THE EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN COOPERATIVE

EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Adult Education

University of Regina

By

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Regina, Saskatchewan

December, 2013

UNIVERSITY OF REGINA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

SUPERVISORY AND EXAMINING COMMITTEE

Ian Vincent Morrison, candidate for the degree of Master of Adult Education**,** has presented a thesis titled, ***The Experiences of International Students in Cooperative Education: A Case Study,*** in an oral examination held on December 3, 2013. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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Abstract

This research explores the experiences of adult international students participating in the Cooperative Education Program at the University of Regina. Purposive sampling was used to select four participants for this study. A case study methodology was used with data gathered through semi-structured interviews and journals and then thematically analyzed. Although the participants reported difficulty finding work placements, the Cooperative Education Program allowed them to gain Canadian work experience and to develop a network of contacts they felt would enhance their careers. Each participant had a unique experience in the workplace with language and cultural differences playing a critical role. Participants reported that their workplaces differed in their approaches to cultural diversity.

Given the growing cultural diversity of students in Cooperative Education, the findings in the study are relevant to cooperative education practitioners seeking to become more responsive to international students. Cooperative education programs should provide international students with additional training to increase their familiarity with host employers as well as local job search practices. Cooperative education programs should also communicate to employers the benefits of hiring international students and addressing cultural differences. Finally, cooperative education employees who work with international students would benefit from on-going professional development that fosters greater cross-cultural understanding.

Acknowledgements

I would offer my sincerest gratitude to the following people, without whom, this research would not have been possible. I would like to thank my participants who selflessly volunteered their stories for the benefit of future international students in Cooperative Education.

Many thanks to my thesis advisor, Dr. Marilyn Miller, for her tremendous patience, wisdom and guidance throughout this process. Without her overwhelming support, this work would not have been possible. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Valerie Mulholland and Dr. Abu Bockarie for their invaluable input.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their unending support and understanding. My wife, Stephanie, my children, Alexander and Chiara, as well as my parents, sister, and in-laws have all supported me in untold ways.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to the memory of my grandfather, Ronald Morrison whose love of knowledge and wisdom has inspired my commitment to lifelong learning.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This research explores the experiences of adult international students participating in the Cooperative Education Program at the University of Regina. For six years, I served as the Cooperative Education Coordinator for students in the Faculty of Business Administration at the University of Regina. When I started my position, one of my first discussions with my supervisor centred on the challenges associated with finding internships for international students enrolled in our program. The University of Regina has a number of agreements with various universities throughout the world, which facilitate the process of international students studying at the University of Regina for all or part of their degrees. The Cooperative Education program provides students with the ability to obtain a special work permit, which allows these students to work full time off campus as long as they are enrolled in our program. These arrangements make the program highly popular among international students.

Through my experience, I came to discover and discussed widely with my colleagues the reality that international cooperative education students tend to have a harder time with our process than do their local counterparts. Through every placement cycle, we found that local students participating in the program tend to be placed in internships sooner than their international colleagues. We consistently noticed that in the workplace, the challenges faced by international students are typically related to cultural adaptation or language barriers. In spite of this, many international students experience a degree of success, tend to secure employment eventually, albeit, not as easily as local students, and almost all return from their work terms to report positive outcomes. Perhaps

most telling, many international students secure after-graduation employment with companies for whom they previously worked as a cooperative student.

I understand that our local students, who are born and raised in this province, enjoy privileges, such as a network of local contacts, which our international students do not. I, too, am a middle class white male from this province. However, as an adult educator, I am uncomfortable with maintaining the status quo where some students benefit from privileges not enjoyed by others. I would like to see the program address any systemic inequities that may exist.

Context

The University of Regina is not alone in its recruitment of international students. North American universities are experiencing increasing international student enrollment. As a result of declining revenue, rising expenses and competition for enrolment, international students are actively being recruited by North American universities (Andrade, 2006). With the reality of increasing international student enrolment, research into the area of international students in cooperative education is both necessary and timely. Research examining their participation in cooperative education, according to the literature, is underreported (Coll & Chapman, 2000b). Studying the experiences of international students in cooperative education will add to this body of literature and provide feedback to the University of Regina on how cooperative education placements might be improved for international students.

Research Questions

As an adult educator, I believe that adult students are both highly motivated toward and are capable of achieving a high degree of career success. As cooperative

education placements are an important part of their learning experience, this research

seeks to better understand the international students' cooperative education experience. In

addition, I hope to engage in a process of self-exploration to determine how I, as a

Cooperative Education Coordinator, am able to contribute to their success.

Cooperative education students each enter into the program with a history, culture

and worldview that informs their personal definition of success. Discovering what the

participants see as both the challenges and opportunities in the cooperative education

program will highlight the ways in which we can better meet their needs.

Philosophies and Assumptions

Before embarking on this research, I reflected on a number of philosophical

orientations, which inform adult education. Zinn (2004) describes how clarifying one's

educational philosophy will provide greater insight into the relationship between learner

and educator and, as a result, better guide the educational initiative. Zinn identifies five

overall educational philosophies: Liberal, Progressive, Behaviourist, Humanist and

Radical. My approach to working with students in cooperative education is informed by a

humanist orientation. As Rothwell and Cookson (1997) explain, "humanist educators

believe that learners are, and should be, highly motivated. They believe that learners are

self-directed in their outlook and seek to assume responsibility for their own learning" (p.

71). Rothwell and Cookson further explain that the focus of humanistic educators is on

the individual with the role of humanistic educators being to help learners achieve their

full potential. I too, have confidence in my students' ability to grow and learn, and I

believe that my role is to help facilitate that process. I agree with Knowles' (1998)

assumptions that adult learners are more likely to be self-directed, bring valuable work-

related experiences to their learning endeavours, vary in their learning orientations, want to learn useful things and are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated.

The concept of self-directedness is of particular significance in cooperative education. As Brockett and Hiemstra (1998) suggest, certain learning situations require higher levels of self-directedness and certain people are more inclined toward self-directed learning. Students in cooperative education must not only secure their own placements, but are ultimately responsible for transferring their learning from the classroom to the work setting and then back again to the classroom.

This focus on self-directedness is a constructivist view of learning with its emphasis on the learner's individuality (Porcaro, 2011). Porcaro goes on to explain how in some cultures, learning is focussed on the instructor who relays information to the learner. This is significant as many international students come from cultures where self-directedness is not emphasized.

With respect to motivation, the students with whom I work enter university and more specifically, the Faculty of Business Administration, with the intention of furthering their careers. Programs within the faculty are divided into sub categories of learning which give students a specialized training in a particular aspect of business. As a result, students tend to choose this faculty with career aspirations as their primary concern. I believe that cooperative education is an extension of this desire for career advancement.

Cooperative education can also empower students. Beyond the obvious fact that students are paid for their work terms, cooperative education students are independent learners, enrolled as full time students. They are to some degree, able to select their employers, and as a result, have the benefit of gainful employment without sacrificing

control over their own learning experiences. Whereas, Nash (2001) explains, employers often encourage or insist upon ongoing education as a means of developing skills useful to the employer, cooperative education work experience is complementary to the learner's overall formal education. As a result, cooperative education students have more control over their educational experience and are less beholden to their employers.

My Experience with International Students

International students who study in North America often face the dual challenge of negotiating a new culture as well as a new language. Even for English-speaking international students, there are still challenges associated with language variation. In addition to language, other cultural issues create challenges for students. Canadian students, for example, tend to address authority figures in a relatively informal tone compared to international students who are very formal when addressing authority figures. International students often face the contradictory consequences of colonization, which pressures them to assimilate while constantly reminding them of their racial differences (Singh, 2007).

Through my experience of debriefing international students returning from their work terms, I observed that these students were significantly impacted, both positively and negatively, by the level of support they received from their employers. Organizations vary in their capacity and desire to deal with diversity issues. Some organizations do not have the resources to address issues of cultural diversity, while in other organizations diversity is at best tolerated, implying that differences are undesirable and something to be coped with (Brown, 2009). Still other organizations may have specific policies, practices and procedures that both promote and celebrate cultural diversity.

Implications of the Study for the University Community

At the University of Regina's Cooperative Education Program, there are students from many different countries and many different cultural backgrounds. Some international students come from wealthy families and have been sent to develop the skills necessary to further their families' business interests in North America. Other students have completed degrees in their home countries and have worked for years to save enough money to study abroad and earn what they perceive to be a prestigious degree from a Western university. Still other students are seeking to immigrate to Canada and have left their home countries in search of a better life. As a result, one can expect to hear multiple stories reflecting these diverse experiences and backgrounds.

As a group, international students will face challenges in their new environment. Their presence, however, provides a rich diversity of students for our program as well as the greater university community. Helping achieve equitable educational outcomes by removing barriers to success ought to always be of highest concern. This research seeks to further that aim.

The Cooperative Education Program may benefit from the findings that better highlight the needs of the increasingly diverse student body it serves. The University will potentially benefit by being better able to serve this student body through improved programming. Finally, this research may also contribute to the overall literature that informs the practice of the cooperative education community.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I have drawn on the literature from the fields of adult education, human resources development and international education. The specific topics covered include work-integrated learning, international student experience, immigrant students in post-secondary education, international students in cooperative education and workplace diversity. A broader exploration of the literature was necessary due to the limited number of studies in the area of international students in cooperative education.

Work-Integrated Learning

Cooperative education is a form of work-integrated learning. Students engaging in work-integrated learning are exposed to situations that can never be fully experienced in a classroom. According to Cord & Clements (2010), students who have an element of work integrated into their academic experience tend to gain non-technical skills such as interpersonal or communication skills, which are not easily taught in a traditional classroom setting. Work-based learning encourages personal reflection, which helps students understand the link between theory and practice. Since the literature on cooperative education is limited, it is important to also examine the literature on internships. Internships may not be identical to cooperative education, but they do offer some similarities and parallels that may apply to this study.

Cooperative Education

As identified by Haddara and Skanes (2007) and Schaafsma (1996), there are varying definitions pertaining to the concept of cooperative education and there is no clear consensus on what constitutes a cooperative education program. Part of the confusion surrounding the definition of cooperative education can be attributed to

variations among programs. In Canada, the Canadian Association for Cooperative Education (CAFCE) is the accreditation body for post-secondary institutions. CAFCE provides the following definition for cooperative education:

> Co-operative Education Program means a program which alternates periods of academic study with periods of work experience in appropriate fields of business, industry, government, social services and the professions in accordance with the following criteria:
>
> (i) each work situation is developed and/or approved by the co-operative educational institution as a suitable learning situation;
>
> (ii) the co-operative student is engaged in productive work rather than merely observing;
>
> (iii) the co-operative student receives remuneration for the work performed;
>
> (iv) the co-operative student's progress on the job is monitored by the co-operative educational institution;
>
> (v) the co-operative student's performance on the job is supervised and evaluated by the student's co-operative employer;
>
> (vi) the time spent in periods of work experience must be at least thirty per cent of the time spent in academic study (CAFCE, 2009).

Cooperative education programs in Canada not accredited by CAFCE also use the term "cooperative education", so it is unclear whether or not the standards listed above are adhered to in these programs. This loose use of the term has likely contributed to the lack of a universal definition.

In spite of the varying incarnations of cooperative education, Groenewald (2004), (as cited in Haddara & Skanes, 2007), claims that elements common to cooperative education programs are "(a) an integrated curriculum, (b) learning derived from work

experience, (c) cultivation of a support-base, and (d) the logistical organization and coordination of learning experience." (p. 24). The University of Regina's Cooperative Education Program's website offers the following definition: "Co-operative Education and Internship Programs are a plan of higher education that incorporates productive work experience as a regular and integral part of a student's learning process" (University of Regina, 2010). Students in cooperative education programs at the University of Regina alternate between academic and work semesters until a given number of work terms have been completed, usually three or four. As my experience with cooperative education is within the context of the University of Regina, I will employ the University's definition throughout this study.

