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Indigenous Knowledge and Literacy Acquisition: A Qualitative Study of Low-Literate Elder Refugees' Educational Backgrounds and Cultural Dissonance

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ABSTRACT

Prior knowledge is central to memory and learning, but many older refugees come to the classroom with ways of knowing and experiences much different from what they find in Western teaching contexts. In describing refugees' prior learning experiences, research often cites ethnological differences between print-based cultures and oral traditions. But relatively few researchers cite adult learners' own words when describing these differences. In this study, elder refugees' narratives illuminate our understanding of indigenous knowledge, which is passed down orally through generations, and is specific to the place where they lived. What happens to this place-based knowledge when they must leave their country? By analyzing themes from a qualitative study with low-literate elder refugees from Somalia, their instructor, and observations within a beginning language and literacy class in the U.S., this research seeks to broaden critical discourse around LESLLA learners in general and elder learners aged 60 and older in particular.

INTRODUCTION

Elders and beginning language and literacy classrooms

Teachers in beginning language and literacy classrooms know how essential it is to familiarize themselves with who their students are and what they know. TESOL International Association recently deemed "Know Your Learners" as the primary component for excellence in English language teaching (2018), and as a central tenet to adult learning theory, background knowledge and validation of prior life experiences in the classroom is essential to literacy acquisition

(Knowles, 1980; Tarone et al., 2009). Research on LESLLA learners also points to a need for understanding the experiences learners' have had before coming to the U.S., as well as how age affects the learning process (Vinogradov, 2013). Educators working with refugee populations know that these learners bring with them a deep knowledge base and a wealth of life experiences, but sometimes this knowledge may be altogether unfamiliar to teachers in Western teaching contexts.

Among refugee populations, elder refugees as non- and low-literate learners present a complex issue in society. Illiteracy is regarded as an abnormality, and the interpretation of the assessments of the cognitive abilities of elders with limited formal education are even mistaken as showing signs of dementia, or nervous system and neurological disorder (Ardila et al., 2000). With such a pathological stance on aging and education in our society relying so strongly on print literacy, if a student is over 65 years old the sentiment among even the most committed educators may be that it is too late for them. The dearth of research exploring the social transformation of elder refugees, as compared with the substantially greater focus and quantity of research on younger refugees whose social transformation comes about more quickly supports this view (Haines, 2010). While the field of research on non- and low-literate ESL learners is growing, research on elder learners is lacking, and most often limited to high-income white populations (Doetinchem de Rande, 2012).

In the community school where the researcher worked, low-literate East African elders represented a significant portion of the most regularly attending students. East Africans comprise one of the largest groups of primary and secondary refugee arrivals to Minnesota (MN Department of Health, 2015). Elder learners who enrolled in ESL programs at low-literate functional levels accounted for the largest portion of students intakes, suggesting that elders from the East African community are most often LESLLA learners (Lepage, personal communication, 2014).

A number of factors contribute to the characterization of elder learners as being "hardest to serve" (Schleppergrell, 1987). Elder learners are almost invariably impacted by mental and physical health and transportation issues. Studies show that language processing, or the speed at which we remember and process language, slows down by our 70s (Borella, Ghisletta, & De Ribaupierre, 2011; Wingfield, Kemtes, & Miller, 2001). Our inhibitory control, or the ability to eliminate irrelevant information when processing language, is also affected (Borella, Ghisletta, & De Ribaupierre, 2011; Stine-Morrow, Hussey, & Ng, 2015). But perhaps most significant among elders is the prevalence of hearing loss. The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) reports that in the U.S., 17% of adults suffer from hearing loss. The prevalence of hearing loss among adults increases as we age-- 25% for 65–74 year olds, and 50% for those aged 75+, and a delay in diagnosis of hearing loss is very common (2016). Aging refugees face additional psychological risk as the upheaval of relocation to a third country itself results in their social isolation and loss of role in the family (Dubus, 2010; Heger Boyle & Ali, 2010), and is further compounded by limited English proficiency, poverty, trauma, and

unemployment which many aging refugees face (Marshall, 2005; Ridgard et al., 2015).

In addition to health issues, elder learners are also impacted by current legislation governing adult education (WIOA, 2014) which emphasizes college and career readiness of all programs receiving federal funding. Employment-based outcomes which are not achievable or simply irrelevant to elder learners makes it difficult for programs to accommodate the needs of elder learners, instead providing instruction and assessments that focus on achieving quick outcomes (Condelli, 2007; Reder, 2013).

Elders and indigenous knowledge

In order to better serve low-literate elder learners, teachers must become more familiar with their students' prior learning experiences. Studies show that recognizing the epistemological diversity in classrooms and knowledge systems possessed by learners is essential if we are to encourage retention and persistence (Smith & Pourchot, 1998; Watson, 2010), and cultural dissonance occurs when students perceive a difference between their prior experiences and current expectations for learning and what is being presented in the classroom. Participants in this study had not attended formal education programs in their country and were not literate in Somali. The history of formal education in Somalia was limited and mostly intended to further colonization of the country by Britain and Italy (Abdi, 1998), and it was it was not until 1972, when Somali elders today had already reached adulthood, that Somali became the national language and language of instruction.

Text-based formal educational experiences typically characterizes teachers' background knowledge in classrooms in the US. However, the foundation of elder learners' prior learning experiences in this study was indigenous knowledge systems, which are characterized as place-based, orally transmitted, and accumulated over generations (Kincheloe & Semali, 2002). Critical Pedagogy recognizes indigenous knowledge as a primary component to challenging power among marginalized populations. However, indigenous knowledge has long been regarded as superstitious, primitive, or illegitimate, based on oral traditions which are unstructured and less rigorous scholarly traditions based on the written word (Ahmed, 2014; Akena, 2012; Ong, 2002). Considering the current paucity of ESL and literacy research citing oral tradition and indigenous knowledge, the interview responses of this study have the potential to become the sources for citation in future research.

Research questions

In order to know more about the educational background of elder refugees in beginning language and literacy classrooms, we must understand their prior learning experiences within indigenous knowledge systems, as well as elicit their perspectives on different ways of knowing and the expectations of ESL programs in the US.

This study addressed two important questions:

1. What indigenous knowledge do low-literate elder learners bring to the beginning literacy classroom?
2. How does this indigenous knowledge interact with the western teaching and learning context they are currently studying in?

METHODOLOGY

Setting and participants

This study took place at an affordable housing high-rise in a major metropolitan area in the upper Midwest between October to November of 2015A total of 14 low-literate East African elders (11 female and 3 male) living in this building were interviewed. Participants self-identified as elders between 60 and 80 years old most often gave an estimated age, as their dates of birth had not always been recorded in their home countries. Participants characterized their educational backgrounds as never having gone to school in their home country, and either having gone to school in the US as adults for a limited time or never having gone to school at all.

The researcher of this study had previously worked as an Adult ELL Program Coordinator from 2012 to 2014 at the building, and in that capacity had gotten to know many of the elder participants as learners in on-site English programming. The challenges described by Tarone and Bigelow (2004) in conducting longitudinal studies with low-educated transient refugee populations was thus circumvented by conducting the study in a single housing complex where elder residents of the building also attended on-site English programs. The study also benefited from an interpreter who not only interpreted for the interviews and assisted in recruiting participants, but was also a respected resident of the building, thereby contributing to a positive rapport to the interview process, and likely adding a high level of trust between the researcher and participants (Gonzalves, 2011). It is worth noting that there were in fact more elders who requested to participate in interviews than the capacity of the research project could support.

The purpose of the interviews was to elicit low-literate elder refugees' experiences with informal and formal education. These interviews focused on indigenous knowledge, in order to help educators understand more about LESLLA learner backgrounds. But, great care was taken in eliciting these narratives, as researcher bias was recognized in the fact that the researcher had been a teacher within a learning context that is largely shaped by the Western learning paradigm typical of classes in the US. Further, due to the fact that the researcher did not share a background with the participants in either Somali culture or indigenous knowledge, extra effort was made to ensure that the collection and interpretation of data remained true to the ideas of elder learners themselves, and advised the interpreter not to explain interviewees' responses or explain what the researcher said if the participant didn't understand the question, but rather to alert the researcher to a misunderstanding and then allow the opportunity for follow-up questions and arrive at a clear understanding in tandem with the participant. For this reason, eliciting narratives on indigenous

knowledge was expected to be challenging based on the researchers' relative lack of familiarity with elders' ways of knowing and the students' expectation that perhaps these were not relevant, based on the researcher's position as a white, literate teacher in a Western learning context. Furthermore, as indigenous knowledge is sacred and has been exploited throughout colonial and imperial eras of histories affecting indigenous people throughout the world, critical theory was chosen as the theoretical lens for the study in order to promote change and give power back to marginalized populations.

Once elders expressed interest in participating, the researcher and an interpreter orally explained the purpose and the procedure of the research project. In keeping with university research ethics, participants signed a consent letter stating that their information will be kept anonymous, with each participant and the building where they lived given a pseudonym ("High-Rise A"), and that they could terminate the interview or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence to them.

Measurements / data collection

This study began with one-on-one interviews conducted with 14 elders in their first language at High-Rise A through the help of Somali interpreter, and generally lasted 30 to 40 minutes. In order to ensure that my collection and interpretation of data remained true to the ideas of elder learners themselves, I advised my interpreter not to explain interviewees' responses to me in the event that I didn't understand the response or the participant didn't understand the question, but rather to alert me to a misunderstanding and then allow me to ask follow-up questions and arrive at a clear understanding in tandem with the participant. The interviews sought to elicit narratives of informal education and indigenous knowledge, whether elders perceived any differences between their success in learning prior to going to school and the experience of classroom learning in the US, and whether that and/or additional factors were problematic to their continued attendance. The interviews were flexible and followed a line of inquiry that included the following kinds of questions developed by the researcher to elicit and code elements of indigenous knowledge: 1) Where are you from? 2) What was it like growing up? 3) What were you an expert at? 4) How did you become an expert?; as well as questions about their experiences with formal education: 5) Have you been to school in the US? 6) If so, did you like it? 7) What suggestions would you have to make it better?

After the individual interviews were completed, the interview findings were triangulated with data collection from two classroom observations in which elder participants were students, as well as an interview with their instructor. Classroom observations were completed in order to corroborate themes which emerged from individual elder interviews, and the classroom activities themselves were not modified or selected by the researcher. The instructor interview questions were shared with the teacher and then collected later in the form of written responses, per the teachers' request, and focused specifically on the challenges and strengths of elders as learners, and any observations the

instructor determined helpful through his work with elder learners in respect to their background in informal education and indigenous knowledge.

