proposed in the work of Owen (1984), Krueger (1998), and Morgan (1998) regarding thematic analysis, particularly, the *repetition* criterion. Yet in making the distinction, what differentiates the narrative approach is that it does not "fracture" data and is case-centered rather than focusing on theorizing across cases (Riessman, 2008). During the review of the data, I found that evidence for the themes appeared in different places throughout the narratives of the student participants as they led the flow of the conversational interviews.

Using the three-dimensional narrative inquiry life pace to frame the discussion and interpretations of participants' stories, I listed the topics, threads, and themes that emerged out of each participant's data and found that the overlapping topics and themes of participants clearly fell into the frame of personal-social interactions. Given that students' interactions with people and situations in and out of school surfaced as the most powerful component, I decided to

structure the discussions of their stories around such interactions over time and in places within school. Paying attention to the two dimensions of temporality and space, I chose to begin by discussing participants' stories within the temporal dimension while illustrating how transformations in the shapes and qualities of their interactions took place over time, within the personal and social dimensions. I therefore discussed social integration and academic achievement as major themes as elements of past, present, and future lived experiences, followed by themes of relations with peers, teachers, and family members. I then wrote each sub-section in a way to present changes that occurred, if any, over the journey in transition from past lived experiences in home countries, upon arrival in Canada, and over the period of time spent in Canadian schools. Finally, I discussed how certain places within home country versus Canada, within school versus home, and within certain classrooms at school, where events unfurl, helped in concretizing each narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), and how the contexts within such places aided in shaping the overall schooling experiences of participants.

In the following four chapters, the life stories of the four main student participants, highlighting their past lived experiences in their home countries, their transitional experiences during the immigration process, and their current lived experiences as students in Canadian high schools are presented. For the purpose of confidentiality, all participants' names and certain demographic information including school names are not revealed; all names appearing in those four core narrative chapters of this document are pseudonyms.

As has been mentioned in earlier sections and further details are described in the core chapters, the four main Arab student participants are nationals of four different countries: Somalia, Palestine, Iraq, and Syria. Three of the students attend different public high schools in the city, while one attends a Catholic high school. In addition, three follow the Islamic religion

and one follows Christianity. Further details about the life stories of these Arab high school students are presented in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER 4: SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC CHALLENGES

### **Safa—Story of a 17-Year-Old Somali Student**

#### **Meeting Safa's Family**

On a November morning in 2012, after I had dropped my children off at school and was on my way to my office at the University of Windsor, I saw a family van on the side of a main street parked next to an ambulance. A Muslim lady dressed in hijab was standing there talking to the paramedics while looking panicky and out of control. I glanced at the van and saw a number of children, and, without much thought, I turned around and parked next to the van. I got out of my car and walked to the hijabi lady, who seemed to be the mother of the children in the van, and asked if there was anything I could do to help. I imagined myself in that situation and thought how much support I would have probably needed if I were in her shoes. The lady looked happy to see me and asked if I could stay with her children in the van for a few minutes. I immediately did that as I chatted with the children in an effort to distract them from what seemed like a stressful situation. A few minutes later, mother came to the van and we both introduced ourselves. She told me that her name was Dana and that she had only been in Windsor for a week and that one of her daughters was feeling her chest getting tighter as the family was on its way to the public library in the area for a morning tour. The daughter felt better after a short medical procedure that the paramedics performed on her in the ambulance and was ready to leave a few minutes later. The lady was grateful, and we exchanged phone numbers. I asked her to call if she needed help with anything, and we parted.

Later that evening and with no prior arrangement, I once again saw the lady, Dana, with her children for the second time in a community gathering and had a chance to get to know this lovely family better as we all introduced ourselves to one another and chatted a little. This was

how I met Dana, and her children.

I started to learn more about Dana and Safa's family and their lifestyle in Canada and Somalia as we continued to see more of each other. During that time, I personally made sure I kept a regular routine of taking my children to a community social gathering that was held on Friday evenings, in an effort to keep my children connected to their culture and language. With time, my children befriended Dana's boys and started to play with them in the community centre whenever we met them there. Eventually, we also arranged play dates for the boys at parks or playgrounds, and Dana, the girls, and we spent some time chatting and enjoying some coffee and snacks as the boys played. Although quite fluent in English, Dana would speak Arabic with a mix of some English whenever we met. The girls, on the other hand, spoke only Arabic to me.

Although I was not given permission by the public-school board to enter the public high school which the girls attended; for observation, I was lucky enough to have had repeated chances to observe the school environment as I volunteered in some ELL classes at the school in 2013, prior to becoming friends with Safa and the family. I also had chances to meet with the family in different settings out of school. This allowed me to watch the progress of the young ladies from a distance as we chatted when we met. They repeatedly expressed how overwhelmed they were with all the challenges they had to overcome both academically and socially. Dana also expressed many times her concerns about the girls coping at school and how it was challenging to manage family affairs on her own while her husband worked away from home during weekdays. Monem, the father, worked as a truck driver, transporting goods back and forth to the U.S. via the Windsor–Detroit border. This was the reason why they chose Windsor as their new hometown when they returned to Canada in 2012 after spending 11 years in Somalia.

The family consists of the parents, four girls aged, 20, 17; 15; 13, and two boys, 10 and 7. Since their return to Canada in late 2012 and until the time of research participation in March 2014, the three older daughters all attended the same public high school that had a large population of newcomers. While their youngest sister, and the boys attended a public elementary school. Dana, the mother, occasionally asked me to chat with the girls and offer advice as she knew I had been an immigrant high school student myself and that they were going through similar struggles. Our friendship grew stronger with time, and, when I was granted permission from the REB at the University of Windsor to recruit research participants—both from schools and the community a year later—Dana and her daughter Safa were amongst the first to express interest in participating in the study.

### **Safa's Transitional Experiences Between Canada and Somalia**

Safa, Dana's second daughter, is a 17-year-old girl who was born in Canada and was then brought back to Somalia when she was 4 years old. Safa was raised in Somalia from 2000 to 2012, until she turned 16. She had recently returned with her family to Canada and had been in Windsor for a little over a year (at the time of research participation) since late 2012.

Safa's parents had been residents of Canada since they were young. Dana, the mother, had emigrated from Somalia with her family when she was 10; Monem, the father, on the other hand, came to Canada as a refugee in the early 1980s after he had finished his high-school education in Somalia. In the 1990s, the couple met each other at community gatherings and events in the Greater Toronto Area, and got married shortly after as the marriage was arranged by present members of their families. Dana, Safa's mom, was only 13 then, and had felt excited about getting married at the time; she dropped out of school when she married, thus ending her educational life at the grade-8 level. The young couple's life had a number of turns and twists as their family grew

bigger and they started to move from one place to another.

**Safa's life in Somalia.** Safa's parents continued to live in Toronto for a few years after they were married and had their four daughters. They later decided in 2000 that it was time for the family to move back to Somalia to make sure that their girls properly learned the Somali language, traditions, and religion. Safa was 4 years old at the time and had not yet attended school. It was a tough decision since the couple knew it was not going to be easy for Safa's father to find a decent job back home in Somalia to provide for his family, so Safa's mother and the girls moved back while he stayed in Toronto and continued to work as a truck driver.

Safa's father had stayed in Canada for 11 years while his family remained in Somalia. During that time, the father traveled to Somalia every year to spend a few weeks with his family. Throughout the 11 years, Dana, Safa's mother, returned to Toronto twice, once in 2003 and once in 2005 to have her baby boys, and spent some time with her husband while her in-laws (paternal grandmother and aunts) took care of her four daughters. For a few years afterwards, Dana and her children were all in Somalia, and Monem, Safa's father, continued to work as a truck driver in Canada and only went to Somalia to visit and spend time with his family.

Living apart from Safa's father required the mother to take on more family responsibilities as a single parent. Looking for the most suitable living conditions for her family, the mother moved with her daughters from one city to another in Somalia. Their relocations involved a number of changes in the children's schooling arrangements.

**Safa's schooling in Somalia (grades 1 to 9).** Learning about Safa's current schooling experiences entailed gaining a broader knowledge of her past schooling, as pasts are inseparable of present experiences (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Safa attended grades 1 to 3 in the first town they settled in upon their arrival in Somalia before she and her siblings were homeschooled

for 1 year as they relocated to another city. The mother hired tutors to come home and help the children with all the subjects according to the country's school curriculum. Safa was therefore homeschooled for grade 4. As Safa spoke about her returning to school experience after being homeschooled for one year, she said:

When I went back to school for grade 5 after being home-schooled for a year, I was the best in class in mathematics, and I was very good at all other subjects. And I continued to do very well in school for many years afterwards, and I always believed that I was smarter than most of my classmates.<sup>4</sup> (Individual interview in coffee shop, March 22, 2014)

During the 11 years, the family spent in Somalia, Safa and all her siblings attended a religious school to read and memorize the Islamic Holy book, the Quran every day. They attended the religious school in afternoons after their regular school day. Safa was the first of her siblings to complete the memorization of the Holy Quran, at 13 years of age, a tradition that some Muslim parents continue to uphold as a way of helping their children learn the teachings of Islam. She spoke proudly of her accomplishment as she described the laptop her grandmother gifted her as a reward at the time. A device very few owned back in Somalia at the time.

For her schooling in Somalia, Safa and her older sister went together to the same Arabic primary schools from grades 1 through 8, while her younger sisters went to another, because of age differences. Safa told me that in Somalia, school-aged children either went to Arabic- or English-speaking schools. In either type of schools teachers were mainly males due to the lack of qualified female teachers, she explained. Since Safa had attended an Arabic school for the majority of her primary education, her parents decided that she would continue to attend an Arabic school for her secondary education.

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all participants' citations were translated by the researcher from Arabic to English as accurately as possible in order to retain both the content and tone of participants' narratives.

**Safa’ challenges in Somali high school.** As per her parents’ decision, Safa therefore was enrolled in an all-Arabic private secondary school. Safa believed that she was a high achiever throughout her academic life, until as she explained:

It was getting harder and harder, and I was starting to feel overwhelmed with the workload and the difficulty of the material to be studied. It was the same time at which I became acquainted with friends from our neighbourhood who kept on telling me that the English-speaking schools were much easier.

In probing about why she did not seek help from teachers at school, Safa explained,

That’s something I couldn’t do back home. You know how in Somalia the teachers are all male? If I or any other female student approaches a teacher to ask for help after class or even if we keep asking questions during class, we would be thought of as flirting with the teacher. And that’s so culturally unacceptable in Somalia and gives you a bad reputation.

So, I decided to transfer to an English-speaking school, which was a big move for me. I didn’t know much English. There was one English –as a second language- course per grade level taught in the Arabic schools that I have attended all my life. It was also of a very negligible importance in terms of grades. So, throughout my grade school years I never made much effort to learn the language. And then, when I transferred to the English school, a lot of things started to change in my life. I was starting to do poorly in school. I started failing tremendously in some subjects and mainly in the language class. I was also going through a tough time at home. That’s when my sister got sick and my mom started getting busy with her and then took her to Canada for medical checkups. (Individual interview in coffee shop, April 19, 2014)

**Safa’s family in Somalia.** In addition to the academic challenges Safa was experiencing as she enrolled in high school in Somalia, other family circumstances took place which had an effect on her social life as well. In 2011, one of Safa’s sisters started to get health symptoms indicating that she needed medical care. Dana, Safa’s mother, took her ill daughter to see doctors all over Somalia and was dissatisfied with the lack of diagnosis. She therefore took her back to Toronto to get the opinions of medical doctors in the city. Dana left the rest of her children in the care of her in-laws once again (years earlier she did the same when she had her baby boys in Canada in 2003 and 2005). She spent over 5 months in Toronto in 2011 going from one doctor to another to find out what was going on with her daughter. Because of the length of time it took to

get the needed medical attention and to perform all the required testing for her daughter, Dana finally left Toronto without a confirmed diagnosis of her daughter's symptoms and went back home to Somalia with the girl. This raised concerns for the family; as the well-being of the girl was being at risk with minimal health care provided in Somalia.

**Safa's new challenges in Somali high school.** During the months while Safa's mother was away taking care of her ill daughter, Safa's academic scores became lower and lower. Safa being concerned with her family's current circumstances felt the need to hide her marks from her mother in order not to disappoint her, and was thinking she would still be able to catch up with her grades. Nonetheless, things got out of control and she started to feel helpless. In the midst of feeling miserable, she became acquainted with friends whom she called "slackers" [Safa used the English word while she was telling me the whole story in Arabic] and non-achievers. Consequently, while still in Somalia, Safa started to care less at school, and her relationship with her mom got negatively affected as her mother later became aware of the situation, upon her return from her medical trip to Canada in 2011.

Upon the mother's return, she realized that things were slipping out of her control and realized how important it was to sit with Safa to have a chat. Safa was resistant to her mother's efforts to help her catch up at school at first. Safa explained: "I thought that my mom was so mean to me and so I started to become less obedient." (Individual interview in coffee shop, April 19, 2014). Later, Dana, Safa's mother, spoke about this period of Safa's life:

It was a tough time for me, too. I continuously felt frustrated and angry to see Safa turning into a bad girl. I had always thought of her as a wonderful young lady of whom I was proud. She became disobedient and stubborn and got worse day after day. At times, I felt helpless and cried so much. Her school principal called me once and said, "I am embarrassed to call you about this, and I also can't believe Safa is getting in trouble." He called to tell me that Safa was caught drawing graffiti on the school walls with a bunch of her friends.

I spent a few months feeling helpless, as I tried different methods of dealing with the situation. At times I grounded her, I took away privileges, I did not permit her to see her friends, and I stopped talking to her. On the other hand, I always shared my misery with my husband whenever he called. At the same time, I also kept on praying for her to get back on track and to start realizing her wrongdoing. It was getting harder and harder to take care of the children, three of whom were going through adolescence. (Individual interview in coffee shop, June 11, 2014)

As Safa's mother continued to reason with her over a period of a few months, Safa came forward about her wrong doing and mother promised to help her get back on track in school.

Safa said:

I had to break up with the friends I had made over the past few months, who had been a bad influence in my life. And this is how I developed a strong relationship with my mom ever since. Although I regret everything I did during that period of my life and wish it never happened, I think I've learned a lot from that experience. I also gained my current strong relationship with my mom. (Individual interview in coffee shop, April 19, 2014)

### **Father's Decision to Bring Safa's Family Back to Canada**

In summer 2012, Monem, Safa's father, visited his family in Somalia like he did every summer. One morning as he got out of bed he asked his wife to make no plans for the evening as he was planning to take her out for dinner. Dana, Safa's mother got excited about the dinner plans, yet a little worried because her husband rarely asked to go out with her without their children, as she explained. She said: "I had a feeling that he had some news to tell me, and I wasn't sure what kind of news to expect".

In the evening, and after Dana and her husband had a nice meal in their favourite restaurant, he revealed his dramatic decision to change the family living arrangements. He explained that he no longer wished to continue to live apart as they did for many years and that he was ready to take the family back to Canada. He explained that he felt it was no longer efficient for the family to stay in Somalia, given the medical attention one of the daughters

needed, in addition to the support he thought he can offer to his wife in parenting their teenage girls. Safa's mother narrated the story:

I was shocked when he told me. I wasn't expecting it. I had wanted to come back to Canada for many years, but throughout all those years he was so determined not to bring us back that I eventually let go of my desire. I never even tried to teach the kids English because I never knew we'd end up taking them to Canada. When he first told me he wanted us to return to Canada, I was a little disappointed because I had grown accustomed to living in Somalia again; it had been 11 years since the girls and I returned to live in Somalia. I had mixed emotions, but I never said no. I took his offer seriously and immediately started making arrangements for the move. (Individual interview in coffee shop, July 16, 2014)

### **Safa's Family Returns to Canada**

As much as the father's decision to bring the family back to Canada was a shock to Safa's mother, so it was to all her children. Safa and her siblings had no chance to properly say goodbyes to their friends and family; as they were only told of the news one week prior to their leaving Somalia.

It was already the end of October 2012, as Safa and her family arrived for the first time in Windsor and were taken by her father to the house he had already rented for them. He had also purchased a minivan for his wife to drive the children in as he went back to his work. This was one week before I had the pleasure of run into Safa and her family for the first time, yet many more meetings were destined to occur between us.

**Safa's life in Canada.** It was a Saturday afternoon in March. Dana, Safa's mother, had invited me to her home for the first time so that we could have a chat about school life. I took this opportunity to explain in detail what the research study entailed. Everyone except the father was home, and we all enjoyed some tea together.

I was a little surprised to find out that the family lived in an upper-middle-class suburban area in Windsor as I recalled a casual conversation I had with Dana once, in which she said: "It can

be overwhelming to have to provide for a family of eight in Canada, especially when you also have a financial responsibility towards family back home in Somalia.”

When I arrived, it was one of Safa’s younger sisters, who opened the door and welcomed me and my two children in. The girl said her mom went across the border to the U.S. for grocery shopping and should be on her way back. She quickly called her mother on the phone and her mother insisted I go inside and wait for her. I sat in the guest hall and chatted with the girl as we waited for her mother’s return. I was intrigued by the simplicity yet lively home décor of the house. There were green plants, some artificial and some real, in a number of corners in the hall and delicate metallicly coloured wall pieces decorated the walls surrounding the simple beige and turquoise couches. The house looked too clean for a family of eight. The only thing I saw that indicated the number of people who lived in the house was the shoe shelves by the entrance. There were at least 15 pairs of different styles and sizes neatly placed on them.

It wasn’t long before Dana, the mother, was back home with her groceries. Everyone rushed to help with carrying the groceries into the house while the boys went downstairs to play. Dana freshened up and came to sit with me. She then explained:

We send money to my husband’s mom every month, and occasionally to his sisters, too. A lot of my Somali friends who are financially capable send money back home, too. So, I do my best to save a little by going across the border a couple of times a month for our grocery shopping. (Family visit—informal conversation, March 15, 2014)

Later, Dana’s four daughters took turns sitting with us and participating in the conversation, which was mostly in Arabic since the girls were less fluent in English than their mother. In the meantime, the others put groceries away. They finally all made it to the guests’ room with two trays of sweets and cheesecake and a tray of tea and mugs. They helped their mom in serving the tea and sweets, and everyone seemed to know their jobs. We chatted and

talked about several things as each of the girls spoke about different aspects of school or home. Safa told me that she was training for her driving test and that she was very excited to get her driver's license in order to relieve some of her mom's daily load in driving children back and forth from school and other activities in the afternoon several times a day.

Before I left that day, Dana, the mother volunteered to participate in the study along with Safa, the 17-year-old girl. We agreed that it was going to be more convenient for everyone if I took Safa out for coffee as we chatted about her experience for her research interviews given how busy their house would be with all the siblings around; and this is how I have come to know more about Safa's life and school experience in Canada. (Fieldnotes—family visit, March 15, 2014).

**Safa's schooling in Canada.** Following my home visit with Safa's family, I picked Safa up a couple of weeks later on a Saturday morning and went to a coffee shop close to their house. I went in with Safa and stood in the line to get a coffee. I asked Safa what she would like to have, but she was quite shy and insisted that she did not want anything. When I told her that I was getting her something anyway, she finally asked for an iced latte with a cookie. I immediately noticed that her English was not weak at all and that she did not seem to have any difficulty communicating in English.

***Working round the clock.*** As Safa and I sat ourselves at the round table in the corner of the coffee shop I asked her how her English became that fluent, she explained: "My mom helped us a lot. She hired a private tutor as soon as we got here and we spent an hour daily just practicing conversational English." She then added:

My mom used to pick us up every day from school. We didn't have enough time to go back home to eat, so she used to bring our dinner for us to eat on our way. She used to drive us to the public library, and we spent a couple of hours with the tutor every day. We used to take turns. Two of my sisters and I would spend an hour with him mostly chatting,

and he used to introduce us to common expressions and make us talk about school. Then it was our youngest sister, and the boys' turn. We used to work on our homework assignments when it was the younger ones' turn to work with the tutor. Once we were done, my mom drove us to the community recreation centre closest to our house where my brothers were enrolled in a mathematics boot camp. The boys went to attend their math class for an hour while we continued to work on our homework assignments in the car as we waited for them. Sometimes I needed extra help in mathematics, too, so I occasionally sat with another tutor that my mom also hired for me. We basically spent all our days running from place to place. It's like we lived in our van [giggling]. I felt like we were working round the clock for the first year. Things are much better now in terms of our language acquisition; we are not very fluent yet, but our English has generally improved a great deal, so we've stopped the tutoring sessions. (Individual interview in coffee shop, April 19, 2014)

Safa's passion for success and her determination jumped at me clearly since our initial conversations, as she described how she and her family members were all so committed to get through the tough times of language and cultural adjustment at school. A couple of months later, as Safa's mother and I chatted; she explained how she strived to help her children succeed and shared her concern about her children's education. She said,

It can be challenging at times to raise children in Canada. We always have to make sure they are doing well at school, they are not losing their identities, and they clearly understand their religious affiliation. This was the reason we took them back to Somalia in the first place. Nonetheless, I believe that they have better life opportunities here, and I will continue to do everything I can to provide them with the opportunities I was not provided with when I was their age. I was married at a very young age. My mother was remarried after her divorce with my father and her husband did not wish for me to stay around. I didn't know better and I thought marriage was my only way out of that house then. I cannot complain because my husband is one of the best men I've come to know, but I shouldn't have had to take responsibility of a family at such a young age. I wish for my daughters all to go to university and to get honourable degrees, but I can't force them to. I can only help them throughout the journey, and the choice will be theirs. (Individual interview in coffee shop, July 16, 2014)

***Silence—A big challenge at school.*** After Safa had narrated her immigration story, she began to describe her feelings upon transitioning to her new life in Canada and her early days at Windsor public high school, she explained:

I was shocked when I first came. I spent all my days at school without talking to anyone. I

felt that my world had completely flipped upside down. The hardest thing to cope with was that I was too shy to ask when I had a question in class. (Individual interview in coffee shop, April 19, 2014)

I told Safa that I, too, felt a culture shock when I first came to Canada and was enrolled in high school. I explained that it took me a whole year to be able to communicate with teachers and even my classmates. She explained that she had a very hard time speaking up in classes when she needed to. Her hardest was a mathematics mainstream class,

I did not feel confident enough in my language skills, so I always preferred to stay quiet rather than making a fool of myself. In computer class, it was a little easier because I would be working at my workstation and I would raise my hand for the teacher to come close before I asked. In math, I would raise my hand after fighting an internal battle, and then all the words would just jam in my mouth, and I wouldn't be able to utter a word. I would start talking very quietly and the teacher wouldn't hear me. She would ask me to raise my voice, and I would just stop talking and look down. She would come to my desk if she was in a good mood or she would just ignore me and carry on explaining the lesson. I wish math teachers would understand more of how we feel and know more about our struggles. If my math teacher understood, she would have probably tried not to embarrass me or she would at least put some effort into helping me after class or something. Instead, I had to stay after class and push her to explain to me while she showed no interest. She seemed like a teacher who lacked motivation in general, and it was worse when dealing with me because I needed more help, of course.

I realized that Safa was opening up and sharing feelings that have kept her uncomfortable in some of her classrooms. As she spoke about her mathematics teacher, I understood that mathematics in particular had created more problems for Safa than did other subjects. She also added:

When I did my first oral exam in the ESL class, my teacher told me I was doing well and it was about time to participate in class discussions and that I had nothing to fear. Even in level B (that's the second level), a boy in my class came up to me once and told me that my English had improved a great deal. I was surprised to hear it, but he sure made my day. Ever since that day, I started to occasionally have more courage to speak up in the classroom. I started to ask questions when I needed to. (Individual interview in coffee shop, April 19, 2014)

*Not making friends—An added challenge.* When Safa mentioned how her classmate’s comment about the progress of her language skills encouraged her to slowly come out of her shell, I told her how I also struggled in a similar sense, as my personal experience of being too quiet made it harder for me to make friends during my high-school years. She immediately seemed to relate as she explained that making friends at school has not been easy for her. Although there’s a big population of multicultural students in her school, she was still unable to let her guard down around most. She explained that she is friendly with everyone in the school, and she says hi to so many people every morning, yet she always keeps her distance.

Knowing Safa from community events and the multiple times I’ve met her with her family, I have perceived her as a friendly and sociable person. Her obvious harsh critique of her social relations at school, led me to wonder about what might have caused her cautious interactions with schoolmates. As I probed for more, she continued to narrate:

Let me tell you about this incident that happened to me one day at school. I was walking in the hallway once during my free period, and there was one girl walking in front of me. Apparently, she had her phone or her iPod in the front pocket of her backpack, and her earphones were hanging out of the pocket, and she was about to step on them. I ran up to her and held the earphones in my hand and said, “your ear buds are about to fall,” and I just walked away. Later that day, one of my classmates came up to me and blamed me for trying to help. She said that the girl I tried to help earlier told her friends that I tried to steal her earphones instead. I was so hurt and offended and decided its best if I just stayed away from these people. I could’ve made a big deal out of it and complained to someone in the office, but, instead, I thought it was best to stay out of trouble and stay focused on my work. A lot of people in my school get in trouble and even get suspended over such incidents. I used to be different back in Somalia. I would never back off if I was offended by someone. Now things are different, I can’t afford to waste my energy on such issues anymore. My plate is full enough. (Individual interview in coffee shop, April 19, 2014)

The incident Safa shared seemed to make her more cautious and uncomfortable around schoolmates, creating more social tensions for her.

*Mathematics nightmares!* In addition to the social tensions that Safa had to deal with in her high school, she also had to overcome academic challenges, she noted, “When I was at the

second level (level B) of ESL, I was placed in a mainstream mathematics class.” I asked: “You must have been pleased with the placement because it was a sign of improvement!” she immediately replied:

Well, it was not really all that great because I was still struggling with the language. I had to acquire mathematical skills along with mathematical English terminology. So, I failed the first test and then passed the midterm with a 56%. (Individual interview in coffee shop, April 19, 2014)

“Have you ever approached your teacher for help out of class?” I probed.

She looked unhappy as she explained,

No, I never did. First of all, our teacher was changed in the middle of the semester, and I had to adapt again, but it was difficult. And neither one of the two teachers made me feel welcome to ask for help anyway. They both seemed uninterested in offering a helping hand whenever I had the courage to ask. So, I failed the following two tests and got depressed and stopped trying. Then, one day I was talking to my [level B] ESL teacher, who is a wonderful person, and I told her that I was having a hard time in mathematics. She called my mom that evening, and told my mom that I needed extra support. That’s why my mom hired the mathematics tutor to help me out. I ended up passing the course but with a very low grade. When other students would try to ask me about my test marks when we got our marks back after a test, and I was just too ashamed to answer them, so I would pretend not to understand them.

I then went to summer school to improve my grade and ended up continuing to struggle with applied math. Word problems continued to pose a challenge because it was harder to understand the contexts of questions and thus to use mathematical skills in the right place. I hated the whole thing, because I originally used to love mathematics and felt brilliant back home, and things changed completely for me when I got here. I also hated the school itself in summer school. I felt so lonely because it was mostly mainstream students, mostly from other schools, and I didn’t know anyone. Even the couple of Arab girls in the class were not welcoming at all, so I always ended up working all alone even when we were allowed to work in groups. (Individual interview in coffee shop, April 19, 2014)

She added as she spoke about her summer school experience:

I just wish I had a partner to work with, especially in math class. Back home people raced to be partners with me in class because they knew I could be a good source of help. Now, I feel like I want to have a partner, but people prefer not to work with me because I can become a distraction and a waste of their time. Anyhow, I managed to pass the course with a 60%. It was a tough 2 weeks for me though. I used to have math nightmares. My sisters

would laugh at me in the morning and tell me that I recited mathematical formulae in my sleep [giggling].

Unlike Safa, I personally thought that mathematics saved my life when I first enrolled in high school, as it was easier to come around due to less use of words and phrases as is the case with other subjects. It also made me gain confidence in my abilities to achieve high grades in a subject many considered more difficult than other subjects. Safa continued,

This year, in the fall semester, I did not take any math, but this semester I am taking it, and I feel that my English has become better. Although I still struggle with the word problems, I am determined to do whatever it takes for me to get a grade higher than 85% this year. (Individual interview in coffee shop, April 19, 2014)

This was how I offered to help Safa with studying mathematics on a regular basis given my experience as a high school mathematics teacher for a few years prior to resuming my graduate studies, and I started to meet up with her once every weekend to help go over some mathematical exercises. This gave me a chance to know more about Safa as she shared a lot about her schooling and her experience as a newcomer Arab Canadian. When we met, she would be too shy to ask me to book the time for our math sessions because as she said, she didn't want to be a burden. She repeatedly apologized because she thought that she overwhelmed me with tutoring sessions. Nonetheless, she would be very prepared with plenty of questions and exercises marked for us to do together. Safa's attitude towards her schoolwork showed the high standards she possessed in accomplishing tasks required of her. I felt drawn to helping her overcome her math struggles and wished to see her succeed and give back a little of how much she was offering to the research study through her voice and stories. I continued to work with her until the semester was over, and she had a final grade of 68%, which was not a surprise for her but a great disappointment, given all the effort. She eventually decided to go to summer school again this

year in the hope of improving her mark because she was thinking of university acceptance and how her grade would affect her life choices.

***Support programs at school.*** Although Safa was constantly trying to overcome different types of challenges, particularly over the first couple of years, she expressed how grateful she was for having a support system at her school. She spoke about the journey she has gone through in the ELL program, moving from one level to the next in different conversations, she once said: “The good thing about the classes for ESL students was that teachers did not deal with us like they did with mainstream students. They spoke slowly so we wouldn’t be lost”. (Individual interview in coffee shop, April 19, 2014) and later she said with a smile on her face: “I think it’s an amazing program. I have learned a great deal of English from these classes. I have always felt more comfortable in these classes contrary to mainstream classes where I felt estranged and lonely” (Individual interview in coffee shop, May 16, 2014).

I was pleased to learn about the extent of support the ELL programs provided for Safa and students like her, and in trying to find out more about the different programs for newcomers, I asked Safa if she knew of any events or activities that took place in her school that were dedicated to supporting immigrant students at school or the Arab students in particular. She mentioned that the school offered Muslim students a room during lunchtime to perform their noon prayers and a bigger room on Fridays for their congregational prayer that is usually led either by one of the students or a Muslim teacher from the school.

A few weeks later, as Safa’s mother and I had coffee together, we talked about extracurricular activities at Safa’s school. She explained that her daughters were not involved in any extracurricular activities because they hardly had enough time to catch up with their school work. She also added:

Also, honestly, the events they had at school did not necessarily complement our cultural and religious values. Like, for example, the multicultural day that they held at their school, I don't think it greatly benefited my girls. They did participate, but I wasn't convinced it did them any good. Their school has a large population of students from very different backgrounds. I've always heard of the fights that take place on the school campus. So, I tried to avoid leaving them at school for much longer after school is over. Let alone staying for extra-curricula's. (Individual interview in coffee shop, June 11, 2014)

***Friendly teachers make Safa's life brighter.*** Although Safa needed to deal with academic and social tensions at school, she Also encountered, what she perceived as, very friendly teachers, who made her feel safe to go to them whenever she needed help, not only academically. While she sadly spoke about her math struggles, she smiled briefly as she began to express her gratitude for a guidance counselor at her school who had gone an extra mile to help her get through the difficulties she faced in her science class once. She explained,

When I told her that I was having difficulties understanding what's going on in science, she wrote a note in her agenda and then called me into her office the next week and asked if I would like to have a tutor help me during lunch time for free. I was so delighted because I was in desperate need of help. I think she spoke to one of the student-teachers who was training at our school and asked if she would help. (Individual interview in coffee shop, May 16, 2014)

**Safa's family in Canada.** Over a period of 4 months, during which Safa and I chatted about school on different occasions, in addition to expressing gratitude to those passionate teachers at her school, she repeatedly expressed her gratitude for her mother and said that she could not do it without the support of both her parents and that she much appreciated it. Safa's mom continues to offer support to her girls both academically and emotionally despite the fact that she herself did not go to high school.

One Saturday morning before the final exams, I was at the family's garage in my car as I waited to pick Safa up for one of our tutoring sessions, when her mother stepped out to greet me. She thanked me for helping Safa with her mathematics and briefly asked me how I thought Safa

was doing. As I tried to make the mother feel at ease about Safa's mathematics coming up exams, Safa ran out and jumped into my car. We waved at her mother as I drove away and I said: "you have such a caring mom, Safa. Is she always that concerned about all of you?"

Safa replied: "My mom can be not only caring but also overprotective at times. She stays in touch with all our teachers. She calls in and checks on us. She also tells teachers to call her if an issue ever comes up that needs her attention." (Individual interview in coffee shop, June 21, 2014)

She also added as she continued to talk about her mom's involvement:

I once had a conflict with one of my ESL teachers. We were asked to write an essay. I wrote mine and handed it in. When the teacher marked the essays, she wrote a note for me to come see her. I stayed after class and asked her what the problem was and was surprised when she told me that she was suspicious of my writing and thought it wasn't my own work. She asked me to come during lunch and rewrite the assignment again in class. So, I did, but I was offended because cheating is not something I would do. I told my mom about this on our way home that day. I always tell my mom about my days at school. So, she came to school the next day. We sat with my teacher and compared both papers, the one I handed in the first time and the one I re-wrote and compared my writing. My mom told the teacher that I was hurt and that I am not a cheater. (Individual interview in coffee shop, June 21, 2014)

Although Safa was grateful, her mother's dedication to supporting her children's schooling raised concerns for her. On several occasions, she expressed her concern about her mother's well-being given that she is hypertensive and that too much stress can make her more ill.

***Safa's mother multitasks to manage family affairs.*** On the other hand, Safa's concerns about her mother have raised my curiosity to find out more from Dana, Safa's mother, herself. One afternoon in June while all the children were at school, I met with Dana for coffee and we chatted about Safa and her siblings. Dana seemed overwhelmed, especially because her husband was home for a few days with a back problem. He had been suffering from back pain for a while, and it became worse because he continued to work for long hours without treating it. He finally

decided it was time to take a few days off and rest when his truck brakes became loose and needed to be fixed. He thought he would use the time to rest while the truck was at the mechanic's shop. Safa's mother, being in an unhappy mood that day, was too critical of herself as she did not seem very satisfied with her performance as a full-time mother at home when we spoke about the girls. She explained,

It's very difficult to give equal attention to all your kids when you have many of them. Each one of them is so different. I have so much on my hands, and I multitask all the time. So, I feel that some issues require more attention than others, which makes it harder to pay attention to the less troublesome children. Sometimes I feel so guilty about Safa. I feel that I give her much less attention because she is less of a troublemaker.

My husband does one of the most difficult jobs to provide for us. He eats all alone and spends his days and nights on the road to ensure our comfort and satisfaction, and I feel obliged to pay him back for his selfless acts. I am always running around to make sure the needs of everyone in the family are properly met. (Individual interview in coffee shop, June 11, 2014)

Safa's mother expressed how challenging she thought raising her children in Canada can be. She justified her continuous involvement in her children's schooling as her way of trying to stay in close contact with their teachers. She volunteers to prepare food and even participates in the selling during bake sales, she volunteers on field trips, too, at the elementary school. Yet, she is still challenged sometimes by her children's teachers, as she explained:

A couple of weeks ago, one of my daughters, brought conflict home. Her school has arranged for them to go on a camping trip. It will be held at a place about a 4-hour drive from Windsor, and they will sleep overnight for 4 nights in a row at the camp. I said no, she couldn't go, because you know how this would be against our traditions and culture. I would equally not let my sons go even if they were older, let alone a daughter. So, this opened up doors of conflict between my daughter and I and between her teacher and I. Her teacher kept on challenging my decision. She called a couple of times to question me and try to convince me. She has no clue that it is non-negotiable for us. Although I made it clear that my daughter couldn't go when she spoke to me, she still talked to her and told her to challenge us at home. She told my daughter to get Safa on board so she can help in convincing me to let her go. Safa turned her down, though. She told her: "none of us ever slept overnight out of home, so you should not either."

This teacher made my daughter believe that it was her right to go and that we were stripping her of her right. I was really disappointed with this teacher's approach. (Individual interview in coffee shop, June 11, 2014)

***Parents' viewpoints.*** In response to the story Safa's mother shared about her daughter bringing conflict home, I asked her: "With all the challenges at hand, do you or your husband ever regret the decision you made in bringing your children back from Somalia to Canada?" She replied with confidence as she explained that despite all the struggles, she believes that she and her husband have made the right decision in bringing their children back to Canada. Having her husband spend a couple of days a week with them was a blessing as she explained, and feeling a sense of trust that her children will eventually make it to university instilled a sense of security and comfort for her and her husband as parents. Although bringing the children back to Canada meant so much more work on all levels, yet Safa's mother was grateful because she wanted to offer them a better life and a better education (Individual interview in coffee shop, June 11, 2014).

### **Safa's Ambitions to Become a Surgeon**

Although Safa was facing some tedious social and academic tensions in adjusting to her new life in a Canadian high school, she never lost hope of becoming a valuable member of the society she would continue to be part of. Her strong desire to achieve at school and eventually go to medical school at university was much supported and encouraged by her parents. In one conversation, Safa's mother told me: "I know how ambitious Safa is about her future career, and I encourage her to work hard towards achieving it." (Individual interview in coffee shop, July 16, 2014)

Safa's hopes are to become a surgeon helping in treating sick people who cannot afford medical help. Living in Somalia has exposed her to life circumstances in which she witnessed first-hand what it can be like for poor people to get sick and end up suffering or dying because

they cannot afford to be treated. Achieving at high school had bigger meanings for Safa as she looked forward to joining university and becoming a surgeon.

### **Things Start to Improve**

Later in September, during one of my follow-up interviews with Safa at the beginning of the 2014-2015 academic year, she finally told me about a pleasant experience she recently had. She had taken part in the Newcomer Orientation Week program, designed to allow new Canadian students—with some experience in the Canadian education system—the opportunity to share this experience and their expertise with those who had only recently arrived to Canada. Those students chosen to be the guides were trained for 4 days to guide newcomers in their orientation week, which takes place in the week prior to the start of school. Safa was very excited as she described how it made her feel valuable to be able to give back to the society through welcoming and helping other newcomer students. She explained “We’ve taken them on a tour around the school, introducing and talking to them about the programs offered at school and giving them advice that I wished was given to me when I first got here” (Individual interview in coffee shop, September 13, 2014).

Again, during the winter semester, in March 2015, I visited Safa and her family at their home. I had recently sent Safa a copy of her retold story, through email, and asked her and her mother to read it and verify if they felt it represented them and me accurately. I was pleased to notice the apparent change in Safa’s attitude and tone as she spoke about her new school. Safa had moved to another public high school in the city at the start of this academic year. She previously told me through personal communications that she had changed schools because she was officially done with all the ELL course requirements and that she no longer needed to be in a school that offered an ELL program.

