A NARRATIVE AND POST-/ANTI-COLONIAL APPROACH TO
UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF FOREIGN CERTIFIED TEACHERS IN
RURAL SASKATCHEWAN SCHOOLS

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by
James Alan Oloo
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James Alan Oloo, candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education, has presented a thesis titled, *A Narrative and Post-/Anti-Colonial Approach to Understanding the Experiences of Foreign Certified Teachers in Rural Saskatchewan Schools*, in an oral examination held on December 16, 2015. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

**External Examiner:** Dr. Paul R. Carr, Université du Québec

**Supervisor:** Dr. Ken Montgomery, Faculty of Education

**Committee Member:** Dr. Patrick Lewis, Faculty of Education

**Committee Member:** **Dr. Lee Schaefer, Faculty of Education**

**Committee Member:** Dr. Marc Spooner, Faculty of Education

**Committee Member:** Dr. Louis Awanyo, Luther College

**Chair of Defense:** Dr. Karen Eisler, Faculty of Nursing

*Via Skype

**Not present at defense
ABSTRACT

This study takes a narrative approach toward understanding experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan classrooms. It grew out of my own experiences as a teacher of refugee students in my native country of Kenya and as an international graduate student and teacher assistant at a Canadian university. The study explores experiences of four foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. The experiences are situated within postcolonial and anti-colonial frameworks. Field text inquiry involved two main processes: highlighting “commonalities, connections and patterns” (Lewis & Adeney, 2014, p. 168) in the experiences of the foreign certified teachers, and identifying the “unique moments that stand out” (p. 168) in each individual study participant narratives. Implications for foreign certified teachers, school administration, teachers, students and parents, and further research are presented.
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DEDICATION

To the memory of my Dad Pius Oloo and my brother David Oloo

And to all foreign certified teachers
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 My story

I received my Bachelor of Education degree from Maseno University College, Kenya in 1998. Soon after graduating, I took up a job as a high school teacher of mathematics and social studies at Kakuma Refugee Camp in Northern Kenya. Almost 90 percent of my students were refugees from neighbouring countries and had lived in the refugee camps from between six months and eight years. Many were from non-English speaking countries of Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Kenya uses English as the official language and language of instruction in its schools. The experience made me look at issues from the point of view of the students – I was a ‘foreign’ teacher, the curriculum was different, as well as language and accents. Further, as refugees, the students had many challenges in their personal lives which could not be divorced from their lives as students.

After teaching for about one year, I joined the master of education program at the University of Lethbridge in Southern Alberta, Canada. At the University of Lethbridge, I realized that I could work towards getting Alberta teacher certification while continuing with my master of education program. Most of my colleagues in the master of education program were working as teachers and hoped to become school administrators such as vice principals or principals when they completed the program. Soon after graduating in 2002, I got a teaching job in Southern Alberta.

My native language is Luo. I also speak Swahili. While I have been speaking English from a young age, compared to how most people in Lethbridge, Alberta, and
Canada, in general, pronounce English words, I describe my English as having an accent. This was a challenge at times in my verbal communication within and outside the schools - considering the fact that according to 2001 Census Canada data, the population of the City of Lethbridge was just over 67,000 and was not very diverse in terms of ethnic and racialized minority population. Except for one Caribbean and one Aboriginal teacher, all the teachers in my school were white. Most of my students were also white. In the initial months as a teacher, I realized that some of my students had difficulty with my accent. However, as time went by, the accent seemed not to be an issue as indicated by anonymous feedback from my students.

Cultural differences were hard to ignore. Student discipline and the way some students were assertive even aggressive in demanding better grades were a big contrast to what I had known prior to stepping into Canadian classrooms.

During the time I was in Lethbridge, the number of African families in Southern Alberta was starting to grow. I could identify with the experiences of the African students, especially those from refugee backgrounds. I was the founding Vice-President of Southern Alberta Afro-Canadian Association. Twice a week, I held two-hour classes after regular school hours free of charge to offer additional academic coaching to students who were interested. Many who attended were African. About 12 students between ages seven and 18 who were attending three different schools in Lethbridge never missed any of the sessions.

Many black parents (please note that this study does not in any way intend to essentialize identity by the use of such terminology as white, black, and Aboriginal. However, I recognize that “group and collective experiences have [often] been shaped, to
varying degrees, by racial identification” (Lund & Carr, 2010, p. 230)) regarded me a member of their families and always invited me to their homes and sought my advice regarding their children’s education. One day, when I was talking on Skype with my mother who is in Kenya, she told me that a lady whose two children were attending my academic coaching sessions had called her to say thank you for how I touched her children’s lives. As a teacher, that to me outweighs any challenges I may have experienced.

My relationship with students racialized as white and their parents was different but just as good. Most of my students had not travelled outside Canada, United States or the Caribbean. What many of them knew about Africa or black people was mainly through the media. My social studies classes created a good environment to build a positive relationship with my students. Once this was established, my relationship with their parents was generally very positive.

As a student in Kenya, I often had teachers who were ‘different.’ I had three teachers at Kisumu Boys High School who were from other countries where they earned their teaching credentials and worked as teachers before coming to Kenya. Mrs. Msitwa the chemistry teacher was from Uganda. Mr. Chawdhry, English teacher was Pakistani, and Mwalimu Shabani, the Kiswahili teacher, was from Tanzania. When I was taking my undergraduate degree in education in Kenya, I had professors from Uganda, Ghana, and Cyprus. I later had a German immigrant professor at the University of Lethbridge’s master of education program. As a foreign certified teacher and doctoral student in Canada, my professional and academic experience has enhanced my understanding of and appreciation for my foreign trained educators. Looking back, I regard them as ‘star
teachers’ who were not only successful in what they did in the classroom, but also how they “built instructional lessons from our cultural frames of reference … held high expectations for students, understood our cultural backgrounds, and used a political lens to motivate us … to succeed academically” (Beck, 2010, p. 65).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) contend that research interests within social sciences are often influenced by the researchers’ own personal and professional storied experiences. This study has been influenced by my personal, academic, and professional experiences. I come from a “position of theoretical and methodological pluralism” (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 420) with education (bachelor of education and master of education degrees) and public policy (master of public policy) backgrounds as well as experience working in the public service as a policy analyst and as a classroom teacher. Over the past four years, I have been working as the research coordinator at the Gabriel Dumont Institute, a Métis-owned educational, employment, and cultural institute. The Métis, together with First Nations and Inuit, makes up Aboriginal population of Canada. I have published papers on diverse fields in peer reviewed journals and non-academic magazines. These include performance measurement within a Canadian municipality (Oloo, 2011), quality assurance of degree programming in Alberta, Norway, and Kenya (Oloo, 2010), Aboriginal education in British Columbia (Oloo, 2007), and child mortality in developing countries (Oloo, 2005). My articles have also appeared in the Saskatoon and Region Chamber of Commerce magazine (Oloo, 2015), and the Saskatchewan Business and Industry North (Oloo, 2013).

I regard myself as occupying a ‘hybrid’ position within social research. This hybridity emerged gradually from when I was a student at Kisumu Boys High School in
Western Kenya where I had teachers from other countries, and later, as a teacher at Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya. In both cases I was always amazed by the power of the storied experiences of foreign teachers and refugee students. These were further influenced by my interests in narrative epistemologies as well as the colonial and postcolonial histories of Kenya and African countries where the refugee students and the foreign teachers were from. In a similar vein, I have been interested in the history of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada ever since I first met an Aboriginal person in 1999.

Years of conversations with students (refugee and/or immigrant children in Kenya and Alberta, Canada) and other teachers (including teacher assistants, foreign certified teachers, and university professors in Canada) about our individual experiences at a home far from home drew me to the power of narrative as a way to understand human experience. Further, as Mauthner and Doucet (2003) write,

The ‘choices’ we make in our research with regard to ontological and epistemological positioning, methodological and theoretical perspective, and the adoption of particular research methods are bound up not only with our personal or academic biographies, nor are they motivated exclusively by intellectual concerns. The interpersonal, political and institutional contexts in which researchers are embedded also play a key role in shaping these ‘decisions.’ (p. 421)

Such interpersonal and institutional contexts have more or less been shaped by the stories of my mentors and past and current professors. These include Dr. Erika Hasebe-Ludt (University of Lethbridge), Dr. Samson Madera Nashon (University of British Columbia), and Dr. Patrick Renihan (University of Saskatchewan). I am privileged to
have met the three scholars who variously describe themselves as educators who immigrated to Canada as adults, and had conversations with each one of them about our experiences. Equally important are the conversations I have had with immigrant students, parents, and participants in this study. These have not only enhanced my belief in the importance of stories, but they have also influenced my choice of academic texts and perspectives that I bring to this study.

It is from this background that I enter this narrative research into storied experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) articulate, “stories matter and … we are interested in knowing the stories that … people live and tell” (p. 71). They continue, “Inquiry … into those stories that people live and tell, also matters” (p. 71). While I have “approached the topic of narrative from particular standpoints, as all investigators do” (Reissman & Quinney, 2005, p. 392), I take up Squire, Andres, and Tamboukou’s (2012) view that “narrative research which is based on conversations between people is invariably a process of ongoing negotiation of meaning” (p. 299). And because “all narratives are, in a fundamental sense, co-constructed,” (Salmon & Resissman, 2008, p. 80), a “central area of narrative study is human interaction in relationships” (Reissman & Quinney, p. 392).

The perspectives I bring into the study can potentially “filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). This study is an “extension of [my] understanding of the worlds [I] seek to more fully comprehend” (Ramanathan, 2005, p. 291). I am honoured by the opportunity of being able to listen to
the stories of the foreign certified teachers and hope that this study has helped create a
space for their voices to be heard.

1.2 Background

As stated above, this study grew out of my reflections on my experience as a
Kenyan who received teacher education and worked as a classroom teacher in Kenya
before coming to Canada as an international graduate student. My experiences as a
graduate student and as a teacher in Canada, and conversations with other foreign
certified teachers as well as international students and foreign trained teachers who are
working towards their teaching credentials in Canadian universities have made me realize
that much is not known by stakeholders – such as teachers, parents, school
administrators, policy makers – about foreign certified teachers. There is little
information about where foreign certified teachers come from, their journey to Canadian
classrooms, their experiences, challenges they face, their strengths and coping strategies,
and their contributions to education in Canada. This relative lack of understanding about
foreign certified teachers could lead to or reinforce existing prejudice towards these
teachers especially in those areas that tend to be less ethnically diverse such as rural
Saskatchewan.

In this study, foreign certified teachers refer to practicing teachers in
Saskatchewan who were born, educated, and accredited to teach in a country outside
Canada, and who have also received teacher certification in Saskatchewan. As discussed
in more detail in Chapter Four, the foreign certified teachers who participated in this
study are from Hong Kong (China), India, Nigeria, and Poland.
While much has been written about schooling in rural Saskatchewan (Preston, 2006; Ralph, 2003; Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit, 2003; Wotherspoon, 1998), the stories of foreign certified teachers in Saskatchewan schools have received little attention to date. Perhaps, this is because the very notion of foreign certified teachers “tends to go against the grain: teachers are seen … as representations of the culture, responsible for passing” its norms and ways of knowing to the next generation, and so “one would not expect this important task to be put in the hands of newcomers to the culture” (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004, p. 389). Teaching might then be deeply infused with conceptions of ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 2006) subtly reproducing inclusions and exclusions that shape who belongs and who does not, who is legitimately positioned to speak for the nation, its values, cultures, traditions, narratives, and its constitutive provinces and professions.

If, as Elbaz-Luwisch (2004) has argued, teachers represent and transmit a society’s culture and ways of knowing, then the foreign certified teacher finds him/herself in the in-between space within the culture of their native home that they have left behind (although the culture continues to be a part of them) and the culture of their new home that is Saskatchewan. As discussed in Chapter Four, sometimes there are tensions between these two cultures, for example, with respect to student-teacher relationships and classroom management. Bannerji (2000) examined the paradox of “both belonging and non-belonging simultaneously” (p. 65) which shapes the lives of newcomers to the society: they live in the community and participate in its socioeconomic wellbeing, yet they “are nevertheless racialized as outsiders, as not being ‘real’ Canadians” (Thobani, 2003, p. 408).
In the case of Saskatchewan, Schick and St. Denis (2005) note that due to the relatively small in-migration to the province, Saskatchewan has maintained a steady dominant population of descendants of European settlers. Schick and St. Denis further assert that “the presumed stability of a white population serves dominant discourses that marginalize” racialized minority groups (p. 297). However, white supremacy (Stanley, 2011) and denials of racism (Montgomery, 2013) are a common phenomenon in most parts of Canada where the myth that Canada is a raceless society endures (Montgomery, 2005). While, according to Stanley (Chia, 2011), “racism was built into Canadian state formation and social relations” (para. 2), racist acts have often been viewed as exceptional events, or as Montgomery puts it, “individualized problems of psychological or moral deficit … that can be easily eradicated or stopped wherever they are seen to start” (p. 3). But this is seldom the case. Montgomery (2005) found that history textbooks used in Ontario schools imply that racism no longer exists in Canada. The work of Stanley (2000), Thobani (2007), and Montgomery (2005) illustrate that Canada has often been ‘imagined’ in racialized terms such as that it becomes possible, even normal, to view the less dominant cultural groups as other or as ‘non-members’. Yet, regardless of inequalities even within the imagined community itself, the community “is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson, 2006, p. 7) as if official multiculturalism has rid the country and the school system of racism and other systemic discriminatory practices. And therein lays the crucial challenge not just for foreign certified teachers, but also for teacher educators at Canadian universities. Montgomery (2013) writes that attempts to disrupt “denials of racism … and silencing of racialized non-whites has been frustrated by the fact that getting racialized whites … to simply
acknowledge their privilege and power continues to be a huge challenge in many teacher education classrooms” (p. 3) Montgomery (2013) points out that “even a greater challenge is to facilitate an understanding among racialized white students … that such power has not been accrued via egalitarian and meritocratic means” (p. 3).

Arun (2008) submits that while most studies on teacher experiences have identified barriers to employment for foreign certified teachers; little research has examined the foreign certified teachers’ narratives of professional experiences. Iredale (2001) suggests that understanding the unique perspectives of foreign certified teachers is key to creating and implementing effective programs for recruitment, mentorship, and professional development of such teachers. Consequently, there is a need to narratively explore the foreign certified teachers’ experiences in order to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse Saskatchewan student population and to ensure a positive transition for foreign certified teachers into rural Saskatchewan.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to unfold and understand foreign certified teachers’ lived experiences on professional knowledge landscapes in rural Saskatchewan, an environment that is different from the one in which they themselves were raised, educated, and worked as teachers. The study aims to shed light on the challenges faced by foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools and how they meet those challenges, the qualities and strengths that the foreign certified teachers bring with them to rural Saskatchewan schools, and to highlight their positive experiences and factors that contribute to those experiences.
With this goal in mind, I examined experiences of four foreign certified teachers using a version of methodological hybridity that draws from narrative research. As a research methodology within qualitative research, narrative research is a “means for inquiring into storied experiences” (Griffin, Ciuffetelli-Parker, & Kitchen, 2010, p. 2). “Narratives of personal experience... are ubiquitous in everyday life... telling stories about past events seems to be a universal human activity” (Riessman, 1993, pp. 2-3). As well, narrative methods emphasize the uniqueness of each human experience (Chase, 2005). The merits of inquiring narratively into the experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools include: 1) creating space for the teachers to tell and retell stories of their lived experiences; 2) the “first-person insight” resulting from the “voices of those who are traditionally marginalized,” will help create more understanding and possibly help inform educational policy and practice; and 3), help draw attention to foreign certified teachers “as a valuable and critical resource to increase the pool of potential teachers” (Carrison, 2007, p. 5).

1.4 Research questions

This dissertation is guided by the following overarching research question and sub-question: What are the professional experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools? How do the foreign certified teachers perceive their prior experiences as preparing them for their teaching roles in rural Saskatchewan?

1.5 Significance of the study

This study of lived experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools has useful implications for research and practice. Specifically, the study has implications for foreign certified teachers; the stakeholders at the schools where they
work, namely students, teachers, and parents; school and educational administration; teacher education programming; and research (see Chapter Seven).

Lewis (2011) points out that narrative researchers “hold the space for the story and the storyteller” because it “is through story that we may come to know, through the story of the other” (p. 506). Four study participants shared the stories of their experiences and the meanings they make of those experiences. While experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan may not be generalized, other foreign certified teachers will find this study useful as they get to learn from experiences of the study participants. In her research in shifting identities of academics in the United Kingdom, Trahar (2011) writes that “I am not seeking to make generalisable claims from this study, but rather to provide rich stories of … experiences of teaching in diverse … contexts” (p. 48). Trahar continues, “It would, however, be somewhat disingenuous to regard each story as unique, only telling me about that person’s experiences” (p. 48). This is because, as Riessman (2008) points out:

> What close narrative study of a single case can add is displaying how larger social structures insinuate their way into individual consciousness and identity, and how these socially constructed ‘selves’ are then performed for (and with) an audience, in this case the listener/interpreter. (Riessman, pp. 115–116).

This study will contribute to available research by providing multiple first-person narratives of foreign certified teachers in Saskatchewan; it will provide a unique insight into how experiences of foreign certified teachers contribute to qualities that these teachers bring to rural Saskatchewan classrooms. It will also contribute to areas that would benefit from exploration in the Saskatchewan context including development of
the most relevant teacher induction and professional development programs for foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. The study may also shed more light upon the educational workforce under-representing Canada’s cultural and linguistic diversity, and the need to disrupt the systemic structures and practices that create the so-called red tape or “bottlenecks” for foreign certified teachers to receive certification to teach in Canada (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009). Further, the findings of this study could be of specific interest to public policy makers who are involved in developing initiatives for internationally educated immigrants.

As the population of Saskatchewan increases (after registering a negative population growth of -1.1 percent between 1996 and 2001, the province saw its growth exceed the national average between 2006 and 2011, at 6.7 percent) fueled by both national and international migrations and becomes more ethnically diverse, experiences of foreign certified teachers in the province is a timely area of inquiry.

For school and educational administrators, this study will help create an understanding of the strengths that the foreign certified teachers bring with them to rural Saskatchewan schools as well as the challenges that they experience. Administrators may get to understand that the foreign certified teachers may be used to different styles of school leadership. Experiences of foreign certified teachers as retold in this study will enable school administrators to promote a school environment where their strengths and potential can be fully developed and used to enhance the teaching-learning experiences.

This study has implications for teacher education. Saskatchewan, like other jurisdictions in Canada and elsewhere, require foreign certified teachers to get the province’s teacher certification to be eligible to work as teachers in publicly funded
kindergarten to grade 12 education system. By becoming familiar with the experiences of the foreign certified teachers, teacher educators will be able to come up with strategies, processes or courses that may enable the foreign certified teachers to better meet some of the common challenges they are likely to face, such as those with respect to cultural differences and communication.

Finally, as Wesche (2004) reminds us,

(I)n an ever more interconnected world, in which people of diverse nationalities are increasingly called upon to communicate with one another and work together on common issues, it is crucial that the citizens and the leaders of powerful countries have the intercultural awareness and understanding of the world. (p. 279).

By holding a space for the narratives of experiences of foreign certified teachers, this study will play a role in increasing understanding of foreign certified teachers and promoting intercultural awareness in Saskatchewan schools. Further, by engaging with theories of postcolonialism and anti-colonialism, the study is able to interrogate experiences of study participants as adults who were born, raised, educated, and worked as teachers overseas before coming to Saskatchewan. The theoretical lenses used, namely Homi Bhabha’s hybridity, Edward Said’s Orientalized subject, and Gayatri Spivak’s Subalternity as well as anti-colonial perspectives, help problematize experiences of the study participants as foreigners in the settlers communities in rural Saskatchewan. The theoretical frameworks are also useful in interrogating the “continuing legacy of European imperialism and colonialism and … oppositional discourses of those who have
struggled against its lingering effects” (Tickly, p.147) as they relate to experiences of the foreign certified teachers.

1.6 Scope of the study

Drawing from multiple narrative approaches to narrative research, this study seeks to explore experiences of foreign certified teachers who 1) were born, raised, and received their teacher education outside Canada, 2) have worked as a teacher outside Canada, 3) speak English as a second or additional language, 4) migrated or immigrated to Canada as adults, 5) have gone through Saskatchewan’s credentialing process to become a teacher in Saskatchewan, and 6) have worked as full time teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools.

This study focuses on the personal narratives of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan how they construct meaning of those experiences through their stories. Although my focus was on narrativization of professional experiences, there was at times significant ambiguity between what might constitute professional and personal experiences of foreign certified teachers. Consequently, if participants deemed personal situations (such as those involving family, children, and finances) to be important in relation to their professional experiences, such narratives also formed part of my analysis.

1.7 Overview of the study

This chapter introduced the current study covering the research questions, scope and significance of the study, as well as my subjectivities as the researcher. Chapter Two is a review of literature relevant to understanding experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. It reviews literature on experiences of im/migrant professionals in general but emphasizes on salient themes in experiences of foreign certified teachers.
Chapter Three outlines a theoretical framework for the study, namely, postcolonial and anti-colonial theories. Chapter Four discusses narrative approaches that this study draws on to examine experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. In Chapter Five, I retell the stories of the study participants. In Chapter Six, I highlight the common themes in the study participant narrative accounts, and Chapter Seven is a discussion and implication of the study as well as the conclusion.
2.1 Introduction

Globalization and changes in Canadian immigration policies have contributed to increasing transnational flows of people to Canada in recent decades. One of the ways in which these changes have impacted education in Canada in general and Saskatchewan in particular is evidenced by the presence of foreign certified teachers. Such teachers have included those from non-European or non-native English-speaking backgrounds. In this chapter, I review literature on experiences of foreign certified teachers and other professionals who live and work in settler states such as Canada. Settler states are founded “by immigrant groups who assume a superordinate position vis-à-vis native inhabitants … [and] are organized around the settlers’ political domination over the indigenous populations” (Weitzer, 1990, p. 24). Often, settler states are resilient colonial formations rooted in racist ideology and practise (Montgomery, 2005).

A decade ago, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2003) predicted that western countries such as Canada were likely to experience a shortage of experienced teachers in the coming years. A few years later, the OECD recommended that its member countries could learn from each other through “sharing innovative and successful [teaching] initiatives, and … identify[ing] policy options for attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers” (OECD, 2005, p. 17). While Saskatchewan is not experiencing a teacher shortage (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011), many school divisions in the northern part of the province report much
difficulty in recruiting local/Saskatchewan teachers and thus hire many from outside the province, usually Ontario (K. Montgomery, Personal communication, October 7, 2014).

2.2 Who are foreign certified teachers?

Various terms have been used in research literature to describe a category of teachers that I am describing as foreign certified teachers. The terms include: foreign trained teachers (Flores & Huerta, 2008), immigrant teachers (Subedi, 2008), internationally trained teachers (Myles, Cheng & Wang, 2006), internationally educated teachers (Faez, 2007, Pollock, 2010), and visible minority teachers (Ng, 2006). As well, Myles, Cheng and Wang (2006) uses ‘internationally trained teachers’ to refer to teacher candidates with teacher qualifications from outside Canada.

Despite the different terminology used, the descriptions generally include: 1) teachers who got their teacher education and certification outside Canada, 2) immigrants who have held teaching positions abroad, 3) immigrants who teach in their host country, and 4) immigrant teachers and teacher candidates who study or work abroad. The term ‘immigrant teachers’ may have unintended meaning as it highlights the teacher’s immigration status in a host country (Zhao, 2012). The phrase ‘foreign certified teachers’ is used in this study to refer to teachers who earned their teacher education credentials outside Canada and who are currently working or have worked as teachers in Saskatchewan schools. Because each Canadian province has its own requirements for teacher credentialing, current teachers in Saskatchewan who have worked in Canadian schools outside Saskatchewan have presumably met additional qualifications in those provinces.
2.3 What are some of the experiences of foreign certified teachers?

Experiences of foreign trained professionals include initial challenges upon arrival in to the new country as they look for employment and as they settle in their new environment. As Pinars (1975) asks, “What is the experience of being ... a stranger in a land not one’s own?” (p. 399). For a foreign certified teacher, tensions and contradictions found in dichotomies of language, culture, ethnicity, and pedagogy become generative spaces to reflect on the experience (Lewko, 2009).

Collins and Reid (2012) asked foreign certified teachers in their study about the difficulties they have experienced in Australia. The teachers in this study responded by identifying problems with the bureaucratic systems and processes in the education system – which included varying registration procedures and requirements, getting their teacher qualifications recognized, and assessment of their English language proficiency; employment difficulties including challenges in securing permanent full-time teaching positions; and non-recognition or appreciation of credentials obtained outside Australia. Other difficulties noted by the foreign certified teachers were student behaviour which tended to point to lower levels of student discipline in Australian schools compared to the foreign certified teachers native countries; and cultural gap/way of doing things.

In her investigation of the professional integration of Russian immigrant teachers in Israel, Remennick (2002) noted that barriers faced by foreign certified teachers included language, school curriculum and culture, as well as student-teacher relationships. Other researchers (Deters, 2006; Nganga, 2011; Wlodkowski, 1997; Zhao, 2012) have identified similar challenges facing foreign certified teachers. Some of the challenges are discussed below.
2.3.1 Culture, cultural tension, and cultural adjustments

A number of studies (Rosenberg, Westling, & McLeskey, 2008; Anderson, 2006; Amit & Burde, 2005; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004) have identified the link between culture and education. Culture affects beliefs about schooling, student–teacher relationships, and classroom participation styles. In some cultures, for example, students are expected to be silent in the classroom and to avoid eye contact with teachers as a sign of respect (see for example Nilson, 2010). In other cultures, active classroom participation and eye contact with teachers is encouraged (Frank, 2004).

In suggesting that cultural tendencies impact the teaching-learning process, Rosenberg, Westling, and McLeskey (2008) outline various expectations about "normal" school behavior for students from individualist and collectivist cultures (see Table 1 below). Although human cultures are too complex to be squeezed into two categories and there are individual variations even within a given culture, the work of Rosenberg, Westling, and McLeskey can help in understanding the impact of culture on how students learn and teachers, especially those from different cultures, teach and/or manage their classrooms.

Table 1: Individualist and collectivist cultural perspectives on education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individualist Perspective</th>
<th>Collectivist Perspective</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students work independently; helping others may be cheating.</td>
<td>Students work with peers and provide assistance when needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students engage in discussion and argument to learn to think critically.</td>
<td>Students are quiet and respectful in class in order to learn more efficiently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student should be praised frequently. The</td>
<td>Student should not be singled out for praise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
positive should be emphasized whenever possible. Positive feedback should be stated in terms of student’s ability to help family or community.

Teacher manages the school environment indirectly and encourages student self-control. Teacher is the primary authority, but peers guide each other's behaviour.

Parents are integral to child's academic progress and participate actively. Parents yield to teacher's expertise to provide academic instruction and guidance.

Adapted from Rosenberg, Westling, and McLeskey (2008) and The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory (2002).

Table 1 enables us to consider how foreign certified teachers, who are not aware of the cultural knowledge of rural Saskatchewan communities and schools could misinterpret a student’s behaviour. Rosenberg, Westling, and McLeskey point out that because cultural differences are not always easy to discern, they may cause tensions in the classroom due to inaccurate interpretations or judgements.

Also focusing on the impact of culture on student learning, The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory (2002) identifies various “principles of culture and learning:”

Students come to school with specific cultural knowledge or “cultural capital,” including their particular experiences and prior knowledge; Valuing students’ cultural knowledge and building upon it is a key component of culturally responsive teaching; Culture is largely mediated by language, as manifested in metaphor, storytelling, songs, and greetings; A group’s culture reflects its shared traditions, which can include a common history, language, religion, customs, and
literary traditions; and Culture is dynamic and ever changing - a group’s culture includes the goals, ideals, and beliefs that will ensure the group’s survival. However, there are variations among individual members of a cultural group in terms of their beliefs and values. (p. 1)

Rosenberg, Westling, and McLeskey (2008) and The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory (2002) highlight the importance of understanding and promoting students’ cultures in the classrooms as a way to enhance their personal and academic development. The foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan are thus in a tension filled space where they not only need to value and promote the local cultures, but they also need to negotiate the perceived borderlines between their own cultures and the cultures in Saskatchewan. As already stated, cultures are dynamic and there are variations even among members of the ‘same’ cultural group.

The issue of cultural adjustment, or as Xu, Gutierrez, and Kim (2008) put it, “transformation through clinging to hope, (un)learning, and resilience” (p. E33) is common in literature on experiences of immigrant professionals. Differences in cultural backgrounds of foreign certified teachers and the school community may pose a challenge to the teachers. In such cases, for example, Xu, Gutierrez, and Kim (2008) report that foreign trained professionals “experienced profound cultural dissonance that compelled them to reflect on their identity as cultural beings, leading to (un)learning or reaffirming who they were” (p. E41).

In reference to Asian immigrants working in Western countries, Lin (2009) argues that in “Eastern collectivism, hard work is expected and hierarchy is respected” (p. 239) while in the West, individualism is highly valued, hard work is rewarded and respect
earned. As discussed later in Chapter Three, the East-West binary represented in Lin’s work is certainly open to critique through a postcolonial lens such as Said’s (1978) Orientalist perspective. Wlodkowski (1997) observes that teachers who ignore or trivialize the cultural background of their students are likely to face resistance. Thus, as Kumek (2009) observes mutual respect and understanding between foreign certified teachers and students – and other stakeholders such as parents, other teachers, and school administrators – is important. Dicicco-Bloom (2004) compares living and working in a different country to being culturally uprooted, hence perception by immigrant professionals of having “a foot here, a foot there, a foot nowhere” (p. 28).

Korean immigrant professionals who participated in a study by Yi and Jezewski (2000) research overcame their cultural conflicts and language barriers “through determination and hard work” (p. 724) that enabled them to adapt to the language and culture in the United States. As indicated later in Chapter Four, the notion that personal agency (alone), namely perseverance and hard work, determines the success of immigrant professionals including foreign certified teachers seem to be common in literature including participants in this dissertation. However, such a narrative is problematic and seems to be based on the belief that North America, and settler societies in general, are a “land of limitless opportunity in which individuals can go as far as their merit takes them” (McNamee & Miller, 2004, p. 4). That is, career success is linked to individual merit and depends on such factors as hard work, self-motivation, and integrity. McNamee and Miller rightly refer to this line of thought as “meritocracy myth.” While merit plays a role in the careers of immigrant professionals, including foreign certified teachers (such as teaching positions in rural Saskatchewan schools), there are non-merit
factors at play that “suppress, neutralize, or even negate the effects of merit and create barriers to individual mobility” (McNamee & Miller, p. 6).

Yi and Jezewski (2000) give suggestions on how to minimize cultural barriers and enhance job satisfaction for foreign trained professionals. These include, offering cultural orientation programs, communication skills training, continuing employee cultural awareness and diversity training for all staff. Lin (2009) suggests that a respect for and understanding of cultural diversity is key to minimizing chances of cultural conflicts and discrimination. In other words, there is a positive correlation between familiarity and respect of another culture and foreign trained professionals’ satisfaction with their employment. Similarly, Zhao (2012) found a positive correlation between acculturation and job satisfaction among foreign certified teachers. Carney (2005) suggests that there should be cultural competence and awareness training for both foreign trained and domestic employees at the workplace. Lin (2009) describes cultural competence as the ability to interact with people from different cultures and points out that cultural competence involves awareness and respect of those cultures. She suggests that research into the experiences of foreign trained professionals should include the issue of cultural challenges experienced in the host country.

Deters’ (2006) study with foreign certified teachers found that community acceptance was crucial to the teachers’ success. In one of the school communities discussed by Deters, the foreign certified teachers felt that there was a demonstrated appreciation for cultural diversity. One study participant said she felt welcomed as a member in this diverse school community, and had access to the social resources of the school’s community of practice such as interactions and guidance from more experienced
peers, and physical resources such as course materials. These, she noted, made her more satisfied with her work.

2.3.2 Relationship with parents

Relationships between foreign certified teachers and parents have also been the focus of discussion in literature on the subject. In Nganga’s (2011) study, for example, some foreign certified teachers felt that parents were not very cooperative when it came to discussing student behaviour and performance. The opposite was the case in British Columbia (Hirji & Beynon, 2000). The explanation for this apparent contradiction perhaps rests upon an understanding of the specific context in British Columbia. In 2011, about 712,000 people in the Greater Vancouver Area reported speaking a language other than English or French most often at home (Statistics Canada, 2012). Of this, nearly 18 percent or 128,000 reported speaking Punjabi. In Hirji and Beynon’s (2000) study of teachers of Punjabi Sikh ancestry in British Columbia schools, the teachers felt that Punjabi Sikh parents viewed them positively. The parents viewed teachers of Punjabi Sikh ancestry “as being appna or ‘one of us’” (p. 256), someone they could trust, talk with and get assistance from.

Hofstede (1986) points out that parents in China, India, Nigeria, and Turkey tend to trust the teacher more than the students and that in many Western countries, parents generally side with the students if there is a disagreement between a teacher and a student. If the latter is the case in Canada, then this is an experience that is likely to be a challenge to teachers from overseas who are teaching in rural Saskatchewan. Kuhn (1996) identifies issues that could shape the interactions of foreign certified teachers with students and parents as including the differences in their directness, their social skills and
their public speaking experiences. Kuhn asserts that while foreign certified teachers tend to be more direct in their assessments and comments on student work, they often have relatively ‘poor’ public speaking skills compared to their American counterparts. This can potentially lead to misunderstandings between teachers and, students and their parents. Kuhn, a German immigrant teacher in the United States, recommends public speaking support for foreign certified teachers.

2.3.3 Relationship with students

Writing about relationships between foreign certified teachers and their students in American high schools, Nganga (2011) argues that the way teachers view their students impacts their professional identities. She notes that “the story of teaching is hence related to the story of negotiating student relationships” (p. 134). Similarly, Day (2002) suggests that teachers’ professional identity has a potential impact on their beliefs, engagement, and relationships with their students.

Punjabi Sikh teachers in British Columbia schools (Hirji & Beynon, 2000) narrated how their Punjabi Sikh students felt comfortable with them and often sought their advice. Schmidt and Block (2010) have suggested that racialized minority teachers provide students with the opportunity to “see and hear themselves reflected in their educational setting” (p. 4) and, therefore, reduce the potential of marginalization that they may otherwise experience. Hirji and Beynon quote a teacher who suggested that the presence of racialized minority teachers is likely to break stereotypes that their mainstream students and the wider society in general may have about minority groups. The teacher argued that “it's very good for nonminority kids (sic) to see minority people in these roles, probably just as important as it is for Punjabi kids to see me.” The teacher
noted that “all teachers can have an important impact on kids and so it's just as good for me to have that effect on Johnny ... as it is for me to have an effect on Jasdeep” (Hirji & Beynon, 2000, p. 258). That is, while the Punjabi Sikh teachers felt a commitment to their Punjabi Sikh students, they none the less saw themselves as being a model for all students, not just those of Punjabi ancestry.

Howe’s (2011) analysis of the socioeconomic benefits of the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Educational Program, a four year baccalaureate degree program offered in partnership between Gabriel Dumont Institute, University of Regina, and University of Saskatchewan, captures this point aptly. Howe suggests that Aboriginal teachers have a positive impact on Aboriginal students for reasons such as being role models and understanding the unique experiences of Aboriginal students. He argues that Aboriginal teachers also impact the lives of non-Aboriginal students because non-Aboriginals are able to see Aboriginal peoples in positions of authority. Similarly, Schmidt and Block (2010) assert that schools with a diverse teaching force benefit from insights and contributions of various social and cultural backgrounds that can enhance learning experiences for all students.

In a study (Osier, 1997) of Black teachers in the United Kingdom, both foreign certified and United Kingdom-born, the teachers noted that education was regarded by their own families as a ticket to success in life. Consistent with the desire and expectation of their own parents, the teachers in the study felt a commitment to their racialized minority students and a higher expectation of the students’ achievement than did their white colleagues.
Like the Punjabi Sikh teachers in British Columbia (Hirji & Beynon, 2000), the black teachers in Osier’s (1997) study saw themselves as role models to racialized minority students. Similarly, Carrison (2007) notes that minority bilingual foreign certified teachers often act as role models for their minority language students. Through their example of dedication and perseverance, immigrant teachers in Carrison’s study “represent[ed] the hope of learning to use a new language and navigating an unfamiliar culture” (p. 235). She concludes that for “their students, [foreign certified] teachers represent the potential for setting and accomplishing goals they might otherwise not even consider” (p. 235).

In contrast to the findings of Carrison’s (2007), Hirji and Beynon’s (2000), and Osier’s (1997), Allen (1994) argues that expectations that racialized minority teachers would be positive role models to racialized minority students “risks stereotyping minorities on the basis of race and gender imposing upon ... [racialized minority] teachers the … obligation” (p. 182) to act as ideal role models rather than as individuals. Like Howe (2011), Allen suggests that racialized minority teachers provide all students with important role models of successful people who contribute to society.

2.3.4 Relationship with other teachers and administrators

Nones-Austria (2001) investigated experiences of Filipina teachers in the United States. She found that relationship between the Filipina teachers and school administrators not only had an effect on the teachers’ identities but also impacted their effectiveness as teachers. Participants in Nones-Austria’s study indicated that the attitude and behavior of the school administrators towards them – both in the Philippines and the United States - influenced and affected the Filipina teachers’ motivation, and self-
confidence. This finding concurs with Chen’s (2009) argument that a supportive school environment has a positive correlation with teachers’ willingness to take up new challenges and opportunities to try new ideas. Research (Beck, 2010) shows that collegial relationships between foreign certified and other teachers in a positive and supportive work environment where all teachers feel valued are likely to have a desirable impact on the transitional adjustments of foreign certified teachers.

Carrison (2007) reports that foreign certified teachers often play important leadership roles both to their teaching colleagues and to their students. She asserts that through informal interactions such as a cluster teacher support groups or modeling by example during parent conferences, foreign certified teachers have helped instill a greater understanding of the learning and support needs of immigrant students and their families. Carrison submits that in more formal leadership or instructional roles such as district sanctioned trainings, foreign certified teachers have been in the position to “potentially influence pedagogical practices on a much wider scale” (p. 235).

While the presence of foreign certified teachers may add “depth and breadth of perspective, it can also be fertile ground for misunderstanding and miscommunication” (Carrison, 2007, p. 210); a situation that could lead to foreign certified teachers “being left out of the dialogue” (Delpit, 1988, p. 282) at school. There is, therefore, a need for building and developing social capital in the school community. Bourdieu (1986) describes social capital as the “aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 248). This group membership, he explains, affords members with support of the “collectively-owned capital” (p. 249) from which an
individual can draw upon. Cannuscio, Block, and Kawachi (2003) view social capital as a type of “public good that is provided by a group or community, and, consequently, the benefits of social capital tend to be more widely shared by members of the community” (p. 395). For foreign certified teachers and other (im)migrants, while certain social capital remain intact through family and other social networks such as their places of worship or other cultural affiliations, the professional social capital they had prior to immigrating is often left behind (Carrison, 2007). Carrison notes that rebuilding professional social capital networks in a new country could be a major challenge.

Whether they are in bridging programs at Faculties of Education as a way of getting teacher certification in Canada or as newly hired teachers, foreign certified teachers are positioned simultaneously as teachers and learners (Britzman, 1991), as professionals and as newcomers (Block, 2012), and as capable and vulnerable (Thiessen, Bascia, & Goodson, 1996). While many teachers, whether foreigners or not, would occupy such tension-filled spaces, the situation, in my experience and the experiences of participants in this study, is further complicated by the fact that we were strangers to the community, country, and to the education system.

Block contends that foreign certified teachers are positioned through socially constructed categories which place them as outsiders or other. Block, in her study of foreign certified teachers in a university-based bridging program contexts in Manitoba, points out that the teachers are “positioned in a cross-cultural exchange with each other, with their instructors, and with their mentor teachers and their students” (p. 89). In the context of working in the school system, the foreign certified teachers are further re-positioned within a particular school community. Block suggests that this hybridity in
the positioning and re-positioning of foreign certified teachers could have positive impact in schools with foreign certified teachers.

But, school can be viewed as a site of contestation. Bhabha (1995) points out that hybridity is a place of resistance in which the dominant and the other “interact in colonial superposition” and forge a “new space inaccessible to either discrete group” (Kayne, 2004, p. 3). To Bhabha, hybridity does not signify the classic dominant-other binary, but rather, it results in something much different which can be signified only by those participating in the relation (Bhabha’s postcolonial critique is discussed in Chapter Three).

Foreign certified teachers in a study by Deters (2006) spoke of the importance of mentorship and support. Wong (2008) defines mentorship as “a formal coaching relationship in which an experienced teacher gives guidance, support, and feedback to a new teacher” (p. 1). Note that while foreign certified teachers may be experienced teachers, they can nonetheless be regarded as new teachers in their new locations. Wong suggests that mentoring should be included in the foreign certified teacher induction process.

Recent studies (Hutchison & Jazzar, 2007; Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007) on experiences of foreign certified teachers suggest various kinds of mentorship processes that may lead to successful transition of such teachers. According to Kostogriz and Peeler, “mentoring experiences, whether informally arranged or formally sanctioned, can help bridge differences to a certain extent and empower (foreign certified) teachers to creatively construct a new professional identity” (p. 114). Arguing for formal teacher mentoring arrangements, Feiman-Nemser (2001) points out that foreign certified
“teachers need sustained and substantive learning opportunities” (p. 1042) which can be enhanced through such factors as professional development and support by other teachers. For an in depth analysis of teacher mentorship in Saskatchewan, please see Kutsyuruba (2012), Thomas-MacLean, Hamoline, Quinlan, Ramsden, and Kuzmicz (2010), Hellsten, Prytula, Ebanks, and Lai (2009), and Ralph (2000) among others.

2.4 Common themes in literature on foreign trained professionals

In general, research on foreign trained professionals has identified a number of common themes. These include teacher certification and entry into the host country’s educational system (Cruickshank, 2004), socialization and acculturation processes (Deters, 2008; Flores, 2003), cross-cultural communication and pedagogical issues (Hutchison, 2006), mentoring international teachers (Hutchison & Jazzar, 2007), stories of a teaching self in a foreign place (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004), as well as marginalization and discrimination (Lin, 2009), and support systems and strategies for coping (Xu, Gutierrez, & Kim, 2008). The governments of Canada and Saskatchewan have, in recent years, prioritized immigration to address labour shortages (Carter, Pandey, & Townsend, 2010); yet many immigrant professionals continue to experience multiple barriers to employment.

Beck (2010) identifies some of the common reasons for challenges experienced by foreign certified teachers in the United States which are relevant to the Saskatchewan context: 1) foreign certified teachers tend to have little or no training on how to teach in the schools of the country to which they have moved, and 2) foreign certified teachers sometimes hold stereotypical views that may hinder their transition into their new space, leading to what Fry and Anderson (2011) refer to as “reality shock” (p. 13), that is, the
gap between expectations of the foreign certified teachers of teaching in their new locations and the reality of life and work in those locations. As articulated in several studies (Flores, 2003; Collins & Reid, 2012; Beynon, Ilieva & Dichupa, 2004; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004), the issues identified by Beck are not unique to the United States, but rather are also present in other countries including Australia and Israel. Some of these challenges are described below.

2.4.1 Communication barriers

Studies show that many foreign certified teachers experience barriers relating to language and communication. For example, Russian immigrant teachers in Israel who are non-native speakers of Hebrew reported difficulty in teaching in their second language - Hebrew (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Remennick, 2002). Remennick demonstrates that Hebrew language proficiency was the primary determinant of the Russian immigrant teachers' successful experience as teachers. Elbaz-Luwisch (2004) reports that many of the Russian immigrant teachers in Israel felt that because they did not fully understand the language and culture of their new home, they were concerned about unintentionally saying something or acting inappropriately. Similarly, Remennick noted that barriers faced by the immigrant teachers included language, school curriculum and culture, and student-teacher relationships.

In a number of studies on experiences of foreign trained professionals, there was an underlying issue of both native English speakers and non-native English speakers stating that they had experienced discrimination because of their accents (Collins & Reid, 2012; Myles, Cheng & Wang, 2006). Flores (2003) demonstrates that Filipino immigrant teachers in Hawai‘i ‘often’ experience discrimination as a result of cultural differences,
“enforced through official attitudes toward accent, language, and cultures” (p. 3). Flores further asserts that Hawai‘i school officials tend to take “speaking English with a non-Western accent and comprehending different cultural codes and practices” as evidence of “sub-par qualifications” (p. 3). Thinking back to my own experience, I did not encounter discrimination at school. Initially, some students and teachers did struggle to understand my accent. Some, however, told me they liked my accent. I was open about the fact that it could be difficult for some to understand me, so I tried my best to speak as slowly and clearly as possible. It was also a time when the population of racialized minorities was increasing, both at school and in the community and the school was generally very welcoming.

I realize that not every racialized minority or foreign certified teacher had positive experiences like I did. Heit and Blair (1993), writing about the language needs of Aboriginal students in Saskatchewan, argued that a majority of ‘standard English’ speakers in the province view Indigenous English speakers as having a less developed command of the English language. Henry and Ginzberg (1998) found that “minority-accented” (p. 359) employees are more likely than their non-accented colleagues to experience discrimination at their workplace.

The accented English spoken by most immigrants from non-Anglo Celtic backgrounds, such as those cited above, are generally a variety that differs from the English spoken by the White majority population in Canada and North America in general. Yet, even among various population groups in North America there are a variety of spoken ‘Englishes’ (Sterzuk, 2008) such as African American English (Green, 2002) and Indigenous English (Sterzuk, 2008) among others. In posing the question, ‘Whose
English counts?” Sterzuk argues that imposing the variety of English that is spoken by the majority and generally accepted as standard on those who speak a variety of spoken English, including ‘minority’ and ‘non-Western’ accents is cultural imperialism.

Similarly, Mayne (2012) points out that during colonial rule, language was a medium through which hierarchical structures of power were perpetuated with ‘standard’ English regarded as superior to all others. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1995) have adopted the view of language as “a fundamental site of struggle for postcolonial discourse” arguing that “the colonial process itself begins in (the) control over language by the imperial centre … by installing itself as a “standard” against other variants which are constituted as “impurities” (p. 283).

Baily, Hathaway, and Isabel (2006) point out that while “teaching profession relies on awareness and understanding of language and culture of the students” as well as that of the society in general, for many of the foreign certified teachers, “it was merely an accent that built walls around them” (para. 56). However, Lippi-Green (1997), giving examples of renowned ‘accented’ non-native English speakers such as Henry Kissinger and Butros Butros Gahali, argued that the presence of an accent does not necessarily indicate a lack of communicative competence in the English language. It does, however, potentially mark the speakers for some/many privileged English speakers as ‘foreign’ or somehow less legitimately belonging to, or representative of, the imagined community of the nation.

Writing about the emergence of multiculturalism within Canada’s bilingual framework, Haque (2012) argues that historically, language has served as a boundary marker in Canada with the country’s ‘national narrative’ emphasizing the language and
culture of Canada’s two founding nations, English and French, at the expense of other groups. Baily, Hathaway, and Isabel (2006) suggest that the issue of language is potentially both a handicap and a solution. That is, language can enable the foreign certified teacher to become an ‘active’ member of the new or imagined community, yet feelings of isolation and low self-esteem can result from language misunderstandings. Xu, Gutierrez, and Kim (2008) report that the issue of language was often sensitive and would result in conflict and disagreements when immigrant employees were found speaking their native languages at the workplace.