The interviews and observations were audio-recorded and coded using Dedoose, a qualitative software which organizes and compares data from participants' demographic information and partially-transcribed interviews. From this analysis, themes relevant to the experience of elder learners in beginning language and literacy classrooms were identified. Excerpts from the interviews have been included in this study to support findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Elders as learners

The purpose of this study's analysis was to identify themes which characterize elder learners' perspectives of beginning language and literacy classrooms in the US, and how they related this to their prior learning experiences. In this section we summarize the themes of aging, health, isolation, low evaluation of learning ability, and trauma, as well as themes related to elders' background knowledge illustrated by the themes of indigenous knowledge and cultural dissonance.

Aging and health

Throughout the course of the interviews with elder participants, the researcher sought to understand more about indigenous knowledge and learning experiences. What was revealed was a full portrait of elders as learners, in which several themes relevant to their learning experiences were identified. One might predict that age was a common barrier for elders, due to the widely held belief that the younger a student is, the easier it is to learn-- and that to make an effort at an advanced stage of life is a sincere but futile effort. Of the participants in this study, six elders cited age as a barrier to learning. As one elder regretted, "I don't know anything. I can't learn. I become old. My brain's old. I believe [the teacher] knows everything, but our brain is too old. I wish I could go back in time 5 more years." Poor health was also cited as a major barrier to attendance, and of the four elders who cited poor health, none were currently attending school.

While there are differences between younger and older learners, language development does not stop after childhood, but instead is a lifelong process that continues to present both advantages and challenges to acquiring language for adult and elder learners (De Bot & Makoni, 2005). The instructor interviewed for this study described ways these differences can be successfully accommodated:

> For ones with physical problems, I accommodate them using comfortable chairs, large print, things like that. My colleagues take trips with their students to places outside the classroom like the public library. I don't do that because many of the elders have limited mobility. But overall, I don't really approach teaching the elders any differently than for any other student.

In this study, not every elder cited age or health as a barrier to learning. As one elder explained, "It's too hard to learn at the beginning, but if they give time, they will learn even if they're old. [To those who say they're too old to learn] I would say they're not ready to learn. You will learn if you want it." The instructor also noted that he did not perceive that age prevented learning:

> Elder students might need some extra encouragement because they may believe that their age makes them unable to learn well. I haven't found that to be the case, but they often believe it, so it's good to help them get past it. Generally, they're really great to work with.

Isolation

Societal expectations around aging in the United States emphasize individual self-sufficiency as a key indicator of success in the late stages of life. However, this is not the reality reported by all elders. Even in a strong, supportive community, like the high-rise where this study took place, which by many accounts looks after their neighbors, elders reported the grave consequences of isolation: "Nobody knocks on your door in America. I can't tell my problems, whatever I have inside." Interdependence, as is found in a collectivist culture like that of the Somali elders in this study, is essential for health in aging (Clark, 1991). A sharp critique of individualist culture was given in one elders' profound indictment:

> Why don't you know your neighbors? Somali people and our religion say you have to know your neighbors. What did they eat last night? If they didn't eat, you have to feed them. You have to eat together-- that's what being neighbors means. In America, the only way that they don't know each other is because there is no trust. When one of their American neighbors dies, how do they go?

Prior learning experiences and past success in acquiring skills are central to memory and learning. But, the consequences of isolation have an impact on elders' sense of themselves as learners: "I don't know if I can remember if I was an expert. the reason is I am alone in one room. I don't have anything. If I would have my family, if I weren't lonely, I could remember." Thus, the importance of community, positive emotions, feedback, and the emphasis on significant connections between students and teachers which is well-recognized as contributing to learners' persistence and investment in the classroom (Chinn, 2007), is all the more important for elder learners.

Low Evaluation of Learning Ability

Elders with limited formal education may experience shame, guilt and remorse when participating in formal schooling for the first time at an advanced age. As with age, participants described a belief that they could not learn because they had never been to school. As one elder described it,

> Learning is important to me. For myself, I did not learn something, and I feel like I lost something. I feel like I lost something for myself. When I remember that my brother or my sister are educated with degrees, when I see them, I feel sad for myself and guilt-- why didn't I learn? What happened to me? Why didn't I learn?

These negative thoughts impact learners' affective filter and suggest that learners would need positive habits of mind modeled and encouraged in the classroom in order to persist and succeed. The instructor may have implicitly mitigated this by his student-centered approach, and while completing the classroom observations I noted that equal time was given for each student to lead classroom activities, regardless of their level.

Of those participants who reported low self-esteem, one had only attended school briefly, and having had great difficulty, quit after just three months: "I think, 'why do I bother my teacher? I'm not going to bother my teacher.' *[Why do you feel like you're wasting the teacher's time?]* People keep going and I'm going behind. And I will stay home. That's what I decided." It was my perception that poor self-esteem was affecting some elders present at the time of the classroom observations and may have impeded their progress since I had last worked at the school.

Trauma

Six elders in this study cited the civil war and the resulting loss and upheaval as having deeply negative consequences in their life and their sense of self as learners. In one instance, my interpreter signaled to me that a participant likely stopped the interview early because of sad memories she experienced when recounting her life before and after moving to the United States. Jaranson et al. (2004) estimated that 36% of Somali refugees had been victims of torture, and excerpts from this study's interviews reveal that six of the elders referenced trauma and the civil war affecting their memory, their self-concept, and their ability to learn. As one elder described the impact of the civil war on her sense of self and expertise in mathematics, she explained: "If you ask me now I forget. They used to tell me, 'Come on, come on -- you are the expert at adding together.' But now I don't know because of the civil war. Our life was so bad, that's why we forget a lot."

Several elder participants reported that they were bothered by thinking about the past, or "thinking too much." In a report by the Minnesota Department of Health (2014), "thinking too much" was identified as a possible indicator of trauma and PTSD affecting functionality, and this was corroborated by the testimony of several elders in this study. Recognition of trauma is a first step towards incorporating the systemic changes needed to adequately serve students who have been affected by it (Ridgard et al., 2015).

Over the course of the interviews, several participants made reference to the term dark person: "I believe I can only remember the civil war. If the civil war didn't happen, I could remember. *[If you weren't lonely and the civil war didn't happen, you could remember?]* Of course, now I am a dark person." As described by one

elder, "dark person" refers to someone who doesn't know anything, but as could be deduced from other excerpts, this term may hold deep connotations of the loneliness, hopelessness, and the difficulty of losing one's sense of self and abilities.

Indigenous knowledge

The elders' descriptions of prior learning experiences made reference to indigenous knowledge, which is a wholly different knowledge system from that presented in Western educational contexts, and offers insight to a specific facet of knowledge which is place-based, accumulated over generations, acquired through close observation, and transmitted through apprenticeship within families or communities.

As indigenous knowledge is place-based and orally transmitted across generations, each elder was asked about the place where they grew up and what they learned as a child. The majority of the participants (12) grew up outside of urban environments, with parents involved in either a settled agriculture (6 participants), nomadic (5 participants), or semi-nomadic lifestyle (1 participant). One elder succinctly described learning in these indigenous contexts and its contrast with formal education and text-based learning:

> You can practice with your parents. You look at your brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers, and your neighbors. How to butcher, how to milk, how to build and move. It's not something you imagine- it's something you can watch.

Throughout the course of the interviews, elders attested to the differences between indigenous knowledge (most often referred to as "culture") and formal schooling. When recounted as memories from their childhood, these instances were often remembered as positive self-affirmations: *[Wasn't learning the Somali culture a beautiful way (to learn)?]* "Yes, that was. The animals, also, you can take outside, you can milk. You can learn that too. I was good at that way. That's what I believe." Indigenous knowledge was also attested to be equal in value to formal education: "I learn from you; you can learn from me too. Take me back to Africa. I can show you," and another elder described a basis in oral tradition as not inferior to text-based learning:

> Everything about the country, you can write. If you don't know anything, you are a dark person. *[Do you think country people are dark people?]* Country is country, city is city, the education is a different way. Everybody knows what they know. No, everything is good. *[In reference to images of nomadic lifestyles:]* This is education. This is a building that they build. This is their house. Sometimes they move. Sometimes they build. This is learning. See? It's learning.

It is essential to realize that indigenous knowledge is not "one thing" fixed in time, nor is it something primitive or simple. Of the participants, only three

continued in the lifestyle of their parents, while those participants raised in urban areas stayed there, and the remaining participants who grew up the in the country left for occupations in business, trade, or manufacturing, or became housewives in urban areas. Thus, we see that students' relation to indigenous knowledge is dynamic and subject to shifts in lifestyle and occupation.

Cultural dissonance

When learners perceive a difference between their prior learning experiences, expectations for education and their current experience in the classroom, this presents cultural dissonance. While many of the elders in the study identified indigenous knowledge as valid and valuable to them in their experiences as learners, others conceded this belief later in the interview:

> Whatever you learn by reading and writing is way different. Something you can do, I can do it. Something you can read, I can't do it. *[What do you think about more watching and less reading and writing?]* When I watch something, I will learn. I don't want it that way. The only thing I want is to read and write. I would love to copy, copy, copy. *[I don't think that works.]* Yeah, it didn't work.

This cultural dissonance was echoed in the instructor interview as he was asked to share his perspective on differences between the class and learners' perceived expectations:

> Again, what I'm going to say here isn't limited to elders but is more prevalent in them. [Enrollment] is an ongoing, rolling class situation - so whenever an individual student shows up for the first time, we're in the middle of something. Some students are intimidated by that. They want me to start with A B C as if it was day one for everybody. Provided they stick with it for a few days, they usually get comfortable pretty quickly. Also, students often expect school to be formal, strict, and teacher-centered. They expect to sit quietly, copying, repeating, and memorizing what I put on the board. I imagine this is what they're familiar with in their home culture. I try to give them some of that, but overall my class is informal, student-centered, and frankly a bit chaotic. I encourage them to talk and work together, have fun, think critically, and take turns leading the class. Students really enjoy this kind of class once they get used to it, but at first it can be confusing for them.

The high attendance of elders in the instructor's beginning language and literacy class attests to the truth of his statements and the efficacy of routinization of activities, Whole-Part-Whole methodology, and student-centered instruction for low-literate adult learners (Vinogradov & Bigelow, 2010).

