

## Towards School Leadership Development: The Essence of Working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Newcomer Families in Saskatchewan

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Abstract	Article Info
<p><i>The article is based on a study whose purpose was to examine the lived experience of school leaders in Saskatoon with newcomers to whom English is an additional Language (EAL). Phenomenology as a methodological approach was used to gather and analyze data from leaders representing two school divisions. What was common in their accounts was synthesized to establish the essence of the leaders' experience with EAL newcomers. Findings revealed that the nature of the experience manifests as a celebration, a learning opportunity and as a challenge. Its essence requires school leaders to have knowledge, skills and dispositions for acknowledging and responding appropriately to difference and the associated stereotypes, cultural diversity with its infinite variations, relations between dominant and minority cultures, the role of parents, communities and inter-organizational partnerships in school leaders-newcomer relationship. The essence also calls for school leaders to have self-knowledge, to be more reflective, and to embrace cognitive dissonance as learning opportunities.</i></p>	<p><b>Article History:</b>  <i>Received</i>                      March, 04 2019</p> <p><i>Accepted</i>                      June, 14, 2019</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 10px auto;"/> <p><b>Keywords:</b>  <i>School leadership development, newcomer families,, cultural diversity, and linguistically diverse, culturally responsive leadership</i></p>

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**Introduction**

Canadian government data points to a consistent growth in the number of English as Additional Language (EAL) immigrants in all of the provinces in the country (Statistics Canada, 2019). The percentage of those who are choosing to settle in the prairie provinces of Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, is increasing compared to other provinces (Statistics Canada, 2019). The most recent annual population reports show that immigration accounts for the largest proportion of the population increase in Saskatchewan (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018). The growing number of immigrants is also as a result of the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program (SINP), a provincial government initiative that attracts newcomers who can contribute to the economy (Government of Saskatchewan, 2019a).

The most recent census revealed that only 7% of the immigrants who have settled in Saskatchewan identified English as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada, 2019). Most of the immigrants settled in the two larger cities, Saskatoon and Regina, and more than one third (35.2%) of them were of school age (Statistics Canada, 2019). The census data disaggregated by immigrants' country of origin revealed that 72% of them came from Asia and Pacific region, followed by Europe and the United Kingdom (11%), Africa and the Middle East (11%), South and Central America (4%), the United States with about 1% (Statistics Canada, 2019). More than a third of the entire immigrant population was from the Philippines (See details in table 1)



Table 1.

*Top Countries of Birth of Immigrants to Saskatchewan, 2016*

<b>Country of Birth</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Philippines	34.7
India	12.8
Pakistan	7.2
China	7.0
Bangladesh	3.1
Ukraine	2.8
Syria	2.3
Nigeria	2.2
United Kingdom	1.8
Vietnam	1.8
Others	24.3

These population trends are changing the demographic make-up of schools, and increasing the need for support that is specific to EAL newcomers (Drake, 2014; Kanu, 2008; Okoko, 2012). Studies carried out in North America and the United Kingdom show how school leadership plays a significant role in the academic success of the EAL newcomers (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Lumby & Coleman, 2016; Scanlan & Lopez, 2015). As the demographic change continues, school leaders are expected to engage more with precarious incidences associated with diversity and the success of all students (Epstein & Sander, 2006; Riehl, 2000). They are expected to assess and manage the differences in various cultural practices that emerge from the

demographic changes that are occurring in their schools (Lindsey, Robin & Terrell, 2009). Unfortunately, the study upon which this article is based, and other related studies have indicated that school leaders in Saskatchewan and in Canada are hardly prepared to meaningfully engage with the growing number of culturally diverse immigrant families (Berhard, 2010; Goddard, 2010).

This article is based on a study that was designed to examine the experience of school principals and to use the findings to provide suggestions for improving programs that prepare school leaders for work with EAL immigrants, who are referred to as newcomers. The study used a phenomenological approach, with interviews, to seek descriptions of how principals experienced “the school leader – newcomer phenomenon.” The process was guided by one main question: what is your experience with EAL newcomer families? Subsequent questions were used to probe for responses on who the newcomers were, incidences that the principals considered as significant, and the gaps that existed in their preparation for work with EAL newcomers. The purpose of this article is to use the study findings to articulate the essence of the school leaders’ experience with EAL newcomers. This article focuses on what was reported as the significant incidences associated with the experience.

