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REFUGE

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BRIDGING SOLITUDES: PARTNERSHIP CHALLENGES IN CANADIAN REFUGEE SERVICE DELIVERY

Introduction

Claudia María Vargas

Although it would be wonderful to get to the point where we would not have to consider service provision to refugees, the reality is that there is a continuous and escalating need to do so as conflicts around the world continue to displace thousands of people.[1] While the number of people encountering dislocation swell, countries seem to be responding by restrictive asylum policies and by limiting services, a phenomenon occurring in the first country of entry and in asylum granting countries. (For a thorough discussion on the legal restrictions adopted by Canada, the United States, and the European Union, see Cooper, forthcoming; and the article by the same author in this issue). In spite of these and other obstacles, nonprofit organizations strive to deliver a variety of services to refugees. This challenge has intensified with the shift from a welfare state framework to a market oriented state. Thus, nonprofit organizations have had to step in to fill a void left by a slashing of government services (Welsch 1999; Salamon 1994).

In such a setting, key questions emerge. How do non-governmental organizations (NGOs) deliver much needed services in a time of shrinking budgets and restricted policies? What strategies do NGOs use to meet these obstacles within an ethic of service? In other words, what challenges do service providers encounter in delivering serv-

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ices while trying to ensure organizational sustainability? These questions must be explored at both the points of service level and the interorganizational level. More specifically, we need to explore how service providers connect with or bridge with refugees as well as how service organizations bridge with each other. (Although it is beyond the discussion of this essay, it is important to acknowledge that there is a growing literature on nonprofit organizations that considers the relationship of NGOs with private and government agencies [Herman and Associates 1994]).

Exploring these questions generates a thesis: The challenge of the dynamic and pressure-filled environment in refugee service delivery can only be addressed by partnerships. Partnerships, though, can be effectively established and maintained if, and only if, an ethic of service and a culture of cooperation is developed based on trust, commitment, and effective cultural mediation at the direct service delivery as well as the interorganizational levels. This is particularly critical in difficult economic times.

The contributions in this issue represent various perspectives from practitioners and academics. The practitioners include cultural interpreters, NGO managers, psychologists, and a school principal. This blend of practitioners and academics also bridge a much needed connection between research and practice. Furthermore, the pieces represent the multidisciplinary approach required in serving refugees, though not the full range of services.

Why the Need for Nonprofit Organizations?

Since the rise of political demand for downsizing of government and reduction of public spending, nonprofits have been growing to provide services traditionally delivered by government entities. According to Weisbrod, "Nonprofits perform the kinds of functions typically identified with government—helping the disadvantaged, providing social services, ... However, when populations are very diverse, services that satisfy the majority may leave many people severely under-satisfied; nonprofits are thus understandable as an alternative mechanism for providing collective services" (1997, p. 542). Nonprofits perform an essential function in refugee service delivery, especially when access to services is restricted by status of the asylum process, or the unfortunate ones who are referred as "refugees in orbit" (Gallagher et al. 1990).

The contemporary context in Canada presents a diversity of people and needs. It merits a brief analysis with particular attention to the problems faced by nonprofit organizations that serve refugees. Recent fiscal and legal constraints complicate delivery of services. The outside pressures experienced by NGOs affect their operations and their ability to deliver quality services. The pressures also affect the health of the organizations and their ability to survive continuing cutbacks. What has become evident from research interviews is that NGOs delivering services to refugees are often sustained by the quality of the people that operate them.[2] However, as Cooper asks, "At what point is an organization unable to perform its mandates, is it that last 2 percent cut?"

On the other hand, as Herman asserts, "... the future of nonprofit charitable organization, in the United States and Canada, is likely to be determined less by organizationally focused actions than the extent to which nonprofit organizations build more cooperative or more competitive sectors" (1994, p. 616). But, how do organizations build and support cooperative endeavours in a fiscally lean context, when organizations seem to be stretched to the maximum? "The organizations that constitute a nonprofit community [v. an industry] understand that they are stewards of the larger community's resources and instruments for meeting the public needs of the larger community. Fulfilling such a role requires that members of the nonprofit community often act in cooperative ways" (Herman 1994, p. 617).

Although collaboration and cooperation is desirable, these features may be imposed from outside the organizations. Lofty sounding goals like building partnerships may create possibilities but they may also produce less helpful results, including competition and conflict.

Whether the pressure to cooperate comes from outside funding sources, legislative mandates (Herman 1994) or from the need for service delivery, the question still remains, how can we align the mission of the various organizations involved? More specifically, how do the many potential partner groups build consensus on what the common mission is to be? Which route collaborative efforts take will sometimes depend on appropriate cultural mediation of each organization's goals and mission anchored on an ethic of service. This is what Spigelblatt (in this issue) refers to as "organizational cultural mediation."

Cooperation or Competition Among Nonprofit Organizations?

Although common sense may dictate that nonprofit organizations should embrace a cooperative or collaborative model over a competitive one, all models present their own problems (Weisbrod 1997, p. 543). The competition may be due to "fiscal pressures on both types of organizations," nonprofit and government. Fiscal pressures may lead some NGOs to expand their activities into areas traditionally the domain of 'for-profit enterprises', e.g. consulting, thus moving away from their original, charitable goals. Still others may suffer changes in management and therefore in mission. Shifting emphasis, even by degrees, from service to income generating goals in one organization may weaken or destroy previously established partnerships.

At the same time, in the area of refugee service delivery cooperation (and alliances) among numerous NGOs, in some cases, have been sparked by the threat of severe cuts in government allocations. Creative arrangements among non-profits organizations have also been developed as a way to provide necessary services without one organization carrying the whole financial burden. That was, for example, the case of the Ottawa Board of Education's partnership with the Ottawa-Carleton Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) (Vargas 1999).

For cooperation to work, an ethic of service (Jeavons 1994) by all NGOs involved must be firmly established. As Thomas (1994) states, NGOs need to strive to build and sustain a culture of service. However, even when NGOs are committed to, and practice an ethic of service, and though they may seek to concentrate on collaboration and cooperation, other factors may erode their ability to do so. One significant factor is the yearly funding cycle. Grant writing and contract renewals consume much needed resources in service delivery, though they are necessary for a NGO's sheer survival. Unfortunately, these tasks also compete with organizational collaborative efforts.