2.4.2 Certification and entry into the profession

A key feature of globalization is international mobility of highly skilled professionals. However, with the globally mobile professionals is the reality of credential recognition and professional certification in the receiving countries. Many researchers (Collins & Reid, 2012; Girard & Bauder, 2005) agree that often this process does not meet the expectations of many foreign trained professionals.

Canada accepts over 200,000 immigrants annually including highly skilled foreign trained professionals. As Beynon, Ilieva and Dichupa (2004) found, “Teachers immigrating to Canada with credentials from non-Canadian jurisdictions are regarded as desirable immigrant professionals because of their high levels of education” (pp. 429-430). Bauder (2003) reports that after arriving in Canada, many immigrants tend to look for employment in their area of specialization; however, they often experience multiple barriers to employment. Walsh and Brigham (2007) identified challenges that foreign certified teachers often face with respect to obtaining Canadian credentials. These challenges include difficulty in getting accurate information about accreditation process,
little or no knowledge about the Canadian education systems, difficulty in gaining
Canadian teaching experience, lack of recognition of prior education and teaching
experience, and differing pedagogy and educational expectations.

While it is not clear if teacher education credentials from all Canadian
jurisdictions are considered equal, the issue that is likely to come up with respect to non-
Canadian credentials is “what and whose credentials count” (Shan, 2009, p. 359). Shan
argues that credentials from developing countries are “to a great extent devalued in
Canada” (p. 359). Mehta, Janmohamed and Corter (2011) found that a number of
internationally trained educators seeking early childhood education equivalency in
Ontario have had their credentials devalued or not recognized.

For foreign certified teachers, the challenges to gaining teacher certification and
credibility in the school community are rather complex because, in general, there is no
teacher shortage in Saskatchewan (Block, 2012; Government Trustee Bargaining
Committee, 2011). It is worth noting that while officially there is no teacher shortage in
the province, one of the foreign certified teachers who participated in this study was
offered a teaching position in rural Saskatchewan while she was in Ontario. She told me
that two other teachers in her school and another one in a nearby school were all recruited
from Ontario around the same time.

In general, foreign certified teachers have to get teacher certification before they
can work as teachers in their host country. Countries that require foreign certified
teachers to go through a re-credentialing process include Australia (Cruickshank, 2004),
Canada (Beynon, Ilieva & Dichupa, 2004), Israel (Epstein & Kheimets, 2000), and the
United States (Bullough & Robert, 2008).
Education falls under provincial jurisdiction in Canada. Therefore, education policy in the country is set separately by the ten provinces and three territories. In Saskatchewan, the government requires those seeking teaching positions at publicly funded or independent schools in the province’s pre-kindergarten to grade 12 education system to hold a Saskatchewan teaching certification (Government of Saskatchewan, 2010).

Requirements for obtaining a Saskatchewan teacher certification vary depending on the location of the applicant’s previous education. For graduates of teacher education programs completed within North America, the Teacher Services Unit of the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education assesses the applicant’s teacher qualifications. It issues Saskatchewan teacher certification to qualified candidates from other provinces in Canada. However, applicants who are deemed qualified from the United States are expected to obtain a teaching position in Saskatchewan before they may get Saskatchewan teacher certification (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2012).

The certification process for graduates of teacher education programs completed outside of North America involves course-by-course assessment of the applicant’s credentials by the World Education Services to determine if the applicant qualifies for a Saskatchewan teaching certification. The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education may then issue the applicant with Saskatchewan teacher certificate, recommend specific university courses for upgrading, or advise the applicant to apply to a Bachelor of Education program at either of the province’s two universities, the University of Regina or the University of Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2012).
Bascia (2006) argues that factors such as immigration status, English-language proficiency, professional experience, teacher beliefs and racialized minority status tend to impact career paths of foreign certified teachers due to their effect on whether the foreign certified teachers get accepted as teachers, what positions they receive, career advancement possibilities and how they are treated at the organizational and individual level. Bascia suggests that foreign certified teachers from racialized minority backgrounds often experience isolation, fewer opportunities for professional growth (see also Collins & Reid, 2012), a lack of or limited involvement with curriculum development and decision making, and are seldom considered for administrative positions irrespective of their credentials and experience. Further, Bascia points out that racialized minority teacher candidates, including foreign certified teachers in the process of getting Canadian teacher certification, often experience devaluation of their abilities in their attempt to conform to the normative teacher identity in Canada. Norton (1997) points out that “Whereas immigrant learners’/teachers’ experiences in their native country may be a significant part of their identity, these experiences are constantly being mediated by their experiences in the new country, across multiple sites in the home, workplace, and community” (p.14).

Girard and Bauder (2005) argue that “immigrants have greater labour force participation rates and earn higher incomes when they settle in smaller communities instead of larger gateway cities” (p. 2). This is especially the case in Saskatchewan where close to 45 percent of all physicians practising in the province are foreign-trained; and in rural areas, this number is closer to 75 percent (Northern Medical Services, 2011). Similarly, in Australia, there were relatively more openings for permanent teaching
positions in rural and remote schools while positions in urban schools tended to be mainly temporary or casual (Collins & Reid, 2012). Collin and Reid report that there was a higher representation of foreign certified teachers working in rural and remote regions than in metropolitan schools across Australia.

Girard and Bauder (2005) suggest that professional licensing processes (such as teacher credentialing) for foreign trained immigrants often “devalue their human capital and leave immigrant professionals with little choice but to settle in Canada’s largest cities where ‘survival’ job opportunities are more plentiful and ethnic and social networks are better developed” (p. 2). Girard and Bauder argue that while foreign credentials, especially in the regulated professions such as teaching, must and should be evaluated, minimizing structural and institutional barriers to securing Canadian professional licenses is likely to enhance the integration of foreign trained professionals into the workforce in the host country at a level that is commensurate with their human capital and experience. The contention by these authors is that such changes would help facilitate the transfer of foreign trained professionals to underserved rural areas.

2.4.3 Discrimination

A number studies on experiences of foreign certified teachers report various kinds of discrimination stemming from factors such as culture, accent, religion, race, ethnicity, and nationality (Alexis, Vydelingum, & Robbins, 2007; Collins & Reid, 2012; Dicicco-Bloom, 2004). Discrimination in the workplace may be in the form of a barrier to getting a teaching job or a constraint on the working lives of the foreign certified teachers after they get employment. In a study of foreign certified teachers in Australia (Collins & Reid), a substantial number (31 percent) of foreign certified teachers felt that there was
discrimination against foreign certified teachers in the processes and procedures related to promotion.

Participants in a study by Zhao (2012) on experiences of foreign certified teachers in Canada did not use the word discrimination to describe their experiences. However, Zhao quotes one of the teachers as describing the experience thus, “You can feel it, but you can't say it. Every immigrant feels that. It doesn't matter how good you are. It doesn't matter how good your teaching is. You feel it, right? But you can't say it in words” (p. 156). These acts of discrimination and marginalization amplified their perception of otherness which not only impacted their work performance and integration into the workplace, but also perpetuated a feeling of alienation and lack of trust (Xu, Gutierrez, & Kim, 2008) especially when there was no support from peers, supervisors or employers.

Collins and Reid (2012) demonstrate that despite their perception of discrimination, almost six out of ten (59 percent) foreign certified teachers across three Australian states rated their work ‘favourably’ or ‘very favourably’ compared to their experience working as a teacher in a country other than Australia. On the other hand, only 15 percent of the foreign certified teachers in the same study rated their professional experience in Australia as ‘not very favourably’ or ‘very unfavourably’ compared to their experience working as a teacher in another country. This is a critical issue regarding retention of foreign certified teachers. Indeed, when asked if they plan to continue teaching in Australian schools in the next five years, 75 percent of the foreign certified teachers in the study responded affirmatively. Further, 60 percent of foreign certified teachers
teachers who participated in the research by Collins and Reid stated that they have or would recommend teaching in Australia to other foreign certified teachers.

Similarly, a study by Alexis, Vydelingum, and Robbins (2007) on experiences of racialized minority (im)migrant professionals in the United Kingdom reports that most of the study participants highlighted the benefits of being stationed in their present work location. Others were thankful for the opportunity to gain work experience in a different culture, and some found satisfaction in knowing that their students appreciated their efforts.

2.4.4 Resources and support are available for foreign certified teachers

A key step in the foreign certified teachers’ journey to getting into the classrooms in their host countries as teachers is obtaining teacher certification of the host country or jurisdiction such as Saskatchewan. One of the most common and visible strategies in place to better support foreign certified teachers enter and integrate into the teaching profession is special re-credentialing programs in faculties of education in a number of universities. A few Canadian examples are presented below.

Mawhinney and Xu (1997) assert that like the general immigrant settlement pattern in Canada, a large proportion of foreign trained professionals including teachers have historically chosen Ontario as their new home. However, many such teachers have experienced difficulty in satisfying the requirements for an Ontario Teaching Certificate. The difficulties often resulted in foreign certified teachers discontinuing their professional practice; a fact that Mawhinney and Xu contend, is a loss to Ontario’s education system of the expertise and experiences of foreign certified teachers and raises issues of equity in the ethnically diverse province. In response to such challenges, the
University of Ottawa’s Faculty of Education developed and implemented a re-credentialing program for foreign certified teachers, the Upgrading Pilot Program, in 1994. The goals of the program included 1) assisting foreign certified teachers to obtain Ontario teacher certification, 2) providing foreign certified teachers with opportunity for teaching practice in Ontario classroom context, and 3) facilitating foreign certified teachers’ access to the Ontario school system (Mawhinney & Xu, 1997).

Queen's University, the Ottawa Carleton District School Board, and Local Agencies Serving Immigrants in Ottawa have collaborated to offer the Alternative Teacher Accreditation Program for Teachers with international experience (Zhao, 2012). The program is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and is intended for immigrant Canadians who have international teaching experience, but who have been unable to get an Ontario Teaching Certificate. Other universities that offer specialized programs for foreign certified teachers include Simon Fraser University and the University of Manitoba while the University of Toronto, York University, and the University of British Columbia have special admission category for foreign certified teachers.

Internationally educated and trained professionals in Nova Scotia have joined together to form associations in a number of occupations under the umbrella Association of Internationally Educated and Trained Professionals of Nova Scotia (Province of Nova Scotia, 2012). These include Nova Scotia Association of Internationally Educated Teachers, International Pharmacy Graduates of Nova Scotia, Internationally Educated Dentists Association of Nova Scotia, and Association of Internationally Educated Engineers of Nova Scotia. These associations assist their members in numerous ways
such as providing peer support study groups, special events, speakers, and advocacy. Through website and newsletters, the Nova Scotia Association of Internationally Educated Teachers provides a forum for the foreign certified teachers to share their experiences and information on pathways to teaching profession in Canadian schools.

2.4.5 Job seeking strategies for foreign certified teachers

After successfully getting teacher certification in Canada, many foreign certified teachers experience challenges in getting teaching jobs. Zhao (2012) presents three main job searching strategies used by foreign certified teachers in her study. These include hard work and seeking support; networking; and attending career fairs and seeking alternative job opportunities as discussed below.

Most foreign certified teachers in Zhao’s (2012) study mentioned ‘work hard’ when describing their experiences in looking for teaching jobs in Ontario schools. One participant who got a teaching position before she graduated from a teacher education program at an Ontario university noted that “I may say that I am very lucky. I can also say that I work very hard. Many people wait for jobs. I never wait for jobs. I look for jobs” (p. 160). Zhao points out that the foreign certified teachers not only started looking for teaching jobs when still in teacher education programs but also sought help with job search, resume writing, and interview skills. Zhao further notes that most of the foreign certified teachers who graduated from the University of Toronto said they used the services of the university’s Academic and Cultural Support Centre and the Pre-Field Experience Program that provide special assistance to international students and foreign trained professionals. The teachers also shared information and their experiences with each other.
As described in Chapter Six, the issue of individual agency in the form of being proactive, as implied by statements such as “I never wait for jobs” and “I work very hard,” was also a common theme in the stories of the foreign certified teachers who participated in this study. While these statements and others speak to experiences of individual study participants, they also point to the perceived role of meritocracy in teacher success experiences, a perception that, as suggested later in this study, may be misleading.

Zhao (2012) reports that in order to enter the community of practice in the teaching profession, many foreign certified teachers made connections and networks through practicum, internship, and volunteer work. Nishino (2012) defines community of practice as a group of people who share social practices and work together toward common goals. Nishino suggests that learning and professional development occurs as a result of participation in communities of practice.

A third strategy used by foreign certified teachers in Zhao’s (2012) study involved attending career fairs and seeking alternative employment opportunities. For those who are looking for jobs, attending career fairs has many benefits. They provide a good opportunity to speak one-on-one with employers that the foreign certified teacher may otherwise not be able to access; find out what skills, experience and qualities employers are looking for; know about job opportunities in the profession; and gather information about school boards and other organizations of interest (University of Toronto Mississauga Career Centre, 2013). Plus, career fairs often offer networking programs, resume reviews, and workshops for job seekers, and could be helpful for foreign certified teachers in their search for permanent teaching jobs.
In general, immigrants tend to settle in cities where they have family or ethnic ties (Ng, 2006). For this reason, it is likely that upon getting their Canadian teacher certification, many foreign certified teachers look for teaching careers in the cities they have settled in. As demonstrated by Zorlu (2008), family ties generally tend to hamper the likelihood of spatial mobility over long distances across the province or country for migrants. Further, Zorlu shows that the absence of family ties is associated with higher probabilities of moving both within the same metropolitan area and across long distances. Zhao (2012) reports that some foreign certified teachers in her study were able to find teaching jobs after moving across Ontario or to other provinces.

2.4.6 Professional integration and coping strategies

Many foreign certified teachers who come to Canada desire to continue their teaching careers in Canadian schools (Zhao, 2012). Upon getting their Canadian teacher certification and job placements, many foreign certified teachers face a number of challenges relating to professional transition and integration (Wang, 2002). Professional challenges involve navigating the expectations of what it means to be a teacher in the host country from the perspectives of the students, school, and school administration. Nganga (2011) suggests that professional transitions also include issues of professional growth and development, subject matter content, student-teacher relationships, teacher workloads, and adjustment to the general school structures such as block schedules and curriculum sequencing.

While the studies cited above agree that many foreign certified teachers and other professionals generally “encounter an invisible barrier: a kind of ‘glass wall’ that keeps them on the outside” (McCoy & Masuch, 2007, p. 190), many of them use their
perseverance, serendipity, and “ingenuity to turn challenges into opportunities, their high-level job satisfaction in spite of adversity, their desire for learning and execution of strategic plans for performance and career enhancement through further education” (Xu, Gutierrez, & Kim, 2008, p. 33).

Remennick (2002) investigated the professional integration and adjustment of 36 immigrant teachers from the former Soviet Union in the Israeli education system. Of the 36 teachers, 20 (or 55 percent) continued their teaching profession in Israel while 16 (or 44 percent) left the teaching profession. According to Remennick, both personal characteristics such as perseverance and resilience and external factors including relationships with other teachers, students, parents, and school administrators, helped determine whether the immigrant teachers had successful integration into the new educational system or they decided to change careers. Remennick, while highlighting the relevance of gender and institutional sexism, suggests that younger immigrant teachers in their thirties or early forties were most likely to have successful professional integration, and that older male immigrant teachers had better prospects than female teachers.

The foreign certified teachers in Israel (Remennick, 2002) reported positive teaching experience when they were familiar with the local language, Hebrew, and when they understood the curriculum and school culture. Other immigrant teachers valued the importance of student discipline and respect for teacher authority. Once the teachers realized what it took to have a satisfying teaching experience, they worked towards that goal.

Li’s (2005) study of employment experiences of immigrant faculty members at a Canadian university found that the immigrants attributed their successful professional
integration to positive influences from their home culture and the support they received from their employer. Wang’s (2002) study of cultural adaptation of foreign certified teachers from China in Toronto schools points out that the teachers made a conscious effort to maintain their Chinese culture which also influenced their teacher identity, teaching philosophy and practice in Toronto.

2.4.7 Stories of teaching self

Foreign certified teachers in Baily, Hathaway, and Isabel’s (2006) study perceived their experiences in the United States through scenes of their homeland experiences. Several of the teachers described what a particular experience would mean (meant) for them in the United States and in their home countries. Baily, Hathaway, and Isabel cited one of their study participants, thus, “In terms of education in the Philippines, if you are rich, you can go to a private school and there they have money to fund all the textbooks…If you are poor…you get used books (or) you don’t get books so where is the social justice there?” (para. 54).

Foreign certified teachers in separate studies by both Beck (2010) and Nganga (2011) noted differences in student behavior in their home countries and in the United States. Nganga states that her study participants felt that there were times when “students were insolent and impolite as compared to what they were previously used to in their countries” and that some foreign certified teachers “wrestled with the manner in which students treated each other and spoke to teachers and principals. The fact that the culture of respect among students was generally lacking in the classrooms and in the schools as a whole was disturbing” to the teachers (p. 134).
Writing about experiences of a Nigerian-trained teacher in the United States, Kumek (2009) avers that previous teaching and learning experiences affect the way teachers teach. This is because, teachers tend to teach the way they themselves were taught (Arends, 1991). Kumek writes that students in Nigerian schools listen to lectures, the authority of the teacher is well understood, and “discipline or classroom management is not a concern for the teacher” (p. 88). This, Kumek contends, is not necessarily the case in the American educational context where “the lecture only method may not suffice” and “teachers’ instructional style may be more important than the content” (p. 88).

According to Baily, Hathaway, and Isabel (2006), making such connections to the new land sometimes meant giving up practices and beliefs about the homeland in order to navigate with ease or acceptance the U.S. system. They note that “When Lucia compared her experience as a teacher in Mexico with her new position in the U.S., she points out that she has become more like an American teacher” (para. 58). Many foreign certified teachers pointed out that the differences and challenges they encountered in American schools provided them with an opportunity to become better teachers (Beck, 2010).

2.4.8 Teaching in rural contexts

This study inquires into the lived experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. Hence, literature on the circumstances, challenges, and context of ‘rural’ places is relevant to this review. Wallin (2008) points out that education in urban contexts is quite different from education in rural contexts. As Eppley (2009) notes, “Successful teaching in a rural school is different than successful teaching in other settings” (p. 1). Eppley suggests that unlike in the urban schools, a teacher’s role in rural

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contexts include being “a mediator between the curriculum and the lived experiences” of the students in rural areas, which tend to be different than those of students in urban schools. This, she argues, is because students in rural locations are generally “deeply rooted in the immediate community, having extensive generational ties and few opportunities to travel beyond the nearest town” (p. 1). The teacher thus needs to understand the ties that the students have with the local community while at the same time using his/her expertise to enable the students to imagine themselves as being part of a larger world. Like Eppley, Theobald and Howley (1998) have suggested that teachers in rural contexts have a duty to ground curriculum and instruction in their immediate locality. This, they point out, is not always the case in urban schooling. As well as different approaches to curriculum in rural and urban settings, DeYoung (1987) suggests that there “exist[s] an urban bias to most educational research” (p. 128). Preston (2006) concurs with that view and points out that much of the research on recent educational reform efforts has been directed toward urban schools. And DeYoung calls on “new generations of educational researchers to become involved in rural education” (p. 142).

Research on rural education in Canada tends to be geared toward such issues as teacher education (Ralph, 2002), teacher professional development (Boyczuk, 2006), educational administration and leadership (Wallin, 2001), and amalgamation (Hurton & Raval, 2006). In the United States, literature on rural education in the past decade was mainly centered on the No Child Left Behind Act, and its inequitable consequences for rural school divisions (Jimmerson, 2005; Hodges, 2002).

Monk (2007) presents the following characteristics as being common among rural schools: they are relatively small; teachers tend to report relatively few problems with
discipline, higher teacher turnover and less than average share of highly trained teachers. Monk suggests that because compensation in rural schools tends to be low, rural schools often experience challenges in attracting and retaining teachers. From the review of literature on factors that attract foreign certified teachers to rural schools, it is however not clear if there is a correlation between a rural/urban salary differential and a decision to take a teaching position in rural school divisions.

2.4.9 Rural schooling in Saskatchewan

The conceptualization of rural contexts is arguably more complex in Saskatchewan because of its size, population, and settlement patterns. As an illustration, Saskatchewan is more than twice the size of the United Kingdom with a population of just over one million people compared to 66 million people in the United Kingdom. For reasons such as the weather and infrastructure, over one half of Canada’s population lives within three hour drive of the Canada-United States border (Chandra, Head, & Tappata, 2011). In Saskatchewan, like in most other Canadian provinces, the northern areas have relatively lower population density. The Saskatchewan rural context is further complicated by the fact that there are over 200 Aboriginal Reserves in the province most of which are rural. Yet, reserve schools are often the schools in which foreign certified teachers get their first teaching jobs in Saskatchewan (Oloo, 2012).

Statistics Canada (2007) defines rural as being those areas outside the commuting zone of centres that have a population of 10,000 or more. Similarly, the Government of Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration, 2012) defines rural as areas with population of 10,000 people or less. The two definitions of rural apply to this dissertation.
Corbett (2006) writes that “(t)he fact is that we do not know a great deal about rural schools and how they operate in their communities, partly because they are largely absent from most Canadian educational policy discussions” (p. 297). He, however, concludes that there tends to be an ambivalent relationship between school and community in rural areas “because schools educate many rural youth to leave” (p. 297).

In recent years, Saskatchewan, and other Canadian prairie provinces have experienced increased urbanization and a decline in rural populations (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011). This has impacted rural schools in various ways including the closing of smaller schools and amalgamation of rural school districts. For example, between 1991-1992 and 2009-2010, the number of provincially funded schools in rural Saskatchewan decreased by 164 (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011).

In the 2009-2010 academic year, 32.1 percent of students attending provincially funded schools in Saskatchewan lived in rural areas and 3.2 percent lived in the northern parts of the province. During the previous three years, enrolments in rural areas declined by 2.7 percent while those in northern areas fell by 1.2 percent. During the same period, student enrolment in urban schools increased by 0.4 percent (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011).

Despite the decline in enrolment in rural schools, there will still likely be demand for teachers in rural school divisions in the coming years especially because of three main factors identified by Ralph (2003): 1) many veteran teachers are approaching retirement age, 2) the number of students entering teacher education programs has not increased substantially, and 3) many graduating teachers wish to pursue their careers in urban rather than rural areas. I may add, demand for foreign certified teachers may continue as
increasingly more immigrants settle in rural Saskatchewan (Passler, 2005). Further, as Corbett (2006) states, “it is fairly clear that formal education is understood and experienced by most school-successful rural youth as a ticket to elsewhere and that formal education correlates powerfully with out-migration from rural communities” (p. 297). Corbett implies that even among rural youth who enter teacher education programs and become teachers, most do not come back to take up teaching positions in rural schools.

A Saskatchewan study (Ralph, 2003) on rural internship experiences of 86 pre-service teachers in their final year of a Bachelor of Education program identified both advantages and challenges of teaching in rural Saskatchewan schools. According to the participants in this study, some of the key advantages of being a teacher in a rural Saskatchewan school include: better acquaintance with students; high community involvement; support by staff and community; better acquaintance with families; and smaller classes. These same participants identified the challenges of being a teacher in a rural school as including limited professional resources/services; invasion of privacy; work overload due to such factors as split grades and extra-curricular duties; and professional and social isolation they encounter (Preston, 2006).

The study by Ralph (2003) is important in that it sought the opinions of the participants regarding improving teacher experience in rural Saskatchewan schools. Respondents gave the following advice to future beginning teachers: be involved in a variety of school and community activities; be conscientious about teaching activities, and be open-minded about the rural placement (p. 33). As seen in Chapter Four, some of
these views resonate with those of the foreign certified teachers who participated in this study.

2.5 Conclusion

Clandinin, Pushor and Murray-Orr (2007) call on researchers to position their work relative to other research. In this chapter, I have attempted to do so by providing an overview of literature that is relevant to understanding experiences of foreign certified teachers. It covers a broad spectrum of research including international, national (Canada), and provincial literature. The studies cited have employed different approaches within qualitative research and highlight various themes within the literature on experiences of foreign certified teachers and other foreign trained or immigrant professionals. The chapter also reviews literature on teaching in rural contexts and contends that only a handful of the studies examined experiences of foreign certified teachers. This study will add to existing literature by inquiring into experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. In the next chapter, Chapter Three, I present an overview of the theoretical framework that I have used in this study, namely, postcolonial and anti-colonial theories.
CHAPTER THREE
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND ANTI-COLONIAL THEORY

3.1 Introduction

There is a long history of engagement between postcolonial theory and education that can provide a lens for exploring professional experiences of foreign certified teachers in a settler state like Canada. According to Rizvi, Lingard, and Lavia (2006), for example, “postcolonialism’s contentions, surrounding the relationship between knowledge and power,” have a strong connection to “education, both as an institution where people are inculcated into hegemonic systems of reasoning and as a site where it is possible to resist dominant discursive practices” (p. 257). While teaching, as a process of initiating the young into the norms of the society, could be perceived as “an object of postcolonial critique regarding its complicity with Eurocentric discourses and practices” (p. 257), it, together with education in general, offers an opportunity to “reveal and resist colonialism’s continuing hold on the geographical imagination” given that “education is also a site where legacies of colonialism and the contemporary processes of globalization intersect” (p. 257). That is, schooling is simultaneously about both liberation and domination (Montgomery, 2013).

About 20 years ago, Bennett (1993-94) suggested that “Postcolonialism offers a powerful and attractive model for Canadian criticism, one that will undoubtedly have an impact on the future of our discourse” (p. 109). She argued that

Canada seems an ideal laboratory for the study of postcolonial writing: it was formed by the interactions of three distinct cultures — the aboriginal, the French,
and the English. Each of these cultures was deeply affected by colonialism, and each has writers who identify themselves as members of these originary groups and who explicitly deal with the problems of colonial dominance and the difficulties of finding identity after having been subordinated to another culture. (pp. 113-114)

As Bennett predicted, postcolonial critique continues to impact “our discourse” however, the space now has more players than the three she identified. In fact, recent studies (Stanley, 2002; Mar, 2007), have shown that the view of Canada as a nation of three founding peoples is mythological insofar as it excludes the historical fact that many non-whites and non-Aboriginals were also in the space we have come to call Canada long before the confederation. Stanley, for example, reminds us that the Chinese settled on the island of Vancouver before confederation and, at one point, outnumbered English settlers there. Mar notes that the “Chinese have influenced Canada’s society since the 1850s” (p. 13). Thus, “the Chinese too,” Stanley writes, “had made British Columbia, with their sweat, their talent, and their wealth” (p. 148). Similarly, according to Winks (1997), black people have lived in Canada well before it became a country. Edugyan (2014), for example, notes that there were over 40,000 blacks in Canada at the time of the confederation in 1867.

Writing about the United States, Hilliard (1988) argues that colonialism and its effects have “existed in our nation during virtually all of its history (and) has guaranteed privilege to certain cultural groups, but oppression of some others.” Hilliard points out that “every facet of the social system has been mobilized to produce the society that both
the privileged and the oppressed experience; education is merely one facet of that complex social system” (p. 36).

Postcolonial discourse involves more than just a defense against charges of neocolonialism. According to Francis (2007), for example, postcolonial studies involve engaging “academic disciplines in the intellectual movement of reformulating and transforming the very patterns of life” (p. 9). Crossley and Tikly (2004) note that in general postcolonial approaches share “a common commitment to reconsider the colonial encounter and its continuing impact from the perspective of formerly colonized countries, regions and peoples, but within the context of contemporary globalization” (p. 148).

3.2 What is postcolonial theory?

‘Postcolonial’ is a contested term that has generated confusion and misunderstanding (Subedi & Daza, 2008). According to Mbembe (2001), postcoloniality refers to both a period in time as well as experiences of societies emerging from colonization. Hickling-Hudson (2004) defines postcolonial perspective as one that is “concerned with how cultures have been influenced by the legacies of colonialism, the culture wars that result from challenges being made to those legacies and the difficulties and ambivalence involved in change” (p. 290). Viruru (2005) views postcolonial theory as the “unmasking of the will to power, that essentializes diverse ways of viewing and living in the world” (p. 7). According to Olson (1998), postcolonial discourse aims to “analyze and articulate the dynamics of systems of domination and oppression, to highlight ‘difference’ as an important, even central, aspect of political relations … to focus, that is, on the crucial importance of Otherness” (p. 47).
Venn (2006) and Bahri (2004) use metaphors in their critique of postcoloniality. For Venn, “postcolonial” refers to a “virtual space, a space of possibility and emergence … a potential becoming,” where postcolonialism becomes a doorway “towards a future that will not repeat existing forms of sociality and oppressive power relations” (p. 190). In applying postcolonial theory to rhetorical education, Bahri defines “postcolonialism” as a moment of “emblematically philosophic rupture with European modernity” (p. 74). Bahri continues thus, postcolonialism “is a moment, a movement, a method, a message, a mirage, a misnomer” (p. 74). Bahri’s metaphors reflect the “contrariness of postcoloniality, by nature anti-foundational due to its tenet of social transformation, yet consistent in its agenda, allowing for a number of possible means by which to achieve the transformation of colonial forms of domination” (Francis, 2007, p. 7).

Slemon (1989) demonstrates that while there are various definitions of ‘postcolonial,’

(T)he concept proves most useful not when it is used synonymously with a post-independence historical period in once-colonized nations but rather when it locates a specifically anti- or post-colonial discursive purchase in culture, one which begins in the moment that colonial power inscribes itself onto the body and space of its Others and which continues as an often occulted tradition into the modern theatre of neo-colonialist international relations. (p. 6)

And Mongia (1996) argues that what is important is not offering prescriptive definitions of what postcolonial theory is, but rather identifying and interrogating the various positions within postcolonial theory. As Rivzi (2007) reminds us, one of the goals of postcolonial theory is to challenge dominant discourses while recognizing that “relations
between global and local are always complicated and ambiguous and require detailed ethnographic case-by-case analyses” (p. 261).

Battiste (2008) explains that, “a postcolonial framework cannot be constructed without indigenous people renewing and reconstructing the principles underlying their own worldview, environment, languages, communication forms, and how these construct their humanity” (p. 508). In her more recent book, Battiste (2013) argues that Eurocentric models of education as practiced in Canada today are inherently racist and have failed to enhance the socioeconomic wellbeing of the Aboriginal peoples. She proposes a new model of education that incorporates Aboriginal ways of knowing. In the same vein, Henderson (1997) suggests that “postcolonial theory is an intellectual strategy of colonized Aboriginal scholars and writers… it is a criticism that confronts the unequal process of representation by which the historical experience of the colonized Aboriginals comes to be framed in Eurocentric scholarship” (p. 23). Postcolonial theory and critique, according to Henderson, seek to end the "privileged position of Eurocentrism and colonial thought in modern society and create parity in modern thought" (p. 23). Similarly, Waliaula (2011) argues that those who are marginalized, such as Aboriginal peoples, need to reconstruct their own worldviews to operate in ways that benefit them and the wider society despite their lived experiences of disruption and interruption.

Postcolonial discourse is informed by socio-political histories, cultural differences and various forms of tensions that are practiced and normalized in settler and other postcolonial societies. As Young (2001) puts it, postcolonial critique is concerned with colonial history “only to the extent that history has determined the configurations and power structures of the present” (p. 4). While acknowledging the various theoretical
perspectives that continue to inform the work of postcolonial scholars, Young suggests that what makes postcolonial critique unique is “the comprehensiveness of its research into the continuing cultural and political ramifications of colonialism in both colonizing and colonized societies” (pp. 5-6). Young demonstrates that such scholarly work is useful inasmuch as it “reveals that the values of colonialism seeped much more widely into the general culture, including academic culture, than had ever been assumed” and so this “archeological retrieval and revaluations is central to much activity in the postcolonial field” (p. 6).

3.3 Why postcolonial theory?

“Narrative,” Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) write, “is an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding” (p. 42). The main goal in this study is to explore the stories of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan and to make sense of their lived experiences. Like Lewis and Adeney (2014), I “have a belief in … the value of story” (p. 162). But, as Lewis and Adeney remind us, “Narrative research is complicated, complicating and never easy” (p. 162).

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) write that “stories people live and tell … are a result of the confluence of social influences on a person’s inner life, social influences on their environment, and their unique personal history” (p. 41). And because, as Kim (2015) suggests, stories cannot be “isolated or [be] independent from societal influence … we need to be sensitive to the historical and social layers that the story bears” (p. 132). In the case of this study, such layers would take into consideration the fact that Saskatchewan is a settler society, the study participants came to Saskatchewan from various parts of the
world, and two of the four study participants were teachers at predominantly Aboriginal schools in rural Saskatchewan.

Lewis and Adeney (2014) suggest that studies of participant stories in narrative research “often disrupt or run counter to the larger ‘taken for granted’ dominant narratives” (p. 162). And, in a similar vein, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) contend that “the narrative inquirer does not exclude the possibility of analyzing the oppressive effects of macrosocial conditions” (p. 50). However, “(t)here are … real differences of opinion on the epistemological, ideological, and ontological commitments of narrative inquirers” (Clandinin and Rosiek, p. 37). Lewis and Adeney, for example, write that “narrative researchers are open to a view that there are alternative epistemologies or ways of knowing” (p. 163). But as Clandinin and Rosiek point that “Many social theorists who ground their work in a pragmatic ontology examine the macrosocial conditions of oppression … as do many narrative inquirers” (p. 50).

A key puzzle I have wrestled with is whether grounding an inquiry in a theoretical framework, such as postcolonial lens, in an attempt to “examine the macrosocial conditions of oppression” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 50) and “the historical and social layers that the story bears” (Kim, 2015, p. 132) undermines the goal of understanding the foreign certified teachers’ experiences. I was not any closer to solving this puzzle after reading Clandinin and Rosiek’s work on borderland spaces and tensions within narrative inquiry research. However, a number of recently completed doctoral dissertations shed light on the puzzle.

One of these doctoral dissertations, entitled ‘A narrative inquiry of successful black male college students’ (Harrison, 2014), employs anti-deficit thinking theory.
Citing Valencia (2010), Harrison asserts that in “examining the educational attainment of people of color, it is important to note the detriments of the historical and current consequences associated with basing attainment capacity on reasons other than how schools are structured and operated educationally, pedagogically and environmentally” (p. 11). Another dissertation, ‘Electronic portfolios as living portals: A narrative inquiry into college student learning, identity, and assessment’ (Nguyen, 2013), uses critical hermeneutic theory to inquire into the experiences of students with electronic portfolios.

Similarly, Edge (2011), in her dissertation titled ‘Making meaning with ‘readers’ and ‘texts’: A narrative inquiry into two beginning English teachers' meaning making from classroom events,’ writes, “I outline a theoretical framework that I refer to as classroom literacy in which I envision teachers as readers and writers of a dynamic ‘classroom text’” (p. 46). Edge also uses Rosenblatt’s transactional theory (pp. 53-55) in her inquiry. In the same vein, Hissong (2005) writes, “The theoretical perspective of feminist poststructuralism and the notion of non-unitary self were the guiding framework for this narrative inquiry” (p. iii). She notes that feminist poststructuralism “offers a lens to address the intersections of identity as a mother, patriarchy, rural living, and conservative religious beliefs of the women who were engaged in this narrative inquiry” (p. iii). Last but not least, Cavendish (2011), in grounding her dissertation titled ‘Stories of international teachers: A narrative inquiry about culturally responsive teaching’ in social cultural theoretical framework argues that “(h)ow we construct new understandings and engage with one another is set within a sociocultural context” (p. 15).

My reading of the aforementioned studies lead me to believe that while narrative approaches to the study of lived experiences can be grounded in various theoretical
lenses, tensions may still arise. However, I have endeavoured to not let the lenses of postcolonial and anti-colonial theories silence the voices of the foreign certified teachers who participated in this study. In the section below, I discuss my justification for the choice of the theoretical lenses I have employed in this study.

Postcolonial theory provides a critical perspective that can effectively inform narrative research that examines experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan as it allows for a historical as well as pedagogical perspective on the issue. Francis (2007) points out that postcolonial perspectives allow researchers to “maintain a historical perspective, to embrace rather than reject the problematic past, and subsequently to recognize the weaknesses of the inherited discourse of colonialism,” (p. 2) which include historical tendencies toward oppressive and unequal relationship between the dominant and the other (Özkazanç-Pan, 2009).

According to Rizvi, Lingard, and Lavia (2006), postcolonialism helps to make comprehensible the linkages between discourse and power, and how colonial modes of representation perpetuate inequalities. In so doing, postcolonialism seeks “to produce a more just and equitable relation between different peoples of the world” (Young, 2003, p. 7) including foreign certified teachers and their Canadian-born professional counterparts in Saskatchewan.

Subedi and Daza (2008) identified three issues advocated by postcolonial theory that are relevant to this dissertation. First, postcolonial theory “locates how the dichotomous representation of the world establishes a rigid division between local/global, citizen/foreigner....” (p. 2). As articulated in the study participant stories in Chapter Five, such a division may bolster the exclusion of those viewed as ‘other,’ including foreign
certified teachers. Schmidt (2010) captured this fact in her argument that “teachers from non-Anglo Celtic backgrounds have historically been excluded from the Manitoba teaching profession” (p. 245). Contemporary views of what Cummins (2003) referred to as “difference as deficit” (p. 41) have tended to perpetuate that exclusion. Brown-Glaude (2010) referred to the "legacy of exclusion" (p. 808) that she argued, has continued to persist despite some improvements to increasing diversity in the academic profession. Subedi and Daza further submit that postcolonial theory rejects the claims of universal notions of experiences and ways of life that subsume differences. This is important because, as Freire (1998) observes, “the dominant class has the power to separate itself from the dominated class by rejecting the differences which exist” (p. 71). The goal, according to Freire, is to maintain the power differential between the two and for the dominant class to capitalize on the “inferiority” of the other.

Second, postcolonial theory concerns itself with “questions of agency and how (the) marginalized are capable of interrupting or resisting dominant discourses” (Subedi & Daza, 2008, p. 3). In his quest to critically explore and understand events in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the United States beyond the official position expressed by government officials, Apple (2002) underscored the importance of interrupting dominant discourses if the society is to engage in transformative teaching and learning practices. Subedi and Daza suggest that the issue of agency is important for its ability to enable the ‘other’ to contest dominant educational practices. Spivak (1988) linked agency to power discourses that render the subaltern’s voice inaccessible; while Simon, Eppert, Clamen, and Beres (2001) have talked of the
"shattering of the hermeneutic horizon on which past and present meet and within which historical interpretation becomes possible" (p. 296).

Third, “by foregrounding racial, ethnic, religious and other identities in the making of a citizen-subject,” postcolonial theorists “have been critical of the ways in which national identity and citizenship are conceptualized within racialized and heteronormative frameworks” (Subedi & Daza, 2008, p. 2). Schmidt (2010), in her example of a foreign certified teacher from Ukraine who was in her practicum as part of teacher certification in Manitoba, argued that some Canadian teachers may not be used to working with their foreign certified peers and could scarcely fathom the possibility. Quoting the Ukrainian teacher who participated in the study, Schmidt writes, “All teachers were asking me, ‘Are you going back to Ukraine?’” (p. 245). Subedi and Daza put it like this. Foreign certified teachers who speak with an accent or are of racialized minority backgrounds are often asked, “‘Where are you from?’ or ‘Where are you really from?’ regardless of where they were born/raised or may claim official national citizenship” (p. 5) or the teaching credentials they currently have. Ash (2004) discusses this phenomenon in her essay, “But Where Are You REALLY from? Reflection on Immigration, Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity,” in which she writes,

There is an ironic coming of age for all Canadians of colour: the moment when you first become aware that you are not seen as a Canadian. That you will forever have to justify your presence in your country in a way that white Canadians, and even newly-arrived white immigrants, never will. (p. 399)

She continues thus,
The startling disjunction between the common self-perception that Canadians are white, and the reality that Canadians are multicultural and come from a large variety of ethnic and racial origins is deserving of study. In the face of Canada’s proclamation of multiculturalism, how does Canadian identity remain a white identity? (p. 399)

The concepts of other and alterity when viewed from a postcolonial lens represent ways in which difference or diversity has been delineated and acted upon by the dominant structures in the postcolonial society. Ayling (n.d.) argues that the other represents the postcolonial subject that is constructed from external influences – such as historical, economical, and social - that is embedded within oppressive structures (including both material and conceptual).

Fanon (1967) questions the rationale for characterizing colonialism and its effects in terms of a binary opposition of the colonizer versus the colonized. Rather, he suggests that colonialism and its aftermath presents a complex network of internal power imbalances between various stakeholders within the broader categories of colonizer and colonized. The querying nature of postcolonial theory thus makes it a useful tool for the analysis of and unpacking of the legacy of colonialism and its effects on experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan.

While Rizvi, Lingard, and Lavia (2006) argue that a key achievement of postcoloniality is “its insistence that, far from being secondary to the economics of colonialism, discursive and cultural practices must be viewed as essential to the production and maintenance of colonial relations” (p. 256), they suggest that postcoloniality has been criticized for its “attempts to undermine western culture itself”
Such arguments, though not necessarily accurate, became especially more common both in the media and academic circles following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States (see for example D’Souza, 2002 and Thobani, 2007). My view is that postcolonial critiques do not intend to “undermine western culture,” and that while some people see it this way, postcolonial theory rather aims to undermine the presumed legitimacy and authority of western culture.

As already stated above, postcolonial perspectives have been broadly defined and encompass a wide field of social sciences. At the same time, postcoloniality tends to have shared concerns such as Western epistemological hegemony and an emphasis on the formation of others’ identities (Özkazanç-Pan, 2009) – binaries that silence some while empowering others. Grounding this study in postcolonial theory allows me to apply unique approaches of various postcolonial thinkers to these concerns. In particular, the perspectives of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak have provided a critical lens for this dissertation.

While Said (1978) speaks to the rigid binary between the dominant colonizer and the colonized other, Bhabha (1984) highlights the contradictions inherent in colonial ideology. For example, although, colonial ideology is often marked by a stark contrast between the dominant West and the ‘inferior’ East, it also attempts to find a common ground (such as through the spread of Christianity) by remaking the other in the image of the self. This, Bhabha points out, renders colonial discourse “ambivalent” and “hybrid,” where hybridity signifies “the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities” and “the strategic reversal of the process of domination” (p. 154).
Bhabha (1984) asserts that colonial authority cannot produce a perfect copy of the original; rather it only produces a ‘corrupted’ version of itself. Hybridity thus “opens up spaces for the colonized to subvert the masterdiscourse” (Kumaravadivelu, 1999, p. 464). This point is well captured by Loomba (1998) in her assertion that English education in the colonized nations of Africa and Asia – including Nigeria, India, and Hong Kong where three of the study participants come from – both assumed the superiority over local languages and became an important tool in resisting colonialism, demand justice and freedom, and foster nationalism. That is, English language became “a weapon of the dispossessed” (Warschauer, 2000, p. 516).

Bhabha’s (1984) representation of resistance centres on his questioning of the authority of the colonizer. His postcolonial critique shows a recovery of the native voice (such as by using English language as a ‘weapon’). This contrasts with Spivak’s (1999) view that the subaltern cannot speak for herself.

Spivak (1999) points out that voices of resistance that Bhabha and others cite are often those of the Western-educated (like herself) rather than those, especially women, in the margins. This, she contends, is because the women in her text are unable to speak for themselves; and even if they were to do so, their voices would not be heard. The inability of the subaltern to speak for themselves is mainly due to lack means for successful communication among them. This, according to Spivak, is precisely because Indian indigenous discourse has been so damaged by colonial history and its effects. In other words, the subaltern cannot speak not because of some innate deficiency but rather because of histories of domination and exploitation, a fact that may also apply to other countries outside Europe.
While Spivak sympathizes with attempts to recover the subaltern voice, she nonetheless “sees difficulties and contradictions in constructing a speaking position for the subaltern” (Kumaravadivelu, 1999, p. 465). Spivak (1985) is not against representation of the subaltern per se, however, she calls on postcolonial writers who chose to do so to employ reflexive practice. This would enable them to “unlearn their privilege and ethically mark their own theoretical positions” (Kumaravadivelu, 1999, p. 465).

According to Kumaravadivelu (1999), by unlearning their privilege, those who occupy dominant positions would be able to “avoid imperialistic gestures that seek to represent those who cannot represent themselves or to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves” (p. 465). Beverley (1999) defines ‘unlearning privilege’ as “working against the grain of our interests and prejudices by contesting the authority of the academy and knowledge centres at the same time that we continue to participate in them and to deploy that authority as teachers, researchers, administrators and theorists” (p. 31). Similarly, Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking (2011) write that unlearning one’s privilege “means not only understanding the historical context in which this privileging was formed but also working hard at gaining … knowledge of the others and attempting to speak to them in such ways that make it possible for them to answer back” (p. 80).

Brady and Hernandez (1993) identify a two-step process of unlearning one’s privilege. The first step involves challenging the “exclusionary and often colonizing discourse of dominant groups by carefully scrutinizing the(ir) legitimation … and understanding place and identity in relation to issues of power and domination” (p. 331). The second step in unlearning privilege requires confronting differences constructively.
These, Brady and Hernandez suggest, require a rethinking of the way the other is represented: “from fragmented and passive voices to active subjects in the struggles of history” (p. 331). Like other human beings, these ‘active subjects’ “make meaning through [their] stories, [they] are [their] narratives and [their] stories are who [they] are” (Lewis & Adeney, 2014, p. 165). While “the stories of individuals often disrupt or run counter to the larger ‘taken for granted’ dominant narratives” (p. 162), the goal of the narrative researcher, as Lewis and Adeney remind us, is “the exploration of the stories humans tell to make sense of lived experience” (p. 161).

This possibility of recovering alternative voice resonates with narrative inquiry, which highlights the centrality of researcher reflexivity, ethical relationship between the inquirer and the study participants, as well as the need to identify ontological and epistemological assumptions of the study (Clandinin, 2013). These are presented in Chapter Four (Research Methodology). Further critiques of the three postcolonial theorists, Said, Bhabha, and Spivak, are summarized below.

3.4 Postcolonial critique of Edward Said: Disrupting Orientalist representation

Said’s (1978) *Orientalism* critiques the concept of otherness by asserting that the Occident/West (Western Europe and North America) created a dichotomy between itself and the Orient/East with the latter signify anything that the former was not. Said provides various definitions of ‘Orientalism.’ These include: “A way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience;” (p. 1) “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the ‘Orient’ and (most of the time) the ‘Occident’,” (p. 2) and “A Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (p.
3) by discursively constructing the place and people of the Orient (the Other) and, 
conversely if more subtly, the place and people of the Occident (The West, the Self) ... 
and in ways that clearly are hierarchical and, indeed, dependent upon and reproductive of 
racism.

Orientalism indicated the power of the Occident over the Orient with the 
Orient homogenized and viewed as a problem to be solved. That is, the non-
Western peoples were regarded as being in need of enlightenment from the West. 
When viewed this way, Orientalism has a history in Saskatchewan where the 
British were the governing authority (the Queen is the Head of State in Canada) 
possessed power in the education system and in the classroom where the teachers 
were white and privileged and the students in residential schools and First 
Nations Schools were Aboriginal (according to Wilson & Oloo, 2011, just eight 
out of a total of 3,700 school teachers in Saskatchewan’s major urban centres in 
1980 were Aboriginal).