### **Summary of Safa's Story**

Safa is a Somali returnee to Canada who returned at the high-school level only to find herself struggling to survive a culture shock, language difficulties, and other personal issues at her Canadian high school.

Safa's difficulties in mastering the English language skills during the initial years in a Canadian public school presented her with more than just social tensions. Despite her dedication and the high emphasis she placed on achieving academically as a goal during her transition, she continued to struggle and perceived her struggles as mainly the consequences of her lack of language proficiency.

Upon her enrollment in Canadian public school, Safa worked hard to achieve her desired academic goals and was privileged to have the full support of her mother and a number of dedicated teachers, yet was repeatedly faced with a number of hurdles in her journey to adjustment. Her dissatisfaction with her level of academic accomplishment initially exacerbated some social tensions leaving her at unease with her school milieu in general.

Fortunately, transformations began to take place and Safa started to make friends and engage with her school community over time. Such transformations helped change some of Safa's initial perceptions of her high schooling experiences in positive ways.

In the following chapter, the story of Basel is presented, a Syrian Canadian student fleeing a war-torn country and attending a Canadian public school in Windsor. While Basel's story illustrates similar struggles to those initially experienced by Safa as a newcomer Arab student in high school, it also exposes some challenges which may be unique to those who are faced with immigration challenges paired up with post-traumatic symptoms given the unstable circumstances in the country he comes from.

## CHAPTER 5: HOME TENSIONS

### **Basel's Story—A 14-Year-Old Syrian Student**

#### **Meeting Basel's Family**

A couple of years after relocating to Ontario to begin my doctoral studies at the University of Windsor, I moved into a small house in the South Windsor neighbourhood. The house was quite nice and had a decent backyard for my children to run about and play in, weather permitting. When my husband and I decided to renovate the basement to expand our living space, we were referred to an Arab immigrant contractor who offered home-renovation services in the area.

Following a few visits to a local hardware store, the contractor arrived with Omar, another Arab (Syrian) Canadian handyman to begin work on the project. The men continued the work each afternoon over the next couple of weeks, and after chatting with them during that time my husband and I invited the men's families over for coffee, and we then began to visit each other occasionally. I stayed in close contact particularly with Omar's family because his wife, Hana, was closer to my age and had initiated contact with me several times to arrange play dates for our younger children. Hana also brought her two daughters, over for coffee a few times. As we continued to learn more about each other's lives, Hana asked me to bring my sons to the soccer field where boys from Arab communities played on weekends. My son, who was 13, started to occasionally spend time with Hana's boys, who were 13 and 14.

I subsequently was granted permission from the University of Windsor's REB to conduct my study, and I began recruiting participants both from schools and from within Arab communities in the city. As Hana learned about my inquiry, she expressed great interest in participating in the research study and asked if Basel, her 14-year-old son, now a grade-9 student

in Windsor, might be given the opportunity to talk about his experience and to express his feelings, given that she was worried that he was a quiet and introspective young man.

Although Basel's parents had become friends with my husband and I, and we visited each other a number of times and have also met in a number of gatherings outdoors prior to their participation in the study, they preferred to have the individual interviews with Basel take place in the family's home under their supervision.

Consequently, I began to spend time with Basel at his home, chatting about his schooling experience in Windsor, and he also recalled events and incidents related to his life experiences in Syria. All our conversations were conducted solely in Arabic; whenever I inadvertently expressed an English word or phrase, I had to quickly translate it as Basel otherwise would simply look puzzled.

### **Basel's Life in Syria Before Returning to Canada**

Basel was born in 1999 in Canada after his parents had resided there for 2 years. He then moved with his family to Syria (their homeland) before age 3. He spent more than 10 years in Syria before his family returned to Canada, settling in Windsor in 2013, about a year before he became a participant in my study, when Basel was 13.

In addition to his parents, Hana and Omar (neither of whom held high-school diplomas), Basel's immediate family included two older sisters, ages 15 and 16, and two younger brothers, ages 13 and 7.

**Basel's family in Syria.** Basel shared many details with me as he recalled memories from his home country. He was a quiet young man and was somewhat reserved during our initial conversations; it took some time for Basel to feel comfortable enough to share his memories and experiences with me, and consequently, his narrations were a bit brief at first. His mother and

sisters had told me candidly that Basel was not a sociable boy and would perhaps have difficulties sharing his feelings. As a narrative inquirer, I surmised that I would need to share some of my personal experiences so that he could begin to relate to me and eventually tell me about himself, and this indeed was the case.

On a Saturday morning in late March 2014, as I began to sit with Basel at the dining table in the family's living room, Basel looked shy at first and made little eye contact. His mother tried to break the ice as she approached us and asked if we would like to have coffee or tea. She later came back with coffee and some cookies as she chatted with us a little.

*Basel's extended-family household in Syria.* As Basel's mother left and headed to the kitchen, I wanted Basel to feel comfortable and so I began by narrating stories of my first year as an immigrant Arab girl in the early 1990s. I told Basel about how impressed I was with the beautiful weather, the greenery and beautiful scenery I found in the city of Halifax where my family and I landed in comparison to the desert nature of the UAE, the country where I came from.

A short while later and in response to my stories Basel seemed more comfortable as he began to tell me about the nature of the life he lived in Syria as he said:

We lived in a big three-story family home. We had lots of relatives and friends. We used to get together with my maternal grandparents, aunts, and uncles every Friday. We'd have dinner and spend the rest of the day together as my cousins and I played soccer in the courtyard located on the main floor of the house. My grandparents lived on the main level, we lived on the second level, and my aunt's family lived on the third. My grandpa had planted some trees in the courtyard where we played soccer. They grew taller with time and produced mint, lemon, cucumbers, and grapes. I would even smell the mint and lemon in my room on the second level of the house on windy days.

My paternal grandparents, on the other hand, lived about a 15-minute walk away from our home. My brother, my cousin, and I walked to their house to visit every weekend, too. They were elders, but as you know, it is part of our culture to have the youngsters visit their elders and help them out with household chores if needed. So, my father always reminded us to go visit.

My cousin Sami, who is about 6 months younger than me, was my closest friend. We used to spend a lot of time together. He would come over, and we would spend time together, play soccer, and go places. (Individual interview in family's house, March 26, 2014)

*Basel's family flees war-torn Syria.* Basel looked sad as he mentioned his cousin and made me wonder about the kind of relationship he had with him, I asked: "Are you guys still in touch?" and Basel responded:

I miss him so much. We still keep in touch through Facebook, and we even call each other on Skype sometimes. He also left Syria a few months after my family and I left; our town is almost barren now. There are no schools still running or even families who still live there. It became too dangerous for anyone to stay at one point; everyone found themselves a place to go to. Even our home was destroyed after we left. (Individual interview in family's house, March 26, 2014)

Basel's family spent a whole year in Syria during the war. It was a very stressful time for everyone as they described. At first, as Basel explained, it started out with protests and developed into gunshots. He described,

We would hear gunshots all the time. At first it used to bother us, and we'd get scared and stay up all night; with time though, we eventually got used to it that it didn't scare us as much. Generally, whenever authorities started shooting, everyone ran to their homes and hid except for the people who had weapons. (Individual interview in family's house, March 31, 2014)

Basel continued to explain that things got pretty bad. He expressed how horrible he felt:

It was the worst of all for me the day I heard the news about the death of one of my close classmates. My classmate's family received a phone call telling them to quickly evacuate their house because a bomb was scheduled to hit their place by authorities, and as they ran out of the house their car was targeted by a rocket that killed my friend and all his family members on the spot. His dad was the only one who survived. I saw the picture of his half-torn body with my own eyes. (Individual interview in family's house, March 31, 2014)

I was saddened by the horrific images that Basel tried to describe as he told me of what he had seen. He seemed somewhat detached as he told me the stories, though. He did not show

overt signs of trauma, and it seemed that he tried to maintain his composure as he described more of his horrific experiences.

Having learned about the horror Basel was exposed to during that year, I later spoke to his mom about the necessity of seeking professional support in school or the community to help Basel recover from any possible post-traumatic effects he may be quietly suffering from. She explained that the SWIS (Settlement Worker in School) at his school had been closely following up with him and his sisters; as the SWIS worker monitored their school progress academically and otherwise. Hana, Basel's mother, also told me that the SWIS worker tried to have Basel enroll in a community-support group for troubled children, yet he refused to go to the meetings and insisted that there was nothing wrong with him. I tried to explain the importance of convincing him to take advantage of the support offered to him, as results of post-traumatic events can last a lifetime if left untreated. Hana requested that I talk to him about it as he may listen to my advice, and so I did indirectly on several occasions. After many conversations about this, Basel consequently promised to speak to the SWIS worker at school and ask her to connect him with the support group.

**Basel's schooling in Syria.** As Basel spoke about the way he and his family were forced to leave Syria due to the increased risks of war, he clearly emphasized that he dreamt of going back to Syria if ever it became possible to do so. He was feeling homesick and had been longing to the old days he spent with friends and cousins.

Basel had attended elementary school in Syria. He lived with his family in a rural area in Syria where children walked back and forth to school each day. Basel had walked to school with a sibling or more every day, either with his sisters when they had attended an all-girls' school across the street from his own, or with his younger brother after his sisters had transferred to a

high school located further away. Basel enjoyed walking to school in Syria, as he and his siblings had passed by farms each day where they saw hens, roosters, and sheep every morning.

Basel explained that there were both male and female teachers at his school in Syria and that they belonged to different religious denominations, and no one ever expressed any concern about such religious differences; because the population largely encompassed followers from multiple religious faiths. He deliberately pointed that out to clarify that the religious conflict that rose in the recent years was only a product of political conflicts and war.

*Basel recalls school teachers in Syria as too strict.* As we continued to chat about his school experience in Syria, Basel's narratives of his schooling in Syria had a different tone,

Teachers were so tough back home. School was too serious; it felt like a military camp. Teachers would scream and even hit us if they had to. I personally had my share of their tough treatments many times. I had one female teacher break my arm once. She hit me with a big wooden rod. It was just a fracture in the bone, but my arm was swollen for a whole week and turned into all kinds of colours afterwards. (Individual interview in family's house, April 10, 2014)

Keeping in mind that this incident which Basel narrates may have been a reflection of just an individual teacher's behaviour, probing for more about whether that was the norm in Syrian schools, Basel explained that he must have driven his teacher crazy on the day she hit him on the arm; because he kept on talking to his classmates and disturbing her as she was teaching. He seemed to believe that teachers were generally too rough; because teachers were thought of by society as responsible for disciplining children and thus were given similar privileges to those of parents. Such accidents were not frowned upon as a result. Similarly, Deema, whose story is presented in chapter 6, had a similar perception of teachers in Syria as she also recalled memories of her school days there.

Learning about Basel's perception of his teachers back in Syria, I said: "Do you feel relieved to be in the Canadian school system in which students are protected by law from any form of abusive interactions." He responded:

Yeah, I've never seen any teacher hit a student at school since I arrived in Canada. Teachers hardly raise their voices to shout at a student here. However, I'd still prefer to be at school back in Syria. My friends are there, and I feel like I belong there more than I do here. I know that school is better here like my parents keep saying; I know it's better for my future, because I have a greater opportunity to go to college if I stay here, but I don't like school anywhere. I never wanted to go to school back home in Syria, nor do I wish to go to school here, either. I guess that's who I am. (Individual interview in family's house, April 10, 2014)

### **Basel's Life in Canada After 2013**

Upon the arrival of Basel and his family to Windsor in March 2013, Basel was enrolled in an elementary school for a couple of months until the end of the school year. Basel then attended grade 9 at Windsor Public High School (the same school attended by Safa, the student participant in chapter 4, and the same school I volunteered at during the fall 2013 semester). The school had a notably large population of immigrant students.

**Basel's family in Canada.** Although Basel's family members viewed fleeing the war as a blessing, which Basel and family members expressed several times, they were still faced with challenges of a different kind upon their arrival. Financial issues posed a challenge for the family. During one of my visits with Basel's family, his mom and sisters told me of the hardships they faced when they first arrived in Windsor. Hana, Basel's mom, explained that they had to start from scratch, and they had no financial support. They had to spend all their life savings in the first few months. They rented a house and had to pay first and last month's rent up front because the landlord needed assurances that they would be able to continue to pay rent, and they had no references. She explained:

We were lucky enough to find an Arab landlord who let us rent his house with no proof of income whatsoever. We slept on the ground when we first rented the house. We had to

wait for a few weeks for my husband to have some home renovation project done before we were able to buy pillows and blankets. We hardly had any clothes because we brought close to nothing with us when we flew to Canada”. (Informal conversation in family’s home, May 10, 2014)

Although Basel’s family managed to flee to Canada at an early stage in terms of the war, their participation in the study was especially valued because they presented an angle of the picture that can only be seen by those who have been through trauma.

**Basel’s schooling in Canada.** In April 2014, during my third one-on-one chat with Basel, to get our conversation started about his schooling experience in Canada after he had told stories of his life in Syria, I began by narrating stories of my first year as an immigrant Arab girl in the early 1990s. I told Basel that my older sister, who was attending university in Texas at the time, was visiting my family in Canada when school started in September upon our immigration. I told him that I was too nervous to go to school all alone as my father had already left to resume his work overseas, and my mother could not communicate in English and so did not take me or any of my siblings to school on our first day. I told Basel that my visiting sister came with me instead, and asked teachers if they would permit her to attend classes with me for the first 2 days. I explained how culturally shocked I was and how my sister tried to ease me into the new life I was about to dive into. I continued to tell Basel different stories of my first days at high school and how I felt at the time as I compared the school’s social settings in Canada with those of my home country.

Basel eventually began to describe his school day in Canada. He took the city bus to get to school every morning then directly went to his first class as he arrived at school. At lunch, he waited until class time began and never ate lunch while waiting. At the end of the school day, Basel then went directly to the bus stop to take the bus back home. Not so often, he would go to

the New Canadian Centre that is closest to his school, in order to get some help with homework assignments. Continuing to describe his school day, Basel added,

Usually I am home by 3:30; I eat my supper and then take a nap. Sometimes I'd be too tired, and the nap can be very long; I wouldn't get up before 9:00 at night. I spend an hour or a little less doing my schoolwork. I then spend some time browsing the net and watch the news for a bit. Sometimes I hear bad news about my friends back home in Syria, and I would feel so bad and get depressed. I would eat something then go back to bed.  
(Individual interview in family's home, April 10, 2014)

*Lunch hour—An unhappy time for Basel.* Being surprised to hear that Basel did not eat lunch at school, I asked if he has always done the same in Syria. He looked unhappy as he spoke about lunch time and explained, "In Syria, I used to have lunch with my friends, here I prefer to wait until I get back home to eat, and most of the time I spend lunchtime on my own. I would rarely sit with one or two of my classmates during lunch time". (Individual interview in family's home, April 10, 2014)

I understood Basel's isolation dilemma yet discussed with him the importance of having a balanced meal at lunch time, and explained how both his brain and body needed nourishment to be able to function properly and to help him succeed. We also searched the Internet together for some articles on proper dietary habits and took some time to read through them. Basel promised to reconsider his eating habits and to start packing a small lunch every morning.

The next time I visited Basel's home to chat with him, one of his sisters let me inside and we chatted a little until Basel came to the living room. In probing for more about the family's eating traditions, she explained that she and her siblings all took lunch to school, except for Basel who refused to eat at school. She thought Basel felt embarrassed to eat at school.

"What do you think had triggered this and was there an incident that made you think this way?" I asked.

Basel's sister explained that she did not witness any particular incident and that Basel would not admit being embarrassed to eat at school, but she had offered Basel food at lunchtime several times, yet he flatly refused her offers and asked her to leave him alone (Fieldnotes, informal conversations, April 2014).

This raised questions as I wondered whether this is something that boys struggled with more than girls, or whether it is a social dilemma commonly faced by teenagers, or in any way culturally related. A few weeks later I followed up on the subject and asked Basel if he had made an effort to adjust his eating habits. He answered that he now was trying his best to take a lunch to school with him or else he would eat breakfast before leaving home in the morning. Even breakfast as small as a banana. (Fieldnotes, informal conversations, April 2014).

***Basel as an ELL student in a Canadian public school.*** It was quite evident during my conversations with Basel that he was not fluent in English and had difficulty understanding even the most common English words and phrases that I occasionally let slip as we chatted in Arabic. "How much English do you understand at school, Basel?" I asked. He replied:

Very little. School was all in Arabic in Syria, and we only had one course for English as a second language per year, and I don't remember ever taking it seriously. They placed me in level B when I first arrived in my high school this year, here in Windsor, because I passed level A in grade school where I spent a couple of months upon my arrival in Canada last year.

At first, I was so reluctant to say any word in English to anyone. I still feel that I lack the ability to have a conversation in English, but at least I am better able to understand what's going on in class around me. (Individual interview in family's home, April 10, 2014)

***Basel faces academic challenges.*** Speaking about his language struggles, Basel began to reveal academic challenges which he was facing at school. Similar to Safa, the student participant in chapter 4, Basel also had struggles with passing the applied mathematics course he

was enrolled in. To find out more about the sources of such challenges, I asked, “Has mathematics always presented challenges for you?” He answered:

It’s not too bad here. It’s less work than the workload back home in Syria for sure. The problem though, is that I find it harder to understand what I’m being asked to do, and so I’m not able to do my work most of the time. I just ignore the work I don’t naturally get during class time. It starts to accumulate as I continue to ignore and avoid it. I then feel too ashamed when the teacher calls on me in class and I couldn’t answer. It all adds to the pressure, and I start avoiding going to class. (Individual interview in family’s home, April 10, 2014)

*Basel shies away from approaching teachers for help.* “Have you tried to ask for help? Did you ever take advantage of teachers’ availability?” I asked Basel. He responded:

Yes, some teachers are very good. One of my ESL teachers stays in class during lunch to give us the opportunity to drop in and ask whenever we need help. Other teachers are not available during lunch though, and it’s pretty much the only free time I have. I’ve tried to ask my mathematics teacher for help a few times when I didn’t know how to solve a question, but I wouldn’t ask if I didn’t understand the whole lesson. I would be too embarrassed to ask. (Individual interview in family’s home, April 10, 2014)

“What makes you feel embarrassed, Basel? Do you have any doubt that your teachers really wish to help?” I asked. He answered:

I know some teachers do care, but they may be too busy to worry about the well-being of every student. I had teachers call my parents a few times to check on me when I skipped classes more than once or when I was late to class in the morning. Sometimes I’m late because I miss the bus in the morning, or I don’t go on time on purpose because I simply don’t have my homework done. (Fieldnotes, May 2014)

While Basel was struggling on an academic level, some teachers were there to help. In fact, being at Windsor Public High School for a couple of months in the fall of 2013, I knew that some teachers at the school were very kind and welcoming and were frequently approached by students who asked for help. Safa, the student participant in chapter 4, who also attended the same school, had frequently asked teachers for help.

I was also fortunate to be able to informally speak with a couple of teachers at Basel's school on different occasions. In fact, Basel's mathematics teacher, Mr. Conrad, told me when discussing issues related to Arab newcomer students:

I love helping students who approach me, and I give them all the attention they need. My problem with some students, though, is that they become unmotivated, and I can't run after them to offer help. Some students also tend to expect me to answer their homework questions rather than help them understand them. (Informal conversation, December 2, 2013)

Basel may have fallen into this category according to this teacher who could have been a valuable resource to Basel and students like him.

*Basel's perceived lack of interest in academic success.* Basel's mathematics teacher was not the only one who thought that helping students like Basel was not an easy task. In a subsequent conversation with Hana, Basel's mom, during one of my visits to the family's home, she said:

Basel is the only one of my children who gives me a hard time with schoolwork. I am always worried that he will not succeed at school with this attitude and mentality. He keeps telling me that he does not want to go to school and that he wants to drop out. He leaves his schoolwork to the last minute every night. He even ignores it completely sometimes. I monitor him from a distance every day because I am done arguing with him. I fear that I will lose him if I continue to nag about schoolwork all the time. Sometimes he would get himself busy with other things all afternoon until he goes to bed at night without touching his school bag or getting any schoolwork done. (Informal conversation in family's home, June 7, 2014)

Learning about Basel's academic struggles, I offered to help him with schoolwork, and he seemed somewhat uninterested. Upon his mother's pleas, I insisted that Basel allow me to help with mathematics homework. He let me help a couple of times very briefly as he said repeatedly: "I can do this; I'll do it later by myself." His apparent lack of interest flagged concerns for me. I started to wonder what caused his reckless behavior towards school achievement and wished to know more.

*Basel's social life at school in Canada.* Basel spent most of his time at school alone and avoided classmates. He would arrive at school exactly on time for first period to avoid having to wait for the class to start. He would also rush out as soon as the bell rang at the end of the day to avoid talking to anyone. One day, and on one of my visits to Basel's school, prior to his joining the study, as the bell rang at the end of the day, Basel was the first person rushing out of the school's main entrance. He had hurried out all alone and was walking quickly towards the bus stop. Basel's isolation from his peers and his obvious eagerness to leave school as quickly as possible was apparent. Inquiring about Basel's social adjustment at school, I asked: "Were you able to make new friends upon your enrolment in high school, Basel?" He answered,

It hasn't been easy. I haven't found one single friend that I can get along with so far. There are only two boys in the whole school that I am even able to talk to occasionally, and they are both Arab. One of them just arrived in Canada this semester. There are so many Arab boys at school, and all the classes I attend are filled with Arab students, but I feel that the majority of them have behavioural issues. They either sell or take drugs, or hang out with girls and spend all their days partying, and the rest of them smoke cigarettes. I don't fit in with any of these kinds of boys, so I avoid everyone on purpose. (Individual interview in family's home, May 24, 2014)

Basel's narrative about the lack of friends at school reminded me of Safa's narratives, in chapter 4; she also seemed to avoid other students because of conflicts between her personal values and theirs. Nonetheless, Basel expressed his need for having friends, although he emphasized several times that he preferred being on his own than to have friends with whom he did not get along. He explained that he had friends from out of school instead and that he spent time at the community centre with friends most weekends, even on weekdays sometimes.

*Basel's inability to adjust socially raises concerns for his mother.* On the same subject, as I dropped by Basel's home to sit and chat with him about his on another day, I spoke briefly with Hana, his mother, as we had tea before Basel joined us at the dining table. In a rush, and as she looked at the hallway to make sure Basel wasn't coming, Basel's mother expressed her concern

about Basel not socializing with boys his age. She was worried he was having psychological difficulties due to the increased challenges,

Sometimes I watch Basel as weeks go by, and I notice that he stays home and hardly goes out with anyone or even talks to friends on the phone. His brother, who is only a year younger, is always with friends and seems much happier. I am afraid this can have a negative effect on his personality later on as a man. He also told me once that he was offered drugs at school. He said he refused to try, but I am getting concerned. What if he does try?! (Informal conversation in family's home, April 10, 2014)

*Basel and family conflict.* Basel's mother then added:

His dad is tough on him. I am afraid he's pushing him away with his rough attitude. I always feel trapped in the middle between the two of them. I do not want to lose either my husband or my son, but they're both being ridiculous. I've managed to convince my husband to use incentives to motivate Basel to do well at school. We just bought him the phone he wanted, a couple of weeks ago, but it didn't seem to work. Basel never gives me the feeling that he is trying. I tried to talk to him many times; all he did is make me feel like I knew nothing, and there was so much going on at school that I would never understand. I am tired of all of this. Basel poses a challenge to all of us as a family. (Informal conversation in family's home, April 10, 2014)

Before I was able to discuss any of what Basel's mother just shared, Basel appeared in the hallway as he approached us. He greeted us with a sleepy voice and took a seat on the table next to me. In an effort to divert from negative experiences, and to identify what Basel liked to do instead of focusing on the cause of his difficulties, I asked him, "Would you tell me about one thing that happened at school that made you happy?" Basel replied with a smile:

There was once this running competition that my physical education teacher nominated me for. We had to race with competitors from other schools, and I was so proud when I won second place. I think that was the one single time I was proud about something since I joined my high school. (Individual interview in family's home, April 10, 2014)

### **Basel—5 Years From Now**

Towards the end of the school year, my boys and I joined Basel and Hana on a fishing trip. We spent a nice afternoon together as we fished and enjoyed the warm sun. As I sat next to Basel, on a bench in front of the river, we chatted about different things, I asked Basel where he

might see himself 5 years from now. Unlike Safa, Basel had different ambitions for his future life. He said:

If things got better in Syria, I may go back home. If not, I hope to go to college for a couple of years and become an electrician or something. I don't enjoy school; I don't enjoy reading and writing. I prefer working over studying and I don't see myself spending more time with books. I've had a conversation with my dad once about it, and he knows I will not go to university for sure. He told me it will be best, though, if I went to college and got a diploma instead of nothing, before I go out and find some job. If it was up to me I'd drop out of school today and look for a job. (Informal conversation, June 28, 2014)

Months later, in the winter of 2015, as I visited Basel's family at home, I was surprised by the number of changes that took place in Basel's life since I last met with him a few months earlier. He has moved to a new school due to domestic circumstances. His younger brother joined the same high school this year and they both spent time together at school with a number of new friends. Basel expressed happiness to finally feel a sense of belonging at school as compared to his previous school where he used to feel isolated and lonely all the time. He said a group of newcomer students joined his school this year, some of whom have just come from Syria. He looked much happier as he spoke about his social life in school this year.

His mother, on the other hand, seemed a little concerned about it, though for the opposite reasons than those she had previously shared. She expressed concern that Basel was spending too much time with school friends now and not paying enough attention to his schoolwork.

As a side note, I asked Basel if he was eating breakfast before going to school every morning now. He told me that he ate breakfast with his friends at school now. He explained that he paid a small amount of money every month, and the school provided him with a breakfast. He also told me that he no longer missed classes in the morning because he used the school bus to go to school since he lived in the school district now.

### **Summary of Basel's Story**

Basel is a young Arab immigrant/returnee, torn between the memories of his loved ones and places he considered home in Syria and his new life in Canada with all its challenges that must be overcome in order for Basel to cope. Basel and his family escaped a war-torn country and returned to Canada as he joined high school. Basel experienced a multitude of challenges beyond his coping abilities that initially left him unable to live a normal life as an adolescent for the first couple of years upon arrival in Canada. Interestingly, despite all the difficulties, he did eventually find comfort in feelings of belonging as he joined a new school and met a new group of newcomer Arab immigrant students a couple of years down the road. Nonetheless, he was faced with a major conflict at home as his parents had trouble understanding and coping with the difficulties he was experiencing as a newcomer Arab student and a war survivor teenage boy. Conflicts at home aggravated him to a large extent as he became unhappy both at home and at school.

Basel's unique story and experience made him a particularly valuable student participant for this study because he offered a broader picture of individuality within the narratives that are presented here. Basel's unique personality was reflected in his narratives, with its concomitant tensions to be unpacked and factors to be studied. Basel experienced war and had witnessed incidents that few children in Canada have experienced at his age. On top of trying to adjust to his new life at school, life at home posed added challenges. The question thus remains: Are Basel's perceptions of his experiences similar to those of all Arab students in high schools in Windsor? Are they more specific to those who have witnessed war in their home countries before immigrating? Other student participants' stories will shed more light on the subject. Let us find out the answers to such questions as we explore the lived schooling experience of Deema, a

student who had resided in a number of countries and in unique settings as a refugee before becoming a Canadian refugee. More to be revealed about Deema's story in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 6: SCHOOL MILIEUS AND CULTURAL TENSIONS

### **Deema—Story of a 17-Year-Old Palestinian Student**

#### **Meeting Deema at Queen Elizabeth Public High School**

In late March 2014, after visiting the public-school principal, as explained in Chapter 3, a number of students of Arab backgrounds were nominated for invitation to join the study; given that they were easily identifiable as a very small minority in the mainstream school's population. Deema expressed interest in joining the study once I contacted her through email. Following a couple of conversations over the phone, I met with Deema several times in the school library at the end of the school day in May and June of 2014 for individual interviews. A number of students and teachers were always present in the library at the time of interviews as this was the place where academic extra help was provided on a regular basis.

As Deema and I met at the school's main entrance at the end of the school day for our first interview, she had a wide smile on and looked comfortable as she introduced herself in person for the first time. She was dressed in Islamic attire, hijab and long dress as she led the way to the library carrying her cross-body school bag, and finally chose a table for us to sit once we were inside. As we sat ourselves down I told Deema that her school environment resembled the school I attended years back and I began to speak about my background, being an Arab immigrant myself and my wishes to help newcomer students integrate well within Canadian schools. Deema was an outspoken girl as she seemed to enjoy our conversations and was readily motivated to tell me lots of details about her experiences and memories from school before coming to Canada. She spoke proudly about her family as she narrated their history of moving from one place to another. She was obviously very fond of her father with whom she seemed to relate to a high degree.

## **Deema's Transitional Experiences Between Iraq, Jordan and Syria**

Deema is a 17-year-old middle child, enrolled in grade 12, who has four siblings: two sisters (ages 22 and 11) and two brothers (ages 21 and 10). Deema has lived in Iraq, Jordan, and Syria for a number of years and was 12 when she moved with her family to Canada in 2009.

**Deema's life in Iraq and Jordan.** Deema was born and raised in Iraq until age four when she and her family moved to Jordan a few years after the Gulf War in 2002; as the living circumstances became more difficult to bare. A few months after settling in Jordan, Deema's father returned to visit his brothers in Iraq and to follow up on his business matters. While visiting Iraq, he was detained for political reasons and was not let back into Jordan to rejoin his family. Instead, he was deported to Syria where he stayed for 4 years trying to sponsor his family to bring them to Syria for a reunion. Deema's father is a Palestinian, born and raised in Iraq, where his mother was originally from. Deema's father had stopped his schooling after completing grade 9 in Iraq to join the family business that his father started at that time. His father passed away a few years afterwards and left him in charge of managing the family business (a café), from which he supported both his siblings and his own family. Deema's mother is also a Palestinian, though born and raised in Jordan and only moved to live in Iraq after marrying Deema's father.

During the 4 years they lived in Jordan, the family faced severe financial challenges and they did not see Deema's father at all and only spoke to him on the phone once every few months while he looked for ways to bring his family to Syria. Deema's mother in turn also looked for ways to bring her husband back to Jordan. Deema's mother held a beautician's diploma but worked in tailoring and also sold retail goods to neighbours and friends to support

her children during their stay in Jordan. People also occasionally came to her place for beauty services.

Deema seemed to recall the financial hardships she and her family faced with quite vivid memories of her mother working late at night to prepare merchandise for selling, or household chores she needed to complete before a busy morning the following day. Yet she seemed to remember fewer specifics about her schooling days in Jordan and was more ready to narrate stories of her schooling in Syria instead.

**Deema's life in a refugee camp in Syria.** Deema's father finally succeeded in sponsoring his wife and children as refugees and brought them to Syria where they reunited in 2007. They resided in a refugee camp for Palestinians which housed approximately 30 families at the time. They did not know how long they would have to stay in the refugee camp as they immediately applied for immigration to Canada as refugees through a United Nations' agency. In the camp, they lived in tents at first, but then residents of the camp started to build brick houses for themselves as they realized they were going to stay longer than expected.

Despite what has come to my mind as I first learned that Deema and her family have lived in a refugee camp for a couple of years, similar to Basel, Deema seemed to recall happy memories with friends and schoolmates in Syria in the years before her migration. She described,

I had a wonderful 2 years in Syria. It was so much fun and adventurous living in tents, some days we'd have rain fall through the tents and some days it would be too cold that we'd light up fire and gather around it during the night to get warm. Even when we started having the brick houses, it was still fun, just more privacy I guess. It was great to live within a caring community. All 30 families in the camp knew each other and got involved in each other's sorrows and happy occasions, too. Everyone in the camp had their share of hardships in their lives and so everyone tried to support each other. (Individual interview at school library, May 12, 2014)

**Deema's schooling in Jordan and Syria (grades 1 to 6).** Showing excitement about the adventurous lifestyle Deema described, I explained that I had little knowledge of what it was like

living in a refugee camp, and that I have only watched a couple of documentaries about this.

“Did children of the camp attend schools?” I asked. She added:

Oh, yes. We used to take the bus to school every morning, and it would be a big crowd of the camp’s kids waiting together. Some days, the bus would not come to pick us up for some reason, and we all walked to school together. It was lots of fun. It was more like a field trip [smiling]. (Individual interview at school library, May 12, 2014)

Deema attended grades 1 through 4 in a public all-girls’ school in Jordan, and later grades 5 through 6 in a public co-ed school in Syria.

*Deema’s mixed memories of her schooling in Syria.* Speaking solely in Arabic as we chatted, Deema spoke of her accomplishments at school in both countries:

I liked school in Jordan and Syria because I was a high achiever and always felt my efforts appreciated. I was popular in my schools for leading morning assemblies and school events and ceremonies. It gave me lots of confidence and always motivated me to do better. My parents always encouraged me to excel, too, and supported my progress. I was known to be very sociable and outgoing. I even used to go and greet people I didn’t know, even elders on the street. (Individual interview at school library, May 1, 2014)

She then added,

There were two different types of teachers in Syria; those who were kind and caring, whom I loved and worked hard to impress and felt excited to go and see every morning, and those who were rough and whom I hated to see every day. I remember my geography teacher in Syria was always bad tempered. I used to ignore her subject, and I also avoided doing the homework she assigned most of the time. Whenever she got so angry she would call the principal into the class and have him punish us and hit us with a ruler on our fingers. (Individual interview at school library, May 1, 2014), Deema explained.

Deema’s memories of her geography teacher from Syria reminded me of Basel’s stories, the student participant in Chapter 5, of his share of rough treatments from teachers in Syria as well. On the other hand, Deema spoke of her life in Syria in such a positive way it was almost difficult to believe she was staying at a refugee camp,

I enjoyed being in Syria, until one day we were told that our Canadian refugee papers had been accepted and that we were going to Canada. It was a big surprise to us because we thought it would be much longer before we’d hear back from them. The United Nations

agency, which was managing our refugee camp then, gave us permission to leave the camp and go shopping in some parts of the country for 10 days prior to our departure day. So, we went and bought some winter clothes. We had one neighbor in the camp that had relatives in Canada, and she told us it would be really cold in Canada and we'd need lots of winter clothing. Funny as it sounds, we arrived in the summer and were struck with the heat wave, and we needed more summer clothing than any winter attire. (Individual interview at school library, May 12, 2014)

### **Deema's Family Arrives in Canada**

Upon the family's arrival in Canada in 2009, they were rented a house in a small town out of Windsor as they were sponsored by a family in that part of the city. Both her parents joined work in a greenhouse upon their arrival. Her brother also worked in mushroom picking on a big farm during the weekends while he was enrolled in a high school at the time. Deema explained that it was difficult for him to find a balance between his job and schoolwork during weekends, but they needed the money.

**Deema's life in Canada.** As the family initially settled in their residence, a kind gentleman in the neighbourhood approached the family and volunteered to come to their house once a week to help teach them English. He was an elderly retired English teacher, who spent hours teaching them grammar and helping them practice speaking skills. Deema expressed how grateful she was to this man and said,

He even used to give us tests and would reward us with little surprises whenever we did well. I would never forget how helpful and kind he was. He sometimes bought us school supplies and offered to help with English homework. We enjoyed the time he spent with us. (Individual interview in school library, May 19, 2014)

**Deema's schooling in Canada (grades 7 to present).** Having met with Deema twice already before she began to tell me about her schooling experiences in Canada, we only spoke in Arabic on our two initial interviews. As I joined Deema at the table where she was waiting in the library for the third interview, one of the teachers on duty that day approached us with a bowl of snacks and asked if we would like some. Deema jokingly took two and told the teacher that these

were her favourite. I started by praising her apparent comfort in using the English language, even jokingly, something I was unable to do for many years upon my high school enrollment as a newcomer, I explained. Deema began to tell me that she was enrolled in grade 7 in an elementary school in the town of their residence when she first came to Canada, “It wasn’t easy at the beginning, I had a hard time with gaining language skills over the first three years” (Individual interview in school library, May 19, 2014).

*Encountering bullying as a newcomer in Canada.* Before Deema had a chance to explain further, the fire alarm went on and we were asked to evacuate the building. We waited among a small crowd outside of the main entrance for a few minutes before we were permitted to go inside again. On our way, back to the library, Deema said: “I hate fire alarms. They remind me of my awful days at grade school.”

“I’m sorry to hear this. What did fire alarms have to do with the whole thing?” I replied.

She explained,

Whenever fire alarms went on in grade school, I felt so lonely because my classmates would gather in small groups and start chatting and laughing, while I waited all alone and felt miserable. In grade school, I was enrolled in ESL classes, and it was a town with very few Arab immigrant families, so it was hard on a social level as well. I also looked different with my hijab. I regularly got bullied at school and went home and cried for hours many days.

There was this popular boy named Rayan in my classes. He used to do all kinds of offensive things to me in order to look cool and grasp his friends’ attention. For a while I was suffering quietly without telling anyone. I didn’t think it would get any worse, and I thought everyone in my family was having a hard time adjusting to our new life, so this must be part of the hardship I had to go through to cope. Until one day Rayan, the boy in my classes, saw me in the hallway right after lunch break on my way to class. He ran after me and pulled my hijab down. I had it secured in place with a poppy pin, but he pulled it so hard that the pin scratched me at the neck and my head veil fell on the ground. I cried out loud in front of everyone and screamed at him to stop. I quickly took my head scarf, put it back on and ran to the office. I told them I wanted to go home. My dad came to pick me up after they called him. He took me home, and I was too upset to talk about what happened. But because I have a strong relationship with my dad, he is usually the first person to find out about the things that happen to me at school even if I don’t say anything. He’d start asking me about all kinds of things until he figures out what’s happened. So, I eventually

told him what happened. My dad called the school and suggested that the boy should be punished and that his parents should be notified. I was later told that they talked to his parents and gave him some sort of punishment, which I was not made aware of.

Nonetheless, Rayan, the mean boy, later continued to bully me but perhaps less often than before. He once threw his opened juice bottle on me, and again I cried all day and told my family about it. My father was reluctant to talk to the school about it this time and told me to simply avoid Rayan at school. My dad said we were new and lonely in this country and that we didn't know much about its laws, and had no language or power and that it was not wise to keep raising issues with the school given the circumstances. It was generally a tough few years for the whole family, and I didn't want to make it any harder on my parents. (Individual interview in school library, May 19, 2014)

*Sunshine brightens the skies during dark times.* Feeling saddened to learn that Deema had to struggle alone without much support; I tried to show sympathy by explaining that I resonated with her feelings of misery as I similarly tried to cope with immigration challenges on my own in high school.

“I hope not everyone you’ve met in grade school were as mean as Rayan?” I asked as we sat back at the table.