Some elders report a cultural dissonance in their belief that the successes that they had in learning were not effective, not preferable, or were not "learning" at all: "Me, I'm not educated. *[You don't see all the things you learned as a resource in your life?]* When you ask me about learning, I always think pen and

pencil. But me, I don't think it was learning." While teachers may wish to access adult learners' deep reserve of prior learning experiences, some elders attest to the dissonance between what they know and the things presented in ESL classes: "English and Somali are different. I didn't even go to duqsi (traditional Quranic school). All the things I've learned wouldn't help me in English class." For elders who do overcome significant barriers to attending school, negative thoughts about their prior learning experiences can follow them into the classroom, raising their affective filter and making it difficult for them to learn and affecting their attendance. Seven participants had gone to school in the US for more than two years, and of those, six were currently attending school at the time of the study. Of the remaining participants, five had attended school in the US less than six months and were not currently attending school, while two had never attended school in the US.

The instructor posited that some of the source of difference between LESLLA instruction and the expectations of East African elders may be due to Quranic education and experience with texts and readings of the Islamic faith. This is undoubtedly a factor, and presents instructors with the need to implement new practices into the classroom to explore and accommodate areas of difference between western classrooms and learners' expectations. Several important frameworks exist to help educators address the cultural dissonance that was cited by participants in this study. Elders as Fonts of Knowledge (Watson, 2015) is one such approach that has shown success. Marshall's InterCultural Communication Framework (1994) also provides excellent methods used to navigate the cultural divide between these populations of learners and their educators. Recognizing and validating elders' expertise may also call on educators to "flip the classroom," and Marshall & DeCapua's Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP) also presents promising tools to incorporate refugee and immigrant learners' indigenous knowledge in the acquisition of new skills (2013).

FUTURE RESEARCH

In this study, I have explored how indigenous knowledge and its interplay in western classrooms as perceived by Somali elder refugees in a beginning language and literacy class. While there was no comprehensive answer to the first research question of this study, that is, "What indigenous knowledge do low-literate elder learners bring to the beginning literacy classroom?", many of the interview responses coded by the major themes and trends discussed in the findings not only attested to the importance of indigenous knowledge and other ways of knowing, but also revealed their significance to elders as learners in response to the second research question, "How does this indigenous knowledge interact with the western teaching and learning context they are currently studying in?". The most obvious area of further research would be to replicate a similar study with another group of indigenous peoples, such as Karen elders of Burma (Myanmar) or Oromo elders of Ethiopia. This would allow for cross-

cultural comparisons and may corroborate themes identified by this study, or produce additional themes which had not been considered here.

Another area for future study would be to delve further into unresolved areas of this study; for example: how much does Quranic education affect pedagogical preferences of learners? Does a greater understanding of Islam inform indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing that could be incorporated into beginning literacy and language classrooms? Most importantly, although a semi-structured interview format was a strong fit for this study, a more in-depth method data collection may aid in eliciting a wider range of examples of ways of knowing that could further account for the cultural dissonance noted by participants here.

It must also be noted that the nature of indigenous knowledge as an epistemological concept makes it a difficult study for outsiders, as I was in this research project, to apprehend. Oftentimes I felt I was at an impasse and didn't know the right questions to ask in order to come to know more from the participants in this study. This study was primarily an exploration of theoretical implications of indigenous knowledge in western learning contexts, application of these ideas in new and innovative classroom activities was outside the scope of this study. While curriculum development and innovation is a clear area for future exploration, indigenous knowledge is not merely a "show-and-tell" project, nor is it available "packaged" as school materials are. indigenous knowledge is abstract, dynamic, and complex, and will require pioneering research to fully explore its potential to reach all learners.

Finally, despite the challenges we perceive as being exclusive to elder learners, their vitality and perseverance suggests that these challenges are not "their" problems or shortcomings, but problems that we face as a society. Isolation and loss exist for us all, but for victims of trauma and elders in particular, these are acutely felt. Learning is a sacred process, and because it is sacred, we must not devalue any who come to take part. While indigenous knowledge may be place-based by definition, to deny its role in learning is to demote refugee elders who have fled their country to "blank slates." One way of teaching and learning may prove effective, but the indigenous knowledge systems which elders have mastered must be recognized and tapped into by educators. For this to be accomplished, we must open up a new discourse-- one in which elders hold prominence and indigenous knowledge can claim power in new places.

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Impact of Language and L1 Literacy on Settlement in Canada

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the interplay between L1 literacy and access to social services in Canada for two LESLLA learners. Participants described the target language and literacy skills as critical to navigating life in Canada. Social and cultural capital were also found to affect access to available resources. While length of residency and increased L2 may reduce the level of support required for day-to-day tasks, the need for language training, support accessing services and access to information remained over time. L2 programs play an important role in enabling access to social services.

INTRODUCTION

Many factors affect settlement for newcomers to Canada. Awuah-Mensah's (2016) literature review found common barriers to settlement in Canada included "social support services, language barriers, social isolation, mental health, patriarchal ideologies, social networks, social class, and racial discrimination" (Awuah-Mensah, 2016, p.20). Settlement needs are gendered and dependent on factors like whether a person has arrived to Canada as a refugee or an immigrant. Settlement needs of Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) are different from those of other class refugees who are more likely to have family connections prior to arrival in Canada. Well-developed second language (L2) and literacy skills are important, but alone do not guarantee successful settlement for newcomers, (see Norton, 2016; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Warriner, 2007; Wood, McGrath, & Young, 2012; Ennser-Kananen & Pettitt, 2017; Derwing & Waugh, 2012). L1 literacy may also have implications for adult newcomers who have migrated to a highly literate society.

Literacy development is also affected by many factors, pre- and post-migration. In post-industrialized countries, girls tend to fare slightly better than boys in reading, even though globally the majority of persons who have not developed print-literacy skills are women (Stromquist, 2014). Gendered barriers

to education may continue to exist post-migration (see for example, Folinsbee, 2007; Gonzalves, 2013; MacKinnon, Stephens, & Salah, 2007; Watkins, et al., 2012). Socio-economic status also has a bearing on literacy skills development (Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, & Soler, 2000). Additionally, the very nature of the classroom environment and educational programming requirements are incompatible with what we know to be best practice for teaching LESLLA learners (Reder, 2015).

Literacy Education and Second Language Acquisition for Adults (LESLLA) has created a base of research from which we can draw to inform program design and instructional practice with adult L2 learners with no to little formal schooling. A growing number of studies offer information about how L2 literacy acquisition occurs in adults with no to limited print literacy in the first language (see for example, Kurvers & Ketelaars, 2010; Strube, van de Craats, & van Hout, 2013; Tarone & Bigelow, 2005; Young-Scholten & Naeb, 2009).

In keeping with the Canadian context, the terms *settlement* and *resettlement* will be used in this paper to refer to programs and services available to immigrants & refugees and to Government-Assisted Refugees respectively. Settlement refers to "a long-term, dynamic, two-way process through which, ideally, immigrants would achieve full equality and freedom of participation in society, and society would gain access to the full human resource potential in its immigrant communities" (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, 2000). Settlement services are available to immigrants and refugees. They include language training (largely Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada or LINC), employment training, and supports like settlement counselling (IRCC, 2017). Eligibility for settlement programs ends upon obtaining Canadian citizenship.

The Resettlement Assistance Program available to GARs only includes accommodation at a resettlement center for a short time after arrival, a small temporary living allowance, and a loan to cover the cost of their flight to Canada (Simich, Beiser, & Mawani, 2003). Drawing from Wong & Tézli's (2013) working definition, Integration is used to describe "where groups and individuals have full and equitable access to, and participation in, power and privilege within major societal institutions" (Wong & Tézli, 2013, p.14).

This paper is built on the assumption that access to available services is a critical piece of the settlement process. Drawing on research from multiple disciplines, the following study was viewed through a theoretical framework of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), this paper looks into how two women with LESLLA backgrounds accessed social services by listening to their day-to-day experiences. Interview data was taken from a qualitative study in Western Canada where five women with LESLLA backgrounds, a LESLLA teacher and a settlement worker were interviewed about their work with LESLLA learners or clients. The purpose of the study was to answer two questions. 1) What barriers do LESLLA clients experience to accessing social services and to settlement? and 2) What resources are they employing in order to access these services? The answers to these questions can help us think about

approaches to target language and L2 literacy training for LESLLA learners. They may also provide insight into ways social services are provided to such clients.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study was to look into the interplay between L1 literacy and access to services for LESLLA learners. A qualitative approach was taken to the questions at hand (see Mackey & Gass, 2005). The data included in the present analysis were part of a larger study (Wall, 2017) involving five women with LESLLA backgrounds, a teacher in a LESLLA-focused program, and a settlement counsellor.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted mainly at participants' classes either with the support of an interpreter or in English. Each participant was interviewed one time for approximately an hour. In exchange for their participation, learners were offered tutoring at a local library outside of class time. Though none of the five participants pursued this offer, several participants asked questions about accessing services during their interviews. With participants' permission, I spoke with a teacher, settlement counsellor or other resource person who could connect participants with the information or resources in question. Interview questions were informed by the literature review and my previous experience working with LESLLA learners. LESLLA participants were asked about language and literacy use. They were also asked about services accessed, as well as barriers to and successful experiences accessing social services and who helped them access services. They were asked how important speaking L2 and literacy skills were to their lives in Canada. Learners were also asked their advice for teachers teaching students with LESLLA backgrounds. Interviews with a teacher and settlement worker offered insight into the service providers' work with LESLLA background clients.

Video recorded interviews were transcribed and coded by types of services accessed, barriers and enablers to those services and the resources employed to access services.

PARTICIPANTS AND CONTEXT

Two women's stories, those of Abrehet and Tenneh (pseudonyms), were selected for the following discussion. Abrehet and Tenneh both arrived to Canada as GARs. Abrehet had arrived relatively recently, while Tenneh had lived in Canada for approximately 13 years. Both had relocated from the Canadian cities where they had initially landed. Both reported no prior formal schooling or print-text literacy prior to attending classes in Canada. They were enrolled in community-based LESLLA classes that ran twice a week for a total of six hours of class time. Both learners attended two different classes, doubling their class time to 12 hours per week. The ESL literacy classes were offered by an immigrant-serving agency offering a range of Settlement Programs, and the teacher participant not included here, made frequent referrals to the agency's services. Their similar backgrounds and contrasting lengths of residencies made

for an opportunity to look at how LESLLA learners' experiences of the L2, literacy, and access to services might shift over time.