Over 20 years before Said (1978) published Orientalism, Sinor (1954) wrote that, 
“Orientalism is that branch of scholarship which uses Western methods to elucidate 
problems pertaining to lands lying east of the European ecumene” (p. xiv). Lary (2006) 
suggests that Orientalism encompassed the field of study of everything not Western in 
tradition and its practitioners were often “learned Western men ... steeped in the 
unquestioning acceptance of the superiority of the West. In other words, they belonged 
to a world of colonialism and imperialism in which they were on the dominant side” (p. 5).
The power to define others and by extension oneself, according to Said (1998), is inextricably linked with the political power to dominate. He argues, for example, that from the point of view of many in the United States, and perhaps most of the Western world, “Muslims and Arabs are essentially seen as either oil suppliers or potential terrorists. Very little of the ... passion of Arab-Moslem life has entered the awareness of even those people whose profession it is to report the Arab world.” He continues, “What we have instead is a series of crude, essentialized caricatures of the Islamic world presented in such a way as to make that world vulnerable to military aggression” (para. 9).

How the foreigner is perceived in Canada is a little different but just as complicated. In a study of Canadian history textbooks and their relationship with nationalism and the “incarcerating banality of white supremacy,” Montgomery (2008) points out that,

In racial states such as Canada, 'white governance' prevails to the extent that policies and practices of multiculturalism have the effect not of disrupting white domination, but rather of making such domination appear invisible via representing it as given, normal, or commonsensical. (pp. 83-84)

This view concurs with Said’s (1978) critique that rejects the notion that effects of colonialism are no longer being felt today in liberal democratic states like Canada. It is the histories, domination, difference and tensions that forms the object of critiquing experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools.

Said (1978) draws from post-structural theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault and uses this frame to examine the question of representations of non-
Western persons by deconstructing the binary oppositions perpetuated in the occident (Kitonga, 2010). He (Said, 2000) emphasizes the need to go against the self-serving ways of excluding the foreign other and his work has resonated with researchers in various fields including early childhood education (Viruru, 2005), subaltern studies (Guha & Spivak, 1988), and Queer, Lesbian and Gay Studies (Sumara & Davis, 1999).

Spivak (1993) celebrates Said’s (1978) seminal text *Orientalism* as an important contribution through which 'marginality' has become a discipline of study in the Anglo-American academy. Spivak points out that “the study of colonial discourse, directly released by work such as Said’s, has … blossomed into a garden where the marginal can speak and be spoken, even spoken for. It is an important part of the discipline now” (p. 56). Similarly, Barker, Hulme, and Iversen (1994) suggest that Said’s work has significantly helped move matters of colony and empire “centre stage in Anglo-American literary and cultural theory” (p. 1).

Although Said is not without his critics (see for example Landow, 2002), his work has contributed to the area of postcolonial thought by highlighting the power-knowledge constructs that limit and define relationships between the dominant and the other (Milligan, 2011). To this end, his analytical perspective was helpful in this narrative research into experiences of foreign certified teachers who work in rural Saskatchewan schools especially in those contexts involving racialized minority teachers or Aboriginal reserve schools with foreign certified teachers of European descent.

I am reminded of the fact that in a research relationship between the researcher and the study participants, the former occupies a dominant position (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009). However, “paramount to all narrative work,” write Lewis and
Adeney (2014), “is the centrality of relationship in the research process and recognizing the sacredness of the stories participants entrust within the research environment” (p, 171). Further, narrative research emphasizes researcher reflexivity and ethical relationship between the researcher and the study participants (Lewis, 2008). Thus, while the researcher still has a dominant voice, the potential negative impact on such dominance is minimized in narrative research. This could help explain why research participants in narrative research have been referred to as collaborators (Lewis & Adeney, 2014), co-researchers (Green, 2013), and co-constructors (2013).

3.5 Postcolonial critique of Homi Bhabha: The hybrid subject

Homi Bhabha’s contributions to postcolonial studies include his engagement with such concepts as cultural difference, hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence to explore how colonized peoples have resisted the power of the colonizer (Huddart, 2006). Bhabha (1994) suggests that postcolonial critique “bears witness to the unequal and universal forces of cultural representation” (p. 171) that vies for political and economic control in the contemporary world. Bhabha (1992) views postcolonial perspectives as emanating from the “colonial or anti-colonialist testimonies of Third World countries and from the testimony of minorities within the geopolitical division of East/West, North/South.” He argues that these perspectives “intervene in the ideological discourses of modernity that have attempted to give a hegemonic ‘normality’ to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged histories of nations, races, communities, and peoples” (p. 46).

Like Said (1978), Bhabha (1994) argues that the dominant/other binary in which the former regard themselves as being superior are not based on scientific facts, rather
they are due to territorial and hegemonic ambitions of the colonizers. In the process, Bhabha attempts to speak back to such epistemological domination through his concept of hybridity (Özkazanç-Pan, 2009). He defines hybridity as “the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the ‘pure’ and original identity of authority).” He continues, it is “the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects” (Bhabha, p. 112).

Hybridity thus “creates ambivalence over the purity of identities and knowledge for either the colonized or the colonizer by remarking the co-implication of all colonizer-colonized relationships” (Özkazanç-Pan, 2009, p. 41) and in so doing denies the colonizer’s superiority. Bhabha (1994) asserts that the concept of hybridity does not intend to bridge the tension between two cultures; rather it is “a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority - its rules of recognition” (pp. 113-114).

Bhabha (1994), while emphasizing hybridity and the ‘in-between’ spaces of competing cultural differences; points out that postcoloniality usually involve ‘liminal’ negotiations of identity across people from mainstream and ethno-cultural and racialized groups. According to Bhabha, “The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation” (p. 23). Bhabha suggests that if colonialism leads to “hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist
authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs.” He continues, “The ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority enables a form of subversion, founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention” (p. 45). That is, despite the obvious differences that may be present such as with respect to culture, teacher education and experiences, as well as expectations between foreign certified teachers and the Saskatchewan communities that they now call home, the in-between spaces between the two or more groups involved creates hybridity between and across cultures without diminishing the subaltern voice or uncritically accepting ‘supremacy’ of the dominant power.

Özkazanç-Pan (2009) argues that the “postcolonial self, constituted through historical and contemporary power relations, counters and resists such hegemonic representations of identity by interjecting the pure with the hybrid” (p. 19). Through this act of disruption and dislocation (Young, 1996), the postcolonial “voices itself in the space occupied by the colonizing notion of the (Western) self” not as an assemblage of interacting cultures, but rather as a product of “a polyvocal relational process embedded in historic power relations” (Özkazanç-Pan, p. 19).

In ‘Signs Taken for Wonders,’ Bhabha (1985) explores how the colonizer uses “the book” as an instrument of control of colonized peoples because it carries with it a logocentric and "civilizing" power that displaces the subaltern's authority of experience. The subaltern copes with the colonizer's presence through imitation and mimicry, an ambivalent position involving the attempt both to become like the oppressor and to resist the imperial presence (Olson, 1998). Bhabha’s concept of mimicry critiques the
psychanalytic dimensions of domination and its effects on postcolonial subjects. It is “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 1984, p. 126).

The mimicry of the postcolonial subject is potentially destabilizing to colonial discourse (Ashcroft, 2005) as the very techniques that highlight the dominance of the colonial discourse, also expose its inherent weaknesses that ultimately destroy itself from within (Bhabha, 1984). Bhabha reminds us that “the success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace” (p. 127). He suggests that the ambivalence and subtlety of mimicry enables it to avoid marginalization while at the same time resisting and being a form of difference in the face of a dominant other. As Bhabha writes “Mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask … The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (p. 127). Turton and Freire (2009) liken mimicry to instances of simulation that break with the dominant power. Such simulations not only subvert hegemonic discourse with a set of unwelcome resemblances but they may also lead to resemblances that are always partial and never get to the point of a full replication.

Spivak (1988) argues that despite well-intentioned efforts to give voice to the subaltern, there is little possibility for recovering the subaltern voice, since hegemonic discourse constitutes and disarticulates the subaltern. Unlike Spivak, Bhabha (1994) explains that the subaltern is able to speak by adopting indirect methods via a type of "sly civility". Olson (1998) concurs with Bhabha and suggests that the “subaltern does not escape hegemonic discourse, but speaks from within it, turning it on itself” (p. 50).
act of resistance by the subaltern interrupts and diminishes hegemonic power (Bhabha, 1994).

Bhabha’s (1994) work underscores the fact that individuals make meanings from their experiences and thus questions the notion that ideas can be imposed or transferred mimetically between different cultures. As explained in Chapter Four, the foreign certified teachers in this study are from different countries and cultural backgrounds with different ways of knowing and experiences. Where necessary, experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan can be viewed through Bhabha’s hybridity lens. This takes into account the fact that narrative research “involves a focus on stories and storytelling throughout the research process” (Lapum, 2009, p. 3).

Hybridity also offers a means to interrupt the notion of the other as being fixed, in the sense that cultures and human beings are stable. For example, it is tempting to essentialize the foreign certified teachers who participated in this study and regard them as a fixed and homogeneous group. Yet, the teachers are individuals whose personal narratives allow for evolution of a distinct hybrid self. Hybridity as discussed by Bhabha comes to play in two key ways, first, as an “act of recovering a self that is colonized by a homogenizing lens” and second, as a means of disrupting “mimetic impositions of ideas [including those about self]” that have been imposed upon the other (Özkazanç-Pan, 2009, p. 82). This makes it a useful theoretical lens in studying experiences of foreign certified teachers and the meanings that they attach to those experiences.

3.6 Postcolonial critique of Gayatri Spivak: The subaltern subject

Said’s (1978) Orientalist representation focused on the binary relation between the dominant and the other. Bhabha’s (1994) critique explored the hybrid between the
two binaries. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak brings in another perspective. Spivak’s interests include the connections between culture, capital and power. Her work offers insights into how ideas of privilege, merit, development and difference deriving from colonial processes play significant roles in the justification and perpetuation of inequalities (Andreotti, 2007). Spivak notes that works of such celebrated European writers as Marx, Kant, and Hegel tend to exclude the subaltern from their dialogue and hinder non-Europeans from occupying positions at the global high table.

Spivak (1999) not only explores how binary oppositions are created and sustained, but she also employs deconstructive methods to dismantle such binary categories. Like Bhabha, she questions ontological assumptions of pure cultures and cultural differences. However, while Bhabha highlights the psychological aspects of domination, Spivak (1999) emphasizes the textual production of domination. She, for example, critiques “taken-for-granted categories such as ‘East’ and ‘West’ and suggests neither category exists as an ontological reality independent of attempts to represent them in relational terms” (Francis, 2007, p. 47). But unlike Reagan (2004), who highlights misrepresentation of non-Western cultures in Western scholarship, Spivak deconstructs Western texts that use narratives to treat non-Western populations as homogenous. She critiques the textual production of the gendered postcolonial subject as she outlines how this subject exists at the margin of Western feminist and academic writing, as well as global economic influence (Özkazanç-Pan, 2009).

Spivak’s (1999) postcolonial critique explores the notions of subalternity, reflexivity, and gender. She questions the ability of the subaltern to speak for herself and suggested that if the subaltern were to get a voice, she would not be subaltern anymore.
She suggests that the subaltern cannot speak for herself and that the researcher as an ‘expert’ cannot speak for the subaltern. Thus, to approximate a subaltern for foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan would be like committing violence against the former. The question then is, ‘Can the subaltern exist and speak as a deconstruction and self-reference?’ (Kayne, 2004, p. 11).

The assertion that the subaltern does not have a voice probably means that she is unable to speak in a way that would carry authority or meaning for non-subalterns without altering the relations of power/knowledge that constitute the subaltern in the first place (Andreotti, 2007). According to Ashcroft (2001), the phrase ‘the subaltern cannot speak’ does not necessarily mean that subaltern’s voice is silenced. Rather, Ashcroft argues, it “suggests that the voice of the subaltern does not exist in some pure space outside the dominant discourse” (p. 46). Ashcroft concurs with Spivak (1999) in his suggestion that “the subaltern can never speak outside the discourse of power,” however, he maintains that “all language is like that” (p. 46). Ashcroft further contends that the subaltern can have access to the dominant discourse and use this discourse to transform the prevailing hegemony. Spivak expresses her suspicions at attempts to retrieve a pure form of subaltern consciousness and equates efforts to find an authentic subaltern with desire of the intellectual to be benevolent in a process that silences the subaltern.

Spivak points out that as a ‘native informant,’ the researcher needs to articulate his or her research text through reflexive writing. This view is compatible with Clandinin’s (2013) notion of narrative research as being relational, that is, the researcher and the study participants are in an ethical relationship and co-create knowledge. Such a relationship requires that the researcher reflexivity be purposefully articulated (Schaefer,
Lewis’s (2011) call for researchers to hold space for the narrator and her (or his) story may be seen in the same context. Neither Spivak nor Lewis supports the idea of speaking for the ‘native informant’ or the subaltern. The three, Spivak, Clandinin, and Lewis agree on the importance of using reflexive writing whereby the researcher’s story is told as part of the research. Martin and Griffiths (2010) remind us of the need to recognize our own worldviews as well as the ontological and epistemological foundations that underlie them in order to begin to “learn to unlearn” our privilege as researchers and thus realize “transformational learning” (p. 4). Such learning, for example, by school administration, other teachers, and foreign certified teachers should be deliberate and reflexive. I followed this advice by identifying myself and my possible biases in Chapter One.

Spivak offers a framework for an educational approach that could enable educators and learners to value and learn from difference and to reconstruct their worldviews and identities based on an ‘ethical relation to the other.’ Her insights add strength to the argument around the significance of critical literacy as an educational practice that prompts learners to examine their locus of enunciation and the connections between language, power and knowledge, to transform relationships and to reason and act responsibly (Andreotti 2007).

However, it must be remembered that foreign certified teachers in Saskatchewan are not a homogenous group. By way of example, I came to Canada in 1999 as an international student in the master of education program at the University of Lethbridge after graduating with a bachelor of education and getting teacher certification and teaching experience in Kenya. Since then I have graduated with both master of education
and master of public policy degrees, worked as a teacher assistant and, classroom teacher, and as a researcher or policy analyst with all the three levels of government in Canada – City of Edmonton, Government of Alberta, and Government of Canada. I have travelled to Australia, Europe and across North America. Even though I am a foreign certified teacher, my experiences do not necessarily reflect those of other foreign certified teachers. At the same time, my experience with discrimination bears similarities and differences with those of the study participants. Perhaps that is why Spivak (1988) warns against romanticizing and homogenizing the subaltern.

Francis (2007) notes that a key contribution of Spivak’s framework is the “reflexive position and questioning that she requires of researchers who want to study postcolonial subjects” (p. 50). Thus, Spivak’s critique of postcolonial thought “speaks directly to the problematic of representation: giving voice is neither an academic methodological issue nor necessarily possible to do. It is a practice that attempts to address the … power relations among different people” (p. 50), which in this case includes foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. Francis suggests that “While, for some, Spivak’s critique seems to encompass a massive dismantling of postcolonial studies, for many, the ardent call of ‘making the Subaltern speak’ has resulted in a much appreciated self-examination as well as a rearticulation of the postcolonial subject” (p. 29).

Said’s Orientalism, Bhabha’s hybridity, and Spivak’s subalternity are all to varying degrees concerned with discourses of power relations. Power relations within a classroom, school, and rural Saskatchewan communities where the schools are located are constructed from the actions of all participants, namely the foreign certified teacher,
students, other teachers, school administration, and community members. While in some cultures, including in my native country Kenya, there is a common assumption that the teacher is the source of classroom power, in other cultures, such as in Saskatchewan, power can be seen as arising from the interaction between students and (foreign certified) teachers (Manke, 1997), and between the (foreign certified) teachers and the school. Postcolonial framework provides a perspective through which to more fully understand the effect of colonialism and its aftermath on the relations and experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan.

3.7 Anti-Colonial theory

Although postcolonial theory, and particularly postcolonial theory through the work of Said, Bhabha, and Spivak, forms the main theoretical framework for this research, anti-colonial theories have been drawn upon as a complementary lens. While postcolonial lens emphasizes the continuing effects of colonialism after the formal end of colonization (such as in the former colonized societies), other theorists, such as Dei (2009), Pratt (2004), and Rabaka (2003) propose anti-colonialism as a framework for interrogating situations where the colonizers are present in the spaces that were formerly colonized. Such spaces would include settler societies like Saskatchewan and postcolonial and anti-colonial frameworks would help understand experiences of foreign certified teachers in such a society.

As described in Chapter Two, literature on experiences of foreign certified teachers (and other foreign trained professionals) and trends in international immigration into Canada show that Canadian schools, including those in rural Saskatchewan, are increasingly becoming spaces of cultural contact as students and teachers (increasingly
those) from formerly colonized countries enroll in or accept employment in these schools. Pratt (1991) refers to such spaces as ‘contact zones,’ which she defines as “spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived out in the world today” (p. 34).

Using examples of schooling experiences of her son and a class she teaches at Stanford University, Pratt discusses how in both cases difference is dealt with by being ignored – much like experiences and worldviews of many racialized minority students and teachers have sometimes not been validated in many Canadian classrooms (see for example Dei & Rummens, 2010). Pratt then proposes a classroom space where all voices can be heard. She theorizes such a space as involving a teaching-learning process that does not subsume difference, but rather recognize and examine such differences.

Pratt (1991) gives an example of her experience teaching in such a space:

All the students in the class had the experience … of hearing their culture discussed and objectified in ways that horrified them; all the students saw their roots traced back to legacies of both glory and shame; all the students experienced face-to-face ignorance and incomprehension, and … the hostility, of others… [but the] kinds of marginalization once taken for granted were gone. (p. 39)

At Pratt’s contact zone,

Virtually every student was having the experience of seeing the world described with him or her in it. Although with rage, incomprehension, and pain, there were exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom – the joys of the contact zone. (p. 39)
As already stated above, schools, as contact zones, could be viewed not just as spaces where individual student voices are nurtured, or as imagined communities (Anderson, 1982) where collaborative learning occur; but also as spaces where the tensions between the foreign certified teacher’s own discourses, those of the rural Saskatchewan school, as well as the worldviews that the students bring with them to school are made visible (Harris, 1995). Further, Pratt (1991) identifies an aspect of contact zones that could be relevant to understanding experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan, namely, “safe houses” (p. 71). She defines safe houses as “social and intellectual spaces where groups can constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degrees of trust, shared understandings and temporary protection from legacies of oppression” (p. 71). Pratt notes that safe houses are ‘built’ to help cope with the tension and uncertainty often experienced in the contact zones.

Dei (2012) points out that anti-colonial discursive framework “involves a theorization of colonial and re-colonial relations and the aftermath and the implications of power and imperial structures on: the processes of knowledge production, interrogation, validation and dissemination,” and “the recourse to agency, subjective politics and resistance” (p. 112). Rabaka writes that (2003), “one of the most important tasks of a critical anti-colonial theory … is to capture and critique the continuities and discontinuities of the colonial … in order to make sense of our currently … colonized life and … worlds” (p. 7).

Dei and Kempf (2006) suggest that anti-colonial theorizing provides a framework that enables us to ask and perhaps find answers to questions such as why and how have
certain voices become dominant or subordinated. What is the impact of that subordination? They argue for unsilencing the subordinated voice in order to “subvert and challenge what is taken for granted, what is seen as normal, what is accepted as the conventional norm” (p. 17). Spooner (2011) goes on further and contends that the issue is not that such voices are silenced, but rather they are not heard. This, he argues, is rooted in the colonial relationship between the (dominant) European settlers and (colonized) Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

Dei (2002) presents anti-colonial discourse as “theorization of issues, concerns and social practices emerging from colonial relations and their aftermath” (p. 117). He (Dei, 2012) suggests that ‘colonial’ goes beyond anything ‘foreign’ or ‘alien’ to implicate all that is ‘imposed’ and ‘dominating.’ To him (Dei, 2012), anti-colonial theorization allows for the “interrogation of power relations structured along lines of race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, language, disability and sexuality” with the goal of transforming rather than merely understanding the “complexities, messiness, disjunctures, contentions, and contradictions of social realities” (p. 112). The continuities of the effect of colonialism have at times been perpetuated and validated within the school system (see for example Montgomery, 2005). Dei suggests that “teasing out points of contention, resistance and opposition” such as in the voices of foreign certified teachers based on the relationship between self and other offers “possibilities for transforming current social systems” (p. 112).

Dei (2006) reminds us that an “anti-colonial prism … scrutinizes and deconstructs dominant discourses and epistemologies… and explores alternatives to colonial relations” (pp. 2-3). Pratt (2004) has spoken of the “diffusionism,” which she defines as “the often
unarticulated assumption that universal civilization naturally but at the same time
mysteriously arose in Europe and spread to the rest of the world” (p. 444). She rejects
the particularization of “the European’s self-invention as the monopolist of the universal”
(p. 444). Dei’s anti-colonial critique seems to agree with Pratt’s diffusionism. He (Dei,
2009) advocates for a “culturally grounded perspective that centers oppressed peoples' worldviews/perspectives helps resist the dominance of Eurocentric perspectives and can create counter-hegemonic knowings which challenge mainstream media and culture” (p. 253). This anti-colonial perspective is key to understanding the existing colonial power relations in Canada and how this is (unintentionally) perpetuated by the school system. As Montgomery (2013) points out, it is necessary “to take seriously the structural domination reproduced through the teaching” at schools and teacher education programs “and to do so by highlighting pedagogical approaches that have liberating potential” (p. 2).

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989) hold a similar view to Dei’s (2009) and points to the “continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression” (p. 2). However, unlike Dei they explore the colonization of Africa and Asia (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka) where, to a great extent, the colonizers left after political independence (to a great extent because there is significant white populations in parts of Africa including Zimbabwe and South Africa, however, the political dominance of the once colonized indigenous populations has overshadowed that of the colonial governments). While there are similarities in the after-effects of colonization in Africa and Asia on the one hand, and in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand on the other (for example, both “emerged in their present form out of the
experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989, p. 2), for the most part, the latter represent settler states.

A notable point of departure between postcolonial and anti-colonial theorizing is that postcolonial framework has tended to emphasize problems with essentialism in research, knowledge, and relationship between the dominant group and the other (Angod, 2006); while anti-colonial “theory of difference” (according to Dei, 2006) allows for difference to be embraced as a source of collective identities and resistance. Anti-colonial prism as presented by Dei (2002; 2006), Rabaka (2003), Pratt (2004) and others provide a perspective that helps in understanding experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan.

3.8 Conclusion

In this study, I have applied postcolonial and anti-colonial frameworks because of the nature and objectives of the study and taking into consideration that the study participants are first generation emigrants/immigrants including those from non-Western cultures and a white male who teaches at a predominantly Aboriginal school. My review of literature on the experiences of foreign trained professionals revealed common themes of difference, discrimination, and feeling of being an outsider. I have had similar experiences. The lenses of postcolonialiality and anti-colonialism provide me with a critical frame to coruscate power relations and its effects on discourses in the West (Subedi & Daza, 2008) to the extent that it applies to the experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools.
A postcolonial lens enables critical engagement with issues of difference and social transformation as perceived by foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools. As well, it allows for a historical, political, and pedagogical perspective of the study that could allow the reader to “embrace rather than reject the problematic past, and subsequently to recognize the weaknesses of the inherited discourse of colonialism” (Francis, 2007, p. 2).

Just as Apple (2000) points out that “it is impossible to understand current educational policy in the United States without placing it in its global context” (p. 58), so also it is difficult, nay, impossible to unfold experiences of foreign certified teachers in a rural Saskatchewan context without first attempting to historicize idea of ‘the global context.’ Colonization, as Said (1989) points out, is a “fate with lasting, indeed grotesquely unfair results” (p. 207) including hierarchies of cultures, knowledge, and value (see Gandhi, 1998) which perpetuates what Said calls the “dreadful secondariness” (p. 207) of some peoples and cultures. Postcolonial and anti-colonial frameworks enable my study to do this by taking into consideration the lingering effects of colonialism within the rural Saskatchewan context.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: NARRATIVE RESEARCH

(N)arrative is the everyday practice of storytelling, the teller/speaker uses the basic story structure to organize events and/or experience to bring forward what is perceived as important and significant for the teller and the audience. Narrative research, then, is the exploration of the stories humans tell to make sense of lived experience. (Lewis & Adeney, 2014, p. 161)

4.1 Introduction

This study employs narrative research methods to explore the stories of experiences of four foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan classrooms to make sense of their lived experiences. The phrase narrative research is often used to refer to an umbrella of methods within qualitative research that use stories to describe meanings that humans make of the world around us (Polkinghorne, 1995). Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2008) suggest that people make sense of their experiences through stories. Maxwell (1998) writes that the “perspectives on events and actions held by the people involved in them ... are part of the reality” (p. 75) the researcher seeks to understand. Narrative research has been used in various disciplines including environmental studies (Rogers, 2004), psychology (Smith & Sparkes, 2008), education (Thomas, 2012), and medicine (Clandinin, Cave, & Cave, 2010).

The field of narrative research is diverse both theoretically and methodologically (Riessman, 2008). It “has realist, modernist, post-modern, and constructionist strands, and scholars disagree on origins and precise definition” (Reissman & Speedy, 2007, p. 428). Clandinin and Connelly (1994) trace the historical development of narrative
research and point out that narrative approach has been influenced by numerous
researchers and educators such as Dewey's (1938) theory of experience, MacIntyre's
(1994) views of change, among others. Reissman (2008) argues that this diversity is a
key strength of the narrative approach. She describes “narrative analysis as a ‘family’ of
analytic approaches to text,” and notes that “(a)s in all families, there is conflict and
disagreement among those holding different perspectives” (p. 151). This study draws on
different narrative approaches to explore the experiences of foreign certified teachers in
rural Saskatchewan.

Chase (2005) notes that a common thread among narrative approaches is the
emphasis on the uniqueness of each human action and storied experience. As human
beings, we construct ourselves through narrative and make sense of our lives by telling
and retelling stories of our experiences (Lessard, 2015). Clandinin and Connelly (1994)
remind us that narrative as a way of knowing involves the construction and
reconstruction of personal and social stories. They write that

Stories are the closest we can come to experience as we and others tell our
experiences. A story has a sense of being full, a sense of coming out of a personal
and social history …. Experience … is the stories people live. People live stories
and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. (p.
415)

Narrative research is a “means for inquiring into storied experiences” (Griffin,
Ciuffetelli-Parker, & Kitchen, 2010, p. 2). In stressing the universal appeal of narratives,
Riessman (1993) suggests that "narratives of personal experience... are ubiquitous in
everyday life... telling stories about past events seems to be a universal human activity” (pp. 2-3). Meier and Stremmel (2010) argue that teacher narratives enhance reflection and professional inquiry as well as enable teachers and teacher candidates to better “recognize and interpret key moments in their classrooms and better address problems of meaning in their daily teaching” (p. 250). As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) point out, narrative inquirers study experiences of teachers and through the study seek ways to enrich and transform the experience for themselves and others.

Booth and Barton (2000) assert that: “If story is a basic way of organizing experience, and if we search for our own stories in the stories of others, can narrative be a form of research that we can employ to examine education and our role in the teaching/learning process?” (p. 37). This question raises the issue of the difference between narrative and story. According to Binder (2011), narrative refers to the process of inquiry, or to use the words of Connelly and Clandinin (1990), “the study of how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future” (p. 24 emphasis added). Story, on the other hand, refers to the “phenomenon of telling” (Binder, 2011, p. 1).

In the section that follows, I review some of the key features of narrative research approach as a research methodology. The section also identifies key differences between narrative inquiry and other forms of narrative research. As Lapum (2009) writes, “my methodological decisions were based on what best fit my substantive research area and my way of thinking and being” (p. 66). Duke and Mallette (2004) point out that there are various ways of conducting research and that some methodologies cannot always fit
exclusive categories. That is, “some research can be considered more than one type of
research or may combine methodologies in various ways” (Duke & Mallette, p. 1). I
regard myself as occupying a methodological hybridity space within qualitative research.
As such, I draw from both narrative inquiry and other narrative approaches. The
hybridity lends itself to the fact that while narrative ways of knowing often have
philosophical differences, they can complement each other.

In affirming that “there is something distinctive about narrative inquiry that marks
it as narrative inquiry,” Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, p. 69) write that “there were
borderland spaces between … various forms of inquiry, borderlands in which these
distinctions become blurred and difficult to identify” (p. 70). While I would not consider
this study to be defined as narrative inquiry, my “conversations, writing, and desire to
work in relation with” (Griffin, Ciuffetelli-Parker, & Kitchen, 2010, para. 15) the study
participants have been significantly influenced by narrative inquiry and narrative
research. Chase (2005) views narrative ways of knowing as “an amalgam of
interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches and both traditional and
innovative methods – all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as
narrated by the one who lives them” (p. 651). Lewis and Adeney (2014) ask, “Why are
researchers turning to narrative?” They suggest that “it may be that story is our primary
mode of making meaning and understanding of lived experience, our own and others” (p.
162).

4.2 Basic claims of narrative research approach

Lieblich, Mashiach-Tuval, and Zilber (1998) note that while there is diversity in
research approaches, strategies, and methods within narrative research, there are
territorial markings that distinguish narrative researchers from other qualitative researchers. What narrative researchers have in common is the study of stories of experience or descriptions of a series of events.

Moen (2004) identifies three key assertions of narrative research approaches. These are: 1) human beings organize their experiences of the world around them into narratives. That is, human experience is made meaningful primarily via narrative and so narrative research concerns itself with how individuals assign meanings to their experiences by use of stories. 2) The stories that an individual tells depends on the individual’s past and present experiences, values, the person(s) the story is being told to, as well as where and when the story is told; and 3) the “multivoicedness that occurs in the narratives” (p. 30). Moen argues that narratives are both personal stories shaped by “knowledge, experiences, values and feelings of the person who is telling them,” and at the same time collective stories that are influenced by “the addressees and the cultural, historical and institutional settings in which they occur” (p. 31). Moen submits that “narratives are thus mediated actions that connect the individual and the social context. In this way there are a multitude of voices within an individual’s narratives” (p. 31).

Moen (2004) suggests that narratives and narrative research have been employed in various directions in research projects. These directions include the use of narratives in the representation of a qualitative research (see for example Creswell, 1998), as a research methodology (Gudmundsdottir, 2001), and as a frame of reference in a research process where “attention is paid to narratives as producers and transmitters of reality” (p. 229). I concur with Moen’s view that narrative approach is a “frame of reference, a way
of reflecting during the entire inquiry process, a research method and a mode of representing the research study” (p. 29).

As Dewey (1938) points out, every human experience should have the capacity to prepare the individual for “later experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality,” and this is the “very meaning of growth, continuity, reconstruction of experience” (p.47). Dewey views life, experience and education as being closely linked together. That is, narrative is both a method of studying human experience as well as the phenomenon under study. It is part of the theoretical frame in which the inquiry is grounded. Dewey notes that “amid all uncertainties, there is one permanent frame of reference: namely, the organic connection between education and personal experience” (p. 25). Thus, according to Dewey, experiences, and indeed education, are neither isolated nor static, and human experience has at least two main educative features, continuity and interaction. Continuity of experience implies that “every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (p. 35). Human experience is not just within the individual, but is also a product of the individual’s interaction with his or her environment (Moen, 2004).

Grumet (1988) argues that “to tell a story is to impose form on experience” (p. 87). That is, when we perceive of story(ies) of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan as “life as told,” then it is through story that we come to know life as experienced. Lewis (2000) describes narrative research a “collaborative process” in which “teachers [as study participants] tell stories and researchers collect those stories through a variety of methods, and then, researchers tell stories, or narratives, about those stories (data) collected” (p. 274). Lewis identifies three key aspects of this process. One,
the researchers “listen, to the stories” (Lewis, 2008, para 18) of the study participants, in this case, the foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. The goal is not to “silence the researcher; [rather], it ensures that the [foreign certified] teacher … is provided with the opportunity to share her or his story” (Lewis, 2000, p. 274). Two, Lewis (2000) contends that researchers who use narratives to understand human experience generally agree that it is “a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and restorying” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4) between the researcher and the study participant. And three, this research relationship (see also Polkinghorne, 1995) in the form of collaboration ensures that “In the end what is presented [as research texts] are ‘collaborative stories,’ mutually constructed by the [foreign certified] teacher and the researcher out of the lives of both” Lewis, 2000, p. 274).

Following the sentiment expressed by Griffin, Ciuffetelli-Parker, and Kitchen (2010), while I would not consider [my] reflections in this [study] … to be defined as narrative inquiry, [I] do … attest to the fact that [my] research orientation [draws on] … narrative inquiry and experience, and accordingly, influence and shape [my] conversations, writing, and desire to work in relation with [others]. (para. 15)

As already stated, this study occupies a methodological hybridity within research that employs narratives to understand human experience. To this end, the next section explores narrative commonplaces (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) through stories of four foreign certified teachers who participated in this study.
4.3 Narrative commonplaces

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) have identified three commonplaces, or areas of focus in narrative inquiry that “specify dimensions of an inquiry space” (p. 479). They suggest that all the three commonplaces; temporality, sociality, and place need to be addressed concurrently for a research project that uses narratives to understand lived experiences. The commonplaces are an inherent part of the theoretical frame as well as method within narrative inquiry that adhere to Dewey’s notion of experience. However, as the work of Harrison (2014), Nguyen (2013), Lessard (2010), Edge (2011) and others have shown, narrative research does not necessarily preclude application of other theoretical frames. Therefore, wherever necessary, I have drawn on both Dewey’s notion of experience as a phenomenon and theoretical lens, as well as on postcolonial and anti-colonial perspectives – a process that has been marked with tensions, structural impositions, and at times, perceived incommensurability.

Temporality refers to the assumption that people, events, and places are always in transition, always in the process of changing, and so they have a past, a present, and a future. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) write that “events under study are in temporal transition” (p. 479) and so attending to temporal ways points narrative inquirers toward the past, present, and future of people, places, things, and events under study.

Temporality evokes the notion of human experience as being a continuous process of negotiation and change rather than static and frozen in time. This, as seen in Chapter Five, is evident in the storied experiences of the study participants as they reflect on their journey from their home countries to rural Saskatchewan classrooms, as well as their imagined personal and professional knowledge landscapes as they look to the future.
From a postcolonial perspective, such processes of negotiations – in the case of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan - could be problematized as occurring within “complex structures and systems (including systems of beliefs and psychological internalizations), power relations and attitudes that tend to eliminate difference and maintain … enforced disempowerment” (Andreotti, 2008, p. 59) of the less dominant groups.

Sociality, refers to the personal conditions (such as feelings, hopes, and moral dispositions) and social conditions (such as existential conditions and the environment), as well as the relationship between the researcher and the study participants that form the context for the stories of the individual study participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Clandinin (2013) reminds us that the researcher is in an inquiry relationship with study participants and sociality “directs attention to the relational ontology” of narrative research (p. 41).

Similarly, Andreotti’s (2008) postcolonial reading calls for an inquiry relationship with the other that is ethical and based on epistemology that is not binary or hierarchical. This, according to Martin and Griffiths (2010), implies the adoption of an epistemology that is contextualized, relational, and does not privilege one knowledge system over another. The emphasis on specificity, that is, the situated and contextualized epistemology, means that individuals in an inquiry relationship, such as the researcher and the study participants or the foreign certified teacher and the school community in rural Saskatchewan, “will know and understand the world differently according to their geographical, historical and cultural contexts” (Martin & Griffiths, 2010, p. 7). Spivak
(1988) suggests that an ethical relationship invites the researcher to interrogate his/her own positioning, context, and complicities.

Place, refers to the physical location or locations from which stories emerge (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In writing about the close link between people, place, and stories, Connelly and Clandinin point out that “all events take place some place” (p. 481). This is especially the case for foreign certified teachers who have left their countries for Canada and are currently teaching in rural Saskatchewan schools. The venue where the study participants told me their stories was a location of their choice.

When applied to a white settler state like Canada, the commonplace of location brings to the fore the issue of colonialism and its effects on the power relations between the dominant and the other. Such a relation has an impact on experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. ‘Colonial,’ according to Kempf (2009) goes beyond imperialism and territorial control to encompass anything dominating or imposing. Kempf calls of the “recentering of objective assessments of power relations” that emanate from colonial encounters as well as an examination of “myriad ways which colonialism has shed its skin only to emerge in a new form—shape shifting to accommodate the needs of the colonizer (newly and broadly conceived)” (p. 1).

According to Clandinin and Huber (2010), the three narrative commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place are important in a research process that employs stories to understand human experience because they help “challenge the dominant story of phenomenon as fixed and unchanging” (p. 9). Each of the commonplaces briefly described above informs the research design of this study as well as the relationship between the study participants and me.
4.4 Key elements of narrative inquiry that are relevant to this study

Clandinin, Pushor, and Murray-Orr (2007) propose eight elements of narrative inquiry that I found useful to this study: 1) justification for the study, 2) the phenomenon that is under investigation, 3) the methods used to study the phenomenon, 4) analysis and interpretation processes, 5) positioning of the study, 6) the uniqueness of each study design, 7) ethical considerations, and 8) the process of representation and the research texts. Clandinin, Pushor, and Murray-Orr suggest that each of these elements should be considered by researchers as they “undertake, live through, and write about” (p. 24) their work. The eight elements are discussed below in relation to how each informs this study.

4.5.1 Justification for the study

Clandinin, Pushor, and Murray-Orr (2007) suggest that three main kinds of justification need attention. These are the personal (why the study matters to the inquirer), the practical (in terms of what differences this research might make to practice), and the social (such as the differences that this dissertation might make to theoretical understandings of the phenomenon under study). While Clandinin and Connelly (2000) acknowledge that it can be challenging to “establish a personal sense of justification” (p. 122), they nevertheless suggest that, “for narrative inquirers, it is crucial to be able to articulate a relationship between one’s personal interests and sense of significance of larger social concerns expressed in the works and lives of others” (p. 122).

My personal justification stems from my experience as someone who was raised in Kenya and got my teacher education and certification as well as teaching experience in Kenya before coming to Canada as an international student. I later became a classroom teacher in Canada. Further, I was a teaching assistant at the University of Lethbridge and
the University of Regina where I met and had discussions with student teachers who had teacher certification from outside Canada and international students in the teacher education program who hoped to become teachers in Canada. My practical and social justification arose from the telling and retelling of my stories, which helped create spaces where other foreign certified teachers and foreign students in teacher education programs would share their stories. In general, these stories of lived experiences awakened my colleagues and I to our “lack of space and voice” (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray-Orr, 2007, p. 25) on the journey to becoming certified teachers in Canada, as well as to “how the cultural, social, and institutional narratives” (p. 25) in which we were embedded shaped our views as teachers.

As I entered into relational space with foreign certified teachers who participated in this study I was reminded of Clandinin’s (2013) social justification of narrative inquiry which include “making situations more socially just” (p. 35). Daiute and Lightfoot (2004) point out that “researchers that have adopted narrative methods have found them particularly useful for addressing the unmet challenge of integrating culture, person and change” (p. viii), a challenge that in my view has become perhaps more pronounced in Saskatchewan in the recent years as the province experiences economic and population growth fuelled in part by international migration and investment (see for example Zong & Perry, 2011). Daiute and Lightfoot (2004) argue that because “the texture of modern life is increasingly defined by weaving together separate generations, life stages, cultures and social and political ideologies” (p. viii), an understanding of these complex “life systems” encompasses all aspects of our lives including policy development with respect to foreign certified teachers.
4.4.2 Phenomenon under investigation

I am interested in the lived experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools. Drawing from narrative inquiry not only allows me to adopt a “narrative view of the phenomenon” (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray-Orr, 2007, p. 25), but it also enables the voices of foreign certified teachers to emerge in the context of the study participants’ life stories, or “life space” (p. 27). Kramp (2004) describes narrative research as “a by-product of narrative knowing” (p. 108) and suggests that the researcher endeavours to better understand the lived experiences of the study participants.

4.4.3 Methods used to study the phenomenon

Clandinin (2013) writes that “In one-on-one situations, [study] participants are asked to tell their stories in a variety of ways: by responding to more or less structured interview questions, by engaging in conversation as dialogue, or by telling stories triggered by various artifacts” (p. 103). I engaged with four foreign certified teachers individually in one-on-one conversations as dialogue (elsewhere referred to as interviews as conversations as explained later in this Chapter) shaped by unstructured research puzzles that were geared toward understanding their storied experiences. The method enabled me to use the study objectives as a guide while at the same time leaving space for study participants to offer insights that I may not have foreseen (Brenner, 2006).

Consistent with narrative approaches, I employed open-ended questions (Peters & Pearce, 2012) to initiate collaborative and dialogical relationship with study participants.

According to Elliot and Timulak (2005), open-endedness refers to the general strategy of data gathering in which 1) study participants are encouraged to elaborate on their accounts, 2) observations are not restricted to certain pre-existing categories, and 3)
the inquiry is “flexible and carefully adapted to the problem at hand and to the individual informant’s particular experiences and abilities to communicate those experiences, making each interview unique” (p. 150). Because “humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves” (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 14), I had follow up conversations with the study participants by various means including face-to-face meetings, Skype, email, and by telephone.

Narrative data may involve more than interviews and stories. Other sources of data included field notes, photographs, and other documentation that were shared by the foreign certified teachers. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, the overall narrative portrait can be generated from the composition of documented “actions, doings, and happenings, all of which are narrative expressions” (p. 79) as well as the co-composition of field texts by the researcher and the participants.

4.4.4 Analysis and interpretation process

Data analysis in naturalistic inquiry is often an iterative process that begins before the process of data collection is complete (Denzin, 2001). In this study, I used methods drawn from Clandinin, Lessard, and Caine (2012) and Horwitz (2001). The approach involves identifying the central meanings in each of the study participant’s story; and looking across individual narrative accounts for “resonant threads or patterns” (Clandinin, Lessard, & Caine, p. 10). I “drafted narrative accounts and negotiated them with each participant until each [study participant] felt [I] had an account that represented something of who they were and were becoming” (Clandinin, Lessard, & Caine, 2012, p. 9). The narrative accounts of the study participants are presented in Chapter Five.
Andrews (2007) suggests that in Western research “we orient ourselves towards that which is unique about each individual while often ignoring the social fabric that forms the framework of a person’s life” (p. 489). Considering the contextual and relational factors as they pertain to narrative research will therefore enhance “the salience of the distinctive boundaries between the self, the interviewee and all others” (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray-Orr, 2007, p. 489).

4.4.5 Positioning of the study relative to other research

Positioning of a study relative to other research forms a key aspect of social science research and usually takes the form of literature review (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray-Orr, 2007). I recognize that participants in this study are from diverse backgrounds and that the insights uncovered about their experiences “as mediated through (my) own interpretive lens, will always and can only be a partial knowledge” (Andrews, 2007, p. 509). I also appreciate that communication across sociocultural boundaries can and did lead us to new and different realities. It follows that every “story has a point of view that will differ, depending on who is telling the story, who is being told, as well as when and where the story is told” (Kramp, 2004, p. 108). Andrews’ suggestion that narrative researchers should “resist the temptation to over-interpret those empty spaces that lie within our conversations” (p. 509) and to recognize the likelihood that their own life experiences may impact the researchers’ ability to draw different kinds of insights is therefore commendable.

As I attempt to position this study relative to other research, I am aware that narrative research is a diverse field. And while “it is claimed by numerous writers that the common link that binds all forms of narrative [research] is an interest in studying
experience,” (Thomas, 2012, p. 221), that link is not always simple and straightforward. Elliot (2005) for example uses narratives to interrupt and deconstruct the ‘boundaries’ between quantitative and qualitative social research. Further, in giving examples of trauma narratives, Thomas reminds us that, “not all narratives seek to make sense of experience,” rather “some narratives ‘unmake’ and trouble sense” (p. 211). This study is influenced by a number of narrative approaches and even though I have made significant references to narrative inquiry as presented by Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly, this study does not follow the steps outlined by the two renowned narrative inquirers or many of their colleagues and former students.

4.4.6 Uniqueness of the study

The study is unique because little research has been done in rural Saskatchewan regarding the experiences of foreign certified teachers. Further, many studies conducted on or with foreign trained immigrant professionals, including teachers, have been grounded in theoretical frameworks such as sociocultural theory (Beyon, Ilieva, & Dichupa, 2004), human capital theory (Lee, 2007), and theories of assimilation (Beck, 2010). Although these studies are very important and provided the much needed background information for this dissertation, they have, in general, tended to uncover only a partial view of the lived experiences of their study participants especially in the context of settler jurisdictions such as Saskatchewan where the experiences of foreigners are deeply linked with the histories and present-day effects and reproductions of colonialism and its aftermath. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), while using the metaphor of borderlands between narrative inquiry and research that employs other ontological and epistemological assumptions, encourage “narrative inquirers to be good neighbours in the
broader community of scholars” and to “recognize the good neighbours in others” (p. 70) by attempting to understand and learn from differing ontological and epistemological assumptions.

4.4.7 Ethical considerations

As Lewis (2008) reminds us, narrative research is an ethical process that involves co-composition of field texts by the researcher and the “storyteller-participants” (para. 5). Lewis and Adeney (2014) write that, “Paramount to all narrative work is the centrality of relationship in the research process and recognizing the sacredness of the stories participants share and entrust to [the researcher] within the research environment. Researchers must respect the offering of these story gifts” (p. 171). As narrative researchers, “relational ethics live at the heart, perhaps are the very heart, of our work” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 30). When I started the doctoral program, I was intending to ask a few foreign certified teachers to share their stories with me and use those stories to satisfy the expectations of my educational journey. During this study, I have entered into relationships with individuals I never imagined I could meet. These stories were not just data; rather the participants and I entered into “a space where [we] could feel safe enough” (Cardinal, 2011, p. 88) to not only share our individual experiences in detail, but to also imagine our future personal and professional knowledge landscapes. During our conversations, as the stories took over, we could not help but laugh, smile, shake our heads, and used various non-verbal communication if only to reassure the other, or let them know of our attempts to see invisible thoughts. It became clear that I could not have such an experience with any other individuals. Relationship was necessary. A relationship that is ethical, safe, non-judgemental, and trusting. Lewis and Adeney
(2014) remind us that responsible “relationality begins with the inquiry, grows and
develops during the inquiry, and continues along after the inquiry, all the while forming,
informing and reforming the text” (p. 172). In such a relationship, “value judgements
lose their meaning. What is more important and meaningful is fulfilling a role and
obligations in the research relationship – that is, being accountable to your relations”
(Wilson, 2008, p. 77).

The University of Regina also requires ethical reviews for all research involving
human participants. This study was approved by the University of Regina Research
Ethics Board (see Appendix A) and abides by the required ethical considerations. The
ethical considerations complement the ethical relationality that informs narrative research
and involves an “explicit contract that states the role relationships between researcher and
participant (such as “This is who I am. This is the purpose of my study. You are free to
participate or not … You may withdraw at any time.”) (Josselson, 2007, p. 539).

Arguing that narrative research “is inherently a relational endeavour,” Josselson
points out that

(N)arrative research is founded in an encounter embedded in a relationship, the
nature of the material disclosed is influenced … by the trust and rapport the
researcher/interviewer is able to build with the participant. Thus, the participant
is reading, not what has been made explicit, but rather the subtle interpersonal
cues that reflect the researcher’s capacity to be empathic, nonjudgmental,
concerned, tolerant, and emotionally responsive as well as her/his ability to
contain affect-laden material.” (p. 539)
Merriam (2009) writes that in the end, the “actual ethical practice comes down to the researcher’s own values and ethics” (p. 230). My ethical considerations were greatly influenced by the notion that “what is essential is that an ethic of care be used when conveying information garnered from others” (Lewis & Adeney, 2014, p, 174). No ethical issues arose during this study.