### **Context**

The government of Saskatchewan has 27 publicly funded school divisions. The divisions fall under four major categories: Public, Catholic, Independent and Francophone (Government of Saskatchewan, 2019b). Most of the public schools in the larger cities like Saskatoon fall under the Public or Catholic school divisions. The steady growth of EAL newcomers in the public schools has led to the



creation of newcomer centres in the larger school divisions: Saskatoon Public Schools (SPS) and Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools (GSCS). These centres are the point of entry into the school system for EAL newcomer students and families. They assist in registering the students in elementary and high schools, assessing the students' language skills, and recommending support and programming services (Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, 2019; Saskatoon Public Schools, 2019).

The SPS and GSCS offer support for all elementary and high school students who are learning English as an additional language. Both student numbers and educational needs are taken into consideration when EAL staffing decisions are made (Anderson & Tilbury, 2014). The goal of EAL programs at both elementary and high school is to improve students' cultural and linguistic competency so that they can be integrated successfully into mainstream classrooms (Anderson & Tilbury, 2014; Government of Saskatchewan, 2019b).

The school divisions also partner with settlement agencies such as Saskatoon Open Door Society (SODS) and the Global Gathering Place (GGP), for language translation, interpretation services, mentorship, coaching, and other socio-cultural support services. One of the successful partnerships is with the Open Door Society through the Settlement Support Worker in Schools (SSWIS) program (Government of Saskatchewan 2019a; Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, 2019; Saskatoon Public Schools, 2019).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This article focuses on the ontological aspect of school leaders' work with EAL newcomer families by examining the nature of the experience. The tenets of existential phenomenology are used to

establish the entities that exist in the experience and how they are experienced (Piem, 2018; van Manen, 2014). The approach examines commonalities in the descriptions provided by school leaders to establish the essence of experience (van Manen, 2014; 2015). The focus is on two characters of phenomenology: (i) concreteness of the experience, addressing the question, “What is the nature (object) of the experience?” and (ii) how the school leaders relate to the phenomena. What it is like for the leaders experiencing the phenomena (subject and their perspective) (Piem, 2018; van Manen, 2014; 2015)?

### **Related Research**

The demographic changes that are occurring due to immigration are forcing school leaders to engage with the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of EAL newcomer families (Epstein & Sander, 2006; Riehl, 2000). House, Hange, Javinda, Dorfman and Gupta (2004) noted that beliefs and assumptions distinguish effective from ineffective leaders, more so because the values held by members of a culture influence the leadership approach, and their motivation for achievement power, authority and affiliation. This led authors like Chin and Trimble (2015) to illuminated the importance of cross-cultural competency in effective leadership. Unfortunately, few leadership preparation programs require that school leaders enrol in cross-cultural education courses (Garrison-Wade, Sobel & Fulmer, 2007; Liou & Hesbol, 2017). Further, Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) revealed the deficit in principals’ awareness of the connections between affirming diversity and student achievement.

Seashore (2003) emphasized the need for strong democratic school leadership practices that support newcomer families at the school and district levels, and the need to include all parties (teachers,



students, parents, and leaders) in decision-making. Riehl (2000), Dimmock and Walker (2005) advocated for school leadership practices that are responsive to culturally diverse groups, i.e., practices that: (a) foster cultural diversity; (b) exemplify inclusive instructional practice; (c) build partnerships between school and communities; and, (d) engage in school governance and decision-making processes that reflect multiculturalism. Engaging settlement support service providers and culture brokers (Georgis, Gokiert, Ford, & Ali, 2014), as well as providing space for students and family members to feel welcome in the school (Drake, 2014), are other practices that have been reported to facilitate the success of culturally and linguistically diverse newcomer students.

Several authors have identified attributes that constitute culturally competent school leadership. For instance, Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016) associated such competency with leaders who (a) are self-reflective of their leadership behavior, (b) develop culturally responsive teachers, and (c) promote a culturally responsive, inclusive environment. Similarly, Lindsey, Robin and Terrell (2009) considered culturally proficient leaders as being able to (a) assess culture (b) value diversity (c) manage dynamics of difference (d) adapt to diversity and (e) institutionalize cultural knowledge. Lumby and Coleman (2016) pointed out that having trust in education institutions and those who represent them (i.e., teachers and administrators) is fundamental to the success of newcomer students.

While examining the role that vice principals play in diverse, multi-ethnic schools, Hamm (2017) noted that they needed supervision, training, and mentorship to lead the multi-ethnic schools that are now the reality in Canada. Some of the best practices described by the vice principals included developing of strong communication

networks that help to reduce barriers associated with managing a multilingual community, working with immigrant services, and breaking language and cultural barriers for new immigrant parents who were hesitant to approach teachers and school leaders due to their perceived deficiencies in the dominant language.