Herman identifies three essential principles to local intrasector cooperation. However, cooperation is only possible if NGOs can work and act as a community (Herman 1994, pp. 623-624). Among Herman's principles one is particularly significant. "Grant-makers will need to commit multiyear funding to the project and be willing to fund continuing operating costs for some organizations (rather than funding only or mostly innovative projects or start-up costs)" (Herman 1994, p. 624). Based on research interviews Professor Cooper and I have conducted, this is rarely done in Canada or elsewhere.[3] Instead, a yearly funding cycle seems to be the norm, especially for resettlement funds. Ongoing competition for these funds tends to pull NGOs in different directions.

Beyond that, there is a long overdue and pervasive need for organizational renewal. Organizational renewal is a set of techniques organizations employ to help their people and the group as a whole to recover from stresses, avoid burnout, and reenergize for renewed effort. For the past ten years, when we have posed the question, "How do you deal with organizational renewal?" The response is blank faces looking at each other, followed by, "There is none. [long silence!] We just support each other."[4] The silence seems to come from the surprise of such a question, because the issue had never been considered: "What a novel idea!" Clearly, the support comes from individuals, and not from the organizations. In fact, none of the organizations where Professor Cooper and I have conducted interviews had any allocation for organizational renewal. Instead, burnout rings a common tune.

What, then, keeps refugee service providers going in such an environment? The articles submitted by the contributors of this issue suggest two alternative routes towards fostering a "community of nonprofit organizations." Partnerships are explored at various levels: 1) partnerships among nonprofit organizations and 2) partnerships at the direct service level. First, partnerships among organizations may include partnerships with either government agencies or service providers from other sectors. Second, partnerships at the point of service may be with a client in a therapeutic context, with a family or with students in a school setting, or with colleagues from other fields in delivering services to children with disabilities. Before embarking on this discussion, it is important to acknowledge that a multidisciplinary, holistic approach is necessary in refugee service delivery because, given their experiences, refugees have a multitude of needs, including housing, employment, education, health, mental health, and occupational training or retraining, among others.

There are two other critical factors to consider in delivery of services to refugees, the need to build trust and the role of cultural diversity. Because refugees have frequently been betrayed by the state in their homelands, trust is a real issue. The cultural diversity they represent complicates interactions. In dealing with health care providers, refugees may experience disbelief about why a doctor or a psychologist would want to help them; "there must be a hidden agenda." In 20 percent of survivors of torture, a physician participated in the torture (U.S. Committee for Refugees 1999). Therefore it is not surprising that refugees naturally respond with fear and mistrust in the asylum country.

The issue of trust is equally important at the interorganizational level among refugee service organizations. Since many of these NGOs are staffed by former refugees or immigrants, because they embrace an advocacy role, and operate within a rising anti-immigrant sentiment, trust is an essential ingredient. Furthermore, in terms of organizational behaviour when building partnerships or networks, stakeholders from the organizations involved need to know that all are entering the endeavour in which survival depends on putting all the cards on the table. The strength of the partnerships is contingent upon sharing a mission and having no hidden agenda. However, we need to ask, are partnerships enough during resource shrinking periods? Are there other approaches that we need to consider to sustain nonprofit organizations? Let us consider the concepts of partnerships and networks in this essay.

Interorganizational Partnerships or Networks

Among the contributors, two address the issue of interorganizational partnerships and networks. The partnership created between OCISO and the Ottawa-Carleton School Districts, analyzed by **Lucila Spigelblatt** focuses on the creation of a specific and particularly effective programme, the Multicultural Liaison Programme (MLP). Although a success by all accounts—testimony from students, parents, community members, teachers and principals—it merits exploration of what constituted the most difficult areas in the embryonic stages of this partnership. Spigelblatt demonstrates that it was not the mission that created challenges, but the subtleties in communication and the diverse meanings allocated to the same words by the programme's clients and its other stakeholders. Spigelblatt artfully illustrates another dimension of cultural mediation: *organizational* cultural mediation. This is required to align meanings and therefore goals for both of the organizations involved, none of which would have been possible without a foundation based on trust. What is also interesting is that the direct service experience informed or confirmed the dynamics occurring interorganizationally. Her essay draws a parallel between the direct service experience and the interorganizational workings, both of which depend on cultural interpretation.

Phillip J. Cooper explains that the interorganizational relationships among refugee service providers are in reality even more complex than simply a number of two-way partnerships. The political, fiscal, and legal pressures on contemporary Canadian refugee services have forced both government and non-for-profit organizations into complex service networks. These sets of relationships among federal and provincial ministries, city governments, school boards, health care organizations, housing agencies, counselling services, full service refugee and immigrant settlement organizations, and more specialized NGOs seeking to address particular requirements of battered women, survivors of torture, or others with special needs are mechanisms that help us to meet the need to do more with less. However, these networks create complex inter-dependencies. The networks themselves must be managed. Organizations that must operate within these networks must learn how to do so, including the need to recognize the impact of network operations on the internal workings of their own organization. After explaining the contextual forces that have increasingly forced refugee service providers into networks, Cooper outlines the critical characteristics and coping skills for network service delivery and highlights some of the internal challenges about which NGO participants need to be aware.

Partnerships: Multiple and Diverse in Direct Service

A very popular concept in education parlance but not an easy one to implement, **Patricia Irving** and **Claudia Maria Vargas** explore what it takes to create "a community of learners." In order to promote and sustain a community of learners at the school level, an organization requires a principal whose leadership style is bold enough to reculture a school by expanding its horizons far enough to include other stakeholders but also a principal who adopts an ethic of service and equality. Inclusion of all stakeholders depends on appropriate cultural interpretation to engage parents, community members, teachers and multidisciplinary professionals from other agencies in the learning enterprise. As other contributors have pointed out, partnerships can be created if trust is crystallized. It is then that all stakeholders participate and contribute, benefiting from each other's cultural wealth, knowledge, and expertise to support educational endeavours. In synthesis, for the concept of a community of learners to work in a diverse setting, cultural interpretation is necessary to tap the potential of the plurality represented (Genesee 1994, Coelho 1994; Richman 1998). For principals, the crux of the matter is how to balance so many competing demands.