4.4.8 Representation and the research text

Clandinin, Pushor, and Murray-Orr (2007) offer a number of possible suggestions for representing narratives of study participants. These include textual format of presenting the research, a consideration of the audience, identifying criteria by which the authenticity of the research may be judged, and clearly stating the significance of their research. Clandinin and Huber (2010) point out that voice, signature, and issues of audience are important when composing research text. Further, Lewis and Adeney (2014) view “the final research text as a blending of stories composed and recomposed [by the researcher and the study participants] all within the midst of life” (p. 173). I have identified the possible audiences for this study and suggested implications for various stakeholders including teachers and school administrators, students, parents, and researchers.

4.5 The ‘narrative turn’ in research

Several (Clandinin, 2013; Lewis, 2010; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006; Denzin, 1997) references to the phrase “narrative turn” have been made in the literature on narrative research. In defining “turn” as a change in direction from one way of thinking or being toward another, Pinnegar and Daynes use the phrase “narrative turn” to describe the movement from quantitative studies towards a narrative approach to research. Pinnegar
and Daynes identify four themes in a series of turns toward narrative research and point out that the four turns can appear in any order or even simultaneously. The first turn refers to the change in the relationship between the researcher and the study participant. This change is characterized as a movement away from a position of objectivity towards a research perspective focused on interpretation and understanding of meaning in which the inquirer and the research participant are in a relationship with each other.

The second turn is marked by a move from numbers as data to language as data. Pinnegar and Daynes (2006) posit that the turn from numbers to words as data is not a rejection of number per se, but a recognition that “in translating experience to numeric codes researcher lose the nuances of experience and relationship in a particular setting that are of importance to those examining human experience” (p. 15). That is, numbers provide limited ways of representing study findings that involve human experience. This is not to suggest that language is not fraught with its own limitations in terms of capturing human experience; but compared to numerical representations, language is more widely used in narrative research.

The third turn to narrative research was a move “from the general to the particular” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006, p. 21). Narrative researchers embrace the power of the particular for understanding experience of a particular individual or individuals and using findings from research to inform themselves in specific places at specific time. As Lewis and Adeney (2014) write, narrative research “does not seek a conclusive finding or findings. It looks for understanding and meaning” (p. 175).

The fourth turn to narrative research is characterized by a turn from one way of knowing to recognition that there are multiple ways of knowing and understanding
human experience, as well as a variety of epistemological frames through which to view human experience. This view provides flexibility for researchers to use various ways of knowing to create and or understand storied experiences of the study participants; and to ground such an inquiry on a lens, such as postcolonial theory, that rejects totalizing and essentialist discourses which ignore contextual and human agency (Said, 1978).

Isay (2007) writes that “If we take the time to listen, we’ll find wisdom, wonder, and poetry in the lives and stories of the people around us” (p. 1). Narrative research provides a way for understanding human experiences. Lewis and Adeney (2014) contend that “narratives are possessed with a capacity for social justice, which allows ... silenced peoples to tell their stories and others to listen and respond” (p. 165). As well, narratives allow for the intimate study of experiences of the foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. An individual's experience is a central lens for understanding the person and understanding how one experience leads to another. Narrative approaches to research often concern themselves with understanding the history and past experiences of an individual and how these contribute to present and future experiences.

Narrative approach not only provides a less exploitative way of conducting research (Hendry, 2007), but it also helps provide a space where the voices of the traditionally marginalized groups could be heard by enabling them to articulate a storied narrative of their experiences that is culturally, historically, and socially specific. Shields (2005) identifies an aspect of sharing stories that informs and connects us across time and place. This involves reconstructing stories from the past in the light of present knowledge. She argues that it “is not enough to retell the same story in the same way across time if that story is to be used to connect with new meaning and inform us in the
present,” rather “a story remembered must be revisited and reconstructed using our own life experience across the intervening years” (p. 180). Shields suggests that this would then enable us to “make use of specific stories to inform and guide us, to connect us to the core of ourselves which we may have sensed tacitly from the very beginning,” but “left behind as we went out into the world where knowledge often seems to be connected more to 'expert texts' than to our own human experience” (p. 180).

As already stated above, the research field that employs narrative approaches is quite broad and, as Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou (2013) point out, “there are well-defined debates on conflicting approaches within the field” (p. 1). However, as Lewis and Adeney (2014) remind us, “it is in and through narrative meaning making that humans gain insight and understanding of lived experience; we are stories and stories are us” (p. 175). This study draws from diverse narrative approaches because such a methodological hybridity is best suited to examining experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. I concur with Thomas’s (2011) suggestion that research approaches within social sciences should be seen as complementing rather than competing against each other. It is not my intention in this study to present any one approach to narrative research as “the salvation of the [research] world,” for such a claim would do injustice to this important area of qualitative research by misrepresenting (a) narrative approach as “another orthodoxy” (Bowman, 2006, p. 14).

4.6 Paradigmatic assumptions and perspectives

Paradigm, in the context of educational research, refers to a set of philosophical assumptions or beliefs about fundamental aspects of reality and how they can be understood (Hammersley, 2007). There is diversity in paradigms within social science
research and “each researcher … bring(s) their own epistemological and ontological views and approaches to their particular study” (Lewis & Adeney, 2014, p. 164). In identifying my paradigmatic assumptions as a qualitative researcher, I approach this study from a perspective that draws on John Dewey’s view of experience as well as the work of Dr. Jean Clandinin, Dr. Michael Connelly, and some of their colleagues and former students including Dr. Sean Lessard, Dr. Lee Schaefer, Dr. Janice Huber (all of the University of Regina) and others (such as Caine, Estefan, and Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2009; Schaefer & Clandinin, 2011). In general, these researchers view narrative as both a method of inquiring into and making sense of human experience as well as an epistemological frame.

This study has also been influenced by narrative researchers (such as Harrison, 2014, and Edge, 2011) who, while adopting Dewey’s notion of narrative as an epistemological frame, have also grounded their work in other theoretical frames including social cultural theory (Cavendish, 2011), feminist poststructuralism (Hissong, 2005), and transactional theory (Edge, 2011). In the section below, I address my ontological and epistemological assumptions.

4.6.1 Ontological commitments

The purpose of this study is to unfold and understand the experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools. As a qualitative study, it assumes that reality is subjective and multifaceted (Lewis, 2010). From my experience as a teacher of refugee students in Kenya to my personal and professional landscapes in Canada (as a friend, neighbour, brother, uncle, in-law, graduate student, teacher or teacher assistant,
public servant, and researcher), I have always been intrigued by the relational view of the world. This was heightened by my choice of narrative research as a way to understand experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan classrooms.

At the core of narrative research is a commitment to relationships, such as between the researcher and the study participants. There is also the relational between an individual and his or her social and physical environment, as well as relation between past, present, and future experiences. This study draws from Mauthner and Doucet’s (2003) notion of “relational ontology in which conceptions of the separate, self-sufficient, independent, rational ‘self’ or ‘individual’ are rejected in favour of notions of ‘selves-in-relation’ or ‘relational beings’” (p. 422). Mauthner and Doucet hold the view that “human beings are … interdependent … and … embedded in a complex web of intimate and larger social relations” (p. 422). This view was evident in the study participants’ stories of experience as they reflected on their journey from their native countries to rural Saskatchewan schools, and into the future; a future they were optimistic about and even recommended to other (potential) foreign certified teachers.

Ontological commitment in narrative research enables relational process of entering into an inquiry space by the researcher and the study participant. The foreign certified teachers who participated in this study not only relived some challenging experiences but also trusted me with their stories. It became clear to me that what the study participants chose to talk about and how they talked about it – in terms of detail – depended to a great extent on the relationship we had. Perhaps if they were to have the same conversations with someone else, they could have each said different stories or the same story differently. I believe that the lived experiences of the study participants that
they shared with me constitute what Lewis (2007) would call a “good story,” and it was significantly influenced by the relationship I had with each one of them, and the way our conversations took shape as guided by the research puzzles.

Ontological commitment in narrative research is closely connected to ethical relationships between the researcher and the study participant (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009). The relationship I had with the foreign certified teachers was ethical. They were not regarded simply as passive sources of data or as “merely represent[ing] the community being investigated” (Boylorn, 2008, p. 600) as a means to achieving research objectives, but rather they were experts whose experiences are an important source of knowledge. The relational ontology “validates and privileges the experiences of [study] participants, making them experts and therefore … collaborators” (p. 600) in the inquiry space. It also enabled me to theorize some of the challenges experienced by the foreign certified teachers as “relational problem[s] involving interpersonal and cultural ‘disconnections’” (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 422).

Writing about the relational and ethical of narrative research, Cardinal (2011) contends that,

In the inquiry space created with the [study participants], relationships were key. The conclusions I reached and the [research text] I wrote attempted to honour the sacredness of the stories told. With care and tenderness, I wrote to understand and to respect the gift of stories I had been given. (p. 82)

Other than being attentive to the issues of quality and rigour in this narrative research, some of the key forces “holding me accountable [are] the relational ontology, the
research inquiry space, and the writing for and the keeping in mind of the need to benefit” my audience and relations (Cardinal, 2011, p. 87).

The ontological commitment during the research process opened “safe places for stories to exist and be told and inquired into” (Cardinal, p. 85). Lewis (2008) writes that “the story act creates the sacred space for the storyteller to share her story … consequently, storytelling is a sacred act” (para. 5). I feel privileged and honoured that the four foreign certified teachers invited me to walk with them individually across their personal and professional knowledge landscapes.

4.6.2 Epistemological commitments

In exploring the experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools and the meanings that the teachers attach to those experiences, my epistemological assumption draws on John Dewey’s (1933) view that as human beings, “We learn from reflecting on experience” (p. 78). Dewey defines reflection as “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or practice in light of reasons that support it and the further consequences to which it leads” (p. 9). That is, “experience is not static, nor does it come piecemeal … rather, experience is continuous” (Griffin, 2011, p. 67). Caine, Estefan, and Clandinin (2013) suggest that relational ontology “underpins a central epistemological commitment of narrative inquirers, that experience is knowledge for living” (p. 6).

As discussed in Chapter Three, my second assumption is that postcolonial and anti-colonial lenses could provide useful insights in examining experiences of professionals from diverse sociocultural backgrounds in a settler society like Saskatchewan. Postcolonial and anti-colonial theories have been used to complement
rather than as competing against epistemological perspective based on Dewey’s (1933) notion of experience as described above. A similar approach has been adopted in a number of studies that employ narrative ways of knowing including Harrison (2014), Nguyen (2013), and Rushton (2004) whose epistemological commitments draws on both Dewey (1933) and other theoretical frames.

4.8 Study methods

This study occupies a version of methodological hybridity that employs narratives to understand experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools. It utilizes qualitative research methodology as outlined by Creswell (2003) and Merriam (2002). Creswell defines qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. According to Merriam, characteristics of qualitative research include the use of methods that are interactive and interpretive and use inductive analysis to holistically explore social phenomena while developing a rapport with participants. Qualitative research is designed to answer questions about lived or social experiences and give meaning to those experiences (Denzin, 2001).

But, as Creswell (1998) writes, “I would say metaphorically, qualitative research is an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colours, different textures, and various blends of materials” (p. 13). Like a bricolage (Kincheloe, 2005), this study uses bits and pieces from narrative methodologies, goes “beyond the blinds of particular disciplines and peer[s] through a conceptual window to a [hybrid space] of research and knowledge production” (p. 323).
4.7.1 Contacting and meeting study participants

Locating and recruiting foreign certified teachers to participate in this study occurred in various ways. I recruited one participant through ‘community nomination’ (Foster, 1997). I asked a friend who is a retired superintendent of a school division in rural Saskatchewan if he knew of any foreign certified teachers in his former school division. He introduced me to Adaora, a female teacher from Nigeria. Adaora and I communicated for close to two years before she participated in this study. I was able to establish a connection and an ethical relationship with her (Lewis, 2007) before meeting with her in person and engaging in interview as conversation with her as guided by the overall research puzzle. Please note that to maintain participant confidentiality, I assigned a pseudonym to each of the four foreign certified teachers who participated in this study, namely, Adaora, Ashakiran, Laoshi, and Nauczyciel.

My attempt to use the community nomination method to recruit additional participants with such organizations as Open Door Society, Filipino-Canadian Association of Saskatoon, and Association of Nigerians, Saskatoon (ANS) was not successful. I then placed newspaper advertisements in five community newspapers in rural Saskatchewan: The Saskatchewan Valley News, Moose Jaw Times Herald, Prince Albert Now (www.panow.com), Estevan Mercury, and Yorkton News Review. At the same time, I had study participant recruitment posters at the College of Education University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina Education Building after being granted permission to do so. As well, I had an advertisement on Kijiji Canada Classifieds, an online site that describes itself as “Canada's largest and most visited free classifieds site,” for about nine months.
Laoshi read my participant recruitment poster at the University of Regina and contacted me by email. We communicated several times by email and telephone for about two months before we met at the University of Regina and had a formal interview.

Ashakiran lives and teaches at a school in northern Saskatchewan. She was at the University of Regina about 750 km away during summer of 2013 when she saw my posters calling for study participants. She contacted me by email about her interest in the study. We communicated by email and phone during the summer she spent studying at the University of Regina. She also introduced me to two potential study participants, her husband Abhaijeet and their friend Nauczyciel. The two expressed interest in the study and for about three months, I was in touch with them by email and phone. Nauczyciel later thanked me for giving him the opportunity to discuss his experience as a foreign certified teacher in rural Saskatchewan.

At the end of summer, Ashakiran and I arranged to meet in Saskatoon, my home town, on her way home from Regina. However, due to last minute change in plans, we did not meet. We rescheduled a meeting at her home just over 500 km northwest of Saskatoon. On arriving at the northern village, I realized that my mobile phone was not working. It displayed a message that said, “There are no signals. Only emergency calls allowed.” At my hotel, I sent Ashakiran emails stating that I was in town and was looking forward to meeting her and her family the following day.

The next morning, I sent Ashakiran another email. I tried calling her mobile phone using Skype and Google Voice without success. About two hours after check out time at the hotel, I went back to the same hotel to use Internet. There was no email from Ashakiran. Because I did not have her address, I was unable to drive to her house.
although I knew that Ashakiran and her family were expecting me at their home for lunch and were probably concerned because the last time we communicated was about 16 hours earlier when I was on the road driving to her community. Eventually, at around two o’clock in the afternoon – two hours after our scheduled meeting – I started driving back to Saskatoon 500 km away.

As I was approaching Saskatoon, I stopped at a gas station. I decided to look at my phone, and there it was working normally. The earlier message ‘There are no signals. Only emergency calls allowed’ was not there anymore. As I checked my text and voice messages, I realized that Ashakiran had been trying to contact me. She had sent me several messages and was getting worried because of my silence.

One week later, Ashakiran, her husband Dr. Abhaijeet, their two-year old son, and Abhaijeet’s parents who were visiting from India welcomed me to their home. The home is three blocks from the only grocery store in town. The store was the last place I went to before leaving town the previous week. I visited with the family for about four hours and had lunch with them before Ashakiran invited me to her home office where we were engaged in a conversation for about 90 minutes about her experiences as a foreign certified teacher in rural Saskatchewan.

The visit with the family was a great experience. Abhaijeet’s sibling lives in Australia with his family and his parents recently visited Australia to meet their grandchildren. I have been to the same Australian city. As we talked, I also realized that they were familiar with the history of Indian settlement in Kenya – how Indians were brought to colonial Kenya by the British to build railway lines in the 1890s. Abhaijeet’s family also knew of the charity work that has been done by religious leader and
philanthropist the Aga Khan and the associated Aga Khan Foundation and Aga Khan Development Network in a number of countries. I attended Aga Khan School and my mother worked at The Aga Khan Hospital in Kenya. Kramp (2004) reminds narrative researchers of the need to attend to ways in which narrative of experience are embedded in sociocultural and institutional narratives. I later spoke with Dr. Abhaijeet for about an hour followed by a conversation about his experiences both at his home office and in his backyard.

I met Nauczyciel in person for the first time in Northern Saskatchewan. We drove around his town in my car showing me his place of work, where he plays soccer, the house he previously owned. Nauczyciel and I then went to his home where we had a conversation about his experiences as a foreign certified teacher in rural Saskatchewan for about 90 minutes. We also had discussions by the river that passes close to his home and also at the residence of his friends Ashakiran and Dr. Abhaijeet. As with Ashakiran and Dr. Abhaijeet, my conversations with Nauczyciel were guided by the study’s overall research puzzles. As well as audio-recording my conversations with the study participants, I took field notes, photos, and wherever possible, artifacts. The latter included a banner, handmade moccasins, dream catcher, and thank-you cards that were given to the study participants by their students.

I received ten responses from potential study participants. I thanked two of them and told them that they did not meet the criteria I had set for participating. A third individual did not respond to my subsequent emails. Another individual expressed his interest in the study and we communicated for over six weeks. He then stated that he could not participate in the study because of personal reasons. I met face to face and
engaged in conversations with six of the ten respondents: Laoshi from Hong Kong, Balala (Kenya), Nauczyciel (Poland), Adaora (Nigeria), Ashakiran (India) and Dr. Abhaijeet (India) as shaped by the study’s overall research puzzles around their experiences as foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools. One of the participants, Balala, withdrew from the study for personal reasons that included travelling out of the country. Another participant, Dr. Abhaijeet, was not included because I realized after my conversations with him at his home that although he was teaching in an adult basic education (high school-equivalent) program, he had not received a Saskatchewan teacher certification. The conversations with individual foreign certified teachers were conducted between June and November 2013.

4.7.2 Study participants

If one lives where one was born and bred, the continuity of one’s existence gives it and oneself and one’s environment … a subdued, flat, accepted reality. But if … one suddenly uproots oneself into a strange land and a strange life, one feels as if one were acting in a play or living in a dream. And plays and dreams have that curious mixture of admitted unreality and the most intense and vivid reality. (Woolf, 1961, p. 25)

Laoshi is a Hong Kong native who came to Canada as an international student and graduated with a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Saskatchewan in 1973. The retired teacher aged 62 spent all her Canadian teaching career in Saskatchewan teaching English, social studies, and mathematics in rural school districts. She had previously worked as a teacher in Hong Kong prior to coming to Saskatchewan. Laoshi is married with two adult children and lives in Regina with her husband.
Adaora is from Nigeria where she got her Bachelor of Education degree and worked as a teacher. After teaching in Nigeria for a few years, she moved to Australia where she earned a Master of Education degree from the University of New South Wales. She holds New South Wales teacher certification, ‘Approval to Teach’ and previously worked as a teacher in New South Wales. The 43 year old married mother of four has taught mathematics, biology, and chemistry in rural Saskatchewan schools for about 10 years.

Ashakiran is a 41 year old female and has been teaching for over 17 years in her native India, in Ontario, and in rural Saskatchewan. She holds a Bachelor of Education, Master of Education, and Master of Business Administration from universities in India. Ashakiran and her husband moved to Ontario from India in the late 1990s. She has Ontario College of Teachers’ Certificate of Qualification and Registration and was a volunteer teacher at an urban school in Ontario for about one year before moving to Saskatchewan. She has been teaching mathematics and sciences in the northern communities since 2008. Ashakiran and her husband have a two year old son.

Nauczyciel is in his early 60s and came to Canada from Poland in 1981. He got his Saskatchewan teacher certification in 1984 and has been teaching mathematics and sciences in northern Saskatchewan since 2004. He has two adult children and has lived in Saskatchewan since arriving in Canada from Poland where he had received his teacher education and worked as a teacher.

4.7.3 Engagement with the study participants

Perhaps it was as a graduate student in the Master of Education program at the University of Lethbridge that “I first came to see stories and the details of people’s lives
as a way of knowing and understanding” (Seidman, 2006, p. 1). In one of my Master of Education courses, I was the only international student from Africa. Most of my classmates were full time teachers in the Alberta’s kindergarten-to-Grade 12 school system. I got used to being asked what it was like to be a teacher in Kenya and also how I came to make my way to graduate program in Alberta, Canada. As a teacher in Alberta, my students and fellow teachers asked about my experience as a student, and as a teacher in Kenya, and in Alberta. Whenever I met a teacher who was from another country, I got interested in their experiences.

Or maybe it was long before I even came to Canada. I was a teacher at Kakuma Refugee Camp in Northern Kenya, which is perhaps the largest refugee camp in the world (De Montclos, & Kagwanja, 2000). Almost all my students were refugees from neighbouring countries with a majority coming from Sudan and Somalia. While Kenya uses English as a language of instruction from kindergarten, Sudan and Somalia do not. However, despite the numerous challenges that my students were facing, it was through stories that we were able to know each other, where we came from, our hopes and dreams, life. Stories brought tears to our eyes, made us speechless, and also made us see the good in human beings.

I concur with Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber’s (1998) suggestion that “One of the clearest channels for learning about the inner world is through verbal accounts and stories” (p. 7). As Spanbauer (1992) writes, “the only thing that keeps us from floating off with the wind is our stories. They give us a name and put us in a place, allow us to keep touching” (p. 125). When the time came for me to conduct research on experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan, it was the stories of those teachers
that I turned to. This I did while taking into account the notion that narrative research also concerns itself with how individuals interpret their social world and their place within it (Andrews, 2007a). Therefore, how the foreign certified teachers “imagine a world other than the one [they] know … the seeing of difference” (p. 490) is of importance. While narrative research do “not seek to make generalizable claims” (Trahar, 2011, p. 48), an individual study participant’s experiences as lived and told may shed light to “the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 18). As Riessman (2008) explains,

> What close narrative study of a single case can add is displaying how larger social structures insinuate their way into individual consciousness and identity, and how these socially constructed ‘selves’ are then performed for (and with) an audience, in this case the listener/interpreter. (pp. 115-116)

According to Banks (2001), “Social research has to be an engagement, not an exercise in data collection” (p. 179). As a relational enquiry, narrative research involves ethical relationships between the researcher and the study participants (Cardinal, 2011). Together, the researcher and the study participants co-compose an understanding of lived experiences through the telling and retelling of their stories. Such a research process calls for genuine dialogue between the researcher and the study participant. Clandinin (2013) identifies “conversations or dialogue” (p. 103) as one of the ways in which study participants are often asked to tell their stories. And, in calling for dialogue as a way of empowerment, Freire (1973) writes that effective dialogue is where there is “horizontal relationship between persons” (p. 45).
Clandinin (2013) identifies two starting points for narrative research: starting with living stories or with telling stories. She notes that of the two, telling stories is the more common starting point among narrative inquirers. The methods most often used in telling stories in qualitative research that employs narratives are “conversations or interviews as conversations” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 45) which are used to compose field texts with participants.

Some researchers (Elmir, Schmied, Jackson, & Wilkes, 2011; Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009; Reynolds, 2002) have observed that there remains an unequal and hierarchical power relation between the researcher and the participant in a qualitative interview process. To minimize the unintended impacts of the hierarchical relations, I constantly paid attention to the relational ethics in narrative research (Lewis, 2007), the emphasis on co-construction of meaning by the researcher and the participants (Clandinin, 2013), as well as the notion that “there is no one single truth” (Hartley & Muhit, 2003, p. 103) in qualitative research.

I also made deliberate effort to develop a comfortable relationship with the study participants both prior to and after meeting face to face with them. I did this by discussing my experiences and the current research in informal ways and also talking about any topic that came up (such as family, process of emigration to Canada, and the weather). The talks also included the study participant choice of interview sites as well as the types of research puzzles I had regarding their experiences. Having such conversations ahead of the one-to-one meetings “allowed me to give the participants some participatory control” (Smith-Price, 2009, p. 64) and to also address any questions or concerns they might have had.
To address the issue of power relations in qualitative interview process, researchers have used phrases like narrative interviewing (Trahar, 2011), dialogic conversations (Anderson, 2012), interview conversations (McCormack, 2004), conversational interviewing (Roulston & Lewis, 2003), conversational approach to interviewing (Toney, 2008), dialogic interviews (Knight & Saunders, 1999), and interviews as conversations (Trainor & Graue, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2006) to describe the methods used to engage with the study participants. While Clandinin, Downey, and Schaefer (2014) highlight the difference between conversations and interviews based on the power relation between the researcher and narrator, the aforementioned studies imply that the (impact of such a) difference can be minimized by at least two main ways. One, if the conversation is “based on people’s everyday competencies to narrate their own experiences and [their] main goal is to generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers (stimulus/response interview model), or general statements” (Issari & Karayiannia, 2013, p. 21); and two, if the process is viewed as a “discursive accomplishment” (Riessman, 2004, p. 709) in which the researcher is able to “keep her research aims and personal interests in mind, while leaving enough space for the conversation to develop into a meaningful narrative. It has to procure ‘stories’, namely concrete examples, episodes or memories from the teller’s life” (Josselson & Lieblich, p. 2003, 269-270). “Narrative interviewing is, then, a conversation between, usually, two people for the purposes of the research of one of them in which the narrator and listener will together produce the narratives” (Trahar, 2011, p. 49). This is what I am referring to when I use the words interview, conversation, or interview as conversation in this study.
4.7.4 Background to conversations with the study participants

As stated in the section above, researchers have used various terms to describe their engagement with study participants. These have ranged from interviews, conversations, interviews as conversations, interview dialogue, and narrative interviewing among others. I think the key issue is not definitions and semantics, but rather what the process entails. The process, in this study, is informed by relational ontology as well as the notion that the study participants’ individual experiences are a source of important knowledge that is worthy of being explored using narrative research. To effectively do so, the study participants must be able to speak freely without any restrictions such as those that are imposed by structured research puzzles or perception of hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the study participants.

I used qualitative interviewing as conversations to encourage the foreign certified teachers to describe their lived experiences in their own terms (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Seidman (1991) points out that qualitative interviews are “a powerful way to gain insight into educational issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives constitute education” (p. 7). And Merriam (1998) writes that “interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behaviour, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate” (p. 72). Similarly, Rubin and Rubin (1995) note that “through qualitative interviews you can understand experiences and reconstruct events in which you did not participate. Through what you hear and learn, you can extend your intellectual and emotional reach across time, class, race, sex, and geographical divisions” (p. 1).
Being cognizant of these strengths of interview method in qualitative research, I decided that the method was best suited to enable me gain insights into experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. But there are diverse interview techniques ranging from “structured question/answer format to a more open-ended, relaxed format that would result in more conversation type interviews to result in a story” (Smith-Price, 2009, p. 64). Based on my previous experiences of engaging in conversations with foreign certified teachers, students, parents, and others that involved the telling and retelling stories of our lived experiences, I was more drawn to the ‘conversation type interviews.’

I drew from narrative research approaches because the methodology allows study participants to tell their stories as they occur in everyday life (Bruner 1990). To effectively do this, I used interview approaches proposed by Holstein and Gubrium (1997) and Seidman (2006). Holstein and Gubrium point out that interview process is an ongoing meaning making of the phenomenon being examined. It is planned and organized while at the same time active and collaborative inasmuch as

(M)eaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning, nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter. Respondents are not so much repositories of knowledge – treasuries of information awaiting excavation, so to speak – as they are constructors of knowledge in collaboration with interviewers. Participation in an interview involves meaning-making work. (p. 114)

Holstein and Gubrium (1997) suggest that researchers are “deeply and unavoidably implicated in creating meanings that ostensibly reside within respondents”
They note that what happens during the interview influences the meaning making and shapes the narrative that is co-constructed by the researcher and the study participant. This “means consciously and conscientiously attending to the interview process and its product in ways that are more sensitive to the social construction of knowledge” (p. 114).

This study was guided by “open, unstructured interviews” (Trahar, 2011, p. 50). While some researchers have called for using multiple sources of data as a key characteristic of qualitative research (see for example Patton, 1989), the “case can be made that in some research situations … interview, as the primary … method of investigation, is most appropriate” (Seidman, 2006, p. 2). Seidman asks, “Why interview?” to which he answers, “Interview because I am interested in other people’s stories” (p. 7). Lewis (2008) writes that “Story, narrative imagining is one of our paramount ways to engage with meaning making. Story is central to our understanding of self, other, and, quite simply, the lived-world” (para 12).

“Interviews as conversations” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 45) were conducted with each study participant at a place of their choice. The process typically began with small talk usually about the road trip to the site of our meeting or about parking. Before we engaged in the conversations as guided by the research puzzles, the study participants signed the University of Regina research consent forms. Three of the four study participants granted their permission for our conversations to be audio recorded. For the conversation that was not audio recorded I wrote down notes.

I started by giving an overview of the study, its purposes, and rationale. I noted that I was interested in their stories of their experiences and thanked them for their time
and for entrusting me with their stories. This was intended to remind the foreign certified teachers of, and orient them to, the goals of the study and the reason why we were having the interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). The conversations that followed took the form of open-ended, unstructured approaches that were “more a friendly conversation than a data-gathering interview” (Knox & Burkard, 2009, p. 567). As stated above, the conversations that I had with the foreign certified teachers were “shaped by [the study’s] overall research puzzles around their experiences” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 104) as foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan.

Callary (2013) writes that, “since narrative research is intensely relational, ethical issues abound (p. 2). She points out that study participants in narrative research “are vulnerable when they divulge their stories, and must develop a sense of trust that the researcher respects them and treats them fairly in the presentation” (p 2). I paid attention to relational ontology, which, according to Stewart-Harawira, 2005) is necessary if the researcher is to “honour the ‘being’ of the other,” (p. 156), namely, the study participant.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note that “The way an interviewer acts, questions, and responds in an interview shapes the relationship and therefore the ways participants respond and give accounts of their experience” (p. 110). Clandinin (2006) reminds us that “we negotiate relationships … as well as how we are going to be useful in those relationships” (p. 48); and Wilson (2001) writes that “as a researcher you are answering to all your relations when you are doing research” (p. 177).

4.7.5 Framing of research puzzle

Clandinin and Huber (2010) refer to research question as research puzzle and suggest that “framing a research puzzle is part of the process of thinking narratively” (p.
10). Thinking narratively “highlights the shifting, changing, personal, and social nature of the phenomenon under study” (p. 9) and rejects the view of the phenomenon under study as being static and unchanging throughout the research process. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that research puzzle is often framed in such a way that it carries within itself “a sense of a search, a ‘re-search,’ a search again, a sense of continual reformulation” (p. 124).

I used Seidman’s (2006) three-tier interview process as a guide. All the study participants were asked similar initial questions, though not necessarily in the same order. I also asked follow-up questions, which were not necessarily the same of each participant as they depended on their responses and were intended to probe individual foreign certified teacher’s stories in more depth. All initial conversations were conducted in person at a place chosen by the foreign certified teachers and ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. Follow-up conversations were between 45 to 90 minutes long and used various forms including face to face, telephone, email and Skype.

Seidman (2006) contends that human experience becomes more easily understandable and meaningful when placed in the context of the individual narrator’s life and his or her social environment. In using Seidman’s three-tier interviewing approach, the overall research puzzles guide the conversations to include at least three key areas of study participant experiences. The first is based on what Seidman refers to as “focused life history” (p. 4). I invited the foreign certified teachers to describe in detail their life experiences until their coming to Canada with the goal of becoming foreign certified teachers. The study participant’s educational background, teaching
experiences at jurisdictions outside Saskatchewan, and their imagined personal and professional landscapes in Canada were covered.

The second area of focus was on Seidman’s (2006) “details of experience” (p. 11). This enabled the foreign certified teachers to talk about their life in Canada, in Saskatchewan, getting the Saskatchewan teacher certification, settling in rural Saskatchewan, their teaching experiences, challenges and coping strategies, as well as key moments that may have stood out in their experiences.

In the third area of focus, referred to by Seidman (2006) as “reflection on the meaning” (p. 22), study participants were asked to consider the meanings of their experiences as foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools. Issues that arose from previous conversations and needed clarification were addressed in subsequent conversations.

In general, the conversations were shaped by the overall research puzzles around the study participant experiences as foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan, while at the same time the participants directed the flow of dialogue (Maple & Edwards, 2010). Some of the study participants followed the format suggested by the interview questions, providing a temporal frame of their experiences before coming to Canada, life in Canada, and the meanings they make of those experiences. Others preferred to share their stories in other ways that they felt were more appropriate to their experience (Maple & Edwards, 2010). As suggested by Maple’s (2005) use of recursive interview techniques, I occasionally interrupted the interviewees to clarify points when necessary. Further, I used previously provided information to frame follow up questions.
Other than the interviews, other sources of data collection included artifact, field notes, and photographs. This process was quite selective and mainly focused on the following: In the case of Adaora, Ashakiran, and Nauczyciel, I was able to see and take photos of school buildings where the teachers worked and residential areas where they lived in rural Saskatchewan. In the three cases, there was just one school in the community and permission to visit was not sought because school was on summer break and I did not go beyond the gates of the school.

4.7.6 Researcher-participant relationship

Some time had elapsed between when the study participants and I made contact and when we met for the first time. Initial communication with the study participants during that time was by a number of methods including email, telephone, and Skype and helped build a rapport and develop background knowledge about the foreign certified teachers. It also afforded information that “provides direction and precedent, connecting the researcher’s interest to the respondents’ experience, bridging the concrete and the abstract” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997, p. 116). This proved very useful during the formal face to face interview. For example, in reference to the background knowledge I could say, “When we spoke previously, you said that you started teaching in [a place in rural Saskatchewan] in [year],” as a lead into the interview question. Maple and Edwards (2010) suggest that using such prior information to create a comfortable and safe interview space is conducive to conducting interviews in an intimate way.

As mentioned earlier, narrative research is a relational inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). The nature of relationship between the researcher and the study participant is important in qualitative studies because it may impact the quality and authenticity of the data collected.
Further, it helps guard against what Spivak (1999) refers to as “epistemic violence” against the subaltern by attempting to speak for the voiceless. Spivak notes that representations (of the other, or in the case of this study, the foreign certified teacher) are closely linked to (the researcher’s) positioning, hence the need for self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher. The importance of relationship between researcher and research participants goes beyond data collection stage as “narrative researchers attend closely to the move from field texts to research texts,” (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009, p. 599) a move that is grounded in the study’s ontological and epistemological commitments.

4.7.7 Analysis of the foreign certified teachers’ stories

Marshall and Rossman (1995) define data analysis as “the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data” (p. 111). Merriam (1998) goes further and state that “data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning” (p. 178).

Data analysis involves a systematic process where field text and other raw data is organized and ordered to draw conclusions. Narrative researchers have employed various methods of data analysis (Creswell, 1998). In narrative research, the process of data analysis often begins during data collection and the “final product is shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process” (Merriam, 1998, p. 162).
There are diverse opinions on whether or not narratives should be analyzed. Hendry (2007), for example, views as “an act of colonization” (p. 494) the process of analyzing and interpreting narratives because the researcher’s voice is likely to take precedence over listening to the voice of the storyteller. Hendry suggests that, “research is not about interpretation but about faith. Trusting in the stories of the storyteller” (p. 494). Lewis (2008), while supporting Hendry’s (2007) view that narrative researcher’s “primary task” (p. 494) is listening, points out that researchers tend to stress “the importance of analysis and interpretation” and in the process “re-marginaliz(e) … the very voices that we are supposedly giving voice to” (p. 2). Lewis (2010) reminds us that the role of the narrative researcher is to “hold the space for the storyteller and her story, transforming the place and the space, listening the story into being” (n.p.). In the same vein, Delaney (2005) asserts that “our story is finally all any of us owns, because … a story has only one master” (p. 651).

However, there are narrative researchers who call for analysis and interpretation of narratives. Hoskins and Stoltz (2005), for example, say that, “at a fundamental level … interpretation is the foundation of narrative research” (p. 97). Similarly, Reismann (1993) suggests that “interpretation is inevitable because narratives are representations” (p. 2). Riley and Hawe (2005) state that the narrative researcher's “role is to interpret the stories in order to analyze the underlying narrative that the storytellers may not be able to give voice to themselves” (p. 227). Polkinghorne (2007) calls on narrative researchers to “argue for the acceptance of the validity of the collected evidence and the validity of the offered interpretation” (p. 8).
Hoskins and Stoltz (2005) note that little has been written about dilemma experienced by many narrative researchers during the data analysis phase. I believe that there are various ways of conducting narrative inquiry and no one particular approach is superior over the other(s), rather the decision on whether or not to analyze narratives or use the two approaches to complement each other should be informed by such factors as researcher background and the purpose of the study. I concur with Thomas’s (2012) view that “narratives can and should, at times, stand alone” because “some are significant testimony in their own right” (p. 213). It thus follows that an “either/or” perspective in regard to analysis … overlooks the fact that all narratives have already undergone a form of analysis in the telling process” (p. 213).

I employed “rich first person accounts” (Lewis & Adeney, 2014, p. 169) to give prominence to the elements of the study participant narratives. Key messages in individual narratives of experience stood alone; and patterns across the narratives were investigated. By situating the narratives in the postcolonial and anti-colonial theories I attempted to make and “trouble sense” of the experiences of the study participants (Thomas, 2012). However, the process of data analysis was more daunting and filled with tensions than I had anticipated. Given the numerous pages of interview transcripts, I felt “at a loss as to where and how to begin” (Kiesinger, 1998, p. 84) to construct what Ellis (1995) calls “a meaningful story” (p. 71).

Further, after examining a few studies (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Li, 2005; Mishler, 1991) on narrative inquiry as a research methodology, I noticed that while there was consensus that narrative inquirers aim to understand meaning within story as well as broad parameters of what should or should not be part of analysis or
interpretation within narrative inquiry, “there were no clear steps that described how to do narrative inquiry analysis” (Maple and Edwards, 2010, p. 39). Horwitz (2001) came to similar conclusion when she wrote that there is no fixed set of procedures for analyzing stories. While this lack of clear direction on how to conduct narrative inquiry analysis and the fact that “literature was largely silent about ways to approach long stretches of talk that took the form of narrative accounts” (Riessman, 1993, p. v) was overwhelming, I realized that “it allow(ed) for freedom and flexibility of data analysis that may be lost when using other methods” (Maple & Edwards, 2010, p. 39).

This study occupies a version of methodological hybridity within narrative research. The approach provided mechanisms that “retain the complexity of the situation in which an action was undertaken and the emotional and motivation meaning connected with it” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 11). Gregen (2004) reminds us that an “analytical method of deconstructing stories into coded pile” is likely to undermine “the aims of the research” (p. 272) by deflecting attention from thinking narratively about experiences of the study participants (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Similarly, Maple and Edwards (2010) advise narrative inquirers against coding pointing out potential dangers of such an approach including “depersonaliz[ing] and decontextualize[ing] the stories from the participant” (p. 35). Maple and Edwards call for analysis process that is geared toward “understanding the story within the teller’s social situation, locating not only what is said and not said, but also the way in which events are placed and the importance given to them” (p. 35).

The data analysis (or field text inquiry) approach I used draws from Horwitz (2001) and Clandinin, Lessard, and Caine (2012). Horwitz’s approach to analysis of
narrative data considers 1) unique experiences or plot of a story (that is, what is the story that the study participant is conveying?), 2) Subject positioning (How does the foreign certified teacher see himself or herself? What aspects of his/her identity does he/she reveal? Horwitz suggests that the study participant’s identity is relative to the central meanings and the social context in which it exists; and 3) Evidence of secondary themes (that is, various aspects of personal perspectives that may not be central, but to which the participant attaches significant meaning).

Clandinin, Lessard, and Caine (2012) “drafted narrative accounts and negotiated them with each participant until each [participant] felt [the researcher] had an account that represented something of who they were and were becoming” (p. 9). They then looked across individual narrative accounts for “resonant threads or patterns” (p. 10).

I drew from the two analytic approaches because they would allow me to honour the stories of the foreign certified teachers and to “offer a deeper and broader awareness of the(ir) experiences” (Clandinin, Lessard, & Caine, 2012, p. 10). The field text inquiry process typically started with my writing down notes or transcribing the audio-recorded interviews. I transcribed the interviews and read them through before conducting the second interview. This was helpful to me in at least two main ways. First, it allowed me to become familiar with and to reconstruct and reinterpret the stories (Li, 2005) that the foreign certified teachers told me during the first interview. This made it easier as I negotiated the drafted accounts with the study participants. Second, because I transcribed the interviews fairly soon after conducting the interviews with my memory of such issues as body language and tone of voice still fresh, I was able to recall details of the interview that could be of crucial importance when moving from field text to research text.
(Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I then read the transcribed data numerous times and frequently returned to the audio recordings to enable me to become more familiar with each foreign certified teacher’s story and to ensure that the context of the narratives and the plot being examined were not removed from that originally portrayed by the study participants (Maple & Edwards, 2010). As I was reading through the transcriptions, I paid attention to the central plot of the story, how the study participants positioned themselves in the story (Horwitz, 2001), and my unique experiences with the study participants (Clandinin, Lessard, & Caine, 2012).

As stated earlier, my engagement with the study participants using interviews as conversations demonstrated flexibility as opposed to putting emphasis on standardized procedures. Clandinin and Huber (2010) remind us that, “being in the field” while composing field texts “involves settling into the temporal unfolding of lives” (p. 10) of the study participants. Schaefer (2012) suggests that people do not always share their stories of experience in chronological sequence. My intention was to demonstrate sensitivity to the context and preference of each foreign certified teacher. As a result, some study participants required more prompting and structure than others (see for example Maple & Edwards, 2010).

Chase (2005) argues that “the idea of a particular story cannot be known, predicted, or prepared for in advance” (p. 662). That is, the foreign certified teachers created their stories within the context of the interview. In describing her research experience, Chase writes that in her attempt to “bring (her study participants) to the point” of an interview question, the narrators would at times “break through” (p. 662) her structure and instead offer their own stories of experience in a way that they chose.
Likewise, my aim was to have a data collection design that would allow the study participants to “break through my structures” whenever necessary and share their rich and unique stories; “stories that” in the words of Chase were not “predicted or prepared for in advance” (p. 662).

Mainly because of this flexibility in data collection process, I “moved the texts around in different ways” after transcribing the interviews “to uncover deeper meanings” (Maple, 2005, p. 100). Rearranging texts (Mishler, 1991) proved useful in a case where it was done around Seidman’s (2006) three-tier interviewing approach. Mishler views rearranging of texts as meaning making, “a process of testing, clarifying and deepening our understanding of what is happening in the discourse” (p. 277).

I also conducted an evaluation of individual teacher’s narratives. Given that foreign certified teachers who participated in this study had unique experiences and each of their narratives were made up of a multiplicity of stories that spoke to who they were and were becoming, I analyzed each individual data text separately. I paid particular attention to issues that include but are not limited to what the study participants talked about the most, their experiences as teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools, and perceptions and meanings that they make of their experiences. As well, similarities and differences in experiences of the study participants became clearer.

Working throughout the inquiry process, I realized that to some extent, I was unintentionally segmenting the lives of the study participants into categories that seemed fixed. However, in reality, I see lives as fluid, overlapping, and always changing (Schaefer, 2012).
Like James (2006), I struggled with the question of whether to keep the narratives of the foreign certified teachers intact after transcribing them from the audio recordings of the interviews, or to present the narratives in the form of themes that were emerging from the transcripts. The former would be perhaps a more honest and rich presentation of the voices of the foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools; while the latter would involve analyzing and interpreting the stories of the study participants with a goal of contributing to the general understanding of the experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. While I wanted to “lift their voices and experiences as vessels for knowledge and understanding” (James, 2006, p. 96), it was clear to me that experiences of these foreign certified teachers as told to me in their stories was the data for this dissertation. In the end, I presented their stories using rich first person accounts and “highlight(ed) the resonant threads or patterns” (Clandinin, Lessard, & Caine, 2012, p. 10) across individual narrative accounts while lifting the voices and attempting to be as true to each participant’s story as possible. I was, however, reminded of Lewis’s (2008) suggestion that no matter how true we try to be to our study participants’ stories, we are reperforming them already simply by our retelling them in another context. My goal is that the research text will contribute to an understanding of the experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan.

This dissertation is grounded in postcolonial and anti-colonial theories. According to University of Alberta scholars Parsons and Harding (2011), postcolonial theory “challenges the superiority of the dominant … perspective and seeks to re-position and empower the marginalized and subordinated ‘Other’” (p. 2). On the other hand, while narrative research “often concerns itself with notions of social change” (Lewis &
Adeney, 2014, p. 166), experience as lived and told in stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999) often “evokes emotionality and self-feelings” (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). As a narrative researcher, my intention is not to judge or change experiences of the study participants, rather I hope to use their stories to try to understand experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools.

According to Kramp (2004), the primary objective of narrative research is understanding rather than providing an explanation. Kramp points out that “narrative ways of knowing “changes the question the philosopher Richard Rorty identifies as the epistemological question that has historically preoccupied Anglo-American philosophy, from “How do we come to know the truth?” to “How do we come to endow experience with meaning?” (p. 104). That is, narrative research helps to make sense of lived experience.

I have struggled with this seemingly theoretical tension as I conduct this study. However, as Sullivan (1995) explains, “a life is a puzzle to be decoded, but it is not a solution to the puzzle that one is after; it is an unlayering of the depths of the puzzle so that its mystery can be revealed” (p. xiv). Creswell (1998) writes, “I would say metaphorically, qualitative research is an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colours, different textures, and various blends of materials” (p. 13) some contrasting, some complimentary, and others analogous. I welcome Roman and Apple’s (1990) call to “commitment on the part of the researcher to allow her or his prior theoretical and political commitments to be informed and transformed by the life experiences of the group she or he researches” (p. 62).
In the end, I have used the stories from the study participants to gain an understanding about the ways in which the foreign certified teachers’ own experiences equip them to be teachers in rural Saskatchewan. I have done this by writing a narrative that closely reflects the study participants lived experiences and my interpretation of their stories.

As Lewis (2010) points out, narrative inquiry does not claim to search for an ideal truth. Rather, the “narrative researcher engages in an ongoing process of questioning, and seeks to represent that questioning in research texts that invite productive readers to continue the questioning” (Leggo, 2004, p. 110). Like Peshkin (1985), I “invite other researchers to look where I did and see what I saw” (p. 280) in the quest for understanding perceptions and experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan.

4.7.8 Quality and rigour

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note that narrative research “relies on criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalizability” and cautions against “squeeze(ing) the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research” (p. 7). According to Merriam (2002), rigour in qualitative inquiry generally relate to matters of trustworthiness, authenticity, reflexivity, and integrity as presented by the researcher. Lewis and Adeney (2014) contend that the issue of quality and rigour in narrative research can be addressed by such questions as, “what is a good story?,” “Are the story and the story teller believable?” and “Does it resonate with the broader human experience” (pp. 169-170).
Patton (1990) suggests that, while there are no “straightforward tests” for ensuring quality and rigour in narrative research, “this does not mean that there are no guidelines” (p. 372). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) define a “good narrative as having … an explanatory, invitational quality … authenticity … adequacy … and plausibility” (p. 185). Lewis and Adeney (2014) write that “narrative research orbits trustworthiness because in its simplest form a story and the storyteller inherently ask for trust” (p. 170). And Lewis (2008) writes about the importance of “trusting the story [and] the storyteller” and suggests that “There is no objectivity, no truth, there is only story” (para 6). I paid attention to these suggestions in this study. Further, I drew on Lincoln & Guba’s (1985) notion of member checking, and Ellingson’s (2009) crystallization.