### **Methodology**

The study used open-ended interviews to garner accounts from ten leaders about their experiences with EAL newcomers (Moustakas, 1994, van Manen, 2015). The leaders included principals from schools with a higher number of EAL newcomer students, based on the lists provided by school divisions. I carried out at least two, 90 minutes interviews with each of the participant, over a period of 10 months. The participation rate was at 90% and they all identified as Caucasians of European descent. Table 2 has the breakdown of the participants by school division, years of experience as school principals and the countries of origin of the EAL newcomers they had worked with.





Table 2.

*Participants' Demographics*

<b>Participants Identification Number</b>	<b>School Division</b>	<b>Years of Experience as Principal</b>	<b>Country of Origin of Newcomer Families in their School</b>
1	GSCS	5	Somalia, Eritrea, Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Vietnam, Thailand, China, Ukraine, Kenya
2	SPS	1	Philippines, Nepal, Ethiopia, Somalia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, India.
3	GSCS	9	Philippines, Iraq, Sudan, Ghana, Poland, Ireland, Scotland, Ukraine.
4	SPS	3	Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Iraq, Eritrea
5	SPS	2	Spain, Ukraine, Iraq, Syria, Congo, Nigeria, Ethiopia
6	GSCS	5	Philippines, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Congo, Sudan, Nigeria, Cameroon
7	SPS	8	Bangladesh, Sudan, Somalia, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, China, Vietnam, Nigeria
8	SPS	3	China Bangladesh, Pakistan, India
9	GSCS	1	Philippines, Iraq, Nigeria, Sudan, Colombia
10	GSCS	10	Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Philippines, China, Sudan, Nigeria

The interview transcripts were chunked into segments that applied to specific interview questions. Structural coding was then used to identify and assign conceptual phrases (e.g. cultural diversity, difference, dissonance) to segments (Saldana, 2016). The segments were also examined for significant statements of meaning (texture) from participants' own voices (e.g. "it is just wonderful", "Am now conscious.") using what Saldana (2016) refers to as *In vivo* coding. The statements were then organized to develop textural and structural description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2015). Themes were used to identify and describe features that were common in the leaders' experience (the essence). The descriptions were then presented as narrations of the essence of the experience, covering its concreteness and how the participants related to it (Piem, 2018). A focus group discussion was then held with 6 of the participants to validate the interpretation of the preliminary findings into meaningful statements that could inform policy and practice (Noonan, 2002). This article focuses on the findings from what was considered to be the significant incidences as the unit of analyzing and articulating the essence of the experience.

### **Findings**

The essence of how the principals experienced the phenomenon of working with EAL newcomers was derived from responses that described the nature (concreteness) of the experience and how they perceived it. The findings are synthesized in a way that highlights three main ways that the experience was perceived, with the descriptions of the related concreteness of the experience under each category. The categories were then organized into themes that reveal commonality or essence of the experience. Consequently, the findings



are organized into four sections (i) as a celebration (ii) as a learning experience, (iii) as a challenge and (iv) the essence in the experience.

### **As a Celebration**

The celebratory experience was expressed in the principals' enthusiasm and delight about the diversity and the dispositions that newcomers exhibited in their quest to fit in their new community. As one principal put it:

*I love it. I love the languages and the cultures...To me most of the difficulties that come with it (the experience) are just part of working with diversity...humanity... I don't know how else to put it. So when they come into to my school, I have a big smile, welcome them and tell them that they're going to love it here.*

And as another principal noted, "It is just wonderful, the value they place on education is amazing. It is more than is placed in Canada." Another principal with a similar experience expressed the following:

*I love our EAL population. I think they come with an appreciation for education. Families come in being grateful for what our schools have to offer, and that doesn't always happen in Canada. We don't always have people that just are grateful for what schools provide. I would say majority of families are very grateful for education, and that shows in how their kids act at school.*

The other celebratory expressions were about students' positive interactions with school actors, their attitude towards learning, and authority. They included words like enthusiastic, polite, driven, and respectful. One principal described the students as "warming up very fast to teachers and their ways of teaching". They were also described as "enjoying sports." Another principal described the students as typically self- disciplined.