In addition to being international students, the participants in this study are also adult learners. Cooperative education and experiential learning, in general, contain a number of characteristics that are compatible with various concepts from the adult education literature. From the above definitions of cooperative education, a direct link can be made between cooperative education and the andragogical principles of adult learning which state that adult learners need to understand the benefits of learning, have the capacity for self-direction, bring personal experiences to the learning initiative, are ready to learn those things which will bring them personal benefits and are both externally and intrinsically motivated toward learning (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2011). By experiencing the practical applications of their curriculum, cooperative education students can come to a greater understanding of and appreciation for that curriculum (Cates & Jones, 1999).

Cates and Jones further explain that integrating work into academic curriculum enhances students' abilities to learn non-technical skills such as teamwork, leadership and social skills as well as personal responsibility and maturity. My own experience has confirmed these findings as students have continuously reported to me that they have gained a greater level of self-reliance and self-confidence by meeting the demands placed on them by their employers as well as being rewarded monetarily.

Much of the research has shown that cooperative education helps students achieve positive career-related outcomes. In their study of cooperative education students, Braunstein and Stull (2001) found that participation in cooperative education internships significantly increased the students' chances of becoming employed by their host company. This finding is due to the perception by employers that participation in a cooperative education program helps students build organizational-specific skills. In addition, the temporary nature of the internships helps employers screen potential long-term employees.

Keen (2001) also identifies that participation in cooperative education may lead to intellectual development through the broader range of experiences that cooperative education students receive in comparison to their purely academically focussed colleagues. She further explains that the integration of work experience into the regular university degree appeals to mature students as a more "practical" method of earning a degree.

According to Coll and Chapman (2000b), there is an overall lack of research into cooperative education as a whole, which they attribute to cooperative education practitioners lacking the mandate or resources to conduct formal research. Further, they

argue that when research has been conducted in cooperative education, researchers have traditionally favoured quantitative methods when a greater focus on qualitative research may give cooperative education practitioners a richer insight into their students' experiences. More research needs to be directed at learning outcomes achieved by participation in cooperative education programs as opposed to simply focussing on employment outcomes (Howard, 2004). According to this study, the lack of research has resulted in cooperative education being marginalized within the university setting.

The effectiveness of cooperative education as it relates to learning outcomes and future employment is of particular importance to international students. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I found that international students have a more difficult time finding placements. By giving international students Canadian work experience and, as a result, helping them overcome certain cultural barriers to employment, cooperative education could be the edge that international students need to become more fully integrated into the workplace. As well, by giving students a deeper and richer understanding of their academic subject matter, cooperative education may be able to help international students overcome some of the difficulties inherent in studying abroad.

Internships

While the literature, as a whole, does not focus on cooperative education, there is considerably more literature on other forms of work-integrated learning such as internships. Internships are significant to the field of adult learning as Jacobs and Hundley (2010) recommend that higher education includes a wide range of learning experiences that challenge and engage adult learners more deeply. They endorse experiential learning, including internships, as a necessary component within an adult

learning environment. Valuing adult learners' experiences is also foundational to the principles of andragogy (Knowles et al., 2011). Jacobs and Hundley (2010) acknowledge, however, that many adult learners have other responsibilities such as families or other work that could make participation in internships difficult.

Much of the research on the effectiveness of experiential learning explores the benefits of internships to graduate employment outcomes. Gault, Redington, and Schlager (2000) found that students who participated in internships secured employment quicker, reported higher job satisfaction and earned higher incomes than students who did not participate in internships. These findings were confirmed by Gault, Leach, and Duey (2010) and Callanan and Benzing (2004) who found that "the completion of an internship [is] the most significant variable in terms of the influence on the ability to obtain a career-oriented position" (p. 86). In addition to higher starting incomes and enhanced job prospects, Lampe and Rothman (2004) also reported that students who participated in internships tended to have higher grade point averages than those who did not participate. However, it is not clear whether internships were the cause of the higher averages or if these programs were merely attracting students with higher averages.

A fundamental principle of cooperative education that may not be present in other internships is the paid nature of the work. Internships are voluntary and although Westerberg and Wickersham (2011) mention the risk of internships as cheap (or free) labour, they identify the benefit of students being able to experience the practical application of their field of study. They also state that internships provide a link between institutions and the community, which could further help students transition out of post-secondary and into the workforce. Even in the case of unpaid internships, host employers

may be willing to cover the cost of relocation and living expenses for the duration of the internship, which can provide interns with the added benefit of cheap travel (Warlick, 2008). As a cooperative education coordinator, I found that money was second only to work experience in terms of importance to the students. Monetary remuneration not only serves the practical purpose of helping students to financially sustain themselves throughout their academic careers, but also indicates that the work they are performing is of value.

International Student Experience

Although there is a large body of literature that looks at the experience of international students studying in North American Universities, it was mostly through the broader lens of adaptation and learning outcomes in the university context (Andrade, 2006). Lin and Yi (as cited in Jacob & Greggo, 2001) define international students as "a group of individuals who temporarily reside in a country other than their country of citizenship in order to participate in international educational exchange as students" (p. 74). Jacob and Greggo (2001) point out that international students differ from domestic students who are members of visible minorities. International students have recently arrived in a new culture and as a result, often have to undergo a period of cultural adaptation, which would not be experienced by someone who grew up inside that culture, even if that person was a member of a minority group.

Siu (1952) describes this type of international student as a "sojourner" in that they travel to a new country while maintaining certain aspects of their culture while in the host country. Sojourners tend to view their time in the new country as temporary and as though completing a job. The term sojourner, has been used in more recent studies such

as Langley and Breese (2005) who found that sojourners tend to develop a greater appreciation for different cultures as the result of their experiences abroad. Similarly, Ward and Rana-Deuba (2000) explored sojourner adjustment to find that that the key to a positive psychological adjustment is found in the quality of their personal relationships.

A notable difference between Siu's sojourners and the international students in this study is that many of the students in cooperative education in Regina choose to remain in Regina upon completing their study period. It is not clear, however, exactly when these students decide to remain in Canada. It is possible that they initially intend on a temporary stay in Canada and change their minds once they have become accustomed to the local culture and come to recognize the extent of available opportunities.

With the increase of students travelling abroad to study, issues of culture are unavoidable. As Hermes (2005) points out, the notion of culture can be multifaceted. Culture may include any customs, habits and other characteristics that a people may possess (Popadiuk & Arthur 2004). As a result, a student traveling to a different country in order to study will inevitably experience a new culture.

Culture is, however, not limited to ethnicity and may include other factors such as socioeconomic status, which is not directly tied to country of origin. As a result, when students study abroad, they may face a myriad of culturally related challenges with which they must cope. International students are likely to experience culture shock, which is described as "a multifaceted experience resulting from numerous stressors occurring in contact with a different culture" (Winkelman, 1994, p. 121). When one experiences culture shock, their entire surroundings become unfamiliar and even simple tasks become confusing and complex (Roberts, Thakur, & Tunnell, 1997). Dutton (2012)

proposes five stages of culture shock. First, people with culture shock experience a period of fascination with the new culture as the new environment is seen as exotic and novel. People in this stage tend to experience excitement or even pleasure. The next stage of culture shock is dislike of the environment as unpredictability and a sense of lost control become apparent. During this stage, people become acutely aware of the differences between their new culture and their home culture. The home culture is romanticized and negative stereotypes of the host culture are easily accepted. At stage three, an understanding of the new culture is reached followed by acceptance, which is stage four. At the final stage, the new environment is viewed as predictable and familiar and is accepted as normal.

Winkelman (1994) identifies four basic causes of culture shock: physiological stress reactions associated with exposure to the new environment; cognitive fatigue associated with taking in excessive information; role shock resulting from different expectations placed on the individual by the new society and finally, personal shock due to a lost support system. All these causes tend to have behavioural and physiological consequences for the individual. The severity of culture shock varies among individuals based on personality and pre-departure preparation.

Many of the studies on international student adaptation look at students from specific ethnic groups. For example, Bektas, Demir, and Bowden (2009) examined Turkish students at American campuses and found that support networks and self-esteem were the most significant predictors of adaptation. In their study of Caribbean students in the United States, Edwards-Joseph and Baker (2012) found that five major themes arose from students who experienced culture shock. Those themes were "loneliness and

feelings of not fitting in, anxiety and depression, value system and cultural differences, cultural identity, and environmental factors" (p. 716). The common element for those students who did not experience culture shock was a strong sense of community. Finally, in a study of Black Sub-Saharan African Students, which looked specifically at adult learners, Kumi-Yeboah (2010) found that these students also experienced a period of culture shock. The students reported an especially difficult adjustment to the individualistic nature of North American culture, which differed from their more community-oriented culture.

Sandhu (1994) divides the problems faced by international students into two broad categories: those associated with intrapersonal factors and those associated with interpersonal factors. Intrapersonal factors are internally rooted feelings about the self that are associated with the transition. Interpersonal factors are externally associated with the new environment such as the shock associated with being transplanted into a new culture. Sandhu suggests that intrapersonal factors cause more problems for international students than do interpersonal factors as intrapersonal factors are more closely associated with one's ability to cope.

When individuals from different cultures come in contact with each other, issues of power and dominance cannot be avoided (Berry, 1997). Berry describes a process of acculturation, which occurs where one of the cultural groups is likely to change in a more profound way. He proposes four possible acculturation outcomes (integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization) which depend upon the degree of dominance exerted by one group on the other and the value placed on both groups' cultural identities. One of the groups must exchange some part of their cultural identity

for that of the more dominant group or face isolating consequences. Berry's model of acculturation is of particular significance to this study. From their arrival to Canada through their education and their participation in cooperative education, international students face a continuous series of acculturation experiences.

A technique used by international students, which illustrates the separation outcome, is the phenomenon of clustering. In her study of five Chinese international students at the University of Regina, Liu (2008) found that the students who participated in this study mostly interacted with people from their own cultural background (i.e., other Chinese students). Although clustering may lead to separation, it does have the positive effects of providing a sense of security and protecting one's cultural identity within the host society.

The ability of students to cluster assumes that there are multiple representatives of that particular culture present in their university. Hsieh (2007) examined the experience of an international student in an American university who was the only member of her ethnic group among her peers. The student in the study reported tremendous feelings of isolation, largely due to language barriers, whether real or perceived. She felt uncomfortable being the only person in her class not of the dominant culture and therefore, chose to remain silent.

Host language proficiency is also critical to international student adaptation. Kwon (2009) found a strong negative correlation between English proficiency and feelings of isolation and intimidation in the classroom. Kwon also found that English proficiency was not strongly associated with cultural adaptation issues such as

homesickness among Asian students, possibly due to the phenomenon of clustering previously mentioned.

These studies describe how membership in a small community of people from similar backgrounds lessens the difficulties associated with cultural adaptation. In addition, Kwon identified financial issues followed by failure as the top two fears associated with international students. Although her study also identified fear of making friends and homesickness, these fears were marginal compared to concerns about finances and the fear of failure.

Immigrant Students in Post-Secondary Education

The study of international students is of increasing relevance in light of the ongoing phenomenon of globalization. Glastra, Hake and Schedler (2004) point out that globalization is an ongoing process rather than an event. The consequences of globalization cannot be fully described because the outcomes are not yet known. On the other hand, one is able to observe some of the characteristics of globalization such as mobility, not only of financial resources and information, but also of people. R. Freeman (2006) reports that Canada is a top destination for immigrants as indicated by 18% of the Canadian population born outside of Canada as of 2002. Saskatchewan and, more specifically, Regina have also seen an increase in immigration with Citizen and Immigration Canada reporting the number of foreign workers in that city tripling between 2006 and 2010 (Citizen and Immigration Canada, 2011). Although international students are differentiated from immigrant students in that immigrant students are citizens or permanent residents, the experiences of these two groups may be sufficiently similar to merit consideration.

The mobility of individuals and the resultant influx of people into Canada have significant implications for higher education. Forty percent of all adult immigrants engage in some form of education or training within the first two years of arriving in Canada with the majority attending post-secondary institutions (Adamuti-Trache, 2010). This trend is not new since "higher education was always more internationally open than most sectors because of its immersion in knowledge, which never showed much respect for juridical boundaries" (Marginson & Wende, 2007).