Deema seemed torn between the angry emotions she had towards people who contributed to her struggles, like Rayan, and the gratitude she felt for the people who went out of their way to offer help and support; as she responded:

No, it wasn't all dark. During the first couple of years, I hardly spoke to anyone at school. I generally spent most of the time at school all alone. When we had to work in groups in classes, I ended up working alone the majority of the time. I tried to join different groups several times, but I was always turned down. Classmates always made excuses to turn me down. They would tell me that they had enough members in the group or they would tell me to ask other groups. It always felt so humiliating and hurtful.

But like my father always says, “you will always meet good and bad people anywhere you go”. There was one teacher, who worked at the LST (Learning Support Teacher) room, who was very nice and helpful. I used to spend a lot of time in her room doing homework as she helped me along the way. I also confided in her whenever I felt bad about something, and she often offered to talk to my teachers to help ease some of the difficulties. She really brightened many of my days there. She was the only friend I had in the whole school. Even after I moved out of grade school, I sent her a long letter thanking her for all the support and kindness she had offered over the two years. On my last day, we took pictures, and she was the only teacher in the school who hugged me at

the graduation ceremony. I will never forget her kindness. (Individual interview in school library, May 19, 2014)

Deema's expression of gratitude towards the kind gestures of this teacher resembled that of Safa's feelings, the student participant in Chapter 4, toward the guidance counselor who got out of her way and helped Safa get extra help in science when she needed it the most.

Having learned that Deema had a close relationship with her father after she mentioned him several times as she told her stories, and that he was the most important source of support to her, I thought his views could inform the study. Before Deema and I parted that day, I asked her to invite her father to participate in the inquiry if he wished; to speak about Deema's experiences from his point of view. Nonetheless, he preferred to stay out of it and thus I respected his wishes.

*Attending Queen Elizabeth high school in Windsor.* As Deema graduated from elementary school, her family moved to Windsor when her two older siblings joined the University of Windsor. Subsequently, she enrolled in the public high school (QEHS) closest to their new home. At the time, she did not even know there were high schools in the city that were more multicultural or had a higher percentage of Arab students. QEHS had a very low percentage of immigrant students and no ELL program. Deema was accepted into the school directly and was not asked to attend a school that offered ELL support because she had already been in Canada for two years. Speaking about her initial enrollment, Deema narrated:

My mom and dad came with me on the first day to get me enrolled in school. I was happy to see a few Arab students walk around in the school hallways. I also saw two hijabi girls, and it just felt like heaven to see them that day. (Individual interview in school library, May 19, 2014)

*Making friends in high school.* Glad as I was to hear about Deema's feeling affiliated with schoolmates at QEHS, I asked if she was able to make friends quickly upon her enrollment. She explained,

When I first joined high school last year, I spent the first couple of months alone. It didn't feel good, and I felt embarrassed when other students passed by during lunch and saw me all alone. I used to sit next to a window by my locker in the hallway and get myself busy with homework assignments to avoid looking at kids passing by.

I resented the time I spent at school every day and could not wait to go home to see my family and feel like I belonged somewhere. I have changed completely over the past few years. I have become less social and I have turned into a quiet and shy girl. I tend to wait for people to approach me now, and if they don't, then so be it. Even my dad told me I have changed so much.

Until one day, one of my friends now, who is a Canadian-born girl of Arab descent, approached me and asked if I would like to join her and her friends for lunch. Ever since that day, I started to hang out with them during lunch every day. They are a group of three hijabi Arab girls and three girls of European background.

Deema's lonely lunch time resonated with Basel's, from Chapter 5, unhappy lunch hour before he was able to make friends in school.

"How have things been since you've joined the group of girls?" I asked. Deema replied,

Things felt so different ever since, especially that one of these girls happened to be in one of my classes this year. It felt wonderful to have someone to affiliate with in class, and work with when asked to work in groups. Before I started having friends, I always felt so shy in classes. I was always surrounded by boys because girls always sat really far to avoid making any unwanted conversation with me, and if a book fell from my desk or something, everyone would simply stare at me, and I would start to sink through the floor. Now, it's different, I can even see it in the eyes of my classmates that they do not think I'm that lonely alien anymore [giggling]. (Individual interview in school library, May 19, 2014)

***Multiple experiences with teachers.*** Deema's narratives were not only focused on her experiences with schoolmates. She constantly jumped from topic to topic as she was trying to express her feelings about her multiple complex experiences within her school community. Encounters with teachers encompassed a great deal of Deema's stories.

*Deema and an art teacher.* Deema's smile brightened her face as she spoke about her friends at school and as she continued to explain that her grade scores were improving and that she was proud of her continuous progress. She explained that she has adopted a reward system for herself to help keep herself motivated. She would get herself a box of chocolates or spend some money at Walmart on a treat if she does well on an assignment or a test. She also

mentioned that her father tends to support her hard work as well. He would occasionally take her out for coffee or ice cream to celebrate her accomplishments. Speaking about her academic progress, Deema remembered that she had to complete an art assignment that was due in a week, and this is when her smile quickly disappeared. She expressed disappointment as she began,

Although most teachers are kind, I have an art teacher who is not very nice. She generally seems iffy in class, and I try to avoid having any personal contact with her. Sometimes, if I ask a question in class, she acts like she can't understand what I say and instead starts to answer a question I didn't ask. I just thank her and pretend like she answered my question.

I am also not good with art. I like watching people draw or paint and I enjoy looking at artistic work, but I'm not an artist myself. Nonetheless, I always did my art assignments and submitted them ahead of time as well in art class. We had to submit a sketch every Thursday, and I always did because I noticed that the teacher was not a very easygoing one, so I always tried to avoid any conflict with her.

Until when one day, she asked me how long I've been in Canada, and I told her that it's been 5 years. Ever since that day she started to call me "the ESL girl" instead of calling me by name in class. At first, I told myself that I must've heard her incorrectly. I didn't want to believe that she was calling me that because I didn't want to be hurt. She then started to talk to me like I had a mental problem; she'd talk slowly and in a silly way. Everyone in the class would start looking at me, and I would feel so embarrassed! (Individual interview in school library, May 19, 2014)

Although I sympathized with Deema as she described how she felt in art class, I immediately recalled a comment made by a guidance counsellor I interviewed in another school a few days earlier as I tried to comprehend the difference in perspectives. The guidance counsellor said,

One of the biggest issues I notice is that some of our teachers speak so quickly with these [ESL] students. Sometimes I would try and ask a teacher to speak slowly, indirectly, of course, and in a nice fashion. Because I feel that a lot of what these teachers say goes over [the ESL students'] heads easily. Some teachers are simply not comfortable speaking to their students with a grade-1 level tone. When I make my daily tour, and see some of the brand-new kids, I do a lot of sign language talk, and I know I look funny, but I know it makes them feel good. (Individual interview at school, May 13, 2014)

*Deema and a social worker.* Probing for more about Deema's experiences with her teachers, I asked, "Have you always had difficulties with teachers?" She responded,

Not really, some teachers are so kind. One day I had a math exam first period in the morning, and I'm usually a little slow in writing exams. So, that morning, I did not manage to complete answering all the exam questions in time, and the math teacher told me to come during lunch break to finish it. The second period I had to write an English exam and then went straight to finish the math exam during lunch break. It was a stressful morning, writing exams for 3 hours straight. After break I had history class, a class where I had a classmate who was generally rude to me throughout the year, but I usually ignored him. He used to annoy me, like he would push his chair backwards quickly to bang my table, or push my things off the table to fall on the ground and then pretend like nothing happened. On that day, the history teacher assigned us work in class, and out of nowhere, that silly classmate looked at me and said something about me being too slow in finishing my work. It really was a bad time for me, and I could not take any of his rude remarks, so I immediately shut my book closed and left the classroom angrily. I went to the washroom and cried for like fifteen minutes, and, on my way out of the washroom, the school's social worker saw me. She took me into her office and insisted I tell her what happened. I told her about the boy in my class and how stressed I already was. She called on the boy and had him apologize, but it was one bad day!

*Deema and an Arab teacher.* Deema paused a little and took a deep breath as if she felt hurt remembering how stressed she was that day. She then continued,

I am also taking a class with a teacher who happens to be of Arab descent herself, and is also a hijabi lady. I feel comfortable in her class, and I participate confidently all the time. Sometimes, in other classes, I put my hand up and participate, but teachers don't get what I mean. A few minutes later another student re-iterates what I said in a different way, and I feel angry because they get the credit for something I said but was not clear enough for the teacher. (Individual interview in school library, May 19, 2014)

***Class participation.*** "Do you always participate in classes?" I asked Deema. She explained:

I am more open to class participation now than I was over the past few years. It still takes a lot of effort to make a small comment, though. It takes me a few minutes to arrange words in a sentence in my head before I put my hand up to share, and even when I do, I still feel my heart beats hard, and my face blushes. I get too conscious of my classmates' looks and start to worry about the accuracy of the meanings of my words. (Individual interview in school library, May 19, 2014)

***Deema and extra help programs.*** Later in June, I met again with Deema for an interview at the library. By then I had been familiar enough with the school and we had started to meet up directly at the library instead of her waiting for me at the school's main entrance. When I arrived

at the library that day, I spotted Deema at a table across the room working on her mathematics. I approached quietly and asked if she wished for me to give her some time to finish her work before we would start to chat. She said she was just waiting for me and quickly put her mathematics work aside.

“Do you often come here for extra help?” I asked.

She replied,

No, I never do. When I first came with my parents to register for school, I was told that there would be people here to help with homework assignments after school every day. I came for help once and found lots of people. They were too loud and unorganized. I didn't know what I was supposed to do to get the help I needed. There were a couple of teachers helping everyone, and when I called a teacher to help me, she briefly answered one question for me and left to help another student. I needed more help to understand the whole lesson and not just one question, and I felt shy to call on the teacher again. So, I left and never came back again because I thought it would just be easier to ask my sister to help me at home instead. (Individual interview in school library, June 18, 2014)

### **Following-Up With Deema**

Following the conclusion of the interviews with Deema, I stayed in contact with her throughout the following year and met with her in March 2015 to have her verify her narrative account and my interpretations of the themes that emerged. Deema explained then that everything was okay at school and that she was receiving better grades in most classes now, yet there was not much change in any other aspects of her schooling. She mentioned that she had not been able to complete the pre-requisites for entry into a university program of her desire, so she had decided to spend an extra year in high school. She wished to pursue a university degree that would enable her to build a career, yet had no clear picture of what she wanted for her future. She generally envisioned herself in the future as a successful business woman who travels and sees different parts of the world.

In general, seeing Deema again a few months after our earlier conversations, I could sense from the way she greeted schoolmates in the hallway and her tone when she spoke about her academic progress that she was happier and more confident.

### **Summary of Deema's Story**

Deema is a student participant who had been in Canada for more than four years and had experienced unstable life circumstances as she and her family lived in three different countries before they moved to Canada. They were also separated from her father at some point and only reunited in a refugee camp four years later. Deema added a different perspective to the study as a refugee to Canada and by sharing incidents of bullying and feelings of otherness upon her arrival in Canada. Her unpleasant initial experiences with schoolmates in her Canadian elementary school made it harder for her to cope as a high school Arab girl, as she was cautious and too sensitive at times to her schoolmates' attitudes and behaviours. Despite such struggles, she continued to have hope for success and to work hard towards achieving her goals.

Fortunately, Deema was able to overcome initial struggles as she began to cope with her environment a few years down the road. Making friends at high school proved to be the best cure for her initial struggles as she found refuge in affiliating with other schoolmates. Further discussions of the transformations in her experiences follow in chapter 8.

In Chapter 7, Lauren, an Iraqi girl tells her story as she yet adds a different angle to the inquiry being a Christian Arab girl attending a Catholic high school. Although similar to other participants in many ways, Lauren shows her uniqueness in overcoming initial challenges of immigration.

## CHAPTER 7: PERSISTENCE AND SUPPORT – THE KEY TO SUCCESS

### **Lauren — Story of a 17-Year-Old Iraqi Student**

#### **Meeting Lauren at St. Mary’s Catholic High School**

Lauren was one of two students who contacted me through email and expressed interest in participating in the study upon her English teacher’s class announcement about the study. Lauren was a pleasant and easygoing young lady who greeted everyone she passed by with a wide smile. She wore her mid length wavy black hair down all the time and was dressed in her dress shirt and shorts uniform every time we met at school. During our initial meetings, I did not need to do much effort to build a rapport because Lauren spoke to me with ease as if we had known each other for a long time. Lauren and I met several times during her free periods in the support room which was a quiet and private room. In the support room, two big windows brightened the room as the sun rays streamed through on sunny days, and rain drops slid on the glass on rainy days. Lauren repeatedly looked out the window as she told stories of her experience as if she was recalling details and memories.

#### **Lauren’s Transitional Life Between Iraq and Syria Before Immigration**

Lauren is a 17-year old Iraqi immigrant girl who was enrolled in grade 12 during her participation in the research study. Lauren was born in Iraq and lived there until she finished grade 3, at which time she moved with her family (consisting of her parents and a sister 4 years her elder) to Syria in 2005, as a result of unstable living circumstances during the years following the Gulf War in Iraq, similar to the migration of Deema’s family from Iraq, the student participant in Chapter 6.

Lauren’s father had earned a business administration degree in Iraq and had his own business while her mother had worked as an English language university instructor in both countries.

**Lauren's schooling in Iraq and Syria (Grades 1 to 7).** Lauren did not seem to recall any special memories of her schooling in Iraq and only described her years in grades 1 to 3 as normal childhood memories. Yet, she had more vivid memories of the years she spent in school in Syria as she and her family settled in Damascus after they left Iraq in 2005. She had lots of friends in Syria and maintained contact with some of them through Facebook even after migrating. She recalled that in Syria she was very interested in learning and using the English language, contrary to the case with Safa and Basel, from chapters 4 and 5, who were both uninterested in learning the English language before coming to Canada. Lauren thought her special interest in using the English language while still in Syria may have stemmed from her mother's constant encouragement. Given that Lauren's mother was an English language instructor, she always helped Lauren and her sister, with their English schoolwork and generally encouraged their use of the language.

In Syria, Lauren and her sister were enrolled in a public all-girls school. Lauren enjoyed school in Syria and lightened up as she spoke about her memories of that time. She spent her elementary years from grades 4 to 7 there and indicated that teachers were generally "tough" when she was younger, which was consistent with Basel's narratives in Chapter 5 and Deema's in Chapter 6, yet she said teachers treated students with more respect as they grew older.

Lauren remembered school as a place she liked to go, where she was happy and in harmony with her teachers and classmates. She was generally recognized a high achiever and had received multiple awards for her academic excellence during the years she spent at school before moving to Canada.

## **Lauren and Family Immigrate to Canada**

As Lauren's family arrived in Canada in 2009, her father faced challenges in finding employment, and therefore opened a small grocery store as a business venture. Lauren's mother on the other hand, enrolled in an ELL program when she came to Canada to improve her English language speaking skills. She completed a year of high school in Windsor, maintained a good average, and consequently went to college. In college, she earned a pharmacy technician diploma; and later found a job in a local pharmacy.

While Lauren's parents had a well-established life style in Syria, they decided to immigrate to North America in search for peace, more stable residence status given that they were not citizens of Syria, and to be surrounded by family. A number of Lauren's uncles, aunts, and even her maternal grandmother all lived in Detroit, U.S., across the bridge from Windsor. Lauren's parents applied for immigration to both Canada and the USA and were eventually granted access to Canada.

**Lauren's schooling in Canada (Grades 8 to 12).** Upon arriving in Canada in 2009, Lauren enrolled in an elementary Catholic school for grade 8 and then continued in St. Mary's Catholic High School from grade 9 onwards. As Lauren told me about her family history in our initial interview, I immediately noticed that her English was very fluent and that she used English more often than Arabic as she spoke. She was also very eager to answer any questions I asked, and was ready to add lots of details. She shared even more enthusiastically after I disclosed personal stories about my past experiences as a newcomer immigrant student, in our second interview. I told Lauren about my first year in Canada:

I felt more like 'a deaf person celebrating a wedding ceremony' as the saying goes in Arabic. I used to sit in class waiting for hints indicating that we had to do something, and I would just do like my classmates did. This is how much I lacked English language skills.

In response, after laughing loudly at my metaphor, Lauren explained,

When I first arrived in Canada, I knew grammar because that's all we were taught in terms of English as a second language in school back in Syria, but I could not speak much English. I would understand what was being said around me, but had difficulties expressing myself. I am naturally a very outgoing person, so I used to try to speak in English anyway, even if I made mistakes. (Individual interview in school resource room, April 14, 2014)

As Lauren began to tell stories of her initial experience as a newcomer student in her Catholic high school, the differences between her personality and that of Safa's, Basel's, and Deema's were quite apparent. Contrary to all three previous student participants, Lauren seemed more willing to take the risk of making mistakes while learning in her initial years.

"So, English language skills were no issue to you upon your school enrollment in Canada?" I asked. She replied,

It was most difficult when teachers knew I was a newcomer but still talked too fast, and I didn't understand. Or when they asked me to read a paragraph or something out loud in front of everyone. I was too embarrassed. I knew teachers were trying to challenge me and push me to try, but it was not easy. I usually blushed and started to stutter and could not read a word. So, I remember one day I spoke to my English teacher after class and explained how hard it was. That was in grade 8. (Individual interview in school resource room, April 14, 2014)

"Has it become any easier since you came to high school?" I asked.

Lauren replied, "A lot of things were different in high school" She then added,

For high school, I had the option to attend the school across the street from my home, but my mom said I should take advantage of the ESL program at St. Mary's, so I chose to come here and join my sister for high school. I live pretty far, and I take two busses to school every morning. My mom used to drive us while she went to college for the first two years, but then I began to take the bus when she finished her program at the college. However, I think it's worth it; I like my school. (Individual interview in school resource room, April 14, 2014)

***Ethnically-diverse school environment.*** "That's interesting! What makes you feel it's worth the travel?" I asked Lauren.

She explained,

Being in a multicultural school made the overall experience easier for me. For example, whenever I had a presentation or something I would not be worried that I was the only one who did not speak perfect English or was a little different. (Individual interview in school resource room, April 14, 2014)

I expressed surprise that this was a concern for Lauren and told her that her English was very good, that no one would have guessed she had only been in Canada for a few years. She said,

Oh, thank you. It is not only about the language. It's generally comforting to know that there are other people in the school who are newcomers like me and who have struggles similar to mine. I guess being in St. Mary's made me feel less odd with my dark hair and darker skin color. Technically, I'm not the only girl who's not blonde with blue eyes. [smiling] I can't even imagine what it would have been like if I went to a different school. It is much harder to be around Canadian born classmates. Sometimes I find myself unable to make a simple conversation with some girls because they only talk about their dogs or their boyfriends. I try to be nice, but I feel like there's almost nothing in common to talk about. (Individual interview in school resource room, April 14, 2014)

***Lauren and the ELL program.*** I told Lauren,

I can relate! When I first came to Canada, it just felt great to be able to affiliate with other newcomer students in the school and not feel stared at the whole time. In my case this only happened in the ESL class because there were just a few of us in the school. I enjoyed that period the most because that was where I didn't feel different from everyone.

She responded,

When I joined high school, I was also more comfortable in the ESL classes than all the other classes, of course. I think it helped me more on a psychological level than on an academic level. It was the classes in which I let my guard down and just enjoyed myself. (Individual interview in school resource room, April 14, 2014)

Lauren expressed a level of comfort in participating in class discussions and activities in her ELL classes in comparison to mainstream classes. She mentioned facing some difficulties in forcing herself to participate in academic mainstream classes upon her initial enrollment in high school, but it seemed to have bothered her less and for a shorter period of time than it did for Basel, Safa, and Deema. She preferred to remind herself that she was able to overcome this challenge, "I eventually got over that phase as time passed. I do put my hand up and participate most of the time now". (Individual interview in school resource room, April 14, 2014)

Probing for more details about how she was placed in ELL classes when she first joined high school, she explained that she was first tested for her English language proficiency level when she joined grade 9. She scored in between levels B and C, so she got to choose to go to either one of the two levels and “of course I rushed into choosing to go to level C because I thought it would help me graduate earlier, but it was a mistake” she explained. She completed the ELL requirement early on and had to attend academic classes for grade 10, which was very hard for her. She explained,

I could’ve easily stayed in ESL classes for longer like my sister did. My sister went to ESL classes for her grade 11. She took biology and chemistry for ESL students. So, she only did English academic [which is the class for mainstream students] in grade 12, and she got away with it, while I had to take English academic for grades 10, 11, and 12. But I didn’t know any better then, when I made the decision; I didn’t understand the way the system worked. I remember my sister advised me to go to level B when I was given the choice, but I didn’t listen [giggling]. Grade 10 English was so hard, and it wasn’t only hard for me, even mainstream students struggled with it. It was an English literature class after all. So anyway, I didn’t do so well. I think I got a final grade of something like a 60%. (Individual interview in school resource room, April 14, 2014)

“That’s actually good for a newcomer in a mainstream academic class. I remember I passed with a 53% in my first academic English class in my first year in Canada.” I commented.

She replied:

Yeah, we were assigned novels to read on our own and had many essays to write, and I hardly managed. But it was a fun experience after all. We used to do plays and discuss things and so on; I didn’t mind the class, as long as the people I worked with were nice. (Individual interview in school resource room, April 14, 2014)

***Interactions with schoolmates.*** Lauren’s comment about the importance of having nice classmates raised inquiries. “Were your classmates indeed nice?” I asked her. She replied:

“Actually there were a few Arab students in that class. I remember I used to work with them whenever we needed to work in groups. That made me more comfortable.”

In probing for more, Lauren added,

Having someone to share ideas and to work with made life easier for me. Whenever we had to work in groups, we -the immigrant students- usually got together, and they [Canadian-born classmates] went together automatically all the time. (Individual interview in school resource room, April 14, 2014)

“Is it any different now that you’ve been in the school for over three years?” I asked.

Lauren explained,

It is easier to find a group to work with now, but I still prefer to work with immigrant classmates because we tend to understand each other better. A lot of my friends now, with whom I work in class, are non-Arabs, but non-Canadian-born either. I watch Canadian-born kids as they work in class sometimes and they mostly tend to be reckless; they only spend minutes to complete their work and then they chat the rest of the time. They have no problem presenting their half-done work in front of everyone. With many of us, immigrant students, we take longer to decide on things and we care more about details before we are able to present our work. We can be picky sometimes!! I don’t know, maybe it has to do with our cultures too. (Individual interview in school resource room, April 14, 2014)

“Are you saying that you think your values have at times made it harder to engage with schoolmates?” I asked.

Lauren replied by narrating a story she recalled,

Sometimes I think it’s more a matter of misunderstanding each other’s values I think. For example, one day, I was on the bus going home at the end of the school day, and I was sitting and chatting with two Korean boys whom I knew from class. Two boys from school got on the bus, too, and started making silly comments about me and asking if the Korean boys were my boyfriends. I got so angry and offended, and I started crying, especially because there were some Arabs from school on the bus, too. I guess I was too conscious of my cultural image. I made a big deal out of it and cried all day long afterwards. I even went to my guidance counsellor the next day about it. The boys who made the silly comments were called into the office and were warned not to mention such issues to me again. When I remember that incident I feel embarrassed. I don’t even understand why I took it so seriously then. If this was to happen to me now, I would take it differently. I would probably just laugh about it and ignore them. I guess we change with time as we learn more of other people’s values. I was too sensitive. (Individual interview in school resource room, April 14, 2014)

We then had a discussion about the ways people grow and change and consequently start to see things differently. Lauren clarified that she did not think her cultural values have changed, yet

her understanding of her schoolmates have made it easier to deal with them. She explained that it took her a long time to learn anything about her classmates' lifestyles and values, and she only began to learn anything of that sort after she began attending academic classes and started to mingle more with mainstream students. She then added,

Now, people ask me all the time in school if I have a boyfriend, and I am not embarrassed to tell them that I simply don't date. I think at first I was less up-front about the things that made me different than the rest of my classmates. I don't care so much anymore, though. It's who I am and what I believe in. I believe that I have a life ahead of me to date and be in a relationship. I would like to focus on my studies for now and think about dating later on in the future when I'm ready for it. Sometimes I have to explain this to people, but I have no problem explaining now. I have become stronger and more proud of myself that I don't really care what other people think of me. I hang out with some male friends as part of a group at school, but I believe it's not time to be in a relationship yet. Some people think we are gay because we tend to hang out more with people our gender, so it helps to explain. (Individual interview in school resource room, April 14, 2014)

*Lauren attempts to make friends.* "So, you must have been able to make many friends at school over the four years, eh?" I asked.

Lauren replied: "Although it hasn't always been the easiest thing in the world, I guess making new friends has been a blessing in my process of adjusting to my new life in Canada."

Lauren's way of thinking was obviously different than both Safa's and Basel's who preferred to avoid making friendships for a period of time upon their high school enrollment. Lauren continued,

In grade 9, I was so worried that I would not be able to make friends, especially after having a few conflicts with some Arab classmates that year. It was a turning point in my life. This forced me into making new friends, and it's been great getting to know people from all over the world. As you can see, our school is very multicultural, and that's very nice.

Let me tell you about one of the conflicts I just mentioned. When I first came to high school, I was terrified of failing, and I took everything too seriously. So, one day in art class, we had a test, and I was one of few who took it seriously and actually studied for it. My best friend's sister, who is an Arab, was in my class at the time, and she asked me for help in the test. I gave her my paper to copy the answers after I finished answering all the questions. Our teacher spotted my paper in my classmate's desk and pulled me out of class. She said I had to choose either to admit giving my classmate my paper or I get a zero. Of course, I was like, no way; I'm not getting a zero for anyone. So, I told the teacher that I shared my paper. Ever since that day, the girl and her sister stopped talking to me. They also made my life harder.

They made annoying comments about me every time I passed them in the hallways. I was sad for a while afterwards, but I got over it with the help of my mom and sister. I even told Ms. White, my guidance counsellor at the time, about them, and she had to talk to the two sisters. (Individual interview in school resource room, April 21, 2014)

Later when interviewing Ms. White, who is also a guidance counsellor at the school, and has acted as a supplementary informant to the study, she spoke about repetitive patterns that she had seen in Arab students. In fact, she spoke of the same issue, of sharing schoolwork, but from the perspective of a school staff in authority. She explained:

One common trend that I've encountered is that Arab students have the tendency to take cheating lightly. Last week I had to bring in two girls separately to question them on a cheating incident. The newcomer girl, who is smart and a high achiever, was pressured into giving her paper to another Arab girl because she was told she could not join the group of friends if she didn't share her answers. I had to explain that she can get a zero for contributing to cheating and I had to explain that she should not allow anyone to bully her into giving them her work. (Individual interview at school, May 13, 2014)

Lauren explained that life has gotten easier for her from year to year and she has been more capable of making friends and talking to people. She expressed her empathy for newcomer schoolmates because she understood the extent of challenges each has to face before things become easier.

On another interview, a few weeks later, after reviewing Lauren's comments and narratives, I wished to find out more about whether Lauren thought her values made it harder for her to cope at school. I reminded her of her earlier comments about having to explain to schoolmates to clarify things, and then I inquired: "Did you ever feel like you also needed to explain to teachers?"

Lauren replied,

I think ESL teachers in our school are doing a great job, and they try their best in learning more about cultures of their students. Teachers of other subjects, though, are different; I think it's the least of their concerns. And, honestly, I would not be interested in them knowing more about our cultures because I would prefer to be treated like everyone else. Sometimes I feel a little embarrassed to be associated with some of the Arab kids at school. For instance, some Arab girls at school are already engaged and getting ready to be married. I just wonder what kind of image they portray of us as Arabs in the school. I disagree with

their mentality and hate to have people think of me as the same. (Individual interview in school resource room, May 13, 2014)

*Attending a Catholic school.* I resonated with Lauren's initial feelings of cultural conflict upon her enrollment in high school, and I told her that I also needed to explain some values and beliefs to schoolmates given that I went to school in my headscarf, hijab. She responded,

I'm glad I didn't have to face such a challenge. It's a Catholic school, and I'm Catholic, and it's generally a respecting environment overall. There are lots of non-Christian students at the school too, and I don't think they feel singled out or anything. School policies respect the religions of all and their freedom to practice their religions. The only thing is that everyone is mandated to take Catholic religion classes regardless of their religion. It's not too Catholic though, because we discuss issues not necessarily only limited to Catholic religion.

In grade 9, for example, it was more about teachings of the Catholic religion, but as one goes to higher grades it is a little different. In grade 10, I remember that we studied a little about other religions, and in grades 11 and 12, it was more about religion and society and religion and philosophy and similar issues. It's an interesting class, and I think everyone likes it. (Individual interview in school resource room, April 14, 2014)

A few weeks later while interviewing Ms. White, the guidance counsellor and supplementary informant in the study, I discovered that she had taught Catholic religion classes for many years prior to becoming a guidance counsellor; I tried to probe for more about her experience teaching Arab students. She said,

None of the Arab students I've met over the years have ever complained of being in a Catholic school. I've taught religion to very diverse classrooms. Many Arab students were very vocal, very outspoken and many of them, if anything, even set a very good example to Catholic students in many cases. Like during Ramadan, for instance, they were setting an example of what it means to be devoted to your faith. So, I used to tell my Catholic students, if their Muslim classmates could do it during Ramadan, you could do it during Lent. So, from my experience, having religiously diverse classrooms enhanced the learning of everyone. It did not diminish it in any way. (Individual interview at school, May 13, 2014)

*Privilege yet a challenge.* Lauren continued to praise the diverse approaches taken in religious classes. She expressed appreciation of the fact that students were made to think for themselves in the religion class and that it was a teaching and not a preaching class. She explained,

For example, my religion teacher this year doesn't necessarily disagree with me, but he tends to challenge my thinking all the time. Sometimes he takes it a little too far, though, so he makes me think twice before speaking up. I actually had a pretty tense argument with him recently about a case study, and I have been avoiding participating in class for a while ever since. I like participating in class discussions, but when he repeatedly puts me on the spot; it started to feel like I was being singled out because of my views. So, I've been too quiet in class for the past few weeks.

"Would it make you feel uncomfortable to tell me about it?" I asked.

Lauren answered,

He gave us a scenario to discuss in groups one day, which he often does, and then we discussed it as a class. It was about a girl who went to her boyfriend's party where she had a few drinks, and then late at night went into his room to change her shirt after something spilled on it. Her boyfriend then took advantage of the situation and tried to have a sexual relation with her. She did not originally want any of that to happen and made that clear to him when he first invited her, but under the effect of being intoxicated, she was unable to resist and went with it. She then got angry in the morning when she remembered what happened and later sued her boyfriend in court. The subject of discussion was whether or not it was the fault of the girl and whether it should've been considered sexual abuse since the girlfriend had not wanted to engage in the act originally. I was the only one in the whole class, accompanied by one other classmate, who thought the girl had to be blamed for her actions. I even said she was to be responsible for at least 20% of the incident. In my mind, I was thinking she should be held responsible for 80% of it, but I could not say it because of the way everyone looked at me. (Individual interview in school resource room, May 13, 2014)

"How did this make you feel, Lauren?" I asked.

She replied:

Sometimes I feel singled out because of my views, more though by students than teachers. It's just too embarrassing when I feel different. Sometimes I get the feeling that the teacher tries to challenge my thinking to make sure I am not brain-washed by what is being told to me at home, or he thinks I am biased towards my cultural traditions. I think he gets the impression that in our culture we tend to blame everything on females. So, that's something that I have to watch for whenever I participate in discussions. I hate to sound too culturally biased.

Honestly, in my opinion the fact that the girl in the case study chose to go to the party where she consumed alcohol willingly and then agreed to go to her boyfriend's room also willingly, then she should be held accountable for her choices in the first place. Everyone would guess this was going to happen, so she can't claim not to take part in it. The discussion got heated because I started to feel that I was put on the spot. I've been too quiet in class ever since. (Individual interview in school resource room, May 13, 2014)

*Lauren and academic struggles.* Since Lauren was a very pleasant conversationalist, it was easy to share stories and exchange thoughts as she narrated her stories. Although my interactions with Lauren were mainly limited to interviews, learning so much about her life experience was possible because she would tell me a lot even before I asked anything. As she came into the resource room where I was waiting for her for our third interview, she sat herself down at the chair next to the big window. I handed her a cup of iced cappuccino and she politely thanked me and started to take small sips as she explained that she was writing a biology test and that's what delayed her. She explained that biology was the hardest for her. She would study all night, work very hard and think that she mastered it all, then go to the test the next morning thinking she would get a 100, yet would get disappointed once tests were marked and returned.

I'd do well in the multiple-choice questions, and then do awfully bad in the essay questions. My teacher was very picky. He would deduct marks for incorrect use of grammar or spelling mistakes. I ended up with an 80% this year, while my friends in other schools got 90s, and they worked less. I know my teacher cares more, but it is very difficult. I always try my best; I forced myself to stay after class sometimes to ask questions and sometimes to argue the marks of my tests or assignments. I know it would affect my university acceptance into the nursing program because it is such a competitive program, and biology would be the first mark they'd look at. I took biology grade 11 and 12 with the same teacher. I passed with a mark of 63% in grade 11, but I did much better in grade 12 biology because I kind of learned his way of testing by grade 12. I know that I am ready for university-level biology because I had this tough teacher in high school, but it sure was a challenge. It was challenging in a positive way, I think. (Individual interview in school resource room, May 13, 2014)

*Teachers' support.* While Lauren struggled to live up to the expectations of her Biology teacher, she seemed to believe that she did not need academic support at school although it was not easy to manage things on her own at first. In an effort to explain further, she said:

Generally, I have avoided staying after class to ask teachers for help over the years, like some students do. For example, I stayed after class once this year to ask my English teacher for advice on an essay. She didn't help much. She glanced over my essay, gave some advice and handed it back to me. I didn't feel that it was too helpful, so why bother ask in the first place? (Individual interview in school resource room, May 13, 2014)

Nonetheless, other forms of teachers' support were much needed and appreciated, in Lauren's perspective. She explained,

When I first arrived at school, I was placed under the supervision of one guidance counsellor, Ms. White, who was very nice and caring. I used to go to her for advice on anything, even some personal issues and incidents, like the ones I shared earlier about my personal conflicts with friends and the incident on the bus, and Ms. White was always very welcoming. She was the counsellor for all the ESL students at first, but then there were too many ESL students coming in the school; so, they were later assigned by their last names to counsellors. Even I was moved under the supervision of another counsellor. (Individual interview in school resource room, April 14, 2014)

Ms. White commented on the same subject in her interview as a supplementary informant in the study: "It wasn't just the fights and arguments between students that I had to deal with. I had to deal with different issues, including some personal ones." She also added:

Some issues that I encounter with some of the students here tend to be out of my work scope, and I wish to send them elsewhere for counselling or so on, but they don't want to speak to anyone else, and I find myself obliged to deal with the issues in hand. They have confidence in me, so I respect their wishes. I wouldn't hesitate to chat with them because I know they need someone to talk to.

For example, there was one young Arab girl who came to the school at the age of 17 already married, and she seemed very unhappy with her husband. I tried to arrange for her to speak to a social worker several times, but she always came up with one excuse after another because she didn't want to speak to the social worker.

To me, my work entails that I look after the whole social well-being of my students, the mind-body-soul. I know that there are guidance counsellors who would not touch that and that they keep it as formal as possible. This is why I think I attract these kids. In my opinion, I feel that it is my duty to talk to these kids because if I don't, who will? I believe that if you can't do it well, you shouldn't be assigned this kind of work. I think the reason why many of these kids aren't doing well is because they have lots of trauma in their lives that needs to be dealt with. (Individual interview at school, May 13, 2014)

Earlier, as Lauren talked about her experience with different teachers at the school, she seemed to have a similar point of view about the ways different teachers take on students' personal issues, which was consistent with Ms. White's comments. Lauren explained: "My new guidance counsellor is good, too, but not as caring. He made a mistake on my transcript that complicated things for me this year." Upon my requests for further details, she added:

This semester I am only taking two courses because I managed to finish all the required courses already. I did a couple of my required courses in summer school and one online and only had two required courses left to complete. At the beginning of the semester I took an extra course, society and change, which was optional, and I told myself it was going to be an easy course so it could raise my average. When classes started, I realized it was not going to work the way I thought it would and found it a little hard for me and decided to drop the course since I did not need it anyway. I dropped it after midterms since I got a couple of unsatisfactory marks on quizzes. Later, I applied to university at the end of the semester and waited as acceptance letters were mailed to everyone. I waited and waited, and, when my university response letter did not arrive, I went to the guidance office only to find out that they mistakenly did not take out the mark of the society and change class that I dropped. They sent my transcript to university with a failing mark of 28 out of a 100 on the course. So, they delayed my university acceptance as a result, and I had to go to the university registrar's office with my mom to explain the mistake before they officially accepted me. (Individual interview in school resource room, May 13, 2014)

Lauren's views of her guidance counsellors reminded me of Safa's stories, in Chapter 4, and how grateful Safa was to the guidance counsellor who looked after her when she needed the support.

***Lauren and support programs at school.*** Not only did Lauren speak about the support of her guidance counsellor, she also talked about her multiple involvements in school events and programs. She looked excited as she described the multicultural events that took place in her school. She enjoyed tasting new foods associated with different cultures, and thought it gave a friendly environment to the school climate. She also described how cheerful it was when her school held a Christmas party for the ELL students, where students got to meet each other and socialized, before the school stopped hosting it due to budgetary issues. With a wide smile, Lauren continued to add details,

I also participated in an ESL spelling competition that was held in the school once. I did not win; a Filipino kid beat me to it. I still remember the word. It was the word "horizontal." He knew how to spell it, and I didn't. I enjoyed participating, though. It lifted my spirits up to take part in the competition. (Individual interview in school resource room, May 13, 2014)

Nonetheless, Lauren explained that she rarely sought help through the available academic programs in or out of school. She mentioned the extra help room that some students were sent to

during the day if they struggled in their regular classes, and the New Canadians' Centre, which is out of school, which also offered extra help to students if they needed help with homework. She explained that she never went there herself because her house is pretty far, and she believed she had her sister to help with homework if she needed it. She only took advantage of the homework club available at school a few times during her four years at the school. Lauren explained that her sister was too good in mathematics that she was asked to assist ninth graders in mathematics classes during her free period when she was in grade 12.

In addition to her involvement in occasional events in school, Lauren also participated in the NOW [Newcomer Orientation Week] program for 3 years. Similar to Safa's narratives, in Chapter 4, Lauren explained that this was a program designed to help newcomer students. Students who have been in the school longer worked as leaders to help new students cope with new challenges. For the first year, Lauren participated as a newcomer as she enrolled in St. Mary's in grade 9. The following year, she was paid to participate as a leader; and in the third year, she continued to participate, this time as a volunteer in order to give other students the opportunity to be hired. It was obviously the same program Safa participated in, yet each participated on a different year, as it combined students from different schools.

“What was it like to take part in the program, Lauren?” I asked.