Parents were described as willing to engage in school activities. Narratives were provided of EAL parents, mostly women, who volunteered to work in places like library or to educate people on their culture. One such example was a mother who volunteered to educate the school community about her faith and her community after an incident where a person identified as belonging to her faith performed a heinous act of terrorism. One of the principals described the enthusiasm with which newcomer parents participated in “Canadian celebrations” that the school initiated. “They dress their children up for Halloween, and come fully dressed up and ready to participate in our Christmas celebration whenever they are invited.”

This celebratory involvement of newcomers with school leadership was deemed reciprocal because of reported appreciation that newcomer families expressed towards the non-school related support that they received from school leadership, such as guidance and support provided, in some cases, to facilitate access to services such as medical care, English language learning and job opportunities.

### **A Learning Experience**

Most of the principals considered the experience to be a learning process, and focused on the learning opportunities that behavior and practices unique to newcomers offered to their leadership. In many instances, their descriptions elicited learning that was reflective and personal. The learning was related to sensitivity around behavior and practices that were unfamiliar to principals and newcomers, differences in school cultures and school systems, newcomers’ unique needs, and the leadership roles associated with serving the cultural diversity.



## Unfamiliar Cultural Behavior and Practices

The principals expressed uncertainty in their understanding and response to unfamiliar behavior and practices that were unique to EAL newcomers. But, they acknowledged that these experiences availed opportunities for them to seek knowledge, skills and dispositions for responding to beliefs and practices that were not consistent with their own. The behaviors and practices they referred to varied depending on ethnicity, religion, school and educational culture from which specific newcomer families came. Some of the principals expressed how they had learned to self-reflect, and to be conscious about cultural difference and variation in values and assumptions that manifested in gender relations, parenting, conflict resolution, relations with authority, teacher-learner expectations, and relational gestures associates with greetings, expressing remorse or showing respect.

Some of the assumptions that came out included gender related experiences such as one where the principal assumed that women from one of the ethnic groups were not allowed to talk or interact with people with authority in the presence of their husbands. As they stated:

*A mother and father came in for a meeting and for me it was an interesting scenario because the mom was not allowed to talk. Everything came from the father and even when I asked the mother questions the father did the answering and... it wasn't because the mom didn't have the capacity or anything like that. Culturally dad was the person I needed to talk to as a principal.*

Another example was the assumption that newcomers used fistfights to resolve conflict. A principal who identified as a person from “a white middle class, conflict free background” described their lesson from the experience of constantly mediating fights initiated by members of one newcomer family as follows:

*I had never had to deal with that before... but with this family I was constantly mediating their conflict with other people, sometimes with teachers. But I came to realize that they were just passionate, they were just energetic, a full of life kind of family and I loved them for it (laughs).*

A gesture such as having a student smile when they were reprimanded was another example of behavior that some leaders found to be inconsistent with norms in the Canadian context. As one of the principals described:

*The more I talked the more he smiled and I couldn't understand why he was smiling. Then I realized after I had calmed myself a little bit, that he was smiling because he was embarrassed. ...I understood afterwards that I needed to check my own culture.*

Another principal expressed her effort to be more sensitive and respectful towards the culture of newcomer families as follows:

*Am now more conscious. So if I am going to meet a new family, I make sure I put my jacket on because I don't know where the family is from...So I will introduce myself as the principal but I will try and be conscious. I don't want to offend anybody so I will look at the children introduce myself and then I'll turn to mom and then I will put my hand out and then I must say, "Do you shake hands?" to the father and most of our (name of religion) community do but some don't. ...It is such a simple thing but pretty important to our families.*

### **Difference in School Culture and Education Systems**

The leaders acknowledged the influence that school culture and the education systems in the country of origin had on the way newcomers perceived or engaged with school leadership in Canada, and prompted some of the principals to express interest in knowing more about the education systems where the EAL families came from. Most of what was expressed highlighted difference in the perceptions about certain teaching and learning approaches, and what was



expected of students. Some of the examples provided included incidences where parents were dissatisfied with the workload that was given to their children, claiming that it was too light. Others felt that their children were not placed in the appropriate grade. One of the principal stated:

*There is another family in our school, also of (name of a country) descent: their children are what we indicate as low cognitive ability. When we transition to grade 9 we will recommend special programing but the parents have already indicated to us that they will not accept.*

There were also differences in the expectations around classroom placement. For instance, a pedagogical model like the split classroom was misunderstood by some parents who were unhappy because their children were in the same room with learners of a lower grade. An example of difference in parental involvement practice was expressed in a case where members of one newcomer community preferred having parent teacher interviews as a community:

*A group of (Native language) families who had lived in a refugee camp in (name of country) for many years would come to parent- teacher interviews as a community. So members of the community would sit in one child's parent-teacher interview and then move to the next child's...*

The principals also mentioned experiences of difference in teaching practices based on gender related cultural practices. One such example was about a family whose did not allow their daughter to participate in activities that took place out of the school premises unless accompanied by her mother.