The need for cultural interpretation is further substantiated by the article by **Sherman Chan**, **Hardeep Thind**, and **Lesley Lim**. Through the Community Youth Outreach Programme of the Surrey Delta Immigrant Services Society, Community Youth Outreach Workers provide cultural interpretation and extra-curricular activities as a bridge to immigrant and refugee youth and their families. What is evident is that Canadian students and teachers benefit as much as the newcomers from the cultural wealth the new arrivals bring. Immigrant parents and community members who want to join the school community, do so through the Outreach Workers. In fact, parents demonstrate their gratitude and appreciation of Canadian teachers by organizing Teacher Appreciation celebrations or Chinese New Year's festivities. The various strategies developed by the programme indicate a clear attempt to preclude cultural discontinuity or cultural conflicts while enhancing the contributions of immigrants to the Canadian society. The success of the programme has depended on the bridging or partnering of school efforts with those of the ethnocultural communities in the British Columbia area.

The last three contributions are focused on serving refugees with special needs, children and adults, filling a void in the literature, especially in the area of disabilities. **Ester Cole** discusses the "Building Bridges Programme," implemented in Canada as well as overseas (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Albania, and Kosovo) as an alternative to serving children who have been traumatized by war. Because the histories of these children are unknown, it is difficult for schools to assess who is in need of mental health interventions. The "Building Bridges Programmes" renders a series of age-appropriate, classroom- based activities while affording an opportunity for healing to those who are scarred, whether close to the battlefield or in the host country. Its goals are to enhance resilience and bolster coping skills in children through art, drama, games, storytelling, and buddy teams. The Programme resulted from a partnership between the International Children's Institute, a NGO, other cross-sectional organizations, schools and mental health professionals. Programme goals include building home-school partnerships by engaging the parents in panel discussion to ally cultural expectations with school expectations. The effectiveness of the Programme has been documented by qualitative and quantitative analysis of data gathered from participating schools in Toronto. Results indicate a positive impact on children's self-esteem and coping skills, social integration, and academic outcomes through a holistic approach.

The article by **Huong Thai** and **Afarin Beglari** focuses on addressing the needs of children who are refugees and who have disabilities. The need for cultural interpretation is more intense in an area in which so many factors interact: diverse cultural perceptions of disability, complex multidisciplinary teams, home visits, special schools, and different and often challenging peer perceptions, among others. In circumstances in which parents may be overwhelmed by language and cultural differences, accentuated when interacting with professional from diverse disciplines each speaking a specialized jargon, cultural interpreters play an important role in mediating for the student, the parents, and the professionals. Even when the best professional practice is in place, cultural subtleties can undermine the best plans. Parents who may be struggling with other issues associated with their situation, may be bombarded by the demands of a child with a disability compounded with the need to follow a different set of instructions from each professional involved. All of these dynamics are mediated by cultural symbols, values and attitudes. Cultural interpreters often find themselves embracing an advocacy role as they give voice to the voiceless, the children and the parents as they synchronize the goals of the professionals with those of the parents for the well being of the child. This kind of cultural mediation illustrates maturity, sophistication, and experience built over a number of years that tested the foundation of trust and empathy. Cultural interpreters of this caliber promote partnerships between families having children with disabilities and multidisciplinary teams. The quality and diversity of interactions discussed in this piece include and surpass the suggestions for interpreters in the literature (Struwe 1994; Kayser 1998; Richman 1998).

The Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture (VAST) presents a valuable perspective in the article by **Mahshid Esfandiari** and **Frances McQueen**. Survivors of torture, children and adults, face a more dramatic adjustment process as they struggle with even more intense and chronic pain and injuries than other newcomers (Marsella et al.1994; Leavitt and Fox 1993; Kinzie et al. 1998; Locke et al. 1996; McCloskey and Southwick 1996; Cunningham and Cunnin- gham 1997; Sack et al. 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998; among others). Therefore, working with survivors requires embracing a particular set of standards grounded on common therapeutic principles. The authors share VAST Therapeutic Principles for Care complemented with a discussion of some of the critical ones. The authors use case studies to illustrate the functioning of these principles while stressing the importance of using a variety of therapeutic strategies, including bodywork. Given that torture rapes the body as well as the psyche, a holistic approach is particularly underscored. Culturally appropriate therapies, psychological and bodywork, are complemented with social interactions with other refugees or staff members. Central to all of this is being respectful to the refugee's wishes in the healing process. Cultural interpreters who are carefully screened and selected—being attentive to gender compatibility regarding ethnocultural background, political standing, religion, and belief system, among others—support these approaches (Richman 1998). Thus, VAST staff allows the survivor ownership of the process as he or she begins to recognize and to meet personal needs. Adhering to these principles facilitates a partnership or bridge between the survivor and the therapist(s).

Conclusion

The contributions for this issue afford various perspectives in service delivery concerns, those of practitioners and academics. Together they offer a deeper understanding of the challenges encountered by nonprofit organizations, as the work of researchers can become a bridge connecting the lonely struggles of service providers. At the same time, practitioners enrich the work of academics by connecting theory and practice. Regardless of the perspective, what is evident is that partnerships are created between client and service provider,among organizations, governmental and nonprofit.The commonality among these relationships is: embracing an ethic of service that creates a space for cooperation. But, these partnerships need to be sustained by pillars of trust, commitment, cultural mediation and fiscal stability. Sustainability of the programmes discussed is contingent upon funding, a vulnerability indicated by all contributors. One last word on cultural mediation is its pervasiveness at multiple levels, the interpersonal, interdisciplinary as well as the interorganizational level, especially at the intersectoral level.