Table 1

LESLLA Participants: Demographic Information

Participant	Prior schooling	Country of origin	Languages	Length of residency
Abrehet	0 years	Eritrea	Tigrinya, Amharic, some Arabic	3 years
Tenneh	0 years	Liberia	Vai, Mende, Krio, Temne	13 years

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

SLA research has historically been carried out with middle-class university level L2 students (Tarone & Bigelow, 2005). To understand facets of the settlement experience for newcomers with LESLLA backgrounds, this study draws on research related to LESLLA, Information Literacy, and Social and Cultural Capital.

The Role of Literacy for Women with LESLLA Backgrounds

Three studies focusing on women with LESLLA backgrounds (Gonzalves, 2012; Love & Kotai, 2015; Pothier, 2011) are included here. Their participants' backgrounds are similar to those included in the following study, and participants were also asked about their literacy practices (Pothier, 2011) and the place of literacy in their lives (Gonzalves, 2012; Love & Kotai, 2015; Pothier, 2011). A common thread woven through the women's stories was their desire for greater autonomy. They wished to be able to perform day-to-day tasks such as talking to a doctor, taking public transportation, completing paperwork for subsidized housing or helping children with their schoolwork. They described limited literacy as a barrier to full participation in the welcoming country, including further education and training, employment, navigating institutions and, in Pothier's (2011) Toronto study, to obtaining citizenship.[1] Print-text literacy is an expectation of service providers in post-industrialized countries, where completed forms are required to access nearly any service. Participants in Love & Kotai's (2015) study noted literacy was important in their countries of origin, but did not limit their access to services to the same extent pre-migration as it did post-migration.

Participants felt literacy was needed to improve their quality of life, yet they described barriers to attending classes in the receiving country. In addition to

[1] While participants noted that limited literacy was a barrier to obtaining Canadian citizenship, a person is no longer eligible for LINC programming after obtaining citizenship.

commonly identified barriers such as transportation and the need for childcare during classes, women in Gonzalves' (2012) study described three main barriers to learning. First, domestic demands were sometimes at odds with time spent in classes or studying at home. Similarly, studying was not viewed as an important priority for women. A third barrier was affective in nature: women expressed that they did not feel confident stepping foot inside a classroom, did not believe they could be taught, or that studying alongside literate learners discourages women from continuing classes or even attending in the first place.

L1 Literacy and Access to Social Services

It has been established that second language and literacy development occurs differently for LESLLA learners than for adults who have had access to L1 schooling and have developed print literacy in another language. A Toronto area study (Geronimo, Folinsbee & Goveas, 2001) looking into gaps in services for newcomers who had less than a grade nine education and had been in Canada less than five years found that barriers that exist for any immigrant group, like access to language training and employment, were exacerbated by the role literacy plays in accomplishing tasks and accessing services in Canada. Pathways to services in Canada assume a certain level of literacy is in place, and perhaps also that clients' means of accessing and vetting information is compatible with service providers' information provision.

Information Literacy

Information literacy, "those practices, beliefs and skills which enable engagement with information needed for productive social agency" (Richards, 2015, p. 14), offers us another lens into how services are accessed by newcomer groups. Studies have found access to information to be critical to successful settlement and integration for immigrants and refugees in Canada (George & Chaze, 2009; Ahmed, Shommu, Rumana, Barron, Wicklum, & Turin, 2016).

Making information available does not guarantee it is accessed in a useful way. Participants in a Queensland, Australia study (Richards, 2015) looking into the information infrastructure pre- and post-migration for Bor Dinka South Sudanese described a disconnect between ways in which information was delivered by settlement workers in Australia and the ways in which Bor Dinka community members engaged with information. In refugee camps where participants had lived, for example, information was mainly obtained orally from family and clan members. This means of information gathering continued after participants arrived in Australia, where settlement information was mainly provided in print-text and via an infrastructure less based on relationships or networks. Study participants described the importance of the information source to determine whether it was important or accurate. The stark contrast in information practices to the way information was provided in an Australian context meant that, while social service providers endeavored to provide information to the Bor Dinka community, the mismatch in means of provision to the way community members engaged with information rendered it ineffective.

Service providers are encouraged to other consider means of information provision. One valuable method of seeking and assessing information is "pooling" (Lloyd, 2017), which involves drawing on the collective (e.g., a church group) to piece together information and create a full picture. Social service organizations play an important role in not only providing information, but addressing additional barriers, such as those faced by refugees seeking housing in a Toronto area study (Murdie, 2008). Participants in a Winnipeg, Canada study (MacKinnon, et al., 2007) suggested hiring members of refugee communities could increase knowledge about services available in their community.

Social and Cultural Capital

Effective classroom support for LESLLA learners can only take place when recognizing gaps in language and literacy is counterbalanced with understanding the strengths they bring to the classroom (Bigelow, 2007). Bigelow (2007) exemplified an asset-based approach in her case study involving a Somali high school student in the United States, by applying a framework of social and cultural capital to identify strengths the learner brought to her education experience.

Social capital can be defined as the mutually beneficial relationships that can be drawn on to achieve goals (Coleman, 1990; Social capital, 2014), while cultural capital denotes the ability to navigate systems and knowledge of how systems work (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, as cited in Bigelow, p.2). Bourdieu (1986) hypothesized that cultural capital could help us understand variances in children's academic performance at a time when children's academic success was considered the result of merit and aptitude. Cultural capital, "the symbols, ideas, tastes, and preferences that can be strategically used as resources in social action" (Cultural capital, 2014), are passed down from one generation to the next. They serve as a sort of currency that can be converted into social mobility. Bourdieu's (1986) view of social capital includes a person's membership to certain associations, families and social groups and acts to multiply an individual's capital.

Through this lens, Bigelow (2007) identified the social and cultural capital that Fadumo, an 18-year-old high-achieving high school student brought to her schooling. Fadumo's greatest source of social capital was found in her family. Fadumo's mother clearly supported her children's schooling, stopping by the school to talk to teachers, ensuring her children were associating with 'good' friends in school and making her children's studies a priority. Social capital provided by the family was converted to cultural capital in the form of academic success. Fadumo's family also found social capital within the Somali community, where Fadumo's mother recruited community members to translate conversations with the children's teachers. Cultural capital included the strong L2 skills Fadumo and her family had developed and their sense that education was important to their future. Fadumo demonstrated good student behaviours such as strong attendance, asking teachers for help when needed, and consistently completing homework. Bigelow also noted gaps in Fadumo's social and cultural capital. Fadumo did not mention peers supporting her school

experience, and several challenges – like the college application process and underdeveloped literacy skills – arose as she worked towards high school graduation and her goal of entering college. Bigelow pondered the school's role in supporting the development of cultural capital that would have led to a more successful academic transition.

Supporting Settlement and Integration

The design of target language programs and adult literacy programs makes certain assumptions about adult learning. Refugee background participants in a Calgary, Canada study (Wood, et al., 2012) described the many ways in which settlement agencies and counsellors helped them to negotiate the settlement process. Immigrant serving agencies and settlement workers not only serve as a bridge to resources and information, but also as advocates for clients. However, given decreased funding and increasing demands on settlement workers, high rates of burnout in the sector were also reported. Federally funded language training programs are part of Canada's Settlement Program and are designed to provide language and literacy skills necessary for settlement and integration into Canadian society. These programs, like settlement counselling, however, are available only until a person obtains Canadian citizenship, a change in status which is unrelated to whether or not a person needs help to access services.

Language training programs across Canada are heavily settlement-focused (see Aberdeen & Johnson, 2015 for examples of how settlement themes are embedded into LINC ESL literacy classes). Reder (2015) notes that LESLLA learners benefit from bringing literacy issues they face in their own live to class and work to solve these literacy problems as a class (2015). Fleming (2015) suggests drawing on Westheimer & Kahne's (2004, as cited in Fleming, p. 71) notion of justice-oriented citizenship for ESL literacy programming. Applied to language training, learners would be engaged in dialogue that challenges existing systems.

Adult literacy programs tend to reflect a K-12 model, where seats are filled, learners retained, and attendance is considered key to learners' academic achievement (Leander, 2009 as cited in Reder, p. 4). Reder's (2015) large-scale longitudinal study on Practice Engagement however, challenges the efficacy of such a model for adult literacy learners and instead confirms Condelli, Wrigley & Yoon's (2009) study disputing the relationship between instructional hours and literacy proficiency for LESLLA learners. Data showed that enrolment in formal literacy programs increases engagement in literacy practices outside of the classroom in the short-term. Literacy skills show minimal improvement. However, engaging in literacy practices over time led to literacy gains long after exiting a program. Progress takes place over long periods of time and is also tied to life events such as the birth of a child or starting a new job. Reder (2015) proposes what he terms a busy intersection approach to literacy, where literacy programs are designed as a resource from which participants take tools for literacy practice in their lives at various junctures in their lives.

Language and literacy skills, gender, protracted periods in refugee camps and information practices are just some of the barriers facing women with refugee

backgrounds and limited no prior access to schooling to achieving their self-defined measures of success. The next section explores how two women with LESLLA backgrounds valued second language and literacy skills and experienced access to social services in Canada.

FINDINGS

During their interviews, Abrehet and Tenneh talked about the value of developing English and literacy skills and their experiences navigating systems. Their advice to teachers concluded the interviews.

Abrehet

Background. Originally from Eritrea, Abrehet spent 14 to 15 years in a refugee camp in Sudan before arriving in Canada. Abrehet spoke Tigrinya, Amharic and a little Arabic which she picked up during her years in Sudan. At the time of the interview, Abrehet had been in Canada for three years. She left her destined city[2] shortly after arrival when a friend told her more jobs were available elsewhere. Abrehet lived with her young adult son who was studying at a community college. Her interview was conducted in Tigrinya, with the support of a community interpreter.

Abrehet had not accessed schooling prior to her arrival to Canada, though her son attended school while in the refugee camp and Abrehet learned to speak some Arabic. Abrehet reported that she rarely used English outside of school. When asked about her use of L1 or L2 literacy, she said that the first time she had put pen to paper was in Canada and that she did not read or write outside of class. On several occasions during her interview, Abrehet said that she had no one in Canada but her son, though she was engaged in a Tigrinya-speaking church on the weekends.

Taking the Bus. Several times throughout her interview, Abrehet talked about her experiences with public transportation.

> [My son is] like 18. With the bus, he used help me, like uh, which bus goes where. Because like before I used to get into bus number 3 thinking it's 4, or I'll get into bus number 4 thinking it's 3, so I used to get lost...It was difficult for my son before. It was very, very difficult, but he's okay now...I do everything by myself. I'm becoming like a native person now...I go to church by myself...I'm like independent now.