### **Responsibilities Associated with the Needs of the Newcomers**

The principals narrated how working with EAL newcomers called for engagement in roles that were beyond regular school leadership practice. They found themselves having to learn how to

initiate and manage collaborations with settlement agencies. Besides managing collaborations, language barriers brought with them issues related to trust for both newcomers and school leadership, especially with regard to decisions about the choice of translators. According to the principals, some families preferred bringing in their own translators even when it was hard to determine the authenticity of the translations:

*If the translator is a friend of the family and we are passing on delicate information such as a child who is not performing at the expected level, or when you are dealing with a child or family with any sort of special need, you need to be sure that all the information is clear.*

One other issue that was reported was the cliques that emerged as members from different cultures tried to establish their identity within the school. There were descriptions of instances where leaders had to solve issues associated with the lack of trust, feelings of fear and discomfort around certain groups, or students fearing or feeling uncomfortable going to certain areas in the school because they are dominated by certain ethnic groups. Some leaders reported cases of parents pulling children from schools because of an increase in the number of EAL newcomers from certain ethnicities.

There was also mention of more personal needs that some principals attended to, such as assisting parents to find jobs, or spending hours assisting newcomer parents who needed social support. As one of the principals narrated, "In their country they were assisted by their parents or grandparents but now they seek support from me. I work with them on things like identifying doctors and following up with appointments." These learning experiences provided an opportunity for leaders to reflect on gaps in requisite





knowledge, skills and dispositions for work with culturally and linguistically diverse families.

### **A Challenge**

The view of the experience as a challenge was derived from descriptions of what was considered problematic. The leaders cited contentious issues associated with resourcing, funding, and support services. As far as some of these principals were concerned, EAL newcomers needed more attention, additional programming, and professional support to navigate through unique challenges associated with language, settlement, and poverty, and trauma. The challenges demanded more from school leaders as they worked towards students' academic success. One principal described the process of differentiating whether a student needed support with language or cognitive ability as taking a lot of time and effort. He referred to a case where they had to translate a test in the student's native language to confirm the student's capability. Other challenges were policy and system related, for instance working with frustrated parents and students who were finding it hard to accept decisions about placement, and what they thought was lower academic expectations of their children. The principals were also confronted with decisions about overwhelmed or traumatized students who needed specialist support from counsellors or social workers.

There were also non-academic challenges associated with newcomer students. One principal described a challenge with judging the language levels of parents. The principal used an example where she thought a parent knew enough English, but later on realized that the parent did not comprehend her instructions. This led to some miscommunication and so they had to start all over again with a translator. Some principals described their experience with managing

students who suffered from the effects of war and refugee camp life. In one participant's words,

*We expect people to come into our schools, sit down at their desk and do the work. That's not a reality for everyone. Some people have been in a refugee camp where there are no chairs, let alone places to write. ... (Name of the child) had come from basically survival mode to a structured mode here and those two didn't mesh. ... When (Name of the child) was here he would throw a wreck and hurt others or himself.*

Another principal described an experience with a traumatised student, which resulted in the engagement of law enforcement:

*I remember dealing with (name of a student). Police had to be called to help find him one day because he took off and got lost trying to find his way home. But he was a handful.... We worked with his family and had to put in as much support as we could for him to slowly come around. And I am not saying he came around to our way of doing things but he came around to an understanding that we were here for him and that the school was a safe place for him to be.*

Other non-academic challenges were mistrust, conflict among various ethnic groups, and working with law enforcement because of family or community disputes that extended to the school. There were also gender related challenges such as the one expressed by a principal who was frustrated by a male parent who found it difficult to discuss the challenges his child was having with school with her because she was a woman. As she stated: "I consider myself to be an intelligent and understanding person. It really bothers me when a parent cannot talk with me because I am a woman."

Besides these challenges some leaders mentioned having to deal with occasional false accusations of racism. As one of the leaders put it: "I think this is important, some parent went to an outside agency to report that there was a racism issue in our school because we were



singling out their boy for special interventions because he was (name of an ethnic group).”