Most new immigrants, however, do not come to Canada solely for the purpose of seeking higher education. Instead, these people view higher education as a means to make themselves more employable (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010). Further, many new immigrants to Canada do not lack education or experience. As G. Guo (2006) explains, "a number of studies have revealed that many highly educated immigrants experience deskilling or decredentializing of their prior learning and work experience in Canada" (p. 198).

Perhaps further aggravating the problem, S. Guo (2010) contends that while higher education is often seen as a sole means to material improvement for new immigrants, access to lifelong learning is limited. Guo suggests that new immigrants face barriers to all social programming, including lifelong learning as a result of "language difficulties, lack of information about services, cultural patterns of help seeking, lack of cultural sensitivity by service providers, financial barriers and lack of service availability" (p. 159). In addition, Guo claims that when access is granted to new immigrants, lifelong learning is used to persuade people to conform to social norms. Yet,

in spite of its shortcomings, Guo does maintain that lifelong learning could be used as a piece in a larger societal move towards social justice for immigrants.

When immigrant students engage in post-secondary education, the literature indicates institutions have a high degree of influence over the outcome. In their study of recent immigrant adult students (RIAS), Lum and Grabke (2012) found that post-secondary institutions can play a key role in determining their adjustment success. They recommended that institutions closely monitor their RIAS enrollments in an effort to ensure that these students receive necessary services. The services that Lum and Grabke identified as being critical for RIAS are help with institutional processes, focus on language needs and student-focussed classroom management. More importantly for this study, they recommended that post-secondary educational institutions provide more opportunities for immigrant students to participate in cooperative education programs as these programs were positively linked to future employment.

International Students in Cooperative Education

With a few exceptions, research on international students participating in cooperative education programs is underreported. The existing literature tends to focus on students from Western cultures going abroad (Miller, 2004; Wong & Coll, 2001). Little in the research, however, focuses on foreign students, particularly from non-Western cultures, in cooperative education or other experiential learning programs as a part of their international student experience.

Some of the literature on North American students working abroad does, however, address the human experience of working in a foreign culture. Lupi and Batey (2009) studied education students from the University of North Florida completing an

international teaching internship in the United Kingdom. The goal of this international internship was to facilitate transformational learning in the program participants.

Transformational learning "is the process of effecting change in a frame of reference" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). Mezirow explains that frames of reference are developed either in childhood or through cultural assimilation. They are habitual and can only be changed through a process of critical reflection where assumptions are brought into question. When the old assumption is discarded in favour of a new explanation of reality, transformational learning has occurred.

As a result of these internships, Lupi and Batey (2009) reported that their participants experienced a transformative change in the way that they looked at themselves and other cultures. Although theses teaching interns were American students studying in a culture in which they shared both a common language and ethnicity, this literature does raise the possibility that international internships can have a profound impact on students by exposing them to transformational learning experiences.

In another study of international students experiencing work terms in New Zealand as well as New Zealand students studying abroad, participants reported financial costs, feelings of homesickness and loneliness, lack of preparation and relevant skills prior to the placement. Increased self-confidence, improved career prospects and language skills, and rich cultural experiences were reported as outcomes following work experience (Coll & Chapman 2000a). It should be noted, however, that the students in Coll and Chapman's study were from Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States and the Netherlands. With the exception of the Netherlands, these are all officially English speaking countries and all represent Western cultures. International students at

the University of Regina, by comparison, tend to come from a variety of non-European cultures, including Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East.

International students who are also members of visible minorities report common experiences when studying abroad, from difficulty navigating the policies and structure of their host institution to overt discrimination (Lee & Rice, 2007). From the literature, it remains unclear whether the experience of international students inside classrooms differs from those same students' experiences during cooperative education internships. My study aims to fill this gap in the literature by examining the transition from the classroom to the workplace.

<div align="center">**Workplace Diversity**</div>

The issue of diversity has become increasingly relevant to both the fields of Adult Education and Human Resource Development as both educational institutions and workplaces have become increasingly diverse. Cooperative education similarly straddles these two fields of study as cooperative education students perform the dual role of student and employee. Their entry into the workplace makes that workplace more diverse. Diversity also transcends the criteria represented by legally recognized groups and, as such, Haring-Smith (2012) argues for an expanded definition of diversity to also include socioeconomic class and political ideology.

Although diversity transcends issues of ethnicity, Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2008) propose that the issues of multiculturalism and diversity are not easily separated. They describe how North American academia privileges dominant cultural norms by saying, "this alienation for people of color occurs when the White, male, Western cultural norms of individuality, debate, and competitiveness, which are

antithetical to the norms of many other cultures, dominate the classroom environment"

(p. 46). Further, Hofstede (2001) suggests that cultures differ greatly with respect to

power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity versus femininity.

To overcome barriers to diversity in adult education, Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey

(2008) submit that instructors must become conscious of attitudes and practices that

marginalize. They must be open to discussion and learn to acknowledge and manage the

emotions that the topic invokes.

The administration of adult education programs can also impact marginalization

in society. Adult education can be used as a vehicle for empowerment, by helping diverse

groups gain skills and knowledge, which later lead to opportunity and independence

(Townsend, 2008). On the other hand, Townsend argues, adult learning can be used to

perpetuate marginalization as dominant forces within a culture may control both the

access to learning and the learning content. As it relates to cultural diversity, adult

education can result in both positive and negative social outcomes.

Ross-Gordon and Brooks (2004) point to a lack of research among human

resource development and continuing professional education (CPE) academics. Although

industry and society in general have focussed heavily on the topic of diversity, they state

that "actual research and theory-building endeavours have been few" (p. 74). In

discussing the situation of skilled migrants, Akram Al Ariss, Koall, Özbilgin, and Suutari

(2012) also explain that, "little attention has been paid so far in management and

organizational literature to understanding the dynamics of international mobility from

cross-cultural and inclusive perspectives" (p. 99).

Within the Human Resource Development (HRD) literature on diversity, the focus centers on "managing" diversity and where diversity is valued, the motivator for so doing is typically a business strategy (Mavin & Girling, 2000). Some research (Glenfield & Bunni, 2006; Tomlinson, 2002) focusses on the legal and economic ramifications of diversity in the workplace or simply presents quantifiable data relating to organizational diversity. Bierema (2010) also argues that although many organizations have adopted diversity awareness training for their employees, it is typically done for economic reasons such as attracting a more diverse customer base or in order to avoid litigation.

Diversity has also been explored with respect to recruitment and selection practices. McKay and Avery (2005) explain that recruiting diversity can be difficult when an organization does not have a positive record of hiring diverse candidates. The key to recruiting diversity is to create a climate conducive to diverse employees. This can be done through ongoing auditing, hiring practices and providing realistic job previews. In many organizations, they contend, minority candidates are hired frequently but are not retained due to an unwelcoming corporate culture.

Even with an organizational strategy aimed at achieving diversity, it remains difficult for diversity candidates from foreign cultures to access the workplace (Morgan & Várdy, 2009). Morgan and Várdy suggest that minority candidates exhibit verbal and non-verbal cues that are often misinterpreted by employers, making it especially challenging for applicants unfamiliar with North American customs to get hired.

Their findings are of particular significance for the cooperative education process where a good deal of an individual's success in the program stems from the ability to

secure a placement. This finding relates directly to my initial concerns, addressed in Chapter 1, that international students are at a disadvantage in the hiring process.

Perhaps a limited attention to diversity within the HRD literature is not surprising given that the concept of diversity is complex and is found within many different fields of study. Each researcher's approach to diversity depends on their personal philosophy, area of expertise and even political agenda. The topic of diversity has implications for countless areas of research which Zepke (2005) argues, has led to a lack of coherence in the literature. Yet, in spite of shortcomings within the literature, the reality of cultural diversity that globalization represents is not in dispute. As Hite and McDonald (2010) explain, organizations, like society in general, are becoming more diverse and the need for expanding diversity-oriented research is becoming more acute.

Finally, as the participants in this study are all members of racial minorities in North America, the issue of racism within the workplace context is significant. Racism has been widely addressed in the adult education literature, typically with a focus on the systemic nature of racism in adult education, with institutions privileging white culture and ways of knowing (Manglitz, 2003). Guy (1999) explains that in American society, the people who derive from European cultures are more likely to consider themselves ethnically American as early as the second generation after immigrating. People from non-European cultures, on the other hand, are more likely to consider themselves "hyphenated" Americans, even several generations after immigrating. This difference implies that non-white immigrants maintain a separateness that continues indefinitely. There are cultural differences in Canada that may lead to a different immigrant experience. Saskatchewan in particular, has a small but growing population of non-

Aboriginal visible minorities (Government of Saskatchewan, 2008). As a result, these individuals are likely to be perceived as different. With few exceptions however, such as Rahimi and Fisher (2002), the effects of racism on non-Aboriginal minorities in Saskatchewan has not been heavily investigated.

Summary

As international students in cooperative education is quite specific, it was necessary to draw upon and examine the intersections within a broader and more diverse literature. Cooperative education is a form of work-integrated learning, which allows students to combine classroom learning with work experience.

As the literature on cooperative education is limited, it is helpful to also consider the literature on internships, another form of work-integrated learning. By participating in these programs, the research suggests that students enhance their employment prospects while gaining a deeper level of understanding of their curriculum. Experiential learning also helps students to apply what they have learned to a practical setting, which, in turn, provides an advantage when they return to classroom studies.

The literature on international students participating in cooperative education is limited with most of the research focussing on the experience of students from Western cultures. The research does suggest, however, that an international experience involving work-integrated learning may lead to transformational learning. This literature also reports that students experiencing work terms abroad tend to report similar experiences, such as feelings of loneliness, as students studying in foreign classrooms.

In contrast to cooperative education, research relating to international students has been more broadly explored. Much of the literature on international students,

however, focuses on members of specific ethnic groups in very distinct situations. One of the main findings on international students is that students studying abroad tend to experience challenges such as isolation or loneliness, which is primarily impacted by the quality of their personal relationships and support systems. The majority of the studies on international students, however, do not differentiate between traditional aged learners and adult learners. As a result, it is helpful to also examine the experiences of recent immigrants participating in higher education. Much of the literature on these individuals contains elements that are applicable to the experience of international students.

Finally, this study has relevance to both the fields of adult education and human resources development as it considers both academic and work-related issues. One such example is workplace diversity, which the literature suggests, tends to focus on the employer's perspective rather than considering the experiences of the individuals.

The topic of international students in cooperative education brings together many different fields of study. Some of these fields have been well researched while others have been left relatively unexplored. This study aims to help fill gaps in the literature by providing some new insights into the international student experience in cooperative education as well as providing better ways to serve these individuals.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This qualitative research study used case study methodology to explore the experiences of international students participating in the Cooperative Education Program at the University of Regina. In this chapter, I describe the research methods that I used to gather my data, select my participants and analyze my data. It describes my rationale for using qualitative research and case study methodology as well as the philosophical underpinnings of this research approach. I also discuss the trustworthiness of my data and explore the ethical considerations of my research.

As this study explores experience, I have chosen a qualitative research approach. As Merriam (2009) explains, "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds and what meaning they attribute to these experiences" (p. 5). All of the participants in my study are unique individuals with personal histories that have formed their worldviews and inform how they interpret and experience phenomena. As international students participating in the same program, there were commonalities among their experiences and, yet, all individuals had a unique understanding about what happened to them. The objective of qualitative research, as Merriam explains, is not to provide quantitative findings such as correlations or cause-and-effect relationships, but rather, to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon of interest which, in this case, is international students participating in the Cooperative Education Program at the University of Regina.

In addition to adopting qualitative research methods, I approach my research from a constructivist epistemology. The participants in my research assign meanings to their experiences based on their personal contexts, which include their ethnicity, belief

systems, past experiences and countless other factors that have contributed to their worldviews. As Merriam (2009) suggests, "There is no 'objective' experience that stands outside its interpretation" (p. 9). As a result, the experiences of the participants in the Cooperative Education Program have all been assigned a subjective interpretation.