She replied:

Sometimes it wasn't easy because I took it on as a responsibility and some participants were not very cooperative, but it was really fun to do it nonetheless. It felt empowering to lead in the program. It made me more comfortable with the idea of presenting in front of people because I had to present several times in front of participants as a program leader. Of course, I presented in Arabic, but at least I learned that I was capable of presenting clearly and with confidence, regardless of the language I used. (Individual interview in school resource room, May 13, 2014)

***Lauren's excitement about a school trip.*** Excited as she was to talk about her extra-

curricular involvement at school, Lauren added,

I've always enjoyed taking part in school events. I like volunteering to help out. I like going on trips, too, and so on. There is this trip to Cedar Point waterpark in Detroit in about 2 weeks. It's a 3-hour drive from Windsor, and I'm excited to go with my friends. I had to convince my parents, though. They are being overprotective. They're afraid something could go wrong or I would get hurt on the rides or something. I understand when it's an overnight trip, like the one I didn't go on, in grade 8. It was a long drive to a campsite, and they [students who participated] camped in the woods for a few days. I didn't think it was safe, so I didn't even ask my parents if they would let me go. My mom and dad do not like the idea of us [Lauren and her sister] sleeping anywhere but home. We never slept over at anyone's house, not even grandma's. I once went to a friend's house for her sleep-over birthday party. She was a family friend, and she also was an Iraqi Catholic. We had lots of fun, we watched a movie, played, and everything, and when it was time for everyone to go to bed, everyone had a sleepover except for me; my mom came and picked me up. I know this may be culturally related, but I honestly felt a little left out in grade 8 when everyone was getting excited about the trip. I am excited to go with my friends this time. (Individual interview in school resource room, May 13, 2014)

A couple of weeks later, I met with Lauren again for a concluding interview. She looked tanned and tired as she grabbed a chair to sit next to me in the resource room. She dropped herself on the chair at once and said with a smile, "I'm exhausted!" she then continued before I said a word,

The trip was a blast yesterday. It was so much fun. We left school at 7:00 o'clock in the morning and were back by 11:00 at night. It was a two-and-a-half-hour drive, and we stopped for an hour on the way to cross the border. The weird thing is that there were no Arabs on the trip. I was a little surprised.

She paused for a second, then continued,

Well, I can see why. There was a border crossing, and many of the newcomers still have no out-of-country movement flexibility due to their status in the country, I guess. Also, it may be because it was a trip far from the city. I think if more trips in the vicinity were organized to include the ESL students, many of them would enjoy participating. (Individual interview in school resource room, June 2, 2014)

*Lauren's positivity helps her overcome difficult times.* "I'm so glad you enjoyed the trip.

You look happy" I said.

Lauren explained:

Things are much easier now after being in Canada for a few years. I have learned many new survival skills over the years—most important of all is how to be positive. There’s nothing more depressing than what I have gone through with university acceptance just recently, but I always try to look at the positive side of things. My parents keep telling that I am still young and shouldn’t worry about it even if I don’t directly go to university after this year. My sister, for example, had to do an extra 2 years in high school when she got here in order to go to university. It won’t be the end of the world if I have to spend an extra semester or two in high school to upgrade my grades in order to get accepted into the program I want. I’m only 18, and I already have a job, I have family and friends and a busy life. (Individual interview in school resource room, June 2, 2014)

“That’s awesome! I didn’t know you worked!” I exclaimed.

I work at Tim Hortons. I just got the job recently, and it’s a good time because I’d like to keep the job for the summer and that’s the only way to get it. Otherwise, it would be too late to apply later on because all vacancies would be taken.

She continued to say proudly,

It was very stressful at first. There are a lot of duties, and I had to learn all the company rules and policies. I had to be up to any task at any moment, and if there are fewer employees on duty, there are more duties to be responsible for. It’s good, though. It’s only twice a week now, so it’s not too bad. (Individual interview in school resource room, June 2, 2014)

“Have you always been this positive about everything?” I asked.

She replied:

Obviously not! Life is full of ups and downs, but I try. I’ve been through a lot, and I guess I learned that the best way to deal with life is to be positive. I think it’s a personality trait that I’ve developed as a coping strategy and it does work. Grade 12 has been the most rewarding year since I came to Canada. I am finally able to see the fruits of my hard work over the last couple of years. Up until last year, I was still getting 60s in some courses, and now 80s are my lowest grades. Despite my delayed acceptance into university, I got accepted into the bio-medical stream, bio-chemistry, and human kinetics. I am still hoping to be able to get into the nursing program like my sister, though. So, I’m not quitting. (Individual interview in school resource room, June 2, 2014)

### **Following-Up With Lauren**

As I continued to occasionally keep in touch with Lauren throughout the following year as the school year started in fall of 2014, I learned that she was successfully accepted into the competitive nursing program at the University of Windsor, like she wished. She was always happy

and excited about being part of the program and having lots of mature and good classmates and teachers in the program.

In March 2014, when I sent Lauren her narrative account through email to read and verify, she got excited and said she loved it. She asked to be given a copy once it was published and expressed gratitude for being given the opportunity to tell her story and hoped it would be educative to others.

### **Summary of Lauren's Story**

Lauren is a Catholic Iraqi immigrant girl who joined a Catholic high school in Windsor. Like any other newcomer immigrant student Lauren was faced with a number of challenges. Despite all the challenges Lauren had to overcome in her first couple of years, she seemed to do very well for herself towards the end of high school. She was positive, happy, had friends, a close relationship with her family members, and was optimistic about the future.

Lauren's story not only provides an example of the life of an Iraqi immigrant student in a Canadian school, but also her understanding of the changes that occurred as she matured and came to view her struggles in a different light after years of reflections. More about her story is discussed in the discussion chapter.

## CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

A central aim of this study was to explore the varying complex schooling trajectories of Arab immigrant students in Canadian high schools. I adopted a narrative inquiry research methodology to describe, retell, and interpret students' schooling experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The goal was to understand the different factors that contribute to Arab immigrant high school students' experiences and perceptions, and to identify practical strategies that could support their overall academic and social success. The research sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do Arab immigrant students experience and perceive their schooling in and out of their Canadian high schools?
2. How do Arab immigrant students perceive their high schools' climates and environments?
3. To what extent do Arab immigrant students benefit from their high schools' support systems and the programs designed to enhance immigrant students' learning experience, and how do they perceive the effectiveness of such programs/systems in helping them learn Canadian language(s) and culture(s)?
4. What recommendations can be made to best support Arab immigrant high school students' language, cultural learning, and integration?

In this chapter, I use the three-dimensional life space of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)—corresponding to temporality (past, present, and future), personal-social (interaction), and place (situation) — as a framework to examine the contextual situations and interactions of Arab immigrant student participants as they unfold in different contexts of their Canadian high schools. In other words, I use this framework to illustrate how time, interactions,

and physical spaces contribute to Arab student participants' schooling experiences in Canadian schools.

As a narrative inquirer, I begin from “the conception of reality as relational, temporal, and continuous” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 44) and try to arrive at how that reality can be known and understood. In doing so, I take “the sphere of immediate [Arab student] experience as the first and most fundamental reality we have” (p. 44). Examination of the interactions participants have in the three-dimensional narrative life space reveals the extent to which a schooling experience is shaped by the context in which an individual student interacts. The participants are in the midst of constantly changing situations that require ongoing negotiation of relationships with people in and out of school, and their experiences are shaped by time, place, and the people with whom they interact in these constantly changing contexts and situations. Moreover, participants' perceptions of their ongoing experiences also change as they move from context to context.

In the discussions here, I pay close attention to the temporal dimension so that I could take every possible opportunity to understand my participants' changing experiences as newcomers to more established Arab Canadian students. As Xu and Connelly (2009) explain, “everything in the life space, all the time, is in temporal motion” (p. 360). In this light, I interpret participants' stories while keeping in mind that these do not only reflect current experiences at their high schools, but also evoke past experiences in their home countries, as well as initial experiences upon arriving to Canada, and expectations for their future. In a temporal sense, as everyone, is subject to “temporal and contextual contingencies” (Conle, 1999, p.16), I discuss the experiences of Arab student participants in relation to people, and in situations within their school and home milieus, while paying attention to the transformations that take place. I attend to the transitioning students'

attitudes, “feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions of the person” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480) within the personal-social dimension of their lived experiences. Participants’ stories reflect the quality of social relations and interactions they had in the past and continue to have within their school communities and amongst family members.

Finally, place, as contexts and situations, “always makes a difference to how one may understand a life space” (Xu & Connelly, 2010, p. 361). In other words, experiences can differ to a large extent depending on the situation, formality, culture, and place where these experiences occur. As Elbaz-Luwisch (2004) argues, “It is impossible to look at how people negotiate immigration and acquire or create a sense of belonging in a new place without at the same time questioning how the place itself makes it possible for various groups to belong” (p. 391). Therefore, in my discussion of student participants’ experiences the term “place” refers to different living situations and/or contexts within their home countries, their high school milieus, and their home milieus. I particularly discuss how social contexts within the support programs in Canadian schools aid in shaping the schooling experiences of Arab student participants.

Section 8.1 in the temporal dimension, discusses moments of participants’ past lived experience within home countries, early high school experiences in Canada, and lived experiences a number of years in the journey. As “These life spaces are fluid and dynamic and change as we work with them” (Xu & Connelly, 2009, p. 224), the discussion then carries forward to highlight how past, present, and future lived experiences bring transformations in the stories of participants over the number of years they attend Canadian schools. I discuss participants’ experiences in transition to explore ways in which their lives and perceptions of Arab students shifted as they moved from their countries of origin, to their experiences as newcomer Arab immigrant students, and eventually to more established Arab Canadian students. I focus in particular on ways in

which participants' past educational experiences and upbringing influenced their initial and ongoing perceptions and experiences of academic achievement and social integration within their Canadian high schools, as they narrated them.

Next, section 8.2 discusses how personal qualities and social interactions of Arab student participants with members of their schools and families impacted their high schooling experiences and perceptions thereof in Canada. As described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry examines how participants frame their stories in relation to the dominant social storylines. In this sense, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) explain that social conditions refer to "the context including administration, policy, community, and so on" (p. 480). In this light, I pay attention to the quality of participants' personal and social relations with their peers, their teachers, and their parents; and the roles those social conditions and interactions play in shaping the schooling experiences of student participants and their perceptions of such experiences.

Finally, section 8.3 discusses how the intersection of different social settings and dynamic physical places before and after immigration, in and out of school, and within certain support programs, offer participants opportunities for growth and integration. I particularly focus on participants' lived experiences in contexts of their countries of origin versus Canada, and in contexts of school versus home, and in contexts of different classrooms within Canadian high schools.

In my discussions in this chapter, I provide examples from the four principal student participants' stories to illustrate themes that emerged from their stories presented in the core chapters: 4, 5, 6, and 7. Safa and Basel had been in Canada for less than 2 years, while Deema and Lauren had spent a little over 4 years in Canada prior to participating in the study. The four student participants had immigrated from different Arab countries and each had enrolled in and

attended a different high school in Windsor (both in the public and Catholic boards). I further enhance my interpretations by exploring the convergence and divergence of some features of the narratives offered by three other Arab immigrant high school informants (Bana, Meera, and Labeeb) to broaden the scope of the discussion. Bana is a newcomer Jordanian Christian girl who was enrolled in grade 11 in the same Catholic school Lauren attended. On the other hand, Labeeb, a 16-year-old Palestinian boy, and Meera, a 15-year-old Palestinian girl who was born in Kuwait and came to Canada at the age of 5, had both been in Canada for 11 years at the time of the study.

Storied experiences offer insight into the attitudes and perceptions of Arab immigrant students, which in turn provide an understanding of how these students experience Canadian high schooling contextually and temporally. While each participant's experience is unique, it is possible to draw connections between the influences of their early high schooling experiences and their overall integration. Thus, in this chapter, I discuss the themes that emerged from my participants' narratives in the three-dimensions of narrative inquiry life space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

### **Section 8.1: The Temporal Dimension of the Experiences of Arab Immigrant Students in Canadian High Schools**

This inquiry into the schooling experiences of Arab immigrant students illustrates a strong sense of temporality. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain, "When we see an event, we think of it not as a thing happening at that moment but as an expression of something happening over time" (p. 29). In that sense, "Narrative phenomena are not seen as existing in the here and now but, rather, are seen as flowing out of the past and into the future, as we observe" (Xu & Connelly, 2009, p. 224). Newcomer participants' past experiences in the home countries

and initial experiences upon high school enrollment in Canada paved the way for present and future experiences. In this section, I adopt Clandinin and Rosiek's (2007) notion of the sphere of immediate experience as the first and most fundamental reality, and I follow Xu and Connelly's (2009) suggestion to imagine the three-dimensional life space as a sphere, in which "Our imaginary sphere is always moving and floats through time" (p. 224).

Therefore, borrowing Xu's (2006) metaphor of looking at mountains as ocean waves frozen in time to describe the process of thinking narratively; I begin by discussing initial moments of high schooling in participants' stories. I then demonstrate how time, being a powerful component in understanding change, brought about transformations in the experiences of participants from past to present and future. Those changes "are characterized by ongoing and gradual development, by complexity, by embeddedness in context, and by layering of different levels of change" (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007, p. 367). Such transitions are captured through the storying and restorying of participants' life experiences (Craig, 2015).

### **Newcomer Arab Students Join High School in Canada**

Upon arriving in Canada, initial transitional experiences of Arab newcomer students can be sensitive to a number of factors, both in the past and the present. Participants' stories indicate that their initial experiences varied depending on a number of factors including their past learning and social upbringing in their home countries prior to immigration.

**How do past learning and social milieus influence the transition of Arab newcomer students into Canadian high school?** As student participants and informants had come from a number of Arab countries, with some experiencing multiple migrations and having different social standings, their past educational experiences before arriving in Canada varied in shape and quality. Some were schooled in English language speaking schools; some were introduced to

English language at beginners' level, while others had no prior English language learning in their countries of origin.

*Past Schooling impacts initial English language proficiency.* In fact, looking across Arab student participants' narrative accounts, it is clear that past social upbringing had played a role in determining the level of exposure each student had to the English language prior to immigration. Consequently, levels of past English language learning prior to immigration had impacted students' initial English language skills upon arrival in Canada. Their early English language skills in turn, influenced their initial degree of school integration and academic achievement.

To illustrate, consider the story of Basel (see chapter 5) who had come directly from Syria after completing grade 7, where English was only taught as a minor second language class. The use of the English language was not encouraged at school, at home, or elsewhere in Basel's lived environment, as his family lived in a small town in Syria. Basel's father worked in farming and construction, and Basel was encouraged to help when possible. Little emphasis was placed on Basel's academic achievement in general; as he was expected to carry on the family tradition and work in similar jobs. When Basel enrolled in grade 8 upon his arrival in Canada, his language proficiency test scores indicated his rudimentary knowledge of the alphabet and an ability to read and write a few words, but that was about all he knew at the time. He recounted his initial reluctance to communicate in English, "At first I was so reluctant to say any word in English to anyone", and although he continued to feel unable to converse using the English language a year later, he was better able to understand the spoken language, "I still feel that I lack the ability to have a conversation, but at least I am better able to understand what's going on in class around me". This illustrates how his past education involving nearly no English language learning influenced his initial language skills and thus his school engagement in Canada. He further

explained that his lack of English language skills inhibited him from actively participating in class: “I would only raise my hand to answer a question if I was certain I knew the correct answer and was fully able to express my thinking in English.” There is a correlation in Basel’s narrative between his lack of language proficiency and his initial diminished class participation and self-confidence.

Lauren on the other hand, while she told a somewhat similar story, her initial experience was a little different. After being in Canadian schools for 4 years she became a lot more confident with her language skills; nonetheless, she still recalled similar tensions in her initial stages of schooling in Canada. Upon joining her high school, she was mostly able to understand the language, but had difficulties speaking it,

When I first arrived in Canada, I knew grammar because that’s all we were taught in terms of English as a second language in school back in Syria, but I could not speak much English. I would understand what was being said around me, but had difficulties expressing myself.

When compared to Basel, Lauren possessed stronger initial English language skills and knowledge when she arrived in Canada because of her past learning experience. Her mother, an English language instructor, had placed more emphasis on her English language learning even prior to their immigration to Canada. This illustrates how Lauren’s past educational experience and the family context within which she was raised facilitated her easier transition into the Canadian school system. While both Lauren and Basel reported improvements in their language skills during the first couple of years of attending Canadian high schools, Lauren had an easier initial transition in comparison to Basel’s.

In fact, participants’ initial transitional stories indicate that past learning experiences and social upbringing proved to influence their initial transition into Canadian high schools, both socially and academically. For example, Basel’s, Safa’s, and Deema’s, limited past exposure to

English language learning in their home countries impacted their overall school integration and academic achievement experiences in Canada.

*Past experiences impact initial school integration.* As described in his earlier narrative, Basel's participation in class required more than simply acquiring necessary subject content knowledge to be able to engage in class discussions and activities. He also needed to develop the courage to combine such content knowledge with language skills that allowed him to raise his hand and participate in class. Deema similarly had close to no prior English language learning in the multiple school settings she had attended in the past, as she and her family resided in a refugee camp in Syria and had previously attended a public school in Jordan that offered no English language instruction. She also experienced initial difficulties in terms of class participation upon joining high school in Canada: "I was always afraid I'd start to stutter if I put my hand up."

Likewise, Safa had limited English language education in her past in Somalia, and was faced with major tensions when she enrolled in an English-speaking school for a few months prior to migration, "when I transferred to the English school, a lot of things started to change in my life. I was starting to do poorly in school. I started failing tremendously in some subjects and mainly in the language class". She described her initial transitional challenges in Canada, which similar to that of other student participants, and clearly attributed them to language difficulties leading to social tensions,

I was shocked when I first came. I spent all my days at school without talking to anyone. I felt that my world had completely flipped upside down. The hardest thing to cope with was that I was too shy to ask when I had a question in class.

In her initial years, she seemed to struggle to bring herself to speak up in front of her teachers and classmates. Bana also experienced similar social tensions: "I don't remember raising my hand once to participate in class in my first year".

Furthermore, participants' stories reveal that initial challenges in communication and class disengagement hindered their initial school integration, particularly among English-speaking schoolmates. As Bana indicated, "I was afraid of making speaking mistakes, and mostly listened", initial language barriers inhibited her from actively participating in mainstream academic classes in particular. Since the majority of her classmates spoke English fluently in these classes, she showed signs of initial fear of alienation, which in turn impacted the level of her classroom engagement as a newcomer Arab student. Similarly, Safa also expressed initial limited class engagement within certain classes: "In math class, for example, it was even harder. It was a mainstream class, so I felt more intimidated".

Safa, Deema, and Bana became quieter as they were placed in mainstream academic classes in their initial years and felt less able to converse using the English language. Safa for example, recalled spending her initial years in silence as she was reluctant to speak in English, "I did not feel confident enough in my language skills, so I always preferred to stay quiet rather than making a fool of myself". Deema similarly described her initial silence:

I resented the time I spent at school every day and could not wait to go home to see my family and feel like I belonged somewhere. I have changed completely over the past few years. I have become less sociable and I have turned into a quiet and shy girl. I tend to wait for people to approach me now, and if they don't, then so be it. Even my dad told me I have changed so much.

Bana, Safa, and Deema's initial social isolation made their high schools places where they felt lonely and silenced and thus became linked to feelings of inferiority. This phenomenon of initial isolation, which many newcomer Arab students experience upon immigration, may mistakenly be attributed to newcomer students' culture, gender, or personality, as per Lincoln's (2003) findings, although Arab students' narratives here show a range of different factors contributing to its occurrence, further discussion of such factors follows.

Participants who had been more sociable in their home countries in the past felt more discontent towards their initial social isolation. For example, Bana and Safa also noted that they felt vulnerable at times during the initial transition. They traced such feelings to language barriers in addition to the fact that it takes less time and energy to avoid certain social situations with peers. Safa shared a story about a girl she tried to help in the school corridor, who instead claimed later that Safa wanted to steal her ear buds. Safa felt that she had more important things to worry about, such as her academic achievement—that she could not afford to waste her energy on justifying her misunderstood action; as she explained, “my plate is full enough”. Bana similarly described her story and reaction to a classmate who sarcastically mocked the way she spoke: “I fear that I may not have the language skills necessary to carry a conversation to defend myself. So, I tend to stay quiet and try to ignore such incidents instead”.

Additionally, Safa was unable to develop any friendships with peers during her initial transitional years in Windsor high schools. Having learned about Safa’s past relations, I recognize underlying tensions arising from such experiences, which may have made it more difficult for her to make friends upon relocating to her new high school in Canada. Safa’s past failed friendships, which she briefly disclosed in her narratives regarding her friendships in Somalia, had obviously impacted her present school relations. In describing a phase in her past life in Somalia, she said: “I had to break up with the friends I had made over the past few months, who had been a bad influence in my life”. This illustrates how past educational and friendship experiences had impacted initial transition into Canadian schools in terms of school integration, as lives continued to evolve on a temporal continuum. Further discussion of participants’ personal and social interactions, and their adjustment through developing new friendships, follows in the personal-social dimension in section 8.2.

Bana, Lauren, Safa, Deema, and Basel all reported similar feelings in their initial years due to initial language barriers. Something in their stories resonated with my own (Conle, 1996) and evoked in me emotions that brought me back to my initial personal experience as a newcomer student many years ago. I could identify with many of the participants' stories and empathize as they described their initial language difficulties and social concerns. Nonetheless, I felt optimistic and hopeful for their quick progress and integration as I clearly saw the changing landscapes within the Canadian education system, during my personal journey in education. I witnessed the huge improvements and the collective efforts made to support newcomer students in general. My expectations were soon confirmed as participants' stories revealed transformations in terms of class engagement and participation as time passed, and as they began to develop more advanced language skills, as illustrated in section 8.1.

In summary, participants attributed their increased initial sense of embarrassment and integration tensions to three factors: (a) limited English language skills upon arrival in Canada leading to inability to clearly phrase their thoughts and answers using the English language; (b) fear of feeling different and inferior among peers; (c) increased sense of alienation, particularly within mainstream classes; and (d) past failed friendships and fear of further disappointment.

***Past experiences impact academic achievement.*** As discussed in the previous subsection, some participants arrived in Canada with no prior English language skills, while others demonstrated somewhat more advanced initial skills. Similarly, participants' academic performance in their home countries varied in form and shape. Stories of participants indicate that past language learning and overall academic performance in their countries of origin had impacted their experiences and perceptions of their initial academic achievement levels, upon their high school enrollment, in several ways. Arab student participants, who had higher past

academic achievements in their home countries, were better equipped with academic skills that facilitated their academic adjustment in Canadian high schools.

Nonetheless, all Arab participants recounted different initial tensions and concerns about their academic performance due to their low English language proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking skills in English even after a number of years of being in Canada. This shows that language barriers impact Arab students' academic achievement in the transition, even for students who were originally high achievers. For example, while those participants, who were high achievers in their home countries, demonstrated stronger academic skills in Canadian schools when compared to less achieving student participants, they still faced academic tensions due to initial language barriers. Those who were high achievers in their home countries were better able to adjust academically over time. They passed academic courses and fulfilled their high school graduation requirements, as they gained reasonable oral language skills over several years in Canadian high schools. However, the majority were never able to achieve the grade scores they initially had aspired to.

For example, Safa, who was a high achiever in Somalia, had limited language skills upon arrival in Canada which negatively impacted her academic performance. Her initial language difficulties led to her struggles in understanding mathematical concepts, as she was working her way through acquiring language proficiency. Participants' stories also indicate that language barriers had generally hindered their ability to seek academic support at school, which in turn impacted their overall academic achievement during their transition. Bana described such tensions, "If I didn't understand, I stayed quiet and tried to survive on my own. My last resort was to ask a classmate or a teacher to help, only if it was major and essential for understanding the whole lesson". Safa also felt that she was unable to seek clarification due to difficulties in

expressing her thoughts in English, which in turn complicated her mathematical achievement.

Describing her initial struggles with seeking help in math class, she said:

I would raise my hand after fighting an internal battle, and then all the words would just jam in my mouth, and I wouldn't be able to utter a word. I've done it a few times. I would start talking very quietly and the teacher wouldn't hear me. She would ask me to raise my voice, and I would just stop talking and look down.

Likewise, initial language difficulties created hurdles for Lauren in scoring high grades in subjects that required more language skills, such as biology. Lauren was also a high achiever in the multiple school settings she had attended in the past prior to immigration, and had possessed better language skills upon high school enrollment. She was able to score higher grades in tests that used multiple choice questions than those that contained essay questions and required broader use of vocabulary. She explained,

Academic work was a big challenge for me, too. Biology was the worst. I would study all night, work very hard and think I mastered it all, then go to the test the next morning thinking I would get a 100, and screw up. I'd do well in the multiple-choice questions, and then do awfully bad in the essay questions.

Similarly, El-Rifai (2009), in a study investigating the impact of language proficiency on the academic performance of Arab-American students in mathematics word problems, found that difficult vocabulary was especially problematic for students with less language skills.

Contrarily, Labeeb's story illustrates how he was better able to take advantage of available academic supports at school as he had no language barriers to overcome, which is discussed further in section 8.3. Meera also demonstrated high academic achievement as language posed no challenges to her, in addition to the availability of other enhancing factors in her life, as discussed further in section 8.2. This illustrates how time in the evolving lives of participants, served as a factor in making academic achievement more attainable to Arab students

who have spent a longer time in Canada as they acquired language skills, and had other social supports that provided them with better academic opportunities.

Nonetheless, language barriers were not the only factor inhibiting academic achievement of newcomer Arab student participants in the transition, as past learning experiences also played a role. Unlike other participants, Basel experienced more academic tensions as language was not his only source of academic struggles. Basel's academic achievement had always proven challenging even back in his home country. He explained that his academic difficulties in Canada usually began when he missed a key point during classroom instruction; although he would intend to ask the teacher for help, he often became too embarrassed to ask and therefore he would miss additional concepts. As a result, he would become unable to do homework as difficulties in understanding new concepts accumulated. He would later feel resentful to be caught in class without his completed work, making it harder for him to come to class. Consequently, he would either begin to skip classes or feel miserable when he attended, as he explained, "It all adds to the pressure, and I start avoiding going to class". Although this pattern may reflect issues common amongst newcomer students in general, as impacted by language barriers, it also reflects the impact of past academic performance in his home country on the academic achievement in high school in Canada. Basel also seemed to struggle with school achievement and attendance back home, "I never wanted to go to school back home in Syria, nor do I wish to go to school here, either. I guess that's who I am". Further discussions of how personal qualities impact students' transition follow in section 8.2.

Therefore, participants' past academic experiences impact their academic skills and English language skills, which in turn impact their academic achievement upon joining high school in Canada.

## **Transformational High Schooling Experiences of Newcomer Arab Students in Canada**

As newcomer Arab students, like newcomer students of any ethnic group, join high school in Canada they initially face tensions while they try to adjust to their new living circumstances. The coping strategies each student uses during the transition, can vary in form and effectiveness, depending on the survival skills he/she is equipped with from past lived experiences, and his/her motivation for achieving future aspirations.

**How do newcomer Arab students overcome initial adjustment challenges?** Arab participant stories indicate that the majority are highly motivated by the desire to acquire higher education qualifications in the future. This motivation aids them as they try to learn English as an additional language, work hard to succeed academically, and try to understand and learn Canadian cultures. Such future aspirations are highly fueled by their cultural values that are embedded in their home milieus in temporal continuums, as they move from past childhood upbringing, to present transition experience, to future ambitions.

*Hard work and dedication facilitates adjustment.* Most participants worked hard to overcome academic tensions upon their high school enrollment. Participants perceived that many newcomer Arab students require more work hours and greater effort to achieve what their mainstream counterparts quite easily accomplish with less effort. As Safa explained, “I felt like we were working round the clock for the first year.” Bana also perceived that she as a newcomer Arab student worked harder than the majority of her mainstream schoolmates to complete her everyday work assignments, “In some subjects I had to translate word to word in Arabic before I understood and did my homework. Some nights I worked 4 to 5 hours after I went home”. These perceptions point to the initial level of frustration and how overwhelmed both girls were with the number of tasks they needed to accomplish. Bana felt that she did not have much time to spend

with family or friends in the initial years. In a reflective comment, Lauren related Arab students' work ethics to their cultural values: "Maybe it has to do with our cultures too." This establishes that hard work and dedication is a common coping strategy among newcomer Arab high school students, highlighting values enforced within family contexts as sources of academic motivation and hard work, as discussed further in the Family Relations subsection in 8.2.

While such work ethics and hard work provided most of the participants the platforms for academic adjustment over a short period of time, it inhibited them from participating in social school events and activities, which may have aided in their social adjustment. Safa explained her reason for not getting involved in any school organized events, "I don't have any time to spare. During the first year, I spent all my time between school, tutoring sessions, and finishing schoolwork". Nonetheless, improved academic performance, in most participants' stories, helped them indirectly to adjust socially, as they regained confidence in their abilities, and consequently several transformations took place in their ever-evolving lived experiences. Further discussions of participants' social integration follow in section 8.2, of the personal-social dimension of their life space.

As student participants worked hard to overcome initial adjustment challenges, they began to see improvements in their oral language skills after spending a year or two at their high schools in Canada. These improvements in turn impacted their levels of school engagement and academic achievement positively. Transformations in the experiences and perceptions of student participants took place over time during their journeys of transition from the past, to the present, and future. For example, Lauren had been in Canadian schools for more than 4 years at the time of her participation, and so her present perceptions and future aspirations are influenced by her past years' experiences. She recounts her storied experiences from past and present perspectives,

providing a flavour of those perspectives both before and those present now (Ciuffetelli Parker & Craig, 2015).

**How do newcomer Arab students become engaged within their schools over time?**

Arab student participants' stories indicate that they gradually felt more at ease participating in classes and engaging with their school communities as they gained greater language skills commensurate with the length of time spent in Canada. Both Deema and Bana, for example, began to have more courage to speak up in class a year or two after attending their high schools, and were better able to seek help when needed. While Bana initially expressed tensions in terms of class participation, she emphasized that: "It eventually got better as communication became easier". Deema also explained: "I've improved a great deal now; I have more courage to participate more frequently and even feel more confident as I do". In Lauren's case, years after attending a Canadian high school, she clearly linked her improved class participation to her advanced language proficiency: "I was mostly shy to talk and participate. I eventually got over that phase as time passed. I do put my hand up and participate most of the time now."

*Developing new friendships improves integration.* Additionally, participants expressed varied levels of feelings of belonging in their high schools which also improved as time passed, particularly as they developed new friendships. Integration within school eventually became more meaningful as students narrated many stories of making new friends and feeling a sense of belonging, as they began to engage with their school peers in and out of classroom over time.

Deema, who initially experienced social integration tensions, as discussed further in section 8.2, was able to make a number of new friends one year after enrolling in her high school, and with whom she spent her lunch time every day since. Therefore, her perception of

her experience was transformed as she felt a stronger sense of adjustment within her school community. She described her transition as follows:

Things felt so different ever since, especially that one of these girls [a new friend], happened to be in one of my classes this year. It felt wonderful to have someone to affiliate with in class, and work with when asked to work in groups. Before I started having friends, I always felt so shy in classes. ... Now, it's different, I can even see it in the eyes of my classmates that they do not think I'm that lonely alien anymore [giggling].

In addition, Basel demonstrated an excellent example of transformational school integration as his perception of his experience started to change as he began to make new friends and feel a sense of belonging at his new school, compared to the high school he first attended. Telling his story during the initial years, Basel had a sad tone and although he expressed gratitude for the available supports, he was generally unhappy. He initially expressed disapproval of what he perceived as school peers' irresponsibility and recklessness, as he justified his reasons behind avoiding peers at school during the initial phase, further discussion on this follows in section 8.2. Later, as we conversed a few months after his transfer to another school, where he was able to make friends, his eyes were glowing with happiness and his sad tone disappeared as he explained, "I eat breakfast with my friends at school now".

***Extra-curricular participation impacts school engagement.*** Safa, on the other hand, who also experienced initial school integration tensions, not only was able to make friends a few years after joining high school, but also had demonstrated active forms of participation and social integration within her school community. Two years after her high school enrollment she participated in the *New Orientation Week* program in the leadership capacity (which is further discussed in section 8.3). I met with her during the follow-up phase of the inquiry, right after she had participated in the program as a leader, and I witnessed the increased self-confidence she had developed as a valued member of her school and of the community as a whole. She

explained with a proud smile: “I’ve always felt sympathy for newcomer students; because I’ve been in their shoes and I know how hard it is at the beginning. Within the NOW program I was able to provide more than just sympathy”.

Participants’ narratives indicate that although they initially faced challenges in becoming engaged with their school communities upon joining high school in Canada, they were all better able to adjust over time. This illustrates the important role temporality plays, as length of time spent in Canada, in improving the levels of Arab students’ school engagement from past, to present, to future. Likewise, the Arab American high school students in Ayish’s (2003) study initially had limited potential academic achievement and social development but they were able to develop important coping strategies over time.

As the lived experiences of Arab immigrant students are in constant temporal flow, and transformations take place in their experiences and perceptions of their school integration over time, their academic achievements also undergo several changes from the past, to the present and future. Discussions of evidences of such transformations follow.

**How does temporality impact newcomer Arab students’ academic adjustment over time?** In addition to the improvements in the school engagement of newcomer Arab students, academic tensions also seemed to gradually transform into more attainable future aspirations over time, as participants gained better language skills and adjusted to the new school system. The majority of the Arab participants expressed satisfaction and pleasure to see their academic scores improve over the years, including Deema who shared that, “Recently, I got full scores on a couple of quizzes after battling with my grade scores for a while. I was so excited to show it to my mom and sister, that I quickly took a picture and sent it to both of them”.

*Academic performance improves over time.* Furthermore, while initial transitional academic experiences of Arab immigrant students were variable as transformations took place on a temporal continuum, those initial experiences played a big role in shaping participants' current attitudes, perceptions, and experiences and their ambitions for the future. For example, Bana expressed her pride and feelings of accomplishment as she saw improvements in her academic performance over time,

My tourism class teacher was so pleased with my progress. She told my mom that I have accumulated a 90% grade average in her class, and that I have been working hard. It honestly felt so good to see my hard work pay off. Every time I got a report card it was an inspiration for me to try harder as I saw my grades get better from one semester to the next.

*Initial academic challenges result in blocked opportunities.* Nonetheless, despite constant improvements in her academic achievement over time, her present academic experience impacted her future academic plans and ambitions. Bana's initial academic experience shows the everlasting impact it had on her future life. She had originally aspired to become a lawyer, given that she was originally a high achiever in her home country and was able academically adjust fairly quickly upon joining high school in Canada. She had planned to pursue a business degree upon completion of high school, in her undergraduate studies at a university first, and later apply to law school. She was faced with an obstacle in her second year at high school, as she was given a zero on a major term paper due to failure to appropriately cite a Wikipedia source. This anecdote of alleged plagiarism blocked her opportunity for passing the academic English course that is required for admission to university business degree programs. This academic obstacle forced Bana to change into a different stream which only allowed her to apply to college upon completing high school.

On the subject of plagiarism, having listened to Bana and Safa talk about their experiences of being accused of plagiarism in their initial years, and later the supplementary informant

guidance counsellor Ms. White's comment about it being a phenomenon among Arab students, I am able to establish that this is another tension common with some Arab newcomer students upon joining high school in Canada. Plagiarism is a multilayered concept, particularly for newcomer immigrant students of any ethnic backgrounds. Plagiarism can easily be misjudged in the work of those who have challenges that far exceed standard conventions of writing and citing information, like the majority of newcomer Arab students. Further discussion of plagiarism, as a commonly noticed phenomenon among newcomer Arab students, follows in the Family Relations section below.

Similar to Bana, Safa—who had originally aspired to become a surgeon—struggled constantly during high school to achieve high academic scores in mathematics courses; while improving over the years, she was never able to score as high grades as she had wished. Upon high school completion, she ended up enrolling into a bio-medical technician program at college, because her academic scores did not qualify her for university admission. On the other hand, both Deema and Lauren who arrived in Canada before high school, and had longer periods of time to adjust, had better academic chances and both qualified for university admission upon high school completion (Lauren was accepted into the competitive nursing program she had originally wished to join).

In general, language barriers seemed to present newcomer students with initial academic tensions, which continued to ease up as they gained stronger language skills and were better able to socially integrate and adapt. This manifests the influences of temporality on the academic and social experiences and perceptions of Arab students.

Temporality not only played a role in shaping integration and academic experiences of Arab participants from past to present to future, but also intersected with the personal-social

dimension and in contexts, in the place dimension, through different ways of knowing and being (Xu & Connelly, 2009). I therefore move on to discuss, in section 8.2, how stories of Arab student participants indicate that their personal qualities and social interactions with people and situations, also impacted their transitional high schooling experiences.

In addition, while transformations from the past to present and future were taking place within the imaginary life sphere of each participant, personal qualities and social interactions in and out of school places were in constant intersection. Further discussion of such intersections and their impact on the lived experiences of participants follows in chapter 9.

### **Section 8.2: The Personal-Social Dimension of the Experiences of Arab Immigrant Students in Canadian High Schools**

While it is important to understand what is unique about each individual Arab student participant, defining the personal dimension of her/his life, we should not ignore “the social fabric that forms the framework of a person’s life” (Andrews, 2007, p. 493), and defines its social dimension. In this light, it is impossible to understand an Arab immigrant student’s transitional experience in a Canadian high school without first understanding his/her personal qualities and social conditions and interactions with people and situations during the transition (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

In returning to Xu and Connelly’s (2009) imaginary sphere of life, I imagine each student participant inside his/her sphere, within which life activities took place and personal and social interactions occurred. While observing life activities, interactions, and events happening in the life sphere of each participant, I keep in mind that the sphere constantly floats through time.

Dewey (1938) emphasizes that experience is education and that education is experience. Similarly, Connelly and Clandinin (1988) perceive curriculum as “one’s life course of action” (p.