### **The Essence in the Experience**

The way school leaders perceived the phenomenon of working with EAL newcomers and the nature (concreteness) of the experience revealed common feature in the phenomena. These features were themed from the structural and textural descriptions of the experience. They were derived from leaders’ assumptions, feelings, and observable and relational realities. Whether the experience was celebrated, posed learning opportunities or was experienced as a challenge, common features include the view of newcomers as different and the assumptions that were associated with the difference. This sense of difference was in the shadow of a dominant-minority cultural dynamic where the newcomers were the minority. There was also the experience with cultural diversity and the variations that existed within it. The diversity and variations cut across beliefs and practices based on ethnicity, religion, and schooling and education. They were a source of cognitive dissonance which most leaders turned into learning opportunities. Other common features were the other significant actors in the school leader - newcomer interactions. These included the parents and families, and the organizations that partnered or collaborated to provide the needed services. Details of how these essential features manifested are discussed in the subsequent section.

### **Discussion**

The nature of the experience of school leaders, be it from the celebration, learning, or the challenges, revealed pertinent aspects that were the essence of school leaders’ experience with EAL newcomers in

the Saskatchewan context. The essence is synthesized into themes that need to be considered while preparing of school leaders for their work with the EAL newcomers, namely: (i) difference and the associated assumptions, (ii) cultural diversity and variations, (iii) dominance-minority dynamic, (iv) dissonance as a learning opportunity (v) self-knowledge and reflection (vi) parental and community involvement, and (vii) collaboration and partnerships (See Figure 1).

Figure 1.

*The Essence of School Leader EAL Interactions*



**Difference and the Associated Stereotypes**

Difference, whether real or perceived, was evident in the way leaders identified themselves and the worldview they portrayed. For



instance, all the leaders identified as Caucasian of European descent and described the EAL newcomers as being from diverse ethnicities and races. They experienced most of the newcomer relational practices as collective, hierarchical, and representing what authors like Chin and Trimble (2015) described as an Eastern worldview, and considered the Canadian worldview as being egalitarian. One such example was the preference of communal parent teacher interviews among some newcomer parents and their tendency to consult with their community or use the community norms to argue for or make decisions about the education of their children.

Difference was also evident in the general descriptions of the socioeconomic, culture, and curriculum needs of the newcomers. Inasmuch as most of the principals acknowledged the commitment that most newcomer families had toward education, they were mainly depicted as a homogeneous group that was of a lower SES status with lower academic abilities compared to their Canadian born peers. They were considered to have a deficit in language and prior content knowledge.

There was also evidence of leaders holding negative views of newcomers based on what they considered to be unfamiliar cultural practices rather than their cognitive ability. For example, one principal described an experience where he realized how one student's performance was excellent when a test was offered in the student's native language instead of English. This echoes Lumby and Coleman (2016) who argued that stereotype, prejudice, and language limitation lead to the underestimation of newcomer's ability. Despite the strikingly diverse cultures and skill levels, they are typically put together with one underequipped teacher who is expected to address their varied needs (Calderon, Slavin & Sanchez, 2011). For instance, the

needs of refugees and the economic immigrants were not the same, and not all EAL newcomers have a language deficit. Evidently, leaders need to be cognisant of these differences, and the assumptions and biases associated with them. As such, leadership development initiatives need to use strategies that encourage reflection on personal histories, and understanding how difference works in schools by examining how factors like socioeconomic and cultural circumstance influence achievement (Blackmore, 2006).

### **Cultural Diversity and Variations**

The leaders' descriptions revealed how newcomers were from various nationalities and diverse cultures within those nationalities. The cultural variation in the newcomer-school leadership context was also based on religion, gender, ethnicity and race. Such diversity and cultural variation influences school leaders' behaviour and practices (House et al., 2004). This was evident in the reaction of principals to behaviour that they deemed unfamiliar, especially relationships associated with authority, gender, parenting, meaning of gestures, conflict resolution, and the difference in experience with school systems and academic expectations. There was also the newcomers' dissatisfaction with placement of students, workload, or unfamiliar pedagogical models such as split classrooms. Such differences prompted many leaders to want to know more about the diverse culture and education systems. It also calls for leaders to have cultural competencies for responding effectively to the needs of the newcomers (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis, 2016; Lindsey, Robin & Terrell, 2009). Hence the need for preparation and development at both the individual and system levels (Hansuyadha & Slater, 2012).