The specific qualitative methodology that I have employed for this research is the case study methodology. "A case study is an in depth description of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). Merriam goes on to explain that the key methodological consideration in conducting a case study is to fully decide what, specifically, is the case to be studied. Stake (2000) suggests that "an institution, a programme, a responsibility, a collection or a population can be the case" (p. 23). In this research, the case is international students studying in the Cooperative Education Program at the University of Regina. The case is bounded in time in that it considers the students' experiences during their time in cooperative education. The case is also bounded by place as the students studied at the University of Regina and participated in their work terms at various organizations in the city of Regina.

Whether exploring single or multiple cases, Yin (2003) suggests that case studies can be exploratory, descriptive or explanatory. Exploratory cases seek to find a question to be later studied, descriptive case studies seek to describe a phenomenon and explanatory case studies seek to find a cause and effect relationship. The nature of this case study is descriptive. By looking at selected international students in the Cooperative Education Program at the University of Regina, I am trying to understand the experience of international students within this context.

Although the cases are bounded by time, I have not discounted the personal histories that the various participants brought to the study. As the individual contexts and histories of the participants will colour their experience in cooperative education, I hope that providing some broader information about these individuals will result in a richer and deeper understanding of their experiences in cooperative education. The fact that the participants could not be considered without first examining their personal histories also gives greater credence to the choice of case study as a methodology.

Yin (2003) states, "the case study is the method of choice when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context" (p. 4). The participants in this research all entered the Cooperative Education Program having had the experience of traveling abroad to a foreign culture to live and study. This experience, and the experiences that occurred prior to coming to Canada, shaped the participants' worldview and informed how they as individuals perceived their experiences during their time in cooperative education. Further, the Cooperative Education program takes place at the University of Regina and the students work for various employers throughout the city. All these factors create a "context" that has framed the experience for the participants. This approach to studying adult learners is also aligned with Knowles et al. (2011) who explain that experience informs who the adult learner is as an individual and that the past experiences of the learners ought to be valued.

Donmoyer (2000) further describes three benefits to the case study method that are realized within this study. According to Donmoyer, case studies allow one to experience phenomena vicariously that might otherwise not be accessible to the reader. Donmoyer also suggests, that case studies allow the readers to see through the

researcher's eyes, which can bring to light things that may not have previously been noticed by the reader. Finally, as readers of case studies are often removed from the case itself, case studies can reduce defensiveness that may occur if the reader were to confront uncomfortable situations in his or her own environment. Such defensiveness, Donmoyer posits, could result in filtering out any details that make one uncomfortable. Case studies are read with a certain degree of distance between the reader and the subject, allowing for a more objective understanding.

These three benefits apply to this research in that, as a Cooperative Education Coordinator, I had the opportunity to not only access a very specific group of participants who have shared a common experience but also to explore phenomena that might not otherwise be noticed or considered worthy of study. This study also touches upon issues such as diversity and workplace dynamics, which may cause discomfort if one were to confront them within their own environment. The case study method provides a safe distance, which will, hopefully cause the reader a deeper level of consideration and, therefore a richer understanding.

Another benefit of the case study method is that it provides both depth and breadth to the study of a particular phenomenon. Merriam (2009) describes case studies as particularistic in that they focus on a "particular situation, event, program or phenomenon; descriptive in that they produce "a rich, 'thick' description of the phenomenon under study", and heuristic in that "case studies illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study" (p. 44)

Merriam goes on to explain that although the goal of case study is not to provide explanations that can be generalized across other cases, by helping to better understand

the situation within the case, case studies can give the reader insight that can be applied to other contexts. Lincoln and Guba (2000) refer to this concept as transferability. Within qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba explain, the contexts are always unique, making sweeping generalizations across cases impossible. Readers of case studies are, however, able to transfer data gathered from one case to another. The degree of transferability depends on the similarities between cases and is dependent on the discretion of the reader.

Narrative Inquiry

In addition to the case study methodology, this study draws from some of the principles of narrative inquiry. People understand their own experience narratively (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As a result, much of the data gleaned from the subjects were provided in a narrative form in that they provided short anecdotes as answers to a number of questions that I posed. The narratives were targeted at particular events within the context of the overall experience rather than overarching stories that comprehensively described the experience.

In conducting my research, I also realized the need to go beyond language. Language requires interpretation and meanings may become distorted in transmission. As Rogers (2007) suggests, "each word holds so many meanings that we can never say something and express only what we intend to say" (p. 108). The researcher must look beyond the actual content of the narrative and search for clues in the demeanour of participants, how they tell the story, what they choose to include, and what they choose to omit. This deeper analysis is essential to effectively research the experiences of international students. With the language and cultural differences that exist between the

participants and me, fully exploring the narratives is critical to understanding the meaning behind what is being said.

Finally, as a researcher I recognized that I had to transcend my own personal context. As a researcher, I tried to understand the perspective from which the participant operates. In describing her own narrative process, He (2003) explains "Looking at our lives at the North American academy without thinking about our lives in China or our lives in Canada fails to capture the ceaseless motion, disruption, and continuity of our cross-cultural experience" (p. 77). With respect to the cross-cultural nature of the international student's experience, Carger (2005) states that "stories that focus on cultural contexts and reveal cultural values also offer pathways to cultural sensitivity that may sidestep barriers to comprehending the unknown" (p. 241). I acknowledge that a significant divide exists between me and my participants and by considering the data within the context of the larger experience for the participants, I believe that I have been able to overcome some of the limitations of my own perspective.

Research Methods

Participant Selection

In discussing the challenges of conducting qualitative research with people from a culture different to our own, Andrews (2007) questions, "is it desirable or even possible to remain unchanged when we come to know, however indirectly, the worlds that exist beyond the radar of what has always been familiar to us?" (p. 489). I submit that one should not and, indeed, cannot remain unchanged when exploring the unfamiliar worlds of international students. This fact, coupled with my desire to improve my work as a cooperative education practitioner, influenced my choice of participants.

I used purposive sampling to select my participants from ethnic groups most represented in cooperative education. Purposive sampling, often necessary for qualitative research, results when the researcher selects representative participants based on their ability to provide rich information, while still recognizing limitations on the researcher such as availability of participants (Coyne, 1997). As our program consists of international students predominantly from African and Asian cultures, I invited these students to participate. I interviewed four students, a relatively small number. The reason for choosing a small group was due to the fact that case study research seeks depth of knowledge, and therefore generates large amounts of data (Hammersley & Gomm, 2000).

Initially, the manager of the Career Centre emailed all of the students participating in the Cooperative Education Program seeking volunteers to participate in the study. Four students replied to the email, indicating that they were interested in participating. Two of the students, Lilly and Dan (a woman and man respectively) are from Mainland China and the other two, Lekan and Seriki (both men) are from Nigeria. The participants were in their mid to late 30s with the exception of Dan who was 23 at the time of the study. The participants were accepted for convenience and because they originated from those countries highly represented in the Cooperative Education program. Initially I had intended to select two male and two female students however, of the four volunteers, three were male and one was female.

Data Collection

In this study, I used semi-structured interviews, student journals and my own notes to gather data. My approach was informed by Woodside (2010) who explains that case study research is not "restricted to one set of research methods" (p. 11), but instead, can employ a number of methods with the quality of the research improving with greater numbers of research methods being employed. This process, called triangulation, involves using multiple methods in order to gain a deeper understanding of that which is studied as well as increase the internal validity of the study (Merriam, 2009). Prior to working directly with the participants I received approval from the University's Research Ethics Board. The process of achieving ethics approval required me to consider risks associated with participation, conflicts of interest and my relationship to the participants.

Interviews

The bulk of my data was gathered from interviews conducted with the four participants. I began by briefly exploring the students' backgrounds, focussing on their motivation for studying abroad, why they chose the University of Regina, and the events that led to them coming to Regina. The purpose of gathering this background information was twofold: I wanted the students to feel more comfortable and I wanted to get a sense of who they were as individuals outside of the boundaries of their academic careers. I then asked the students to describe their experiences in cooperative education, paying particular attention to the factors that may have facilitated or impeded their perceived success in the cooperative education program.

Throughout the interviews, I asked the participants about the meanings they derived from the particular experiences. This was done in an effort to bridge the

contextual divide, which exists as a result of separate individuals having different interpretations of the same narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I acknowledge that the participants and I may not assign the same significance to events and as a result, I tried to allow the participants to give voice to their own meaning. This approach to the research follows the constructivist epistemology, which acknowledges that learners develop their own meanings based on experience (Kumar, 2006).

I interviewed two of the students during the last week of their summer 2011 work term and the other two students during the first week immediately following the same work term. Initially, I had hoped to interview all of the participants one week after the work term however, scheduling conflicts forced two of the interviews to occur during the final week.

Journals

The participants were asked to write about their experiences in a journal throughout their work term. Only three of the four students wrote in their journals. Journals serve the dual purpose of providing a rich field text as well as compelling the participants to engage in a more meaningful self-reflection (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). With respect to adult learners specifically, Hiemstra (2001) recommends journals as "a tool to aid learners in terms of personal growth, synthesis, and reflection on new information that they acquire" (p. 20). As the researcher, I found that the participants' journals helped me to gain a clearer understanding of the individual students' perspectives. Certain issues and observations were emphasized that give clues to what the participants value.

The journals were valuable in that they provided additional and in some cases richer information than was garnered through the interviews. This was especially the case with Lilly, the lone female participant. She provided deep reflection in her journal writings on her observations and her experiences as well as the meaning she placed on the things that happened to her. Although the other two participants who did choose to write in their journals did not provide the same emphasis on personal meaning, there were areas that they highlighted in their journals that gave a deeper understanding of what they deemed important.

In retrospect, I should have provided the participants with more detailed instructions and placed clearer expectations with respect to the journals. I also did not monitor the participants' progress in their journals. Although, I did not want to unduly influence what the students wrote in their journal, my lack of follow up and instruction may have given the participants the impression that I believed the journals were not important.

Field notes

In addition to the interviews, I took notes throughout the process detailing any observations that I made about the participant and their reactions to participating in this process. This technique of "unstructured observation" allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the context in which the participants construct their understanding of phenomena (Mulhall, 2003). This process allowed me to gauge unspoken communication such as body language and to explore beyond the text of the data in a search for deeper meaning. In addition, although not the focus of the study, my

notes also helped me to record my own reactions to certain situations. This, in turn caused me to reflect on my own biases or preconceptions.

Artifacts

Finally, I had asked the participants to provide any artifacts that they feel may be important, such as photographs or portfolios of work completed on their internship. Due to confidentiality and privacy, the students were not able to provide any work related artifacts. However, I did examine our internal office artifacts such as correspondence and official documentation. Most of this however was generic documentation and not highly revealing. Although, I was not able to secure artifacts from the work terms, I did find within the interviews, the participants did refer to objects from their experience such as work-related reports, gifts to and from co-workers, and office attire that did provide a deeper understanding of the students' experience.

Data Analysis

As previously mentioned, I have sought to delve further into the data than just examining the words chosen by the participant. For data collection purposes, I audio recorded and transcribed the interviews with the participants. In addition to the interviews, I took observational field notes and had the students keep journals throughout their work terms. This broad approach to data collection yielded a rich supply of data for analysis.

Riessman (2008) describes several types of analysis that may occur either alone or alongside another. Two such methods of analysis are thematic and visual analysis. For my project, I conducted a thematic analysis, examining consistent themes that arose in the interviews, journals, and my own observations.

According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), researchers begin with broad categories within which they believe their data will fall. These categories are understood prior to gathering data and act as a guide in developing tools such as interview guides, which drive data collection. I began with a large amount of data in the form of four transcribed interviews, three journals, as well as my own field notes. Having perused the data, I coded sections of text and then separated them into broad categories. Given that all my participants are international students, some obvious categories, such as cultural adaptation issues experienced by the participants or internal motivation of the participants guided my data collection. Within these broader categories, certain themes such as opportunity as the driver for participation in cooperative education have arisen. These themes will be discussed in detail in the data analysis chapter. Finally, a thematic analysis guided my interpretation of the data.