1). Given the interconnectedness of experience and education, I refer to all that student participants experience in their school context in the form of formal academic curriculum, as well as all that occurs in their school and home contexts, as education that has the potential to contribute to their Canadian high schooling experiences, and what these experiences mean to them. Given this broad base of potentially influential interactions in shaping participants' experiences, I attend to the importance of recognizing the quality of personal and social relationships participants have with peers, teachers, and parents within the personal-social dimension of their narrative life space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

### **Personal Qualities**

To illustrate how personal attributes could play a role in shaping initial social integration, let us examine the cases of Meera and Labeeb, the supplementary informants. Meera, a well-established Arab Canadian student, speaks perfect Arabic and English and is recognized at her high school for her academic and extracurricular achievements. Both Meera and Lauren showed signs of exhibiting more extroverted personal characteristics, unrelated to their schools' milieus and constitution and levels of language proficiency. On the other hand, Labeeb, also a well-established Arab Canadian student, faced tensions while he sought social acceptance at high school. Although Labeeb, like Meera, had experienced no language barriers at all due to the length of time they both spent in Canada, they led different lifestyles at school. Labeeb had more in common with Basel, a recent newcomer immigrant, and seemed to lead a less sociable lifestyle due to personal attributes that are not necessarily related to language barriers. In the case of Basel, his personal attributes (being shy and somewhat reserved), in addition to his initial limited language skills, significantly impacted his classroom engagement and school integration, showing the overlap of the temporal, the personal, and the social dimensions in his sphere of

everyday life space. For example, Basel had multiple relationship difficulties with people in his life, be it at home or at school as interaction between the personal and the social created tensions for him. He similarly faced academic situations where he felt unable to overcome challenges. In addition to all this, he felt out of place as he struggled to overcome his losses in the journey toward finding or making a place for himself, both in the new culture and as a high school student, particularly over the period of initial transition. While the tensions he experienced were all common among newcomer students in general, his personal qualities had added to the intensity with which he experienced these tensions. In addition, his social segregation hindered his school engagement and in turn negatively impacted his academic achievement. On top of this, Basel had consistent academic tensions even prior to immigration as he also faced academic struggles at school in his home country.

Basel thus is similar to Yong Sheng, the young Chinese newcomer boy in Xu's (2006) study, whose teacher and mother both believed that he was always too shy to answer because of language difficulties, despite knowing the answers to many questions in class. Further discussion of the personal and social interactions of Arab immigrant students within their schools follows.

Contrarily, from her early narratives, Lauren seemed to have a goal of mastering language skills as she enrolled in high school, and she was determined to accomplish her academic goals at any cost even if it meant making speaking mistakes publicly. She seemed to have an open mind as she worked toward her goals, and she was appreciative of teachers' efforts to help push her out of her comfort zone despite the difficulties she encountered. These personal qualities of persistence and dedication facilitated her academic achievement which later manifested in her successful enrollment into the university program of her desire. Further discussion of how personal qualities impact Arab students' interactions and overall schooling experiences follows.

## Peer Relations

Upon arriving in Canada, Safa and Bana were immediately enrolled in high school, while Basel, Deema, and Lauren attended grade school for a while prior to joining high school. Labeeb and Meera on the other hand had both been in Canada for over a decade at the time of their high school enrollment. As established in section 8.1, the quality of Arab students' relations with their school peers do not remain static but undergo stages of transformation. Some examples of changing peer relations and interactions are presented in the following subsections to illustrate how these impacted the high schooling experiences of participants in different contexts.

**How do interactions with peers impact Arab students' high schooling experiences and perceptions?** A number of participants' narratives indicate, that their experiences in high school, were impacted by certain social and personal incident(s) of negative encounters with some school peers. I discuss Deema's experience here to illustrate.

*Unwelcoming encounters with peers negatively impact schooling experiences.* Deema attended grade school for 2 years in a small town outside of Windsor before she and her family relocated to Windsor, where she began high school. She was not required to attend a high school that offered ESL support because her English language was better developed, yet she still faced difficulties in making friends initially. In addition, her negative interactions with some school peers in grade school left her with scarred memories and perceptions. She encountered repeated incidents of bullying, by a boy schoolmate, that impacted her personal qualities and social interactions; as she became shy and quiet,

I have changed completely over the past few years. I have become less social and I have turned into a quiet and shy girl. I tend to wait for people to approach me now, and if they don't, then so be it. Even my dad told me I have changed so much.

As a result, upon joining high school, her perceptions were clouded by those interactions. Although she originally liked going to school in Iraq and Syria, and recalled her past personal

qualities as sociable, outgoing, and in harmony with her schools' milieus, her subsequent perceptions were impacted by her earlier negative interactions in grade school. She had developed a perception of her initial high schooling experiences as isolated and lonely. She began to doubt her personal-worth and her classmates' intentions and attitudes,

I always felt so shy in classes. I was always surrounded by boys because girls always sat really far to avoid making any unwanted conversation with me, and if a book fell from my desk or something, everyone would simply stare at me, and I would start to sink through the floor.

Consequently, she expressed a sense of discontentment, as established in section 8.1, as she initially spent her time at school in isolation. Fortunately, as her imaginary life sphere continued to float in time, her overall school integration improved, impacting in turn the quality of her interactions with school peers. Deema was eventually able to make new friends at her new high school, all of whom were also immigrants, although not all Arab, with whom she spent time during lunch and worked with in some classes. This gave her a new sense of belonging and affiliation over time.

*Need for friendships compromise academic integrity.* On the other hand, Lauren who is perceived as a sociable young girl, making friends was an important coping mechanism for her upon immigration. Lauren was overly concerned with quickly developing friendships as she joined her high school. This concern for friendships, and the way that it connects with personal schooling experience and perception, are central to the stories in which Arab immigrant students explain their place in the culture and in the school. As Lauren was initially able to develop some acquaintances with school peers she quickly considered them friends, and was afraid of losing them, especially after leaving her friends back in Iraq and then later in Syria. Her fear was what drove her to share her work with a classmate, in the anecdote she narrated about her encounter with cheating.

**How do Arab immigrant students' personal qualities and cultural values influence their peer interactions in high school?** Safa, Meera, and Basel seemed to be selective and cautious in their interactions with schoolmates in general although their schools were ethnically-diverse in composition.

*Personal attributes impact qualities of peer interactions.* For Basel and Safa, personal qualities in addition to past friendships seemed to present them with initial tensions in interacting with school peers. As discussed in section 8.1, Safa's past unsuccessful friendships in Somalia and Basel's reserved personal qualities hindered their interactions with peers at high school. On the other hand, Meera, who is perceived as a sociable person and one who has no problem approaching people and making new friends, and is more established as an Arab Canadian student, seemed to have no meaningful friendships at school even after many years of being in Canada. Similar to Basel and Safa, Meera also seemed to be selective in her interactions with schoolmates. She generally preferred to limit her school friendships to Muslim and/or hijabi girls, as she thought her cultural values would conflict with those of her mainstream peers, "You know how it is in Arab's cultures, a girl who is always out and loud can easily be labelled". All three participants attributed their cautious attitudes, in part, to their cultural values, and disapproval of what they perceived as their schoolmates' "recklessness" and misbehaviour. Basel justified his limited interactions with school peers as a result of his perceptions:

that the majority of them have behavioural issues. They either sell or take drugs, or hang out with girls and spend all their days partying, and the rest of them smoke cigarettes. I don't fit in with any of these kinds of boys, so I avoid everyone on purpose.

*Cultural and religious Dress-code impacts social integration.* In addition, among student participants in the study, there were two Muslim hijabi girls, Deema and Meera, who felt their religious dress-code had contributed to their social tensions to some extent. Deema being initially enrolled in a school in a small town with very few newcomer Arab immigrant families, and her

social integration encountered many hurdles along the way. She was mostly conscious of her visibility as a minority student, while observing hijab as the Islamic dress code for girls above puberty age. As she initially experienced the unfortunate situation with bullying; she felt strongly intimidated within the social context of her school. Her personal interactions with schoolmates were much limited as a result, as she felt distinctly different from her classmates.

**How do Arab students develop friendships with peers within Canadian high schools?**

While past encounters with some peers, personal attributes and certain cultural values may have had an impact on the degree of integration of some Arab participants within their school community, the impact of the social context of each school cannot be ignored.

*Ethnically-diverse school milieus enhance social integration.* Lauren and Bana both attended the same Catholic school, which was ethnically diverse in composition. They both had an easier transition than Deema, whose school was mostly populated by well-established Canadian students, as they were able to quickly make friends with other immigrant students within their school. While they both possessed sociable personal qualities, their school context provided them easier opportunities to spend time with peers to whom they were able to relate.

*Plagiarism/cheating.* Some participants' efforts to maintain certain relations also commonly resulted in compromised academic integrity (cheating and/or plagiarism) in some cases as mentioned in the previous subsection. When Lauren was caught helping a classmate cheat, she confessed that her aim was to maintain some friendships in her initial years in the transition. Her fear of losing friendships which she was able to develop initially drove her to share her work with a classmate despite her inherent moral values against it. Nonetheless, Lauren's wise and mature thinking gave her courage to later stand up for herself and admit to her teacher her involvement in the incident.

In general, Arab immigrant students' need for affiliation with a group that accepts them as they first join a new high school in Canada may be an underlying reason that causes some to care less about abiding by the rules and more about being accepted by schoolmates. This indicates that their desire for belonging and developing friendships could be the ultimate motivation behind a compromised academic integrity during their initial schooling experience.

These findings regarding the impact of personal qualities, past encounters with school peers and related concerns, and some cultural values, illustrate how the interaction of the personal and the social dimensions impacted participants' relations with school peers in Canadian high schools. For example, although Lauren is a sociable and outgoing girl and she immediately attempted to develop new friendships upon joining her high school, her reflections on her initial school peer relations were similar to those of other student participants in terms of avoiding mainstream schoolmates. This finding also corroborates the findings of Selimos (2017) recent research with newcomer high school students in the region, in which immigrant students in general reported having less opportunity to interact with mainstream school peers.

Deema and Bana both felt less welcome to join a group of mainstream classmates when asked to work in groups in class in their initial years. Several of their reflections reveal that they were better able to work with other immigrant classmates who, most of the time, more readily embraced their differences and language difficulties. Such interactions with peers seemed to present Safa, Bana, and Deema with signs of social withdrawal and segregation among mainstream peers.

From a different lens, teachers reported noticing the common preference of Arab students to spend time with other immigrant students, yet these teachers preferred if newcomer students would instead interact more closely with mainstream peers. Ms. White, the guidance counsellor,

thought teachers perceive cross-cultural interactions as a venue to foster faster language acquisition among newcomer Arab students. Ms. White narrated the “success story” (i.e., academic achievement, as she described it) of an Arab boy in her school, which she attributed to the boy’s ability to make friends with Canadian-born schoolmates. She linked his quick progress to his interactions with more established peers and more frequent use of the English language, and not limiting his communications to those who shared similar backgrounds.

*Difficulties in interacting with Canadian-born peers impact peer relations.* In fact, all newcomer participants found it initially challenging to interact with Canadian-born schoolmates, more so than interacting with other immigrant schoolmates. Such difficulties were attributed in some instances to the shunning and unwelcoming attitudes of some mainstream schoolmates. Lauren, for example, said that “Whenever we had to work in groups, we [immigrant students] usually got together, and they [Canadian-born classmates] went together automatically all the time”.

*Developing friendships with other immigrant peers.* Participants who felt greater tensions in interacting with more established schoolmates also felt a stronger need to maintain friendships with immigrant peers, either Arab or of other ethnic groups. In fact, although participants’ peer relations improved over time as they became better integrated within their schools, as established in section 8.1, the majority continued to prefer to interact more closely with peers who were also immigrants. This was the case with Laureen, who continued to prefer to work with Arab or immigrant students of other ethnic backgrounds, even after spending many years in Canada. She explained: “I still feel that students who are also immigrants would understand me better”.

Similarly, Deema in her new high school became friends with a group of six girls, three of whom are Arab, and three from another immigrant background. Also Basel, who experienced

noticeable isolation and loneliness in his initial years at high school, became friends with newcomer immigrants as he joined a new high school a few years later, particularly those who came from Syria, his home country.

Likewise, Meera's story reveals an increased sense of belonging and affiliation with other Arab and Muslim students in her school. Meera's experience in her highly diverse school context manifests an easier social integration when compared to Deema's. She was thus better able to succeed academically as an enthusiastic Arab high school student. Meera's experiences at her school confirm research findings which suggest that supportive school climates have been linked to greater school engagement, specifically a greater sense of belonging at school and reduced feelings of alienation (e.g., Anderman, 2003; Ma, 2003).

While there seemed to be a recurrent pattern of integration tensions, particularly among mainstream classmates, Bana, Lauren, and Deema traced these difficulties in part, to their own personal lack of cross-cultural awareness and that of their peers. More discussion of this phenomenon follows.

**How does cross-cultural in/competence impact Arab students' interactions with school peers?** While there seemed to be a recurrent pattern of initial integration challenges, particularly among mainstream classmates, in the stories of Bana, Lauren, and Deema, some participants traced these difficulties, in part, to their initial personal lack of cultural competence.

*Students' cultural incompetence causes integration challenges.* For example, Bana related her initial inability to have a small conversation with a mainstream classmate as a natural consequence for lack of common understanding and interests:

One day, our religion teacher took us on a trip, and we were asked to pick a partner whom we've never worked with before. I grouped up with a mainstream African-Canadian girl, and we had to work on a worksheet together. We answered the questions on the worksheet and stayed

silent for the rest of the time. There wasn't much for us to share other than the assigned work. It just felt awkward to work with her.

Arab participants' initial lack of knowledge of the cultures and living habits of their schoolmates seemed to inhibit their peer relations and further increase their initial segregation. Both Lauren and Bana believed they faced a series of relational barriers due to their initial limited knowledge of Canadian ways of living, in addition to other factors. For example, Lauren narrated a story of an early conflict with school peers on the bus, when they joked about her being the girlfriend of other boys on the bus. She explained that she was initially unaware of her classmates' lifestyles and values, which in turn complicated the situation, and that she only began to learn anything of that sort after attending academic classes and starting to mingle more with mainstream students, similar to Bana and Safa. In fact, her reflections illustrate how over a period of time, storying her experience has helped her reveal various deeply seated assumptions (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013). She began interrogating these storied assumptions by reflecting on and using new cultural knowledge to overcome the influence of what she previously perceived as what is and what is not culturally acceptable. She emphasized that her cultural values have not changed; instead, she believed that the experiences she had over the 4 years she spent in Canada have aided in her cross-cultural understanding, and thus have positively influenced her interactions with schoolmates over time. Lauren's reflection reveals that her improved cultural awareness of her schoolmates a few years down the road have made it easier for her to socialize with them over the years. This illustrates how the social-personal dimension and that of temporality intersect and jointly impact the schooling experiences of Arab immigrant students over time.

To illustrate how the cross-cultural competence of some Arab participants have aided in their social and cultural integration, let us examine the cases of Meera and Labeeb, who are both more established as Arab Canadian students. In Meera's case, being in Canada for 11

years, and being more cross-culturally aware, she illustrated ultimate forms of school integration as she became actively engaged within her school community both academically and socially within one year of her high school enrollment. She easily intermingled with schoolmates of all ethnic backgrounds while preserving her personal choice and preference to restrict school friendships in certain ways. She also participated in extracurricular activities and became well recognized and respected among her teachers and peers. Labeeb also possessed social integration qualities among peers and became a main football player on the school team, all the while showing signs of a more quiet personality attributes.

While participants became better integrated within the social contexts of their high schools over time, as they developed more cross-cultural competence, they continued to feel that their mainstream peers had difficulties understanding and appreciating their differences. For example, Meera was frustrated when classmates asked rather personal questions about her “hidden beauty,” as Meera described it, given that she is a hijabi Muslim girl. She indicated that she liked her classmates and tolerated their curiosity, yet she wished she didn’t have to be asked such questions.

*Stigma and stereotyping cause segregation.* In addition to lack of cross-cultural knowledge among high school students in general, certain stigma may cloud the perceptions and attitudes of some students toward their Arab peers. In this respect, I discuss the current stigmatizing social and political circumstances pigmenting interactions and relations of mainstream students with Arab immigrant students, which clearly affect the degree of their social integration.

Hajaj’s (1993) study on Arab immigrants in the United States found that school people had negative stereotypes of Arab hierarchical family roles and felt that they oppressed women. In

addition, Nassar's (2008) study examining factors that predict attitudes toward Arabs in the USA found that level of media exposure contributed to people's attitudes toward Arabs. Ultimately, it is significant to raise awareness among school communities, including all students, of the values of acceptance, and the significance of understanding the complex diversity among immigrant Arab students, and immigrants of other ethnic groups. In addition, it is crucial that we as educators counter the rising negative portrayal in the media of Arabs and Muslims as villains, in order to foster healthy community relations for Canadian students of all ethnic groups and races within safe and welcoming school milieus.

Moreover, while Canada's ethno-cultural diversity has grown significantly over the past few decades and Canada continues to accept more immigrants from different parts of the world (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1999, 2007, 2011, 2015), Canadian communities' reactions to such settlement processes have varied tremendously with different levels of acceptance. Although different Canadian communities have embraced the process of integration, as immigrant and refugee settlers of Arab descent establish a living and their children attend schools, some prejudices continue to exist, particularly with rising racism fueled by current political global circumstances.

*Neighbouring the United States of America.* Despite strong Canadian efforts to promote racial tolerance and acceptance, being a neighbouring country to the United States creates negative influences on Canadian societal relations that are difficult to ignore. Stemming from Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) framework of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, attention needs to be paid to personal qualities in addition to the cultural and social settings in which participants are schooled within the sociality dimension of their life spaces. Only then can part of the complexity of each participant's life story be understood. For instance, the newly elected U.S. president

Donald Trump has overtly called for discrimination against Arabs and Muslims (Benjamin, 2017), and has made it socially acceptable for some people to act upon their racist belief systems and prejudices. Even prior to Trump's inauguration, evidence clearly indicates that Arab students in Canadian schools have faced and continue to face societal tensions directly linked to their Arab and/or Muslim identity, as discussed in Chapter 2's Challenges for Arab Immigrant Students section. According to a *Windsor Star* article,

There were 12 anti-Muslim incidents reported across Canada in 2013, according to the National Council of Canadian Muslims, which tracks them. There were 63 last year. And there are almost certainly many more. Many Muslims are afraid to speak out. (Jarvis, 2017, para. 18)

Nonetheless, numerous policy documents confirm Canadian schools' commitment to ensuring that Canada continues to welcome people from all parts of the world and continue to develop the diverse and inclusive communities, and schools, in which all people thrive.

Furthermore, in the neighbouring United States of America, "Fears of heightened bigotry and hate crimes have turned into reality for some Americans after Donald Trump's presidential win. And the list of incidents keeps growing" (Yan, Sgueglia, & Walker, 2016, p. 2). Such a sentiment also spread into Canada during Trump's presidential campaign, resulting in discriminatory hate crimes against Muslims and Arabs, and "Some people are saying these racist acts are directly tied to Trump winning the election" (CBC News, 2016, para. 5). Shortly after, an incident that shocked most Canadians took place at an Islamic Centre in Quebec City, where "Six [Muslim] men—all fathers—were fatally shot in the back as they prayed. Another 19 people were injured" (Kassam, 2017, para. 6). The "attack took place amid heightened tensions linked to the travel ban imposed by Donald Trump on seven [all Arab] Muslim-majority countries" (Kassam, 2017, para. 15).

*Canadian tolerance and acceptance.* Amid rising political tensions and racist incidents, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau declared, “We condemn this terrorist attack on Muslims in a center of worship and refuge” (Lindeman & Gillies, 2017, para. 8), saying in an earlier statement that “Muslim-Canadians are an important part of our national fabric, and these senseless acts have no place in our communities, cities and country” (para. 9). While Trudeau and other community leaders in Canada took the opportunity to preach unity, love, and acceptance, others took it as a chance to analyze existing issues of xenophobia among Canadian communities:

The shooting in Quebec is a turning point in Canada's narrative. We have long maintained a sense of pride in being pro immigrant, refugee friendly, and a safe haven for all. This act of terrorism proved without a doubt that this is not the case. Instances of Islamophobia, racism, and anti-immigrant sentiment have been present in Canadian society for longer than most would like to admit. (Thomas, 2017, para. 4)

*Improved cross-cultural competence.* Despite existing social and political stigmas, generally speaking, all participants in the study showed signs of improved social and cultural adjustment over time. Although the majority maintained their cultural connections even after being in Canada for a number of years, they were better able to adapt to the Canadian culture and school settings. Similarly, Saab (1997), in his study examining the cultural adaptation of Arab high school students in a suburban community in the USA, found that they became more assimilated into the majority as their length of time in the United States increased. He also found that they tended to want to maintain their Arabic culture, while becoming assimilated into the majority culture.

While Arab immigrant students’ interactions with peers played a big role in shaping their schooling experiences in Canada, so did their interactions with teachers. Following, is a

discussion of the themes that emerged from participants' narratives around their relations with school teachers.

### **Student–Teacher Relations**

Student participants' stories included many examples in which teachers' attitudes and interactions made a difference to these students' transition journey. It is well known that student–teacher relationships can play a tremendous role in changing the course of students' educational lives (Chiu et al., 2012). A teacher can hold the hand of a struggling student and help him/her overcome difficult times. Chiu et al. (2012) found that positive teachers' behaviours and dedicated teacher support were linked to better immigrant students' school engagement, resulting in the “strongest links to both attitude toward school and sense of belonging at school” (p. 14). In this light, as educators, we need to acknowledge that teachers' attitudes and approaches play a profound and essential role in steering the direction of Arab immigrant students' cultural and social integration into Canadian schools. Culturally responsive teaching styles, as per the perceptions of the participants of the study, require an understanding of the challenges they face, and promoting teachers' positive tendency and willingness to support them in overcoming such challenges. Teachers should not seek to understand Arab students' behaviours in terms of a generalized culture but instead should appreciate the individuality of every Arab student's life and experience (Darrow, 2013; Xu et al., 2007).

The majority of Arab student participants expressed gratitude for the availability of teachers' support and the welcoming attitudes of many, particularly in the initial years. While admitting that most teachers were approachable and personable, some participants struggled to seek their support when needed due to a number of factors. Safa, Basel, Bana, and Deema all justified their hesitation to seek support with what they perceived as one or more of the following factors: (a)

what they perceived as non-responsive attitudes of some teachers, (b) the need for more help than can be granted by subject teachers when approached for guidance, (c) the availability of other help resources at home, or (d) simply their personal embarrassment and fear of appearing to be stupid or inattentive in class. Further elaboration follows in the following subsections.

**How does teachers' level of support impact the schooling experiences of Arab students?** Participants' stories reveal varied levels of teachers' support were offered by different teachers. Lauren had varied experiences with teachers all of which aided in shaping her schooling experience.

*Teachers offer varied levels of support.* For example, her biology teacher enforced language learning techniques into his work assignments and exams. She believed that it made scoring high grades in his course much harder for her as a second language learner, although she understood his philosophy and appreciated his efforts. In fact, the strategies used by Lauren's biology teacher follow Cummins's (2011) suggestions that academic language exists primarily in subject texts and that all subject teachers need to give ample opportunities and encouragement to English language learners to read extensively across a range of genres. On the other hand, Lauren's encounter with a religious studies teacher impacted her experience in less positive ways, despite the teacher's positive intentions. Her teacher noticed her maturity and sociable personality and tried to build on such characteristics, possibly to broaden her horizons and those of other students. He would particularly ask her to speak up and explain her views about case studies in which she felt a cultural conflict. Although she was initially intrigued by being able to voice her opinion about different social and religious issues within the class, she later felt otherwise. She became frustrated for being repeatedly put under the spotlight, as the one with opposing views that are different than the majority. She eventually

felt alienated and became consciously disengaged. This illustrates how Lauren's personal qualities and social interactions with teachers within different classes and contexts have become part of the narrative of her lived schooling experience.

Moreover, in her narrated anecdote of cheating, in her initial year in high school, Ms. White expressed concern and disapproval, thinking of the whole incident as a bullying incident. Although it is unfortunate to learn that Arab immigrant high school students initially tend to fall into this trap, they are fortunate to have school staff care and look after their general well-being. Having teachers acknowledge the problem allows them to lend a helping hand to those students who get involved in such actions. The realization that plagiarism/cheating to some extent may be attributed to bullying, as Ms. White noted, is a strong indication of the dedicated attention and passion of teachers and administrators, especially those in the role of counsellors. Ms. White explained,

One common trend that I've encountered is that Arab students have the tendency to take cheating lightly. Last week I had to bring in two girls separately to question them on a cheating incident. The newcomer girl, who is smart and a high achiever, was pressured into giving her paper to another Arab girl because she was told she could not join the group of friends if she didn't share her answers. I had to explain that she can get a zero for contributing to cheating and had to explain that she should not allow anyone to bully her into giving them her work. (Individual interview in school, May 13, 2014)

*Teachers' cross-cultural in/competence and attitudes impact students' schooling experiences.* Furthermore, it may be worthwhile for teachers in Canadian high schools to understand that Arab newcomer students experience a sense of cultural conflict, as they move from a collectivist-community culture to a more individually focused culture. This is discussed by Al-Hazza and Bucher (2010) and in other studies (e.g., Hoover & Collier, 1985) that have sought to identify what motivates many immigrant students' laxity with regards to sharing their work with classmates, particularly other immigrant students. Some cultural value systems, collectivist

values in particular, may play a role in such phenomena, where one's success is measured by the success of his/her people:

Without an understanding of such cultural value systems, teachers risk attributing incorrect motives to many immigrant (and other) students whose implicit definitions of learning include helping each other. Students may even be referred for counseling or evaluation on the basis of behavior that is judged deviant rather than recognized as simply different from what is accepted by the dominant culture. (Rothstein-Fisch, Trumbull, Isaac, Daley, & Irma Pérez, 2003, p. 138)

Further, while Safa was generally happy to be able to approach teachers for help as compared to the case in her home country, she seemed to encounter some challenges that she felt were related to her interactions with some teachers. For instance, Safa was deeply hurt and insulted to be accused of using the writings of a friend to submit an essay in her first year after returning to Canada. While the passion of school staff for helping Arab immigrant students to do well and to integrate within school is greatly valued, some instances require more than just teachers' teaching expertise. Safa took it very hard when a teacher suspected she had plagiarized someone else's work. Such accusation proved to be more damaging to Safa's overall well-being and learning experience than the positive impact of addressing a possible academic integrity issue as an educational moment. She also experienced some difficulty in approaching her mathematics teachers, the subject with which she had the most difficulties upon joining high school. She explained, "Neither one of the two teachers made me feel welcome to ask for help anyway. They both seemed not-interested in offering a helping hand whenever I had the courage to ask." Reflecting upon Safa's perception of her mathematics teachers' attitude as non-responsive, I realize that a number of factors may have come in play. For instance, what may seem like such an attitude to some Arab newcomer students can be the result of overwhelming teachers with more responsibilities than they can handle. For example, overworked teachers who are expected to teach certain curricula and hold the hands of their students to pass standardized

testing, while dealing with issues that may exceed academic challenges, may negatively impact Arab students' experiences. In fact, learning about the perspectives of teachers, such as those described by Ms. White, the supplementary informant guidance counsellor, about different issues pertaining to assisting newcomer students can be very eye opening. One example of tensions in communication between Arab students' and their teachers occurs due to the lack of teachers' awareness of the difficulties such students face in understanding teachers' fast-paced conversations; as Ms. White explained, "One of the biggest issues I notice is that some of our teachers speak so quickly with these [ESL] students." This can create a gap between teachers and their newcomer students as communication becomes difficult.

On the other end of the spectrum, while Deema was struggling quietly as she had minimal family support during her initial year in Canada, a teacher who showed signs of compassion, was greatly appreciated. The teacher noticed Deema's signs of unhappiness and provided emotional support, as she offered a shoulder for Deema to cry on many times.

There was one teacher, who worked at the LST (Learning Support Teacher) room, who was very nice and helpful. I used to spend a lot of time in her room doing homework as she helped me along the way. I also confided in her whenever I felt bad about something, and she often offered to talk to my teachers to help ease some of the difficulties. She really brightened many of my days there. She was the only friend I had in the whole school. Even after I moved out of grade school, I sent her a long letter thanking her for all the support and kindness she had offered over the two years. On my last day, we took pictures, and she was the only teacher in the school who hugged me at the graduation ceremony. I will never forget her kindness.

This illustrates how the emotional support teachers offer to Arab newcomer students, can sometimes be as important as offering academic support, for the transitional experiences of these students. Nonetheless, participants' stories indicate that they also experienced tensions in seeking their teachers' support, particularly upon high school enrollment.

**Why do the majority of Arab students shy away from seeking their teachers' support in Canadian high schools?** While communication difficulties can serve as a factor inhibiting

newcomer students from seeking their teachers' support during the initial years, other factors can join in to play an additional role.

***Personal attributes impact student-teacher relations.*** For example, Basel had a multitude of reasons that prevented him from approaching teachers; although he felt teachers were generally helpful and welcoming, he felt embarrassed and wished not to burden teachers with helping him out of class. He said:

Some teachers are very good. One of my ESL teachers stays in class during lunch to give us the opportunity to drop in and ask whenever we need help. Other teachers are not available during lunch though, and it's pretty much the only free time I have. I've tried to ask my mathematics teacher for help a few times when I didn't know how to solve a question, but I wouldn't ask if I didn't understand the whole lesson. I would be too embarrassed to ask.

Having closely observed the social context within Basel's family for a number of months during the research period, I realize that his family fostered this attitude of shying away from seeking support due to wishing not to burden others. For the most part, Basel's mother expressed shying out of asking for my assistance several times in different matters. This illustrates that Basel's cultural and social upbringing and the ideals his family enforced, have compromised his ability to seek teachers' help when needed, in addition to his personal qualities of being a shy and reserved boy.

***Language barriers and Arab students need for individual-support impact student-teacher relations.*** On the other hand, Lauren felt that she often needed more help than could be offered by teachers, if and when she approached them. She described her experience approaching a teacher for guidance:

I stayed after class once this year to ask my English teacher for advice on an essay. She didn't help much. She glanced over my essay, gave some advice and handed it back to me. I didn't feel that it was too helpful, so why bother ask in the first place?

Meanwhile, Bana thought she did not need to approach teachers for help because she had the support she needed at home; Bana's mother helped her with English and her sister helped with math.

While the majority of participants expressed tensions in seeking teachers' support during their initial transition due to language barriers and other factors established earlier in this subsection, they all expressed gratitude for the smallest acts of care and interest any of their teachers showed.

**How do teachers' perceptions and understanding of their Arab students' academic motivation and future aspirations impact the students' schooling experiences?** Concurrently, while Arab student participants had varied perceptions of the availability of teachers' help, some teachers' perspectives proved crucial to the levels of support offered.

*Teachers perceive Arab students' demotivation as hopelessness.* Some teachers thought that Arab immigrant students at their respective schools became unmotivated as they lost hope of succeeding at school or of being accepted in certain university programs, and associated this demotivation with personal characteristics of such students. This perception in turn impacted teachers' willingness to support student participants. A mathematics teacher who was also a supplementary informant in the study explained it as follows:

My problem with some students, though, is that they become unmotivated, and I can't run after them to offer help. Some students also tend to expect me to answer their homework questions rather than help them understand them. (Informal conversation with a mathematics teacher, December 2, 2013)

Participant stories do indeed indicate diversity in terms of their abilities to maintain their hopes for success, during the transition. A number of participants' stories illustrate a sense of hopelessness. For example, Basel expressed his desire to drop out of school, and that he would have done so if it wasn't for his parents. Although he was not a high-achieving student even back

in Syria, his hopes of even completing his school education obviously diminished as he was faced with multiple challenges within his transition. Bana on the other hand had greater hopes for her future before and after her migration and had high aspirations for her future. Yet, as explained in section 8.1, she was forced to accept her circumstances afterwards as certain stream choices were forced upon her. As manifested in certain regulations, she was unable to achieve grades that were sufficient for the field she wished to enter: “I originally wanted to go to university and earn a business degree to be able to apply for law school. I wasn’t able to do the English academic course so that screwed me up.” Along the same lines, Labeeb also suffered from hopelessness as he sadly confessed his struggles to live up to his parents’ expectations of joining a business program at university. Further discussion of parents’ expectations follows in the Family Relations subsection. Students’ perceived hopelessness thus impacted teachers’ support efforts and demotivated some to certain extents. While some newcomer students do indeed display symptoms of depression and hopelessness, offering the right types of supports can turn demotivation into inspiration.

*The significance of understanding the driving forces of Arab students’ academic motivation.* Understanding the driving forces that motivate Arab immigrant students to work hard and achieve high grades, is essential to their schooling experience, as teachers can play an enormous role in supporting them through their transition. Realizing the value of educational success to the overall immigration experience of Arab children and their parents, one can see the significance in helping them succeed, as further discussion of this follows in the Family Relations section.

Moreover, it may be important for teachers to realize that newcomer Arab high school students’ strong desire to achieve academically may also be a factor underpinning their tendency

to use someone else's work as their own. Bana for instance did not seem to understand the seriousness of engaging in an act of plagiarism as she was writing her first essay for a mainstream English class:

We once had to do a project, and it was my first project to do in Canada. I mistakenly copied a sentence from Wikipedia and forgot to cite it. [The English teacher] made a huge deal out of it and gave me a zero on the project.

Although teachers may clearly define plagiarism and its consequences at the beginning of a semester, newcomer Arab high school students, like English-language learners of any ethnic background, may not fully understand what plagiarism means and entails due to their lack of language proficiency. This caution has been raised by Hoover and Collier (1985) who investigated issues of referral of culturally different children for suspected emotional/behavioural misconduct: "A child with some English proficiency may appear to understand directions or rules but in reality, lack enough conceptual knowledge to sufficiently comprehend certain ideas" (p. 508). Indeed, I personally can speak to this as I have in many instances in my early high school years, given teachers the wrong impression that I understood a concept, an assigned task, and sometimes casual conversations because I was too embarrassed to ask for clarification given the enormous amount of information that went over my head during that time.

With little understanding of Arab parents' expectations and the cultural values such families place on educational success, teachers can misunderstand parents' hopes for their children's future and think of them as simply unrealistic. As the guidance counsellor Ms. White expressed, "I've seen some repetitive patterns in Arab students over the years; the biggest one is kids who come in and say, 'I want to be a doctor or an engineer,' and they have all 50s—totally unrealistic." Teachers may be logical in being concerned that such unrealistic expectations can be damaging to their newcomer Arab students' well-being. For example, in the case of Basel, his story reveals

an apparent tension caused by his parents' academic expectations that were not close to being met by Basel. Nonetheless, such teacher attitudes, possibly driven by lack of cross-cultural experience and awareness, can play a role in undermining the abilities, future aspirations, ambitions, and efforts of hardworking Arab immigrant students who are struggling.

**How does teachers' cross-cultural in/competence and cultural-responsiveness impact the schooling experiences of their Arab students'?** While teachers' understanding of the multitude of challenges their Arab immigrant students initially face in their transition, as do other newcomer students, is crucial to these students' school adjustment, teachers' support continues to be valuable even after many years.

For example, Bana and Deema narrated several encounters with teachers, some who made positive impact on their stories, and others not so positive. Deema was taught art by a teacher at her high school who demonstrated a clear example of an individual who, despite good intentions, lacked the skills for creating an inclusive class environment for newcomer students. She constantly reminded Deema of her language deficiency and called her "the ESL girl" instead of calling her by name. This teacher's behaviour not only impacted Deema's social experience but also made art class a place of negative emotions for her, further discussion of the impact of place on the schooling experiences follow in section 8.3.

*Arab students need clear and slow oral communications.* Guidance counselor Ms. White pointed out how important it is for teachers to understand the language barriers Arab immigrant students initially experience, and the need to speak slowly when addressing them. Similarly, Safa's mother, a parent informant, wished teachers knew more and were better trained to educate newcomer students, while stressing her gratitude for those teachers who went an extra mile to make the transitions of such students easier:

Some of the teachers need training in ways to deal with ESL students too, I think. Some of them are good people but they really lack the skills to be welcoming and supportive. I don't blame the teachers because I understand how tiring their job is, especially when teaching in a school that houses a diverse population. Some teachers do an amazing job and I can even tell that they have been well trained. I would love to see the school organize some events that help the teachers understand more about their students and their struggles.

Although Deema's art teacher may have meant to speak slowly to help Deema understand, it made Deema feel more alienated: "She would start to talk to me like I had a mental problem; she'd talk slowly and in a silly way. Everyone in the class would start looking at me, and I would feel so embarrassed!"

*The significance of understanding Arab students' cultural boundaries.* Furthermore, Safa's mother chose to narrate an unpleasant encounter with one of her daughters' teachers outside of the classroom. The class was going on a school camping trip for a number of days. Safa's mother chose to keep her daughter at home and not to send her on the trip. The teacher kept reaching to her in hope of convincing her to allow the daughter to join her class trip. In consulting with Safa's mother, I decided to disclose this encounter because it is an example of a social tension students of Arab backgrounds may experience throughout their schooling in Canada due to cross-cultural conflicts. Although the teacher had good intentions of ensuring both the girl and her mother understood the situation clearly, her approach led to a conflict at home. More open and clear communication between the teacher and parent could probably have resolved the issue in a smoother way. Using the student herself as a mediator gave Safa's mother the impression that the teacher was trying to pressure them into accepting something that opposed their traditions. Similarly, Ms. White, the guidance counsellor, narrated a story about an Arab girl at her school who was about to be married to a man she did not personally know, through a family arranged marriage. Both the teacher in the story of Safa's mother and Ms. White felt that they needed to give the girls voice and repeatedly asked them to speak to their families at home. Safa's

mother was disappointed with the teacher's interference and thought the teacher crossed a boundary, contrary to the teachers' perspective as expressed by Ms. White. This is an example of a cultural tension experienced by Arab immigrant students and their teachers alike due to conflicting cross-cultural values and incompetence in understanding cultural values on both sides.

A similar example to illustrate further is that of a principal in one of the schools Ciuffetelli-Parker (2013) examined in a study exploring poverty and schooling issues. The principal had good intentions as she planned a diversity potluck dinner at her school, but because of her limited knowledge of her Arab students' cultures at the time, her initiative to bring the school community together turned into an embarrassing event. She only learned too late that her Arab Muslim students and their families were observing fasting during Ramadan, their holy month, and had accepted her invitation out of respect to her out-reach activity, yet they were not able to eat during the potluck. Although the invitation was intended to welcome and include all school community members, students of Arab and Muslim backgrounds and their parents, were actually made to feel different in that occasion due to insufficient cross-cultural knowledge and training of school staff.

Keeping in mind that student-teacher relations and interactions play a big role in shaping the experiences of Arab immigrant students, it is very important to enforce teachers' cultural learning of their diverse students' backgrounds.

***The significance of understanding and acknowledging the complexity and diversity, of Arab students' backgrounds.*** Teachers' cultural responsiveness requires cultural awareness and understanding. Both Bana's and Meera's stories reveal how they felt uncomfortable at times, for being thought of as part of a generalized culture, and felt the need to inform their teachers and classmates of the diversity within Arabic cultures. Bana described one of these instances,

We once had to do a presentation in one of the classes, and one of the Arab students made a general comment about girls in the Middle East. He said that Arab girls are not permitted to date and that their families would kill them if they did. I felt so insulted because it made all Arabs appear very uncivilized, barbaric, and oppressive, too. He was speaking of his village's traditions maybe, but it really portrayed the rest of us with such a negative image.

Bana's remarks about this issue highlight that although Arab immigrants tend to share many common cultural values; they also have unique histories and must be understood as individuals, as well as members of subgroups within a broader cultural group. As Bana expressed, "It would help if teachers understood more of the geography, the history, and the diversity within the Middle East." In this regard, Xu et al. (2007) warn against the dangers of "explaining student behaviour in terms of a generalized culture" (p. 417).