A common thread among all the articles in this issue is the significance of cultural understanding, trust, commitment, an ethic of service, and a willingness to build partnerships in spite of a number of risks. Therefore, any one who embarks in this field of service delivery needs also to be attentive to the complexities posed by partnerships and networks. ■

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Notes

1. In an interview, a refugee service provider captured the role that Prof. Cooper and I play for service providers as "breaking the solitudes [or isolation]" of service providers. As they are immersed in taxing demands for services, service providers experience a solitude or isolation from each other, or from colleagues who may be experiencing similar challenges in other localities.
2. Interviews [and conversations] conducted in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Ottawa and the British Columbia area, December 1990-December 1999.
3. Interviews conducted in Ottawa and the British Columbia area, 1999.
4. Interviews in Ottawa, Canada, 1993-1999, British Columbia area, 1999. □

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Creating a Partnership Conducive Environment: A Collaborative Approach To Service Delivery

Lucila Spigelblatt

Abstract

This article explores, from a practitioner's point of view, some of the challenges and learning opportunities that occur when organizations partner-up to meet the needs of refugees. This article also highlights the factors that have contributed to the success of a seven-year "service partnership." The author proposes that the process to establish the partnership is as important as the actual service delivery. The commitment and investment of time and resources are essential requirements for the sustainability of a collaborational approach to providing services for refugees.

Résumé

Cet article explore, du point de vue du praticien, quelques-uns des défis et des possibilitcs d'apprentissage qui se présentent lorsque des organisations s'associent pour répondre aux besoins des réfugiés. L'article met aussi en relief les facteurs qui ont contribué au succès d'un « partenariat de services » qui a duré sept ans. L'auteure propose la thèse que le processus pour l'établissement du partenariat est aussi important que la prestation même du service. Un engagement et un investissement en temps et en ressources sont des conditions essentielles pour qu'une approche participative en matière de services aux réfugiés devienne durable.

Introduction

There are few organizations able to meet by themselves the entire complex needs of refugees. Since there are numerous organizations that provide excellent services to meet some of these needs, collaboration among service providers would seem an obvious strategy. Why is it then, that "service-partnerships" are not more predominant as a model for service delivery? Perhaps the developmental stages of a service partnership should be considered as two different projects with overlapping goals. One of the projects would focus on the services delivered to refugees and immigrants. The other project, equally important, would concentrate in creating a sustainable arrangement for collaboration between the service providers.

Using the Multicultural Liaison Officer (MLO) Programme in Ottawa as an example of a "service partnership", this article will focus on some of the agreements and understandings necessary to create an environment conducive to collaboration between service providers. These agreements and understandings promote partnership among organizations serving refugees and immigrants through organizational cultural mediation.

Critical Assumptions

To explore the operational framework, the MLO programme in Ottawa has been analyzed as a case study in service organizations partnership. As a programme manager for settlement services designed to assist refugees and immigrants to Canada, my work experience during the past twelve years has focused in two different areas: one in the design and implementation of programmes to assist in the resettlement and integration of refugees and immigrants into Canadian society; the other in the exploration of "cultural competency," defined as the set of skills that facilitate respectful and productive interaction between people who might not share the same cultural context.

Perhaps because of this dual role, I have noticed on several occasions that there seems to exist an underlying assumption on the part of funders and service providers that because there is a shared goal (meeting the needs of refugees), the rest of the service delivery puzzle should fall in place with little difficulty. This assumption may not hold true in practice.

> Over the past decade there has been a push by funders to encourage immigrant settlement agencies to develop partnerships with mainstream agencies in order to address the issue of access to services. There has also been a tendency for funders to see themselves as partners in the delivery of service. While the shift to collaborative delivery systems is desirable, this has also been a stressful time for settlement services that participate in collaborative programmes either by a sense of obligation from the funder or by independent agency direction in programming. (Pinto 1998, pp. 6-7)

Some of the obstacles to collaborative delivery systems originate in different areas. A critical barrier in the contemporary market oriented policies is a scarcity of resources for delivery of social services. Second, constraint resources lead to competition, not collaboration. Third, the common goal, that is serving the needs of refugees and immigrants in this practical case study.

> We hope we have been thoughtful and strategic in choosing our bedfellows, mindful of staying true to our mandate, principles and standards while striking a balance among the various roles we play in these partnerships. Maintaining the 'core' of who you are and the relationship you share with your community amid these demands may become a greater challenge yet. If we are to accept the challenges and risks of experimenting with new and different approaches, we must also be key players in defining and guiding the direction of the trend. (Di Zio 1998, p. 3)

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Then, the challenges we face may force us to ask: How do we, the two organizations involved, capture a common goal and sustain it amidst a constantly changing environment?

Frequently, the organizations and their funders sit down, hammer-out extensive agreements as to the kinds of services and the budgets allocated to the new "partnership," agree to the lines of responsibility and communication, and hire the best qualified staff. From that point on, they tend to assume that the programme is ready to proceed with service delivery and most of the issues that may arise will be client-related.

While I doubt that anyone would challenge the complexity of the needs of refugees or the willingness and capacity of most organizations dedicated to facilitating their resettlement, I believe that the difficulties added to the service delivery equation when we attempt to collaborate, are underestimated. Perhaps, the key assumption threatening the success of a service delivery partnership is that the initial investment of staff time and resources required to establish a working relationship among the service providers may be assumed to be of marginal importance. This may be so because it is not spent on service delivery to clients.

I call this initial investment "Service Interpretation," for lack of better terminology, and I hope it conveys a concept that is similar to cultural interpretation in that it "interprets" the culture of one organization to the other. I hesitate in my choice of words because, in many cases, the most difficult negotiations between potential partners centre on the different meanings assigned to key words describing services or qualities. Typical examples of this would be the discussions around what "counselling " means (settlement workers "counsell" their clients, so do psychologists, social workers, guidance counsellors, etc., but each one means something different).

Tensions also arise over traditional concepts versus more recent interpretations or practices. Does "professional" mean that you require some sort of regulatory body to certify a level of competency? Who determines what is "professional?"

> Most of the decisions a group makes are routine. The issues are familiar, the solutions are obvious and the implementation can be accomplished with a bare minimum of planning and organizing. Not all problems are routine though and what most people don't realize is that this model does not work when the problem is a difficult one. When a group attempts to solve a difficult problem as though it were a routine problem, they will very likely make a decision that simply does not work. The implementation will break down and the group will find itself sooner or later, back where it began. (Kaner et al. 1996, pp. 140-141)

In the refugee service arena, problems are certainly not "routine," rather they are difficult and complex. In responding to the demands of organizational partnerships, the case of the Multicultural Liaison Programme in Ottawa will be discussed.