According to Richardson (2000), “Crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know” (p. 934). And as Thomas (2012) points out, the “centrality of meaning,” is an important “possibility offered by narrative inquiry” (p. 212). Ellingson (2009) notes that crystallization “combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation” to build “a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers’ vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them” (p. 4). Her principles of crystallization include study participants’ first person accounts in conversations and “complex interpretations” that not only shirk positivist claim to objectivity but also involves “reflexive consideration” of the researcher’s subjectivities, self, and role in the
research process (p. 10). While Ellingson suggests that almost all qualitative research can benefit from crystallization, I am cognizant of Lewis and Adeney’s (2014) view that “Believability and/or authenticity are at the nexus of validity [or quality and rigour] in narrative research work.

Because of the relational nature of narrative research, the study participants were given the opportunity to review the field texts (and/or transcripts) as well as my interpretations of the same and to comment on the same. With respect to researcher reflexivity, I, as the researcher disclosed to my background, assumptions and biases that can potentially impact this study. The notion of crystallization resonates with Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) understanding of a text in the midst, always being negotiated, never complete, and that is always shifted and shaped by the researcher and the study participant relationship.

4.7.9 Moving from field texts to research texts

Clandinin (2013) identifies three key stages in the research process that uses narratives. The first is being in the field – which refers to meeting and engaging with the study participants; the second is composing field texts; and third, composing research text. Elsewhere (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), she refers to composing research text as “writing narratives” (p. 7).

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), “stories lived and told educate the self and others” (p. xxiv). Indeed, the notion that telling and retelling of stories of lived experiences is a way of informing others is not new. Ayers (2006), for example, notes that “far from a weakness, the voice of the person, the subject’s own account” is one of the “ancient approaches to understanding human affairs, relative only to educational
researcher” (p. 5). What is relatively new is the “claim that such stories” by research participants “are legitimate methods for the acquisition and representation of knowledge in mainstream discourses” (Thomas, 2012, p. 213). Below is a description of the process I used in writing the narrative of the foreign certified teachers who participated in this dissertation.

The process of writing the narrative involves reconstructing and reinterpreting field texts. Clandinin (2013) argues that telling stories is not enough. Rather, retelling stories is necessary and research text is the representation of the inquirer’s retelling. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) point out, it is not always clear when the writing process begins:

There is frequently a sense that writing began during the opening negotiations with participants or even earlier as ideas for the study were first formulated. Material written throughout the course of the inquiry often appears as major pieces of the final document. It is common, for instance, for collaborative documents such as letters to be included as part of the text. There may be a moment when one says “I have completed my data collection and will now write the narrative,” but even then narrative methodologies often require further discussion with participants, such that data is collected until the final document is completed. (p. 7)

The writing of foreign certified teachers’ narratives, that is, the move from field texts to research texts (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), was informed by the study’s ontological and epistemological commitments, theoretical lens - postcolonial and anti-colonial theories, as well as my intimate engagement with the study participants’ stories.
Narrative inquiry being “the study of people in relation studying the experiences of people in relation” (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2009, p. 82), ontological and epistemological commitments in narrative research are often “situated in the relationships generated between narrative researchers and their participants” (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009, p. 599). That is, composing research texts must take place in relation with the lives of study participants and the researchers. Field text compositions were based on autobiographical narratives, artifacts, annals, and study participant interviews (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2011). But composing research texts, indeed the whole research process, is “filled with relational tensions” (p. 599) which persist as the research process moves from field texts to research texts through “analysis, interpretation, and representation” (p. 599). Clandinin (2013) reminds us that when composing research texts researchers should be attentive to study participants’ lives and to the scholarly audience.

To structure the move from field texts to research texts, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) identify two “constructions in the form of plot and scene” (p. 8). They assert that plot and scene “are not, in themselves, the interpretive nor the conceptual side. Nor are they on the side of narrative criticism. They are the thing itself” (p. 8). The scene provides the context, characters (such as character descriptions and personalities), and physical environments (such as school and community in rural Saskatchewan where the foreign certified teachers are living and working). In this study, the scene was informed by my communication and interaction with the study participants, their body language, facial expression, voice, jokes and life experience in general both when we were having the interviews and when we were having something to eat, when our conversations were being recorded or when the recorder was off. These interactions, with Ashakiran around
the dinner table with her husband, their two-year old son, and in-laws at their home; with Nauczyciel as we were driving around his community of 1,500 people or standing by the shores of the river that passes near his house; my conversations with Laoshi along the corridors of Education Building at the University of Regina after she had finished her daily morning swim at the University; my discussion with Adaora about Australia (a country where I got married), Africa, the population and construction boom in Saskatchewan, and how some schools in rural Saskatchewan were registering increased enrolments, helped provide a context, a clearer picture, of who the study participants were as individuals and perhaps the glasses through which they viewed their experiences.

Clandinin and Murphy (2009) point out that “priority in composing research texts is not, first and foremost, to tell a good story; the priority is to compose research texts in relation with the lives of our participants and ourselves” (p. 600). On the other hand, while Lewis and Adeney (2014) assert that “What is essential is that an ethic of care be used when conveying information garnered from others” (p. 174), they contend that in the end it is always about “telling a good story” and paying attention to “how … the story [can] be most effectively told to ensure that it is useful … [and] possessed with transformative power” (p. 169).

Plot consists of the key themes that emerge from the field text (Cortazzi, 2001). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) present plot within a three-part structure of time - past, present, and future. Thus, for example, “storytelling and autobiography, for instance, tend to be located in the past; picturing and interviewing tend to be located in the present; and letter writing, journals, and participant observation tend to be located in the future” (p. 9). They submit that this temporal plot structure relates to three critical dimensions of
human experience, namely, significance, value, and intention, and thus of narrative writing. “In general terms the past conveys significance, the present conveys value, and the future conveys intention” (p. 9). An inquiry into experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools therefore entails significance, value, and intention. The plot in this case helps convey a sense of purpose on the writing (Patton, 2002).

The final plot was also informed by what Connelly and Clandinin (1990), building on White (1981), identify as ‘annals’ and ‘chronicles.’ They define annals as events that happened in the past and can be remembered and described but which have no apparent connection between the events. A researcher or research participant may, for example, recall an important incident that occurred on a specific date yet the incident may have no particular interpretive agenda or connection with other events.

For chronicles, events may be clearly linked and could even be in chronological order (such as a series of events since coming to Saskatchewan), however, the meanings of the events, and the plot which gives the explanatory structure for linking the events, may be unstated. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note that while the annals and chronicles are not necessarily mutually exclusive, the distinction between them is important during the move from field text to research text.

In this chapter, I have outlined the study’s research methodology. I have adopted a rather unorthodox organization to the chapter. As already stated, this study occupies a hybrid space within narrative research. It draws from various narrative approaches to explore storied experiences of four foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan classrooms. While several researchers (Binder, 2011; Lewis, 2000; Reissman, 2008;
Meir & Stremmel, 2010; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) who employ narrative methods to understand human experiences have articulated what their narrative approaches entail, few (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) have explicitly defined what their narrative approaches are not. Clandinin (2013), for example gives a definition of the narrative approach she uses and, while noting the existence of borderland spaces and tensions, explains how her approach to narrative inquiry is different than other narrative methods. This helps explain the unorthodox nature of this chapter on methodology. I have found the strategy innovative and it allowed me flexibility to better understand experiences of the study participants. In Chapter Five, I present the study participant narrative accounts as I retell their stories of experiences.
CHAPTER FIVE

RETELLING THE FOREIGN CERTIFIED TEACHERS’ STORIES

“We gather other people’s experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves” (van Manen, 1990, p. 62).

Lewis (2011) points out that “story and storytelling are simultaneously cognitive processes and products of cognition;” and so “when [foreign certified teachers] recollect [their] experiences and share them through stories, [they are] eliciting [their] own potential for making meaning” (p. 505). The field texts for this narrative research were primarily the stories shared by four foreign certified teachers. The stories provide a better understanding of the experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools. Lewis asks, “(I)f story is central to human existence and understanding why, in the research world, is there not more storytelling, particularly in the social sciences?” (p. 505). My hope is that this study will encourage other inquirers “to hold the space for the story and the storyteller” (p. 506) who, in this case, is the foreign certified teacher. As Lewis reminds us, “It is through story that we may come to know, through the story of the other” (p. 506).

In this chapter, I retell the stories of the four foreign certified teachers who participated in this study, namely, Ashakiran, Adaora, Laoshi, and Nauczyciel. Clandinin (2013) points out that retelling of study participants stories is necessary and that research text, including this chapter, is the representation of the researcher’s retelling. As stated earlier, I had several hours of audio recordings of the stories of foreign certified teachers and numerous pages of transcriptions of the stories. While the stories I chose to retell was my decision, I went for criteria that was guided by the purposes of this dissertation,
the research questions, and the fact that a primary feature of narrative inquiry is “seeking
the narrator’s story and in turn the narrator and the interviewer together bring another
story, the story of the interview, to light” (Maple, 2005, p. 107). It was my goal to stay as
true as I possibly could to the perspectives of the study participants. The criteria I used
were a modified version of those used by Dickinson (2012) and Horwitz (2001) and
considered: a) the central theme of a particular story, b) the manner in which the story
was shared indicated its significance to the foreign certified teacher, c) the story indicated
a change in the foreign certified teacher or his or her beliefs, d) my conviction that the
story needed to be told.

5.1 Ashakiran

“I believe that until you have knowledge of your students, you cannot reach out to them.”

Ashakiran quickly came to this conclusion after arriving in a northern
Saskatchewan Aboriginal reserve to take up her first teaching position in Saskatchewan.
The 41 year old married mother of one boy is a native of India and has been a teacher
every year for the past 17 years in India, Ontario, and Saskatchewan. She worked as a
teacher for seven years and as school administrator for four years in India. She was a
volunteer teacher in a large urban school in Ontario for one year and has been teaching in
rural Saskatchewan over the past five years. Ashakiran holds a Bachelor of Science,
Master of Education and Master of Business Administration degrees from universities in
India and is currently taking classes at the University of Regina in Saskatchewan.

Ashakiran says that ever since she was a little girl she loved school and wanted to
become a teacher. Yet education in India is very competitive especially if a student wants
to go to a ‘reputable’ university. Demand for top schools is high and in many cases there
is a quota that is determined by such factors as gender and caste. I could relate to this when Ashakiran was talking about it. We both realized that the education system in India and Kenya, my native country, (see for example Oloo & Odek, 2012) put a lot of emphasis on standardized examinations. A national examination taken during the last year of secondary school determines not only if the candidate qualifies for university but also whether it is a ‘reputable’ university. Further, the cost of public universities in Kenya is subsidized by the government while private universities are generally more expensive. In both Kenya and India, many students and their families – especially those from working class backgrounds - see education as perhaps the only way to a good life in the form of well-paying jobs.

Ashakiran thrived in the highly competitive Indian education system and became a teacher. She believes in the importance of education in creating opportunities for all and especially as a means of economic empowerment of the marginalized populations in her native India including females and those in the lower caste. Ashakiran points out that her experience and education in India equipped her with the skills and knowledge she needed to be the best teacher in India and elsewhere.

Ashakiran and her husband Dr. Abhaijeet have relatives outside India including Australia and Canada. When an opportunity came up for them to move to Canada, they took it. The two came to Canada on Economic Class of the Federal Skilled Worker Visa program. The Visa program uses point system in which type and level of education, skills, and experience – likelihood of transferability of skills to the Canadian labour market - are considered during the Visa application. With Ashakiran’s three degrees and over ten years of experience as educator in India, and her husband being a PhD, they
were regarded as good candidates and given the Canadian Visa. They then came to a large urban centre in Ontario.

In Ontario, Ashakiran and her husband soon realized that to get employment for which they are qualified their credentials from India needed to be assessed. Ashakiran had worked as a teacher since graduating from university and was keen on continuing doing what she likes doing – teaching. She applied to the Ontario College of Teachers for a Certificate of Qualification and Registration, which is the teacher certification or licence to teach in Ontario. In the meantime, she was accepted by a school as a volunteer teacher as she waited for her Ontario teacher certification. She taught in that school for one year.

The application process took about nine months and involved communication between Ontario College of Teachers and the universities that Ashakiran attended in India. The College of Teachers received Ashakiran’s transcripts and course outlines, assessed them and decided that she qualified for the Ontario teacher certification. She was not asked to take additional training or examinations. Ashakiran stated that the experience of getting Ontario teacher certification “went so well” that it surprised her.

Armed with the licence to teach in Ontario, Ashakiran started applying for teaching positions in Ontario and across Canada. She got a job offer at a First Nations reserve school in northern Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education told her that she needed to meet three conditions to get a Saskatchewan Teacher Certification: Ontario teacher certification, letter of good standing from Ontario, and 200 hours of teaching in the Saskatchewan kindergarten to grade 12 school system. Ashakiran already met the first two requirements when she came to Saskatchewan and was allowed to take
up the teaching position in northern Saskatchewan while working towards meeting the requirement of 200 teaching hours in the province.

According to the Prince Albert Grand Council (2014), the Aboriginal community in northern Saskatchewan where the school is located is not accessible by road from the rest of the province for most of the year. It is served by air via a water aerodrome and a nearby airport. Canada Census (Statistics Canada, 2011) reported that 98 percent of the 1,070 residents of the reserve chose Dene, an Aboriginal language, as their mother tongue while the other two percent indicated that English was their first language.

Ashakiran realized that the reserve school was different from the schools she left behind in India and the urban school in Ontario. The “community was pure at heart, either they like you or they do not.” This was unlike what she was used to. The “way we were raised, we may not like someone, but yet pretend that we like them so that we don’t hurt their feelings.” As she puts it, “I went deeper into Aboriginal history and the history of Saskatchewan. I believe that until you have knowledge of your students and where they are coming from, you cannot reach to their hearts.” She continues, “This enabled me to have an understanding of the culture and way of life of my new community. Once [they] saw me as being respectful and interested in them, they welcomed me into their community.”

Aboriginal schools, especially those in rural and remote areas, often face significantly more challenges when it comes to recruiting and retaining qualified teachers (Mueller, Carr-Stewart, Steeves, & Marshall, 2011). Ashakiran’s new school in rural Saskatchewan was located in a community that had high teacher attrition rates. As she puts it, “a number of teachers would come in for a little while then leave.” Some non-
Aboriginal teachers “did not show interest in the community and its culture,” factors that in Ashakiran’s view, can impact student success. Lack of concern for the students and “ignorance can be very harmful to both the students and the non-Aboriginal teacher,” says Ashakiran. She notes that upon arriving in Saskatchewan even before getting to meet an Aboriginal person, she heard statements like “Aboriginal students have the highest school dropout rates; highest levels of poverty; teenage pregnancies, etc.” However, “if you soak too much of that deficit view of Aboriginal people, then how can you as an outsider hope to fit into the community and become an effective teacher?” she wondered. These “are a people with history and who want a good life for themselves and their children just like you and me.”

Ashakiran developed great interest in understanding her students, their past experiences, challenges they face, as well as their strengths. She stated that as she learned Aboriginal cultures and history she could discuss with her students the history of India as a British colony and as a postcolonial state as well as India’s social stratification in the form of caste system (for more discussion on caste system, please see Irshad, Ahrar, & Zuber, 2013). This enabled her to highlight similarities between her background and experiences of her Aboriginal students. The similarities reinforced Ashakiran’s perception that her previous education and experiences made her well equipped for the teaching position in rural Saskatchewan. She realized that including Aboriginal cultures and having cross-cultural dialogue in her lessons was an effective way of making the teaching-learning experience more relevant and interesting.

Ashakiran says her students liked the way she “explained things, taught, and encouraged them,” and that she had a “great experience” at the reserve school and the community.
“They trusted me. It was smooth sailing for me.” She was recognized by the school for her teaching.

Although Ashakiran and her husband liked the community, the husband had difficulty getting a job and that always bothered them. Then one night when the husband was out of town, “someone accidentally came to [their] home in the middle of the night and kept knocking and trying to force himself in.” Ashakiran who was then pregnant with her first child was very distressed. She told me that what happened that night “probably contributed to [her] having a miscarriage.”

Ashakiran believes that the person who came to her home had no ill motives. However, the incident made her reflect on her job and life in the community. While she had always viewed the teaching profession as a “calling,” she became more convinced that “teachers have a huge impact in the lives of their students and the society” in general. As she puts it, “one mistake by a teacher,” whether intentional or not, “can make a student lose interest in the school system and make the student not achieve his or her potential.” The “actions [or inaction] of such a teacher student can affect everyone in the society.”

Ashakiran resigned from the reserve school and got a teaching position at a nearby school division. Her husband also got a job with a public service agency around the same time in the new community. The school is in a Métis village of 1,500 people in northern Saskatchewan. The village is connected to the rest of the province by roads and has one school and a college. It is worth mentioning that the goal of this dissertation was initially to inquire into professional experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools. However, as the study progressed, it became very clear that the
study participants’ professional experiences were closely linked to their social and familial experiences and it was often impossible to separate the various kinds of experiences that taken together impacted their life inside and outside the school. Ashakiran and Adaora, for example, emphasized the importance of having supportive spouses and family in minimizing the likelihood of burnout at work. Adaora stated that she tries her best not to “bring the hurt and challenges at work to her home.” She explained that she did not want her young children to know that sometimes she was unhappy because of what had happened at work that day. As she put it, “my children know that I am a school teacher. If they realize that I have frustrating experiences at school, their perception of schooling may be affected.” While I did not ask Adaora to explain what she meant, my understanding is that she was attempting to shield her children from the thought that school was making their mother unhappy. Such a perception of schooling would not be helpful to her children who were themselves relatively new to the Canadian education.

In the new community, people were “curious about who this 30-something year old woman with a nice job who was a vegetarian, was married with no kids, and was not smoking or drinking or playing Bingo was.” In Saskatchewan, Ashakiran had learned the importance of understanding the local cultures and ways of life. So she started learning about the Métis. Although the former community – a First Nations reserve – and the current one were different, Ashakiran’s experiences from First Nations school proved very useful and helped shape her teaching philosophy. However, “there were more tough experiences here initially.” Ashakiran and her husband are the only people of Indian descent in the community and because her husband wears religious clothing and symbols.
“Almost everyone in town knows us” she says. That had its advantages and challenges. On the one hand, they were outsiders but on the other hand they were insiders – Ashakiran stood out as a teacher who was liked and respected by her students and their families; while at the same time being the only Hindu family in the community.

Some students “were making sarcastic racial remarks. Some thought that people are so poor in India. They did not understand that CIC [Citizenship and Immigration Canada] has a points system that is used to target professionals to immigrate to Canada.” At the same time, “they were amazed that I could speak English quite well,” and that “I showed interest in how the students were doing in school.”

While Ashakiran was aware that she spoke English with an accent, she points out that accent was not an issue. “I don’t think that accent made a difference in the teaching/learning process.” She adds, “I realized that the [reserve community], the [new] community, and non-Aboriginal Canadian teachers [in both places] all spoke different kinds of English” (see Sterzuk’s [2008] discussion on variety of spoken ‘Englishes’). She was not bothered if some students were making fun of the way she spoke. Student behaviour reminded Ashakiran of her own experience as a student:

Kids are kids. When I was a student, we used to give teachers hard time whenever we had a new teacher. We could try to push the teacher to see what his or her limit was. Somewhere in the back of my mind I expected that as a teacher I would one day experience such behaviour from my students. But racial remarks were what would give you much pain internally. Fortunately, cases of racism were few and only among a small number of students.

One of Ashakiran’s students told his parents that she was “one of the best teachers he has had in a while and that there were some students who were playing games and giving her a hard time” and that those students were “not interested in school.” As a result, a number of parents came to school and “together with the school administration
investigated and resolved the issue with counselling provided to some of the students.”

Looking back to when she started teaching in that school, Ashakiran notes that a decision she had made to “invite the principal to sit in [her] classroom for six weeks was a positive decision because the principal was perhaps the best person to evaluate [her] teaching. Ashakiran says that “the principal became confident in my teaching. She told me that as a student, she always had difficulty in math and that she has enjoyed the way I teach math because I make it easier to understand and also very interesting.”

The two Saskatchewan schools Ashakiran had taught at were both rural and Aboriginal. As stated in Chapter Three, there are three distinct groups of Canadians who are referred to as Aboriginal, namely the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. The first school that Ashakiran worked at was a First Nations reserve school and the second one was a Métis school. Unlike the Métis, First Nations fall under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government of Canada. From her research and experience in Saskatchewan, Ashakiran realized that among the primary challenges facing rural schools are improving student performance and decreasing educational achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. As she told me, “performance level is in general, below the provincial average. There had not been a student from this school who had gone to the university straight after completing high school in recent years before I joined the school.”

Ashakiran became emotional when talking about education at her school and the school district in general. It was clear to me that her view of the challenges faced by the schools and possible solutions to those challenges were influenced, at least in part, by her experience in her native country India. In India, whether a student moves from one grade
to the next at the start of a new academic year is almost always determined by the
student’s performance in examinations that are taken at the end of each semester.

According to Ashakiran,

One of the reasons for [the relatively] poor performance is that from Grade 4,
students get promoted to the next grade irrespective of their academic readiness.
They are promoted to the next grade on the basis of age rather than expected
ability for that grade. And so by the time they reach Grade 8 there is maximum
dropout rate.

In other words, a significant number of students are not performing at the
expected grade level, and rather than addressing this problem to ensure that all students
meet and or exceed expectations from the early grades, the school, school district, and the
school system in general ignore the problem which then leads to too many students
dropping out or being pushed out of school before completing high school. Ashakiran
believes that “one student who falls through the cracks is one too many.” She says that
“one policy failure can wreak havoc on the student and the society” as the student may
end up “in the streets, in jail or being dependent on the state.”

Ashakiran notes that not all students who leave before graduating from Grade 12
“are lost.” Some of them do go back to school to finish high school. But this can often
be a challenge for both the students and their teachers.

Some students who left school before finishing come back and some do not.
When those who drop out of, say, Grade 8 come back, they may go to Grade 8 or
Grade 9. Sometimes they may not have read any book since they left and
sometimes they may be having learning level ability of Grade 5 or Grade 6. In
that case, as a teacher, I first have to cover the foundation level to bring the
student up to expected level before I can effectively deliver the actual curriculum
taking into account the northern [Saskatchewan] context. That may be a
challenge.

However, the challenges made “student resilience and success very satisfying” for
Ashakiran and others. She recounts with a smile, “After my first year of teaching here,
my Grade 11 student won an award for mathematics in my school division. The boy is now an engineering student at the university. [He] was and still is a role model for many at the school and the community.”

Ashakiran may have contributed to improved student performance when she started offering free extra remedial classes soon after coming to the school. As she explains,

After school was over at 3:15 pm, I was offering a two hour remedial class twice a week and encouraged students to attend. Many students were proactive and came forward. That year, the graduating class was a group of students with high motivation. So the extra classes were very welcome and useful to them.

She notes that as the number of students coming for the extra classes increased, parents were giving positive feedback both at parent-teacher conferences and to the principal. At the time, no students had graduated from the high school and joined university within one year of finishing Grade 12 in over five years.

Without intending to take away Ashakiran’s voice, it is worth giving context to her narrative account above. The work of Dei and Rummens (2011) and Dei, James-Wilson, and Zine (2002) suggest that the risk of school dropout/pushout by English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students before completing high school is two to three times higher than it is for other youth. Such dropout/pushout rates, these studies argue, are the result of a number of factors that likely include a Eurocentric curriculum and teaching force. Like ESL students, Aboriginal students have higher rates of non-completion of high school than non-Aboriginal students. Schick and St. Denis (2005) demonstrate that students who “fit within dominant cultural practices of the classroom see the school reflected back to them” given that “the construction of racial dominance is a significant part of what students learn in school” (p. 298). It follows then that enhancing the ability
of foreign certified teachers to be successful in increasingly diverse urban/rural Canadian contexts would be beneficial to the English-as-a-Second-Language students, their families, and the country inasmuch as it could potentially contribute to a reduction in dropout/pushout rates.

Ashakiran narrated that,

Instead of telling the students that they could not do it, I was encouraging them and telling them that ‘nothing is impossible, you can do it; we are going to work on this together.’ That led to wonderful results. Last year, 21 students graduated from high school, the largest number in recent years. It was a long journey for me.

Five years previously, the graduating class had five students. Ashakiran regards her student success as her own personal success. She says, “I feel blessed to be a part of this. Who knew that a little girl from India would in some small way help impact the life of a Canadian student?” She continues, “I always remind my students that as the labour market becomes more competitive, education will help improve their chances of getting employment.” She believes that “as a teacher in Saskatchewan, you earn love and respect. In my country [India], we treat teachers as gurus [gods] with high respect. When greeting a guru, we bow; and when a teacher comes to class we stand up.”

Ashakiran is happy that she has respect of her community.

I thank God that the community respect me and appreciate what I have helped accomplish at school. There are workers who never get acknowledged or recognized for what they have done. Today, a number of families are like a family to us. The older brother of [the one who went to the university] did not finish high school. His mother and grandmother always tell me that if I had been in their community earlier, may be the older boy would have gone to university also.

Ashakiran’s humility and spirituality was touching. Her success was not just because of her efforts, but also due to her supportive husband and blessings of God. As she narrated,
God is always watching, whether people acknowledge what you do or not. Each morning I go to work, I remind myself that I am not answerable to anyone but God who has given me the opportunity to be a teacher in Saskatchewan at such a time in my life. I am being paid for their quality time, so I must give them a quality experience. But it helps when you get support from your home also. My husband has been very supportive.

2011 was a tough year for Ashakiran and her husband and this had an impact on her work. She recalls with pain in her voice thus, “My husband was not happy with his job” because of reasons that included “burnout and workplace frustration.” Therefore, “he resigned.” They then started thinking of moving from the community; “perhaps there would be more employment opportunities for him in a larger city.” However, before they made the move, Ashakiran became pregnant and had a son.

Unfortunately, our only child came with medical complications. It was a difficult time; but having good relationships and support system can make a huge difference. I was in constant touch with a number of community members and I told them that I was going to Edmonton for specialized medical care for my son.

The community came around Ashakiran and her family during their time of need. She remembers with great appreciation thus,

The parents and community members were very disturbed when they heard the news that we were going to the hospital out of town. They went to the community and organized a fundraiser. In [this community], people always get together to help one of their own in the case of tragedy or challenge. They raised almost $5,000 for my son. They visited my relative who lives six hours [drive] away and handed the money to him. I did not know about the fundraiser until much later. I was at the children’s hospital in Edmonton at the time.

Ashakiran and her husband were touched by the community’s act of benevolence:

I was in tears. I had no words to express my appreciation. After that I told my husband that we should not move away from the community. I persuaded him to take any job he could get, even as a substitute teacher. And he agreed. We decided to come back after my maternity leave; and the community welcomed us back with open arms. They put a big banner of welcome outside our house. High school students wrote their best wishes on the banner. You can take pictures of that banner. I am saving it.
Figure 1 below is a photo of the banner the students made welcoming Ashakiran, her husband and son to their home. I have blotted out their names to protect their identity.

Figure 1: Student-made welcome home banner for Ashakiran and her family

Other than the banner, the community also gave Ashakiran something she has always wanted:

They gave me authentic handmade moccasins. This is so important because my husband had previously told me that we could not afford a $500 moccasin. Then I remembered a day when one of my students asked me, “Can I have the size of your feet, the shoes you wear?” He was like, “I just want to frame it and put it in my wall so I can remember you.” I told him why not my hand print? But he insisted on having my foot print. I never thought much about that conversation again. I love those moccasins and I like telling the story! It is not $500 for me; it is priceless and very precious. As you know, moccasins have a great historical and cultural significance for Aboriginal peoples.
Ashakiran sees a better future for her school despite some of the challenges faced by the students. “Many students seem to have no structural direction. Teenage pregnancy is very common. That is a major reason for school dropout among girls.” She continues,

The young people have very few [positive] role models and many have no idea of what they would like to do after high school. Some come from abusive homes, alcohol, single parents. I sometimes feel bad. A girl told me that she wanted to get pregnant so she can have freedom and move away from home, saying that she hoped to qualify for housing facility and benefits from the government. Yet, to get out of one negative situation, she was choosing to go into a worse situation.

Ashakiran admitted that many of the challenges faced by her students are very complex and need more than just the school system to resolve. However, she is already seeing changes as evidenced by increasing graduation numbers. She believes that a key starting point, especially for non-Aboriginal teachers in the community, is showing interest in the community and going out of one’s way to understand the students, their strengths and barriers they face. Further, “When you include empathy in your instructional practice and classroom management, and answer the students’ questions satisfactorily, they will listen to you and respect you. They will start relating to you.”

Ashakiran recalls that,

A few years ago, I was in my mid 30s, married with a good job. The fact that I did not have children was hard for [my students and even some members of the community] to understand. I told them that I had to make myself consistent with my employment first before I could have a baby so that I can provide the baby with a good upbringing. When I had my son, the whole community was happy. Such a discussion helped open the door for Ashakiran and her students to talk about their different cultures. As she puts it, “They do ask me about my culture, and I answer them and attempt to make a connection with their culture.” That leads to mutual respect and understanding and creates a stage where learning can occur. Ashakiran notes that,
It was different at the beginning. For example, many of the students were used to swearing and using inappropriate language in class. I told them that I found such language offensive; and because they never hear me use such kind of language, they now speak normal English in class like they should. There was a gradual transformation, but it worked. I always pray to God to help me be a better teacher.

Ashakiran’s “relationship with other teachers and parents is generally very positive.” The “teachers are great and very helpful” and “parents are very supportive” which made it easier for her to settle in the new community. She says that once the students and the community realized that “she had genuine interest in and respected the local culture,” and that she wanted the best for the students, she felt welcome. The school principal told her that “the school has experienced high teacher attrition among non-Aboriginal teachers” and that she was hearing positive comments about Asharikan from the community. The “community care and appreciate a teacher who is respectful and interested in the success of the students.”

Ashakiran has made it clear to the school administration that the principal is welcome to her class any time as was the case when she started teaching at the school. As for other teachers,

When I started working [more] close[ly] with students in extra remedial classes or attending their grad parties, I noticed that some teachers’ actions and body language – not in words – but the way they behaved was not encouraging. I had expected that if a new teacher goes to a new school and starts doing things differently, then not everyone would be supportive. Still, they were like, “What is she up to; let’s wait a see how she is going to do whatever she is trying to accomplish.” I did not take anything personal. Rather, I was focused on what I was doing, and did not engage in cat fights or finger pointing. I know they are professional teachers and that they want the best for their students.

Overall, things have improved over time with other teachers. As Ashakiran says,

Now those teachers appreciate the work I have done and continue to do. They realize that I started the project as a pilot to see if it can be helpful to the students. It was never about me. I do not criticize what others [teachers] are doing, that is their life. I may have grown up in a different culture, but I respect other cultures. I
saw for example a teacher tell a student not to smoke and how smoking is harmful. The student did not take him seriously and continued smoking. The student knows that that teacher smokes too. When I told the same student that he should try to quit smoking, he later told me that he stopped. He listened to me because I don’t smoke.

Ashakiran’s experience in India, a large urban school district in Ontario, and two different rural schools in Saskatchewan has made her a better teacher and changed her perception of her social environment. She observes that,

Community vibes are different even across northern Saskatchewan. It is not about something being good or better; all communities have their positives, but they are different. Challenges are everywhere. There are some challenges that are unique, for example, when you are from different ethnic background and as an immigrant who is trying to settle and adjust in a strange land. But there are always ways to take things negatively or positively. It depends upon you how you want to take the challenge. How you want to become a part of that new culture; and how you want to offer yourself. If you offer your best, you will receive the best. Good is always reciprocated with good. If you love and respect someone, they cannot hate you forever. You may not know what past experiences the community has had especially in their school. Why should they trust you, you are an outsider. You have to build that feeling of trust before you analyze whether they are good or bad. If you say they are bad, they will analyze you the same way and take it that you are bad. Every day is a challenge. Every day. But if you just stay on, and do your best, it will be very rewarding.

When I asked Ashakiran whether given her experience as a foreign certified teacher in Saskatchewan she regrets having come to Saskatchewan, she emphasized that she would do it all over again. It has been a learning experience for her and she has touched lives of many students and made good relationships. She notes that, “I would encourage foreign certified teachers to come here [Saskatchewan] and serve in northern communities. There is a lot to learn here.” Ashakiran has an advice to foreign certified teachers.

You are dealing with human beings not objects. They have cultures, and ways of doing things. So, first be open to learning the ways of the community you are going to teach in. Do not think that the way you were raised is the only way. You may have years of experience teaching in a different context. And that is great.
However, remember that each case may be different. There may be challenges, but learn to turn them into strengths.

Ashakiran views the teaching profession as a calling. She taught in native India for over a decade prior to coming to Canada. As stated above, it took Ashakiran about nine months to get her Ontario teacher certification. The process involved assessment of her university transcripts and teacher certification from India and she was not required to take any additional courses in Canada. With Ontario teacher certification all she needed to get a Saskatchewan teacher certification was 200 hours of teaching experience in Saskatchewan schools. Despite facing challenges with respect to cultural difference and relationship with students and other teachers, she describes her experience as “fulfilling.” But it was not that way initially. As she says, “There was a time when I wanted to quit the profession: school administration was not very supportive, a number of teachers were not friendly, and [it seemed like] students were taking their time [before they could] decide if they liked me as their teacher or not.” But, thank goodness, my husband persuaded me to stay. He said to me that challenges are always there in most professions; so why not take challenge in this teaching profession that I love.” She did and says that that was one of the best decisions she made.

5.2 Laoshi

Laoshi is a 62 year old Hong Kong native and married mother of two adult children. She was a certified teacher at a private school in Hong Kong before coming to Saskatchewan. Unlike other study participants, Laoshi came to Canada as an international student and graduated with a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Saskatchewan in 1973. Her first teaching experience in Saskatchewan was as a student teacher during her professional semester at a rural school. The retired
teacher taught Grades 5 and 6 in rural Saskatchewan schools for several years before moving on to the Sylvan Learning Centre Regina, Saskatchewan. Sylvan Learning is a Baltimore Maryland-based corporation that consists of supplemental learning centers which provide personalized learning programs for students in the K-12 education system.

When Laoshi first started teaching in rural Saskatchewan, except for a handful of students, all (her) students and teachers were white. The students and their parents “were generally very friendly.” She says that although she was an outsider, in general students did not treat her differently nor ask about where she had come from. She further notes that “compared to say, 20-30 years ago, a growing number of [racialized minority groups] has settled in rural Saskatchewan and therefore the shock of seeing someone who is different is perhaps less serious” today.

Laoshi commends Saskatchewan’s two universities – University of Regina and University of Saskatchewan – for having “significant numbers of international students.” As a result, many student teachers in both universities have opportunity to meet international students and potential future colleagues and this helps to promote cultural understanding. Laoshi says she enjoyed her teaching career in rural Saskatchewan schools. She felt that attending university in Saskatchewan, including taking a professional semester, gave her a “good understanding of Canadian culture, educational system, and what to expect” when she later became a teacher in rural Saskatchewan.

Laoshi was very thankful to have been offered her first teaching position in the same school where she did her practicum as a student teacher. She noted that coming back to a familiar location made the transition easier. She also stated that her cooperating teacher during the practicum became her mentor and helped her “decide early in [her]
career that [she] loved teaching in the rural school and that [she] was going to enjoy the teaching career.” The fact that she kept in touch with many of her university classmates who accepted teaching positions elsewhere made Laoshi appreciate that they all had different challenges and experiences as they started their teaching careers.

The differences between Saskatchewan and Hong Kong schools were very clear to Laoshi. These included class size, student behaviours, student-teacher relationship, and class management, among others. She says that average class size in rural Saskatchewan schools was much smaller than that in Hong Kong at about 16 students per class in Saskatchewan compared to almost 30 in Hong Kong. She described class size in Saskatchewan as being “very impressive.” Laoshi says that “in Chinese nature,” education system in Hong Kong is very competitive. While in the “Saskatchewan system, collaboration and team work is common” both among students and teachers.

Further, Laoshi points out that students in rural Saskatchewan tends to “have too much freedom.” She says that Hong Kong students in general tended to respect the authority of the teachers. For example, “in Hong Kong classrooms, students raise their hands to seek permission before speaking in class or leaving the classroom, while in Saskatchewan students could come and go at any time.” Students in Saskatchewan “were more vocal and assertive than their counterparts in Hong Kong and seemed to have too much freedom and liked it that way.” To her, Canadian “students had more authority than even the teachers.”

In giving an example of a teacher who was very good at work but “was forced out of school by parents because she was strict rather than the way she taught,” Laoshi suggests that while parents should be encouraged to be involved in their children’s
education “teachers should be given space to do their job.” She continues, “Parents may be professionals in their own fields, but they should let teachers teach.”

Laoshi found that many of her students were primarily concerned about getting good grades. She noted that oftentimes, the parents also seemed to put emphasis on grades. This, in itself, was not necessarily a bad thing according to Laoshi. However, as an educator, she points out that her role included enabling her students to “develop a love for learning, especially at early age” rather than just “studying to earn a good grade or please their parents.” She did this by using a number of strategies including developing their interest in reading, play, storytelling, as well as supporting and encouraging each of her students.

Laoshi also emphasized the importance of creating space in the classroom to enable all voices to be heard. She tells her students the importance of treating others with respect. As she puts it, “A student does not have to like a classmate or the teacher, or agree with all their views;” however, “to have a classroom atmosphere where effective learning can take place, respect must be practiced by all.” As a rule, Laoshi also encourages her students to always do their best. She ensures that the students know what doing their best is. This includes “being respectful, prepared, coming to class on time, participating in class discussions, and submitting assignments on time.”

Laoshi stated that when she started teaching in rural Saskatchewan, she was self-conscious of her accent, appearance, race, and culture. But “it so happened that these were not a major source of problem.” On at least one occasion, a student “made fun of the way I talked, and I wish students show more respect to their teachers. But, in general, I did not experience much behaviour challenges.”
Describing herself as “Chinese who speaks English with Hong Kong accent,” Laoshi said that as a student teacher and earlier in her career in rural Saskatchewan, she had “a tendency to befriend and stick to” members of the Chinese community. She says that while there were advantages in doing so, it is better for foreign certified teachers to “get out of their comfort zone,” reach out to other Canadians and embrace Canadian cultures and ways of life. As she says,

Newcomers to the community often hang out with their native groups. However, they need to blend in with Canadians. Reason is not to forget your heritage, but rather learning about and reaching out to Canadians. After all, you file income tax in Canada, so try your best to blend into the Canadian world. Even if your area of teaching is math, try to learn about Canadian history. Participate in Canadian events and community functions. Embrace Canada without forgetting your country of origin and its cultures. To live in Canada, you should act like Canadian.

While she viewed herself as an outsider in the rural farming community where she got her first teaching job, Laoshi states that she “had no experiences of discrimination whatsoever” and that “both parents and students were welcoming [and] easy to get along with.” This, together with the fact that “there were a few Chinese families in (the community) made her life as “a new teacher in a new community less stressful.” As she puts it, “People – the community, teachers, principal, and superintendent – [were] friendly, and willing to help in rural Saskatchewan.” The principal often organized social events and invited teachers and their families. “I was always included in school and community activities.” Laoshi was always glad to receive invitations, and ways also proactive in helping to organize or volunteer in communal events such as “fundraising for the local sports teams and public events.” She advises that, “It would be helpful for new foreign [certified] teachers to learn about the local culture, be friendly and respectful, and
open to new ways of doing things.” Ashakiran, who has never met Laoshi, made similar suggestions.

Laoshi would like to encourage foreign certified teachers to take up teaching jobs in rural Saskatchewan. She has advice to foreign certified teachers that she believes would help enhance positive experience in their new community.

Although we [foreign trained teachers] tend to be good in written language of English, oral communication may sometimes be a challenge. While many foreign teachers may have had their education in English, slang and accents can be difficult challenges to overcome and can present communication problems to foreign teachers. Foreign [certified] teachers should take it upon themselves to practice spoken English and interact with other Canadians.

A foreign certified teacher may not be able to “get rid of her [or his] accent, but they can do their best to blend into the Canadian society. We need to make an effort to fit into the Canadian culture.” While Laoshi seems to be arguing for assimilation, she, like all the other study participants, maintains that foreign certified teachers should “maintain their cultures.” Adaora and Nauczyciel even describe their accents as who they are, their identity. These views of culture highlight the tension-filled space of seduction and resistance within the [rural] Saskatchewan [rural] school system and community. He (2002), in her paper titled ‘A narrative inquiry of cross-cultural lives,’ refers to this as the balance between stability and change: “outsider educators” within the North American education system including her “do not want to be totally transformed because we want to keep our own identities. Sometimes, even when we want to be transformed, that does not mean we can successfully be transformed” (p. 528). Laoshi, like other study participants, narrated her story of tension in the in-between space that awakened me to her experience of trying to negotiate her identity. The narrative of her lived experience in
her native Hong Kong and rural Saskatchewan echoes Clandinin and Connelly’s (1998) view that identities are

(N)arrative constructions that take shape as life unfolds and that may … solidify into a fixed entity, an unchanging narrative construction, or they may continue to grow and change. They may even be, indeed, almost always are, multiple depending on the life situations in which one finds oneself. (p. 25)

Laoshi advises foreign certified teachers that even if they experience behaviour problems in their class, they should always view “good classroom management as the norm.” Further, she suggests that foreign certified teachers should always make a concerted effort to pay attention to all students whether they draw attention to themselves or are quieter. She observes that there are students who because of their behaviours tend to attract more attention in the classroom and that this may result in the teacher getting to know more about them – both academically and non-academic aspects of their lives. However, this could “lead to a situation where students with more reserved personalities are left at the margins.” Laoshi asserts that as an outsider, she has always been aware of the risk of marginalizing “the more quiet [and] reserved students who would otherwise need to be prodded in order to participate in classroom [discussions]” and so ensures that all students are included.

Laoshi talks very well about Canada and her experience as a teacher in rural Saskatchewan. She would like to encourage foreign certified teachers to consider taking teaching positions in rural Saskatchewan schools. As she says, “I believe that Canada has a lot more opportunities for immigrants, probably more than the USA does.”
5.3 Adaora

Adaora is a married mother of four. She got her Bachelor of Education degree from her native Nigeria where she also worked as a teacher before going to Australia for graduate studies. She holds a Master of Education and a teacher certification from New South Wales, Australia. She worked as a teacher at a large urban school in New South Wales before moving to Saskatchewan in 2001. Her husband is also a school teacher in Saskatchewan.

To a great extent, there are similarities between Canada and Australia, such as both being settler states with Aboriginal minority populations, and having similar education and political systems. This made Adaora expect commonalities between teaching-learning experiences in the two countries. She states that while her education and experience in her native Nigeria and Australia prepared her to be a teacher in rural Saskatchewan; she was surprised at the level of differences between Canadian and Australian schools. She describes her experience in Australia as being much better in terms of relationship with parents and support by school administration. Further, Adaora notes that “student behaviour was not an issue” at the two Australian schools where she did her teaching practicum and where she later worked as a teacher. She points out that although the positive experience at Australian schools could be in part due to the fact that both were Catholic schools, to a large extent schools and the communities in which they are located tend to reflect local cultures and ways of life.

Upon coming to Saskatchewan, Adaora applied for Saskatchewan teacher certification. She was then advised to take three courses at a Saskatchewan university and a professional semester at a school before she could qualify for the province’s teacher
certification. The courses were Native studies, Canadian history, and special needs education.

Adaora indicated that intercultural experience she gained during her training at the teacher education program in Saskatchewan prior to becoming a certified teacher had a positive impact on her awareness of cultural diversity (Banks, 1993). This was mainly in two ways. Her classmates, though predominantly white, included racialized minority student teachers as well. Further, during her professional semesters in Saskatchewan schools, the student body had different levels of diversity. For Adaora, learning about Aboriginal peoples of Canada was important not only because she got to understand that the history and experiences of Canada’s Aboriginal peoples was different from that of the Aborigines of Australia, but also because of the requirement by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education that Aboriginal content be included in the curriculum.

She finished the program and was granted the Saskatchewan teacher certification. She soon got her first teaching position at a rural school district as a substitute teacher – that is, a teacher who comes in to teach a class when the regular teacher is not present. She worked as a substitute teacher for one year before getting a full time position at another school in rural Saskatchewan.

The first year of teaching had its exciting and challenging moments for Adaora. Exciting because she had just got a certification to teach in the province and had been offered a job that she really loved. She was looking forward to learning about Canadian education system and also sharing her experiences from Nigeria and Australia. In general, students were welcoming and were happy to have her as their teacher.
However, some members of the staff were not friendly toward her. As was often the practice, substitute teachers would get a phone call from the school ahead of time with details about the class to be taught. Adaora became emotional when she remembers such a telephone conversation. “I could hear someone on the other end saying, ‘She has a strong accent I cannot understand her.’” It was disheartening to her to hear someone talk about her like that.

At the Australian university Adaora attended and in the classrooms where she taught and community she lived at, she never heard a negative comment about the way she spoke English. In fact, in her native Nigeria, she was always commended for her well spoken English. In Saskatchewan, she knew she spoke English with an accent but did not regard that as a marker of inferior proficiency in English. Writing about regional variety of spoken English, Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin (1995) reject (A) normative concept of ‘correct’ or ‘standard’ English used by certain classes or groups, and of the corresponding concepts of inferior ‘dialects’ or marginal ‘variant’ of one kind or another, and is in that sense ‘marginal’ to some illusionary standard. This makes it an important political stance from which appropriation of language can take place. (p.6)

The notion of a dominant form of language that is regarded as the only valid language silences the other as was the case with Adaora.

Adaora described another incident at the same school when she went to the staff room to have lunch. Another “teacher came to me and demanded, ‘This is my chair, I need it!’ The chair had no name [on it]. But I quietly got up and went to my car.” Unfortunately, it was not just the teachers, for the school “secretary was not welcoming”
either. The “tone of her voice was demeaning and condescending; on more than one occasion, I waited around to see how other substitute teachers were being treated.” She concluded that, other substitute teachers were “treated with dignity and respect, certainly better than (how) I was being treated.”

As Skogen and Mulatris (2011) point out, “the lives of those who are made other by a host society can be very painful” (p. 21). However, despite the challenges, Adaora did not give up on the teaching profession. And with a conviction that “God is always watching,” she did her best at work and was always eager to learn from her experience as a substitute teacher. This being her first teaching job in Canada, Adaora promised herself not to let the negative experiences change her view of what schooling in “one of the best education systems in the world” was. Adaora is grateful for the opportunity she got in that school to learn about Saskatchewan public schools as well as relationships with students, parents, other teachers, and school administration.

Partly because of her desire to get a full time teaching position and to escape some of the challenges in her current school, Adaora started sending job applications to other school divisions in rural Saskatchewan and in the neighbouring province of Alberta. “I was ready to undergo Alberta’s teacher certification process. But deep inside, my prayer was that the situation would improve at that school, or I’d get a job at a nearby school.” She continued, “We came to Canada with four little children, my husband was now a student at the University of Saskatchewan and we were struggling financially. But I like to be positive. That was eight years ago.”
Adaora says that her prayers were answered and she soon got a job at a nearby school division. As she describes the position, “It was permanent with benefits and better than subbing [or working as a substitute teacher]. God answered my prayers.”

The new school was located at a distance that required significant driving. Looking back, Adaora says, “I was not used to winter driving. We bought an old van which my husband said was not reliable for winter driving. So we decided that I rent a place in [near the school] and drive home every weekend to be with my husband and children.” She describes that period as “very difficult” for her and her family.