Data Trustworthiness

I acknowledge that, as Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest, entering into the researcher/participant relationship is a negotiated process whereby the researcher allows the participant to have a voice. This process empowers the participant. At the same time, however, it is important to communicate this empowering intent to the participant. In gathering my research, I strove to give my students this opportunity. I tried to articulate my goals to the participants in a way that secured entry into the field. Two aspects of my study should be mentioned as they may have altered the data. First, the students volunteered to participate in the study and, therefore had knowledge of their participation during the work term. Knowing that they were participating in the study may have, in some way, altered the experience. Second, I acknowledge that the participants may have

perceived me as being in a position of power and influence. For this reason, the participants may have tempered their criticism of the process and may have been hesitant to admit or even talk about uncomfortable situations. To the greatest extent possible, I have attempted to overcome these barriers by providing a safe and relaxed environment and by reassuring the participants of my intent. Some specific steps that I took to remove any impact associated with power were having my manager invite the participants, conducting the interviews in a neutral location away from the cooperative education office and outlining the steps I would take to ensure the participants' anonymity. Finally, I acknowledge that in undertaking this study, I have reflected on my own bias towards cooperative education. I have, to the greatest extent possible tried to authentically reflect the thoughts of the participants in my analysis of the data.

Qualitative research and quantitative research differ greatly in their treatment of reliability and validity. As mentioned previously, people reside within a dynamic environment. Further, the information gathered is largely determined by the skill of the researcher and traditional controls, which might otherwise ensure reliability within a quantitative study, are not possible within a qualitative study (Merriam, 2009). M. Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, and St Pierre (2007) point out a similar problem with respect to validity within qualitative research stating that "there are no 'pure', 'raw' data, uncontaminated by human thought and action, and the significance of data depends on how material fits into the architecture of corroborating data" (p. 27). Finally, as this study considers unique individuals in a very specific context, my findings are not generalizable (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). There may, however, be certain elements of this study that could be transferred to similar situations.

According to Riessman (2008), qualitative research looks beyond reliability, instead aiming for trustworthiness, which they suggest, is comprised of competent practice and ethical conduct. Instead of searching for truth, they suggest that researchers search for "truths" as reality is interpreted. Two strategies identified by Rossman and Rallis (2003) to enhance the credibility of a study are sharing results with participants and triangulation or drawing data from multiple sources. In this research, I employed both of these methods, by first, sharing the transcripts of the interviews with the respective participants to ensure accuracy of the data and secondly, using multiple data collection methods which have been previously identified.

In addition to issues of research quality, I gained informed consent from my participants. They all signed consent forms, which outline both the nature of the study as well as mutual expectations between me and the participants. I have also made an effort to, as Clandinin & Connelly (2000) suggest, manoeuvre through the juxtaposition of obtaining formally documented informed consent and building an informal atmosphere conducive to gathering good narrative data.

Other ethical issues identified by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) include anonymity, data ownership, truthfulness and relational issues between the researcher and the participant. My strategies for dealing with these issues are as follows: I identified the participants with pseudonyms and I was clear from the beginning on how I plan to use the data. Further, I strove to develop a relationship of trust and openness with the participants and I have continually re-examined my own biases and agendas to ensure that I am not unwittingly contaminating the data.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Discussion

This chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the data obtained in the interviews and journal entries of four international students who participated in the Cooperative Education Program at the University of Regina. The interviews were guided by a series of questions to explore how the participants perceived their cooperative education experience. In addition to the interviews, the participants were asked to keep journals throughout one of their work terms. With the exception of one student, the participants did not write extensively in their journals and the majority of the data were derived from their interviews. The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of international students' cooperative education experience.

Four major themes emerged from the data: opportunity for career advancement, cooperative education as experiential learning, navigating a new culture and language, and developing relationships within the work environment. Opportunity for career advancement was divided into three sub-themes: the prospect of entrepreneurialism, the challenge of the job search process and the value of networking. The themes and sub-themes, in many instances, were interrelated and overlapping.

Opportunity for Career Advancement

The participants consistently cited career opportunity as a main factor in their decision- making processes, both before and during their participation in the Cooperative Education Program. They enrolled in the University of Regina and later in cooperative education because they believed that educational participation would lead to greater future career opportunities.

Adult learners seeking career advancement through higher learning is well documented in the literature. While there are numerous specific motivators for adults to enter or return to post-secondary education, for most adult learners, post-secondary education is associated with better job opportunities (Ozaki, 2009). Although the participants in my research cited various reasons for initially coming to Regina, the decision to attend university and later participate in cooperative education was consistently attributed to a desire for career advancement.

Lilly, who initially came to Regina simply for the experience of living abroad, exemplifies the participants' propensity to seize the opportunity for career advancement. Lilly had an aunt who lived in Regina and she traveled to Canada as an opportunity for a new lifestyle. When she first arrived in Regina, she worked at a restaurant in a mall food court.

> Yeah, but at the time, I was living with my aunt so I think I, if I could have changed, to go to university, it would change my life potential so that's why I decided I would go to get into the university again.

Lilly made the connection between attending university and the likelihood of future success. Her use of the words, "life potential," indicates that she assigns long-term value to education. At this point, the adventure of coming to Canada took on a higher purpose, which compelled her to first enter the University of Regina, and later, join the Cooperative Education Program. Initially, Lilly did not seek to use her education or experience from China to secure employment in Canada, choosing instead to take a low-skill job. Once she self-selected into a service sector job, she did not entertain a more professional career path until she entered the Cooperative Education Program. Although Lilly did not explicitly state that she faced barriers to employment in a more professional

job, she did express frustration at understanding spoken English, which may have influenced her decision to initially take a low-skill position. Despite the fact that Lilly's experience was influenced heavily by the obvious challenges of being a student in a foreign country, she is somewhat typical of the adult learner whose career path is not linear (Baruch, 2004).

In contrast to Lilly who changed her focus after perceiving greater opportunity, Lekan, a Nigerian student, sought out opportunity from the beginning. He stated his reason for coming to Regina as follows:

> I think the first decision was when I was in Ontario and I just decided to move here first thinking for better opportunity, not technically, the first intention was not to do my masters at the U of R but to come to see if I could get a better job...Then again to start my immigration stuff. But so I was looking at the options and thought, I looked at it, two hundred thousand population. It's going to be really small. Be able to work and to make it to school in the evening at an adequate time. Like, it's not going to be like Toronto, Calgary which you have to take hours to get to school. So I kind of find that I can use two stone, I can use one stone to kill two birds by working at the same time and doing my masters.

In seeking out opportunity, Lekan made a calculated decision to come to Regina. Similar to Lilly, his career path was not linear as his initial intention was to work. Although Lekan is an international student, his experience reflects G. Guo's (2006) finding that immigrants do not initially intend to seek higher education.

The Prospect of Entrepreneurialism

Not only were Lekan's decisions motivated by what he believed would yield him the greatest benefit, he continually scanned his environment in search of new opportunities. The desire to be entrepreneurial was evident among the male participants with Lekan and Dan developing small entrepreneurial ventures based on ideas gleaned

from their work terms. Seriki also noticed larger opportunities from his experiences in cooperative education as the following excerpt from his journal suggests:

> On a different note, it all got me reflecting on the erratic power situation in Nigeria where there are several flowing rivers and also has a huge coal deposit! And how we would eventually lead the adoption of such technologies in the near future to both generate power as well as renew/sustain our oil deposits.

Seriki wrote this reflection after site tour during his work term. Although it is not clear from this passage that Seriki was directly seeking opportunity for career advancement, it does show that, like the other participants, he was able to take what he had experienced and contemplate a greater application.

The students' attitudes towards entrepreneurialism support Davey, Plewa, and Struwig, (2011) finding that international students from developing nations look more favourably upon entrepreneurship than do students from more developed countries. Although this study did not specifically look at Asian students, they found that African students looked more favourably upon being an entrepreneur, which was attributed to a lack of certainty in developing nations as well as a strong cultural value on ownership. I believe that becoming an entrepreneur was not the objective for the participants but evidence of their propensity to constantly seek new career opportunities.

The participants' habit of scanning the environment for new opportunities reflected their propensity to view their experiences, including cooperative education, as building towards something greater. For all of the participants, post-secondary education and cooperative education specifically, was important insofar as it advanced their career objectives. Education was not an end in itself but a means to unlocking greater career potential. This reality is explained by G. Guo (2006) who suggests, that many immigrants

do not come to Canada for the sole purpose of seeking higher education but find that, after arriving in Canada, education is necessary for improving their standard of living.

Lekan, for example, initially came to Regina seeking "a better job" while intending to seek further education. He initially worked at an accounting firm in Regina and then left to pursue his MBA full time. He perceived greater opportunity in moving to Regina and later came to believe that even greater opportunity could be found by completing graduate studies. In the case of Lilly, her motivating factor in coming to Regina was simply the adventure of a new experience. Only later did she realize that by obtaining a Canadian education, she would better be able to more fully realize her "life potential".

Seriki, on the other hand, decided to come to Regina for the sole purpose of attending the University, having already lived in central Canada for a number of years. Seriki initially came to Ontario to work and only later decided that furthering his education would enhance his prospects. In each of these cases, education was sought as a means to creating better occupational outcomes. The experiences of these three participants demonstrate, as Kanfer, Chen, & Pritchard (2008) suggest, motivations can change and vary because of the passage of time or changes in life conditions.

The Challenge of the Job Search Process

The process of finding a job is challenging for international students. Dan attributed the difficulties in securing employment to language barriers and a lack of knowledge about Canadian employers.

> It's hard for international students to come into Co-op for the first work term…I felt the language…and uh, we just don't know the companies. We are not familiar with the companies here… we don't know what doing business they are.

In my experience, I found that the process of job applications, resumes and interviews were unfamiliar to international students. Further, many of the students that I worked with had not had part time jobs as students. With respect to job applications, some employers place a tremendous value on how well students articulate their qualifications and their desire to work for a particular company. Obviously, this process poses a greater challenge for students whose first language is not English.

The participants found that the process of work placements differed from finding jobs in their home cultures. Seriki described finding a job in Nigeria as follows:

> It's basically by word of mouth. … So if you know someone who knows someone who can make a phone call and get you an interview, you are most likely to know about the job… Because, you don't know that there's a position available, it doesn't really, you won't apply for the job.

As a result of the difficulties associated with finding a work terms, international students often take jobs that are not complementary to their desired career track or they may find that their personal skill set is not adequate for a job in which they have been placed. The participants experienced placements that were either not highly relevant or challenging**.** Dan's first work term was not relevant to the type of work that he hoped to do upon graduation. Fortunately, Dan was eligible to take part in three work terms. He reported that each work term was progressively better than the previous one. By his third work term, Dan was doing highly relevant work in his chosen field of accounting and was earning significantly more than he had in his prior two work terms.

Dan reported that he was able to take something beneficial away from his work terms. He was able to gain experience in three industries: agriculture, insurance and construction. Dan explained that experience in these industries would lead to future

opportunities when he suggested "And these three areas is the most, if you want to make money in China".

Seriki also accepted a work term that was not highly relevant to his career aspirations or skill set. In his journal, he wrote, "I've just been thinking of why I accepted this job in the first place." He goes on to describe how he believed his employer misrepresented the position. Making the most of the situation, he later wrote, "In my previous classes, I've deduced that it is the 'operators' on the frontlines that make any project, large or small, succeed or fail." His method of overcoming his frustration was to apply his education to the experience and notice how his work fit into his employer's organizational mission.

The Value of Networking

Throughout their experiences in cooperative education, the participants also recognized the value that networking held for their careers. When asked about why he decided to enter the Cooperative Education Program, Seriki indicated that he had friends who had previously found success in the program.

> Yeah, so they were also doing the co-op program and you know, it sounded pretty interesting. I'm like "yeah, sure" um, the co-op is a way to maybe get your foot into the company or an organization. I'm like, alright after I do a few courses, maybe I'll try out for it.

The friends that Seriki referred to were other Nigerian graduate students who had also secured work placements. I worked with these individuals and was familiar with their situations. As many international students, they came into the Cooperative Education Program unsure, but hopeful that the experience would be helpful. They were successful in finding meaningful work terms, went onto graduate from both the

University of Regina and the Cooperative Education Program and transitioned smoothly into the local workforce.