The Case of the Multicultural Liaison Programme, Ottawa[1]: The Context for the Programme

Born out of the desire to serve the needs of refugee and immigrant children, the programme fulfills a critical role in the integration of immigrants and refugees into Canadian society by partnering education and settlement services. Over the past seven years, it has evolved into an efficient model for service delivery to immigrant families. In doing so, the Board of Education recognized the value of an NGO, the Ottawa-Carleton Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO[2]) dedicated to immigrant services, as a full and equal partner. Prior to this, the NGO's credibility had to be established. This required what I call, "organizational cultural mediation."

The programme is a "service partnership" between the public French and English boards of education and OCISO. It has grown from an initial team of four workers to the actual team of sixteen Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLOs).

Ensuring that the needs of refugee and immigrant children were met in a timely manner, with minimal administrative procedures and a high degree of quality and consistency was an initial point of agreement for both the school board and OCISO. Since there was a willingness to negotiate the kinds of service that would be offered and the funding for the programme was adequate, the partners assumed it was just a matter of programme planning and delivery.

Setting aside the services delivered to refugee children through this initiative, I would like to present the process required for the partners to be able to work together. For the Multicultural Liaison Programme, the front-line workers became the pioneers who discovered, by trial and error, where there was need for interpretation or mediation between the two organizations. The MLOs became multicultural liaison officers not only between clients and service providers but also between the two institutions involved. Perhaps this role of the MLOs would be that of an "informal mediator" who is described as an insider. With a stake in the outcome, the MLO may not be acceptable to all parties, yet is able to act impartially but may not be seen as impartial, whose role is flexible and multi-sided, and whose authority and values come from her or his position in the group (Beer and Stief 1997, p. 136).

A combination of the very same mediation and negotiation processes that worked for problem solving with the clients, was used to help the service providers to understand each other and to provide consistent support for a team of workers. For example, the lines of responsibility seemed to cross- since an MLO might work based in one or two schools, where of course, the principals are responsible for anything that happens at the site. The MLO, who is an employee of the settlement agency must report to the programme manager at OCISO who is at a different work location and who has absolutely no jurisdiction over activities that occur in the school setting. In addition to that, the MLOs need free access to each other. The combined wisdom of the group is crucial to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services to the students and their families.

The Negotiated Solutions

The school board and OCISO agreed that the MLO would report to the Director of Cross-Cultural Programmes at OCISO, with daily direction to be taken from the principals of the assigned schools. This was the easier part. It is spelled out in the job description for the position and it only requires occasional clarification. The second part of the agreement, accepting that the MLOs are school-based but not school-bound, took a lot more discussion and experimentation. Principals, on the one hand, were told that an MLO would be assigned half-time to their school therefore they assumed "... half-time equals 17.5 hours at my school on a regular schedule."[3] On the other hand, the management team at OCISO assumed "... All MLOs will come to the agency half-day per week for team meetings or general staff meetings and they will contribute like any other member of OCISO's staff."[4] In addition, the MLOs themselves felt that if they needed one of their colleagues to help with specific cases, they should be free to move from one site to the other without having to ask for permission from either the principal or the programme manager. After seven years, there is an implicit agreement that MLOs are the best judges of the urgency or importance of their presence at one or another location as well as the need to maintain a regular schedule at their assigned school bases. They are truly school-based but not school-bound. Now, both the school board and OCISO understand a bit more of the opportunities and constraints in their respective organizations.

As an example of the need for organizational cultural mediation, the interpretation of the guiding principle posed challenges. There was agreement as to what that principle should be for both OCISO and the school board: "Ensuring that the needs of refugee and immigrant children were met in a timely manner, with minimal administrative procedures and a high degree of quality and consistency."[5] However, the guiding principle generated contention because it meant different things to each of the organizations. There were heated discussions centred on the deep meaning of words such as "quality" and we discovered that indeed, almost every word we used, meant different things to each organization. On top of that, "different" frequently meant "my way is right and yours is not." Nonetheless, we struggled with difficult questions such as:

> What behaviour is ethical? How employees should behave/be treated? How decisions should be made? Who deserves respect? How organizations should run? Of course, these differences in matters of principle can also be major factors in the dispute. Learning to notice these underlying beliefs can help you to articulate and translate the parties' divergent perspectives. (Beer and Stief 1997, p. 78)

Furthermore, among the challenges in the programme design and decision-making processes were assumptions about policies, methodology and procedures. On the one hand, one of those assumptions was that larger "mainstream" organizations are more "professional" than smaller NGOs. On the other, it was assumed that "mainstream" organizations are not really capable of acting in a manner that takes into consideration the individual needs of the refugees.

The need for "organizational cultural mediation" became necessary as we gave shape to the programme. Although it was a muddled process, as cultural mediation sometimes is, we struggled at the institutional level in a manner quite similar to that of the MLOs between clients and service providers. I offer Deborah Tannen's explanation: "Because words matter. When we think that we are using language, language is using us. The terms in which we talk about something shape the way we think about it and even what we see"(Tannen 1995, p. 14).

Organizationally, we were using terms based on the perspective of the organization we represented. Tannen proposes that language "invisibly moulds our way of thinking about people, actions and the world around us. This perspective then limits our imaginations when we consider what we can do about situations we would like to understand or change" (Tannen 1995, p. 14). In the process of development of the partnership, it was required, so to speak, that we learn to walk in our partner's shoes.

In the course of planning and trying out small scale activities such as interpretation during parent-teacher interviews or informal conversations to present information to staff members or parents, the MLOs often came to a point that we called the "I never thought about it like that!" moment. When this type of comment was made by a parent, a child or a staff member, it usually marked a key moment in terms of trust and understanding. When exactly the same kind of comment was offered at the management level, it became a milestone on the road to partnership.

> Occasionally after an intense exchange there is a moment we call the 'Turning Point'. Someone makes an apology, someone offers a concession or a kind word. Then, like water rushing through a breach in the dam, comes an outpouring of personal sharing, of ideas and offers. This dramatic shift from accusations and defensiveness to empathy and resolution is what mediation at its best is all about. It is not something that you as a mediator can make happen, but you can watch for it, make room for it, them move gently on to discussing the mundane details of the agreement. (Beer and Stief 1997, p. 41)

Within the Multicultural Liaison Programme, the organizations' struggle to understand one another's perspective through the work of the MLOs created a shared framework of understanding. This framework, in turn, allowed constructive solutions reflecting the values of both OCISO and the school board. Indeed the programme success is largely due to the partner's ability to constantly adapt the services for the clients, while maintaining consistency in the goals that both organizations hope to attain.