From a teacher's perspective, according to Ms. White, the lack of cultural knowledge did not seem like an issue worthy of attention; as other issues seemed more important. Ms. White's comment shows her confidence that her school teachers were well informed:

We always hold a day at the beginning [of the school year] when we talk to [teachers] about our school, our students, how we deal with them, what works and what doesn't work with our students, how to get through to them, and how to talk to them, we hold many workshops.

On the other hand, when responding to the question asking if teachers and staff were well-informed of the diversity of their students' cultures, Ms. White's response was a little different: "I honestly can't speak for everyone on our staff, but my sole education has been through the students and because I'm not afraid to ask questions". Although students themselves can at times be a valuable source of cross-cultural learning, it is important to be mindful that they may not always be comfortable being the only source. For instance, in spite of how confident and outspoken Meera was, she generally did not like being put on the spot and did not wish to be asked to explain issues pertaining to all Arabs or Muslims. Furthermore, it is important to realize the huge diversity within the Arab cultures of the 22 Arab league countries, and to not assume a

unifying culture among all, or that one or two students can represent most; in a study conducted in Massachusetts exploring the relationships between Arab immigrant parents and American school people, Hajaj (1993) found that school people were often unaware of its diversity.

In fact, participants' stories reveal the need for teachers' broad understanding of their cultural backgrounds and traditions for ensuring harmonious social interactions throughout their high school years, despite the length of time they have spent in Canada. To illustrate, let us discuss Meera's reflections in terms of teachers' culturally responsive attitudes. Meera had been in Canada for over a decade and had displayed signs of successful academic achievement and social integration within her high school. Nonetheless, when telling her story as a public-school student when she was in grade 4, Meera recalled feeling uncomfortable with her grade 4 teacher asking questions about her family. Although this may have been the teacher's way of showing compassion and care, Meera considered her teacher's attitude "nosey." Meera did not perceive the gestures of care that her teacher at the time showed as such; instead, she considered them as acts of invading her personal space. This illustrates the importance of teachers' cultural understanding of their students, as they join in creating the life stories of newcomer students. Meera also described other encounters with teachers many years later, which indicate varied levels of teachers' cross-cultural competence:

I told my careers teacher the other day that I found a job, and he wanted to show support and shake my hand, and I felt so awkward. Of course, I didn't want to be rude, so I didn't tell him that as a Muslim girl, I was not supposed to shake hands with men. My science teacher on the other hand, who knows more about our traditions, always gives me an air high five, and he does it with all the Muslim girls.

In summary, teachers' level of cross-cultural competence played a role in shaping the social interactions and school integration stories of Arab participants during the initial transition, as well as many years down the road.

**How does teachers' acknowledgment of their Arab students' efforts impact the schooling experiences of these students?** In addition, participants' stories show that seeing the slightest forms of recognition within the school context, proved to go a long way in making Arab immigrant students feel valued and their hard work appreciated. While some Arab participants felt overwhelmed with the workloads upon their high school enrollment, as established in section 8.1, the smallest acts of recognition of their hard work at school motivated them further.

*Arab students express gratitude for participation opportunities in school events.* For example, Basel expressed delight at the experience of winning a simple running competition at his high school and highlighted how lifting this experience was to him. Lauren also expressed similar excitement over participating in school-organized events, such as an ELL Spelling Bee competition, she explained,

I did not win; a Filipino kid beat me to it. I still remember the word. It was the word "horizontal." He knew how to spell it, and I didn't. I enjoyed participating, though. It lifted my spirits up to take part in the competition.

Although the influence of organized events in which newcomer students might participate and possibly be recognized among their peers may be uncommon in some schools, Arab participants' stories reveal their strong desire for recognition and positive enforcement within Canadian schools. Meera strongly expressed a desire to be recognized as an exceptional student through her involvement in the mathematics competitions at her school. She proudly reiterated her friend's comment: "I looked around the whole room, and you were the only Arab girl in the examination room, you made me so proud." Meera commented, "Her words meant a lot to me." Similarly, Bana expressed great joy at receiving a simple friendly remark after her voluntary efforts to help clean and organize book shelves in the ESL resource room.

*Arab students desire recognition at their high schools.* Although it may be common for adolescents in general to appreciate and desire recognition, it may be more so for those who

desperately need to feel valued and appreciated within their schools, like Arab immigrant students. Labeeb delightfully storied the anecdote when the football coach at his school nominated him to join the school team when he noticed his skills and body build. Also as Deema linked her love of school back home to her efforts being appreciated, so did Lauren and Safa as their stories transformed after leading in the NOW program, described in the NOW subsection of section 8.3.

Furthermore, while interactions with peers, teachers, and situations inside school played a big role in shaping participants' stories of schooling experiences, interactions with family members played a similarly significant role.

### **Family Relations**

Exploring the experiences of Arab high school students led to examining more than simply what goes on in schools as social milieus. Keeping in mind the personal and social dimensions in the narrative inquiry framework (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), factors pertaining to Arab students' lives at home and the roles that their interactions with parents play in shaping their school integration, were key issues that came up in students' narratives recurrently.

**How do Arab students' feelings of life-long debt to their parents impact their schooling experiences?** Both Bana and Labeeb believed that their parents had stable jobs in Jordan and reputable social lives, yet they immigrated to Canada, in hope of providing them and their siblings with better educational and life opportunities. Both students felt strongly the painful loss of social standing which their families experienced in this process of immigration. They both thought the way to be grateful and pay back the debt to their parents, for their immigration struggles and sacrifices, was through academic success at school. Given the multitude of challenges that Arab immigrant students are faced with, upon joining Canadian high

schools as they go through the process of finding or making a place for oneself, both in the new culture and as high school students (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007), hard work and dedication becomes their only option for success.

*Arab parents have high academic expectations.* Arab students' interactions with family members play a big role in shaping their transitional experiences within their high schools. Arab parents in general tend to have certain expectations for their children's future, attributed to their cultural values pertaining to education, as discussed in the Why Arabs Choose to Immigrate to Canada, and the Home and School Conflicting Values sections in chapter 2. Some Arab immigrant students struggle to live up to such high expectations and cultural educational standards by trying hard (perhaps too much so) to succeed academically in order to please their parents and conform to cultural values (Kumar et al., 2014; Naber, 2012). Similarly, more established Arab Canadian students continue to conform to such cultural values. For example, Labeeb had to struggle with university stream mathematics because he knew his parents would be disappointed if he chose the college stream instead. He expressed, "I do not wish to disappoint my parents. I certainly wish to do well at school, but if it wasn't for them, I would've switched to applied mathematics instead". This type of pressure is cultivated by the intrinsic and extrinsic messages transmitted through family relations to children of Arab immigrants, who are made to believe that their parents have sacrificed so much during the immigration process, in order to ensure better educational opportunities for them.

*Arab students experience added strain in trying to live up to their parents' expectations.* In fact, examining Safa's, and her family's, work habits in their first year after their return to Canada, I was intrigued by how committed everyone in the family was to their work. It is amazing how Safa's mother worked so hard in different contexts to help provide her children the

means with which they could overcome transitional challenges and succeed academically. While Safa's narratives reveal the extent of language difficulties and related academic tensions she and her siblings had to overcome upon return to Canada, her story manifests the level of her persistence to adjust and succeed. This indicates the weight Safa and her mother both placed on academic success as a goal in life, establishing that hard work and dedication is common among Arab high school students, as also discussed in section 8.1, and highlighting values enforced within family contexts as sources of academic motivation and hard work. The majority of participants' family environments were found to embrace educational success as a major goal in the lives of the children, despite variations in providing the necessary supports.

With a disparity between the obligation Arab students feel towards achieving their parents' educational expectations and the way the Canadian school settings are more individually focused, conflict of cultural values arise. As Labeeb demonstrated, his academic motivation and hard work were strongly driven by his goal of pleasing his parents. As previously established (in chapter 2) about family relations among Arab families, Arab immigrant youth predominantly seek family approval; and are socialized to follow their families' guidance and seek their acceptance (Aroian et al., 2011; Berry, 2006; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012; Rasmi, Chuang, & Safdar, 2012).

While some participants struggled to find a balance between academic achievement and parental academic expectations, some were more successful in doing so. Meera being a well-established Arab Canadian student, who is a high-achiever, while feeling obliged to please her parents through academic success, felt a great sense of pride in her accomplishments. She constantly received support and encouragement by her mother. Meera's mother worked hard to enforce educational values within her home culture. She is a proud woman who was naturally

eager to talk about her educational and career accomplishments. Meera followed her mother's lead, and narrated several anecdotes of her involvement in curricular and extracurricular activities as sources of joy and pride. Meera's educational values, which constantly motivated her, were strongly influenced by her upbringing within her family, and the strong emphasis on learning and academic accomplishments that was generally evident in the family environment.

In addition, while in some cases siblings played important roles in the integration and learning experience of Arab high school participants, parents' support and approval proved to make the biggest impact on participants' schooling experiences, which confirms earlier discussions provided in the Family Loyalty Versus Individual Competency section, in chapter 2. More discussion of the impact of parental involvement follows.

**How does Arab parents' involvement in their children's schooling impact these students' schooling experiences?** Arab student participants' stories reveal variations in the levels of their parents' involvement in their high school lives. While some expressed total independence, as their parents were less capable of getting involved in effective ways, others narrated limited involvement that was not necessarily apparent in all occasions.

*Transnational immigration impacts parental involvement.* In addition, in conducting this study, I learned that a considerable number of Arab immigrant families to Canada experience transnational immigration due to varied family circumstances, such as financial or career-related arrangements that require one of the parents to travel back and forth to their home country. The case of transnational families—which Xu (2006) also refers to as “astronaut families” (p. 218) in her research on Chinese newcomer immigrant families—are characterized by the separation and reunification of different family members over periods of time (Suárez-Orozco, Bang, et al., 2010). This affects the degree to which both parents can be involved in an Arab high school

student's life. The most common transnational family arrangement among Arab immigrant families is that mothers would often stay in Canada with the child/ren while the father goes back to home country, as the main bread-winner for the family. On the other hand, Safa's family presented an example of a less popular arrangement, where her father came to work in Canada and sent money back to Somalia prior to the family's reunification in Canada 11 years later. Such family living arrangements and other factors contributed to mothers, in some cases, playing a more active role than fathers in the schooling lives of their Arab high school children.

*Arab mothers play an important role.* For example, Lauren expressed pride in her mother's accomplishments in terms of success in her life and career. She mentioned that the support both her mother and sister offered was important in helping her overcome certain challenges during her initial adjustment following a major conflict with some peers at school, "I was sad for a while afterwards, but I got over it with the help of my mom and sister", illustrating a direct relationship between overcoming challenges at school and her family relations and interactions within the home milieu.

Similarly, both Bana and Safa felt assured that they did not need extra academic help at school because they believed that they had the resources and help at home when needed. Safa often spoke about her mother's support to her and her siblings as they made their way through the initial years in Canadian schools. For example, in describing an everyday routine during their first year she said, "My mom used to pick us up every day from school. We didn't have enough time to go back home to eat, so she used to bring our dinner for us to eat on our way. She used to drive us to the public library, and we spent a couple of hours with the tutor every day". Although Safa's mother had only completed a grade-8 level of education because she had no better educational opportunities, she made the effort to get actively involved in the schooling of her

children through different means, which clearly showed in her daughter's attitude towards learning and education. In contrast, Basel's parents played a more passive role as they stayed disconnected from their children's schooling.

While parental involvement varied in form and quality among Arab family participants, and mothers were always found to be the active players, this does not contradict what Krayem (2016) found in his study with Arab American fathers and the role they play in the family. Krayem's findings challenged the traditional stereotypes that depict Arab origin fathers as authoritarian and uninvolved in child rearing. In fact, he found his participating fathers to be highly involved with their children, viewed the father's role as a co-parenting role, and appreciated aspects of parenting in the USA.

*Arab parents show more active involvement in the initial transition.* In my study, student participants also reported more parental involvement during the initial years as they experienced greater tensions. While parents became less concerned with their children's schooling, thinking the worst was over and their children had made it through, different challenges continued to present those students with difficulties. Safa and Labeeb kept issues from their parents, because they wished not to disappoint them and because of the way their parents handled similar issues in the past, showing an overlap between temporality and sociality. For example, Safa was concerned with her mother's well-being and wished not to cause her any health complications through adding stressors. On the other hand, while Labeeb believed that he had a solid relationship with his family members and was convinced that his parents cared for him and supported his attempts to succeed, he preferred not to share with his parents some issues that he faced at school in an effort to avoid burdening them with what he believed were unnecessary disappointments, because of a past experience in which he felt they over-traumatized a situation.

On the other end of the spectrum, positive interactions with family members motivated some participants to do their best. For instance, Meera's story indicate that her mother's constant and active involvement in events at her school obviously gave her a big boost of confidence to pursue her future ambitions and resulted in great accomplishments at school. She also repeatedly commented on how inspiring her mother's life choices and lifestyle had been for her. When asked about her mother's involvement in her school life, she explained:

She's a parent council member this year. She was there in the career fair, and the multicultural day, and on the fashion show day she was amongst the mothers selling food. She was present almost in all school events. Like the science fair, for example—I couldn't have done it without her support. She was the one who drove me back and forth every day, a 45-minute drive away from Windsor.

Meera's mother is the type of Arab mother who encourages the achievement of her children and pushes them to excel, while she strongly emphasizes their adherence to Arab traditions and values.

**What factors hinder some Arab parents' involvement in their children's high schooling? And how are the schooling experiences of these students impacted as a consequence?** While it has been established that Arab parents can be role models for their children in terms of emphasis on hard work, educational values, and traditions, their involvement in their children's schooling can vary tremendously among different families. Similarly, while the majority of Arab parents strongly emphasize the important value of education in their children's lives, they display varied levels of support during their children's transition. In fact, such parental support can be hindered by a number of factors including Arab parents' language barriers, which play a role in problematizing parent-school communications.

***Language barriers hinder some Arab parents' involvement in their children's high schooling.*** Arab student participants' stories indicate a relationship exists between parents'

school involvement and their English language skills and educational levels. Safa for example, whose mother speaks English fluently, narrated a number of occasions when her mother came to school to speak to teachers in support of her daughter's progress, especially when challenges arose. In one instance when Safa was accused of plagiarism, although Safa thought that it was an unpleasant encounter with her teacher, she had no doubt that her mother would back her up in any future incidents. Similarly, Meera's transfer request from a class where she had a personal conflict with the teacher was initially rejected, but was later granted approval and she was transferred after her mother came to school and addressed the situation with the vice principal,

The next day when I went to the guidance office to transfer, they told me that I can't transfer, and I was so upset. My mom came to school and talked to them, and I was into academic English the next day.

On the other hand, students whose parents spoke no or little English did not feel as supported. Such findings are consistent with studies (e.g., Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008) that suggest educated parents are more likely to seek information about the educational system in the host country, as compared to parents with limited education who are unable to help their children in the process of adjustment. Such is the case with Deema's father who had less education in his past and spoke little English at the time of their immigration; instead of fully supporting his daughter when she was bullied at school, he was reluctant to intervene due to initial language barriers and unfamiliarity with school policies. She explained,

My dad said we were new and lonely in this country and that we didn't know much about its laws, and had no language or power and that it was not wise to keep raising issues with the school given the circumstances. It was generally a tough few years for the whole family, and I didn't want to make it any harder on my parents.

This past experience in middle school in Deema's initial years in Canada had impacted her schooling experience for a long time and made her adjustment more difficult. Indeed, my heart sank as I learned that Deema had to struggle quietly for the most part of her initial schooling in

Canada and was worried that she would burden her family with her school troubles. This anecdote illustrates how language barriers can hinder the ability of Arab parents to socially support the adjustment of their children during the transition.

***Parental educational levels impact some parents' involvement in their children's high schooling.*** While such Arab parents were unable to offer social support by effectively getting involved in their children's schooling, they were also unable to provide academic support at home in some cases. For someone like Basel, for example, whose parents did not have English language skills or enough academic knowledge to offer him support with school work, things were much more difficult. He explained, "My parents can't help me because they don't know much English themselves, and they don't understand the mathematics we do at school, either. My sisters, on the other hand, don't always have the time to help me. They have work of their own, too". Similarly, Hajaj's (1993) study of Arab families in the USA also found that language barriers inhibited parents' school involvement to some degree.

Thus, findings in this study indicate that Arab parents' involvement in the schooling of their children is linked to a number of factors related to their past educational and living circumstances, and their impact on current English language skills and levels of education. Additionally, parental skills can play a role in parental support or lack thereof. Although parenting styles can differ from one family to another in general, parenting influences can be far reaching in the lives of immigrant students as they impact their social interactions with people and situations in and out of school.

***Parenting skills impact Arab family relations.*** Parenting can be a difficult task, let alone when it is combined with immigration struggles and cultural conflicts. For some Arab parents, keeping control of their emotions and thus their interaction styles with their high school children

can pose a different kind of challenge to the children themselves. Exhaustion of having to face challenges of their own upon immigrating to Canada, Arab parents can become deprived of the energy they need to maintain positive parental skills. As Kaslow, Leidy, Guerra, and Toro (2010) explain, “differential acculturation is a source of stress for immigrant families and may interfere with their efforts to foster positive family interactions” (p. 258).

Safa’s mother, for instance, despite her continuous and very dedicated efforts to provide learning and social opportunities for her children, complained about self-control issues: “I am mostly stressed out from being overworked all the time; I have less patience in me to reserve for such issues. My only concern every night when I go to bed is how much I push these girls away by being a mother with a bad temper”. Likewise, Fakhoury’s (2012) study exploring the academic achievement of Arab American students in Michigan, found that the challenges that parents may face during the immigration transition, such as financial struggles, may also affect the students’ overall schooling success.

Basel’s mother also expressed frustration, but in this case, it was with her husband’s parenting skills: “[Basel’s] dad is tough on him. I am afraid he’s pushing him away with his rough attitude. I always feel trapped in the middle between the two of them.” Yet, she ultimately considered it Basel’s fault: “Basel poses a challenge to all of us as a family.”

Despite how difficult it is for some newcomer Arab parents to maintain self-control and positive parenting skills, their frustration can only translate into greater pressure on their high school children presenting them with added social tensions in their initial years in particular. Such students are often forced to negotiate their interactions with their parents while already facing enough tensions to deal with at school.

In conclusion, student participants’ relations with parents proved to largely impact their

initial transitional experiences in high school. While such relations continued to impact their schooling experiences years later, participants' overall integration had improved and they were better able to negotiate their existence both at school and at home over time. Furthermore, within the framework of narrative life space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), certain spaces, in the home countries, in Canada, at school and within support programs, provided places where situations and events impacted participants' schooling experiences in different ways, as further discussed next, in section 8.3.

### **Section 8.3: The Place Dimension of the Experiences of Arab Immigrant Students in Canadian High Schools**

Adopting the three-dimensional narrative inquiry life space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), as the research methodology and interpretive framework implied thinking about the schooling experiences of Arab immigrant students within the dimension of space, as situated within context in physical spaces (Riessman, 2008).

In this light, I once again come back to the imaginary life sphere of each student participant, as I “imagine that the sphere exists somewhere, or in a sequence of somewheres” (Xu & Connelly, 2009, p. 224). In doing so, I aim to understand the specifics of particular social and physical contexts in and out of school, as well as Arab student participants in their life settings, their interactions with the physical environment, and the outcomes of such interactions. In the stories of Arab participants, place proved to be a determining factor in shaping each participant's experiences and perceptions as he/she moved from place to place. Furthermore, following Elbaz-Luwisch's (2004) recommendation cited in the opening section of this chapter, I discuss school culture, home culture, and their interaction in home countries and in Canada, within the dimension of place, and the impact such interaction created on the schooling

experiences and perceptions of Arab student participants. To understand the complexity of lived situations, in the lives of Arab student participants, I discuss issues pertaining to the environments in which participants are schooled. While components of places can be restricted to a descriptive approach, by delving thoroughly into an explanative approach of the contexts within such places (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), these components empower the intricacies of the inquiry. I thus elaborate on places in and out of school, or scenes where events unfurled, which aid me in concretizing student narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

### **Arab Students' Experiences in Home Countries Versus in Canada**

Participants' stories indicate that their lived experiences were largely impacted by the places, where certain experiences occurred. As most participants began their schooling lives in their home countries, their academic skills and achievements were determined by their experiences within such schooling systems. Their perceptions of what schooling implies were also originally shaped by such original school settings.

**How do Arab students' early schooling experiences in their home countries impact their high schooling experiences in Canada?** As the stories of Basel, Lauren, and Deema of their early educational experiences in Syria, and that of Bana in Jordan, indicate, school staff had ultimate authority to join in the acts of disciplining students as their parents would, implying more rigid and authoritative relations between teachers and students.

*Arab students feel more at ease with Canadian school structures and policies.* Students in Arab countries were thus acculturated to blindly obey rules and policies without criticizing or rejecting orders. Students wore uniforms to schools and were punished if they arrived late in the morning. Strict policies governed the school structures and were strictly implemented. Basel explained: "teachers were so tough back home. School was too serious; it felt like a military

camp. Teachers would scream and even hit”. In Safa’s school, it was uncommon for students to seek individual support from teachers as student-teacher relations were mainly governed by restrictive cultural gender relations, and school teachers in Somalia were mainly men. She commented, “I liked my teachers, but I always kept my distance. There were no female teachers or staff at school. They were all male”. This facilitated an easier transition into Canadian high schools for most participants, in terms of student-teacher interactions; as Canadian teachers displayed more compassion and welcoming attitudes and were more easily approachable. Canadian school systems were less rigid in terms of the general structural policies, for example, only students who attended Catholic high schools were required to wear uniform to school, students were permitted to bring food or beverages inside the classroom and were granted more personal freedom in areas that do not impact others’ learning or personal space. Nonetheless, Canadian schools were stricter in enforcing policies governing peer- and student-teacher relations. For example, Ms. White explained:

We don’t face many behavioural problems with our Arab students. The biggest one that we have to deal with is boys’ physical shoving and pushing of each other, they seem to have difficulties understanding that we do not tolerate physical aggressiveness when they first join our school.

***Arab students- with no schooling interruptions- arrive with more advanced academic skills.*** Academic subject content in schools, in Arab home countries of student participants, was dense and advanced, and students were mandated to do many homework assignments routinely on a regular basis. Participants felt a sense of relief upon joining Canadian schools, for having to do fewer school related assignments at home. Basel said, “It’s not too bad here. It’s much less work than the workload back home in Syria for sure”. Students were also regularly tested on acquired knowledge and skills from an early grade level which helped the majority acquire strong academic skills. Similarly, Fakhoury (2012) found that immigrant Arab students coming

from stable educational systems were more confident in their academic skills than their mainstream peers because they had been exposed to advanced math and science curriculum in their countries of origin. This indicates that the majority of academic tensions such students experience upon immigration are more likely to be linked to initial language difficulties than difficulties in acquiring academic content knowledge and skills. This was illustrated in most participants' stories with initial academic achievement tensions, and the story of Lauren, who was better able to score higher grades in subject tests that required less use of vocabulary and writing skills, as discussed in the Past Experiences and Academic Achievement subsection, in section 8.

English language instruction was only offered once a week for one period in most schools that participants attended in the past, and students did not take second language learning seriously. All newcomer participants' stories indicate major tensions linked to their initial language barriers. Nonetheless, Lauren and Bana possessed more advanced English language skills upon arriving in Canada, because their families had invested in their language learning out of school, as discussed in section 8.1.

*Arab students feel socially isolated in Canada.* The majority of participants had lived in their home countries among their extended families and had well-established social relations. Even Deema, whose family resided in a refugee camp in Syria for three years before their immigration to Canada, had close friendships among camp residents. She described the camp settings, "there were about 30 families in the camp, and we all knew each other and got involved in each other's sorrows and happy occasions, too. Everyone in the camp had their share of hardships in their lives and so tried to support others". This presented participant students with major social tensions upon joining Canadian high schools as they needed to develop new

relations, while longing for their old friendships back home. Safa describing her initial relational tensions said, “making friends at school has not been easy. I can’t say that there is anything wrong with my classmates, but for some reason I haven’t been able to become friends with anyone”.

In addition, initial lived experiences among family and relatives in the home countries, aided in shaping the mindset of all newcomer participants, who left Arab countries after or around the age of puberty. This has impacted their levels of adoption of, and the degree of enforcement of Arabic cultural values and ideologies in their lives in Canadian high schools. For example, both Bana and Lauren emphasized their disapproval of teen dating and intimate relations; as they were influenced by their Arabic traditions and beliefs. On the other hand, Labeeb, who had been in Canada since the age of 5, while abiding by his parents’ wishes and enforced cultural values, was more accepting of his school friends’ cultures and values that conflicted with his. Describing his school relations, he said,

Sometimes when my parents see me with black friends, for example, they freak out and think that I’m up to something bad. They start to think that black friends are a bad influence on me, and they’d question me when I go back home compared to when I hang out with Arab friends because of the stereotypes they have of black people. They don’t realize that my black friends may be better than other friends, even some Arab friends.

In summary, Arab participants’ past experiences in their home countries had impacted their high schooling experiences in Canada in several ways because they: (a) had more positive perceptions of student-teacher relations within Canadian schools; (b) felt more at ease with Canadian structural policies and school workload; (c) were equipped with more advanced academic skills despite lack of English language proficiency; (d) experienced tensions in developing new friendships; and (e) had acquired Arab cultural values in their childhood.

## **Arab Students' Experiences in Home Versus in School in Canada**

Some stories of participants reveal tensions in striking a balance between conforming to their home culture while adapting to their new school environment, not only academically, but also constantly battling though different social contexts, sometimes conflicting ones.

**How do the lived experiences of Arab student participants in their family homes impact their Canadian high schooling experiences?** While Meera was successful in conforming to her family's educational values and aspirations, other students were less so. Those participants felt that their parents did not necessarily understand or fully appreciate the challenges they faced at school. According to Xu (2006), children of immigrants often must deal with the conflicting values of school and home and are required to mask certain values in each place. This is apparent in the stories of participants who expressed such tensions and felt their efforts were unappreciated by their parents more so in their initial years upon immigration.

*Arab students mask their identities at home and school.* To illustrate, let us take Basel's story as an example. Basel's mother experienced difficulties in connecting with him: "I tried to talk to him many times; all he did is make me feel like I knew nothing, and there was so much going on at school that I would never understand". Basel felt overwhelmed with the adjustments he had to make during his transition into a new school and a new culture, as he tried to find his place in his new world. Being a reserved boy, he not only experienced difficulties in interacting with schoolmates and teachers at school, but also found it difficult to open up to his mother at home, and allow her to support him in his transition. This led him to feel disconnected both at home and at school, as he was initially unable to negotiate his place in either milieu. Fortunately, changes began to transform his experience as his imaginary sphere of life floated in time and dimensions within the sphere constantly intersected.

On the other hand, Labeeb was better able to mask certain values both at school and at home; as he shared, “In the end, when I come to think of it, my school life is quite separate from my home life, and I’m quite a different person at home than the one at school”. For example, Labeeb perceived that his parents’ disapproval of his relationship with schoolmates from other backgrounds stemmed from their view that the majority’s values conflicted with their own. On this issue, Hajaj’s (1993) research with Arab immigrant families in the USA suggested that Arab parents found the more liberal American sexual mores threatening to their view of the primacy of the marriage bond, and this inhibited their friendships within American society, as well as their participation in American communal life in general. Such feelings of disconnection between school and home cultures, which are recurrent in the stories of some student participants, can complicate the lives of immigrant youth and hinder their academic progress (Eccles & Roeser, 2003; Martinez, 2006).

While some participants were seemingly able to negotiate home and school cultures despite the attendant difficulties in doing so, others were not as successful. In her initial years, Safa chose not to make friends at school in order to abide by her mother’s unspoken rules, which her mother openly expressed in her conversations with me, as she consciously tried to limit her daughters’ interactions with schoolmates. She explained:

Their school has a large population of students from very different backgrounds. I always hear about the fights that take place on the school campus. So, I try to avoid leaving them at school for much longer after school is over. I usually arrive at their school 5 to 10 minutes before the end of the school day to pick them up; so they wouldn’t have much time to spend time with classmates at school.

Similar tensions were also reported by Hajaj (1993) in her study with Arab families in the USA. She concluded that in contrast to the American emphasis on freedom and individualism for one’s success in life, Arab immigrant parents were family-centered, and their values emphasized limits and control.

*Arab students conform to their home culture and values.* Luckily for Safa, she was later better able to find a balance as she became more successful in making friendships that did not conflict with her cultural values. For Safa, this was a turning point in her life experiencing schooling and curriculum of life, as Pushor explains, “Turning points, points in time in our lived experiences, contextualized by relationships with people, things and events, and situated in place, demarcate those significant points in our lives which call us to attend to what and whose knowledge counts, and why” (as cited in Pushor & Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013, p. 288).

Meera on the other hand placed all her energy in academic and extracurricular endeavours. This, to a large extent satisfied her mother, especially since Meera had a clear understanding of her Arab cultural boundaries. For example, she wouldn’t ask to get involved in culturally unacceptable activities such as joining academic field trips which required sleeping overnight away from home. Bana and Lauren also seemed to know and understand quite well their parents’ cultural expectations, as evident in a number of narrated anecdotes. They both seemed to conform to what was viewed as culturally acceptable at home in terms of school relations and interactions, as Lauren narrated:

We never slept over at anyone’s house, not even grandma’s. I once went to a friend’s house for her sleep-over birthday party. She was a family friend, and she also was an Iraqi Catholic. We had lots of fun, we watched a movie, played, and everything, and when it was time for everyone to go to bed, everyone had a sleepover except for me; my mom came and picked me up.

Labeeb may have been more successful at masking such tensions, as he managed to make friends within school, as a place constraining these relations, while keeping his parents satisfied by not bringing friendship issues home. Unlike him, Basel had much more difficulty making friends or even adapting to his new environment at school initially, given his reserved cultural home environment in addition to his personal characteristics, as discussed in section 8.2.

On this issue, Daniel's (2013) study exploring acculturation issues of immigrant youth indicates that Arab Canadian youth's positive Arab culture orientation was related to greater life satisfaction within the family domain due to parents' approval and satisfaction. On the other hand, Daniel found that a Canadian culture orientation was related to greater life satisfaction within the school domain as it aided in their school integration.

*Some school events trigger feelings of alienation.* Moreover, certain events at school, while well-intentioned and well-planned, can initiate home conflicts and can remind Arab students of their adjustment tensions. This quickly reminds me of the conflict the newcomer Arab lady at Dollarama experienced (described in the Prelude to chapter 1). While trying to negotiate home culture versus school culture in preparation for Halloween celebrations, in an effort to ease her children's transition, she ran into conflict with her husband at home. Lauren's story with school-organized trips highlighted examples of similar incidents. While Lauren tried hard to overcome all the difficulties she faced at high school, she, much like Meera, was reminded of such conflicting school-home values because of school trips, she expressed, "I honestly felt a little left out in grade 8 when everyone was getting excited about the trip". Similarly, although Meera seemed to appreciate the cultural responsiveness of her science teacher, as discussed in section 8.2, she expressed disappointment at not being able to take part in certain school activities due to cultural conflict issues. Extracurricular events that took place away from school posed challenges for her, yet Meera's mature understanding allowed her to see the cultural boundaries that as an Arab girl she was not supposed to cross in her pursuit of achievement and shining as a distinguished student.

As I have mentioned in the Context of the Study section of Chapter, reflecting on my personal initial experience as a high school student (Conle, 1996), my father constantly tried to

keep me and my siblings linguistically, culturally, and religiously attached to our values and traditions. He was overly concerned about our becoming assimilated into society in ways that might strip us from our identity as Arab or Muslim. Today, as a mother of Arab and Muslim children growing up in Canada, I can understand my father's early concerns and those of other Arab parents. Yet I try to teach my children to respect the different values and traditions of their schoolmates while choosing for themselves to embrace the values that can help them succeed as global citizens.

### **Arab Students' Experiences within Support Programs at Canadian Schools**

Participants reported on a number of programs offered at their Canadian schools that provided direct support to immigrant students, as well as to Canadian-born students in some cases. Their narratives allowed me to discuss the social settings of such programs and whether these settings attracted them as Arab immigrant students in ways that enabled them to take advantage of such programs. Participants' stories also allowed me to interpret how they perceived such programs in terms of supporting their needs.

Reflecting on my personal experience as a newcomer Arab student many years ago, I see great value in the collective efforts clearly evident in the growing number of programs and initiatives aiming at easing the integration of newcomer students today. In efforts to provide inclusive and welcoming communities, the education sector, other organizations, various settlement agencies, programs, and services in Windsor, Ontario and other Canadian regions have together developed relatively strong supports for immigrant families and students (Selimos, 2017). In order to continue to enhance the available programs it is necessary to incorporate the perceptions of such immigrant students themselves regarding the effectiveness of such supports. With the focus here on the perceptions of Arab immigrant students, their narratives can be

informing to the education sector.

**How do English Language Learning support programs in Canadian high schools impact Arab student participants' schooling experiences and perceptions?** English language learning support programs have been designed and implemented in Canadian schools for many years. In Ontario, such programs date back to the early 1990s and are constantly being reviewed and amended for best practices and to best support ELL students. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) released a comprehensive policy guide entitled *English Language Learners ESL and ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12*. The guide emphasized that

This language-acquisition policy is designed to help all English language learners in the province by engaging them in learning that enables them to develop their talents, meet their goals, and acquire the knowledge and skills they will need to achieve personal success and to participate in and contribute to Ontario society. (p. 7)

In Clause 2.3.1 of the policy guide, directions were given to school boards for initial assessments of ELLs' proficiency and placement:

The assessment procedure will include:

- a structured interview to assess oral communication skills (i.e., listening and speaking);
- an assessment of reading comprehension;
- an assessment of student writing;
- an assessment of mathematical knowledge and skills. (p. 17)

Consistently, according to Arab student participants' narratives, a number of schools in the city of Windsor offer comprehensive ELL programs targeted at improving the English language skills of newcomer students. The program consists of five comprehensive levels (A, B, C, D, and E). Students are tested for their language proficiency when they first attend school upon arriving in Canada, and thus are placed in one of these levels accordingly. They are permitted to attend subject-specific academic classes intended for mainstream students only after they complete the

final level (it is worth noting here that a student is only allowed to take two ELL course levels per semester). While attending the ELL classes, newcomer students are offered some academic classes designated for English language learners (e.g., civics, geography, science, cooking, arts, and religion). The student participants of the study started at different ELL levels depending on their language skills when they first enrolled in their high schools and their initial assessment scores.

*ELL programs succeed in supporting newcomer Arab students.* Fortunately, while certain contexts within school presented some participants with added social tensions, other contexts provided a place for easier integration and feelings of belongingness among peers. All participants expressed an increased ability and interest in participating in class activities and discussions within the ELL classes, as they felt comfortable to socialize with other immigrant peers.

The majority of participants reported feelings of belonging within the ELL social settings, increased ability and interest to participate in class activities and discussions, and letting their guard down, consistent with other research findings (e.g., Anderman, 2002; Finn, 1989). In general, all participants' stories revealed a great sense of gratitude for being able to attend ELL classes. Safa, Basel, Deema, and Bana all maintained that the ELL program has helped them gain a recognized amount of language skills over their enrollment period regardless of their initial language proficiency levels. Not only did the program help participants in terms of language learning, but ELL classes have also helped ease some of the social adjustment pressures they initially faced at school. Safa reflected on her experience within the ESL program and said: "I think it's an amazing program. I have learned a great deal of English from these classes. I have always felt more comfortable in these classes contrary to mainstream classes where I felt estranged and lonely".

From a teacher's perspective, ELL programs offer inclusive learning environments. Ms. White, the supplementary informant guidance counsellor, also shared a similar perception:

I guess that's the beauty behind having the ESL program in the school. There are also ESL classes for academic subjects like career and civics, geography, and religion for the first year, so we can build their confidence slowly as they go. These all count as credits towards their high school diploma, too.

While the ELL program enormously aided newcomer Arab students in terms of language acquisition and initial integration among other immigrant peers, the streaming practices of such classes further inhibited their integration among mainstream peers. Lauren, Bana, and Safa all indicated that they had no opportunities to gain cultural understanding of their mainstream peers until after they were mandated to attend mainstream classes. Such streaming practices in turn may need to be further reconsidered to enhance newcomer students' integration within their school communities.

**How do After-school academic support programs in Canadian high schools impact Arab student participants' schooling experiences and perceptions?** While the majority of Arab newcomer students face academic tensions, as they try to adjust within a new school system, their participation in support programs can aid in the transition. Furthermore, newcomer students' interactions with people and situations in such support programs can play a role in determining the level of their participation. As the place and the personal-social dimensions intersected in the lives of participants, the degree of their engagement within these programs was impacted. As established earlier, the majority of newcomer Arab participants faced language barriers that initially inhibited their ability to express themselves in English, and this in turn contributed to their shying away from taking advantage of academic support programs as well.

While research studies establish that the academic performance of immigrant students and students in general, improves significantly among students who participate in formal homework-

assistance programs offered by their schools (e.g. Bang, 2011), participants' level of participation in such programs varied. In accordance with research recommendations and in an effort to enhance the academic chances of high school students, a number of schools in the city offered after-school academic help programs.

*After-school academic programs do not succeed in attracting Arab newcomer students.*

Nonetheless, participants' stories reveal a lack of participation in such academic programs. The social setting within which these supports were offered did not fully succeed in attracting Arab immigrant students. Lauren, Labeeb, and Deema narrated anecdotes in which they sought academic help through attending the after-school support programs. They mainly described it as a friendly setting in which students came into the room, seated themselves, and started working on their homework assignments. A teacher or two was usually available to provide supports in certain subject areas on a given schedule a number of days a week. Some schools provided snacks and made computers available for students to use during that time as well. Labeeb in narrating his experience mentioned that Arab students were very rarely seen in the program. Nonetheless, Labeeb's story indicates that he was better motivated than other newcomer participants to seek support through such programs, as he experienced no challenges in communicating with supporting teachers.

Deema also felt that the program's social setting was not suitable for her needs. She needed individual support and felt there were more students seeking help than the two teachers on duty could handle. She therefore never came back and decided to seek her sister's support at home instead, like Bana and Lauren both preferred to do. She explained:

I came for help once and found lots of people in the library where the afterschool homework club is usually held. They were too loud and unorganized. I didn't know what I was supposed to do to get the help I needed. There were a couple of teachers helping everyone, and when I called a teacher to help me, she briefly answered one question for me

and left to help another student. I needed more help to understand the whole lesson and not just one question, and I felt shy to call on the teacher again. So, I left and thought it may be easier to ask my sister to help me at home instead, and never came back again.