Later in the interview, Abrehet spoke of being lost overnight:

> Yeah, this was when I was like, new like in Canada, that happened to me. Like I went in a bus and like I went...all the way [to the end of the line], and I got lost in there, so I like spent a whole night there, and like the whole night...I was uh, lost in [the grocery store parking lot] so I saw people

[2] 'Destined city' here refers to the city where a Government-Assisted Refugee initially lands, as described in Simich et al. (2001).

> pressing [the button on the bus] and then like getting off. And when I saw that I, I like did the same thing, pressed it and then get off...So the next morning, I got on on the bus and then I went back [home]. And when I saw people pressing [the button] to get off, I had no idea like that's how you get off from the bus. So, when I saw them press it, and then getting off, I did the same thing and then I got off. Even like the next stop, the next day, I was like circling around the streets, and my son was doing the same thing. Just by some accident, we just met at four, at 4:00.

Abrehet returned to her experience of being lost later in the interview:

> In that time I was lost, I thought...the system was like my country, where like, if you raise your hand, the bus driver normally stops. That's... the bus system back home. But that's not how it is. So I just...went along, or the bus just kept on taking me. That's why I kind of got lost. And that time it was summer, so I thought, I will just go out and buy some things and come back. [And that way] there is no way you can just get lost. There is a bus and you just get on the bus and then get off. But like I thought I raise my hand and that's how I end up getting lost. Then when I get off, like nobody can see me. [The people], they didn't notice I was there.

Abrehet relied on members of her ethno-cultural community when she needed directions or had questions about navigating her life in Canada. She approached people who appeared to be from her community en route to her destination for directions or in a medical office to confirm information about her appointment. A previous landlord who spoke her language also called 9-1-1 when she was in a medical emergency. Abrehet felt it was important for teachers to include topics such as these in the curriculum. Given her prior experiences with public transit, it is not surprising that she recommended instruction on how to use public transportation.

Tenneh

Background. Tenneh had lived in Canada for 13 years at the time of this study. Originally from Liberia, Tenneh spent 10 years in a refugee camp in Sierra Leone before moving to Canada. Tenneh reported Vai as her first language, but also spoke Krio, Mende and a little Temne. Tenneh spoke mainly English outside of her home. Tenneh's interview was conducted in English.

Tenneh had not attended school or developed print-literacy prior to arriving in Canada. Soon after landing, she enrolled in a language training program, where she was encouraged to develop print literacy skills, and when a friend took her to a toy store to buy toys for her children, she bought an educational toy that she used to learn the alphabet alongside her daughter. Tenneh lived in her destined city for several years before relocating.

Tenneh spoke about changes in her ability to access services in Canada over the 13 years. While she received very little support from resettlement centre staff when she arrived in Canada, friends helped her obtain important information

about where and how to register her children for school and how to speak Canadian English. It was a friend who took her to the toy store to buy toys for her children, and where she bought an educational toy that she used to learn the alphabet.

Soon after moving cities, friends accompanied her to social service offices. Determined not to rely on friends, she began commuting by herself, asking for help from bus drivers and people on the street when needed. In this way, she learned to navigate important places in the city independently.

Family services. When asked what advice she had for teachers, Tenneh talked about the importance of encouraging students who are new to print-literacy. Teachers should let students know what they are doing right and clearly explain how to perform tasks that are new. As learners in her class came mainly from rural backgrounds, she said that teachers need to show them how to navigate their urban environments, read signs, and understand directions. Tenneh also talked about her experience with family services:

> And, the school send, the lady came, 'I'm gonna take your child.' And this guy was talking. I said, 'Why? Why are you taking [my child]?' He said, 'because this country you can't beat child.' I said, 'Africa it's normal.' He said, 'No.' And I talk, they were talking, then they go out, and it's was two lady, came in, and then they go out, and they come back and say, 'Okay.' And the other lady said, 'Oh, you have to go for parent [parenting course].'

Tenneh had just moved into a new home, in an unfamiliar community with her children. After putting her children to bed, she went to sleep – only to be awakened late at night by her youngest child who was asking where his brother was. Tenneh did not know anyone in her complex at the time. When she eventually found her son behind the building, she hit her him. It is unclear how family services came to learn about this event, however, a social worker told Tenneh she was going to remove Tenneh's children from her care. Tenneh advocated for herself, resulting in her enrolment in a parenting course for newcomers to Canada rather than her children being removed from her care. Tenneh found the program invaluable as she learned positive parenting skills that worked with her children. She questioned why she was not made aware of Canadian parenting norms and laws earlier. Tenneh described a travel show she had seen:

> [T]he government need to teach people, how you come to this country, how you be like this…[T]hat time I was watching TV, like the lady was going Africa. She go for school. She was in the school. They were playing in the TV. How you, how Africa like this, this food in Africa, Africa different.... everybody here if they going for Africa, they can teach you. Why when we coming they can't teach their culture?...The lady, they were teaching, because they say, "...You going Africa. Africa, go like this..." If you go to Africa, you can't say insult people...You can't say something like that. Africa like this.

> The lady, they teach her, explain...in the, like movie...Where Canada, we came, they don't teach me the rule. Now we go in trouble.

Table 2

Summary of Interviews

Partici-pant	**Social capital**	**Cultural capital/ Knowledge and skills**	**External supports**	**Language, literacy and numeracy**
Abrehet	• Family: son • Ethno-cultural community	• Public transportation • Medical appointments	• Settlement counsellor • Medical interpretation • Income tax clinics	• English language necessary to access services
Tenneh	• Family: children • Friends	• Public transportation and navigating the city • Understanding directions • How to ask for help • Parenting in a Canadian context • Self-advocacy • Inequity in access to critical information	• Parenting course • ESL literacy program • Social service agency in housing complex: social worker, settlement counsellor, help reading important documents, referrals to additional services like income tax clinics	• L1 not readily available • Uses English to access services and ask for help, including to file her social assistance report over the phone • Can fill out a few fields on a form by herself • Life is easier with print-text literacy

Barriers and enablers to accessing services

While coding the interview data, it became evident that the same factors that were barriers to accessing social services could serve as enablers to access. Limited knowledge of L2, for instance, left Abrehet unable to ask for help at the bus terminal. Skillful use of L2 was critical to Tenneh's ability to self-advocate when confronted by family services. Limited literacy and numeracy left Abrehet

unable to read bus route names and numbers. The paperwork required by many social service agencies to access services unwittingly created additional barriers to clients. Lack of information led to Abrehet becoming lost overnight and Tenneh nearly losing guardianship of her children. On the other hand, Tenneh later gained information from a parenting program that led to confidence in parenting skills considered culturally acceptable in Canada. A social network or lack thereof were also noted as barriers and enablers to services.

Social and cultural capital were also found to influence participants' access to social services. Abrehet's main source of social capital was her son, who was more adept at using the local transit system and had stronger English language skills and on whom she relied to get around the city. Members of her ethno-cultural community were also sources of valuable information. These supports enabled her to increase her independence. Like Fadumo in Bigelow's (2007) study, social capital was converted into cultural capital of the dominant class. In this case, Abrehet's source of social capital enabled her to develop skills and familiarity with systems she needed to navigate in Canada. Her son and co-ethnic community provided her with important information about how things were done in her new city, and as she developed this knowledge, she was building the cultural capital of the dominant society in Canada. Her connection to her ethno-cultural community at the time was, however, limited and dependent on seeing people in the city who looked like her.

Throughout her interview, Tenneh spoke of various friends who had helped her over the years. When she first arrived to Canada, a friend filled in the gap left by an unhelpful worker at the settlement center who suggested she find a school for her children on her own. A friend taught her the language she needed to use public transit, and another brought her to a toy store where she bought a children's toy she used to learn the alphabet. Later, friends connected her with resources like language training and subsidized housing. Tenneh determined to learn to navigate these systems with greater independence, preferring not to bother friends whose lives are busy. As in Abrehet's case, Tenneh's social capital was converted into cultural capital.

In addition to relying on relationships in their communities, formal supports were also important for successful access to social services. Institutional supports are critical when Abrehet has questions about documents or how things work. Sometimes those supports were, perhaps, accidental. When she saw a member of her ethno-cultural community in a medical office, she spoke with that person to confirm her appointment time. Other institutional supports, such as medical interpreters for appointments or a settlement counsellor who speaks her language and will have the cultural sensitivity to support her effectively are aides that have been built into service provision by service providers. Abrehet also described her LESLLA teacher as important source of support who helps her read documents and who at the time was teaching the class how to contact emergency medical services.

As described by Wood, et al. (2012), settlement workers play an important part in a refugee's immediate and long-term experiences in Canada. Both Abrehet and Tenneh seem to have missed quality support afforded by resettlement

centers during GARs' first year in Canada; Abrehet likely moved too early in her settlement to make use of the services available to her where she landed, while Tenneh's experience shows that the quality of settlement services may vary. While formal institutional supports were important to both Abrehet and Tenneh, the level and type of need for these additional supports differed.

Participants' need for institutional supports may have been affected by their target language and literacy proficiency. Abrehet, whose interview was conducted with interpreter support, spoke strongly of the value of both speaking the target language and of literacy skills. She felt that if the English language was a potion, she would absorb it and that nothing can be done in Canada without literacy skills. While Abrehet spoke little English outside of class, she was now able to greet people in English. She thanked medical staff at the hospital, who in turn complimented her on her language learning and ask her where she had learned English.

Tenneh, in Canada 13 years at the time of the study, spoke mostly English outside of her home. Unlike the other participants, she spoke some English before landing in Canada. Nevertheless, when she first arrived in Canada, her friend helped her learn Canadian English that would be comprehensible. She believed that when a person knows how to read and write, "everything can be easy for you". In addition to attending 12 hours of literacy programming a week, she worked on literacy skills with her six-year-old son at home.

Table 3

Participants' Recommendations to Teachers

Participant	**Recommendations to teachers**
Abrehet	Lessons involve important knowledge, practical skills, and language and literacy skills. Suggestions included how to use 9-1-1 and public transportation.
Tenneh	Understand your learners. ELL literacy classmates come mostly from rural areas and will learn best with a teacher who is patient. Be aware of what learners are doing well. Newcomers need to be provided with information about Canadian law, how things are done in their new country, to avoid problems later on. Information on issues such as parenting law should be shared with all newcomers.

Both Abrehet and Tenneh's primary recommendations to teachers centered around sharing information about how things are done in Canada. For Abrehet, including content like how to use public transportation and how to access emergency services were invaluable. And for Tenneh, who had been in Canada for much longer, knowledge of parenting law in Canada was of primary importance. Tenneh also indicated that it is important for teachers to understand their students and to consider their backgrounds. Teachers need to be patient with their students, to explain information 'slowly', and to recognize and

acknowledge what learners are doing well. In this way, Tenneh said, learners can feel proud of their accomplishments. Knowing that they are learning and capable encourages learners to persevere despite demands on time and energy.