The concept, which Seriki described as getting your "foot in the door", while important for anyone seeking to establish a career, is particularly significant for international students. Sagen, Dallam and Laverty (1999) suggest that of all aspects of job-search techniques employed by new graduates, having direct contact with employers was the most effective method of finding employment. International students, however, typically arrive in Canada with few contacts and face the added burdens of learning a new culture and language. These factors make it more difficult for international students to have direct contact with potential employers. Cooperative education helps international students to overcome this obstacle by providing them with a structured job-search method. They are also assigned an advocate in the Cooperative Education Program who helps them navigate the process.

Once inside a workplace, students have the opportunity to prove themselves, which can lead to ongoing employment. They are also able to make contacts and gain references, which can help them in seeking future employment. All the participants in this study expressed the hope that, as Braunstein and Stull (2001) argue, they would have an increased chance of securing employment with a work term employer. The opportunity to network and the resulting benefits are motivating factors for any student entering cooperative education. Networking is inherent in the process and not exclusive to international students; however, considering the added barriers to employment that international students face, the importance of networking for these individuals is more acute.

Cooperative Education as Experiential Learning

Cooperative education benefits students by offering them the ability to integrate what they have learned in the classroom with real-life work experiences. The importance of combining work with academics was consistent among all the participants in the study. Lekan articulated this as a main reason for choosing to participate in cooperative education.

> Because one thing is, as I said I've been really happy that I made the decision of doing my masters and going to the Co-op. I will take some classes and I'm gonna get to work and be able to apply to work.

By alternating work terms and academic terms, cooperative education allows students to continually apply their course work to a work setting and then to take what they have learned at work and further apply it to their studies. Many instructors commented how cooperative education students are advantaged by this hands-on experience. Some of our participating organizations such as the Crown Corporations in Saskatchewan have a separate pay structures and reserve work of greater responsibility for cooperative education students, separate from other student employees.

The value of alternating between classroom learning and work experience has benefits that exceed simple technical mastery of work-related skills. Consider the following story by Lekan where he described how students are able to combine their classroom learning with practical work experience.

> Change management, that was one of the classes. One of the classes that I wanted to talk about. I remember some of the other classes that really relate to leadership classes. So it's really given me the confidence to like, when I do this and I work on it, it sticks. It sticks. I work on a project which is risk management project. Even though I wasn't, like with the old projects, it was the old project in my unit so the senior consultant just gave me part of it and be like "okay, go and work on the risk aspect of this project. So I work on it, gave him everything and we fine

tune it. Then he, he saw the mistake that I made. He told me "this is the way you should have done it." Prioritizing it and stuff so before I knew it, I came to school and for my wintertime. Winter? Yeah, winter. I did project management. And the project management, one of the things you have to consider for project management is risk. So I told them I would do the risk aspect for the group. I told them this. Cause I was so confident.

Lekan's work experience improved his ability to understand and retain what he learned in class and helped to build his self-confidence. Lekan's experience is reflective of Keen (2001), who explained that cooperative education leads to enriched learning. Lekan's anecdote also shows that participating in cooperative education improved his transfer of learning. This supports Coll and Chapman (2000a) who found that participating in internships as international students increases confidence and Grossman and Salas (2011) who submitted that greater levels of self-efficacy improves transfer of learning. Self-efficacy, defined as the "judgment an individual makes about his or her ability to perform a given task" (p.109) will improve transfer of learning.

Seriki gave another example of transfer of learning in the following story about one of his co-workers:

> Well one of the interesting things, with one of the coordinators which was overseeing summer students is whenever she was in her office, she would literally, intentionally open her door, so that, okay you can walk in and talk to her. You know, if she was on an important call, she would probably shut the door so that she doesn't, you know, people don't overhear that conversation. So some people might not understand what she is trying to do but then, you know, from my course, I can definitely understand that she was trying to open up lines of communication.

Here, Seriki showed that cooperative education gave him the opportunity to apply what he had learned in his course-work to the workplace setting. Being a business student, Seriki had taken an interest in management styles and was using that knowledge to assess his colleagues.

The ability to combine the academic curriculum with the work experience is, however, dependent upon the employers' cooperation as Lilly showed in the following comment:

> I think they could have given me more if they could, if they can. They want really because basically I for the first full work term, for the first four months, I have weekly meeting from my boss. Tell him what's going on, what I learned from my starting work term and every time I met with him, I always wanted to emphasize, I really am willing to get more job to do, more responsibility and then he also bring up this thing at the monthly staff meeting with the other two ladies. But the two ladies, but the one lady said that, like for example, like my boss asked the ladies whether she, whether Lilly have the chance to contact the customer for the goods that are not received. Something like that right? But that lady responded immediately that uh, she never had the co-op student to do this job. So it means, no way.

Here, Lilly lamented that she was not able to fully use her skills in her work term. She believed that the work term was not satisfactory, largely because of her co-workers' unwillingness to allow her to perform more challenging tasks. Although it is not uncommon for domestic students to report feeling underchallenged in their work terms, the fact that Lilly was not allowed contact with customers suggests a cultural bias on the part of her co-workers. They may have been afraid that Lilly's variety of English would reflect poorly on the organization.

Navigating a New Culture and Language

A third theme that emerged from the data was navigating a new culture and, in some cases, a new language. Although, the students' experiences were generally perceived as positive, a number of their anecdotes conveyed a lack of cultural sensitivity on the part of their employers and co-workers. Although racism was not explicitly mentioned, the participants provided examples of tension caused by cultural issues.

Dan indicated that he typically ate lunch with other Asian colleagues, stating that "our style is different from Canadian". I questioned Dan further about what he meant by this statement. He gave the example of an instance where one of his friends brought chicken's feet for lunch. He offered it to a Canadian colleague who, according to Dan, "ran away". Dan offered this story as a humorous anecdote. He was smiling as he told the story and did not appear to have been hurt by the incident. On the other hand, the story illustrates that uncomfortable situations can occur when cultures interact.

Dan often used third party narratives to illustrate his point. He was commonly not the central character in his own stories. There were instances where he was an observer to the story or where his narrative included an event at which he was not present and simply heard the details from someone else. Shokouhi, Daram, and Sabah (2011) explain that stories told in the third person are more objective and less personal. For this reason, it may be possible that Dan was using third party narratives to distance himself from the situation and thereby lessen the emotional impact.

Dan gave another example of cultural differences manifesting in the workplace when he spoke about a time when he tried to tell a joke. "I was trying to make something funny. Something like that, but they are not thinking. Only the Asian people are laughing. I'm thinking or they don't even listen to me anymore." By expressing his concern that his non-Asian co-workers were no longer listening to him, Dan appears to place emphasis on maintaining his credibility. This concern may be of particular significance for Dan as a Chinese student since, as Chan (1999) explains, Chinese culture places a particular importance on the concept of saving face to avoid personal shame.

Lilly also reported cultural differences.

I find [my company] has a very strange things that the peoples like to chat around very much which it rarely happen in the office in China. Especially the two ladies I worked with like to chat a lot each other. They chat gossip, their personal issues and many other things has nothing to do with their job. I really don't like to join to their topic. So I only concentrate at my working. Keep myself quiet.

Seriki and Lekan had both been in Canada for some time before entering the

University of Regina. As a result, Seriki claimed he did not experience any form of

culture shock during his work term.

For me, no. I didn't experience any cultural shock. I would be considered as having Canadian experience,, having already worked in Canada for five years and I'm familiar and comfortable with Canadian business culture and workplace ethics and all that kind of stuff. So it was a natural transition for me.

In some cases, cultural differences were seen as positive aspects of the work

environment with an emphasis placed on mutual cultural learning.

He was one of the Executive Directors in [my company]. We go to the meeting, the first one hour we did not talk about the real discussion. We're talking about how Nigeria is, our culture and everything. So people are culture sensitive.

Lekan went on to further describe his interpretation of the meeting by saying "I think it's

pretty nice when people show interest in you. They make you feel relaxed, make you feel

at home. And too, it shows that they respect you."

Lilly also wrote in her journal about an encounter that she had with a co-worker

from a different department.

Today I have an urgent mail to be sent after the mailroom pickup deadline. So I went down to basement to deliver the mail to them. One lady came up to me and asked me where I came from. After I told her that I come from China, she keep asking me more detail that which part of China. After telling her that I come from Guangdong, she was so exciting. All of a sudden, she speaks Cantonese with me. "Really"? I am surprised that she can speak so fluent Cantonese for a foreigner. She said she used to teach in Hong Kong for 5 years and she love that place so much. I chat with her in Cantonese for some time.

Occasionally, cultural differences caused students to make mistakes in the workplace. Having worked for his father's company in China, Dan explained that business there was done almost entirely over the phone rather than the through the use of the internet. He claimed that, in China, document management was handled differently than in Canada. The following story shows how this difference created a problem for Dan:

> I'm just trying to help each, helping the other people. And my supervisor just gives me this kind of paper. Told just can you, can you give me a favour? Just send in those garbage, and that's the garbage. And I said okay and I direct throw it in the garbage. My supervisor said "oh, you throw it in the garbage? You need to shred or file. That's the record for the company's money, that's accounting.

As Dan's story illustrates, the ability to navigate through another culture is learned through experience. Cooperative education offers international students the ability to gain cultural awareness by exposing them to a Canadian work environment. The type of learning that Dan described here is consistent with Cord and Clements (2010) observation that internships lead to broader skill development. Dan's story shows that he learned how to function in a Canadian work environment, which goes beyond simply acquiring technical skills.

Lilly expressed a difference in work styles between her current job and what she felt was appropriate when she stated in her journal:

> I don't know why they are entitled to claim overtime for I found the just work inefficient. I believe the work could have been done if they didn't chat at work. I think claiming overtime is a sign of inefficiency of working.

Lilly's comments highlight the implications of employing a culturally diverse work force. As S. Y. Kim (2010) explains, differences exist among the attitudes and values between various cultural groups. Kim found that people from East Asian cultures

tend to place a higher value on work ethic than do people from Western cultures such as Canada.

As a researcher, I was also interested to see if or how the participants would directly address the issue of racism. Lilly came the closest to directly identifying racism when she wrote in her journal:

> I come here as a foreigner and I really try to get involved the local activity. Knowing what the people talk, what they like. But it is so hard to continue the conversation with them partly because I still don't fully understand what they are talking about. The other reason might be some discrimination from the ethnic group different from their majority. From talking with the mailroom lady, I feel myself being appreciated. I know myself has some value, catching attention. My culture, my value are appreciated by the people from other culture. In [my company], I feel myself in a zoo. I am one of the exhibition. I also see different kind of species. The species share something similar, are always grouped together. It also similar as the human society. People tend to group together with their similarity.

Here, Lilly expressed a strong sense of marginalization. She saw herself as "other" and was very aware that she was different. Her language and ethnicity caused her to be excluded in her workplace, even though she admitted feeling valued as an individual by a co-worker. Lilly's description verifies Kendalln's (2006) explanation of "white privilege" where "privileges are bestowed on us solely because of our race by the institutions with which we interact…" (p. 64). Lilly also shows how her personal experiences are reflective of the dominant society when she describes how people are "grouped" along cultural lines.

In addition to experiencing a new culture, for many international students, studying in Canada offers the opportunity to improve English language skills. Two of the participants in this study were Nigerians who were fluent English speakers prior to coming to Canada. The other two students were from China and English was not their

first language. For the two students from China, learning to speak English was a key

factor in their decision to come to Regina. The opportunity to become immersed in an

English speaking culture was a constant theme among the Chinese students.

In this passage, Lilly described the process by which she overcame the adversity

and self-doubt of being a non-native English speaker.

> So, at that time I think, I thought to myself, should I, should I just quit? Because I
> know nothing before taking the class I think I know, I'm okay in English but for
> the first class and I still remember the first class, I really don't understand
> anything about what the prof said. So I feel, I feel a little bit frustrated but I try
> to, try to look up some, uh, the resource I can use for, like I, I tried to make
> friends with the local student. I finally got the, the lady in the class, she's uh,
> she's very willing to offer me, to help so I talked to her to see whether she could
> help me and she offered lots of help for me to get me, to get through this class.
> And actually I got a good mark from this class. From the first class.