Some of the city's schools did not offer after-school homework help per se, but according to Meera, "If you care about succeeding academically, you can go to your teacher directly and ask for help." Meera also explained that high-achieving students at her school were offered the opportunity to voluntarily tutor other students who needed extra help. This presented a great opportunity for both types of students involved in the process, as it offered Arab newcomer students accessible tutoring by schoolmates, to whom they could socially relate, and an opportunity for students who were doing well to feel valued and helpful and enhance their personal attributes of success.

While such programs can be a valuable source of support to Arab immigrant students, among all students, specific needs linked to their initial language tensions and increased need for individual support need to be taken into consideration.

**How does the Newcomer Orientation Week (NOW) program in Canadian high schools impact Arab student participants' schooling experiences and perceptions?** The NOW program is operated and funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. As Boyce (2013) describes it,

Employed by settlement agencies and school boards, the program helps give newcomer youth a head start in high schools across Ontario. The program began at eight Ontario high schools in the summer of 2007. After the program exceeded expectations, it expanded to other communities across Ontario. It made its way to Windsor in 2008. (paras. 7-8)

*NOW program succeeds in supporting newcomer Arab students.* The NOW program not only offered newcomer participants a chance to make friends prior to the start of school, increasing their initial sense of belonging within the social context of their school, but also offered a wonderful opportunity for personal growth. The program allows students who have

been in Canada longer to offer support and guidance to more recent newcomer students. Students get nominated to lead for 1 year, in a paid position, before they are asked if they wish to continue to lead in the program on a voluntary basis.

*Social integration.* A number of participants (e.g., Lauren, Safa, and Bana) reported taking part in the NOW program. Students who have participated in the NOW program, whether as leaders or newcomer participants, all expressed gratitude for the opportunity, as it offered welcoming and inclusive social milieus. Lauren, who worked in the program for 2 consecutive years after participating as a newcomer the first year, reflected on her experience as a leader:

Sometimes it wasn't easy because I took it on as a responsibility and some participants were not very cooperative, but it was really fun to do it nonetheless. It felt empowering to lead in the program. It made me more comfortable with the idea of presenting in front of people because I had to present several times in front of participants as a program leader. Of course, I presented in Arabic, but at least I learned that I was capable of presenting clearly and with confidence, regardless of the language I used.

*Personal growth.* Those who participated in the program in a leadership capacity were able to practice their leadership skills, feel valuable, and have their skills acknowledged. I met with Safa during the follow-up phase of the inquiry, right after she had participated in the program as a leader, and I witnessed the increased self-confidence she had developed as a valued member of her school, and the community as a whole. Bana, on the other hand, was only involved in the NOW program as a newcomer participant; she described how she met people from her school even prior to the start of school and how that helped her cope quickly, "It was nice; I got a chance to meet some people before school started".

In summary, the three main programs currently offered in city schools designed to enhance the learning experiences of Arab immigrant high school students (among other ELL students) were: (a) the ELL support programs, (b) the NOW program, and (c) the after-school academic support programs. Arab student participants generally expressed gratitude for the availability of

the first two. They emphasized that interactions with peers and teachers within these programs played a big role in their initial integration and easing the coping tensions they faced in the transition; through enhancing their language skills and emotional adjustment. Participants described feelings of belonging and affiliation with other classmates within the ESL program and the NOW program alike, and added that participating in the NOW program in a leadership capacity helped build their self-confidence and feelings of self-worth. Participants showed less interest in taking advantage of the after-school academic support programs, attributing this demotivation to the social context within which such programs are arranged. Academic support programs were perceived to lack individual support mechanisms, much of which is needed by newcomer Arab students. These findings clearly illustrate the role personal and social interactions play in shaping the evolving adjustment of newcomer Arab high school students in different places.

### **The Canadian High School – A Place of Being and Knowing**

A high school in the city, either Public or Catholic, bound by a physical space in a concrete building space, presents “a given location that is not only specific, describable and distinct from other locations, but that holds meaning, that matters to the persons who inhabit it” (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007, p. 388).

**How are Arab student participants’ schooling experiences and perceptions impacted within high schools in the city?** A number of events and scenes at different schools came up in the stories of participants in ways that relate to the place dimension of a participant’s lived experience in the three-dimensional narrative space.

*Contexts within Catholic schools impact Arab students’ experiences.* For example, let us look at religion classes in Catholic schools. Although Lauren expressed a sense of privilege

for attending a Catholic high school, given that she is Catholic herself, her story reveals that cultural values can still play a role in making an Arab newcomer feel different at times, despite religious affiliations, as discussed in section 8.2's Student–Teacher Relations subsection. This attests to interesting aspects of the experience of Arab immigrant students in Catholic schools. While Lauren expressed mixed feelings toward religion classes, she seemed to assume that Muslim students felt included within such contexts. Ms. White's perspective was also quite similar as she shared joyful memories of embracing the different faiths of her diverse students in her Catholic classes during her religious teaching assignment in the past. In fact, Lauren's narratives are evident of the tensions she experienced while trying to fit in which, makes me wonder what an Arab student affiliated with the Islamic or Jewish religion must feel like in a Catholic religion class that he/she is mandated to attend in a Catholic school. This is an aspect worth exploring in further research to investigate the experiences of Arab students of other religions in Catholic schools in Canada.

*Ethnically-diverse schools facilitate an easier transition for newcomer Arab students.* On a different note, stories of participants who attended ethnically diverse schools reveal that this has helped them in terms of their school integration. As established in the Context of the Study section in chapter 1, a number of the city's schools comprise largely diversified populations given that Windsor is a very multicultural city. Lauren and Bana, attending the same school, were both better able to make friends at school right upon their enrollment, because the diversity within the school allowed students to embrace their differences, as discussed in section 8.2. Lauren for example explained, “a lot of my friends, with whom I work in class now, are non-Arabs, but non-Canadian-born either”. Similarly, Meera quickly felt a sense of belonging as she hardly felt like a minority student at her highly ethnically-diverse school, “there were lots of

hijabi girls in most of my classes so I didn't feel like it was a big deal. I felt like I belonged right away". Similarly, Deema's later narratives, describing the phase as she and her family relocated to Windsor, tells of her transformed perceptions as she attended a class taught by a hijabi teacher at the high school she joined. Within the social context of that particular class, there was a clear indication of increased confidence which Deema expressed in her story, in terms of class engagement.

In fact, participants' stories reveal that sharing similar immigration struggles brings together students of different immigration backgrounds. Having noted the emphasized initial school integration tensions newcomer participants faced among mainstream peers, as discussed in the Peer Relations section, it is worth mentioning that some student participants felt more at ease working with students who shared their cultural origins, as well as immigrant students of other origins. Both Lauren and Deema in some cases reported feeling more comfortable in interacting with students who belong to immigrant ethnic minorities. This affirms findings of other research studies that examined immigrant students' academic integration. In Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova's (2008) study, students who had arrived to America from the Caribbean, China, Central America, and Mexico reported having limited opportunities to build any sort of relations with peers who were not from their own country of origin, which thus contributed to their linguistic isolation.

Unlike participants who attended ethnically-diverse schools, Deema attended a high school mostly populated by mainstream students and less ethnically-diverse in composition, a place that increased her social tensions. She later excitedly expressed her feelings of relief and affiliation as she saw for the first time other Arab girls at the high school she later joined, "it just felt like heaven to see them".

In summary, there were some differences in participants' narratives in terms of initial social integration depending on what schools they attended in the city. In this section, in the discussion of place as a dimension of participants' lived experiences, I "attend[ed] to the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 51).

### **Concluding Remarks for Discussion: Intersection of the Three Dimensions of Life Space**

The schooling experiences of Arab immigrant students are rooted in complex lived situations, in temporal, personal-social, and physical places, as Xu and Connelly (2009) point out, "The personal conditions of feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral outlooks are always in interaction with a landscape environment consisting of people, policies, things and programmes" (p. 224).

As Connelly and Clandinin (1988) stress, "curriculum is something experienced in situations" (p. 6). Arab students experience the curriculum in the complex immigration situations that they find themselves in, within which they are schooled. They experience curriculum in the situations of their home countries prior to immigration, in their schools, in their classrooms, and even in the situations of their own families.

The stories of the Arab high school student participants in the study reveal a number of themes that recurred repeatedly as their lives unfolded in the imaginary life spheres containing the three dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The three major themes that emerged from Arab student participants' stories are: a transitional journey through social and cultural integration, academic achievement: a major life-long goal, and family relations and the overall adjustment. While the themes appear to capture the substance of the students' stories in their quest to adapt, many of these themes overlap in many

instances in the lives of participants in such complex forms that it constitutes and reveals multiple layers and dimensions of life.

Temporally, in the lived experiences of Arab student participants, a number of transformations took place as time passed and their life sphere floated in time. Past experiences impacted present perceptions and future aspirations of participants as the temporal and personal-social dimensions overlapped in their life space and “narrative intersection of ways of knowing and being” (Xu & Connelly, 2009, p. 222) were manifested clearly. Participants’ stories reveal diverse lives from the past to the present across cultural and physical borders on journeys in transition. They tell personal and social dimensions of students’ lived experiences from the past to the present, their adaptation and frustrations in their lives as newcomer students, and their values, traditions, and habits that they hold on to or let go of in the transition. As a narrative inquirer, I see “the personal as an expression of the social and, vice versa, the social as an expression of the personal” (Xu & Connelly, 2009, p. 224).

Furthermore, as Elbaz-Luwish (2004) suggests, “Belonging to a place implies connection with people in that place” (p. 408). In discussing the personal, the social, and their interaction in the transitional experiences of participants, I highlighted the ways in which participants’ interactions shift and change over time, from one place to another. As Moen (2006) explains, “contexts individuals encounter are based on where they are at any particular point in time. As historical conditions are constantly changing, this also results in changed contexts and opportunities for learning and development” (p. 3). This meant paying attention to student participants’ personal qualities, their social qualities, the environment, and interactions between the personal and social as elements of time.

Students' personal-social interactions with people and situations throughout their Canadian schooling as Arab immigrant students, both at school and at home, proved to greatly impact their experiences and perceptions. As a result, social tensions were traced back to initial language barriers that led to various academic difficulties and social integration tensions at school. In addition, cultural tensions both at home and school brought forward issues of Arab parents' educational values, the significance of culturally sensitive school milieus, and ultimately the role of teachers' cross-cultural competence. Three main support programs offered in high schools were also most discussed as places where events unfurled and interactions occurred. Based on such important findings and insights about the schooling experiences of Arab immigrant students in Canadian high schools, I move on to the final chapter of this document in which I make educational meaning of Arab immigrant students' cross-cultural schooling experiences. I then attempt to answer the questions I raised earlier, as I asked myself: How do I know if my inquiry is educative and not simply a collection of personal narratives, and if anyone in the field of education will be interested in my research findings? In other words, will my study make a difference? In my attempt, I offer practical implications for school and policy makers to continue to support, or possibly enhance existing support programs, in ways that best respond to Arab immigrant students' needs and circumstances.

## CHAPTER 9: IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry as the research methodology for the study, thinking narratively of each student's transforming experiences meant imagining life spaces that flowed in time, consisted of the personal and the social interactions, and that moved from place to place. With the three-dimensional life space of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) providing the backdrop for emergent themes, discussions and interpretations within this chapter allow me to reconstruct the seemingly fragmented moments of participants' lived experiences in narrative unity in a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space from the past to the present and future, in personal and social dimensions, and at different places at school. These spaces vary over time with the interactions of Arab students' personal and social knowledge and interactions, and from place to place.

In conducting this narrative inquiry, the puzzle pieces in Arab student participants' ever-evolving lives were initially invisible to me, as they seemed like fragmented pieces, until they began to come together into a meaningful shape over time. Making meaning of Arab newcomer students' experiences in transition required deep thinking and reflection. I constantly tried to make meaning of the intersecting narratives of students with diverse life histories and lived experiences in seemingly every day routines.

With a constant rise in the immigration rates of Arab people in Canada and a remarkable influx of refugees from the Arab world in the recent years, Arab youth continue to comprise a significant percentage of the immigrant youth population in Canada (Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012). Therefore, Canadian schools are in dire need of more resources to help prepare teachers and schools to address inclusion and integration issues relating to these students (Brown, 2015). With extensive research on education-related matters guiding the practice of education

stakeholders, curricula developers, and policy makers, a gap remains with regards to Arab immigrant students' education.

With a particular focus on high school education, this study used a bottom-up approach that considered Arab students' perceptions of their schooling experiences, through a deeper look at the curriculum of lives lived within the school environments, home environments and support programs. The study therefore sought to understand the current living circumstances and perceptions of Arab immigrant high school students in transition, in an effort to bridge gaps in communicating cultural and educational values between school communities and Arab immigrants in Canada.

In this chapter, in section 9.1, I highlight the major insights from the study that may provide a basis for promoting mutual understanding and respect as Arab immigrant students search for harmony within themselves as well as with their families and their Canadian community. Consequently, I offer considerations, in section 9.2, for how school practices can be tailored to best support future planning in the area of Arab high school students' education. Overall, this dissertation's review of current research and the inclusion of participants' voices through story telling can serve, I hope, as a valuable resource for long-term planning of Arab immigrant student-inclusive curricula in Canadian and international high schools.

### **Section 9.1: Making Educational Meaning of Arab Immigrant Students' Cross-Cultural High Schooling Experiences**

In attempting to make educational meaning of Arab participants' stories I focus on understanding their notion of social and cultural adjustment, and the significance of academic achievement for their overall success, and how these impact their journey in transition. Inquiring into Arab immigrant students' stories offered a window into a better understanding of how students

make meaning from their experiences during the transitional stages of their high schooling in Canada.

The student participants' stories in the study are aligned with the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space and reveal how Arab immigrant students' educational experiences are temporally influenced by their lived experiences from the past within their countries of origin, to the present within their new environments in Canada, and to the future. As Huber and Clandinin (2002) point out, in attempting to understand lived lives, the narrative inquirer should consider the temporality of places, events, and things.

In the personal-social dimensions, Arab student experiences are influenced by the values and ideologies they continue to maintain in Canadian society, and the supports (or lack thereof) that these students are provided with through personal and social interactions, in their schools, communities, and at home upon their arrival in Canada. These personal, family, and societal factors then translate into their schooling experiences in their Canadian high schools and affect the degree and quality of their interactions and integration within their environments.

### **A Transitional Journey Through Social and Cultural Integration**

In the journey to becoming well-established Arab Canadians, newcomer students are found to undergo multiple stages of acculturation, adjustment, and school integration. Similar to newcomers of different ethnic groups, newcomer Arab participants initially face a number of transitional tensions, before they are able to overcome many. As no experience can stand alone in time, the stories newcomer students told did not merely reflect experiences they had at the moment they were told, but also served as a reflection of their past educational and social lived experiences, and their expectations for the future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The Arab immigrant students in this study are found to face complex integration-related matters in high school, particularly during the initial years upon arrival in Canada. While some Arab newcomer students display sociable characteristics in their past lives in their home countries, the majority express feeling tensions in terms of their initial personal and social interactions upon joining their high schools.

Generally, Arab students' initial quality of social integration is linked to: (a) initial experiences of language barriers; (b) personal attributes and types of interactions with peers and teachers within the school community; (c) experiences with past relationships; (c) conflicting cultural values between home and school; and (d) levels of cross-cultural competence of both Arab immigrant students and their mainstream peers; (e) opportunities for developing new friendships; and (f) school milieus.

**Language barriers and Arab immigrant students' social and cultural integration.** As established in earlier discussions, in section 8.1, the degree of language proficiency of Arab students upon arrival in Canada varies depending on their past learning and social upbringing within their countries of origin. Nonetheless, all newcomer participants initially experience some degree of language barriers in communications using the English language, which improves at different paces from the past, to the present, and the future. During the initial transitional years, while conversational proficiency takes shape and Arab students negotiate their entrance into a new culture and new school, their personal and social interactions in different contexts in and out of school, contribute to shaping their schooling experiences and perceptions. Initial and ongoing relations with schoolmates, teachers, and family members alike, as “surrounding forces and factors, people and otherwise” (Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007, p. 23), prove to be crucial in shaping their social and academic experiences in general. This has helped me, and I hope it

would help readers as well, “to better understand the value of relationships in bringing about profound changes in Arab immigrant students’ lives (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 22). While participants’ stories of personal and social interactions varied tremendously, it was possible to draw connections between their relations and interactions, and their overall high schooling experiences.

Initial school disengagement, as feelings of embarrassment and reticence to participating in class, are common amongst newcomer students in general, as evident in the literature (e.g., Anderman, 2003; Chiu, Pong, Mori, & Chow; 2012; Mansouri & Trembath, 2005; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan 1996; Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990). Although Arab newcomer students’ oral communication with schoolmates and teachers seem to become easier after a year or two of attending Canadian schools, academic achievement and social integration continue to prove challenging for longer periods of time. This corroborates Cummins’s (2008) study, which found that “Conversational aspects of proficiency reached peer-appropriate levels usually within about two years of exposure to English but a period of 5-7 years was required, on average, for immigrant students to approach grade norms in academic aspects of English” (p. 3).

*Language barriers impact social integration.* Arab students’ initial inability to converse with peers impact their integration and perceptions during the initial years as they feel lonely at school, which for some turns into discontentment for varied lengths of time. Similarly, Altinyelken’s (2009) study of immigrant students in Turkey found that those who were unable to create friendships with mainstream schoolmates or who had academic difficulties in turn became isolated. Teachers in Altinyelken’s study noted that such students withdrew and became introverted. Altinyelken determined that these students used withdrawal as a coping strategy which, while helping them to avoid further embarrassment and rejection by mainstream

schoolmates and society in general, made them miserable and caused them to constantly question their loneliness and become increasingly doubtful of their own worth.

**Personal qualities and Arab immigrant students' social and cultural integration.**

Tendencies for isolation may be justified upon newcomer students' enrollment in high school due to the multitude of adjustments they have to make, while particularly dealing with language barriers, as established in sections 8.1 and 8.2. Nonetheless, it is important to note that personal characteristics, in addition to other factors, can influence the extent to which this isolation affects an Arab immigrant student's experience. This highlights the impact of the personal dimension and the uniqueness in every student's experience and perception, despite common stereotypes of unifying characteristics. For example, Arab students who possess sociable personalities are better able to adjust socially among their school communities than those who are shy and introverted. This also illustrates the overlapping effects of personal and social dimensions with temporality; as personal qualities impact the quality of social interactions while language proficiency, which also plays a role in social integration, continues to develop over time.

**Past relational experiences and Arab immigrant students' social and cultural integration.** Within the temporal dimension of Arab immigrant students' schooling lived experiences, past experiences prove to impact present and future ones. While it has been established that personal qualities impact the initial integration of Arab immigrant students in addition to language barriers, some Arab students' past unsuccessful relations with friends and schoolmates present them with more social integration tensions upon joining high school in Canada. In addition, some Arab students' past experiences of losing friends due to immigration is also found to impact their friendships and peer relations.

*Fear of losing friends impacts academic integrity.* Some students fear of losing friendships that they initially succeeded in developing upon high school enrollment, in some cases compromise their academic integrity as they are found to use cheating as a tool for seeking acceptance. A similar fear was also expressed in the narratives of some student participants in the study conducted by Selimos (2017) with newcomer high school students in Windsor. This also illustrates the intersection of temporal, personal, and social dimensions in the lived experiences of Arab student participants as these impact their social and cultural integration.

**Cultural differences and Arab immigrant students' social and cultural integration.**

On the continuums of interaction, certain personal qualities and social relations prove to play a crucial role in the schooling experiences of Arab immigrant students. While the interactions of Arab newcomer students, with people and situations within their Canadian high schools, are found to improve over time, they are particularly found to develop friendships with other immigrant students, mostly of Arab backgrounds, more so than mainstream peers. This highlights a pattern which, while common among immigrant students in general, may be somewhat more unique to students of Arab origins due to increased family emphasis on Islamic/Arabic traditions and values, directly linking the phenomenon to the home culture. The cultural differences that are not well compensated within home or school turn into conflicting values for Arab newcomer students, and are found to negatively affect their social and cultural integration process, particularly in the transition stage. In this instance, I find it worth noting that some Muslims' beliefs and some Arabs' traditions can be limiting to interactions of Arab immigrant students among peers; due to certain cultural boundaries, dress codes, and restrictions governing gender relations. This is similar to what was found in Hajaj's (1993) research, as Arab

parents found liberating North American values conflicting with their collective family values and traditions.

*Cultural differences turn into conflicts.* These types of home versus school conflicts make school a place where Arab students are made to feel like outsiders. Since teachers interact with students within multiple contexts at school, teachers' and peers' cultural competence is found to be crucial to these students' social and cultural adjustment. In addition, Arab students affiliated with the Muslim faith, particularly girls, are found to have more difficulties in acculturation when compared to those Arab students affiliated with the Christian faith. This is due to their increased visibility as a minority group and due to more family imposed restrictions on their peer interactions, which is consistent with Nassar-McMillan and Hakim-Larson's (2003) findings regarding hijabi girls' perceptions of their social integration. Similarly, Sarroub (2000) in her study with hijabi Arab American high school girls found that home and school worlds sometimes collided. This illustrates the impact of overlapping dimensions of interaction and place, as Arab students negotiate their existence both at home and at school.

*Arab students contribute to the Canadian culture.* Although in some instances Arab students' culturally influenced social values of maturity, family commitment, and feelings of responsibility, are found to become obstacles as they strive to integrate into their school milieus, these values may generally be desirable. In order for those students to be socially able to integrate within their school communities, it is worthwhile to consider and appreciate the knowledge and values they bring to the Canadian high school social context. Their contributions need to be valued and appreciated in the context of the schools they attend in particular, and of the Canadian society in general. The majority of Arab immigrant students are found to display a great deal of dedication and committed work-ethics, as discussed in section 8.1. Such work

ethics and sense of responsibility, if understood and incorporated within school culture, would help improve not only Arab newcomer students' cross-cultural schooling experience but also education for all students of diverse ethnic groups; as they intermingle and learn from each other. Similar to Xu's (2006) argument, I see great value in encouraging Canadian youth, particularly in high schools, to show respect and appreciation of the mutual learning opportunities and contributions that Arab immigrant students can bring into their school communities. As Xu (2006) notes, "the newcomers are perceived more as the ones who need to adapt to their new life rather than as people who contribute valuable social, cultural, economical and educational resources to the increasingly diverse society" (pp. 5-6).

***Developing inclusive school programs and events imply understanding cultural values and boundaries.*** Generally speaking, the cross-cultural differences those Arab immigrant students have to negotiate as they live in the cracks between home and school (Xu, 2006), present them with major social and cultural tensions in their journey in transition. While efforts to create inclusive and welcoming programs for newcomer students are important and appreciated, it is significant for these programs to reflect a true meaning of inclusive environments. Being inclusive implies being mindful of all students' cultural and religious boundaries that could impose certain restrictions on their participation and attendance. Such tensions can also be eased through supporting Arab students in embracing their cultural traditions without having to mask any, due to negative stereotyping within the school community. This can happen by raising cross-cultural awareness of all members within a school community, more discussion of this follows.

**Raising cross-cultural awareness and Arab immigrant students' social and cultural integration.** Within the personal-social dimension, Arab students' relations are found to be

impacted by their cross-cultural competence, and that of members of their school communities. While it has been established that Arab students' social and cultural integration is impacted by their past learning and social upbringing within their home countries, initial language barriers, cultural values enforced by their parents, and personal qualities, the majority are found to initially experience inability to comfortably interact with mainstream peers both in and out of the classroom.

*Cross-cultural in/competence of school community impacts Arab students' schooling experiences.* As discussed in the Peer Relations section in 8.2, while Arab immigrant students develop cross-cultural competence over time and thus become better integrated in their schools, they continue to feel that their mainstream peers have difficulties understanding and appreciating their differences. Lack of cross-cultural knowledge among high school students and teachers in general, in addition to certain stigma may impact the perceptions and attitudes of some towards their Arab peers or students.

The lack of cross-cultural knowledge among newcomer Arab participants and their school peers and teachers alike prove to be the source of blocked integration opportunities for many. Classmates, as well as school staff, tend to mistakenly perceive Arab students of all backgrounds to share a single unifying culture, implying certain customs, traditions, and even religious beliefs. This stereotypical perception then clouds all social interactions with Arab students, leaving no room for individuality and appreciation of one's own personal attributes, as discussed in section 8.2.

In fact, an ethnically diverse school environment is found to make the transition easier for most Arab newcomer students, as such climates are found to serve as a stepping stone in journey of adjustment of those students. Such school milieus offer Arab immigrant students a greater

sense of belonging and thus better social and cultural integration, as discussed in section 8.3, and further elaborated on in the following subsection. This illustrates the impact of place and personal-social interactions on the overall schooling experiences of such students.

**School milieus and Arab immigrant students' social and cultural integration.** As certain contexts within places, where events constantly unfurl, play significant roles in shaping lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000); I examined some school contexts in and out of classrooms to better understand the complexity of Arab students' schooling experiences. The study reveals that Arab immigrant students view existing support programs as welcoming, inclusive, and fostering to their academic and social progress. The three main programs that Arab immigrant students in Windsor schools participate in upon their high school enrollment are the ELL support programs, the Newcomer Orientation Week (NOW) program, and the after-school academic support programs. Arab immigrant students are found to gain tangible language skills over their enrollment period in the ELL programs, and feel a sense of belonging and a considerable level of class engagement—findings that correspond closely with other research on immigrant students' psychological and academic outcomes (Anderman, 2002; Finn, 1989).

***ELL support programs succeed in supporting newcomer Arab students' cultural and social integration.*** Arab immigrant students who attend the ELL classes at some point during their high-school years in Canada, report feelings of relief and comfort in such classes, as a place of learning and being. According to Arab students, these classes provide inclusive social contexts where newcomer students do not feel inferior, as opposed to their feelings of apartness in other classes where they are unable to fluently converse with peers. As discussed in section 8.2, Arab students prefer to interact and befriend peers who are also immigrants. ELL programs offer newcomer Arab participants the place for such interactions.

*After-school academic support programs fail to meet the needs of newcomer Arab students.* On the other hand, newcomer Arab students are found to have less interest in taking advantage of academic help programs due to a number of factors, including: language barriers, social settings within such programs, or believing that they have alternative sources of help at home.

*The NOW program succeeds in supporting Arab students' social and cultural integration.* In addition, the NOW program administered by Citizenship and Immigration Canada is also found to attract and promote newcomer Arab students' social integration, who participate either as newcomer participants or potential leaders over the period of their high school enrollment. In general, newcomer Arab students are found to be more interested in programs that help them cope socially; as they consider social integration to present them with one of the biggest initial challenges, especially upon their high school enrollment.

While ethnically diverse school milieus provide the platform for easier transition and integration among Arab immigrant students, some school events do not necessarily provide the same level of support, as discussed in the Conflicting Cultural Values subsection earlier.

*School diversity enhances Arab students' integration through representation.* In addition, while ethnically diverse student composition within a school implies an easier transition for Arab immigrant students, representation is also an issue worth paying attention to for school policy and teachers' assignment in city schools. In a similar light, Cutri (2013), in her emphasis of the particulars of place in United States' schools, asserts that "The demographics of teachers contrast sharply with the demographics of today's students" (p. 202).

To this end, the unique need for affiliation expressed in the narratives of hijabi-Muslim Arab girls surfaces as an important theme. Again, this illustrates the significance of providing

socially inclusive school milieus through diverse ethnic representation both in terms of student body and school staff, as a way of paying attention to the roles of the personal and social dimensions in shaping the schooling experiences of newcomer Arab students. This can also enhance opportunities for Arab newcomer students to develop new friendships among school peers.

### **Developing friendships and Arab immigrant students' social and cultural integration.**

Generally speaking, Arab immigrant students were found to strongly emphasize their need for developing friendships upon their high school enrollment. This concern for friendships, and the way that it connects with personal schooling experience and perception, are central to the stories in which Arab immigrant students explain their place in the culture and in the school.

*Arab students initially face difficulties in developing friendships.* Although participants' stories illustrate major transformations in terms of their social and cultural integration within their high schools, factors discussed earlier in this chapter were all found to initially hinder their abilities to develop new friendships in school. Similarly, initial tensions in making new friends have often been reported to create difficulties among immigrant students of different ethnicities (Ungar, 1995). Initial social integration difficulties are found to lead to academic tensions, hopelessness and lack of motivation in some cases, all of which undergo multiple transformations over time. Further discussion of such academic tensions follows in the following subsections.

### **Academic Achievement: A Major Life-long Goal**

As established earlier, Arab participants' language development undergoes a number of stages from the past, to present and future. The majority of Arab newcomer students demonstrate improvements in oral communications using the English language before they feel confident of

their academic language improvements. This is consistent with Cummins's (1991) suggestion that oral proficiency among second-language learners can be developed within a couple of years; yet, "we know that conversational fluency is quite different from academic proficiency in a language" (p. 143).

While the majority of Arab students join the Canadian school system at the high school level, they need to catch up academically and are expected to pass standardized literacy and mathematics tests, and to eventually graduate from high school within 4 years. Yet as noted in the literature, a period of 4-7 years is needed for second language acquisition under optimal academic support conditions (Cummins, 1991; Hakuta et al., 2000). The disparity between systemic expectations and real language acquisition challenges are found to create initial academic tensions for newcomer participants, as was the case in Fakhoury's (2012) study which found that lack of language proficiency hindered Arab American students' academic success.

In general, in addition to initial language barriers, newcomer students' academic adjustment is found to be sensitive to a number of other factors which could include: (a) family; (b) school; and (c) individual factors, as consistent with Suárez-Orozco, Bang, et al.'s (2010) findings. In addition, literature indicates that a decline in educational performance is a natural risk in early adolescence (Suárez-Orozco, Gaytán, et al., 2010). This proves that academic struggles are not only unique to newcomer immigrant students or Arab newcomer students in particular. Factors that contribute to creating academic tensions for Arab immigrant students are further discussed in the following subsections.

**Family relations and Arab immigrant students' academic achievement.** Arab immigrant high school students' life orientations and aspirations are found to be deeply connected to the values and traditions enforced and emphasized by their parents in ways that fuel

their hard work and dedication, as discussed in section 8.2, and as noted in Selimos's (2017) research.

***Parental involvement positively impacts Arab students' academic achievement.*** The study found that family life, manifested in the personal and social dimensions of participants' schooling experiences, contribute significantly to the academic adjustment and coping of Arab students in Canadian high schools. Arab parents' levels of involvement in their children's high schooling vary tremendously. Arab parents with higher levels of education and English language proficiency are found to be more involved in their children's schooling lives through constant communication and follow-up techniques, and to present successful role models to their children. Children of more involved Arab parents are found to lead happier lives and have more optimistic feelings of hopefulness and future opportunities. Those Arab students are also found to possess high levels of dedication and to maintain patterns of hard work; in an effort to achieve academic goals and future aspirations. Consistently, studies on immigrant students' education indicate similar attitudes of immigrant students towards school work. For example, Chiu et al.'s (2012) study of immigrant students' engagement at school in 41 countries found that immigrant students in general possess stronger attitudes toward school work than their native-born peers. Similarly, Chinese newcomer students in Xu's (2006) study also reported working intensely hard to achieve success at school, sometimes by doing more work assigned by parents who were used to their children working harder and for longer hours back in China. So did Bosnian newcomer students in Mosselson's (2002) study, who reported working harder than the rest of students as a way to achieve success and social acceptance.

As much as family relations, home environment, and values enforced by parents contribute to the dedication an Arab youth manifests toward school academic success, the personal

attributes of each student similarly play a significant role in shaping his/her academic goals and aspirations, as discussed further in the Personal Qualities and Arab Immigrant Students' Academic Achievement subsection.

*Some Arab parents' disengagement negatively impacts their children's academic achievement.* On the other hand, the study found that language barriers and parents' lower education levels cause some Arab parents to disengage with their children's schooling lives. While such obstacles hinder some parents' involvement and support to their high school children, particularly during the initial transition, families negotiate their ways around them through different means. The extent to which families are able to deal with such challenges depends on many factors, including parenting skills and living circumstances, highlighting individual variations among Arab families contrary to common stereotypes of unifying patterns. Children of such parents are found to face additional challenges in adjusting academically as they have less academic support at home.

Additionally, Arab students' academic achievement is found to be impacted by their teachers' levels of support and their overall school integration, as illustrated further in the next subsection.

**School relations and Arab immigrant students' academic achievement.** Research also indicates newcomer students' classroom disengagement can have a direct impact on their academic scores in assessments designed for mainstream first-language speakers, their reading performance, and their cultural understanding as well as their homework completion levels (Bang, 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008; Suárez-Orozco, Bang, et al., 2010). As established earlier, Arab immigrant students are found to experience initial tensions in terms of classroom engagement, which in turn impacts their initial academic performance.

*Teachers' support and encouragement positively enforces academic achievement.* While Arab students struggle to adjust during the initial transition, teachers' positive enforcement and appreciation of their efforts to cope can make a big difference in an Arab newcomer's experience. While high school can become a place of tensions for some newcomer Arab students, as established in section 8.3, due to the multitude of challenges they initially face, small acts of recognition and appreciation can make school rather a place of accomplishment.

Paying attention to student–teacher relations that foster positive enforcement of students' accomplishments can impact Arab immigrant students' academic achievements in positive ways. In order for teachers to effectively support the pursuit of Arab immigrant students' academic success, they need to be culturally responsive. In addressing the issue of responsive teaching, Darrow (2013) emphasizes that, “To be culturally responsive teachers, we must first have an understanding of other cultures and how students from these cultures differ from one another” (p. 1). Similarly, Richards, Brown, and Forde (2007) also stress that a “culture where all students regardless of their cultural and linguistic background are welcomed and supported, and provided with the best opportunity to learn” (p. 64) needs to be created by teachers inside their classrooms.

In addition, teachers need to be mindful that the lives of their Arab immigrant students have not just begun in Canada, and that they are placed on a temporal continuum, where their present circumstances and future aspirations have been built over a number of years and are based on past learning and living experiences. This is particularly crucial while trying to understand Arab students' desires to achieve high academic scores; in compliance with their parents' expectations. The study found teachers to be attentive to the disparity between Arab parents' academic expectations of their children and the actual academic performance of those students upon high school enrollment, as discussed in section 8.2. In this light, while teachers'

care and compassion is much needed and appreciated, it is worthwhile for teachers to understand the value of educational success to the overall success of an Arab immigrant student in life. As Selimos's (2017) study of newcomer immigrant youth in Windsor, found that low teacher expectations of such students added to their feelings of exclusion and blocked opportunities.

The study found teachers to be attentive to patterns of compromised academic integrity among their newcomer Arab immigrant students in the form of cheating and plagiarism. In this regard, while it is essential for immigrant students to understand and abide by school policies, including those pertaining to plagiarism, it is important for teachers to understand the adjustment process of newcomer students. Arab students go through transitional challenges of moving between different schooling systems, let alone different cultures, and the impact of teachers' approaches in guiding these students gently towards conventional academic practices can be far reaching.

**Personal qualities and Arab immigrant students' academic achievement.** While Arab immigrant students' academic achievement in Canadian high schools is sensitive to a range of factors involving family and school relations, personal qualities also play a significant role in the process. A students' ability to approach teachers and peers to seek academic support is somewhat linked to their personal social qualities, which in turn impacts their academic achievement. This illustrates the role of personal and social dimensions in shaping the schooling experiences of Arab immigrant students' academic achievements.

In conclusion, Arab immigrant students are found to face complex social, cultural, and academic adjustment tensions on personal, family, and societal levels upon joining Canadian high schools. However, the majority of those tensions are found to transform tremendously over the first few years of their arrival in Canada, over continuums of temporality, sociality and place

(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Figure 1 below illustrates the main tensions newcomer Arab students are found to face in their initial years in transition.

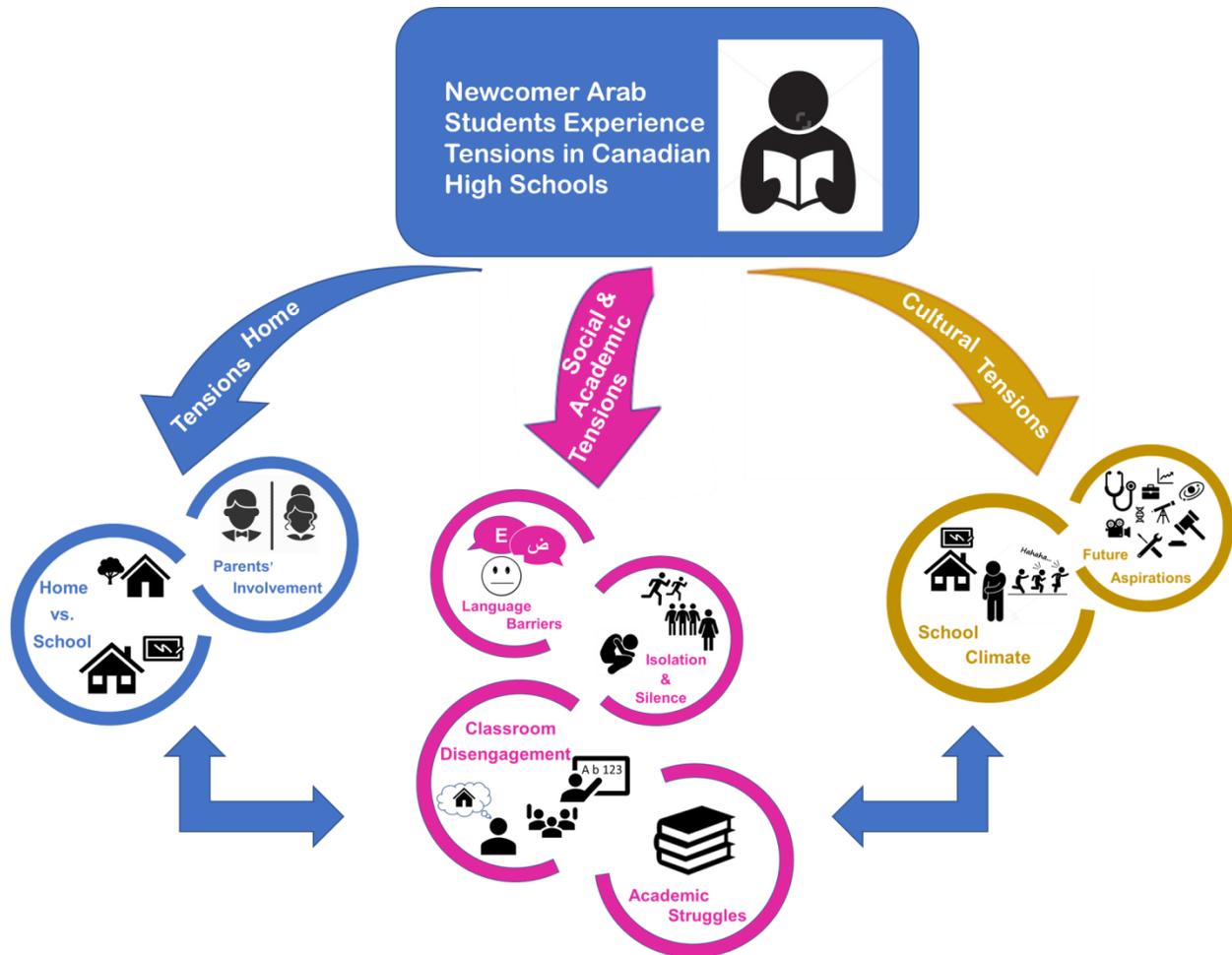


Figure 1. Multiple tensions influence the schooling experiences of Arab students.