The Agreements and Understandings Sustaining the Partnership

The written guidelines, partnership agreements, and "legal" documentation for the Multicultural Liaison Project are minimal. Yet, this might be the most interesting part of the whole partnership (Our "handshake" was enough to get it going!). There is, however, an extensive series of shared assumptions that now form the basis for our agreements and understandings. This framework of understanding that is present when the programme is running at its best integrates key elements that help to establish the "rules of the game."

These shared perspectives developed gradually and we estimate that it took at least three years of work for the partnership to reach this point. The MLOs, through constant feedback to both the school principals and the OCISO programme manager, provided the means for the partners to learn to "walk in each other's shoes." The key areas where "shared perspectives" have been of tremendous help are listed below with a few samples of "things we understand the same way" to illustrate the point.

Challenges in the Work Environment

One of the ongoing discussions in the partnership is the need to strike a balance between flexibility to meet the needs of the clients (and by clients I mean students, their families, school staff and service providers who refer refugees and immigrants to the programme) and a degree of consistency in the services offered so that these same clients do not have to "guess" what the MLO programme will offer. During the initial stages there was great interest in having the same programme at all locations. The field work of the MLOs very quickly highlighted the opportunities that would be missed if the programme was inflexible in its approaches or if the supervisors insisted on "traditional" nine to five schedules for the workers. Those discussions generated the following understandings.

A Sample of Shared Understandings

Among these set of understandings, runs a common thread of flexibility and adaptability for all parties involved.

* The members of the MLO team work at one or two school sites and report to the programme manager at OCISO who is at a different work location.

* School principals who are responsible for anything that happens in a school site are extremely busy and not always available for consultation.

* Client's needs vary a great deal.

* MLOs need free access to each other.

* The combined wisdom of the group is crucial to the success of the programme.

* Access to community resources varies depending on the neighbourhood. Some have services that are nearby and accessible; other neighbourhoods have very few resources.

* The school's priorities for client services vary from one site to the other.

* The MLOs work in elementary and high schools. The activities that might suit the pace and style of each environment are usually quite different.

Thus, the result of our shared understanding is that the MLOs have the flexibility required to perform their job effectively. Their duties or assignment to strictly one school are not rigidly defined.

Priorities

A second area where constant negotiation takes place is the ranking of priorities for service. Maybe the only assumption that we all shared from the beginning was that the MLOs could not do everything, for everybody, all the time. Again, the MLOs have been instrumental in pinpointing the areas where there must be a "shared understanding" for them to be able to function and make decisions in a consistent manner. I would stress that for the partnership what is important is that there is agreement. The actual content is more of an operational matter. Let us visit some of the agreements reached.

* There is agreement between the principal, the programme manager and the MLO about the settlement service priorities for the year and how the MLO will proceed to meet them.

* There is an agreement between the principal, the programme manager and the MLO about the role of the MLO and how he or she will contribute to the school's priorities for the year.

* The staff at the school have a clear sense of the MLO's functions. (Again, the fact that "there is a clear sense" is the crucial part. The MLO functions may vary at each school).

* The MLO team has a clear sense of the programme boundaries for service delivery.

* There is an agreement between the programme manager and the MLOs about the service priorities for the year and how the team will meet them.

* There is an agreement between the executive director, the programme manager and the MLOs about the agency's service priorities for the year and how the MLOs will contribute to meet them.

Communications

One of the strengths of the programme is the diversity of cultural and linguistic backgrounds within the team. It is also one of the potential areas of confusion when a specific set of skills is required. The crucial agreement is that the MLO is the "key" to access a team of multidisciplinary, multicultural workers. In this area, the "shared understandings" focus more on establishing credibility for the MLO as an expert in community liaison and intercultural communication.

* The MLO at the school is the channel used to access the services of other MLOs.

* There is an efficient protocol for accessing the services of other MLOs.

* The MLO has been accepted as a member of the school staff and participates (whenever possible) in staff meetings, school activities, etc.

* The MLO is used as a resource for intercultural communication, and not simply a problem solver for one or two cultural groups.

* The MLO is deemed knowledgeable about resources available in the community.

* There is an agreement between the MLOs, the programme manager and the school principals on when to consult and when to make independent decisions.

This framework of understandings and agreements was essential to the success of the MLO Programme. Nonetheless, there were other elements that we recognized were necessary to sustain the partnership: financial resources time and a team approach.

Nurturing the Partnership

In addition to "shared understandings", there are other important elements that had great impact on the success of the Multicultural Liaison Programme. A brief discussion on each one follows.

Financial Resources

The collaboration of several funding partners with complementary mandates was essential in order to establish a programme that addressed the multiple needs of immigrant and refugee families, school staff, students and the community at large. A programme with a narrow focus does not work very well in a school setting where one is expected to pitch in and help everyone and not a select group of clients only.

Time

Most of the implicit agreements, which govern the lines of communication and responsibility for the partners and staff involved in the Multicultural Liaison Programme, were developed by trial and error method over the length of the partnership. It took time to learn about each other's strengths and weaknesses. It took time and hard work to earn the trust of the parents, the students and the school staff since relationships of trust are based on repeated positive interaction. By keeping promises, maintaining an objective and neutral position and helping parents, students and staff to manage the small matters of day-to-day situations, the MLOs built trust with the three client groups. It also took time to develop effective links with other service providers in the community and with the school resource staff who are not there on a daily basis. More than anything else, it took time to build a team of multicultural, multidisciplinary liaison experts.

Multiplying Talent: A Team Approach

The MLOs depend to a great extent on other MLOs for interpretation, facilitation and consultation. Their job shares elements of the settlement, outreach, community development, and crisis worker. This multifaceted role makes it difficult to explain to an "outsider" why the usual strategies might backfire when applied in a school setting.

What was clear to us is that the combined wisdom of the group is crucial to the success of the programme. At their weekly team meetings, the MLOs present situations that are specially challenging or strategies that have worked exceptionally well. They consult with their colleagues since another MLO will understand the context of the intervention or someone in the team might have already encountered a similar situation. In addition, MLO is the link to a collective pool of languages and intimate knowledge of cultural contexts that would be almost impossible to find in a single person. Thus, if translation or cultural interpretation is needed, all they have to do is call another member of the team who requires only minimal briefing to facilitate an intervention.