### **Dominance- Minority Dynamic**

The dominance- minority dynamic is inherent in the newcomer leadership relationship because of the assumption that the newcomers should acculturate both in the community and in the school system. The anecdotes that celebrated newcomer students had phrases like “warming up to teachers, “accepting new way of teaching,” being enthusiastic, and having acceptable values. Newcomer parents were described as “embracing school activities” and “feeling the need to clarify misconceptions about their culture (newcomers) and educate the school community about their religion to eliminate feelings of mistrust.” One principal described a newcomer student as “slowly but surely coming around to our way of doing things.” This begs the question about the principals’ level of cultural proficiency, as other cultures appear wrong or inferior to the dominant culture in their view (Lindsey, Robin & Terrell, 2009). True school leadership needs to go beyond painting a picture of inclusion, and affirming newcomers’ efforts to acculturate (Lumby & Coleman, 2016).

According to Grant and Roy (2019), culturally competent school leaders affirm the culture and identity of newcomers by encouraging them to speak their language, asking about their culture, creating a welcoming environment, involving and establishing lines of communication with families. Principals can serve as transformative leaders in response to exclusionary beliefs and practices expressed by teachers and families from the dominant culture (Cooper, 2009).

### **Dissonance as an Opportunity to Learn**

Both leaders and EAL newcomers contend with decisions and actions that are not consistent with their cultural values, beliefs or norms. As expressed by the leaders, these inconsistencies provided

both parties with an opportunity to reflect, learn and act. Examples include the female principal who struggled to understand why a male parent had a problem discussing his concerns with her because she was a woman, or using an alternative gesture with parent who did not use a hand shake as a form of greeting with a principal of a different gender. There was also the principal who adjusted her mode of dressing and gestures to accommodate parents from certain communities. LaRoque (2013) reported the benefits of turning challenges into opportunities when it comes to cultural and linguistic dissonance between parents and schools.

Some of the reasons that parents provided for wanting their children to receive additional homework were not consistent with the principles that the leaders held about education outcomes. The communal approach to parent-teacher interviews was other example of a practice that was not consistent with regular practice in Canada. These inconsistencies were a source of cognitive dissonance that motivated change in the leaders' decisions and actions (Festinger, 1957; Elliot & Divine, 1994). Such dissonance avails opportunities for leaders to gain insights into new cultural perspectives and facilitated transition into inclusive leadership practices (McFalls, & Cobb-Roberts, 2001).

### **Self-Knowledge and Reflection**

The inconsistencies in the school leaders' beliefs, and values and the way they acted to include the newcomers affirmed that self-knowledge and reflection are the core of cultural competency (Nobles, 1976). It is through such processes that leaders are driven to want to know and respond appropriately towards values and beliefs from diverse cultures. Self-knowledge and reflection can empower leaders to position themselves to ask the right questions and learn from cultural dissonance (McFalls, & Cobb-Roberts, 2001). Tools like the





cultural proficiency continuum by Lindsey, Robin and Terrell (2009) can facilitate school leaders in gauging and reflecting on their cultural proficiency. The continuum, which has descriptors ranging from cultural destructiveness (denial) to cultural proficiency (integration), with cultural incapacity (defense), cultural blindness (minimization), pre-cultural competence (acceptance), and cultural competence (adaptation) in between, can enable leaders to rate themselves and reflect on the attributes that will facilitate their cultural proficiency. As Hansuyadha and Slater (2012) recommended, school leaders' cultural competency needs to be developed both at individual and system levels. Reflexivity as part of leaders' professional development especially about personal educational and cultural histories and how they influence leadership decisions is also a favourable strategy (Blackmore, 2006).

### **Parents and Family Involvement**

Parents and families are central to school leadership-newcomer relationships (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Grant & Roy, 2019). Parents are custodians of pertinent information about the socio-cultural values, home and prior school experience of the newcomer students. They are key to decisions that are made about the students' school experience including placement, pedagogy, discipline, and communication. According to the leaders interviewed, the school-related decisions that most newcomer parents made were influenced by a communal worldview where family was at the core. Cultural norms were central to newcomer relations with school leadership as evidenced in both curriculum and non-curriculum related decisions, e.g. preferring communal parent-teacher interviews and resisting special programs as interventions for low academic ability. As Grant and Roy (2019) stated, engaging parents and children in more meaningful ways provides an

understanding of cultural practices. They advocated for school leadership to affirm families' culture and identity by providing a welcoming environment, establishing lines of communication, inquiring about their culture and involving families in school related activities (Grant & Roy, 2019; Lumby & Coleman, 2016). Leaders must therefore find ways to create meaningful relationships with parents and work with communities to gain a better understanding of the motivations behind their decisions, and how they can serve diverse needs (Cox-Petersen, 2011; Grant & Roy, 2019).