## Section 9.2: Implications and Recommendations for School/Educational Policy Makers

This dissertation study presented the complexity of Arab immigrant high school students' schooling experiences in a number of Canadian high schools in Windsor, across a variety of unique social, academic, and cultural arrangements within which their lives unfold. As a narrative inquirer, my concern while conducting this inquiry was to understand the conditions of the Arab immigrant participants' schooling experiences in Canadian schools, with less emphasis on the outcome as implications for practice. This is not to imply that I was not concerned about

the outcome; on the contrary, the outcome is one important part of the study as I aimed at building bridges. It is not, however, the core of the study. As Olson (1995) notes, “narrative of experience can be used to confirm what we already know or to lead to new insights” (p. 124). In other words, this focus on participants’ experiences across time, in interaction with personal, social, and material worlds (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) is what characterizes narrative inquiry. Further, one of the ends of narrative inquiry is to offer new understandings and the possibility of new ways of interaction between individuals and their environments, one that can only be tested through future interactions.

Using Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) idea of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space meant exploring student participants’ narratives temporally, in terms of their past, present, and future; socially, in terms of other family members, interacting with school and community members and so on; and through place, primarily the school settings and places where key elements of their lives are lived out within Canadian high schools. This approach allowed me to study my participants’ lives in such a way that life in school and at home is illuminated. I hope that this work will make high school less opaque to Arab immigrant students and their parents, and will make home life less opaque to teachers.

### **Using Schwab’s Commonplaces of Curriculum Making**

#### **Curriculum as Experience in Situations**

Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) theorizing of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space was primarily built on Dewey’s (1938) theory of experience in which he analyzed the structure of a situation. Dewey saw experience as the result of the influence of the natural and social environment, including interaction with other people. He recognized how humans’ understandings of past experiences shape the way they experience phenomena and make sense of

them in the present; he referred to this connection between past and present experience as continuity. The people with whom humans interact influence and shape what they learn from experiences. The idea of the interconnectedness between experience, education, and life (Dewey, 1938) was further reinforced by Schwab's (1973) concept of curriculum as practical and built on by Connelly and Clandinin (1988) who understood curriculum as something experienced in situations. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) then developed narrative inquiry, which is used throughout my study in a way that "is best understood as a human experience method" (Craig, 2015, p. 1995), to allow researchers to see into and meaningfully navigate teachers' and students' knowledge and experience.

Ultimately, the insights outlined in this study bring us, as Schwab's (1973) theory suggests, to the importance of practicality in education. The insights stemming from this study bring us to questions of practice and policy: How do the existing schooling conditions enhance the educational success opportunities for Arab immigrant high school students? How do the existing schooling conditions support the integration of Arab immigrant high school students? What can be done differently to improve educational practices in Canadian educational systems in this regard? While making specific policy recommendations falls outside both the scope of this narrative study and my own expertise on the matter, the perceptions of Arab immigrant high school students vocalized in this dissertation do provide important insights that should be taken into consideration by school/educational policy makers in an effort to effectively and efficiently enhance the schooling experiences of Canadian high school students of Arab origins. In light of those insights, I humbly make a number of recommendations in the following sections as I borrow from Schwab's (1973) commonplaces of curriculum making.

## **Schwab's Practicality in Education**

Following Schwab's (1971, 1973, 1983) concept of curriculum as practical calls for deviation from the more widely understood view of curriculum as subject matter, courses of study, and school syllabus. Schwab (1971) emphasizes that "Theories of curriculum and of teaching and learning cannot, alone, tell us what and how to teach, because questions of what and how to teach arise in concrete situations loaded with concrete particulars of time, place, person, and circumstance" (p. 322). This was clearly manifested in the stories of participants while using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space to frame and understand their life complexities. To transform such practical components into curriculum, Schwab (1973) declares that four commonplaces must be taken into account: teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu. He emphasizes the importance of the four elements in any curricular situation as well as that of informed decision-making in practical educational settings.

Within the conceptual framework of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space used throughout the study, I draw on Schwab's commonplaces in concluding the study, as I try to illustrate the curricular significance of Arab student participants' narratives and to sketch and discuss implications that could aid in supporting the adjustment of Arab immigrant students in their transition, in different curricular situations. I uphold Schwab's teachings and urge school policy makers and stakeholders to adopt and develop practices that seek to improve Arab immigrant high school students' outcomes. This requires the cooperation of everyone in the school system regardless of their position or role, though most notably teachers of any and all subject matters, whom Schwab considers as agents of education.

## Recommendations for School/Educational Policy Makers

### The Teacher

As Clandinin and Connelly (1992) summarize, teachers are “an integral part of the curricular process ... in which teachers, learners, subject matter, and milieu are in dynamic interaction” (p. 392).

**System-wide diversity model.** Teachers are curriculum makers and not only curriculum implementers (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Schwab, 1973). As Craig (2015) puts it, “In Schwab’s view, teachers are more than agents of the subject matter they teach; they are ‘agents of education’ in its entirety” (p. 90). Throughout the study, participants’ stories revealed the impact of their interactions with teachers on their schooling experiences, as curriculum in different situations, experienced on the personal-social continuums (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Several instances revealed that teachers’ lack of understanding the cultures and traditions of their Arab students had complicated their interactions. Therefore, teachers’ enhanced knowledge of Arab students’ diverse cultures and traditions can equip them with better skills to deal with challenges as they arise.

A system-wide model for school staff professional learning about Arab students’ tremendously diverse cultures, circumstances, and unique personal needs should be developed and supported. A successful model would be long-term in nature and focused on learning about diverse Arab cultures, including both the past and current living circumstances in Arab countries.

A mandatory professional learning model that incorporates a sufficient amount of Arab cultural instruction can lead to more responsive teaching styles of Arab students at high schools. Given that newcomer Arab high school students’ academic success and social integration is dependent upon a number of factors in and out of school, the responsibility lies in the hands of all

school staff and officials to offer support whenever possible to ensure the success of this rapidly growing sector of society. This would be in compliance with the Ontario Ministry of Education's (2005) position stating that "Creating a welcoming and inclusive school environment for English language learners and their families is a whole-school activity requiring the commitment of the principal and vice-principal, teachers, support staff, and other leaders within the school community" (p. 36).

A more developed knowledge and understanding of the current circumstances in the Middle East can also enable teachers to better attend to the needs of more disadvantaged students who come from certain war-torn parts of the Arab world. Raising awareness among high school officials and teachers, of all subjects, about the importance of aiding Arab immigrant students, both socially and academically, to achieve their best successes is critical to Arab students' acculturation process. As Craig (2008) explains, "Schwab left discretionary powers with teachers because he understood that no deliberation could be complete without their active involvement as 'fountainhead[s] of the curricular decision' (Schwab, 1983)" (p. 1995). Thus, specific supports should be provided for teachers at the high school level that focus on effective, culturally responsive instructional practices, understandings, and expectations when dealing with their Arab students. In this light, partnering with local universities to enhance ongoing and continuing education of in-service teachers by offering incentives and credentials to teachers through attending political science, and possibly cultural courses, on the various Arab countries and current circumstances could be of great benefit to all.

In this regard, Cutri (2013) emphasizes that in developing teachers' culturally responsive professional expertise, educators do not need to be "concerned with getting teacher[s] to merely consider the 'obligations to diversity' such as being nice to each other or appreciating each

other” (p. 197); rather, they should be concerned with ways to engage teachers emotionally and analytically with the “obligation of equality that focuses on the moral dimensions of everyone having equitable access to power and knowledge in schools and society” (p. 197). In addition, it is worth indicating that it would be practically impossible for teachers and school staff to know every aspect about the cultures of all the students in the school, particularly with such diversity in Canadian schools. Yet, serving the students in an efficient way requires the teachers and administrators to know certain key issues in their students’ cultures. This would offer the best potential for successful teacher–student relations at school, and would improve Arab newcomer students’ chances of success in their attempts to adjust academically and socially, given the impact of personal-social interactions on their overall schooling experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

### **The Milieu**

In addition to investing in the cultural education of teachers, enriching the milieus within which Arab students find themselves becomes a necessity (Schwab, 1973). According to Connelly and Clandinin (1988), milieu refers to everyone else and everything else in a curriculum situation where any one of the commonplaces is of interest. In the same vein, milieu can refer to the community of the school, and the family at home.

School engagement was found in this study to impact the achievement and acculturation process of Arab immigrant students at the high school level within the three dimensions of temporality, place, and sociality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Therefore, it is practical to encourage mainstream students to develop welcoming and supportive attitudes towards their Arab peers at school. Raising awareness of the social and collective advantages of the integration of Arab students can enhance societal and school relations for all.

Considering the importance of milieu (Schwab, 1973) in shaping the curricular experiences of Arab high school students, supporting them socially can augment a focus on their academic achievement and English language acquisition. As this inquiry indicates, this is important especially upon their arrival in Canada. This also entails organizing more social events that open up opportunities for their participation while ensuring that these events are culturally responsive. Through a responsive learning environment, equitable learning contexts can be created that significantly impact Arab students' achievement given the impact of personal-social interactions on students' learning experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

**Partnerships for cultural learning.** The Arab immigrant student participants' stories in this study revealed a particular desire and need for more reciprocal cross-cultural learning within school communities. As the schooling lives of Arab immigrant students unfold within the three dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), paying attention to the quality of personal and social interactions of these students becomes significant. Investing in the area of their cultural learning is worthwhile, not only to the Arab students as learners in this process, but also to other commonplaces of curriculum making: the teachers, subject matter, and milieu (Schwab, 1973). Exploring opportunities for partnerships between various Arab and mainstream stakeholders within the city in developing reciprocal cross-cultural learning models should be encouraged and supported.

Partnering with different Arab community centres in the city can lead to better use of available resources for enhancing such relations and learning. The longstanding recognition of partnerships is emphasized in the Ontario Ministry of Education's (2007) ELL guidelines, and is reconfirmed in today's societal context: "Consultation with community partners will assist boards in making informed decisions about ESL and ELD programming and services" (p. 24).

In an effort to create culturally responsive learning environments that engage all subject teachers and provide cross-cultural learning opportunities, educators could be encouraged to engage in Arab community events and occasions. The ultimate goals should be to (a) support teaching and learning within high school communities and (b) create conditions for cross-cultural knowledge mobilization, given that teachers and learners play an enormously critical role within any curricular situation (Schwab, 1973).

**Newcomers' enrollment policies.** In addition, given the positive impact of ethnically diverse school milieus on the schooling experiences of Arab immigrant students noted in this study, creating more diverse populations within different schools in the city can give Arab students more options and flexibility in terms of enrollment. It can also enhance their social integration and thus their academic achievement during their high school years, specifically during the initial years. The presence of cultural diversity in schools could help students learn about other people's cultures, languages, customs, and ways of life.

Newcomers' enrollment policies and procedures may be developed and/or revised in an effort to encourage a more even distribution of immigrant and Arab students' enrollment among different high schools in the city rather than restricting such enrollment to a limited number of schools. This may enhance the schooling experiences for Arab high school students and many other minority students due to the definite impact of personal-social interactions within certain school contexts as place, on the overall schooling experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

**Family support resources.** Likewise, encouraging Arab parents to get involved in the acculturation process and academic lives of their children is of ultimate significance; because those students are nurtured within their home milieus (Schwab, 1973). This entails direct and effective communication with parents to incorporate their feedback and suggestions for enhanced

involvement and adapting schools' parent involvement programs to the Arab participation styles, teaching parents' self-advocacy, and working to reframe perspectives on cultural differences.

Families of Arab high school students could be better supported through the development of resources that promote and facilitate the overall learning of those students at home and that encourage parents' involvement in the learning process. Such resources may include parental access to workshops and other services as well as the facilitation of those parents' contribution in organized professional settings (e.g., Homework Help facilitated by Arab parents themselves).

Organizing effective parenting workshops especially designed for parents of Arab children to help them cope with their immigration challenges and those of their children can ease the adjustment process for all. Many parents of Arab immigrant students come to Canada with qualifications that may facilitate their ability to act as resources for children in their respective communities, and organizing clubs in which these parents' qualifications may be put to use can also give these parents a sense of value and recognition. This in turn can help better engage parents and familiarize them with their children's school communities. Navigating pathways of school communication and enabling families to access systems of opportunities and resources is important for the overall success of the student. Introducing programs to newcomer parents and ensuring they are made aware of the resources provided to them provides better adjustment opportunities to newcomer Arab students.

In addition, while it is ultimately significant to enhance school–parent communications in an effort to support Arab immigrant students' adjustment, taking into account the specific barriers that may prevent parents' responsiveness may be necessary. While newcomer students' personal qualities and social interactions contribute to shaping their school integration, their parents' personal and social standings also play a role in their children's schooling involvement,

as found in the study. Such diversities need to be considered when planning correspondences with newcomer students' parents for effective reach-out methods. For example, while translating school correspondence to the Arabic language when targeting newcomer Arab families can ease communication barriers, it is important to pay attention to differing parental levels of education and cultural barriers. Even if documents are translated, some Arab parents coming from different countries and different systems may not know the ways in which they can become involved in their children's education.

### **The Learner**

Schwab, like Dewey honoured human particularity and viewed learners as knowers who represent an equally important component of curriculum making, a component as important as the role played by teachers, subject matter, and milieu. To Schwab (1970), learners are “bundles of affect, individual personalities, and earners of livings” (p. 9).

Leading a narrative inquiry into the lived experiences of Arab high school students, I have explored and learned about newcomer participants' transitions both prior to and after their enrollment in Canadian schools, as well as how their perceptions shifted and changed throughout the process of their high schooling in Canada (Clandinin, 2013).

Since Arab students' experiences are continuous from the past, to the present, to the future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), challenges that such students face during the immigration process, such as leaving family members behind, or negative experiences in their country of origin (like war and conflict), may affect their well-being and in turn their academic achievement.

In this light, I realize the importance of the overall well-being of Arab immigrant students, as the learners, in their journey of transition. For example, raising awareness about healthy eating

habits amongst Arab families through mandatory participation of students and possibly their parents in certain workshops and health-awareness events can decrease possible health problems and prevent much unwanted distractions for the students themselves as well as for school officials.

**Newcomer student orientation programs.** Additionally, helping Arab immigrant high school students feel valued and recognized through leading and supporting more recent newcomer students in turn can also enhance their self-efficacy and leadership skills in ways that are sure to help them achieve academically.

Supporting and co-funding newcomer student orientation programs (such as the NOW program) that enhance the social integration and adjustment of newcomer Arab students and those of other ethnic backgrounds should be encouraged. Implementing such programs is in line with what the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) has encouraged in its ELL policy documents:

School boards will develop protocols to define procedures and practices for welcoming English language learners and their families and providing them with appropriate orientation to the Ontario school system, in the first language of the students and their families whenever possible. (p. 15)

**Early identification of disadvantaged newcomer Arab students.** Furthermore, a systemic method for early identification of disadvantaged newcomer Arab students who may have post-traumatic/post-war stress related symptoms also could be developed.

ELL policy guidelines published by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) indicate that “Immigrants/refugees coming from regions of instability may need additional supports to address issues related to trauma and stress” (p. 16). In implementing and fostering strategies for newcomer Arab students, it is essential to keep in mind that Arab refugee students may require more special supports due to a number of factors: (a) refugee families are forced to escape, while

immigrant families choose to emigrate, which can affect the presence of all family members at time of immigration and preparedness for the move; (b) education of immigrant children prior to arriving in Canada usually continues uninterrupted, while refugee children's education may be interrupted due to unstable living conditions in their home countries, which in turn may result in refugee students experiencing more challenges in acquiring necessary academic skills at Canadian schools; and (c) refugee children are prone to experiencing multiple post-traumatic effects in addition to physical problems due to being exposed to war and trauma in their home countries (Ayoub & Zhou, 2016).

Addressing the psychological needs of newcomer Arab refugee students, particularly those fleeing war-torn zones, is critically important given the rise of Syrian refugees fleeing war in their country and seeking refuge in Canada and the emphasis on the learner as an equally important commonplace of curriculum-making as teacher, subject matter, and milieu (Schwab, 1973). A well-planned and developed response to such psychological/learning needs should be incorporated within the school system so that effective, precise, and timely interventions that support these students' learning are readily available. In studying immigrant students' psychological adaptations, Haboush (2007) addresses the role of teachers and other school staff in terms of psychological assessments: "culturally competent practice involves the delivery of psychological interventions based on knowledge and understanding of cultural heritage, values, and behaviors, along with the recognition that levels of acculturation affect delivery of interventions" (p. 184). As part of such a comprehensive psychological plan, specific attention should be given to Arab student populations that experienced significant gaps in schooling due to unstable political circumstances in their home countries. Attention to developing appropriate responses to other learning barriers, such as lack of familial supports, corresponds to Ontario

Ministry of Education (2007) ELL guidelines for school boards: “If initial assessment indicates that an English language learner has had limited prior schooling, the board will provide additional support to the student” (p. 18).

### **The Subject Matter**

While paying attention to the needs of the Arab immigrant student as the learner, and the settings within the school community as the milieu within which the educational curricula are being created, the subject matter these students are being exposed to is no less significant (Schwab, 1973). Helping Arab newcomer students learn more about Canadian culture(s) and norms by incorporating cultural and historical aspects of Canadian living into ELL classes (as well as in other subjects) could also result in better social adjustment for Arab students. Field trips that are suitable and inclusive for all students can also serve as fun and informative tools for cultural learning.

**Enhanced/modified course streaming practices.** Similarly, classroom timetables, course streaming practices, and newcomer-student program requirements should be planned in conjunction and be consistent with extra-help program schedules so as to ensure the participation of Arab newcomer students. Encouraging Arab immigrant students to take better advantage of academic support programs (e.g., by offering academic awards and/or possibly credits toward class/course grades) can enhance participation in such programs due to the strong desire on the part of these students for recognition and appreciation.

Students’ placement in mainstream courses needs to be encouraged, and at the very least, provided as an option to students, in an effort to enhance Arab newcomer students’ adjustment within their school communities in the personal-social dimension (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). While Arab immigrant students were found to adjust over time, speeding up the process of their

adjustment through certain streaming practices should be considered. As the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) ELL policy guidelines indicate,

English language learners should be placed in a grade-level or subject-specific classroom for at least part of each day. Interaction with English-speaking peers supports the English language learner's overall adjustment to the Ontario school system. Appropriate placement encourages student engagement, provides appropriate role models, enables students to build on their existing knowledge and skills, and enhances opportunities for English language acquisition. (p. 21)

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Consensus in the narratives of the Arab student participants of the study and those of other studies confirm that Arab immigrant students, like immigrant students of other ethnicities, initially face difficulties in adapting to their new school environments. Catholic Arab immigrant high school students expressed their appreciation of available supports in their Catholic high schools, yet also described some difficulties pertaining to mandatory religious studies classes that conflicted with their unique belief systems and opinions. In this regard, I believe further studies are needed to explore the perceptions and experiences of both Christian and the large Muslim population of Arab immigrant high school students in Canadian Catholic high schools.

### **Final Words**

In closing this dissertation study, I must reiterate that I have learned a great deal through my inquiry into the lived experiences of Arab students which revealed the uniqueness and individuality of persons within communities that most often are viewed stereotypically as a singular, homogeneous entity. After conducting this research, I have been reassured of my initial thoughts with which I began this journey, that Arab immigrants to Canada leave their home countries for varied reasons and that there was, and continues to be, so much for me to learn about from different Arab immigrant students of diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, I have also learned that my views which have previously been clouded by my personal, somewhat harsh,

experience as an immigrant Arab girl in the past are different from my participants' views in many ways, while similar in other ways. Therefore, as a narrative inquirer, I have learned in the process the significance of trying to understand people's lived experiences in their own terms with no prior judgments and biases.

Arab immigrant high school student participants in this study have presented different perceptions of what it means to be a high school student, an immigrant, of an Arab origin, and to have come to Canada at this particular age and time in history. While the study has sought to document Arab immigrant high school students' perceptions of their Canadian schooling lived experiences, it has presented different aspects of past lived experiences, future aspirations, and current social, academic, and cultural concerns of such students in ways that foreground the complexity of their ongoing high schooling. While Arab immigrant students in Canadian high schools try to negotiate the challenges and possibilities they are presented with upon their immigration and enrollment in their high schools, they are constantly searching for answers to the questions, "What does it mean to become Canadian?" and "How Canadian do they need to become?" I began drafting elements of this research in hope of finding answers to these questions that a newcomer Arab lady threw at me years ago, as I explained in the opening chapter of this dissertation. Today, I realize as I write the concluding words of this dissertation that there is no definitive representation of the depth and complexity of being Canadian, with an Arab origin. However, I hope that the stories and interpretations presented here have provoked readers to think a bit more about the schooling experiences, with all their complexities, of Arab immigrant students and our role as educators in relation to them. As Schwab (1973) emphasizes the significance of teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu as all equally important commonplaces that are integral to any educational situation, I hope that the reader has gained, as

I have, some understanding of the complexities Arab immigrant high school students negotiate in the process of adjustment.

I also hope that this inquiry into the lived experiences of Arab immigrant high school students has offered some understanding of the vast complex diversity within Arab communities in Canada, in terms of their geopolitical backgrounds, religious affiliations, socio-economic circumstances, customs, and traditions, and the complexities such diversity adds to their Canadian living experience. And that the group of Arab immigrant student participants in this study does not represent all Arab students or their lived experiences, but provide a window through which one can peek to get a glimpse of what such students' transition may look like. I hope that it provided an understanding that while Arab immigrant students may be unique in personal ways, and their needs may be unique to their cultural and religious affiliations, they still experience initial immigration transitions in similar ways to students of other ethnic groups. And while they wish to be supported and encouraged to succeed at school, they also wish to maintain family bonds and relations in the process and be treated within their school communities without stereotypes clouding their social interactions. I hope that such understandings can aid in building bridges between passionate educators who may be poorly informed of the cultures, values, and challenges faced by their Arab students, and desperate Arab students and their families who may lack proper communication skills that would enable them to communicate their needs and how much can be done to assist them in this process. I also hope that such bridges could contribute to schooling systems within which Canadian educators could work together to develop social harmony, eliminating all forms of segregation and fear for Arab students and students of other ethnic groups alike.

Furthermore, in conducting this inquiry I have learned that the abilities of Arab immigrant students to adapt to the Canadian culture(s) and school system(s) they become part of develop over time, with patience, practice, perseverance, instruction, feedback, support, positive reinforcement, and opportunity. I have also learned that Arab immigrant high school students are very much similar to immigrant high school students of different ethnic backgrounds, and that their needs and passions are similar as well. I have learned that while Arab students strive to be respected and to have their unique cultures and traditions understood within their school communities, they may not be so different and should not be alienated or treated in ways that segregate them and add to their isolation. I have also realized how important it is to build bridges between passionate educators who strive to offer support and newcomer Arab families who, while holding strong feelings of loyalty and gratitude to Canadians in general, and educators in particular, desperately seek care and support.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Student Consent Letter



University  
of Windsor

## LETTER OF INFORMATION/CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDY (Student)

Canadian-Arab High School Students' Perceptions of Their Schooling Experiences

### **Student Participant:**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Ms. Nesreen Elkord – Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor. As partial requirement for completing a doctoral degree in Educational Studies in the University of Windsor, Ms. Elkord is conducting an exploratory study to learn more about the perceptions of new comer Arab-Canadian students of their schooling experiences in Canadian schools.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to bring an understanding of the lived experiences of Canadian-Arab newcomer students in hope of potentially enhancing the school-home connection and to bridge a cultural gap. Student perceptions can be informing to school communities as to what it can do to best support all students in their learning journey.

### **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in 2 to 3 individual interviews that will last between 1 to 2 hours each. The interviews will be conducted at a convenient time and place of your choice where you would not be identified by either teachers or school staff and students. You will be provided with a list of guiding questions prior to interviews. You will have the freedom of choosing to elaborate on, skip or reject any questions and will be free to add any additional information that you think relevant.

I also wish to observe student participants within the school setting for a couple of months. Your identity will be kept anonymous to school community at all times. You may voluntarily share

artifacts or school work that you feel useful to demonstrate your schooling experience. I would like to audio record the interviews if you and your guardian grant me permission. If you wish, you can check the records when finished.

### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

You will only be asked to share stories you feel comfortable sharing. You will not be pressured to move out of your comfort zone. You will only be observed in public places and only upon invitation if outside of the school.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

I hope to make this inquiry study useful to my student participants and the school community by enhancing the understanding of the Arab-Canadian new comer lived experiences in school.

Findings from this study may result in publication in academic journals or may be shared at conferences without identifying participants. Data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and presentations. If you wish you can review and verify the information included in the writing before it is published.

### **COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this inquiry study will be voluntary and you will not be paid monetary values for it. Once the research study is completed, a full report of the thesis dissertation will be gifted to you to keep.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your identity as a participant in the study will be kept confidential at all times and in all ways possible and will not be revealed in the final report or anywhere else where this study may be shared, as pseudonyms will be used to refer to you.

### **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw from the study with no consequences, up until the data verification stage.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study or your confidentiality please contact Dr. Shijing Xu at University of Windsor (519) 253-3000 ext. 3828 or Nesreen Elkord at University of Windsor (519) 253-3000 ext. 3808. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: [ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER**

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Student Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix B: Participant Consent Letter



### LETTER OF INFORMATION/CONSENT FORM FOR APPROVING CHILD'S PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDY (Guardian of Student Participant)

Canadian-Arab High School Students' Perceptions of Their Schooling Experiences

#### **Student Participant's Guardian:**

Your son/daughter is asked to participate in a research study conducted by Ms. Nesreen Elkord – Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor. As partial requirement for completing a doctoral degree in Educational Studies in the University of Windsor, Ms. Elkord is conducting an exploratory study to learn more about the perceptions of new comer Arab-Canadian students of their schooling experiences in Canadian schools.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to bring an understanding of the lived experiences of Canadian-Arab newcomer students in hope of potentially enhancing the school-home connection and to bridge a cultural gap. Student perceptions can be informing to school communities as to what it can do to best support all students in their learning journey.

#### **PROCEDURES**

If your son/daughter volunteers to participate in this study, he/she will be asked to:

Participate in 2 to 3 individual interviews that will last between 1 to 2 hours each. The interviews will be conducted at a convenient time and place of his/her choice where he/she would not be identified by either teachers or school staff and students. Your son/daughter will be provided with a list of guiding questions prior to interviews. He/she will have the freedom of choosing to elaborate on, skip or reject any questions and will be free to add any additional information that you think relevant.

I also wish to observe student participants within the school setting for a couple of months. Your son/daughter's identity will be kept anonymous to school community at all times. Your son/daughter may voluntarily share artifacts or school work that you feel useful to demonstrate

your schooling experience. I would like to audio record the interviews if you and your son/daughter grant me permission. If he/she wishes, he/she can check the records when finished.

### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Your son/daughter will only be asked to share stories he/she feels comfortable sharing. He/she will not be pressured to move out of his/her comfort zone. Your son/daughter will only be observed in public places and only upon invitation if outside of the school.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

I hope to make this inquiry study useful to my student participants and the school community by enhancing the understanding of the Arab-Canadian new comer lived experiences in school.

Findings from this study may result in publication in academic journals or may be shared at conferences without identifying participants. Data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and presentations. If your son/daughter wishes he/she can review and verify the information included in the writing before it is published.

### **COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**

Your son/daughter's participation in this inquiry study will be voluntary and he/she will not be paid monetary values for it. Once the research study is completed, a full report of the thesis dissertation will be gifted to you and your son/daughter to keep.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your son/daughter's identity as a participant in the study will be kept confidential at all times and in all ways possible and will not be revealed in the final report or anywhere else where this study may be shared, as pseudonyms will be used to refer to him/her.

### **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Your son/daughter is under no obligation to participate in this study. His/her participation is entirely voluntary. He/she can withdraw from the study with no consequences, up until the data verification stage.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study or your confidentiality please contact Dr. Shijing Xu at University of Windsor (519) 253-3000 ext. 3828 or Nesreen Elkord at University of Windsor (519) 253-3000 ext. 3808. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: [ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER**

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

## Appendix C: Student Interview Protocol



### STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### Canadian-Arab High School Students' Perceptions of Their Schooling Experiences

1. Please introduce yourself and tell me a little about your background.
2. How do you describe your experiences in school, including elementary and middle school?
3. Which experience do you consider more positive, your schooling experience in Canada or outside of it?
4. What have you enjoyed the most about secondary school?
5. What have you enjoyed the least?
6. What do you consider as your greatest successes during your secondary schooling? Greatest challenges?
7. What stands out the most about your favorite teachers in your secondary school? Least favorite?
8. Tell me about your experiences at your secondary school.
9. Do you have a part time job? What do you think of it?
10. How do you consider your experience at this job? Does it in any way relate to your experience at school?
11. Do you feel that your family life makes your schooling experience any easier? Any challenging? Explain.
12. What are things that go on in your school that most support Arab-Canadian students' academic performance? Social integration? Learning of the language?
13. Does your life at school elicit any particular concerns or fears for you as a student? An Arab student?
14. What are some of your ambitions for your life?
15. Do you have any plans for your future?
16. What do you believe goes on in school that most hinders Arab-Canadian students' academic performance? Social integration? Learning of the language?
17. What would you like others to know about your secondary schooling experience?
18. In your opinion, how can schools better educate students from a variety of backgrounds and ethnicities? Arab-Canadian students in particular?

## Appendix D: Parent Consent Letter



University  
of Windsor

### LETTER OF INFORMATION/CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDY

(Parent)

Canadian-Arab High School Students' Perceptions of Their Schooling Experiences

#### **Parent Participant:**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Ms. Nesreen Elkord – Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor. As partial requirement for completing a doctoral degree in Educational Studies in the University of Windsor, Ms. Elkord is conducting an exploratory study to learn more about the perceptions of new comer Arab-Canadian students of their schooling experiences in Canadian schools.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to bring an understanding of the lived experiences of Canadian-Arab newcomer students in hope of potentially enhancing the school-home connection and to bridge a cultural gap. Student perceptions can be informing to school communities as to what it can do to best support all students in their learning journey.

#### **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in 1 to 2 individual interviews that will last between 1 to 2 hours each. The interviews will be conducted at a convenient time and place of your choice where you would not be identified by either teachers or school staff and students. You will be provided with a list of guiding questions prior to interviews. You will have the freedom of choosing to elaborate on, skip or reject any questions and will be free to add any additional information that you think relevant. You may voluntarily share artifacts or school work that you feel useful to demonstrate the schooling experience of your child. I would like to audio record the interviews if you grant me permission. If you wish, you can check the records when finished.

#### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

You will only be asked to share stories you feel comfortable sharing. You will not be pressured to move out of your comfort zone.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

I hope to make this inquiry study useful to my student participants and the school community by enhancing the understanding of the Arab-Canadian new comer lived experiences in school. Findings from this study may result in publication in academic journals or may be shared at conferences without identifying participants. Data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and presentations. If you wish you can review and verify the information included in the writing before it is published.

**COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this inquiry study will be voluntary and you will not be paid monetary values for it. Once the research study is completed, a full report of the thesis dissertation will be gifted to you to keep.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your identity as a participant in the study will be kept confidential at all times and in all ways possible and will not be revealed in the final report or anywhere else where this study may be shared, as pseudonyms will be used to refer to you.

**PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw from the study with no consequences, up until the data verification stage.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study or your confidentiality please contact Dr. Shijing Xu at University of Windsor (519) 253-3000 ext. 3828 or Nesreen Elkord at University of Windsor (519) 253-3000 ext. 3808. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: [ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER**

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Appendix E: Teacher Participant Consent**



### **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH (Teacher Participant)**

Canadian-Arab High School Students' Perceptions of Their Schooling Experiences

#### **Teacher Participant:**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Ms. Nesreen Elkord – Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor. As partial requirement for completing a doctoral degree in Educational Studies in the University of Windsor, Ms. Elkord is conducting an exploratory study to learn more about the perceptions of new comer Arab-Canadian students of their schooling experiences in Canadian schools.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to bring an understanding of the lived experiences of Canadian-Arab newcomer students in hope of potentially enhancing the school-home connection and to bridge a cultural gap. Student perceptions can be informing to school communities as to what it can do to best support all students in their learning journey. Taking into consideration the perspective of teachers who work closely with Arab Canadian newcomer students is important to add different perspectives to the study.

#### **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in approximately 1 to 2 individual interviews that will last between 1 to 2 hours each. The interviews will be conducted at a convenient time and place of your choice where you would not be identified by other parents, teachers or school staff. You will be provided with a list of guiding questions prior to interviews. You will have the freedom of choosing to elaborate on, skip or reject any questions and will be free to add any additional information that you think relevant.

## **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

As a participant, you will not be pressured to move out of your comfort zone and will only be asked to share stories you feel comfortable sharing. Your identity as a participant in the study will be kept confidential at all times and in all ways possible and will not be revealed in the final report as pseudonyms will be used, or anywhere else where this study may be shared. With your permission, I would like to audio record the interviews, which will be transcribed so that I may examine the comments made by you with more accuracy.

## **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

I wish to make myself and my study useful to you, your students and the school community by potentially enhancing the understanding of the Arab-Canadian new comer lived experiences in school. Any advice and suggestions will be much appreciated. It is possible that findings from this study may result in publication in academic journals or may be shared at conferences but you can review data related to you if you wish before publication.

## **COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this inquiry study will be voluntary and you will not be paid monetary values for it. Once the research study is completed, a full report of the thesis dissertation will be gifted to you to keep.

## **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time, up until the stage of data verification, with no consequences.

## **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study or your confidentiality please contact Dr. Shijing Xu at University of Windsor (519) 253-3000 ext. 3828 or Nesreen ELkord at University of Windsor (519) 253-3000 ext. 3808. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: [ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER**

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

---

Signature of Researcher

Date

---

Signature of Teacher Participant

---

Date

## Appendix F: Principal Consent Letter



### LETTER OF INFORMATION/CONSENT FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SITE

(Principal)

Canadian-Arab High School Students' Perceptions of Their School Environments

**Dear Respected Principal \_\_\_\_\_:**

I am writing to request your generous permission to allow me to conduct research in your School by recruiting student and teacher participants for interviews and to observe in one or two classrooms in the School for my doctoral dissertation research study. I propose an exploratory study to learn more about the perceptions of new comer Arab-Canadian students of their schooling experiences in Canadian schools. The purpose of this study is to bring an understanding of their lived experiences to potentially enhance the school-home connection and make bridges between cultures. The overarching research questions are:

1. What are Arab-Canadian high school students' perceptions of their schooling experiences and the support programs provided by their schools to accommodate their needs?
2. What recommendations can be suggested to best support Arab-Canadian high school students' English language and cultural learning and integration?

I would like to understand the cross-cultural lived schooling experience of the research student participants by observing them in different school settings. The observational component of the study will not in any way be evaluative of school settings or teaching practices but will rather focus on understanding the needs and behaviours of the research student participants. This study employs a narrative inquiry research design with the target population being newcomer Arab-Canadian students.

This inquiry will employ interview and observation research methods. I hope to be able to recruit 1 to 3 students to participate in conversational and semi-structured interviews at the school at a time and place convenient to them. I also hope to be able to observe participants in different school settings with your permission and consents of classroom teacher(s), student participants, and their guardians without revealing their identities to school community. On a voluntarily basis

I also wish to interview one or two teachers who work closely with Arab-Canadian newcomer students to add the perspectives of teachers to the study. The identity of all research participants will be kept anonymous to school community and data collected will be confidential for ethical reasons. However, I can share the research findings in the final report.

In conclusion, I would like to seek your professional support by allowing me to enter your school to conduct my research. I would very much like to make my research and myself useful to your students and the school community. Your advice and suggestions will be very much appreciated.

I have enclosed a copy of the Ethical Review Clearance from the University of Windsor and your School Board as well as Letters of Information to potential participants about the study, and Consent Forms.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this letter or the research, please contact me at my email address ([elkord@uwindsor.ca](mailto:elkord@uwindsor.ca)). If you have any questions or concerns about the study or your confidentiality please contact my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Shijing Xu at University of Windsor (519) 253-3000 ext. 3828. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research site, please contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: [ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

Sincerely,

Nesreen Elkord

Ph.D. Candidate

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Principal's Signature

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Date

## Appendix G: Parent Interview Protocol



### PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### Canadian-Arab High School Students' Perceptions of Their School Environments

1. How different do you see schooling in Canada compared to where you come from?
2. What do you agree with most in the educational system in Canada?
3. What do you disagree with most in the educational system in Canada?
4. Generally, how do you think your son/daughter is coping with the new schooling environment?
5. Do you think he/she is having a positive or a negative experience? Why?
6. How are you helping them cope?
7. Do you feel involved or separated from their schooling experience?
8. Academically, is it easier or more difficult for them to succeed?
9. Do you feel they are happy at school?
10. What factors do you think impact their schooling experience?
11. Are they getting the support they need at school to help them integrate and cope?
12. What extra-curricular activities your son/daughter is involved in?
13. Outside or inside of school?

## Appendix H: Teacher Interview Protocol



### TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### Canadian-Arab High School Students' Perceptions of Their School Environments

1. How long have you been teaching at the secondary level? In Windsor?
2. Have you taught many Arab new comer students during that time?
3. What do you think are some of the differences/similarities between the schooling experiences of Arab new comer students as compared to that of new comer students of different ethnic backgrounds?
4. What makes you think they are different/similar?
5. Is there anything in particular that you have generally noticed about Arab new comer students?
6. Do you think they integrate in the classroom easily?
7. What are the support programs that run in school to help them integrate easier?
8. Do you think these programs are effective?
9. How do you think Arab being involved in these programs?
10. Have you ever spoken to an Arab new comer student to try and understand their lives out of school?
11. Have you ever been to an Arab new comer family's home?
12. How much do you know about Arabs and their lifestyles?

## VITA AUCTORIS

NAME: Nesreen Elkord

PLACE OF BIRTH: Abu Dhabi, UAE

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1979

EDUCATION: Queen Elizabeth High School, Halifax, NS, 1997

Dalhousie University, B.Sc., Halifax, NS, 2000

Mount Saint Vincent University, M.Ed., Halifax, NS, 2002

University of Windsor, PhD, Windsor, Ontario, 2017