Adaora recalls how things worked out in her favour when her school division was amalgamated with another. She then sought a transfer and came to her present school that she describes as “a nice rural school that is closer to my family home.” At the new school,

The principal was very good and tried her best to make me feel welcome. I found that in general, the students were also great although there were a few cases of behaviour problems at the beginning. I expected that things may be different for both the students and myself as a teacher in a new school. I also knew that if I continued to do my best and reach out to the students and their families, then things would get better with time. And that is how it turned out.

Adaora notes that the challenges with the students were almost always to do with student behaviour rather than the teaching-learning process. “A few students would act out and make fun of the way I talked. There was one [student] who would mimic me, repeating things the way I said them, making fun of my accent to my face, and others would laugh. It wasn’t easy.” She then adopted a new approach.

At the beginning of each semester, Adaora would give the class her expectations for the semester. This included syllabi, course policies, assignments, important dates, textbooks, and her contact information, among other resources. Also included in the
course management package Adaora gave her students was a ‘welcome letter’ “in which I stated that I had an accent and that I would do my best to teach them well. I explained that the accent was not due to my grammar, but rather my first language, it was my identity.” Adaora would have these ready at least one week before the start of the semester. She now does this with every class she teaches because it helps and she prefers to let her “students know what is expected of them and of me prior to the start of the class.”

Adaora narrated about a time when she got exasperated with the issue of accent:

I got frustrated; so I went to the head of English department and told her how frustrated I was because of my accent. The head of department was very sympathetic and told me her personal story. Her mother immigrated to Canada from Ireland as an adult. The mother felt helpless because of her accent. Fortunately, the dad was a handyman and could earn enough money to take care of the family. The mother eventually opened a convenience store – from being a nurse to operating a convenience store so she could get out of the house. She tried to avoid the public because of her accent.

Adaora was so appreciative because of the teacher who was very understanding and could relate to her experience. Although “the teacher was born in Canada and did not have an “Irish accent”, she always remembered what her mother went through.” The fact that someone could understand Adaora and relate to her experience “made the situation less stressful.” Adaora remembers the teacher’s reassuring words, “I feel your pain and I wish I had a solution. But it is not just you. Even me whenever I travel to Ireland, they say I have an accent.”

Adaora recounted another experience with a student that made her think that “some students tend to relate differently to [racialized] minority teachers.” As she puts it,

I had an experience with a student who had attitude issues. That was two years ago. I would be teaching biology when he had his social studies. Rather than going to his social studies class, he could come into my biology class and sit
down then all his classmates would be giggling. I did not realize at first that he was in class. However, when I saw him, I asked him, “What are you doing here?” and he said, “I have a spare time.” I told him that no Grade 9 students have spare time and sent him back to his class. I later talked with the principal about it.

[The student] kept coming to my class and not any other teachers’ classes whenever he wanted to skip his classes. Meanwhile, his social studies teacher was not happy with me. He would say I am the one welcoming [the student] to my class [and] that I could not manage my class.

Next time, I asked the student to leave. Then I talked to the principal again. To my surprise, the principal accused me of not managing the classroom effectively. I told the principal that I thought the student believed that because I am different, he could get away with such behaviour. And whenever I talked to other teachers, they would say, “He dare not do that in my class.”

Adaora felt that she was not getting enough support from school administration with respect to student behaviour and that the problem was not just about classroom management. She told me another experience she had at the rural school:

An issue that came up was to do with washroom use during class. Our classes are one hour long and I always encourage the students to use the washroom before coming to class. I know that there could be emergency or situations where a student needs to go to the washroom. When that happens I understand. But there should be order, not coming in and out of classroom as they wish. I told them that and they listened.

One day a student asked to go to the washroom, and I said, “No, you just came into the class, sit down please.” The student then started describing in detail how he was going to relieve himself in class and other students started laughing. Parents called the principal to complain that I don’t allow students to go to the washroom. When the principal and I had a discussion, I explained to him that I always advise the students to use the washroom before class begins and I also give a five minute break.

I let [the principal] know that I made that rule because students would leave the class for the washroom and come back after 15 or 20 minutes. In all fairness, the principal said, I should use my discretion. I mean, you cannot come to the class and five minutes later say you want to go to the washroom. They later had a new excuse, “May I go to my locker to get a pen?” This is high school; students need to come to class prepared rather than looking for reasons to go in and out of class. It was tough. So, I went and bought a stack of papers, pens and pencils. If they said, “Can I go to my locker to get a pen?” I would say, “Here is one.”
However, when Adaora thought that finally everything was under control in her class, another incident occurred that made her want to rethink her career choice.

A student asked for permission to go to the washroom. I did not think that she was sick, so I told her that because the class will be ending in 10 minutes could you just wait till end of class. The next thing, she went to the intercom and called the office, and asked the secretary if she could speak with the principal. In the meantime, everyone in the class is looking at me and at her. She spoke with the vice principal and asked if she could go to the washroom. The vice principal gave her permission to go to the washroom. By the time she came back, the class was over.

I thought how is this going to play out in my classroom; I am the one who makes the rules. And a student can just ignore me and go to the administration while other students and I are watching. I always believe that it is not good to act when one is emotional. So I let the day go by and the following day I planned to go to the vice principal and tell her that what she did undermined my authority as the classroom teacher. The student just wanted to have her way, and she did. My concern was the impact of that incident on my classroom management. That is what I wanted to tell the vice principal.

Before I could speak to the vice principal, she called me to apologize. She said that she is close to the principal and that on their way home the previous day, she talked about what had happened. And that the principal suggested that she should apologize. It is tough, [but] you just [have to] keep going and try your best as a teacher.

It bothered Adaora that such incidents with student behaviour seemed to happen more often in her classroom than in other teachers’ classes. Because she was the only racialized minority teacher in the school, Adaora thought that her ‘outsiderness’ could have contributed to student behaviour issues. Her head of department, the vice principal, principal, and even the superintendent had all individually and on different occasions – usually at Adaora’s request – gone to her classroom and observed how she conducted her class. They all came to the same conclusion, that Adaora was a good teacher. While she welcomed such positive feedback, Adaora says that generally it was minimal and rare.
Like Ashakiran, Adaora was willing to share her classroom or “pedagogical home” (Skogen & Mulatris, 2011, p. 22) with the school administrators. The gesture, to some degree, requires openness and sincerity on the part of the “host” teacher, in this case, Adaora, as she welcomes her “guests.” She noted that while she conducted her class the same way she always does whether or not she had guests in her classroom, she was “aware of the need to make the classroom environment warm and hospitable.” Her notion of hospitality echoes Derrida’s (Caputo & Derrida, 1997):

‘Hospitality’ means to invite and welcome the ‘stranger’ (l’étranger), both on the personal level – how do I welcome the other into my house? – and on the level of the state – raising socio-political questions about refugees, immigrants, ‘foreign’ languages, minority ethnic groups, etc. (p. 110)

Adaora stated that she has experienced hospitality at the three rural Saskatchewan schools she has had the opportunity to work as a teacher. However, she points out that as in many other locations, there are times when people at her school “could be more hospitable” towards the other. When asked if there were other experiences that she would like to talk about, she nodded and described what happened in her previous school.

We have snow days, days when there is too much snow and so schools are closed and classes cancelled. On this particular occasion, I gave a take-home chemistry assignment the day before snow day. I had a student who was known for his love for hockey. The day after the snow break, I heard him say to his friends that he did not do the assignment because he had a hockey game. He did not hand in his work even though all his classmates did. And so the mother went to the principal and complained that the boy could not do the assignment because I did not give enough information, he did not know what to do, and when he came to me to ask for help, I did not explain it to him. Other students completed and handed in their assignments. Anyway, so I was called to the office and [the student] said he did not do the assignment because he did not know what to do, he did not have enough information. The principal said that I needed to sit down with [the student] and explain to him the assignment. Remember that the student did not
come to me. But the principal told me, sit down with the student, explain to him what is expected, so that the student can go home and do the assignment.

The principal asked me when I wanted the assignment handed in. I told him that I would meet with the student at the end of the day, and he could then do the assignment that evening at home and hand it in the following day. The principal then turned to the student and asked him, “When do you think you can hand the assignment in?” That was on a Thursday. The boy said he had hockey that night and the following evening and requested to be given until the following Monday to complete the assignment. The principal said, “As the principal of the school, I can allow you to do that, hand in your assignment on Monday.” And I was sitting right there. I am thinking to myself, ‘Why did you ask me in front of the student then overrule me in his presence.’

Adaora says that while she understands that parents need to be involved in and support their children’s education, they should be careful not to give positive reinforcements to the children’s negative behaviours. She observes that “because parents tend to side with their children, some students take advantage of the situation and in the process may not get what is in their best interest.” As she remembers,

I had a student who had transferred from the Maritimes [eastern part of Canada]. It normally takes a few weeks for a student’s file to reach us from his [or her] former school. And when it comes, the class teacher let us know whether there are some adaptations that need to be done. In the case of [the new student], it took several weeks for the file to come. Meanwhile, [the student] had registered at our school. For whatever reason, the mother wanted the student to do Biology 30. I realized right away that the student had difficulty. I felt that he was not getting anything from that class, but he did not ask any questions. His mother blamed me and the only thing that the administration said was that my accent could have been the problem, and that the student needed time to get used to the way I spoke. While we were all in the midst of this, the student’s file arrived from his former school.

It turned out that the student had been doing modified science, not even science with adaptation. He was doing [a] totally different thing at his previous school. The student was then removed from the Biology 30 class and placed in the art program. This is where students learn life skills, they are put in work placements, etc. So that is where the boy ended up. What is interesting is that while the school administration thought that the problem was my accent, other students in the school thought that the new student also had an accent.
I talked to my very good friend and she suggested, “Why don’t you go back to the principal?” But I was like, there is no need to go to the office, pull a chair and start saying I told you so. It was not about my being right or wrong, it is about what was in the best interest of the students.

Viewed from a postcolonial lens, the school principal’s devaluation of Adaora’s expertise and teaching style can be loosely seen as a function of binary characterization (Said, 1978) that render the dominant, in this case a white male school principal, more superior to the other, a black female teacher whose accented English he identifies as the hindrance to student’s learning. The principal did this in the presence of a parent who is not only white, and therefore could be tempted to accept such reasoning without considering the possibility of having underlying issues with her child’s education; and perhaps shying away from such issues should her son have another racialized minority teacher or one who speaks English differently. More telling is the fact that though other students thought that the new student - and possibly his mother - spoke English with an accent, the principal did not see that as an issue.

It is perhaps in this sense that, according to orientalist discourse’s occident-orient relation (Said, 1991), the other cannot ‘speak’ (see also Spivak, 1999). As Teti (2014) puts it, “Orietalism disenfranchises the [deviant] other from authoring the truth of its own condition” (p. 203). Rather, the “other” is “primarily to confess its deviations – ‘sins’ which are of course known in advance – to the Occidental Self, whose task it is to then adjudicate on the other’s nature” (p. 204).

Adaora draws comfort in her Christian faith and believes that the God she serves “is just and rewards everyone according to what they do.” She says that the principal later went to her to “try to make things right.” Her confidence in the fact that the principal could finally appreciate what she was going through with a goal of making
student learning more effective was soon confirmed as she narrates in the following incident.

A student was being disruptive in class. After I realized that he was just fooling around, I told him that if he did not stop, I was going to report him to the office. He stopped and the rest of the lesson went on well. However, what he told his mother was quite different. The following day, the mother called the principal to complain that I was picking on her son, that I don’t know how to teach, I get angry when the son asks questions, and that I was not preparing the son well for university. As a result, the son was frustrated and did not want to take biology class anymore. The mother had actually phoned the Director of Education at the Ministry of Education first. The Director of Education told her that there is a protocol that when something happens, it is dealt with at the school level first, and if the parent is not satisfied with the school’s response, then they are encouraged to take the issue to the superintendent, and if again the issue is not resolved, then the parent would take it up with the Director of Education.

What the principal did was interview the students. [He] called the students who were in the class and asked them what happened. Luckily, the students said it just the way it happened. The principal was very thorough. He wanted to get to the bottom of the matter. So he made questionnaires for the students to complete. He instructed them not to write their names and to print rather than use their usual handwritings. The questionnaires included, how do I teach? If they ask question, how do I respond, do I answer well or get angry, on this particular day, did the student ask a question and did I answer? And, it had nothing to do with my teaching. Such an incident made me go home in tears. Yet, you must try so hard not to bring the hurt and negativity from work into your home.

Despite the frustrating experiences, Adaora says that she has always remained composed when in the presence of her students. “I have never “lost it” in front of my students. I just step back keep quiet, breathe deeper then say, let us continue.” However, she points out that “When it gets to a point where you go to teach just because it is a job and you need a paycheque, you realize that it is not right.”

Adaora maintains that most of the stresses were earlier on in her career and that the situation has improved considerably in the recent years. She states that she has always loved being a teacher, and that that is what she will continue doing. “You just have to keep going. God has a plan for each one of us,” she says. But that plan has not
always been clear to Adaora. Like her head of department’s mother who quit her job out of frustration with her accent, Adaora recalls that “A few years ago, I was thinking of going back to school to take a nursing degree so I can change careers. I think that as a nurse, I would have less or at least different kind of interaction with people.” The University told her that she could complete an after-degree nursing program in less than three years. However, she did not pursue the nursing profession mainly because of financial reasons and her “love for teaching.”

Adaora’s eyes lit up when she said that in spite of the negative experiences, not all students and their parents are “mean.” She notes that “A number of parents have come to me or called me and said, ‘My child has really enjoyed being in your class,’ or ‘My son loved the experiment you conducted in the biology class.’ Whenever I hear such kind and encouraging words I feel good and so happy to be a teacher.”

Adaora asserts that “not all parents deliberately choose to be against teachers or blindly side with their children even when the kids are wrong.” She describes a few meetings she had with a parent of her student. Initially, the parent “defended everything the student did even after the principal found out that [the student] had been disruptive.” But Adaora did not give up on working together with the parent to enhance the success of the student.

I had a heart-to-heart [conversation] with her, as a woman and a mother. [I] told her that, you and I want the best for your child. I am doing what I can here in school; if [the student] knows that you and I are on the same team, the situation will get better for [the student] and for both of us. She looked at me as if I was out of my mind; said nothing and walked away. A few [parent-teacher] conferences later, I got to speak with the parent again as if nothing happened before. I told her how her son is making significant improvements at school and that he is getting along better with others. To my surprise, she started crying. [She] gave me a hug, and asked me to help her and her child. Slowly but surely, things worked out very well for the mother, the student, as well as for his classmates and myself.”
When she was coming to Canada from Australia, Adaora thought that her training and teaching experience in Australia had prepared her for teaching job in Saskatchewan. She taught at a Catholic school she describes as having “high standards of discipline.” At that Australian school,

Accent was never an issue or made fun of and student behaviour was not a challenge. Other teachers and the school administration were very good and let me know that they were glad to have me as a teacher there. May be because there was a call for treating others the way you would like to be treated. I was not treated as different person. A parent once said that her child told her that it took her only two days to get used to the way I was teaching. I took that as a compliment. This was in Sydney.

Adaora says that she no longer feels frustrated and she loves her job and is so grateful for it. She would like to see more foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools. When asked if she had any advice for such teachers, she said that the foreign certified teachers should understand that despite previous teaching experiences, rural Saskatchewan is a unique place with unique cultures, challenges, and opportunities and that as beginning teachers, they are likely to experience challenges. Adaora believes that despite the challenges, teaching in rural Saskatchewan is very satisfying. Her message to potential foreign certified teachers is that,

Students are likely to complain about your accent, but do not be discouraged; it is not just you. Also, make sure you teach to the best of your ability. Let the complaints be on things you cannot control such as the way you speak, but not on your ability to teach. No matter how frustrated you are, plan your classes well, teach well, answer student questions well – no matter what you may think of their intent. In other words, do a good job. If you give any assignment to be marked, make sure you complete everything in [a] timely manner – marking, grading, returning the assignments and giving feedback. Be on time. Do not be late for class. Step up to the plate no matter how frustrating things are.

Another thing, do not argue. You do not always have to prove that you are right or innocent. It is not worth it. Just do your job to the best of your ability. Never let any fault be found in things you have control over. If you do your best, things will
get better sooner or later. So, sit back, do a great job knowing that God is watching, [and] enjoy the calling to be a teacher.

Adaora suggests that foreign certified teachers, especially those who are just starting their careers in rural Saskatchewan, could benefit from having mentors who are experienced and have genuine interest in their success. As she puts it, “having a senior teacher to have open conversations with, and who can empathize with their situation and give them constructive feedback and encouragement” can make a huge difference for a foreign certified teacher. Adaora holds on to an advice from her father, “My dad used to say, there is nothing impossible for a determined mind. He was very correct. There were times I got so frustrated, but I am already in the career, am moving forward.” She says that she would do it all over again. As Adaora steps into the future, I am reminded of McMahon’s (1991) observation that “I view the telling of our personal stories … as an essential political act because without our stories recovered the past haunts the present and hopelessly claims the future” (p. 33).

5.4 Nauczyciel

Nauczyciel is a 61 year old father of two adult children. He got his teacher education in his native Poland where he also worked as a teacher for two years before coming to Saskatchewan in 1981. Soon after arriving in Saskatchewan, Nauczyciel applied for Saskatchewan teacher certification. The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (then known as Saskatchewan Learning) assessed his transcripts and teacher certification from Poland, and decided that he met the requirements for the province’s teacher certification and was not required to take any additional courses in Saskatchewan. He got his Saskatchewan teacher certification in 1984. After getting the teacher certification, he
accepted a job with a government agency as a research scientist. It was in 2004 that Nauczyciel decided to take up a teaching job in northern Saskatchewan.

Nauczyciel credits his training and experience in Poland for equipping him with the skills, knowledge and values that he needs to be an effective teacher anywhere. He points out that his experience as a researcher in the Saskatchewan public service increased his enthusiasm and focus on student achievements as well as the belief that, like in other professions, “teachers have an obligation to stay current in their field.”

Every year, many students in Saskatchewan leave school before finishing high school (Richards, 2009). Some go back to school as adults to get their high school diploma in the form of Adult Basic Education or General Education Diploma. It is to those students that Nauczyciel teaches mathematics and sciences. The program is housed at a college in a Métis community of about 1,500 people.

Nauczyciel taught high school mathematics and sciences in Poland before coming to Saskatchewan. Almost 23 years passed between the time he was a teacher in Poland and when he took up a teaching position in rural Saskatchewan, his first teaching job in Canada. Nauczyciel states that despite the differences between his native Poland and Saskatchewan, “a teacher can never forget how to effectively do his [or her] job.” He points out that even when he worked as a researcher in rural Saskatchewan for over two decades he followed debates and developments in education in Saskatchewan; and was an invited speaker on at least five different occasions in high school social studies classes in rural Saskatchewan.

Nauczyciel says that he has always wanted to be a teacher. He likes the fact that as a teacher, he is constantly learning new things. As he puts it, “teaching enables me to
learn more and more. It surprises me that I am getting better at understanding. It is very enriching. Previously, I used to just quote books, now I fully understand. If you understand and show interest in the topic, the students will also do the same.” His observation is supported by Clandinin’s (2013) assertion that “stories lived and told educate the self and others” (p. xxiv). Nauczyciel believes that being a teacher has made him a better person:

I was a research scientist [in my previous job]. It was a good job but certainly different. I spent most of my work time doing research and not developing my people skills. When I started teaching in Saskatchewan, I did not have understanding towards my students. I did not think that it was an issue as long as someone would come to my class and see that I was an effective teacher with respect to classroom management and content delivery. I soon realized that teaching demands more than that. My students are adults who have come back to earn their high school diploma. For most, life has happened since they were last in class. I have [as students] single mothers, those who have not read a book in years [and] those who are convinced that high school diploma can improve their chances of getting a job or postsecondary education. You meet so many students and realize that everyone has issues, even the students. I could not see this clearly before. You have to understand your students. There is no other way around it. Teaching job changes you. It makes you a better person. That is why I love this job. I am glad that I have this opportunity to be a teacher here.

A key challenge that Nauczyciel points out is in regards to student grade levels when they were last in school, and when they return to finish high school. “Some students were in Grade 9 the last time they attended school. Sometimes they come back aged 19 or 20 years old with competency level of Grade 8. Some students accept that but others do not.” Either way, Nauczyciel says that he [and other teachers] understands the challenges faced by students when they return to school as adults and support the students to make their experience a success.

Nauczyciel has always liked living in rural areas. He describes the northern Saskatchewan community where he lives a “very beautiful country with fresh air and
rivers. [It] reminds me of my home in Poland when I was growing up.” The people are also good.” He says that because of the size of the community, many people know each other and “as a teacher you get to receive feedback pretty quickly regarding how you do your work. Funny thing is that, negative reports tend to travel quickly.”

Nauczyciel points out that “other teachers work very well with me. We are a great team. We understand each other and work well together.” He however, suggests that,

I think there is a challenge that is unique to small communities. It is also strength. When you have an individual from that community become a teacher there, he or she brings a history and understanding that strengthens the teaching-learning process. He [or she] can also be a role model for students. At the same time, it creates too much pressure on teachers and students. If teachers from this community took up jobs in different communities, accusations of favouritism and nepotism would be minimized. I think student discipline would [also] be improved when students do not see the teacher as uncle, aunty, cousin, or in-law, but as a teacher. Although sometimes the teacher may wear all those jackets, he [or she] is still a teacher.

Nauczyciel says that while he has always wanted to have his life in school completely separate from life out of school, “it is not easy to maintain a distinct boundary between the two.” I quickly came to this conclusion when I started talking with the study participants. Initially, my intention was to inquire into professional experiences of foreign certified teachers. But like other study participants, Nauczyciel realized that teacher professional experience is closely linked to other experiences of their lives. He notes that given the small size of the community – including only one grocery store in town – many people know each other.

Nauczyciel believes in the importance of having the ability to write well and he always works with his students to develop and improve their writing skills. For example, he gives assignments to his students that involve writing short stories on any topic of their choice. He then marks the stories and gives the students constructive feedback that
encourages improvement. The result is that “student writing has continued to improve and some are now keeping personal journals, dairies, and reading logs” while he gets to understand the students better. Like Ashakiran, Nauczyciel believes that reaching out to your students and getting to know and understand them is a necessary step in the teaching learning process.

Advantages of students integrating journal writing or reading logs across curriculum have been well documented (Fulwiler, 1987). Fulwiler submits that journal writing enables the students to understand themselves and that this is important because "Without an understanding of who we are, we are not likely to understand fully why we study biology rather than forestry, literature rather than philosophy. In the end, all knowledge is related; the journal helps clarify the relationship" (p. vi).

Nauczyciel states that just as it is important for the teacher to know his or her students, it is also crucial that the students know the teacher not just as “someone who is teaching them” but also as “an individual, a human being with a story about his [or her] experiences.” He states that,

I always try my best to let the students know who I am, where I come from, and my path to their community and classroom. I tell them about my experiences in Poland and in Canada. I have often mentioned how sometimes people do not know that I am an immigrant until I speak and they realize that I have an accent. I think that in so doing, I am able to reach those who might initially have assumed that I am a stranger who does not understand their [Aboriginal] history or the challenges they face today.

As already mentioned, many Aboriginal schools in Saskatchewan and across Canada “struggle to attract and keep teachers” (Mueller, Carr-Stewart, Steeves & Marshall, 2011, n.p.). High teacher turnover is an “impediment to the educational, social, cultural, and economic goals of [Aboriginal] schools and communities” (Macdonald,
Mueller, Carr-Stewart, Steeves and Marshall suggest that high attrition rates, especially among teachers with “less experience” may lead to “cohorts of perpetually inexperienced teachers. This in turn increases likelihood that students will be subjected to less effective teaching in more than one school year, thus compromising the quality of long term student achievement” (n.p.). Because, according to Nauczyciel, most of the teachers who have left the school after “just a short period” have been mainly White, it is “even more important that [he] lets the students and the community know who [he] really is and [whether he] is interested in the wellbeing of [his] students.”

Nauczyciel points out that foreign certified teachers play a key role in Saskatchewan public education system especially in “a relatively less diverse” rural community where they can bring a unique experience or different perspective. He is not only grateful for the job but is also “proud of being a Polish-immigrant teacher.” Nauczyciel digs back to his experience in his home country of Poland and states that when he was a student in elementary and secondary schools, “everyone in the school including students and teachers were all White.” He believes that “if he had teachers” or friends who were from other cultures, he would most likely have been “a more knowledgeable global citizen” with a better “understanding and appreciation of different peoples and cultures” early in his life.

Nauczyciel’s students are predominantly Aboriginal adults who left school before finishing high school and are now back in school and working towards their high school diploma. Although the students may be experiencing multiple challenges some of which are historical (including consequences of Canada’s policies on Aboriginal peoples – see for example Daschuk, 2013); Nauczyciel often tells his students that it is possible for
them to attain success “within the system that many would agree is not perfect” and to succeed “in spite of the system.” Nauczyciel contends that while there may be modifications, such as, covering Grade 8 content before starting on Grade 9 curriculum for his Grade 9 class, he does this without lowering his expectations of the students “just like he would do with any other students.” Nauczyciel allows himself to empathize with his students while maintaining high expectations of them and at the same time adopting pedagogical practices that enable him to make learning more effective.

Nauczyciel says that he has developed a close relationship with his students and that many of his students usually come to him to discuss issues affecting them in their personal life. He always remembers that his students did not finish high school because of various reasons including those within and beyond their control and may still be dealing with issues in their lives that continue to impact their performance as students.

Many students see him as “someone they can trust.” He views his responsibility as a teacher as extending beyond school. Nauczyciel sees himself as the face of the outside world, of “what is beyond a small [Aboriginal] community in northern Saskatchewan.” In him “they may be able to see new perspectives and possibilities.”

Like the other study participants, Nauczyciel often draws on his personal experiences and encourages his students to share their experiences as well. He noted that this approach gives a “human face” to his lessons and reassures his students that their voices are important. In her work on engaged pedagogy, hooks (1994) suggests that teachers who “bring narratives of their experiences into classroom discussions … eliminate the possibility that [they] can function as all-knowing, silent interrogators” (p. 21). And by creating space for the voices of their students, teachers, like the ones who
participated in this study, exhibit the “courage to transgress those boundaries that would confine each pupil to a rote, assembly-line approach to learning” (p. 13). Such teachers, according to hooks, “approach [their] students with the will and desire to respond to our unique beings, even if the situation does not allow the full emergence of a relationship based on mutual recognition … the possibility of such recognition is always present” (p. 13).

From his experience as a teacher in rural Saskatchewan, Nauczyciel notes that two key variables are important for effective teaching-learning process in rural Saskatchewan in general and specifically in Aboriginal schools: “ensure that you understand the subject matter; and know your students, show interest and concern in them, their culture, experiences, and ways of knowing.” He suggests, “I think majority of students and the teachers who are originally from the community like and respect me because of my approach.”

Among the challenges experienced by Nauczyciel include student behaviour. Some students display a lack of preparation, low motivation, and low discipline. He also states that, “you can get very responsible students who are beaten by life. They need empathy not just teaching.” In talking about the importance of such factors as empathy, understanding, and care for the students, Nauczyciel raises an important point that goes beyond his classroom to include holistic approaches to teaching Aboriginal students that should be considered by all teachers but more so non-Aboriginal teachers including foreign certified teachers.
When I asked Nauczyciel about his thoughts regarding where he is presently as a teacher compared to when he became a classroom teacher in Saskatchewan about 10 years earlier, he said:

I am now more empathetic even towards difficult students. Such students suffer too. They probably have more problems than me. When I started my only interest was teaching, you know, delivering the content, following the lesson plan. Now I realize that I teach people, and people have their stories and issues. Now, before I give marks, I think and put everything into perspective. My understanding of students and people in general is much better. Teaching job changes you; generally, the change is for the better. Why? You meet so many cases and suddenly you realize that everyone has a problem, even students. And everyone and the society in which they come from have a worldview. People have stories, some are so powerful.

He continues,

I love my job. I feel appreciated. I feel I can impact someone’s life. In my old job as a researcher, all that mattered was that I produced verifiable and reasonable data. Here, I impact lives of real people. Some of my students are parents, so whatever I do, whether good or bad, can impact the lives of two generations of human beings. That is a huge responsibility. It is very rewarding too. Last year, we had the largest number of students in seven years graduate with high school diploma.

Nauczyciel encourages foreign certified teachers to consider taking up teaching positions in rural Saskatchewan. His message to such teachers is,

Please get to know your students and their history; have and show interest in their success; be involved in the community activities as member of the community. Also, do your best as a teacher. Like in every profession, there will be challenges and opportunities; but for me, both have made me a better person.

Without going in details, Nauczyciel gives the following advice to school administration:

For school administration, I appreciate the fact that some of our students are quite vulnerable and that many of the teachers may not have had much experience teaching adult students. While it is good to set high expectations for the teachers, please give the teachers room to work and trust the teachers to do his [or her job]. They are professionals.
I am happy, in fact excited, that someone is taking a research like this. See, you are listening to my story right now. I am saying things that I have never heard myself say before about my teaching experience. Some I have said many times.

In retelling the stories of the four foreign certified teachers who participated in this narrative inquiry, this Chapter has been shaped by Connelly and Clandinin’s (2006) “three commonplaces of narrative inquiry,” namely, temporality, sociality, and place, “which specify dimensions of an inquiry space” (p. 479). The three commonplaces enabled me to unfold the study participants’ experiences. By attending to temporality, I was able to move backward, forward, inward, and outward (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) across time as I engaged with the stories of the foreign certified teachers. This included asking questions of the study participants that covered their experiences prior to arriving and after they arrived in Saskatchewan. I was mindful of Clandinin’s (2013) view that (the) stories of the study participant experiences had a past, a present, and a future.

I also paid attention to the second commonplace, that is, sociality. This included such factors as “feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral disposition” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480), which were noticeable in the stories of the foreign certified teachers. All the study participants, for example, described experiencing the feelings of frustration, as well as satisfaction, and hope. Sociality also allowed me to focus on the social environment of the study participants including relations with students, school administration, other teachers, the schools, and the wider community.

The third and final commonplace, place, refers to the “specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 481). The experiences of the foreign certified teachers occurred at and were impacted by specific
locations. These, in turn, impacted who they were or were becoming in their stories to live by (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2011).

Like in the Driedger-Enns and Murphy’s (2014) inquiry into identity formation of beginning teachers, the foreign certified teachers who shared their stories of experience with me “held onto particular stories as [they] pulled them across [their] experiences in [their] familial, personal, and professional places” (p. 93). The lived experiences of the foreign certified teachers in this study “share particular tension-filled moments in this research text because of the way [they] told them, repeatedly, across [their] worlds and with passion” (p. 93).
CHAPTER SIX

COMMON THEMES IN STUDY PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES

We need to re-narrate the past. We need to tell the past and its stories in ways that allow us to disrupt conventional narratives and conventional history. Such disruptions help us to better understand how racism and social injustice have been seamlessly woven together. (Denzin, 2008, p. 119)

In the thematic approach to narrative research, often more “emphasis is [placed] on the content of a text … than ‘how’ it is said, the told rather than the ‘telling’” (Reissman, 2003, p. 706). While I believe in the importance of both the telling and the content, I pay particular attention to the content of the storied experiences of the foreign certified teachers who participated in this study in this Chapter. Reissman contends that such an “approach is useful for … finding common thematic elements across research participants and the events they report” (p. 707). The process, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), involves the researcher taking into account the “patterns of meanings and issues of potential interest in the [field text]” (p. 92). The researcher then highlights the content and meaning of the patterns. Ryan and Bernard (2000) describe themes as “abstract and often fuzzy constructs the investigators identify before, during, and after data analysis” (p. 780).

This study employed the theoretical lenses of postcolonial and anti-colonial frameworks. In the case of postcolonial framework, I was guided by the perspectives of Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak to help understand experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. In general, these lenses are linked to marginalized perspectives and critique the impact of power relations based on dominant
versus less dominant other. It is, however, worth pointing out that while the study participants have been othered and made foreign, they all have Canadian citizenship.

Postcolonial perspectives spoke to my heritage and experiences as a citizen of Kenya, a former British colony (I was born in the 1970s, the decade after Kenya declared its independence). Three of the four study participants came to Canada as adults from formerly British colonized countries of Nigeria, India, and Hong Kong (China) and postcolonial perspectives of Bhabha, Said, and Spivak helped problematize their experiences as foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. Tickly (2004) reminds us of the importance of postcolonial perspectives in interrogating the “continuing legacy of European imperialism and colonialism and to uncover the oppositional discourses of those who have struggled against its lingering effects” (p.147).

In this Chapter, I situate the experiences of the four study participants within postcolonial and anti-colonial theories. I see both postcolonial and anti-colonial theories as enabling me to understand attempts by the foreign certified teachers who participated in this study to interrogate and disrupt the lingering (and perhaps institutionalized) effects of colonialism that has othered them. The theories also help me to understand how the foreign certified teachers are made subjects of such dominant, indeed institutionalized, discourse. So, it is not merely that the teachers construct a subjectivity in relation to colonialism, but that they are in fact simultaneously subjected to/by (the legacy of) colonialism. Bhabha’s hybridity, Said’s Orientalist subject, and Spivak’s subalternity; and anti-colonial theories (particularly Pratt’s contact zones) also provided a lens from which to understand the attempts by the study participants to imagine (Stanley, 2011) who they are as foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan.
Both anti-colonial and postcolonial critiques reject the notion that the effects of the colonial era are no longer being felt today. And, for that matter, they reject claims that colonialism is not reproduced and newly perpetuated today. The foreign certified teachers viewed the effects of colonialism as being socially embedded and reproduced. For example, one half of the study participants worked in predominantly Aboriginal schools including one school at a First Nations reserve. The study participants noted the disparity, between these schools and Saskatchewan public schools in general, in terms high school completion rates, student motivation, pathways from high school to postsecondary education, as well as teacher attrition. Further, and also related to effects of colonialism, of all the four study participants had had racist comments directed at them; and three of the four stated that their racialized non-white identity had led to them being treated differently.

This study takes a narrative approach toward understanding experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. As stated in Chapter Four, the study employed a two-step data analysis method that involves, first, presenting the key messages in the narratives of the study participants, and, two, examining common threads in the narratives. In Chapter Five, I retold the storied experiences of the four study participants and made an effort to stay as true to their voices as possible. In this chapter, I discuss the common themes in the study participant narratives. Further, I have linked the narratives of the study participants to what Subedi and Daza (2010) identify as three key issues in postcolonial theory (please see brief summary in Chapter Three).

The discussion is organized around seven main themes, which include: 1), rural Saskatchewan classrooms as contact zones, 2) individual agency, 3) identity in-between
spaces, 4) gendered identity, 5) silenced voices, 6) positioning as other, and 7) narratives of effective teaching. A summary of challenges and coping strategies is also presented.

Please note that the intent of this Chapter in highlighting the common threads in the narratives of the foreign certified teachers is not to diminish the importance of their individual experiences (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2011). Because, as Trinh (1992) writes, “storytelling is an ongoing field of exploration in all of my works” (p. 144), my intent is to honour and not silence the storyteller. However, herein lies a methodological tension that according to Lewis (2008) often permeates the move from field text to research text in narrative research, a process that he contends, usually involves the “narrative researchers … ‘writ[ing] up’ their interpretive analysis of the other’s story,” and

(O)nce the work is written, we see no one. There is no human face, no expressions, pauses, no coughs, sniffles, no stammers, no hesitations, falters, no certainties, emphasis, no gestures, no ambiguity or ambivalence, no one – there is only text despite Socrates’ suggestion to the contrary in Phaedrus. At best, it is only a partial story often refracted through/by the interpretive prism of the narrative researcher. (para. 1)

In the same vein, Anim-Addo and Gunaratnam (2013) write that “[a]s others have recognized there is a certain loss of innocence in working with narrative and stories because narratives are always enmeshed in regulator frameworks of power” (p. 393). But as Cardinal (2011), in her narrative inquiry “to seek out people’s stories and determine common themes” points out, “building relationships [is] an essential piece of good research in … narrative inquiry” (p. 80). Cardinal notes that the relationships enabled her to “negotiate a way to feel less tension engaging in research that was personally so very
close,” and that “together [with the study participants, she] composed an understanding of [their] lived experiences” (p. 81).

6.1 Theme One: Rural Saskatchewan classrooms as contact zones

Writing from an anti-colonial perspective, Pratt (1991) invites teachers to imagine classrooms not as a rational and stable space (Hadi-Tabassum, 2006), but rather as a type of “contact zone” or site for complex interplay “where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism (and its) aftermath” (Pratt, 1991, p. 38). Pratt contrasts “contact zone” with “community,” referring to the latter as an imaginary construction that assumes unity and ignores existence of marginalized voices. In building on Pratt’s (2008) work, Singh and Doherty (2004) describe contact zones as “spatial” and “temporal locations” (p. 12). Location in this sense refers to “an itinerary rather than a bounded site - a series of encounters and translations’ in space and time” (Clifford, 1997, p. 11).

The first employment positions held by three of the four study participants in Saskatchewan was as school teachers. Rural Saskatchewan classrooms were, therefore, an important space where a significant amount of their experiences and their (preformed) notion of what Saskatchewan is was put to the test. Many of the cultural exchanges and negotiations between the foreign certified teachers on the one hand and their students, school, and, to some extent, general communities, occurred. Although the study participants had unique experiences at their contact zones, their narratives share a common thread when interrogated from the point of view of postcolonial lens. That lens helps highlight postcolonial spaces and tensions as experienced by the foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan classrooms.
Ashakiran stated that “my husband and I are the only Hindus in (the community);” and that they “practice their faith and culture” while staying open and “respectful of the local (Aboriginal) cultures.” Ashakiran notably asserted that as a teacher, “you cannot reach your students unless and until you understand them and their culture and history.” She did not intend to homogenize her Aboriginal students nor essentialize them as a static other (Said, 1978). As she stated, “I know Aboriginal Canadians have a long and rich culture and a history of colonization and subjugation which would help explain reservation system.” And so to better understand her students, Ashakiran decided to “go to the library and learn about Aboriginal people” and also speak with people in the community.”

In this contact zone, Ashakiran argued, “the students and the community do not know you, why then would they trust you?” She suggests, “As a teacher, you have to go out of your way, show interest in your students; once they realize that you have their best interest, they will accept you. No one can dislike you forever if you are good to them.”

Still, Ashakiran’s students and fellow teachers questioned her culture, especially why she does not eat meat and the meaning of her and her husband’s religious clothing and symbols. Her belief of the teacher as a ‘guru’ (god) with authority over students was also tested. When I co-composed this narrative account with Ashakiran, she drew a parallel between gurus and Aboriginal elders and pointed out that while both are highly respected members of their respective communities, they occupy different spaces. She noted the roles of Aboriginal elders as knowledge keepers whose influence encompasses almost all aspects of life including passing along beliefs, values, and wisdom. However, she found it troubling that while students were very respectful towards the elders [who
were always present at the school], some were disrespectful towards the teachers, something that she said was unimaginable in the case of teachers and gurus in her native India.

Nauczyciel states that some of his Aboriginal students remarked that he did not understand their culture. In the case of Adaora, cultural tension took various forms including a school secretary and school principal making snide remarks about the way she speaks. But she also celebrated positive comments when students and their parents thanked or complimented for doing a good job. Laoshi also experienced cultural conflict with students making racial comments at her. However, unlike other study participants, Laoshi stated that there was “an established Chinese population” in the rural Saskatchewan community where she got her first teaching position. But while having other Chinese people around enabled Laoshi to settle down in the new community faster and with relative ease, she advised other foreign certified teachers against “bury(ing) themselves in a cocoon of their ethnic communities,” and suggests that they should reach out to other Canadians.

At the contact zones people from diverse cultural identities “meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (Pratt, 2008, p.4). These asymmetrical power relations, according to Singh and Doherty (2004), “are not only historically constituted as the aftermath of colonialism, imperialism and slavery, but are reconstituted and contested in day-to-day pedagogic interactions” (p. 12) such as within rural Saskatchewan schools where foreign certified teachers experiences such as those described above occurred. For Pratt, the
intersectionality of cultures at the contact zone enhances the production of identities and perspectives about people from different backgrounds.

Pratt’s critique resonates with schooling in Saskatchewan where schools – both rural and urban - are increasingly becoming key points of contact for various languages, cultures, and worldviews. For example, in September 2014, Walter Murray Collegiate, the Saskatoon Public School Division’s largest school with about 1,500 students, had students coming from 61 countries who spoke 58 different languages (Yeske, 2014). While Saskatoon is a major city of about 270,000 people, the Province of Saskatchewan projects continued population growth across the province fueled in part by international migration. In this case schools in rural Saskatchewan will continue being contact zones both for students, foreign certified teachers, and the school communities in general.

All the study participants stated that classrooms provided space where they learned about the local cultures and also had the opportunities to talk about their own cultures. For example, Ashakiran said that the more she “learn(s) about Aboriginal culture the more [she] sees similarities to [her] own culture.” She points out that by identifying the common ground between both cultures and sharing it with her students she is able to create an environment where local cultures are acknowledged and celebrated and affective learning can take place.

An intercultural learning environment in the foreign certified teachers’ classrooms created an opportunity to “unpack historical, social and cultural influences on worldviews” (Martin & Griffiths, 2010, p. 18). Such worldviews could, for example, be based on binaries that are categorized in oppositional hierarchies with one ‘group’ privileged and the other standing for everything that is contrary to the former’s superior
image (Said, 1978). Martin and Griffiths suggest that there should be a deliberate focus on “translating difference” (p. 18) in intercultural learning. They argue that failure to do so could result in otherness being “translated in ways that make it familiar, comprehensible, and predictable” and perceived as an “alternative form of sameness that can be appreciated as cultural pluralism only by the dominant group in whose cultural forms the difference has been constructed and represented” (Carter, 2004, p. 827). In the same vein, Montgomery (2013) reminds us of the merit of enabling “racialized whites ‘to see’ and ‘to know’ that [they] are indeed empowered and privileged by [their] socially constructed whiteness and hegemonic beliefs and practices” (p. 3).

Classroom, as a site of intercultural contact zone, can then be viewed as more than a space of encounter but rather as a “postcolonial space for learning that focuses on negotiation and discussion and in which participants think dialectically rather than dually” (Martin & Griffiths, 2010, p. 19). Pratt (1991) argues that as a contact zone, a multicultural classroom should be viewed as a site that involves give and take, a compromise. She calls on teachers to view the classroom not merely as a challenge or place of cultural conflict, but as a zone of possibilities for new knowledge and new understandings.

In her more recent work, Pratt (2008) notes that contact is more about “co-presence” and thus should be perceived “not in terms of separateness but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices” (p. 8). This relationality, according to Pratt (1991), can elicit emotions in the contact zones due to the fact that identities, cultures, and perspectives that individuals bring with them to the contact zone are often put “on the line” (p. 39). Thus while contact zones can be
emotional and tense spaces where individuals risk being misunderstood and hurt, they also represent spaces of understanding and peace (Pratt, 1991).

Bhabha (1984) refers to this zone as a third space, a hybrid space where totalizing narratives are challenged and the supposed stability of meanings is disrupted. Further, Morrissey (2005), in highlighting the fluid and dynamic nature of contact zones, argues that contact zones allows for the role of agency in the construction of hybrid spaces and identities.

Like contact zone, hybridity implies difference. As Kanu (2003) puts it, “There is no longer a single set of discourse about progress and change; rather, there is a hybrid – a third space – where local and global images meet in a weaving that has its own configurations and implications” (p. 77). Jordão (2009) presents difference as “a discursively constructed process of symbolic representations, an on-going movement of identifications and des-identifications,” rather than, for example, “an inherited biological trait … or a cultural aspect conferred by place of birth” (p. 2015). That is, difference is a meaning-making process that, although uncontrollable by the subject, “can be resisted and acted upon on those very moments when the slippage of meaning is made apparent” (p. 2015). Jordão points out that because “meanings, like difference, are … in flux, moving from one moment of provisional fixity to another, never permanently fixed … there are spaces in-between, spaces where meanings are creatively fabricated just before they become fixed again” (p. 2015). As a result, ambivalence of discourses of authority is revealed and subversion is enabled (Bhabha, 1994).

Hybridity was evident in the identity and experiences of the study participants. For example, they all hold dual citizenship – as citizens of Canada and of their native
countries. Yet, Adaora identified herself as Nigerian while Nauczyciel refers to himself variously as a Polish-Canadian, and Aboriginal at heart. Bhabha (Rutherford, 1990) noted that encounters at the hybrid space results into something new: “hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (p. 211). All the foreign certified teachers who participated in this study alluded to the emergence of “something new” at their hybrid spaces. All the study participants had, to different variations, attended schools where learning was mainly teacher-centered. In rural Saskatchewan schools, they realized that students had relatively more rights, and the learner-centered approach initially led to what Pratt (1991) refers to as “clashing and grappling.” After years of teaching in rural Saskatchewan schools, the foreign certified teachers noted that teacher-centered versus learner-centered approaches is no longer an issue.

Nauczyciel also noted that as an outsider in a predominantly Aboriginal community, he was prepared to bring a different perspective to the community while also being prepared to learn from the community. According to Banks (1993),

The challenge that teachers face is how to make effective instructional use of the personal and cultural knowledge of students while at the same time helping them to reach beyond their own cultural boundaries … An important goal of education is to free students from their cultural and ethnic boundaries and enable them to cross cultural borders freely. (p. 8)
That is, an effective learning process should enable the students to learn that there are other ways of knowing that are also valid. But it is not just the student that gets to cross cultural boundaries. Teachers who are coming from another culture, as was the case of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools also enter into spaces where various cultures meet and clash. Bhabha (1994) suggests these “in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation” (p. 32). He goes on to suggest that

Once again, it is the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative invention into existence. And one last time, there is a return to the performance of identity as iteration, the re-creation of the self in the world of travel, the resettlement of the borderline community of migration. (p. 12)

In this space of intervention, Laoshi emphasizes the importance of “acting like Canadians” while at the same time holding on to one’s culture. At the same time, Ashakiran, Laoshi, Adaora, and Nauczyciel experienced alienation (such as racist comments directed to all the four) as racialized minorities at the schools where they hold privileged positions as teachers.

6.2 Theme Two: Individual agency

In his reading of Said’s Orientalism, Moore-Gilbert (2000) points out that “the dominant power successfully ‘maximized’ itself at the expense of the subject peoples, who were rendered almost entirely passive and silent by conquest. Unsurprisingly, then, Said’s text focuses almost exclusively on the discourse and agency of the colonizer” (p. 452). That is, the colonized subjects (and by extension, their agency,) are given relatively
less prominence in Said’s work. For Bhabha (1994), hybridity complicates the relationship between the dominant and the other resulting in an ambivalence that renders the dominant “less secure, both psychically and politically” (Moore-Gilbert, p. 457). Hence, what Bhabha refers to as “mimicry” is the “name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination … that turns the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of the power” (Bhabha, p. 112). Thus, in Bhabha’s postcolonial critique, the agency of the marginalized is recovered. However, this recovery of the agency of the marginalized is only partial since the marginalized disrupt the authority of the colonizer, but also replicate its authority in their own imitation of it. They do this in a number of ways such as subscribing to the notion that they must fit in, speak without accent, act Canadian, and refuse to acknowledge racism. In the same vein, Adjei (2007) writes that anti-colonial theories “recognize marginalized groups as subjects of their own experiences, histories, and knowledges … hence, they are relevant to any academic work that focuses on agencies and resistance practices of marginalized groups” (p. 1051).