Results

The time and resource investment during the planning and early implementation stages of the Multicultural Liaison Programme at a new school has consistently resulted into more effective service delivery with clear lines of communication and responsibility. This translates into direct benefits for immigrant and refugee children and their families because the settlement and integration services are provided in a proactive and minimally intrusive manner that networks the resources of two sectors with complementary mandates.

Having said that, I offer a word of caution. After seven years of successful partnership, it is sometimes difficult to establish realistic expectations for the first year of the programme in a new school location. After all, it would seem logical that if there is a programme with good guidelines, tested strategies and a consistent approach, then implementation would be a matter of putting the plan into action and the new site would be "up to speed" in no time at all. Unfortunately, this does not happen quite so fast.

Building a successful relationship takes commitment, resources, time and skilled facilitators. Each potential partner has specific needs which are disclosed over a period of time. It is quite helpful to listen to others who have travelled down that path before, but each partnership as new relationship is uniquely shaped by the people who are involved in it in a particular context.

The Multicultural Liaison Programme is no exception to this rule and it shows once again why the developmental stages of a service partnership should be considered as two different projects with overlapping goals. In this case, the "service project" aims to facilitate the settlement and integration of new Canadians. By the end of the first year, given optimal conditions, one would expect the following indicators of involvement from refugee families:

*Increased interaction and collaboration between staff and parents;

*Increased participation of parents in school activities;

*Increased participation of students in non-mandatory school activities; and

*Increased consultation with the MLO initiated by parents or school staff.

The "partnership project", equally important, concentrates in creating a sustainable arrangement for collaboration among the service providers. By the end of the first year, given optimal conditions, the pattern for the programme activities in the school would be established and there would be a clear understanding of the links of communication and responsibilities among all parties involved. At this point, the MLO is used as a "broker" to facilitate communication and access by students, parents and school staff.

Conclusion

The developmental stages of a service partnership should be considered as two different projects with overlapping goals. One of the projects would focus on the services delivered to refugees and immigrants. The other project, equally important, would concentrate in creating a partnership among the service providers. A shared framework of understanding and agreements is required to create a sustainable partnership for collaboration among service providers.

The case of the Multicultural Liaison Programme demonstrates that for effective collaboration between service providers it is as important to build the "context" of service (shared understanding, trusting the professional ability of colleagues, strengthening the network of service providers) as it is to deliver direct service to students and their families. The time and resource investment during the planning and early implementation stages of the Multicultural Liaison Programme has consistently resulted in effective service delivery, clear lines of communication and responsibility and a proactive, minimally intrusive pattern of intervention. The Multicultural Liaison Programme illustrates the importance of the initial investment required for "Service Interpretation" among institutions that are truly interested in the development of service partnerships. ■

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Notes

Views expressed in this article are the author's and should not be construed as the views of CIC or OCASI.

1. For excellent information on the essence of this programme, see Claudia María Vargas, "Cultural Interpretation for Refugee Children: The Multicultural Liaison Programme, Ottawa, Canada," Refuge, Vol. 18, No. 2, (April 1999), pp. 32-41.
2. Ottawa-Carleton Immigrant Services Organization is a non-profit, charitable organization established in 1974. Its services include settlement, counselling, employment, and cross-cultural education.
3. Planning meetings, MLO Programme, 1994.
4. Planning Meetings, MLO Programme, 1994.
5. Interview with ESL Programme Manager, Ottawa Board of Education, Summer 1992.□

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Canadian Refugee Services: The Challenges of Network Operations

Phillip J. Cooper

Abstract

The context within which refugee service providers work shapes and constrains their efforts. Those legal, political, fiscal, and managerial influences in the Canadian context have tended to force the creation of refugee service networks. This article considers some of the factors that have brought about this network approach to refugee service delivery, but, most importantly, it seeks to understand what the implications of that development are for service providers and the communities they serve. This article argues that service networks can be effective and efficient in meeting refugee needs, but it is essential to be aware of the special challenges posed by network management. Those challenges not only concern how service providers work together and deal with refugees and other immigrants, but also alert them to the impact they can have inside refugee service NGOs.

Résumé

Le contexte dans lequel les prestataires de services aux réfugiés travaillent, façonne et restreint leurs efforts. Ces influences légales, politiques, fiscales et administratives dans le contexte canadien, ont eu tendance à pousser vers la création de réseaux de services aux réfugiés. Cet article étudie certains des facteurs qui ont amené cette approche de prestation de services aux réfugiés par réseau. Mais, avant tout, il cherche à comprendre quelles sont les implications de ce développement pour, d'une part, les prestataires de services et, de l'autre, pour les communautés qu'ils servent. L'article soutient que les réseaux de services peuvent être utiles et efficaces pour répondre aux besoins des réfugiés, mais qu'il faut absolument être conscient des défis particuliers que comporte la gestion de ces réseaux. Ces défis ne concernent pas seulement la façon dont les prestataires de services travaillent de concert et s'occupent des réfugiés et d'autres immigrés. Il est aussi important d'être vigilant quant à l'impact qu'ils peuvent avoir au sein des ONG spécialisées dans les services aux réfugiés.

Introduction

Those of us who study refugee issues come to Canada to learn. For many years, Canadians have taught other nations a great deal by their willingness to open their doors to refugees and their generosity in seeking to provide services for them as the new arrivals become full members of the Canadian society. The creativity of the refugee service community in Canada has provided innovative and effective models for organizations and programmes that can better assist refugees as well other new Canadians. The dedicated corps of people, many of them whom were refugees and immigrants themselves, has demonstrated to the rest of us how energy and commitment can make a dramatic difference in the people we all ultimately seek to serve the larger society. These are among the reasons why the Canadian people were collectively awarded the Nansen Medal (named after Fridtjof Nansen, the first High Commissioner for Refugees under the League of Nations) for service to refugees. This was the first time an entire nation was honoured.