DISCUSSION

For teachers working with LESLLA learners, Abrehet and Tenneh's experiences are perhaps not surprising. L2 language and literacy skills are important to supporting newcomer integration but possession of L2 language and literacy skills does not on its own lead to full integration in Canadian society.

As Geronimo et al. (2001) suggest, newcomers with no prior access to formal schooling face the same challenges as other newcomer groups, only these barriers appear to be magnified for such adults. For Abrehet and Tenneh, barriers were multi-faceted. Abrehet and Tenneh believed that L2 skills and literacy were important for access to social services. Despite a desire for independence and 13 years in Canada, filling out forms was still something Tenneh relied on support for. A lack of information and 'know-how' about how things are done in Canada, whether that be using the transportation system or disciplining children created difficult circumstances for both participants. Discrepancies between language and literacy skills required by social service providers to access services and those held by the two participants made access difficult without additional supports like teachers, a settlement worker or social worker. If it is surprising that participants were unfamiliar with common information, then service providers might consider whether the ways in which information is shared complements the ways in which members of newcomer groups use information.

And while Tenneh and Abrehet described vastly differing levels of social capital, Tenneh prefered to learn how to do things by herself than bother already busy friends for help. Abrehet and Tenneh also utilized their social capital to increase cultural capital of the dominant culture. Abrehet's son accompanied her to her destinations originally, but now she has learned how to get to familiar places on her own. Members of her ethno-cultural community are valuable sources of information as she navigates life in Canada. Tenneh's friends helped her find a school for her children when she first arrived in Canada. When she relocated to another city, friends took her to social service agencies which she later accessed independently. Social capital was converted to cultural capital in both cases.

Regardless of length of residency, participants required organizational support. Both rely on teachers as sources of information and for help understanding documents. Abrehet, after three years in Canada, was still unsure about what types of information or support she could access via community organizations. In contrast, Tenneh, who was able to access social services more independently, still required organizational supports not only to help her fill out documentation but also to gain the knowledge and skills that would enable her family to stay together. Government policy makes access to social services like

the family literacy program Tenneh applied to and full-time LINC programming unavailable when funding ceases after citizenship.

Language training programs play an important role in supporting settlement processes. Abrehet and Tenneh pointed to the value of language and literacy skills to navigate places and systems alike. They wanted to develop both the skills and knowledge to navigate their environments successfully. Their requests for information about services during their interviews underscores the value of connecting LESLLA learners with existing community resources.

IMPLICATIONS

Both Abrehet and Tenneh found ways to navigate systems and information despite the disparity between language and / or literacy levels and the language and literacy demands placed on them by social services. Gaps in cultural capital led to distressing events for both participants. They believed target language and literacy skills are important to their lives in Canada. They described the importance of learning critical information in their ESL literacy classes. Length of residency did not mitigate their need for support.

Social service providers may consider reducing the demands on LESLLA clients' language, literacy and information infrastructure, while teachers might consider how instruction can contribute to learners' independence and successful settlement. By thinking about the ways in which LESLLA learners do access services successfully, service providers can optimize access to social services as well as language and literacy programming.

Reder's (2015) *busy intersection* model is invaluable to both language training and social services to ensure that LESLLA newcomers can access information and services at various locations and points during a person's life. While ESL literacy programs serve a distinct purpose from that of other Settlement Programs, classes developed for or including LESLLA learners must consider ways to improve access to the very services intended to support their settlement. Programs should consider ways to support social and cultural capital, as Bigelow (2007) suggested. Finally, we should consider Fleming's (2015) recommendation to create learning environments where a critical lens to existing systems is encouraged so that learners are better equipped to understand and address social inequities.

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Teaching with Settlement in Mind

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes one way in which a community-based program for adult learners with limited L1 schooling facilitates the transformative heart of the REFLECT model (based on Freirean principles) within a settlement-focused context.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, second language (L2) and literacy programs developed for newcomers to Canada have been settlement focused. Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) teacher guides suggest content like "Finding a Home" and "Working in Canada" (TCDSB, 2012). LINC is the largest program accessed by adults developing print literacy skills for the first time while learning the target language. Smaller community-based programs also exist to address the needs of such learners. No set national or provincially mandated curriculum framework exists for these programs, which rely on their own sense of learner needs to shape program design. The community-based program described in this paper is, like LINC, settlement focused. However, it draws on a participatory approach to learning and teaching while drawing on a curriculum framework to guide facilitators' understanding of literacy development. The participatory origin of the program allows for learning opportunities that are responsive to learners' immediate needs and aims to hold to the transformative nature at the heart of participatory literacy education (Freire, 2007). This paper describes an example of settlement-focused transformative learning for adult newcomers with limited first language (L1) literacy.

Settlement can be defined as the dynamic process through which newcomers "achieve full equality and freedom of participation in society, and society [gains]

access to the full human resource potential in its immigrant communities" (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, 2000). While settlement counsellors work to address the immediate needs of newcomer communities, the continuous nature of LESLLA training programs means facilitators are in a unique position to address settlement concerns of LESLLA learners.

This paper looks into the value of ensuring that learners develop the skills to access settlement services and of instructors considering and removing barriers to those services as part of unit planning and classroom teaching. We describe the small program from which this discussion arose before looking into the REFLECT (Regenerated Freirean Literacy Through Empowering Techniques, Archer & Cottingham, 2009) approach on which the program is based. Next, we discuss models for instruction with a focus on settlement themes. The paper then describes an approach to unit planning used in the author's classroom teaching. Factors considered in these integrated units are organized into 4 main areas of focus: frontloading, skills-building, identifying available resources, and creating opportunities for connections between LESLLA learners and service providers. We offer examples of ways this has been implemented in their context.

We believe that the 4th area, creating opportunities for connections, is what makes classroom teaching transformative in nature. The outline presented is not meant to be a one-size-fits-all curriculum framework, but rather a tool that may be useful in ensuring all of these aspects are included in unit planning in a L2 literacy programs.

Context and Rationale

In this section, we describe the community-based program in which settlement-focused instruction is implemented. A description of the REFLECT model on which this program is based is followed by a discussion of research on literacy instruction compared with literacy practices and a look at ways in which content-based instruction can be transformative in nature.

The Context. We work with an immigrant-serving agency in Canada. Both work mainly with LESLLA learners: as a facilitator in an ELL literacy program and as a learning support specialist with language training programs. The present language training program is community-based and historically participatory in nature. Target language and literacy skills are embedded in contexts that are relevant to learners' lives.

In this program, it is not unusual for learners to bring concerns to the group and to program staff. Learners might bring a letter to their teacher for clarification or ask for help to fill out application forms for subsidized transit passes. Others talk to their teachers about concerns at home, like increases in monthly rent or family conflict. Learners initially referred to learning support services may ask questions about finding winter clothes or managing their prescription medication. Some of these concerns can be addressed by program staff. For instance, teachers can work with a learner to complete simple, low-stakes paperwork. Other questions are beyond the knowledge and expertise of program staff and are best addressed by a settlement counsellor, social worker

or family counsellor within the organization or in the community. In addition to helping learners themselves or referring individual learners to the appropriate supports, settlement issues can be addressed within program curriculum in such a way that learners develop skills and knowledge to navigate systems independently. This type of instruction embeds language and literacy skills development in settlement-themed contexts that are relevant to learners' everyday needs. We have not completed research to determine the how effective this approach to instructional design is. The classes in which this model is implemented, however, are generally filled to capacity and attendance rates are high.

Curriculum and Instruction. In its inception, program developers used the REFLECT or Regenerated Freirean Literacy Through Empowering Techniques (Archer & Cottingham, 2009) as a model for the present program. The REFLECT approach is designed to address immediate needs of literacy participants in rural communities in Bangladesh, El Salvador and Uganda. Adherents to the REFLECT approach use materials available in the community or create their own materials rather than use commercial texts or readers. In the present L2 literacy program, facilitators continue to rely on learners to inform class content, though program facilitators generally use a combination of teacher-made and commercially available texts alongside learner-generated texts. At the heart of the REFLECT approach and in keeping with Freirean methods is its aim to encourage learner dialogue about issues important to them and to empower learners to take action in their communities. Learners are viewed as adult decision-makers and classroom content begins from a position of respect for the learners' existing knowledge and skills (REFLECT Action, 2009). In an action research project looking into the efficacy of the (at the time) newly developed REFLECT approach, Archer and Cottingham (2009) found positive outcomes beyond the classroom: learners were more involved in local community organizations and worked to improve economic and environmental conditions. They note that literacy skills unto themselves do not create empowerment, but that the REFLECT approach is successful because of the way it balances literacy skills and principles aimed at empowerment.

Recent changes to federal policy mandate that LINC programs across the country follow a Portfolio Based Language Assessment (PBLA) model with the goal of standardizing LINC levels across the country. As a result of changes to the Canadian Language Benchmarks, benchmarks for ESL literacy learners now align to benchmarks for newcomers with prior formal education. The program described in this article, however, refers to the ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework (Bow Valley College, 2010) for several reasons. First, the ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework has articulated 18 reading and writing outcomes that are not context specific. The writing outcome "Fill Out Forms," for example, works in a health, transportation or jobs unit where paperwork is required for access to services or employment. This highly supportive document breaks outcomes down into small increments. This means that teachers are guided as they scaffold instruction for learners at various levels from Foundation to Phase III Adequate. Outcomes are not tied to specific themes and teachers in

the participatory program aim to provide programming that is responsive to the particular class of learners they are working with at the time. For instance, one group of learners described challenges they were experiencing in the workplace: one lost her job as a result of being unable to read her work schedule. Her teacher developed a unit on working with different types of schedules, which falls under the reading outcome of "Interpreting lists, tables, charts and graphs." When another teacher learned that learners in her class were experiencing difficulty navigating the city, she developed a unit on transportation.

The L2 literacy program described above is community-based and settlement-focused. Grounded in the REFLECT approach to literacy learning and teaching, it also draws on generalized reading and writing outcomes to inform instruction. In this way, the program embeds language and literacy skills development within settlement content in a way that has the potential to improve learners' lives outside of the classroom.

RESPONSIVE INSTRUCTION WITH LESLLA LEARNERS

In this section, we look into connections between L2 and literacy skills and learners' expressed needs in existing literature. This is followed by a look at combining settlement-focused content-based instruction with a transformative approach to learning and teaching. Lastly, the value of including cultural capital in instructional planning is touched upon.