### **Inter-Organizational Partnerships and Collaboration**

The leaders affirmed the pertinent role of collaboration and partnerships between schools with ethnic communities, settlement agencies and other organizations that serve newcomers (Georgis et al., 2014). Examples included instances when leaders needed to communicate sensitive information or mediation for inconsistencies in cultural practice. Partnerships between school leadership and immigrant serving organizations are a means of accessing resources and settlement services that are necessary for newcomer students' success (Cox-Petersen, 2011; Georgis et al., 2014). One successful example in Saskatchewan is the Settlement Support Worker in Schools (SSWIS) program with the Saskatoon Open Door Society and school divisions. Organizations like Global Gathering Place also offer support with homework and career guidance in selected high schools. Collaboration with community organizations can also facilitate relationships and avail culture brokers, who are an asset when it comes to mediating cultural dissonance, mistrust or fear, related issues (Georgis et al., 2014).



## **Implications for School Leadership Preparation and Development**

It was evident that the leaders yearned for requisite cultural leadership competencies that would enable them to work more effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse newcomers. The need to know about the varied cultures was expressed in their overt call for knowledge and understanding of the educational leadership systems of the countries from which the newcomers came. This need was also expressed in the unclear understanding of the behaviours and cultural practices that the newcomers exhibited. Leaders need to be aware of cross-cultural differences and the diversity that exists within cultures, and how these influence behaviours and practice of both leaders and newcomers.

Leaders need the competencies that will enable them to acknowledge difference, and to minimize decisions or actions that highlight division (Bustamante, Nelson & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). They require competencies that will enable them to affirm the various cultures by creating a welcoming school environment, and maintaining lines of communication, inquiring about cultures, and involving families in school related activities (Grant & Roy, 2019). They should be empowered to engage with parents, create positive relationships among members of the school community, and gain a better understanding of the diverse cultures and practices that may cause dissonance (Cooper, 2009; Lopez , 2015). Exposure to programs and resources that facilitate newcomers to settle in smoothly, such as access to peers and staff who understand their culture and information on the dominant culture, are strategies that some authors have advocated (Lumby & Coleman, 2016).

School leaders also need to know the contextual essence of being culturally responsive. Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016), and Lindsey,

Robin and Terrell (2009) suggested generic frames that could be used to equip school leaders with competencies for cultural leadership. Khalifa et al. (2016) could be a resource for equipping leaders to be (a) critical and self-reflective of their leadership behavior (b) develop culturally responsive teachers (c) promote culturally responsive/inclusive environments, and (d) engage students, parents, and marginalized communities. Likewise, Lindsey et al. (2009) defined and provided descriptors, outlined above, for culturally proficient leaders as those who can (a) assess culture (b) value diversity (c) manage dynamics of difference, (d) adapt to diversity and (e) institutionalize cultural knowledge. Similarly, Liou and Hermanns (2017) advocated for programs preparing school leaders for work with culturally diverse students to establish an ecological framework that can develop aspiring school principals' dispositions to tackle systemic racism and practices associated with deficit thinking and low expectations.

The competencies for working with the personal, cultural, and systemic aspects of the school leader-newcomer phenomena could be availed through both formal graduate degrees and certificate programs to less formal opportunities such as professional development workshops and seminal presentations (Bush, 2010; Earley & Jones, 2009). The essence of school leaders' experience with culturally and linguistically diverse newcomers require instructional strategies that equip leaders with both inter- and intra-personal skills such as reflection, inquiry, and observation. They will also benefit from experiential learning through mentorship and coaching (Earley & Jones, 2009).



## Conclusion

This article reveals the essence of school leaders' work with EAL newcomers as manifested as celebrations, learning opportunities, and challenges. Leaders need to be responsive to unfamiliar behaviour, and open to learning and embracing difference and diverse cultural values and worldviews. The essence also calls upon leaders to be cultural advocates, and to respond appropriately to the dominance-minority dynamic that exists in interactions with culturally and linguistically diverse newcomers. The article identifies cultural dissonance as an opportunity for leaders and newcomers to learn and work with diversity. The significant role that self-knowledge and reflection play in equipping school leaders for cultural competence, and the need for collaboration and partnerships with families, communities, and relevant service providers are part of the essence of the leadership experience. This study affirms the need for school leaders to know about cross-cultural and intercultural communication. It also provides an understanding of the personal, cultural, and systemic aspects of the leadership-newcomer phenomena that are pertinent to the preparation of school leadership for work EAL newcomers.

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