At first she admitted that she experienced self-doubt, wondering whether she

ought to quit, but then displayed resilience and sought out resources. Finally, she

achieved a successful outcome. For anyone entering a new culture, there are difficulties

to overcome in acclimatizing oneself to the new environment. Although this experience

happened prior to entering the Cooperative Education Program, it showed that learning a

new language makes the integration process even more difficult for international

students.

Lilly described her desire to experience learning English while living in China as

follows:

> And I, and I really love to learn English and I found that I always tried to improve
> my English in China but I found there's not chance for me because everybody
> around me just speak Chinese. And the only way I can learn is just by watching
> the English TV or listening to the English song or just, talk to some English-
> speaking people occasionally but not very often.

She went on to describe her initial experience studying English in Canada.

> Program for the new immigrant but later on I found out it's not workable for me because I found it's basically just wasting of my time. To study with all the other new immigrants that just speak a little, very little bit English and then spend six hours in SIAST and just learn the basic grammar, starting from the basic grammar.

Lilly, having studied English in China, was in a difficult position in that her English fluency was ahead of the programming available. Later, after gaining entry into the University of Regina, she struggled to understand the English spoken in her courses.

The Chinese students perceived an advantage in coming to Regina to study because of the relatively low Chinese-speaking population. They perceived that Regina offered an enhanced opportunity for English immersion. Dan described an acquaintance who came to Canada to study:

> They go to, went to Vancouver to study and they learn Cantonese. They're speaking Mandarin but they know Cantonese but they don't know English. Like three years later they just not get to graduate. They just nothing. Spending maybe three years in Canada but they learn Cantonese, not English.

Here, Dan addressed a concern that Liu (2008) refers to as clustering, where international students tend to gravitate to other students who speak their native language.

Cooperative education offers students an even greater English immersion experience than simply studying in a classroom setting. The Chinese participants identified the added benefit of being forced to speak English in the workplace. Further, research has shown that for linguistic, cultural, and psychological reasons, non-native English speakers are reluctant to participate verbally in classroom settings S. Kim (2008). The cooperative education work term requires students to speak with supervisors, co-workers and customers. It is in this setting that immersion is unavoidable. Dan described how his supervisor gave him the opportunity to speak to customers:

> He talks to me, "even though English is your second language, you are not familiar, but when you are here, I want you to practice your language. So I just give you a position with receiving calls." He said, "I will help you try to improve your languages."

In this case, Dan had no choice but to improve his English-speaking skills. He went on to explain how his supervisor was patient and supported him when he was having difficulty understanding a concept and how he felt that the experience helped him to gain confidence. Beyond simply learning to speak better English, Dan learned how to better communicate with people in a Canadian work setting. This aspect of cooperative education confirms Cord and Clements (2010) assertion that internships help students gain non-technical skills that are crucial to career success.

English language immersion may, however, be limited by the willingness of the employer to allow international students to interact with stakeholders. Lilly actually identified how her co-workers would not give her the opportunity to speak with customers.

> No, actually I think I can handle that. Just like contacting customers because the purpose, one of the purposes, I work in, I got the co-op job is to get more chance to improve my English. Like problem solving, cause I have a chance to talk with a customer, I can deal with some changing events and then use my skills. Many things. But I couldn't get this opportunity.

Lilly and her co-workers shared a common supervisor but her co-workers were responsible for assigning her work. When I asked Lilly why she thought her colleagues were limiting her ability to communicate with customers, her response was as follows:

> Well, I just feel, I just feel that they try to protect themselves…yeah, trying to protect their own job because, well if they will teach me more what to do, they will have more threat to be replaced. I don't, well if I were them, I don't mind because, well this only a job because we come up here to learn things.

In describing how this scenario made her feel Lilly admitted that she was disappointed. She felt that the dynamics of her work environment limited the contribution of her work term to her overall academic experience.

Developing Relationships within the Work Environment

The participants faced a variety work environments during their cooperative education experiences. Lekan compared completing assignments for his supervisor with the way he was treated by classmates during a group project.

> A lot of International students are in groups with Canadian students get that pissed off when. Let's say we are in group of five and we write a paper. I have to submit my portion of the paper with my work. I have to submit my portion of the paper and give you like, two pages. But they say the paper should be like five pages so I gave them two pages. If five people put two pages down, that is ten pages. So I'm expecting my, what I contributed should be in the paper. And when the paper comes out and what I find is you only use two or three lines of what I gave you.

Lekan immediately went on to describe how his work was evaluated by his director by saying, "every time, I write a part for my director, he's always, he tears it apart. Because he wants something perfect. So I'm continuously, you take it apart on and on, on and on."

Among his classmates, Lekan's work was essentially ignored. Only a very small portion of his contribution made its way into the final paper. On the other hand, when he submitted written work to his supervisor, it was criticized repeatedly until Lekan was able to provide a satisfactory product. In the first scenario, he felt that his work was disregarded whereas in the second, his work was criticized, but valued. Lekan was held accountable and was forced to improve, with the support of his supervisor.

In some of the participants' work environments, there was a discrepancy between the type of work that their employer was willing to give them and the type of work that they believed they were capable of completing. In Lilly's case, she felt frustrated and disappointed as illustrated in the following passage:

> Well, of course I feel disappointed because I spent eight months. I just want to try to learn, to learn something out of my classroom or get some chance to apply something that I learned from the class. But all I can do, all I got was just filing, the data entry, copying. Nothing much. Give me some chance for working. I had some chance some chance to work in office environment but not much big value added in my academic.

It should be noted that the nature of cooperative education is such that students may be given progressive responsibilities or they may be hired to complete a specific task that does not change throughout the length of the work term. Lilly's situation was somewhat unique in that there was more progressive work available which she simply was not allowed to complete. From her comments, it is unclear whether Lilly was viewed as incapable of taking on greater responsibility or if her co-workers were simply unwilling to coach her. Part of her frustration resulted from this distinction not having been made clear as was revealed in her journal.

> Most of my job is dealing with machines. Sometimes I wish I could have more chance to deal with people. Most of the communications are restricted within the organization. Everyday's work is a whole set of routine. I wish the job could be more challenging.

Lilly felt that she was limited in her ability to perform tasks that were either challenging or allowed her to learn new skills. Much of Lilly's dissatisfaction stemmed from the lack of support and inclusion that she felt she failed to receive from her co-workers.

> When lunch time has come, the lady who I work with didn't offer me any help and then went to lunch directly. I think to myself whether I am just busy in working for nothing. In a team, everyone should cooperate with each other but the

lady just left me to work alone without any appreciation. I wonder if they just don't care about teamwork.

Although the participants were in professional environments, each individual faced a number of different circumstances. Their experiences were largely impacted by the participants' relationships with their co-workers and supervisors. In most cases, the participants worked in welcoming and supportive environments, however, there were a few instances where they had difficulty with co-workers. In addition to Lilly who felt frustrated by a lack of challenge, Dan found one of his co-workers to be rude. After an altercation with this individual, he went to his immediate supervisor who told him "no, she's … doing this kind of thing to everybody".

I expected that the students would undergo a period of loneliness in the work place as Hsieh (2007) suggests this is a common experience among international students entering a new culture. Only Lilly described a situation where she felt isolated, mostly attributing it to the fact that her co-workers did not include her in their personal conversations. All the other participants appeared to develop meaningful relationships in their work places, which probably lessened experiences of loneliness.

There were a number of comments by the participants indicating that they were surprised by the informality of their workplaces. Seriki articulated this observation when he described how his supervisor kept her office door open.

> Well one of the interesting things, with one of the coordinators which was overseeing summer students is whenever she was in her office, she would literally, intentionally open her door, so that, okay you can walk in and talk to her.

He went on to describe his first day at work when he showed up somewhat overdressed.

> Yeah, on my first day there, I showed up with a jacket, you know dress shoes, dress pants, thinking, "okay, okay, you know, let's do this." And some of them

> were looking at me strangely. "Who is this guy? Is he from head office? What's he doing dressed up like that?"

Seriki claimed that he was not embarrassed by this situation but found it to be refreshing and was pleasantly surprised by the cordiality of his workplace. Similarly, Lekan commented how he was impressed that he was able to meet the Deputy Minister. When I asked him how someone in a similar position in Nigeria would be treated, he provided a stark contrast.

> Those are the guys that would be protected by Police or be EDC. I call Robert, Robert is my DM. I call Robert by his first name, "Hi, good morning Robert, hi." He's gonna walk right to my cube, and talk to us.

Lekan went on to describe how this same deputy minister brought tools from home to hang a white board in their office. In both cases, the informal nature of their work environments led them to feel more welcomed and comfortable.

The participants identified a number of other instances where their colleagues made them feel included and valued. They reported spending time with their colleagues outside of work and Seriki mentioned that he had been invited to a party at his supervisor's home. Although Lilly believed that she was not treated well by her immediate co-workers, she described being welcomed by her department manager.

> I can remember once I went into the Vice President of Finance office and I required him to get the signature for the cheque and then because I was, my manager took me there and the Vice President even came up to shake hands with me and just greet me and so yeah, so in my impression of the very high level person like general manager always like straight in the face and never smile but in [my company] the managers are friendly because I think they try to get the employee to get things done so they must be friendly.

Lilly's experience was echoed by Lekan in his first journal entry.

> I am supposed to work on the executive floor where all the executives are: this includes the deputy minister, the three assistant deputy ministers, the chief

technology officer and all the executive directors… From day one, I knew I would be reporting to the director which was pretty unusual for me and a big deal for me, though the beginning was scary as I believe I will need to perform extra hard to satisfy my director.

Lilly articulated the difference between Canadian and Chinese work environments in her journal when she wrote, "I found most of the managers are very nice and courteous to the normal employees. Comparing the behaviour of managers in China, I found the Canadian is much more open-minded to communication". This sentiment was echoed by all of the participants in that they were pleasantly surprised by how informal and accessible managers were towards their subordinates.

The fact that the participants highlighted the informality of their workplaces is of note, given that the participants were of African and Asian origins, specifically from Nigeria and China. According to Hofstede (2001), power distance scores are high in both African and Asian countries. Power distance is defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (such as the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally" (p. 62). If the participants are culturally inclined to accept high levels of power differential, it is understandable that they would be surprised by the level of access they had to high-level managers in their respective organizations.

According to Berry (1997), when a dominant and non-dominant culture interact, the outcome will be integration, assimilation, separation or marginalization. In this study, three of the participants appeared to experience integration while one experienced separation. Berry suggests that integration occurs "when the dominant society is open and inclusive in its orientation towards cultural diversity" (p. 10). With the exception of Lilly,

supervisors and co-workers took some interest in the culture of the participants. In the case of Lilly, however, little effort was made to make her feel included and cultural differences were essentially ignored. The three participants who had experiences most resembling integration were all men. Although I did not set out to explore gender differences among international students in this study, this may be an area for future exploration.

Summary

The four themes found in the data provide a comprehensive overview of the topic of international students' experiences in the Cooperative Education Program at the University of Regina. The students initially entered cooperative education because they perceived that doing so would be advantageous to their future careers. Having experienced the program, they identified experiential learning as a significant component. They struggled with the challenges of learning a new culture along with a new language. They experienced both positive and negative aspects of relationships within the work place. These four themes mirror much of what is discussed in the literature.

Opportunity for career advancement was the largest and most prominent theme discussed. The participants constantly scanned their environments for greater opportunities. Initially, they experienced difficulty finding work terms and in some cases, they took positions below their skill level. In the case of Dan and Seriki, they were able to overcome this adversity. Dan found a different work term while Seriki made an effort to look beyond his assigned tasks and tried to relate his curriculum to his surroundings. Lilly was not able to draw the same meaning or positive outcome from her work term, largely as a result of the dynamics of her work environment, which she felt were not

conducive helping her develop her skills and grow professionally. Finally, with respect to career advancement, the participants recognized the importance of networking with people who might later impact their career paths.