All the foreign certified teachers who participated in this study could be loosely described as cultural hybrids. They all were born overseas before moving to Saskatchewan Canada as adult professionals. To some extent, all study participants, like me, inhabit contradictions as educated and travelled teachers in rural Saskatchewan. And while we are all bodies that bespeak success, we all have a unique history. We all applied to come to Canada and are probably aware of individuals who ‘merited’ the opportunity more or at least, as much as we did.

When I came to Canada, I already had a brother in Canada, and the University of Lethbridge had offered me research assistantship. Similarly, Ashakiran had relatives in
Canada and lived in Ontario for about a year before coming to Saskatchewan. In the case of Laoshi, in 1973 at the time she arrived in Canada, her native Hong Kong was under the British rule. Nauczyciel, a native of Poland, states that until he came to Canada, all his friends, relatives, teachers, and everyone he knew was white. Upon coming to Canada, he worked in the public service for about two decades in Saskatchewan before becoming a classroom teacher. Adaora got her university education in Nigeria and Australia before coming to Canada.

The four study participants regard themselves as coming from working class backgrounds. In our conversations about their university education, the foreign certified teachers noted that in general, academic institutions are spaces that could perpetuate power and privilege. Yet, as school teachers in Saskatchewan public schools, the four foreign certified teachers expressed their belief in the potential of public education, both in Saskatchewan and in their native countries, to improve upward social mobility of “all” students (see for example Haveman & Smeeding, 2006). Whether that potential is realized or not, is a different issue.

The issue of agency was very prominent in the stories of experience of foreign certified teachers both in their identities (as individuals, parents, spouses, neighbours, teachers, etc) and their roles in the hybrid spaces and contact zones. Bandura (2000) contends that “people motivate and guide their actions partly by their beliefs of personal efficacy” (p. 75). Such beliefs, according to Bandura, have effects on “other determinants such as … outcome expectations … and perception of impediments and opportunities in the social environment” (p. 75).
It was clear from the narratives of the study participants that they were proactive. While they all experienced various forms of challenges and discrimination (please see Chapter Five), they had positive view of rural Saskatchewan; they adopted various initiatives that shaped their professional and personal lives, and to a great extent exhibited a great sense of agency and resilience. All the study participants stated that they would or have recommended rural Saskatchewan schools to potential foreign certified teachers.

The notion of agency as it applies to the foreign certified teachers has an implication on meritocracy and the subaltern subject. In their study of privilege and racism in the Canadian education context, Lund and Carr (2010) assert that “power does indeed have a colour in Canada, despite our much-heralded official multiculturalism policy.” They observe that “The ongoing myth of meritocracy in our nation has worked against non-white people in Canada for centuries, and it remains problematic that white people routinely explain underachievement in particular groups by assumed deficits in their individual efforts” (p. 230). In other words, the agency of the foreign certified teacher needs some form of institutional validation (Brohi, 2014) for it to be recognized (or heard) as discussed later in this section.

A common point made by all the four study participants, either as their teaching philosophy or as an advice to other (potential) foreign certified teachers, was the importance of personal attributes (such as passion for teaching and tenacity) in their success and/or career satisfaction. It was Cunningham (2009) who wrote that “Teaching – It’s More than a Job, It’s Magic” (p. 4). Many educators view the teaching profession as more than a duty or source of paycheque; some have even described the profession as a “calling” (Yee, 1990). All the four study participants demonstrated a passion that I
could see in their eyes and recognize in their voice. In spite of the challenges they each endured, the foreign certified teachers regarded the teaching profession as something that gave them a purpose and made their lives a bit more complete.

By the time I met Ashakiran, she had been a teacher every year over the previous 17 years, including one year as a volunteer teacher in Ontario. As she said, “I have always been a teacher. That is all I love doing.” Because of her passion for teaching, Ashakiran was offering a two hour remedial classes twice a week after regular school hours and encouraged her students to attend. Like Ashakiran, Laoshi declared her passion for teaching, “I decided early in my career that I loved teaching … and that I was going to enjoy the teaching career.” And, she worked as a teacher until she retired and says that if it were possible, she would do it all over again.

Adaora stated that her “love for teaching” was the primary reason why she has continued being a teacher despite having to endure various challenges (as described in Chapter Four). She described her teaching experience in rural Saskatchewan as being “very satisfying.” Nauczyciel was also very passionate about teaching, narrating how he has always wanted to be a teacher. He said, “Teaching enables me to learn more and more … it is very enriching.” At least three different times, Nauczyciel used the word ‘love’ to describe his attitude towards teaching. For example, he stated, “I love my job. I feel appreciated. I feel I can impact someone’s life.”

Just as much as they expressed their love for teaching and regarded the profession as giving them a sense of purpose, the study participants talked about the importance of “hard work” and “perseverance” as a way of achieving success in teaching. Ashakiran, for example, stated that while teaching has its challenges, “If you just stay on, and do
your best, it will be very rewarding.” Similarly, Adaora declared that “(T)here is nothing impossible for a determined mind … I am moving forward.” In her advice to other [future] foreign certified teachers, Adaora emphasized, “Do your job well.”

Like Adaora, Nauczyciel spoke to the importance of hard work and being an “effective” teacher. He suggested that, “(E)nsure that you understand the subject matter; and know your students, show interest and concern in them, their culture, experiences, and ways of knowing.” Similarly, Laoshi spoke about the importance of hard work. She noted that while education system in Saskatchewan “encouraged collaboration and teamwork among teachers,” the “competitive nature” of education in her native Hong Kong had instilled in her the “virtue of hard work” that continues to define her work as a teacher. She suggested that “if you work hard and put your best effort,” teaching would be “very rewarding.” In her advice to potential foreign certified teachers, Laoshi suggested that, no matter how challenging and frustrating the (teaching) job may be, “hard work and good classroom management should always be the norm.”

While, as the four study participants noted, there could be a positive correlation between hard work and success (or satisfaction) on foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan classrooms, this view raises at least two issues. One, it implies that teachers who do “not” succeed, such as those who may have decided to leave the profession or transferred to different schools, were not as hardworking as those that stayed. And two, it ignores the impact of underlying factors such as the “imbalanced relations of power” that tends to benefit the dominant group while perpetuating the “denial and silencing” of the other based on such factors as ethnicity and countries of origin (Montgomery, 2013, p. 3).
The notion of freedom of agency and choice, such as those involving individual foreign certified teacher determination, hard work, and love for teaching, was important to the study participants in achieving satisfaction in their work. However, as Spivak (Brohi, 2014) points out, “agency is [an] institutionally validated action” (para. 27). That is, while teacher dedication and love for teaching may offer intrinsic rewards to the teachers and enhance learning among the students, “not all hard work leads to learning” (Chew, 2011, para. 7). This seemed to have been the case when the foreign certified teachers encountered challenging situations. For example, Adaora described how she brought pens and writing paper for her students to enable them stay in the classroom, but some students came up with new excuses to leave the classroom. She also talked about her hockey playing student who went to the principal to ask for more time to complete his assignment when all his classmates did not ask for extra time.

In her call for institutional infrastructure that validates agency and otherness, Spivak (Dutt, 1999) argues that “unless validated by dominant forms of knowledge and politics, resistance could not be recognized (‘heard’) as such” (p. 35). She (Spivak, 2000) highlights the importance of “politics of demanding and building infrastructure so that when the subalterns speak, they can be heard” (p. xx). As Spivak (De Kock, 1992) points out, “the only way that [the subaltern’s] speech is produced is by inserting the subaltern into the circuit of hegemony, which is what should happen” (p. 46). Until then, “when the subaltern speaks there is not enough infrastructure for people to recognize it as … speech” (Lahiri, 2011, para. 8).

Examples of institutional validation in the narratives of the study participants include when Ashakiran stated, with pride, that the vice principal whom she had invited
in to her class gave her a positive feedback and commended her for the way she taught mathematics. Similarly, Adaora and Laoshi both emphasized the fact that vice principal, principal, and/or superintendent who were present in their classes to assess how their teach affirmed their expertise and teaching effectiveness. Further, Ashakiran and Nauczyciel received positive feedback from the community, while Adaora and Ashakiran noted that parents and students recognized and commended their work. Other than the validation, the foreign certified teachers professed love of the teaching profession did not wane despite challenges they may have faced.

As discussed above, Bhabha’s hybridity and Spivak’s subaltern subject problematize such underlying factors and tensions that are not only informed by power relations that privilege the dominant vis-à-vis the other, but are also able to hinder or frustrate individual foreign certified teacher tenacity and merit. Wiley, Deaux, and Hagelskamp (2012) write that belief in meritocracy “can make low-status group members more accepting of inequality” (p. 171); a situation that has led some immigrants to dismiss allegations of marginalization and discrimination in the West (Ogbu, 1990). This poses potential challenges to foreign certified teachers not just when dealing with immigrant and racialized minority students but also with Aboriginal students. For example, Ashakiran noted that when she was still in Ontario and making arrangements to move to the First Nations reserve in northern Saskatchewan where she had accepted teaching position, and after she arrived in Saskatchewan, what she heard about Aboriginal peoples often touched on socioeconomic crisis and what was “wrong with Aboriginal peoples”.

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Unlike Ashakiran, Adaora has taught in predominantly white rural Saskatchewan schools. She says that because she was raised in an environment where merit and individual hard work were regarded as a way to success, it was a surprise for her to learn that it took more for racialized minority teachers and students, and in the case of her head of department’s mother, white teachers who speak English with accents, to succeed in their careers. As Lewis (2007) reminds us, “we come to know our selves through the world and its stories [and] we come to know the world through our experiences and our stories” (p. 11). And as the narrator tells and retells his or her story of lived experience, the audience, no matter what space they occupy, “will interpret it as … one that applies to our own specific lives, however far our lives are removed from the detail of the story” (Turner, 1996, p. 7). This is because “it is in and through narrative meaning making that humans gain insight and understanding of lived experience” (Lewis & Adeney, 2014, p. 175).

6.3 Theme Three: Identity in-between spaces

Foreign certified teachers, like many (im)migrants, occupy marginal spaces with an identity of racialized minority, an in-between space for negotiation, resistance, and uncertainty (Ashcroft, Griffith, & Tiffin, 1995). Bhabha refers to this space as the “third space of enunciation” (p. 209) where cultures meet and construct hybrid identities. This space calls for critical reflection if we are to avoid essentializing the other. According to Bhabha (2004), hybridity is

(N)ot just geographical borderlines, texts, laws from multiple sources, maps that reveal the influences in the naming of locations, but also inside, within, for
example, the body of a coloured south African woman who reveals a difference within, and inhabits an in-between reality. (p. 19)

Bhabha’s notion of hybridity is particularly salient across the narratives of the foreign certified teachers who participated in this study.

Teacher identity is not static, rather, it is a “process that involves complex interplay between different, and sometimes conflicting, perspectives, beliefs, and practices that are accompanied by the development of a new identity” (Flores, 2006, p. 2021). The individual identities of the foreign certified teachers were shifting as they each struggled to align their experiences in-between spaces into a coherent story to live by (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2011). The four study participants had chosen to leave their native homes and come to Canada. While their paths to becoming certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools were different, they had each imagined themselves as teachers in Canada long before they arrived in Canada. Although they were stepping into the unknown, their imagined ideas of teaching had been formed. Ashakiran stated that “I have always worked as a teacher, and as [my husband] and I were making plans to move to Ontario, I had a strong desire to continue in the [teaching] profession.” Ashakiran continues, “My experience in Ontario [both the process of getting the province’s teacher certification and as a teacher] gave me more confidence and optimism about [teaching] in Saskatchewan.”

Ashakira, Laoshi, and Adaora had all, to different degrees, imagined student behavior, classroom management, and student-teacher relationship from the perspective of what they were each familiar with, namely, the teacher’s authority was respected by the students, students were willing and motivated to learn, and classroom management
was not a challenge. For Nauczyciel, “It had been many years since I was a teacher in Poland. I did not know what to expect in [rural Saskatchewan] classrooms. [However], because I was going to teach adults [who were back in school to earn their high school diploma], I did not think that [student] motivation and discipline to be an issue.” Thus, all the study participants occupied a tense space where there expectations (and wishes) were at times contradictory.

As a foreign certified teacher in rural Saskatchewan, Adaora did not regard herself as being in-between cultures. She stated that “I am Nigerian,” and described her accent as her “identity,” that is, something to be celebrated rather than be judged as inferior. However, talking about her experience in rural Saskatchewan, and how, for example, teacher authority and teacher-student relationship were different compared to her native Nigeria, Adaora knew that she did not have the privilege to be ‘completely’ Nigerian at her school.

Nauczyciel declared that he was “proud to be a Polish-immigrant teacher.” He frequently referred to himself as a “Polish-Canadian” and stated that the beauty of the northern Saskatchewan community where he lived reminded him of his home town in Poland. Like other study participants, Nauczyciel demonstrated his identities in the in-between spaces by emphasizing the connections with his home country Poland. Homeland represented a ‘safe house’ (Pratt, 1991), a familiar space of belonging and “shared cultural codes which tend to give a stable and rigid reference of meaning beneath shifts of ... actual history” (Hall, 2000, p.2). However, living in the in-between spaces underscores the fluid and multifaceted nature of identity among the foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. Further, Nauczyciel narrated that during the ‘Idle No
More’ protests; a student asked him what he thought of the concerns of Aboriginal peoples to which he responded: “Although I am a White man, I am also Aboriginal at heart.”

Of the four study participants, Laoshi came out strongly in calling on foreign certified teachers to “do their best to blend into the Canadian society.” As she asserted, “We [that is, foreign certified teachers] need to make an effort to fit into the Canadian culture.” While she is proud of her Chinese roots and urges foreign certified teachers not to forget their heritage, Laoshi nonetheless calls on the teachers to “Embrace Canada without forgetting your country of origin and its cultures. To live in Canada, you should act like Canadian,” which is perhaps an illustrative example of mimicry. Laoshi seemed to be arguing for cultural assimilation in which the foreign certified teachers should, in some ways, be acculturated to become Canadians. Such comments speak to the fact that these teachers are subjected by the dominant postcolonial discourses. That is, they have internalized the desire for assimilation as guiding principle of white-centred nation-formation (Montgomery, 1999). In these moments, there is little sense that the foreign certified teachers are themselves utilizing postcolonial and anti-colonial frameworks, but rather they are clearly being subjected or subjugated by them. Assimilation has tended to attract diverse opinions. Berns (2001), for example, argues that civic assimilation can lead to loyalty to the new country. Fonte (2001), on the other hand views assimilation as a problem and asserts that today’s assimilating forces are much different than those that prevailed in the early twentieth century.

Adaora and Nauczyciel describing their accents, and Ashakiran and Laoshi their cultures as who they are, highlight the tension-filled space of seduction and resistance
within the Saskatchewan’s (rural) schooling system and community. He (2002) refers to this as the balance stability and change: outsider educators within the North American education system including her “do not want to be totally transformed because we want to keep our own identities. Sometimes, even when we want to be transformed, that does not mean we can successfully be transformed” (p. 528).

According to Bhabha (1994), the tension-filled third space occupied by the study participants involves shifting roles and identities in an effort to find something that is pure and original. Bhabha, however, points out that because it is not possible to have an authentic cultural identity, the result is an ambivalence of colonial discourse that entails a “movement between what is always in place, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated” (p. 95) – such as prejudices against the racialized minorities and foreign certified teachers.

Cary and Mutua (2010) citing Bhabha (1994), suggest that what is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. They point out that, these ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for “elaborating strategies of selfhood that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (p. 2). The in-between spaces in the study participants’ narratives show at least two key points. One, the study participants admit to benefiting in their careers as teachers in rural Saskatchewan, and in fact, recommend it to other foreign certified teachers. In general, the study participants like and even encourage the learning
moment(s) that their existence creates for wondering and learning (Cary & Mutua, 2010). And two, the foreign certified teachers resist attempts to essentialize them and their work.

Bhabha’s (1984) hybridity offers a means to interrupt the notion of the other as being fixed, in the sense that cultures and human beings are stable. As the foreign certified teachers narrate their personal experiences, place and dis-place become prominent in their stories thereby allowing for evolution of a distinct hybrid self. Thus, for example, by the time Adaora participated in this study, she had lived in her native Nigeria, in New South Wales Australia, and in Saskatchewan. Similarly, when she came to Canada from her native India, Ashakiran lived and worked as a volunteer teacher in Ontario before moving to Saskatchewan where she first worked in a remote First Nations reserve before settling at the current Métis community. Ashakiran and her husband are the only individuals from East Asia and the only Hindus in the community. As well, Laoshi got her teacher education degree from a Saskatchewan university, had taught in several schools in rural Saskatchewan, married and had children in the province she calls home. While he has lived in Saskatchewan since he moved to Canada from Poland, Nauczyciel worked for several years as a researcher before he became a teacher in Saskatchewan. Hybridity as discussed by Bhabha comes to play in two key ways, first, as an “act of recovering a self that is colonized by a homogenizing lens” and second, as a means of disrupting “mimetic impositions of ideas [including those about self]” that have been imposed upon the other (Özkazanç-Pan, 2009, p. 82).

6.4 Theme Four: Gendered identity

In a conversation with Lahiri (2011), Gayatri Spivak asserts that “Gendering is our first, and most persistent, instrument of abstraction.” She then boldly declares that
“Any kind of academic work is incorrect if not gendered” (p. 1). While Spivak’s assertion may be subject to interpretation, this study took into consideration the effect of gender on the experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan. As Davis (1998) reminds us in her reading of Spivak, “the ‘subaltern’ woman as subject is already positioned, represented, spoken for or constructed as absent or silent or not listened to in a variety of discourses. Her speech is already represented as non-speech” (p. 1009). I have come to understand that the gendered dimensions of this study articulate closely with Spivaks’ notion of the subaltern.

Kapoor (2004) speaks to “the proclivity of dominant discourses and institutions to marginalize and disempower the Third World subaltern” (p. 627). Spivak (1988) goes further, and in giving examples of feminist writings, suggests that women have often been on the receiving end of marginalization and disempowerment.

Three out of the four foreign certified teachers who participated in this dissertation were female. And their gendered identities emerged in their narratives. In my interactions with the study participants, I aimed to be gender-neutral, to the extent that such a thing is possible, however, I was cognizant of the fact that my own masculinity privileged me in important ways to such as effect that I only came to understand the salience of gender well into my research. Ashakiran left her teaching position at the First Nations school mainly because her husband was “unhappy” with his own employment and so they decided to move to a different town. Ashakiran stated how on more than two different occasions her female students told her that they feel comfortable discussing their personal life issues with her because they saw her as a “big sister or auntie.” The vice principal also suggested to Ashakiran that as a relatively
younger “female who had done well for herself,” perhaps she could “talk to and encourage the female students” many of whom risked leaving school before finishing Grade 12 or becoming pregnant.

Laoshi narrated how in parent teacher interviews at her rural Saskatchewan schools she often heard from the male parents how the students, especially boys, were being prepared to “take over the family farm.” More than twice, Laoshi was told by the parents how students were busy with farm duties and so could not complete their homework. Laoshi interpreted this to mean that professions were gendered and “teaching was perceived [by such parents as] a woman’s job” while farming was for males.

The gendered position also became apparent in Adaora’s story. When she told other teachers about a student who would skip his classes and come to Adaora’s class, it was the male teachers who responded, “He better not come to my class.” In other words, classroom management and ensuring obedience to the rules became gendered and associated with masculinity. As a teacher whose classroom the student was fond of ‘crushing’ in to, Adaora became feminized as being unable to stop the student behaviour. In fact, the male school principal suggested that it was Adaora who was encouraging the student misbehaviour. In this context, Adaora lacked a legitimate narrative voice because even though she told the (male) student a few times not to come to her class when he was supposed to be in another class, the student ignored her repeated warnings. Similarly, the male teachers and the principal did not pay attention to the fact that the student had not taken seriously what Adaora had told him. Adaora’s experience could be understood within Spivak’s (1988) critique that the “subaltern as a female cannot be heard or read” (p. 308). Spivak (De Kock, 1992) explains that, “When you say cannot speak, its means
that if speaking involves speaking and listening, this possibility of response, responsibility, does not exist in the subaltern’s sphere” (p. 46).

Malkus (2011) suggests that “education is a gendered field and teachers are often gendered,” (p. 113). Indeed, while the majority (68 percent) of Saskatchewan teachers are female, fewer (41 percent) women hold school administration positions including principals, vice principals and department heads (Corman, 2010). As a public discourse, education is not only a gendered field of practice but it is also pervaded by the effects of colonialism that has tended to problematize power relations between men and women in educational administration. Within the complexities of these realities, the female racialized minority foreign certified teacher, such as Ashakiran, Adaora, and Laoshi, could be viewed as being doubly disadvantaged (Ladele, 2010). Lund and Carr (2010) note that while progress has been made for women in the Canadian labour force and politics, “these have largely been for white, middle class females. Women as a group still face numerous barriers and challenges in society, but for women of colour (sic) the inequities are exponentially more significant” (p. 230).

6.5 Theme Five: Silenced voices

A number of studies have emphasized the importance of dialogue in the teaching learning process. Abbey (2008), for example, argues that dialogue can build robust learning environments and improve learning outcomes. Marchel (2007) asserts that critical dialogue skills are of crucial importance for work with diverse students and their families. Similarly, Edwards-Groves and Hoare (2012) view dialogue as an essential aspect of teaching-learning process.
Pratt (2008) points out that too often; social spaces in many postcolonial societies perpetuate monolingual representations of dominant voices, and calls for schooling to embrace dialogue. According to Pratt, dialogue, whether intended or unintended, fleeting or enduring, across space in rural Saskatchewan such as inside or outside school, could result in ‘meaningful contact’ that helps disrupt prejudices and produce a better understanding or respect for the other. This has led Jones (1999) to ask an important question: if “the best teaching and learning occurs when ‘multiple voices join for mutually empowering conversation,’” then “what happens when the ‘other’ refuses to join in, and when ‘togetherness’ and dialogue-across-difference do not have the same compellingly positive meaning for different ethnic groups (?)” (p. 1). That is, what if a foreign certified teacher’s voice is silent even when ‘invited’ to speak? What if the inviting is recognized as inauthentic, uncomfortable, or unsafe by the foreign certified teacher, who then responds with silence of non-participation in ‘dialogue’? And what if, as Jones points out, “the ‘other’ fails to find interesting the idea of their empathetic understanding of the powerful, which is theoretically demanded by dialogic encounters?” (p. 1).

Spivak (Landry & MacLean, 1996) views speaking as “a transaction between speaker and listener” (p. 289). However, because of power differences, the subaltern, who she (Spivak, 2004) describes as “those removed from lines of social mobility” (p. 531), does not achieve what Kornetzki (2012) refers to as “dialogism of utterance” (p. 7). For as Amer (2012) writes,

(E)ven when the language is spoken, the subaltern is still unable to ‘speak’ because the message is misunderstood. The communicative act fails and the
subaltern’s voice is not decoded as it was intended to be. This is the metaphorical interpretation of the subaltern’s unspeakability.” (p. 178)

I draw on Spivak’s theoretical perspective, the subaltern subject, to explore the theme of silent voices below.

Silencing was a common theme in the study participants’ stories. It was clear to me that while the teachers could and in fact did resist the colonial tendencies such as discrimination and exclusion, often their silence was not by choice. Adaora narrated a number of instances when she heeded her own advice of, “You just keep silent, and keep going forward.” They include a time when her student “went to the intercom and called the office … and asked if she could go to the washroom” after Adaora denied the student’s request to go to the washroom. The “vice principal gave her permission to go to the washroom” as Adaora and the rest of the students were listening to the conversation between the student and the vice principal. Adaora’s subalternity is marked not by her inability to utter a word, but rather for being misunderstood and/or ignored both by her student and the vice principal (Spooner, 2011).

Adaora also talked about an incident involving a student, school principal, and herself in which her voice was silenced. The principal asked Adaora when she wanted the student to hand in an overdue assignment. After she responded by saying the following day, the principal asked the student “When do you think you can hand the assignment in?” The principal then declared that, “As the principal of the school, I can allow you to do that, hand in your assignment on Monday [that is the day that the student said he would like to hand in the assignment].” Adaora asserted, “I was sitting right there. I am thinking to myself, ‘Why did you ask me in front of the student then overrule
me in his presence.”” However, Adaora did not say anything. In her advice to other foreign certified teachers, she said, “You do not always have to be right … sometimes it is good not to argue.” Adaora seems resigned to the fact that even if she speaks, or as she calls it, ‘argues’ it will not make any difference because her voice will not be heard or will be misunderstood and taken for arguing.

Similarly, Ashakiran was unable to speak back (Smyth, 2010) when other teachers were critical of her after she started offering extra remedial classes. Although hesitant to attribute the lack of support to her minority status, Ashakiran asserted that “the way [the teachers] behaved was not encouraging.” She described her response thus, “I was focused on what I was doing, and did not engage in cat fights or finger pointing.” In the end, Ashakiran was vindicated: “Now those teachers appreciate the work I have done and continue to do. They realize that I started the project to see if it can be helpful to the students. It was never about me.”

Ashakiran’s narrative points to two key issues. First, she is not only trying to escape the dominant discourse that is not supportive of offering her students the needed extra support, but, two, becomes a silent activist in doing so. She has gone out of her way to learn the cultures and history of her Aboriginal students, and is concerned by the socioeconomic challenges faced by the community such as low graduation and high teenage pregnancy rates. She also mentions the fact that even if the students and the community are hesitant to welcome her as a teacher and newcomer, she understands the reasoning behind such hesitation, namely, “many teachers have come to the community either do not go the extra mile to help the students, [or] leave shortly after.” Ashakiran believes that with extra help, her students’ performance can improve, and indeed, her
efforts towards this end have been recognized both by her school and the school district. As well, she has received feedback from a family that “if [she] could have been in the community earlier, then perhaps a student could not have dropped out of school.”

Ashakiran complicates Spivak’s (2004) notion of subalternity. She is an outsider and she cannot speak in the staffroom when other teachers and the school secretary criticize her. At the same time, she is an activist who is doing what she can to place her students in the “lines of social mobility” (used here in contrast to Spivak’s assertion that “By subaltern I mean those removed from lines of social mobility” (p. 531)). As Spivak reminds us, “no activist wants to keep the subaltern in the space of difference. To do a thing, to work for the subaltern, means to bring it into speech” (p. 46). And that is precisely Ashakiran’s goal. To show that the goal is achievable, she proudly talks about a former student, “a role model at the school and community who is the first graduate of her school in recent years to proceed to the university to pursue [an] engineering degree.”

Laoshi noted that early in her career in rural Saskatchewan, she was self-conscious of her accent and that on a few occasions she chose to remain silent or speak only when it was necessary. Describing herself as speaking English with Hong Kong accent, Laoshi narrated that it was during that time when one of her students “made fun of the way (she) talked.” Laoshi’s comments imply that the issue is not the English language, but rather how ‘the’ language can be used against the other. As hooks (1994) puts it,

I know that it is not the English language that hurts me, but what the oppressors do with it, how they shape it to become a territory that limits and defines, how they make it a weapon that can shame, humiliate, colonize. (p.168)
But while Laoshi ‘fits’ the description of Spivak’s subaltern, she also subverts it. On the one hand she cannot speak, and on the other she not only holds the position of teacher, but she also urges other foreign certified teachers to adapt Canadian culture and “blend into the Canadian society.” Spivak (Landry & MacLean, 1996) acknowledges that “we are never looking at the pure subaltern. There is, then, something of a non-speakingness in the very notion of subalternity” (p. 289). However, Laoshi subverts subalternity without escaping the dominant discourse.

Although Laoshi stated that over time the issues of her accent and ethnicity ceased being “a major source of problem” for her and her students, she describes herself as speaking English with Hong Kong accent. And while she regards herself as having blended into the Canadian society, she is proud of her Chinese-Canadian identity. But the fact that she thought it necessary to be silent because of the way she spoke and looked – earlier in her career – and she relieves the experience years after her retirement implies that it was important to her.

As already stated elsewhere, Nauczyciel is a white man and all his students are Aboriginal. Before discussing his ‘silenced’ moments, it is important to briefly revisit Aboriginal-settler (white) relationship and popular culture. Pentrone (1990) describes how “from the mid-nineteenth century onward, Canadian politicians regarded the Indians [a word previously used to refer to Canada’s First Nations peoples] in the settlement areas as foreigners to be civilized” (p. 2). In more recent times, King (1990) argues, “Most Canadians have only seen Natives through the eyes of non-Native writers, and, while many of these portrayals have been sympathetic, they have also been limited in their variety of characters, themes, structures and images”(p. ix). The present day Métis
community where Nauczyciel lives is not very isolated although most of its population is Aboriginal.

Between 2012 and 2013, there was a national Aboriginal movement in Canada “Idle No More” (http://www.idlenomore.ca) that highlighted government policies that had been criticised by Aboriginal peoples. Nauczyciel stated that he had been asked by his students and member of the community what he thought about the movement and the general plight of Aboriginal peoples. He noted that he often expressed his solidarity with Aboriginal people. And in other cases, especially when the “students asked tricky questions such as Treaty education, inclusion of Aboriginal content in the curriculum, education funding and completion gaps between Aboriginal students [on-reserve] and non-Aboriginal students,” he watched what he said. He attempted to either give honest answers or “avoided the questions by putting them back to the students for class discussion.” When this happened, Nauczyciel “felt helpless and sometimes guilty that he was unable to say something without worrying about being reprimanded.” When asked to explain further, Nauczyciel said, “some of the topics such as funding for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students is government policy, and I just need to be careful not to come out as condemning government policy.” Nauczyciel’s silence, given his whiteness, is rather different from the other study participants. On the one hand he ‘watches’ what he says, in part out of fear of being perceived as racist or as being insensitive to the structural barriers that have continued to affect Aboriginal peoples; and on the other hand, because he does not want to criticize government (or his employer’s) policies.

All the four study participants narrated at least one experience when they felt silenced. It was clear to me that they were silent not because of their individual choice
but rather because of discrimination and exclusion or because they had somehow been ‘conditioned’ to be passive during such times. Such was the case of Adaora who saw no need in speaking back when her authority as a teacher was undermined by the school administrators.

Jones (1999) argues that an invitation to dialogue does not necessarily mean “a call for voices to speak, but is really a call for the members of powerful groups to listen to the usually excluded and suppressed voice and its realms of meaning” (p. 3). This is because “listening … is hardly required the other way around; members of marginalized … groups do not need to encounter the voice of the powerful – they are immersed in it and ‘hear’ it daily” (p. 3). This is especially true in the case of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools where they are often outsiders. That is, members of the dominant group have not had their ability to hear excluded by others, but rather have self-excluded it. However, the downside of this scenario (say in a settler society where the majority occupies the position of power and dominance) is that “this ‘silence in the ears of the powerful’ is misrecognized as the silence of the subordinate, and it reproduces their exclusion” (p. 3). Such was the case in the examples above where the study participants could not speak, for example, when the principal told a parent in the presence of Adaora that Adaora’s accent could have been the reason why her son had difficulty in class. Adaora was later vindicated when the student’s file arrived from his previous school.

Jones (1999) suggests that “the call for dialogue or border crossing” should be viewed “not (as) a call for voices to speak, but is really a call for the members of powerful groups to listen to the usually excluded and suppressed voice” (p. 5). Otherwise
“(d)ialogue and recognition of difference turns out to be access for dominant groups to the thoughts, cultures, lives of others” (p. 4, emphasis in the original). This suggestion echoes what Bhabha (1984) refers to as “colonizer’s narrative demand” (p. 98). As Bhabha writes, the “colonialist demand it should be addressed directly, that the other should authorize the self, recognize its priority, fulfill its outlines” (p. 98). Bhabha views such demands by the colonizer as being self-serving. In the same vein, Dei (Dei & Kempf, 2006) argues that because of the power dynamics involved in oppressive relations, “all oppressions have colonizing tendencies” (p. 5).

While it must be remembered that dialogue can potentially benefit the other (see the discussion on Pratt’s contact zones), it is also important to heed the calls by Bhabha and Spivak (1988) “to Western intellectuals and researchers to abandon the myths of representational clarity and total accessibility to the other” (p. 480). As Kohn (2004) points out, the knowledge of the Orient in this sense is not just for sustaining imperialism but rather is itself a form of power. Silence by the other may then be viewed as a form of resistance. Resistance, for example, to reification of the existing socioeconomic structures that essentialize the other and privilege the dominant groups while celebrating diversity.

6.6 Theme Six: Positioning as other

In his book, Racial Fault Lines: The historical origins of white supremacy in California, Almaguer (1994) explores racialized experiences and conflicts in California following the annexation of the land from Mexico. Almaguer writes that “race and the racialization process … became the central organizing principle of group life during the state’s formative period of development” (p. 7).
The conflict, according to Almaguer (1994), pitted the dominant European Americans (it is not my intention to underplay any contributions that may have been made by racialized non-white Americans during the war) against the Mexicans. Almaguer points out that while it is likely that – to the extent that it was possible - the Europeans identified with different nations in the geographical space we have come to call Europe (for example, as Italian-Americans, Irish-Americans, etc), this was less important during the conquest of California and its aftermath because they saw themselves as European American. This, Almaguer argues, was crucial in that as “European Americans, they considered themselves as white and therefore superior to anyone who was non-white” (p. 31).

While the California example happened over 150 years ago, its impacts continue to be felt today in the form of racial relations and hierarchies in the United States. Although not to the same extent, racial hierarchies that lead to empowerment of the dominant majority and the exclusion of the minority have been manifested in Canada as well.

As indicated in Chapter Two, most racialized non-white immigrants to Canada have historically chosen major urban centres, notably, Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal, as sites of first settlement (Waters & Jimenez, 2005) in the country. Dr. Paul Carr (personal communication, December 16, 2015), the external examiner for this thesis, points out that there are several cases in which small numbers of immigrants entering ‘smaller communities’ in Canada have experienced welcoming reception. This was the case with the study participants. Ashakiran, for example, described how she felt welcome in the community and Laoshi noted that she was often invited to community
events. Laoshi also felt that many people at the rural Saskatchewan location were friendly and “went out of their way to make [her] feel comfortable.” Similarly, Adaora emphasized that while she experienced “hurtful experiences” at the school, in general, the rural community was friendly and welcoming. Nauczyciel compared his new home in Northern Saskatchewan to his childhood home in Poland. The similarities, he pointed out, were in both the physical and social environments.

Dr. Paul Carr (personal communication, December 16, 2015) suggests that such acts of kindness towards the newcomers are often taken as a “validation of goodness of peoples in rural areas.” The actions could also be perceived as enhancing a collective sense of ourselves as inclusive good Canadians (Montgomery, 1999), thus contributing to imagined community (Anderson, 2006) and grand nationalist narrative of a good nation (Montgomery, 2005). However, when larger more critical mass of immigrants comes in, concerns are more often expressed in the public conversations such as in the comments sections of newspapers and online articles. Sometimes, as indicated in the example below, there is an overtly racialized tint to those comments.

An article in the Maclean’s magazine titled ‘The enrollment controversy: Worries that efforts in the U.S. to limit enrollment of Asian students in top universities may migrate to Canada’ (Findlay & Köhler, 2010) provides an example that may help explain this point. The article notes that a “growing cohort of [Canadian] students … eschew[s] some big-name [post-secondary] schools over perceptions that they’re ‘too Asian.’” (para. 4). Findlay and Köhler suggest that being “‘Too Asian’ is not about racism,” rather, “many white students simply believe that competing with Asians—both Asian
Canadians and international students—requires a sacrifice of time and freedom they’re not willing to make” (para. 5).

While Findlay and Köhler (2010) would like their readers to believe that their article is not actually about racism, it certainly is. And, although this is just one example in a Canadian magazine, it helps shed light on the point I raised previously that concerns tend to be noticeable when a critical mass of immigrants and racialized non-whites come into a Canadian ‘community.’

Postcolonial critiques, in general, have highlighted the relationship between the self and the other. Thus, for example, Said (1978) speaks to the construction and representation of identities at the encounter between the colonizer and the colonized. Bhabha (1994) examines the third space between the colonizer and the colonized, and Spivak (1988) concerns herself with the subaltern subject, whose voice is muffled by the dominant other. Thus, ‘self’ needs an ‘other’ in order to develop and maintain its own existence. Said argues that historically, the hegemonic space occupied by the dominant has left little or no options for alternative interpretations of the other or her voice. As Said (1978) reminds us,

The development and maintenance of every culture requires the existence of another different and competing alter ego. The construction of identity… whether Orient or Occident, France or Britain… involves establishing opposites and otherness whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of their differences from us. (p. 332)

While many theorists agree that “Othering helps to define the self and to affirm identity” (Lister, 2004, p. 102), there is no single definition of the term. Taken from
Said’s (1978) notion of *Orientalism*, othering can be described as the process of creating and/or maintaining a dualism with one side dominant and the other disadvantaged. The process involves the dominant group defining the disadvantaged group into existence “through invention of categories and of ideas about what marks people as belonging to these categories” (Schwalbe, Holden, Schrock, Godwin, Thompson, & Wolkomir, 2000, p. 422). Lister views othering as a “process of differentiation and demarcation, by which the line is drawn between ‘us’ and ‘them’ – between the more and the less powerful – and through which social distance is established and maintained” (p. 101). Schwalbe, Holden, Schrock, Godwin, Thompson, and Wolkomir use the term ‘oppressive othering’ to refer to a situation where “one group seeks advantage by defining another group as morally and/or intellectually inferior” (p. 423). Othering thus creates and reproduces oppression and inequality that may take different forms both subtle and overt.

Said (1978) writes that *Orientalism*

(W)as ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”). This vision in a sense created and then served the two worlds thus conceived. Orientals lived in their world, “we” lived in ours. The vision and material reality propped each other up, kept each other going. (pp. 43-44)

For Said, the other of *Orientalism* resulted not as a fact of nature, but from the need to rationalize and perpetuate existing hegemonic relations. Said argues that the (inferior) Orient is often essentialized and homogenized by the Occident. The difference between the two is problematized to render the Orient inferior to the dominant Occident.
In general, the foreign certified teachers who participated in this study are othered for living and working in the shadows of the dominant dichotomy. The participants attributed many of their unpleasant experiences to their outsidedness. Note that, while there is no physical demarcation between the dominant and the other, the acceptance of the imaginary borderline and the dichotomy with the former as privileged and rational and the latter as inferior is generally often taken for granted by the dominant. Below, I explore how the experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan are related to the concept of othering. I draw mainly from Said’s notion of *Orientalism*.

All the four study participants have teaching experience in rural Saskatchewan schools where student body is relatively less racially diverse. These include a First Nations reserve and Métis community – both with predominantly Aboriginal populations; and farming communities that are mainly white. They have all been othered through (an) “encounter with foreignness, a defining and epiphanic moment … in which we (sic) are confronted with an image of ourselves which prompts us to distinguish our ego” (Alyling, n.d., p. 2). The four found their positioning and experiences to offer an ‘other’ perspective that enriched their teaching. They talked of the importance of understanding their students and the local communities, as well as sharing their own experiences.

Three of the four study participants noted that sharing their experiences in their day-to-day lives, such as those of discrimination and other experiences they attribute to their being outsiders, could make their students become more aware of challenges faced by the teachers and other racialized minority or immigrant groups. As Ashakiran noted, “by sharing my experiences with my students, I am able to let them see the other side and view things from a perspective they [probably] never thought about previously.” For
Adaora and Ashakiran, including immigrant perspective as a teaching strategy enables Saskatchewan students understand how people from different racialized minority groups and those speaking English with accents sometimes face discrimination. The ‘experience of immigrants and refugees in Canada’ is a common feature in school textbooks (Montgomery, 2008) and newspaper articles (Raj, 2015) and usually end up painting Canada in redemptive terms, as a land of opportunity or as having progressed from racism to non—or anti-racism. Newspaper articles have included headlines like, ‘Maryam Monsef came to Canada as a refugee. Now she is a cabinet minister’ (Raj, 2015), ‘Helping immigrant children succeed’ (Marwick, 2010), and ‘Former refugees say newcomers will seize their ‘golden opportunities’ in Canada’ (The Canadian Press, 2015). The latter has a picture of smiling woman and the writing, “Haidah Amirzadeh poses in Saskatoon ... She was seven months pregnant and couldn’t speak English when she arrived as a refugee in Saskatoon in 1989. She is now [a successful lawyer and] the owner of Amirzadeh Law.” Racialized minority teachers (including immigrants and refugees) have a unique opportunity to sensitize their students about their own experiences and in the process contribute towards disrupting some of the claims that glorify immigrant success while remaining silent on the systemic barriers on their paths.

Adaora, Ashakiran, and Nauczyciel, and to a lesser extent Laoshi, narrated a common experience when they have spoken with someone for the first time. They have been asked which countries they come from, how they got to come to Canada, whether they like it “here,” if they ever go back home, and whether they have a Canadian spouse. All the study participants noted how they have received ‘compliments’ on how well they speak English, and occasionally heard from people who have enjoyed visiting (exotic)
places in their native countries as tourists; or sympathized with the socioeconomic challenges experienced in their home countries of origin (Cary & Mutua, 2010, wrote about similar experiences).

While most of the questions and comments to the study participants may have been well intended, when situated within a postcolonial frame, the stories have common threads that “bear a postcolonial stamp” (Cary & Mutua, 2010, p. 68). Inherent in the comments and questions is the assumption that the foreign certified teachers do not belong in rural Saskatchewan and Canada in general. Thus, they are not only asked personal question, but are also expected to justify their presence in their current location. Even if we are to assume that the questions and comments were influenced by the genuine belief in the effectiveness of Canada’s multicultural policy, is it possible to have an intercultural conversation that, in the words of Gorski (2008), “does not insist first and foremost on social reconstruction for equity and justice without rendering ourselves complicit to existing inequity and injustice?” (p. 515). Gorski suggests that in “dialogue experiences [involving the dominant and the other] absent a central focus on social reconstruction, the rules of engagement require disenfranchised participants to render themselves more vulnerable to the powerful than they already are” (p. 521). Thus, for example, all the foreign certified teachers who participated in this study stated or implied that at some point they found it hard to fit in to a space where they were “presumed known and understood merely by the mention of (their) gender and place of origin” (Cary & Mutua, 2010, p. 70), or by the way they spoke.

All four foreign certified teachers viewed themselves as being outsiders at some point. They all noted that while outsider status had its challenges, it was not necessarily a
bad thing. Adaora regarded herself as an outsider and attributed most of the challenges she experienced including student behaviour problem and unsupportive parents and teachers to her being an other. She, however, noted the importance of recognizing one’s own outsider status as being a crucial step in developing skills to overcome challenges that come with such status. As she put it, “I speak with [an] accent, that is who I am,” and she let this be known to her students at the beginning of every semester. As well, she took this to account when teaching and was thus patient with her students.

Ashakiran was aware of her outsider status and in her earlier months at the new school experienced racial remarks directed at her by students. She has turned her ‘outsiderness’ into strength by tailoring her teaching into the needs of her students. This was possible after she took time to learn the history of the communities the schools are located and from her own experience. Ashakiran understands the exclusion and discrimination faced by many society’s outsiders. This was the case of females and people from lower castes and socioeconomic backgrounds in her native India. She notes that outsider “students and teachers,” whether from racialized minority groups or because of the way they speak or their caste, “tend to feel intimidated by those in the position of authority.” She therefore took it upon herself to know her Aboriginal students and to let them see themselves as being able to achieve success. It should be noted, however, that while creating space for Aboriginal student voices and experiences to be heard and validated, the approach by Ashakiran (and other study participants) does not necessarily address the inherent power dynamics that sustain inequality and marginalization of the other. Despite this shortcoming, Ashakiran’s teaching style of including the voices of her
students speaks to her experience as a dedicated foreign certified teacher who aims to prepare her students for a future beyond their village of less than 2,000 people.

While Ashakiran and her Aboriginal students both fall under the broad category of racialized minorities, she is also an ‘other’ in the sense that she is a female of Indian origin. Further, as mentioned earlier, Ashakiran and her husband are the only ‘East Indians’ in the community and because her husband wears religious symbols and clothing, they stand out in the community. It is, however, Ashakiran’s teaching style and relationship with her students that has become an “insider” characteristic. She has been able to establish a rapport with her students to the extent that her students “often discuss almost everything about their lives” with her including family situation and “all those things that teenagers struggle with such as identity and dating.” The students know that they can “count on [her] confidence, advice, and non-judgemental attitude towards them.”

Although white, Nauczyciel felt that he was an outsider, a dominant other (Razack, 1998). He is a Polish immigrant who speaks with – as he describes it – a “Polish accent.” He teaches at a Métis community and most of his students are Métis. Nauczyciel pointed out that becoming a foreign certified teacher in rural Saskatchewan, and specifically a predominantly Aboriginal community, meant that for the first time in his life he was a racialized minority, an other. This implied that he had to deal with racial and cultural issues in a way that was probably new to him. Nauczyciel narrated how some of his students have made racist remarks towards him and a few others implied that he did not understand Aboriginal peoples or did not care about the students.

Being a teacher in this community enabled me to open my eyes to issues of race and racism. Growing up in Poland, the population was over 95 percent white. The
people regarded as other were national minorities, such as Germans, Jews, Lemkos and Ukrainians. They were just different because they traced their roots from other countries; but they were not inferior. So it was surprising to me learning about the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and various forms of racism that still exist today. My background enabled me [to] revisit and appreciate my upbringing but sought of made me apprehensive because for once I was different and the community I call home had faced some negative experiences from the European [settlers and their descendants].

While Nauczyciel emphasized that he had not been treated differently at the school or community, he knew other non-Aboriginal teachers, both foreign certified and Canadian, who had experienced discrimination or racism. He was, however, quick to state that the school had over the years experienced “high teacher attrition” especially among non-Aboriginal teachers. This, he argued, made it harder for the school and the community in general to “put their hopes high that a new teacher will stick around for a long time.” Ashakiran, a foreign certified teacher who also taught in Aboriginal schools in northern Saskatchewan had a similar view. Ashakiran noted that one of her students made “hurtful” racial comments about her; and that the community later accepted her once they realized that she was interested in the success of the students and was doing all she could, including offering remedial classes, to ensure that the students not only stayed in school, but also succeeded. Becoming foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan in some way enabled the study participants to reflect on their own racialized or national identities as well as their experiences and those of others.

The experiences of Nauczyciel indicate that just like their racialized minority counterparts, white teachers may also be ‘othered’ in a settler society like Saskatchewan. Indeed, while giving examples of white immigrant Australians from southern and Eastern Europe and experience of the Irish in the United Kingdom, Reid and Collins (2013) submit that “racism and racialization is not the exclusive preserve of non-white
immigrant” (p. 269) teachers. However, historically, and into the present, racism has nevertheless been predominantly (not exclusively) the preserve of non-whites, with victims of racism being disproportionately non-whites.

As Montgomery (1999) points out, there are gradations of whiteness and of belonging (for example, to the nation) and these shift in relation to time and place. This was a surprise to me because my assumption at the beginning of this study was that teachers from the dominant (white) backgrounds were less likely to encounter experiences of difference or being othered. Nauczyciel’s experience is in line with assertion by Reid and Collins (2013) that teachers from the dominant group are “often unaware of their ‘white’ privilege” (p. 271). The unawareness is brought to the fore in the space that opens up in the encounter between self and other. As Ellsworth (1997) points out, “the gaps between self and other, inside and outside, that dialogue supposedly bridges, smothes, alleviates, and ultimately crosses, are scenes troubled by cognitive uncertainty, forbidden thoughts, unreliable and unstable perceptions” (p. 42).