In her volume on Cultural Practices of Literacy, Purcell-Gates (2006) highlights the frequent disconnect between learners' literacy practices and classroom literacy instruction. She notes we know so little about the literacy practices of various sociocultural groups that we are unable to begin tying learners' actual literacy practices to design literacy curriculum and instruction in an informed way. There is, however, some beginning research on the types of skills learners wish to develop during their time in L2 language and literacy programs. In Gonzalves' (2011) interviews of Yemeni women, the overarching reason for attending LESLLA classes was 'we want to depend on us.' In a small qualitative study on the interplay between L1 literacy and settlement (Wall, 2017; Wall, this volume), 5 LESLLA learners talked about the roles of L2 and literacy in their lives in Canada. Asked for their advice to teachers, they suggested including topics like parenting norms in Canada, reading signs, and asking for directions.

Given the participatory nature of the present program, there is flexibility in program content, so long as the generalized reading and writing outcomes are addressed. This 'hybrid' model, one that draws on learners' life experiences and goals while following a set of outcomes creates an environment in which program content and target language and literacy skills are complementary. That said, there is an added step to be taken if learning is to be transformative in nature.

Like Canada, much of ELL literacy programming in Australia is settlement focused (Chapman & Williams, 2015). Chapman and Williams note that, when policy directs content, there is a risk of programs transmitting information to

learners rather than engaging learners in skills and content important to them in a way that will improve their circumstances beyond the classroom. Content-based instruction can, however, be transformative when it moves beyond the learning of content and what Kerns (2000) terms available designs (e.g. vocabulary, procedural knowledge and declarative knowledge) toward sociocultural content (Chapman & Williams, 2007; Kerns, 2000).

Bigelow's (2007) case study of social and cultural capital's role in a LESLLA high school learner's academic success presents a convincing argument for the role of schools in developing cultural capital. Cultural capital includes knowledge of how systems work and the skills to accomplish tasks within those systems (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, as cited in Bigelow, p.2). A recent study including LESLLA learners in Canada found cultural capital to be an important factor to participants' ability to access services (Wall, 2017). Participants shared stories of times when lack of information placed them in vulnerable situations. One described a time she was lost overnight after realizing she did not know how to indicate her stop bus stop and being taken to the final terminal. Another spoke about a harrowing experience with child welfare in which she nearly lost her children. Participants recommended that teachers provide information about cultural norms and connections to community resources in ELL literacy programs as part of their classroom instruction.

Chapman and Williams (2015) note,

> Transformative learning is about engaging in practical ways in the environment and community that the students live in. In the building of partnerships, the teacher is an advocate in the community, a participant in the activities and a mentor to the learners. (p.46)

An Approach to Settlement-Focused Content and LESLLA Learning

Frontloading	Background knowledge Language and vocabulary
Related Skills	Skills required to access the service
Identifying Resources	Where and how to access services
Community Connections	Guest speakers Field trips

Figure 1: Outline for Teaching with Settlement in Mind

When working in a settlement-focused context, transformative learning involves improving the circumstances of learners lives outside the classroom (Chapman & Williams, 2015). One way to do this is by incorporating the development of cultural capital into LESLLA classrooms. In the sample unit plans that follow, we have attempted to tie language and literacy skills to the development of cultural capital with the aim of transformative learning and teaching. Section 3 outlines an approach to instructional planning where both

facets are considered. The approach described in this section includes frontloading, skills building, identifying available resources, and creating opportunities for connections between LESLLA learners and service providers.

Frontloading

Frontloading refers to the activation and teaching of background knowledge as well as the specific language and vocabulary that learners require for understanding the theme or topic being taught in the classroom. Frontloading leads to increased learner comprehension and focus (Adams, 2012; Murray Stowe, 2010). To complete the real-world task of finding items and prices in a second-hand store, learners need to have basic shopping vocabulary, understand the local currency, and the ability to read prices.

Building Related Skills

Building related skills is the scaffolding that facilitates learner success in the classroom. Specific skills include such things as addition and subtraction, filling in forms, reading maps, writing messages, following instructions and interpreting charts. These skills need to be pre-taught in order to ensure learner success. For example, to successfully complete the real-world task of finding items and prices in a second-hand store, learners need to have skills in basic numeracy, addition and subtraction, reading receipts and flyers and asking for assistance.[1]

Identifying Resources

Introducing learners to community resources that they can access is essential to the integration process. Learners need to know what services are available in their communities. When facilitators share simplified information about agencies, supports and services in their communities, they support holistic integration for their learners. For example, in a unit on financial literacy, information can be shared about tax clinics, basic financial literacy courses and supports in accessing services.

Forming Connections with Service Providers and Community Resources

Connections can be forged with service providers and community resources through both field trips and classroom presentations. This type of exposure helps LESLLA learners feel comfortable accessing services and resources. Presentations from various agencies and community service providers with first language support will ensure that learners comprehend the information and are familiar with how to access services that support positive integration. Field trips have the added value of providing learners with an opportunity to travel to the agency or community resource and to access services for the first time with the guidance and support of a facilitator.

[1] See Vinogradov, 2009 and Vinogradov & Liden, 2009 for more on this and other activities for building L2 and literacy skills)

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE: EXAMPLES FROM THE CLASSROOM

Teaching with settlement in mind may not look dramatically different from a well-organized L2 Literacy class that engages students in topics that are interesting and meaningful to them. However, when an instructor plans themes, topics and lessons within this suggested outline, he or she is explicitly seeking ways to address settlement concerns by providing the language, skills, knowledge and connections that learners need for successful settlement and integration into their communities. In addition, the instructor can provide support during, before or after class with brief, simple tasks that learners are struggling with such as making appointments with a counsellor or correctly filling in paperwork. The outline below provides an accessible, practical means of organizing our approach to ensure that we are incorporating the pressing settlement needs of L2 literacy learners into our teaching. We will look at examples within 3 different units: financial literacy, healthcare and community.

Financial Literacy Unit – Shopping for Clothes

Financial literacy is an incredibly complex and wide-ranging theme including the areas of banking, budgeting, and shopping. Regardless of which area of financial literacy the instruction will focus on, there is significant overlap in the background knowledge, vocabulary and skills required by learners, as shown in Figure 2.

Frontloading	• Basic numeracy, local currency, understanding prices and totals • Shopping vocabulary, banking vocabulary, how to ask for help
Related Skills	• Addition and subtraction • Reading receipts and bills • Using an ATM • Using a calculator • Reading flyers • Dialogue practice
Identifying Resources	• Connecting with a counselor for help in applying for or maintaining financial support • Volunteer tax clinics • Non-profit financial literacy organizations • Where to find interpretation support
Community Connections	• Budgeting presentation with first language support • Second-hand shopping field trip • Bank visit field trip • Grocery store field trip

Figure 2: Sample Unit Plan – Shopping for Clothes

Frontloading. In a unit on clothes shopping, the instructor can begin by talking about what learners are wearing to class that day and by looking at images from clothing store flyers in order to activate the learner's background knowledge. This can be the basis for a classroom discussion with questions such as:

- What are you wearing today?
- Are you wearing a sweater? A t-shirt? Socks?
- Where do you buy clothes in your community?
- Which store has the best prices?
- Where do you buy clothes for adults?
- Where do you buy clothes for children?

Even with very limited English language skills, learners are often able to talk at least in general terms about where they shop as it is a necessity of everyday life. This activity also serves as a needs assessment by providing the instructor with information about learners' experiences and present language skills.

The next step is vocabulary building which can be done through a variety of activities, beginning with oral vocabulary. Repeating the names of clothing items that learners are wearing each day is a fun and engaging activity for learners. The use of picture flashcards is another important tool in building oral vocabulary with activities such as the flyswatter game, bingo, categorization activities (winter vs. summer clothes), and oral partner practice. When learners are familiar with the oral vocabulary, they can be introduced to the written vocabulary through flashcards. Learners can match picture and word cards, play bingo with the word cards, and use the cards as a word bank to label images and complete writing activities. Phonics, reading and writing activities can also be incorporated into this stage of the teaching. It is also important to explicitly teach learners what kinds of clothing are required for their safety and the safety of their families during the winter season.

In addition to gaining basic competency with the clothing vocabulary, instruction can be incorporating numeracy into the classroom with activities such as counting learners and classroom items as well as games and activities to build number recognition. When learners have some basic numeracy knowledge, explicit instruction on reading money amounts and using the local currency can begin. Most learners are highly motivated to learn about money as it is essential to their survival and independence. Educational money for use in the classroom is a fun and accessible tool to teach about currency. Activities such as listening to the teacher and showing the amount requested, finding totals using educational money, and reading and writing dollar amounts all build basic numeracy skills and are essential to the process of frontloading.

Related Skills. When learners are familiar with clothing vocabulary and local currency, instruction can move on to the related skills learners need. The use of flyers in the classroom can help learners be familiar with reading money amounts in a real-life context. Practicing adding and subtracting different money amounts by physically manipulating educational money can help make this challenging task more accessible. Teaching learners how to use the calculator on

their phone is highly motivating and provides learners with a tool that supports their independence. In addition, learning to read receipts with the use of instructor-modified or real world receipts is an essential skill for successful integration. When learners have gained competency in the related skills, the instructor can set up a "store" in the classroom with images and prices of clothing around the room. Learners can ask for help, choose items to purchase, and pay with the educational money while other learners can play the role of cashier and sales help. This fun and engaging activity prepares the learners for the real-world experience of a field trip to a second-hand clothing store.

Identifying Resources. In regions that have dangerously cold winter weather, sharing information with learners about free or low-cost winter clothing programs is a practical way to support learners in meeting their basic needs, thereby increasing their readiness for learning. Using speaker mode during class time to phone a program like a clothing bank and find out key information for accessing the program models this skill for learners and serves as a listening exercise. Bringing in a speaker from a financial literacy organization to provide suggestions and ideas of ways to save money supports learner integration. Ideally, this type of presentation is done with first-language support through the use of volunteer interpreters or learners with more advanced listening and speaking skills. These types of presentations enable learners to become more familiar with the supports available to them in the community so they can make informed decisions about accessing assistance for their families. In addition, learning about which organizations provide income tax preparation clinics and how to access this service is integral to successful integration.