Cooperative education as experiential learning was a smaller yet still significant theme. Although cooperative education provides a chance for students to gain work experience, the program also contains academic benefits. All but one of the participants recognized and discussed the interrelatedness of their academic and work experiences.

Perhaps the most complex and challenging theme for me as the researcher was navigating a new culture and language. This theme reflects the characteristics that separate international students from domestic students. Each participant had unique experiences with respect to culture and language.

Language also led to integration challenges for the Chinese participants, which the Nigerian participants did not experience as a result of being native English speakers. Improving their language skills was a priority for both Lilly and Dan and, in Dan's case, was a factor in his decision to choose the University of Regina. Dan and Lilly reported very different experiences within their work terms. Lilly was limited in her ability to interact with customers and colleagues while Dan was given greater opportunity to improve his language skills.

The participants also reported varying relationships within their work terms. Lekan found that he was valued more by his colleagues and supervisor on his work term than he was by his classmates during academic terms. He felt like he fit in well at his office and made friends among his colleagues. Lilly's experience differed in that she felt socially excluded by her co-workers and was not allowed to advance to tasks that are

more complex. Seriki and Dan made friends easily and were invited to events that other students were not. Finally, all the participants were surprised and impressed with the informality of Canadian work environments and especially how employees could communicate freely with people at different levels in the organizational hierarchy.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of international students participating in the Cooperative Education Program at the University of Regina. Four international students agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews. Four major themes emerged from the data, which have implications for both Cooperative Education Coordinators and the program itself. I have combined the findings from this study, the literature and my own experience to recommend some steps that can be taken to better serve international cooperative education students.

Summary of Findings

The participants in this case study highlighted the important role that cooperative education plays in furthering their careers. At the same time, they identified a number of challenges associated with being students in the program. In terms of furthering their careers, the cooperative education program allowed them to develop a network of contacts and gain Canadian work experience they felt would enhance their job prospects. This opportunity to network is especially important for international students who lack the contacts sometimes enjoyed by their Canadian counterparts. Through the cooperative education placements, the participants were able to build relationships with their supervisors and colleagues, who in turn were able to act as advocates and mentors, helping them remove barriers to future job opportunities. These findings are similar to those of Lum and Grabke (2012) who found that immigrants "…viewed [cooperative education] as key to gaining Canadian work experience and as a means of building social networks and friendships that would help them gain employment in the future" (p. 42).

With respect to challenges, the participants reported difficulty in finding work placements and attributed this to their lack of understanding of local employer organizations and their hiring practices. They were aware that cultural differences played a part in their experience. Once the participants had secured their placements, they reported that workplaces differed with respect to the way they treated cultural diversity. In some workplaces, multicultural differences were openly discussed. In other organizations, the participants expressed discomfort with the way cultural differences were handled. Where cultural differences were openly discussed, there was an opportunity for mutual learning. This type of learning occurred in informal social interactions between participants and other employees rather than through formally organized initiatives.

Implications for the Cooperative Education Program

Given the growing diversity of the students in cooperative education, these programs need to be more inclusive when they provide job search readiness training. To increase international students' familiarity with host employers, the Cooperative Education Program should organize tours of host company sites as well as develop customized training workshops that focus on job search skills. These tours would help international students gain a better understanding of local hiring practices and employer expectations. Workshops should include practice writing resumes, role-playing interviews and training on local customs and etiquette.

Establishing employer orientation workshops will provide an opportunity for program coordinators to dialogue with employers on issues facing international students. The workshops should also be an opportunity to inform employers of the benefits and

opportunities of hiring international students to potentially alleviate any concerns associated with hiring them and to address ways of meeting challenges. While many international students do not have prior work experience, the workshops will emphasize other advantages they bring to employers in this globalized economy such as multilingualism, familiarity with different cultures and fresh perspectives. More effectively branding international students as a competitive advantage to employers will help to remove barriers to their placement.

Students entering the cooperative education program are a culturally diverse group. As such, there is a need for cooperative education coordinators to become more culturally responsive to the needs of these students. As part of their professional development, both cooperative education coordinators and administrative staff will benefit from programs that foster cross-cultural understanding. Collaborative training with other parts of the university that offer this type of professional development should be explored.

The Cooperative Education Program at the University of Regina is voluntary and is currently only marketed to students in participating programs. However, as this study demonstrates, cooperative education can be especially important to international students in that it provides them with the opportunity to network and gain Canadian work experience. For this reason, the university should consider extending the cooperative education program to other areas at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Limitations of the research

As my goal was to examine the particular situation of four international students, the findings are not generalizable. As well, the work environments the students were

placed in were unique, making it impossible to generalize to other contexts but offering the possibility of transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Although I always attempted to listen to the voices to the participants, I acknowledge that my own role as a cooperative education practitioner was significant in this research. I entered the research with a degree of bias gained through personal observation and experience. I also held a position of power in relation to the participants. Throughout the research process, I tried to be cognizant of my own opinions and biases to ensure that the data authentically reflects the participants' experience.

Recommendations for Further Research

Research on the topic of international students participating in cooperative education is underreported in the literature. As the number of international students in Western universities increases, so too will the numbers of international students participating in cooperative education programs. Research that explores the experience of international students from other regions of the world will provide a richer understanding from different cultural perspectives. Further research that examines the career and academic implications of cooperative education on international students could also help programs better serve students. Although studies on cooperative education suggest that participation in these experiential programs enhance an individual's chances of future employment, networking is not explicitly cited as a benefit. Future research that looks at the benefits of networking for international students could provide greater insight into the role of networking on their career outcomes. Finally, conducting a longitudinal qualitative study of the experiences of international cooperative education students would offer more evidence of the benefits of participating in the program.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this research is to better understand the experiences of international students in cooperative education. I decided to research this topic because of the increasing diversity in the Cooperative Education Program. Findings from this research indicate the participants' careers were their primary concern. The participants found that cooperative education gave them the opportunity to network, which was important in helping them achieve their career aspirations. Students were aware of the role of culture in their experience. This study indicates the need for cooperative education practitioners to recognize the diversity of their students and to make changes to their programs to address the unique challenges facing international students.

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Appendix A

University of Regina

OFFICE OF RESEARCH SERVICES
MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 26, 2011

TO: Ian Morrison

FROM: Dr. Bruce Plouffe
Chair, Research Ethics Board

Re: Bridging the Divide: A Narrative Study of International Students in Cooperative Education (File #97S1011)

Please be advised that the University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed your proposal and found it to be:

☑ 1. APPROVED AS SUBMITTED. Only applicants with this designation have ethical approval to proceed with their research as described in their applications. For research lasting more than one year (Section 1F). **ETHICAL APPROVAL MUST BE RENEWED BY SUBMITTING A BRIEF STATUS REPORT EVERY TWELVE MONTHS.** Approval will be revoked unless a satisfactory status report is received. Any substantive changes in methodology or instrumentation must also be approved prior to their implementation.

☐ 2. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO MINOR CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB.** Do not submit a new application. Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.

☐ 3. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB.** Do not submit a new application. Once changes are deemed acceptable. ethical approval will be granted.

☐ 4. UNACCEPTABLE AS SUBMITTED. The proposal requires substantial additions or redesign. Please contact the Chair of the REB for advice on how the project proposal might be revised.

Dr. Bruce Plouffe
Dr. Bruce Plouffe

cc: Dr. Marilyn Miller – Faculty of Education

** supplementary memo should be forwarded to the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at the Office of Research Services (Research and Innovation Centre, Room 109) or by e-mail to research.ethics@uregina.ca

Phone: (306) 585-4775
Fax: (306) 585-4893
www.uregina.ca/research

Appendix B

Dear International Student,

On behalf of the Cooperative (Co-op) Education Program at the University of Regina, I would like to invite you to participate in a study entitled *Bridging the divide: A narrative study of international students in Cooperative Education*. This study is being conducted by Ian Morrison, Co-op Coordinator for Business Administration as part of the requirement for the degree of Masters of Adult Education. The purpose of this research is to examine the experience of international students participating in the Co-o Program here at the University of Regina. It is hoped that any information gained from this study will help Ian and his colleagues better serve the needs of international students in Co-op.

This study will occur in two phases. In the first phase, you will be asked to keep a journal throughout your work term. Upon agreeing to participate, Ian will meet with you for a brief period (approximately 30 minutes) where he will provide you with an orientation to journaling. The second phase of the study will be an interview that will occur at the end of your work term. The interview will occur at a mutually agreeable time and place and will take approximately two hours. You will be asked questions directly related to your experience in the Co-op program.

I want to thank you in advance for your consideration and I ask that you respond to Ian by June 7. Ian can be reached at ian.morrison@uregina.ca. I want to assure you that whether or not you agree to participate will have no bearing on your success in our program.

Sincerely,

Kevin Bolen, BAdmin, MHRM

Director, Student Employment and Engagement,

University of Regina

Appendix C

Interview Questions:

1. What led you to decide to come to Regina to study?
2. Why did you decide to participate in Co-op?
3. Describe your first experience of trying to find a job? What was the process like?
4. What was your first work term like? (probe: Were there things that were unfamiliar? How were you treated? Did you make friends?)
5. Did your experience in Co-op change as you continued through your first and subsequent work terms?
6. Were there things that were difficult for you to understand or cope with?
7. Did participating in Co-op help you in any way? Are there things that could have been done differently?
8. Any other comments?

Appendix D

Participant Consent Form

Project Title: Bridging the divide: A narrative study of international students in Cooperative Education

Researcher(s): Ian Morrison, Faculty of Education, Graduate Student (I am also the Cooperative Education Coordinator, Business Administration), University of Regina, XXX-XXX-XXXX, ian.morrison@uregina.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Marilyn Miller, Faculty of Education, 306-585-4124, marilyn.miller@uregina.ca

Purpose(s) and Objective(s) of the Research:

- This research seeks to better understand the experience of international students in cooperative education (Co-op). Additionally, the researcher hopes to engage in self exploration to determine how, as a Co-op Coordinator, he can contribute to and facilitate student success.

Procedures:

- The participant will be required to keep a journal while taking part in their work term. An orientation to journaling will be provided. Upon completion of the work term, the participant will be required to participate in an interview of approximately two hours in length. The interviews will take place on campus at the University of Regina at a mutually agreeable location. Possible locations may be study rooms on the sixth floor of the Education Building or study rooms in the Research and Innovation Centre. The interviews will be audio recorded and, later, transcribed.
- Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study or your role.

Potential Risks:

- There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research**.**

Potential Benefits:

- It is hoped that this research will contribute to our knowledge of international students in Cooperative Education. Little research has been conducted in the area of international students participating in Co-op placements. It is hoped that this research will provide information about the experience of international students, which may lead to providing a higher quality of service.

Confidentiality:

- The names of the participants will be changed to protect anonymity. Efforts will be taken to conceal identifying characteristics in the final thesis.
- Audio recordings and digital copies of the written transcripts will be stored on a memory stick, which will be kept in the researcher's locked office along with any hard copies of the interview transcripts. Digital files of the interview recordings, whether audio files or files containing written transcripts may also be stored on the researcher's password protected computer.
- **Storage of Data: [***If data will be anonymous, this section may be omitted***]**
  - The data will be destroyed once the minimum period of storage, required by the University of Regina, has lapsed.

Right to Withdraw:

- Your participation is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort.
- Whether or not you choose to participate in this study will have no influence on your Co-op experience.
- Whether you choose to participate or not will also have no effect on your position at the University of Regina as a whole [e.g. employment, class standing, access to services] or how you will be treated.
- Should you wish to withdraw, any data associated with you will be destroyed immediately.
- Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until the data gained from all participants has bee analyzed. After this it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

Follow up:

- To obtain results from the study, please contact the researcher at ian.morrison@uregina.ca.

Questions or Concerns:

- Contact the researcher(s) using the information at the top of page 1;
- This project has been approved on ethical grounds by the UofR Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the committee at [585-4775 or research.ethics@uregina.ca]. Out of town participants may call collect.

Option 1 - SIGNED CONSENT

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my/our questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Name of Participant	*Researcher's Signature*	*Date*