The foreign certified teachers appear to both embrace and resist othering. Adaora, for example, embraces othering when she defines herself as Nigerian, and Nauczyciel does so by referring to himself as a Polish-Canadian. Similarly, Ashakiran is proud to discuss her East Indian culture with her students while also striving to learn her students’ Aboriginal cultures. In the process, Ashakiran highlights commonalities between the two cultures. As well, Laoshi talks of the importance of keeping one’s culture alive, in her case, the Chinese culture and ways of knowing. Such an agency by the foreign certified teachers implies that they embraced the fact that they were othered (Said, 1978).
Just as they embraced othering, the foreign certified teachers also resisted othering. Their resistance, though articulated in various ways, was often subtle. Take the example of Adaora’s student who had transferred from another school and was having difficulty in Adaora’s biology class. To help resolve the difficulty, the principal invited the student, his mother, and Adaora to a meeting in his office where he blames Adaora’s accent. That is, Adaora was positioned as the other, and represented as illegitimate in terms of the way she spoke English. Her speech was thus interpreted as an indicator of her competence as a teacher with the implication that once the student gets past Adaora’s accent, the difficulty will have been resolved and his performance would improve. The underlying assumption is that except for Adaora, all the three individuals in the room, namely, the student, his mother, and the principal, are positioned as speakers of legitimate English (Sterzuk, 2015) and representatives of the legitimate culture. The principal’s comments can be understood as being voiced from this privileged position. Knowing that her voice cannot be heard (Spivak, 1988), Adaora chose silence as a way of resisting against being relegated to the space of the other (Said, 1978).

As already mentioned above, both Ashakiran and Laoshi employed a similar strategy of silence as resistance when Ashakiran faced opposition from her fellow teachers regarding remedial classes for her students; and Laoshi was made fun of by her students for the way she spoke English. Nauczyciel, on the other hand, resisted by speaking up, declaring that he is “Aboriginal at heart” when his Aboriginal students confronted him regarding his views on Aboriginal history and cultures. The study participants, thus, disidentified (Skeggs, 2004) themselves “from the identity (they were) being offered” and thereby “claim(ed) normality, while at the same time accepting the
implicit premise of not” (Jensen, 2009, p. 23) possessing what Brydon (2004) refers to as “authentic Canadian voice” (p. 97). In her reading of “Canadian post-coloniality,” Brydon (p. 101) critiques the “confusion” of those seeking “cultural authenticity” (p. 104) and argues for “hybridity” which she describes as a “post-colonial literary strategy [that] clears a space for history’s silenced ones to speak” (p. 104).

The foreign certified teachers also resisted othering in another compelling way. It was Said (1978) who pointed out that in the power relation between the dominant and the less dominant other, the former is positioned to influence and control the latter. In the same vein, Spivak (1985) argues that a people who are positioned to define others into existence occupy the privileged space from where they control knowledge and representation of others. All the study participants resisted the discourse that othered them and claimed a position of strength as evidenced by Ashakran going out of her way to offer extra remedial classes to her students if only to improve their chances of performing well in school. Similarly, Laoshi cautioned against the risk of marginalizing quieter students who do not draw attention to themselves. Adaora spoke about buying pens and writing pads for her students (many of whom did not seem to appreciate her efforts) to enable them stay in class; as well as approaching a parent, who previously walked out on her, to offer support and reassurance regarding her son’s progress. Nauczyciel encouraged compassion and understanding in his class after coming to a realization that “even students have [personal] issues that they deal with.” Rather than accepting the position of the subordinated other, the study participants reclaimed their agency and channeled it, not towards self-fulfilling ends, but rather to empower their students.
6.7 Theme Seven: Narratives of effective teaching

The foreign certified teachers who participated in this study are professionals who bring passion and genuine sense of pride in their work. They all profess their love for teaching and each; in his or her own way, does his or her best as a teacher in rural Saskatchewan schools. The study participants, being in a foreign space, bring will them their cultures, histories, and world views. Similarly, students come to school from various cultural backgrounds and with different perspectives. In this section, I draw on Bhabha’s (1994) notion of hybridity and Pratt’s (1991) contact zones to help understand experiences of the foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan and their narratives of effective teaching.

Markers of teacher effectiveness are often determined by factors including student academic performance. Kane, McCaffrey, Miller and Staiger (2013), for example, found a positive correlation between teacher effectiveness and test score results regardless of a student’s past performance. Similarly, in the United States, educational policies such as the Race to the Top fund (The State of Florida, 2010) require that teacher preparation programs be held accountable for the effectiveness of their graduates “as measured by test score gains of the students they teach” (Henry, Kershaw, Zulli & Smith, 2012, p. 335). Note that, while this study does not in any way endorse standardized tests, it takes the view that such tests, no matter their merits or lack thereof, have an impact on teachers and their narratives of effective teaching.

The narratives of the foreign certified teachers who participated in this study highlight commendable teaching strategies that focused on more than student academic performance. Nauczyciel and Ashakiran talked about how they encouraged their students
who had considered leaving school before graduating or were more susceptible to dropping out (Dockery, 2012) to persevere and graduate. Ashakiran stated that the family of a student who had quit school told her that they believed that if Ashakiran had been teaching at the school at the time then the student would have most likely successfully completed high school. For Ashakiran, this was a welcome affirmation that her teaching strategies that focused on both academic and non-academic needs of her students produced positive results. Another study participant, Adaora, narrated how she made a concerted effort to include all her students, especially the relatively quiet ones who were not drawing attention to themselves. As well, Laoshi noted that while there are individual differences between students, they can all learn and that a teacher’s role is very important in making that learning take place.

The schools where the foreign certified teachers and the students encounter each other could be viewed as a contact zone. Three foreign certified teachers, Adaora, Ashakiran, and Laoshi noted how education system from their native countries encouraged hard work (which emphasized importance of examinations and standardized testing), competition, and teacher authority and student discipline, among others. In these education systems, the study participants described classrooms where students sit quietly in rows with the teacher in front of the class imparting knowledge and wisdom to the passive students. This is then followed by tests and quizzes and those who fail are reprimanded. The teachers brought such view of education with them to the contact zones.

The experiences of the foreign certified teachers affected them and their imagined stories (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2011), that is the stories of who they would be as teachers
in rural Saskatchewan classrooms. Ashakiran for example, describes how teachers in her native India are regarded as gurus (gods). As Singh (2013) explains, “the word Guru is derived from two words, “Gu” and “Ru”. The Sanskrit root "Gu" means darkness or ignorance. "Ru" denotes the remover of that darkness. Hence guru or the teacher is one who enlightens by removing ignorance” (n.p). Thus, teachers in India are respected as gods. While the notion of teachers as gurus has its root in traditional Indian society, it took a different meaning in colonial India wherein the colonizer was depicted as a classroom or religious teacher, religious leader, or administrative officer, that is, as individual occupying superior position. At the same time, the indigenous colonized person was viewed as being in need of and benefitting from the benevolence acts of the former (the similar concept was behind residential schools for Canada’s Aboriginal peoples). Because education was and still is a valuable way to successful careers (granted, colonial education was geared towards maintaining loyalty to the ruling power), teachers were in many cases idolized as source of knowledge (Cesaire, 1972) and their authority was not to be questioned.

Likewise, students come to the contact zone with the same attitudes and expectations as the community in which they live. That community has socialized the students into an education system that is student-centered and encourages (relatively) greater student engagement (Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation, 2009); at the same time, the teacher’s role has (or continues to) change(d) “from the … ‘imparter of knowledge’ to that of coach and consultant” (Bodgan, 2011, para. 5). The students’ community also encourages “student-to-student teaching, project-based learning, and student-centered learning environments” and its emphasis on “the integration of
technology into every subject and at all grade levels allows unprecedented levels and
types of exciting collaboration and learner to learner connectivity” (Bodgan, para. 6). In
this contact zone is tension as these diverse cultures and ways of knowing meet and clash
(Pratt, 1991).

As discussed above, foreign certified teachers are faced with challenges such as
communication difficulties, problems with student-teacher relations, cultural, structural,
and organizational issues, curriculum, and assessment among others. Likewise, the
students are faced with challenges as the foreign certified teachers seem to have different
expectations that are not necessarily congruent to what they are used to. Therefore, “to
become successful in their new teaching environments,” foreign certified “teachers need
to become active learners themselves” (Hutchison & Jazzar, 2007, p. 369). A common
thread that linked the narratives of lived experiences of the four foreign certified teachers
was that of teacher as a learner. All the study participants talked of the importance of
learning about and getting to know the rural Saskatchewan communities and the schools
where they spent most of their working hours. Ashakiran noted that, “until you know
your students you cannot reach out to them.” Nauczyciel stated that “I am a newcomer in
this community,” and “I need to understand the ways of life and norms” of the
community. Nauczyciel described himself as a student: “there is no other way to say it. I
am a teacher and a student. I learn always to be a better teacher, neighbour, and citizen.”
He suggested that learning with such goals in mind should be “welcome by all teachers.”

Soon after she accepted the teaching position in a rural Saskatchewan school,
Laoshi noticed how different such factors as the nature of student-teacher relationships
and student motivation were compared to what she was used to in her native Hong Kong.
She soon decided that to be an effective teacher in rural Saskatchewan she needed to “learn more about schooling in Canada” beyond what she had learned as a student teacher and during her professional semester at a school in Saskatchewan. Adaora also narrated that from her schooling experience in Nigeria and Australia, and as a teacher at three schools in Saskatchewan, she had come to a conclusion that “communities and schools are unique … and may impact student academic achievement” (Xu, 2009 also came to a similar conclusion by linking student achievement and school location). Adaora noted that it is important to “learn as much as possible” about each school and the community in which it is located if effective teaching is to occur.

The thread of teacher as learner also appeared in the study participant narratives in other contexts. Nauczyciel stated that he “enjoy(s) learning new things so as to enrich [his] lessons.” Indeed, at his house I saw a modest collection of research in education including most recent journals and books. Ashakiran said that the more she “learn(s) about Aboriginal culture the more [she] sees similarities to [her] own culture.” She points out that by identifying the common ground between both cultures and sharing it with her students she is able to create an environment that is both conducive for intercultural understanding and also where local (Aboriginal) cultures are acknowledged and celebrated. This, she asserts, is important for affective learning to take place.

The foreign certified teachers’ individual narratives shed light into how they made meaning of their experiences as learners, and embraced opportunities to learn. These likely enabled the study participants to reminisce about what they had learned as well as the larger contexts in which the rural Saskatchewan schools and communities were socially organized and structured. In their learning they all experienced contradictions
and challenges as evidenced by the fact that all the four study participants mentioned at least one thing in rural Saskatchewan schools that was different from what they were used to in their native countries. These included competitive education system and workplace (Adaora, Ashakiran, and Laoshi), student discipline (Adaora, Ashakiran, Laoshi, and Nauczyciel), student motivation (Adaora, Ashakiran, Laoshi and Nauczyciel), and teacher authority in the classroom (Adaora, Ashakiran, Laoshi and Nauczyciel) among others.

With respect to teacher authority, all the study participants noted that compared to their native countries, namely, Hong Kong (China), India, Nigeria, and Poland, teachers had less authority in the rural Saskatchewan classroom while the students seemed to have relatively more rights. Examples given included the fact that students could walk in and out of the classroom as they pleased, a student mimicking a teacher (Adaora) in front of the class and in the presence of the teacher, and a student calling the principal’s office and demanding to speak with the principal when she did not agree with the teacher’s decision. It is perhaps after Ashakiran and Adaora enter into the third space (Bhabha, 1994) that they were able to step back and not only unlearn their hitherto privileged positioning (that regarded the teacher as source of knowledge and the student as passive learner) and adopt new teaching perspectives that Ashakiran was able to say that “the students and their parents now trust me and know that I want the best for the kids,” while Adaora noted that “although there are still challenges and students who will question or resist your authority as a teacher, things are much better now than when I started” teaching at this school. The four study participants also stated that they received positive feedback and or compliments from students, parents, and school administration.
In “Close to the heart: Teacher authority in a classroom community,” VanderStaay, Faxon, Meischen, Kolesnikov, and Ruppel (2009) remind us that “teacher authority is most essentially a form of professional authority granted by students who affirm the teacher’s expertise, self-confidence, and belief in the importance of his or her work” (p. 262). But the authority of the foreign certified teachers was at times questioned or rejected by students. While some of the study participants (for example Ashakiran and Nauczyciel) argued that such student “resistance” is at times expected by beginning teachers, others (such as Adaora, Laoshi, and Nauczyciel) attributed student “rejection” of their authority to their racialized minority status.

A study (Collingridge, 2008) on workplace hindrances that impact teachers’ efforts to educate their students identifies “being thwarted from fulfilling their primary responsibility to help students learn” (p. 112) as a major challenge facing teachers today. Some of the hindering circumstances identified in the literature include classroom interruptions, lack of support from parents and administrators, and student misbehaviours (Van Dick & Wagner, 2001). In various degrees, foreign certified teachers who participated in this study reported experiencing different kinds of hindering circumstances in their classrooms. However, the tension and antagonism that often inhabit the contact zone led to a more positive experience both for the foreign certified students and teachers. In the case of the former, Ashakiran and Nauczyciel, for example, reported increased high school completion rates. The study participants attributed their positive experiences mainly to their desire and willingness to learn, to enter into the hybrid space.
Given that the study participants had experienced marginalization or had their competence questioned, they must have viewed learning as a way to disrupt discourses of exclusion and even oppression. Further, learning was perhaps regarded by the study participants as a vehicle for creating self-reliance, resourcefulness, and commitment. This was marked by encouraging comments and feedback by parents and school administration. Despite the challenges at the contact zone, all the study participants said that in general, their experiences as foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools were positive and that they would encourage other foreign certified teachers to choose rural Saskatchewan. I kept wondering how the study participants were able to recast their experiences to make sense of their personal and professional knowledge landscapes in a positive frame. None of the participants offered any explanations other than statements like “you just have to keep moving forward” (Adaora), and “like other professions [teaching] has its challenges, [but] it will get better with time” (Ashakiran). Nauczyciel said, [both the] positive and challenging experiences enable me to understand myself and other better. I am glad to have this job that I like so much.” Similarly, Laoshi noted that “Life has challenges [but] you have to be positive and do your best.” It is possible that such perspectives were influenced by the foreign certified teacher individual experiences and also how they were socialized, perhaps, in their native countries (particularly, Nigeria, India, and China) where, in general, hard work is celebrated and ‘quitting’ is frowned upon (see for example, Hsin & Xie, 2014; Minkov & Hofstede, 2012; Makhulu, Buggenhagen, & Jackson, 2010).

As well as linking the seven themes in the study participant narratives to the postcolonial critiques of Said, Bhabha, and Spivak above, I attempt to situate the
narratives to what Subedi and Daza (2010) describe as key issues that are advocated by postcolonial theory in the section that follows. Subedi and Daza identify at least three key issues that are advocated by postcolonial theory that they suggest are of critical relevance within the field of education. First, postcolonial theory rejects universal notions of history, experiences or identities that subsume difference. As well, it sheds light on how binary representation of the world establishes the rigid division between the dominant and the other.

Stories of the four study participants problematize the notion of a fixed and static sociocultural experience, history, and worldview of the other. While all the four were racialized minorities in rural Saskatchewan communities where they live and work, they held different religious beliefs, hailed from different countries and cultures, and had different teaching philosophies. The four also attributed some of their unpleasant experiences to their ‘outsiderness.’ Thus, while there are similarities in experiences of the study participants (after all they are all foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan), they are nevertheless different and unique individuals who have followed different paths and hold different worldviews and so cannot be essentialized.

Second, Subedi and Daza (2010) assert that “postcolonial theorists have been critical of the ways in which national identity and citizenship are conceptualized within racialized and hetero-normative frameworks” (p. 2). Carr (no date), who identifies himself as “white male of European origin, whose first language is English” captures this argument in his paper “Contextualizing divergent perspectives: The search for Canadian identity:”
While citizenship is considered a birthright by some, many Canadians have come to learn that the right to vote, to work unencumbered by harassment or discrimination, and, theoretically at least, to be protected from discrimination in the society, does not always lead to the enjoyment of full citizenship” (p. 1)

Carr continues, “(t)he media abound with stereotypical representation of racial minority Canadians…. This is achieved through marginalization, trivialization, tokenism, inaccuracy, isolation or omission, all equally powerful in reinforcing the bias that certain people are more “equal” than others” (p. 1). Many people in (rural) Saskatchewan get information about “other” people, countries, and cultures from the news media and so as Carr (no date) points out, inaccurate and biased information about the racialized minority groups can perpetuate discrimination and marginalization of the other.

All the four foreign certified teachers who participated in this study stated that they have accepted Canadian citizenship without renouncing the citizenship of their countries of birth. However, they pointed out that they have in the past been made to feel as if they were not “authentic” Canadians. Nauczyciel, for example, states that because he is “white, many people automatically assume that [he is] Canadian until” he says something. It is then that he is asked questions such as “I can detect an accent, where is home? Do you go back often?” Ashakiran and Adaora have separately noted that negative news in the media from India (such as sexual assault on women) and Nigeria (including terror attacks and kidnapping of school girls) respectively have often been followed by questions, messages of sympathy, or suggestions on how to resolve the problems both at school and in the community. Ashakiran and Adaora say that they have
been asked either directly or indirectly whether they are happy that “Canada, a safe place that values equality and human rights welcomed” (Adaora) them and thus protect them from assaults on females in their native countries. Statements that, on one hand, perpetuate stereotypical representations of the other as misogynist, while, on the other hand, continuing to obscure the prevalence of violence against women and gendered inequality within Canada.

Third, Subedi and Daza (2010) write that “postcolonial theory is concerned with questions of agency and how marginalized subjects are capable of interrupting or resisting dominant discourses” (p. 3). They assert that the other does not passively comply with dominant discourses, but rather “refashion and appropriate what is forced upon them” (p. 3).

6.8 Conclusion

As Lewis (2008) writes, “story is central to our understanding of self, other, and quite simply, the lived-world” (para. 7). The narratives of the foreign certified teachers who participated in this study revealed varied and unique experiences as well as recurring themes. Experiences, especially challenges, faced by the foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan as depicted in their narratives are not necessarily exhaustive. Rather, they reflect what the foreign certified teachers chose to talk about. The stories shared can “carry loud messages both in what they say and what they don’t say” (Goodson, 1998, p. 12) and may also convey, challenge, or be silent on priorities and values of the study participants. But like Lewis (2010), I wonder about the in-between spaces of silence occupied by the story(ies) that the foreign certified teachers did not tell.
All of study participants experienced challenges. Their individual “curriculum-as-planned,” namely, students who were eager and ready to learn and be respectful of other students and teachers; parents who would not only entrust their children to schools but also view their teachers as an extension of parental authority (Saint Columbkille Partnership School, 2014); and fellow teachers and school administrators who would not hesitate to make new teachers feel welcome – “had been completely disrupted” (Sousa, 2011, p. 1). There was not much from their previous experiences as students or teachers that would have prepared them for all the challenges.

Adaora and Ashakiran, for example, unknown to each other, had for different reasons decided to leave the first school in rural Saskatchewan where they had been working as teacher. Both were in a “state of liminality,” an enduring and variable space (Little, Jordens, Paul, Montgomery, & Philipson, 1998, p. 1486) that occurs between separation and integration (Barlow, 2007). They individually dreamed of a life as a teacher in another school, perhaps a better less stressful life, away from their current schools. Yet, at some point in that space, they remained trapped in the “in-betweenness” between the reality of their actual experiences and the possibilities of the unknown (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009, p. 99).

In one of my Master of Education courses with Dr. Erika Hasebe-Ludt at the University of Lethbridge, she said something from her perspective as an immigrant that I have always related to, and I have once again been reminded of by her quote in her work with her colleagues who include my former professor at the same university, Dr. Cynthia Chambers (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009): “we cannot escape the pervasive sense of longing, belonging, and not belonging that shapes our relations to the places
where we linger and have lingered and might linger” (p. 98). While the foreign certified teachers may have longed for the school environment they knew or had created in their mind, they were nonetheless, in their own individual ways, “embracing the uncertainty” and the challenges of the life they experienced in rural Saskatchewan schools “with unwavering hope” (Sousa, 2011, p. 3). For as Chamberlin (2003) suggests, “it is only through the pressure of our imaginations that we can resist the pressure of reality” (p. 192). The study participants were not ready to hand in their resignation letters, pack their belonging and go back to their home countries or change careers because it was possible that the situation would improve. Their “stories are resistance stories …, pushing back against the tyrannies of the everyday as well as the terrors of the unknown” (Chamberlin, 2003, p. 192).

When I first thought of research questions for this study, I was leaning towards exploring professional experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools. As the study progressed, it became clear to me that often, experiences on the professional and personal landscapes are closely linked, and that both make up who we are as individuals. This was the case in coping strategies adopted by the foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan where professional and personal relationships was common in the study participants stories of experience.

All the four foreign certified teachers stated that fellow teachers – both foreign certified and others – as well all school administration helped in their transition and settling in to the rural Saskatchewan schools. Adaora narrated how a colleague who was a daughter of an immigrant encouraged her by sharing the challenges that her immigrant mother had experienced. Nauczyciel said that among his closest friends is a family of a
foreign certified teacher at the only school in the community. Laoshi fondly remembers the staff events organized by the school principal who did his best to ensure that she and other teachers felt welcome. Despite having mixed feelings regarding the nature of relationships she has had at the school – including what she thought was a non-supportive attitude when she started offering remedial classes, Ashakiran stated that she has a good professional relationship with other teachers and that they “continually learn from each other.”

In terms of the personal, families and/or spouses were the most commonly cited source of support. Adaora narrated how the support from her husband and patience of her children made transition to rural Saskatchewan much better. She stated that during her early years as a foreign certified teacher in rural Saskatchewan, she rented an apartment near the school and away from her family whom she could visit during the weekends. Ashakiran and Laoshi credited their supportive and understanding husbands for being able to cope with challenges that they experienced as teachers. Nauczyciel stated how he often feels reenergized after talking with his sons about his tough experiences.

Unlike other study participants, Laoshi spoke of the presence of immigrants from her native Hong Kong (China) and how their shared culture and Chinese language was a “symbol of cohesiveness and belonging” (Huebner, 1975, p. 217) to the community that valued her as one of their own and as a teacher whose opinion on the important issue of education was always respected. Ashakiran said how she always looked forward to her monthly six hour drive (one way) to the nearby East Indian grocery store and restaurant where many in the Indian community would seek her advice regarding education and often treated her as a ‘guru’.
Three of the study participants, Adaora, Ashakiran, and Nauczyciel, made several references to their religious faith. While they subscribed to different faiths, two Christianity and the other Hindu, their spiritual base provided them with internal strength to face the challenges in their lives while at the same time being grateful for what they considered as blessings. Adaora, for example, made statements like, “Do a great job knowing that God is watching,” and “God has a plan for each of us.” Similarly, Ashakiran stated that, “God is always watching, whether people acknowledge what you do or not. Each morning I go to work, I remind myself that I am not answerable to anyone but God who has given me the opportunity to be a teacher in Saskatchewan.” Nauczyciel also noted that the “All knowing God will always enable [him] to be a better teacher.”

It was mainly through the study participants’ statements about their religious beliefs that I began to understand how they were able to reconfigure their experiences in largely positive ways. The participants had faith that nothing they were going through was a surprise to God, and that God had good plans for them. Their religious faith gave them a hope for a better future and the courage to endure current ‘temporary’ challenges. No person could ever take that from them. This puts the foreign certified teachers in a position of strength, a position that disrupts the notion of the other who is stereotyped as living in “a fixed reality” and is “entirely knowable and visible” (Bhabha, 1996, p. 373). This strengthened other is also able to employ passive resistance, for example, by turning down invitation to speak - or as Adaora says, “argue” - when the supposed dialogue “turn[s] attention away from the ... ‘other’ and toward systems of power and control” (Gorski, 2008, p. 522).
This study is an attempt to understand experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan schools. It used interviews as conversations shaped by open unstructured research puzzles to engage with four participants. My retelling of the participants’ experiences as told is presented in Chapter Five. In this Chapter, I presented common threads in the foreign certified teachers’ storied experiences and attempted to view those threads through postcolonial lenses, and in the next Chapter is the conclusion and implications for this study.
CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

We are voices in a chorus that transforms lived life into narrated life and then returns narrative to life, not in order to reflect life, but rather to add something else, not a copy but a new measure of life; to add, with each novel, something new, something more, to life. (Fuentes, 1984, p. 1)

This study has been very rewarding in that for many years I have always imagined the puzzle that is the experiences of foreign certified teachers in Canada. The purpose of this study was to examine professional knowledge landscape of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan classrooms. My aim was to gain an understanding of who the foreign certified teachers were and their paths to becoming certified teachers in Saskatchewan. I wanted to examine the challenges these teachers face in rural Saskatchewan schools and identify their coping strategies. Further, I was interested in the strengths that the foreign certified teachers bring with them to Saskatchewan, as well as their positive experiences and factors contributing to such experiences. The study sought to hold the space for the foreign certified teachers stories (Lewis, 2011), and to enable the reader and stakeholders to better consider foreign certified teachers as potential competent employment ‘pool’ for the teaching profession. To this end, four foreign certified teachers entrusted me with their stories of lived experiences. It is then that it became clear to me that professional and personal knowledge landscapes are closely linked and both help make us who we are as individuals and professionals.

Lewis and Adeney (2014) write that narrative research “does not lead to conclusions and certainty … narrative [research] does not seek a conclusive finding or
findings; rather, it looks for understanding and meaning” (p. 175). As stated in Chapter One, the goal of this study was to unfold and understand experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan and the meanings they attach to those experiences. While certainty is not the aim of narrative research (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2011), the study has been an eye-opener for me, having gained a first-hand perspective into experiences of foreign certified teachers in rural Saskatchewan.

In Chapter Five, I presented the narratives of the four study participants using “rich first person accounts in conversations and interviews” (Lewis & Adeney, 2014, p. 169) in an attempt to be as true to their voices as possible. In Chapter Six, I identified and discussed key themes that emerged from the participant stories by linking them with postcolonial and anti-colonial theoretical frameworks as much as possible.

From the study, it is clear that effects of colonialism in Saskatchewan as a settler society continue to impact experiences of foreign certified teachers in the province. What was interesting was the way the foreign certified teachers responded when they thought that they were not being treated right. For example, when the school principal let it be known to Adaora that the way Adaora spoke (she described as, “I speak English with an accent, that is who I am”) was different and possibly less superior to the way the majority spoke, Adaora refused to neither see herself as being inferior or disregard her own knowledge and identity. While she did not “speak back,” it is imperative that holding space for the voices of Adaora and other foreign certified teachers to be heard (Lewis, 2011) is a key critique within postcolonial framework. Mulenga (2001), for example, calls on the postcolonial researcher to “reappropriate the (voices) of the ‘other’ on the margin and rehabilitate their histories and perspectives on their terms, and push them to
the centre” (p. 448). This dissertation has attempted to heed Mulenga’s call by using a narrative research approach and ensuring that the constructed stories of the study participants remain faithful to their individual voices. While Spivak (1999) cautions against trying to speak for the subaltern, this narrative approach allowed me to de-emphasize the power relation (Creswell, 2012) between the study participants and myself by closely collaborating with them throughout the process of this study including during data analysis and interpretation, in an ethical relationship that involves co-creating the research text (Clandinin, 2013).

The study found that while all the foreign certified teachers experienced challenges at some point in the rural Saskatchewan schools, they all stated that the circumstances improved with time. The improvements were generally related to the participants’ individual experiences rather than enhancing anything beyond themselves. A puzzle that follows, then, is whether the three non-white teachers who participated in this study believe, consciously or unconsciously, that they have to attain a degree of whiteness or comply with dominant cultures in order to have a more fulfilling if less challenging experience. That is, once the foreign certified teachers had been in rural Saskatchewan long enough to identify what was required and expected on them, whether in their professional or personal knowledge landscapes, they adopted various strategies including mimicry (Bhabha, 1985) and “acting like Canadians,” being silent, and as Adaora puts it, “not arguing” with the school principal. As well, Adaora’s experience in which the principal is reassuring a student in the presence of Adaora that the student’s academic performance will improve with time, that is, once he gets used to Adaora’s way of speaking, points to a perception of the school, and to an extent, the rural community,
as being tolerant and accommodating despite the perceived weaknesses of the foreign certified teachers. However, as stated in Chapter Seven, compliance by the study participants could imply passive resistance to systemic structures that reify social hierarchies.

As well, when the four study participants narrated how their experiences became less challenging, they were not referring to the curriculum or the general equity and social justice practices. Such practices have historically been geared towards maintaining the marginalization of the other as evidenced in Saskatchewan’s (and Canada’s) policies towards its racialized non-white populations (Lund & Carr, 2010; Mar, 2007; Razack, 1998). Exception, with respect to the wider community, was Ashakiran who noted that “If you are nice to someone, they cannot dislike you forever.” This, she pointed out, was realized when students and their families started inviting her to their homes, and when the community came together to raise funds for her family when her son was unwell. Ashakiran was motivated to do whatever she could to enhance the success of her Aboriginal students, including offering extra-remedial classes to them. She enjoyed the successes when she was recognized for her efforts and when a student transitioned from high school to the university. However existing structures that determine access to power (Gorski, 2008) and justify dominance and oppression (such as education opportunity gaps) remain largely unchanged.

However, all the study participants offered advice to potential foreign certified teachers, and stated that they would or have already recommended rural Saskatchewan schools to others. This is important for two main reasons. First, the foreign certified teachers chose to work in rural Saskatchewan and are better placed to speak about their
own experiences to a potential foreign certified teachers; and two, as mentioned earlier, rural Saskatchewan school districts have often found it challenging to recruit teachers from within the province. As a result, a number of teachers have been recruited from out of the province – notably Ontario (such as Ashakiran). Also, rural and Aboriginal schools have often been the sites where foreign certified teachers and hard to restart their teaching careers in Saskatchewan. Implications of the study are discussed below.

7.1 Implications of the study

A number of implications can be drawn from this study. These include implications for foreign certified teachers, school administration, teachers, students and parents, narrative research particularly stories we tell ourselves, and further research.

7.1.1 Implications for foreign certified teachers

Foreign certified teachers who wish to look for teaching positions in rural Saskatchewan can learn from the experiences of the study participants. The experiences include visa application, teacher (re)credentialing in Saskatchewan, job application process, as well as what to expect regarding the curriculum, relationship with the students, other teachers, and school administration, and the Saskatchewan education system in general.

One of the common reasons for challenges experienced by the study participants was unmet expectations. The foreign certified teachers either did not have sufficient knowledge about Saskatchewan’s education system, or they had assumptions about the education system that were not helpful. It would therefore, be helpful for potential foreign certified teachers to have as much information as possible about schooling in Saskatchewan prior to taking up employment in the province’s schools.
A key gap in the narratives of the study participants was the lack of mentorship by a trusted and experienced teacher. A ‘good’ mentor can play an important role in the early career development of beginning teachers, and especially teachers who are new to the community and the school system. Even where there are no formal mentorship programs in place, the new foreign certified teachers could be proactive and take initiative by seeking support of administration and senior teachers. Such mentorship should not be limited to school work, but could, if possible, include ways in which the foreign certified teacher could, for example, settle in the community.

Finally, as all the study participants noted, teaching, like other professions, has its challenges. The challenges include student behavior, classroom management, and discrimination, and, as the study participants stated, tend to get better with time. The foreign certified teachers in this study suggested that despite the challenges they and other foreign certified teachers may experience, they should always remain professional, be open to learning, and be encouraged to be the best teachers they can be.

7.1.2 Implications for school administration

The theoretical frames used in this study, namely postcolonial and anti-colonial theories, enabled me to highlight postcolonial spaces and tensions that the foreign certified teachers often experienced in rural Saskatchewan. Perhaps the school administrators have some of the ‘biggest’ powers, as a result of their position, to help lessen such tensions that could be interpreted as being influenced by power relations between foreign certified teachers and school administration. While foreign certified teachers are individuals who are often outsiders – due to their cultural, national, or ethnic backgrounds, and despite having interviewed only four such teachers for this study, it is
clear to me that having foreign certified teachers in Saskatchewan schools adds value to the lives of the students. It is, therefore, necessary that the school administration both understands the strengths of the foreign certified teachers and gives them as much support as possible. This could involve having structures in place to enable the foreign certified teachers feel like valued members of the school community, and also enhance their success. In all these, school administrators play a primary role.

7.1.3 Implications for teachers, students, and parents

Although the Saskatchewan population has been growing and becoming more racially diverse in recent years, it is possible that there are teachers, parents, and students who have never had the opportunity to work with a teacher who is a racialized non-white or of a cultural minority or (im)migrant background. As indicated in the stories of the study participants, rural Saskatchewan classrooms, schools, and communities in general, are often sites of cultural tensions, spaces where the foreign certified teachers often found themselves on the minority. For example, Adaora stated that she was the only black teacher at her school, while Ashakiran noted that hers is the only East Indian family in the predominantly Aboriginal community where she lives and works. Yet, as Amit and Burde (2005) noted, a “teacher,” whether native or immigrant, is “by definition the keeper of the culture and the instiller of values” (p. 17).

Despite tensions that may arise from rural Saskatchewan classrooms as contact zones, it is imperative for teachers, students, and parents to be open minded even if they are supportive of the work of the foreign certified teacher. The study participants stated that they enjoyed having positive conversations with – and complements from parents regarding the student performance. The schools can enhance such experiences by, for
example, facilitating interactions between parents and foreign certified teachers and encouraging the foreign certified teachers to talk about their experience. This could lead to a more positive attitude by the parents towards the foreign certified teachers, with a possible result of increased respect and acceptance of the foreign certified teachers by the students. A notable point in Adaora and Ashakiran’s narratives is that both teachers and parents want the best for the students and that when both, as Adaora puts it, “are on the same team,” that is, work together with a purpose, then everyone involved, especially the students, will benefit.

Note, however, that while such actions may not necessarily lead to meaningful structural change nor break systemic barriers experienced by foreign certified teachers, they may be a positive initial step towards creating an understanding between the foreign certified teachers and the rural Saskatchewan schools and communities. However, as Gorski (2008) reminds us, “despite unquestionably good intentions on the part of most people [including teachers and others in the community who strive to promote] intercultural [understanding], most intercultural [practices] support, rather than challenge, dominant hegemony, prevailing social hierarchies, and inequitable distributions of power and privilege” (515). Thus, while the school community, including teachers, school administration, students, and parents, could work with the foreign certified teachers to make the latter feel ‘welcome’ in the school, they should always be cognizant of the unintended consequences of their actions.

7.1.4 Implications for narrative research

This study involved my engagement with four foreign certified teachers who shared their stories of experiences with me. Through their stories, both spoken and
unspoken, I have been able to better understand their experiences and what those experiences mean to the study participants. But, how about the stories that the participants told themselves when they found themselves in the solitude of in-between uninhabited space? When they experienced challenges in the space occupied by tension between their imagined stories and lived stories?

Dingfelder (2011) writes that when people use stories to “turn episodes from their lives into anecdotes,” they are able “to make sense out of otherwise puzzling or random events” (p. 42). As is clear in the stories of the study participants, self-narratives not only “help us smooth out some of the decisions we have made and create something that is meaningful and sensible out of” our experiences (McAdams, 2006, p. 23), but they also help determine our actions, or at least, our perceptions, in tension-filled challenged/challenging spaces we may find ourselves in. As human, “we don't just tell stories, stories tell us. They shape our thoughts and memories, and even change how we live our lives” (Dingfelder (2011). That is, we use stories endlessly reworking our self-narratives to reposition ourselves or remain positioned by the other.

Our past, present, and future experiences are linked (Lewis, 2007). Therefore, human experiences as told can impact our future. All the study participants decided to come to Canada because they imagined a better life for themselves and their families. They all, in different ways, talked about how their individual journeys to rural Saskatchewan classroom as foreign certified teachers was marked with challenges and opportunities. Though Ashakiran, Adaora, and Nauczyciel were still experiences challenges in their careers, they all stated that the situation was better than it was before. The challenges have made them better teachers inasmuch as they have had opportunities
to evaluate their imagined and lived stories of teaching. As well, because of the opportunities they all declared their appreciation for being able to be teachers in Saskatchewan and hope other foreign certified teachers will be able to choose rural Saskatchewan.

Human experiences as told and retold can shape our future. As Dingfelder (2011) points out, telling stories, whether to oneself or to others, about challenges that turn out well may give people hope for the future. Perhaps this helps explain why despite the challenges they experienced, the study participants were positive about the future. Equally important, however, is the view that “The power of narrative … isn’t always positive” (Dingfelder, 2011, p. 42). This is because telling and retelling and living and reliving stories “that focus on negative traits, for instance, can cause you to forget about the positive traits you used to cherish” (p. 42). Listening to the stories of the foreign certified teachers, it seemed like they had a strong determination that eventually everything was going to work out in their favour. They spoke of hard work, doing their best, and their religious faith. They must have told themselves many times stories about how success looked like and how no matter the detours before them, they were on their way to that destination. Adaora, for example, declared that “nothing is impossible to a determined mind … I am going forward.” As John Holmes (Dingfelder, 2011) reminds us, “For better or worse, stories are a very powerful source of self-persuasion, and they are highly internally consistent ... evidence that doesn't fit the story is going to be left behind” (p. 42). There is, perhaps, a need for further inquiry into the foreign certified teachers’ self-narratives as well as how and why they tell themselves particular stories.
7.1.5 Implications for further research

This study has implications for research on experiences of foreign certified teachers in general. As stated in Chapter One, not much research has been conducted on experiences of foreign certified teachers in Saskatchewan schools. This study is an attempt to fill that gap and to connect with experiences of other groups of foreign-certified professionals, such as physicians in the Province of Saskatchewan.

Carrison (2007) asserted that “there has been very little published on Eastern European immigrant teachers” (p. 177). Though by no means representative, this study presents experiences of a foreign certified teacher from Poland (Nauczyciel). Future research could examine experiences of other teachers of Eastern European backgrounds who work in Aboriginal schools in rural Saskatchewan. As well, the study participants’ stories illustrate evidence of internalization of ‘meritocracy’ discourse (they all linked hard work to career success) and ‘integration’ discourses (such as the need to be subservient to dominant cultural practices. More research would lead to a better understanding of such discursive formations.

The experiences of the four foreign certified teachers presented in this study highlighted who the teachers are, the challenges they face and their coping strategies, as well as their positive experiences in rural Saskatchewan classrooms. In some small way, this study has contributed to an understanding of the foreign certified teachers in Saskatchewan.

7.2 Concluding remarks

By sharing their narratives of lived experiences in rural Saskatchewan schools, the foreign certified teachers who participated in this dissertation also spoke directly to other
foreign certified teachers who may consider becoming teachers in Canada and audiences who may include other teachers and researchers. “Without the past,” Lane (2004) suggests, we “can’t learn to live in the unfolding present” (p. 117). Retelling these narratives helps create a space to honour the voices of the study participants as I attempt to keep their experiences alive through narrative research. To this end,

I would like to ask you to remember only this one thing …. The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive; that is why we put these stories in each other’s memory. This is how people care for themselves. (Lopez, 1990, p. 48)

“I grieved for the stories I was told but never heard, for the stories I heard but didn't remember, for the stories I wanted but never asked for. I regretted speaking when I should have been listening” (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009, p. 143).

Tinda.
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APPENDIX A: Ethics Approval

University of Regina

DATE: April 1, 2013

TO: James Alan Collo
1125 Avenue L South
Saskatoon, SK S7M 1Z7

FROM: Dr. Lauren Hoeber
Chair, Research Ethics Board

Re: A Narrative Inquiry into Foreign Certified Teachers’ Professional Experiences in Rural Saskatchewan Schools (File # 6851213)

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. Lauren Hoeber

cc: Dr. Ken Montgomery - Education

**supplementary memo should be forwarded to the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at the Office for Research, Innovation and Partnership (Research and Innovation Centre, Room 109) or by e-mail to research.ethics@uregina.ca**
APPENDIX B: Study Participant Recruitment Poster

UNIVERSITY OF REGINA

Faculty of Education

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR STUDY OF
EXPERIENCES OF FOREIGN TRAINED TEACHERS

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study

A narrative inquiry into foreign certified teachers’ professional experiences in rural Saskatchewan schools

You will be asked to participate in a 45 minute interview. A follow up interview may be conducted. With your permission, the interview will be audio taped.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a $25 gift certificate.

For more information please contact
James Oloo
PhD Student, Faculty of Education
at
(306) 653 0249
(306) 880 4722 (Text)
Email: oloo200j@uregina.ca

This study has received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Services, U of R.
APPENDIX C: Study Participant Consent Form

Project Title:
A narrative inquiry into foreign certified teachers’ professional experiences in rural Saskatchewan schools

Researcher:
James Alan Oloo, PhD Student, Faculty of Education, University of Regina, Telephone: (306) 653-0249 Email: oloo200j@uregina.ca

Supervisor:
Dr. Ken Montgomery, Faculty of Education, Telephone: (306) 585-5031 Email: ken.montgomery@uregina.ca

Purpose(s) and Objective(s) of the Research:
The purpose of this research is to unfold and understand foreign certified teachers’ perceptions of their professional experiences in rural Saskatchewan.

This study will help highlight the stories and voices of foreign certified teachers as well as the wealth of knowledge they bring to the rural Saskatchewan school context and may thus have implications for helping future foreign certified teachers’ transition into Saskatchewan. Providing foreign certified teachers the opportunity to share their experiences and insights through dialogue with the researcher (who is himself a foreign certified teacher) reflects the emphasis critical theorists place on learning and knowledge negotiation as dialogical and interactive.

Procedures:
You are being asked to participate in a one hour interview. A 30-minute follow-up interview may or may not be conducted. You do not have to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable answering, and you can stop the interview at any time. Your involvement is completely voluntary. The interview will be conducted at a place of your choice. 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. If you feel uncomfortable answering the questions please keep in mind you do not need to
respond to any questions you do not want to. Should you feel distressed either as a result of participating in this study, or in the future (for example by relieving past painful experiences), there are resources and agencies that may be of assistance. These include Cross Cultural Counselling and Outreach Program, Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant Settlement and Integration Agencies, Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, Catholic Social Services, and Saskatchewan Ministry of Health. Please let any of us know if you have any concerns.

**Potential Benefits:**
Although you may find participating interesting, there are no immediate benefits in taking part in this study. However, I hope that through this study, other teachers will learn from your stories and experiences and be able to successfully navigate through their initial years of teaching.

**Compensation:**
In appreciation for your time, you will receive a $25 gift certificate.

**Confidentiality:**
Confidentiality will be respected at all times. Identities of the participants will be blurred by using pseudonyms chosen by the participants themselves. Names of the areas in rural Saskatchewan where this study will be conducted will be fictionalized. However, if what is said during the interview makes me think that you, or someone else, are at significant risk of harm, I will have to break confidentiality in order to protect you or that individual by reporting the information to appropriate authorities.” If possible, I will tell you if I have to do this.

The data from this interview will be written in a final report namely PhD dissertation and presented to the University of Regina. We would like to audio record all interviews. Please let us know if you would not like to be recorded.

Consent Forms will be stored separately from the interview transcripts so that it will not be possible to associate a name with any given set of responses. All hard-copy data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the research supervisor’s office at the University of Regina. Electronic data and recordings will be accessed on a password protected computer and be stored on a password protected external hard drive that will be locked in the supervisor’s office. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the data. Data will be stored for at least five years after which all documents will be shredded or deleted.

**Right to Withdraw:**
Your participation is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from this study for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort.

Should you wish to withdraw, please contact the researcher, James Alan Oloo, at (306) 653-0249 or oloo200j@uregina.ca so any data collected so far can be deleted or
shredded. Please note that withdrawal of data is only possible up until the point of dissemination of the completed final report (PhD dissertation) which will be around December 2013.

**Follow up:**
To obtain results from the study, please contact James Alan Oloo at (306) 653-0249 or oloo200j@uregina.ca

**Questions or Concerns:** (see section 12)
Contact the researcher and or supervisor using the information at the top of page 1. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Regina Research Ethics Board on (insert date). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the committee at (306) 585-4775 or research.ethics@uregina.ca. Out of town participants may call collect.

**Continued or On-going Consent:**
We are planning on conducting one interview session. However, if there is a need for a follow-up interview, a brief overview of the consent form will be given to the participants. You will then be asked to give your verbal consent to participating in the interview.

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.

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*A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.*
APPENDIX D: Interview Questions

James Alan Oloo  I  PhD Student  I  Faculty of Education  I  University of Regina
Student ID: 200257147  I  oloo200j@uregina.ca

A narrative inquiry into foreign certified teachers’ professional experiences in rural Saskatchewan schools

Interview questions

Teacher background
- Age
- Gender
- Country of birth
- Your formal education and teaching experience in your native country
- How many years did you teach before coming to Saskatchewan?
- What was the location and size of the school where you taught?
- Which subjects and grades did you teach?
- What is your ethnic or cultural background?
- Please describe any ‘negative’ experiences that you attribute to your ethnic or cultural identity.
- What lessons have you learned from those experiences?

The process of coming to Saskatchewan
- Could you please describe the process of emigrating to Canada and the type of Canadian Visa you received before travelling?
- Why did you decide to become a teacher in Saskatchewan?
- Were you offered a teaching position in Saskatchewan while still in your country?
- What were your first impressions of Saskatchewan classrooms?
- Please describe your experience in getting Saskatchewan teacher accreditation?
- How was your teacher orientation in Saskatchewan? Was it helpful in preparing you for your current position?
- What is it like to be a foreign certified teacher in rural Saskatchewan?

Your perception about how your background and experience prepared you for the current position.
- What was your knowledge of Saskatchewan and its education system before you came to Canada?
- In your view, what strengths did you bring to your current position?
- How have prior teaching experience and training both before coming to Canada and in Canada prepared you to teach in Saskatchewan schools?
- Is there additional training that in your view could have better prepared you for the current position?
Experiences in Saskatchewan
- Can you describe your first year living in Saskatchewan?
- Were there people you could talk to or seek help from?
- How has your race/ethnicity/country of origin shaped your experience in Saskatchewan?

Experiences in Saskatchewan Schools
- How long have you been teaching in Saskatchewan? What grades and subjects?
- What was your experience during your first year of teaching in Saskatchewan?
- How would you describe your teaching experiences after the first year?
- What are some of the differences between your teaching experiences in your home country and in Saskatchewan?
- What are some of the challenges you experienced during your earlier years of teaching in Saskatchewan?
- What were the impacts of those challenges on your teaching and how did you overcome the challenges?
- Are there any professional development courses teacher education classes you have taken in Canada that were helpful in meeting the challenges?
  o If so, how?
  o If not, what kind of professional development and teacher education programs do you think would be helpful in meeting the challenges?
- How would you describe your interactions and relationships with your students, parents, other teachers, and school administration?
- How do you view/understand your students differently now compared to when you first started teaching in rural Saskatchewan?

Your reflections on experiences
- What strengths did you bring to Saskatchewan schools?
  o Can you recall any moments when you felt valued and appreciated in school?
  o Please describe when your work at school had a positive impact on your students, fellow teachers, parents, or school administrators?
- How are your experiences as a teacher in Saskatchewan likely to shape your future work as a teacher?
- What lessons have you learned since you started teaching in Saskatchewan about some of the most effective ways to teach your students?
- How do you view your ethnicity/place of birth as impacting your experiences in rural Saskatchewan?