Community Connections. A practical way to conclude a unit on clothes shopping is with a field trip to a local second-hand store. There are a myriad of learning activities associated with this type of field trip, before, during and after the activity. Before the field trip, activities can include finding the best route to the location using digital transit and mapping apps, creating a class plan for the day, and making lists of clothing items that learners may hope to purchase for their families. Pictures taken en route to the store and during the field trip can be used later as a tool to prompt the writing of a class story. In the second-hand store, learners can find write the names of clothing items, find prices, and ask for help. When the formal learning activity is complete, learners can be given time to explore the store and even purchase needed items for family members.

Following the field trip, writing a class Language Experience story can lead to many group and individual reading and writing tasks with vocabulary and ideas that the learners are very familiar with. In addition to the formal learning opportunities associated with a field trip to a second-hand store, learners become more comfortable using transit to access an invaluable community resource and are familiar with a new shopping option for finding quality, low cost items for themselves and their families.

Health Unit – Going to the Doctor

As with financial literacy, healthcare is a very complex theme with many different areas of focus including human anatomy, health care systems, healthy

eating, and wellness. In all areas of a health-related theme, the learners will require similar background knowledge, vocabulary and skills in order to be successful in moving towards a healthy lifestyle, which is essential to individual and family integration as shown in Figure 3.

Frontloading	• How the healthcare system is organized: family doctors, walk-in clinics, urgent care centres, emergency departments, 9-1-1 • Body vocabulary, health vocabulary
Related Skills	• Filling out forms • Reading directions • Using a calendar • Calling 9-1-1
Identifying Resources	• Learning what service to access for different health concerns • How to ask for first language support • Finding help to book appointments
Community Connections	• Presentations on topics such as breast health, sexual health, healthy eating, etc. • Book interpreter support for presentations • Field trip to an urgent care centre

Figure 3: Sample Unit Plan – Going to the Doctor

Frontloading. While the ultimate goal of this unit is that learners will be feel comfortable accessing health care with some measure of independence, instruction needs to begin with the required background knowledge so that learners have the foundation on which to build their competence. Begin with talking about the body, having learners show various body parts called out by the instructor or by naming body parts on themselves. Playing a version of "Simon Says" allows the instructor to assess the learners' vocabulary while learners are engaged in a fun, kinesthetic learning activity. Picture and word flashcards can be used to develop vocabulary with activities such as bingo, matching, labelling, and partner question and answer exercises.

When learners are familiar with body vocabulary, instruction can begin with health and sickness vocabulary such as headache, fever, and sore throat. Engaging in the same learning activities with the new vocabulary using picture and word flashcards reduces the cognitive load for learners. When learners are familiar with the activities, they can concentrate fully on building their competence with the new vocabulary. In addition, picture and word cards can be used as prompts as learners ask each other, "What is the matter?" Another fun and engaging activity for vocabulary building is to have either the instructor or learners act out various ailments while the class guesses what the health problem is.

Familiarity with the vocabulary of health problems leads to learning about where to access health care services. It is important for learners to know the vocabulary for unique health care access points in their community, including family doctors, walk-in clinics, urgent care centres, hospitals, community health centres and emergency medical care.

Related Skills. There are a myriad of skills related to accessing health care including filling in forms. The complexity of most authentic medical forms and questionnaires may preclude their use with LESLLA learners, but teacher-developed forms can introduce learners to the information needed as well as the types of questions that will be asked. Learning how to use identification to fill in personal information on forms will build learners' confidence in real-life scenarios. Spending 5 minutes daily to practice orally spelling first and last names as well as clearly stating one's address and phone number will develop learner competence. Whole class and partner practice of simple dialogue for a doctor's office will give learners a template for use in real-life scenarios. Setting up a doctor's office role play in the classroom allows learners to use all of the skills they have used in an authentic-type situation. Learners can check in with reception, state and spell their name, fill in the form given them and wait to be called into the doctor's office where they will state their health problem. This type of learning activity is highly motivating as learners recognize its value in their day to day lives.

Identifying Resources. Navigating health care systems is a complex task. Understanding where to access care for what type of problem is key to getting the needed help. For example, many newcomers will go to the hospital for any medical issue that arises, wasting hours waiting in the emergency room for a problem that could have easily been treated by a family doctor or at a walk-in clinic. Specific instruction on health care access points in your particular community is essential. Once learners are familiar with the health care options such as family doctors, walk-in clinics, help lines, emergency departments etc., the class can engage in activities where learners categorize health ailments under the appropriate place to find care for that particular problem. Instruction on how to ask for first language support in hospitals or clinics is also needed. Partner dialogue practice and role play in class will equip learners for their future health care needs. A presentation from an immigrant-serving agency will familiarize learners with help available to them if they need assistance to book appointments or to access interpreter support for medical visits. As a significant point of contact for LESLLA learners, the instructor is in a unique position of providing assistance with brief tasks such as confirming appointments, looking up transit routes to appointment locations and ensuring learners have essential identification and health care documentation needed for their appointments. While these tasks are outside of the realm of literacy and language instruction, spending a few minutes to assist learners with such chores can significantly reduce learner stress.

Community Connections. Presentations on specific health care issues faced by the population of your class can be a useful way to build connections to community services. A dietician can present on healthy eating and managing

diabetes, or a health facilitator can present on screening programs. If it is possible, a field trip to an urgent care centre can familiarize learners with the protocols they can expect, how to access interpretation services, and what documentation is required. This type of knowledge will enable learners to take responsibility for their own and their family's health care needs.

Community Unit - Accessing Community Services

Being able to navigate one's community and access its resources is essential to successful integration. Knowledge of how the community is organized, how to move around in the community and what types of services are available all contribute to the development of a healthy sense of belonging. By building on the key background knowledge, vocabulary and skills that learners require, teachers can create lessons that will promote learner integration as shown in Figure 4.

Frontloading	• Concepts of country, city, community, neighbourhood, address, and home • Places in my community: bank, library, swimming pool, etc. • Directions: turn right, go straight, across from, etc.
Related Skills	• Reading maps • Giving and following directions • Reading signs • Filling out forms • Reading a bus schedule • Asking for help
Identifying Resources	• Libraries • Recreation centres • Immigrant services agencies • Emergency services
Community Connections	• Presentations from an immigrant serving agency • Presentations from city services, such as police and fire departments • Book interpreter support for presentations • Field trip to local library • Field trip to community or recreation centres

Figure 4: Sample Unit Plan – Accessing Community Services

Frontloading. The goal of this unit is for learners to have the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to access community services for themselves and their families. The instructor will begin by talking about community places, using

colour images to elicit responses. The images can support classroom discussion with questions such as:

- Where do you live?
- What is your address?
- Is there a school near your home? A park?
- Do you go to the recreation centre?
- Where is your bank?

This activity permits the instructor to ascertain the learners' background knowledge and language skills in order to determine the needs of the group.

Oral vocabulary can be developed in a variety of ways, such as group games and question and answer activities. For example, learners can use images of various community locations as a prompt to ask and answer the question "Where are you going?" while moving around the classroom. Picture and word flashcards can be used for matching activities, phonics development and writing activities. Developing the concept of where learners are in the world should also be incorporated at this stage in the learning. Using flashcards for activities such as recognizing one's own address, matching common form words such as Address and City with the learner's address and city, and oral repetition of personal information all set the stage for future learning.

The ability to recognize and follow simple directions such as "Go straight" or "Turn right" is also necessary for learners to successfully navigate their communities. Daily practice of direction words using movement is a fun way to prepare learners for map reading and following directions.

Related Skills. When learners have basic competency with community vocabulary, their own personal information and simple direction words, they are ready for instruction in related skills. Map reading, which may be a very challenging task for foundational learners, can be scaffolded by beginning with 3-dimensional maps that can be manipulated. A simple 3-dimensional map can be created with streets drawn on flip chart paper and box "buildings" labelled with image flashcards of community places. Learners can be asked to move from one location to another by following oral directions, to describe the location of the places on the map, and to provide the address of map locations. Simple teacher-created maps, map apps, and authentic maps can be introduced as learners' competency increases. Apps such as Google Maps can provide practice in following directions, as can more low-tech activities such as having one learner read directions to another as they move about the classroom. Using a simple paper or online map to guide a walk around the neighbourhood provides an opportunity to follow directions and to practice asking for help. By practicing in a safe, supported setting, learners will build learner confidence to use this language in real-life situations.

Forms are ubiquitous in highly literate societies and thus literacy learners require this skill in order to access community services. Build upon learners' oral knowledge of their personal information, beginning with very simple and working up to more complex forms. Explicit teaching of how to use one's

identification to fill in the required information on forms is essential to developing this skill.

Identifying Resources. Presentations from immigrant and refugee serving agencies, community organizations such as public libraries and emergency services can help learners to understand what supports, activities and help is available to them. Again, first-language support whenever possible increases learner comprehension and provides them an opportunity to ask questions in their own language. Meeting someone from an agency or a library creates a sense of connection for learners and increased the likelihood that they will access these resources for themselves and their families. If subsidized programs are available in your community, assisting learners to apply for transit and recreation subsidies supports learner integration by reducing the financial burden of traveling to class as well as enabling them to access recreational activities that contribute to learner wellness.

Community Connections. A field trip to a local recreation centre presents many learning opportunities. Before the trip, learners can use maps to plan how to arrive at the destination, read the activity schedule for the centre and practice asking for assistance. If the recreation programs offer financial subsidies for low income clients, forms can be downloaded and filled in with assistance in the classroom. On location, learners can drop off their application forms, take a tour of the facility and even participate in fitness classes or gym activities. By visiting the centre in person, learners are much more likely to feel comfortable accessing the programs, classes and activities themselves or for their families. Again, following the field trip, many group and individual learning tasks can be completed, including writing the directions for travel to and from the centre, creating a future exercise schedule and talking about what learners enjoyed most in their experience.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed ways in which the transformative nature of the REFLECT model has been retained in a community-based and settlement focused ELL literacy program. The program described provides explicit L2 and literacy skills instruction, while attending to learners' settlement concerns. As Chapman & Williams (2015) highlight, learning can be transformative, even when programs and funders require specific outcomes or themes, by ensuring that L2 and literacy learning connects to improved circumstances for learners. In our context, this means learners both develop skills and the cultural capital needed to access available if they so choose.

Programs and classroom teachers can reduce barriers to social services by listening to learners' lived experiences and responding with instruction that addresses learners' concerns both in and out of the classroom. Teachers can work alongside learners in their goals to improve their circumstances by working with learners to develop skills and knowledge that will increase their ability to access services. By identifying available resources in the local community and by forging connections with social service providers, programs can support learners

who wish to access services to take the first step in accessing those services. Transformative learning experiences support access to social services and contribute to greater learner independence in the long term.

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