Of course, in light of all that, when challenges emerge in the Canadian refugee policy and service delivery system, the rest of us should be concerned and seek to learn from the way those challenges are met. It is also important to understand the impact of the decisions that are taken within Canada, for just as it has been a leader in so many aspects of refugee service, the situation in Canada serves as a warning to others of what lies in the horizon of this field.

The challenge of providing refugee services rests in part, as the other articles in this symposium demonstrate, on the level of professional practice - the state of the art in refugee service delivery. But no matter how creative, how expert, or how professional the service providers may be, their ability to successfully deliver support for refugees who arrive in Canada depends, as it does in other countries, upon a variety of issues that they do not control. The context within which service providers and the refugee families they seek to assist must live and work matters. The legal, political, fiscal and management challenges presented by the environment in which the refugee challenge must be met calls upon the very best that dedicated professionals can deliver. Yet they also place boundaries on what can be accomplished and the methods that can be used to achieve their goals on behalf of the people they serve.

An examination of those factors over the past decade in Canada indicates a number of important trends. One of the factors is the tendency for changing policy and resource constraints to alter the working relationships between government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that provide refugee services and among those NGOs as well. In particular, these dynamics have tended to force the creation of refugee service networks. This article considers some of the factors that have brought about this change to a network approach in the refugee service delivery system, but most importantly, it seeks to understand what the implications of that development are for service providers and the communities they serve. Following these arguments that have been presented, the thesis that emerges is as follows: while service networks can be effective and efficient in meeting refugee needs, it is a kind of organization that requires a high degree of awareness of the special challenges posed by network management and a commit-

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ment of resources to meet those challenges. Among these challenges is the need to be alert to the impact they can have on the NGOs which are critical to the system and the differences that exist between network operations in the private for-profit business community and the not-for-profit public service sector.

The discussion will turn first to the forces that are shaping the service networks. It will then consider the network concept in action. Finally, it will address the implications of the move to interdependent service networks.

The Critical Forces Shaping Refugee Service Networks

Canada has increasingly felt a number of forces that have been shaping refugee policy, the resources available to serve new arrivals and the context within which they and their service providers must live and work. These are dynamics that have been building in many other countries, most notably the E.U. nations and the United States, even before some of the most recent changes in Canada. And while Canada remains steadfast in declaring its commitment to the humanitarian principles that have made it a world leader in this field, it would be unrealistic to suggest that these political, economic, and legal stresses have not brought increased stress to the effort to provide refugee services.

Political Pressures to Emphasize Enforcement and Protection of Borders

There is no doubt that the smuggling incidents in recent years have captured a great deal of attention. It was one thing when authorities apprehended small numbers of people attempting illegal entries at various border points. However, the situation took on a new and ominous quality when Canadian and U.S. officials found people in cargo containers at West Coast ports. This occurred shortly after the highly publicized cases in which Canadian agencies, civilian and military, were called in to track and then to deal with vessels, better described as hulks than as ships, carrying immigrants bound for British Columbia. Since these events began in the summer of 1999, Citizenship and Immigration Minister Elinor Caplan has been at pains to answer demands for more enforcement and stronger efforts to exclude illegal immigrants.[1] Sadly, when such demands arise in Canada or elsewhere, the voices raising them are rarely sensitive to the distinctions between legitimate refugees who come by some troublesome means or others. That is particularly true if MPs and party officials see an opportunity for political gain in exploiting public fear and anger. It is all the more troublesome if such events are allowed to fuel already growing anti-immigrant sentiment. And although Caplan has stressed the government's intention to maintain its immigration target at 1% of population and its expectations for 25,000 refugee arrivals in 2000, she has repeatedly found it necessary to respond to fears and frustrations.

> I understand the concerns of many Canadians about these recent marine arrivals. I want to make it clear that I deplore the actions of human smugglers. I am also deeply concerned about the increasing number of people who turn to the criminal element in choosing to enter Canada surreptitiously and illegally. . . .
>
> Criminal actions such as these only confirm the need to change our legislation. Early this year, the government proposed new legislative directions on immigration and refugee policy. These directions include enhancing our ability to intercept illegal migrants abroad, stiffer penalties for those who contravene our laws, and the increased use of detention of people.[2]

These pressures have also meant that many government statements about refugees begin with a recognition of the importance of the immigrant community and the humanitarian commitment to assist refugees, but are frequently qualified. "Canadian are compassionate and generous. That has not changed. But Canadians will not be taken advantage of. This I can assure you."[3] "Our Government will continue to accept refugees, while at the same time take strong measures to stem the flow of those who try to abuse our refugee programme."[4] "I want to keep the front door to this country open, but I know that to do so, we've got to make sure that we close the back door."[5]

Much of Caplan's term has been spent addressing reactions to the illegal ships smuggling people in cargo container, but these high profile events did not mark the beginning of the reaction against refugees and immigrants. By the mid-1990s popular media outlets reported changing attitudes across Canada, and particularly in the West.

Clearly, Canada is not alone in facing such political pressures. Indeed, it is following trends that have been developing for some time in Europe and the United States. In these countries, the humanitarian focus for refugee policy has lost ground to the economic, foreign policy, and domestic politics foci and the general trend has been the attempt to view refugee issues as matters to be dealt with abroad, miles away from one's own country, if possible, or as border problems if necessary.[6] This effort to shift both the focus and locus of refugee policy is clear despite long-standing commitments by these countries to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees[7] and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.[8]

There have been three obvious impacts that emerged from this trend. First, there has been a tendency to discourage the movement of refugees to these countries. Second, policymak-ing has tended to emphasize a law enforcement effort aimed at blocking illegal immigrants in which refugees have come to be seen as another type of immigrant or removing those who seem to have slipped through the net. Third, this focus on borders and beyond, and the increasing importance of law enforcement has tended to support increased attention to resource needs for enforcement with decreasing concern for the needs of refugee service programmes.

The Economic Pressures Of Stressful Times, Market Pressures, and Declining Support for the Social Safety Net

As witnessed around the world at other times and in many places, economics played a role in the growing tensions around refugee policy, including settlement services. Hard times often breed increases in scape-goating. Certainly, the United States provides a particularly glaring history of this kind of behaviour, but it is not the only place where refugees and other immigrants have been falsely accused of taking jobs away from natives. Of course, as Minister Caplan has reminded Canadians:

> One reason for this tolerance and compassion is that we are a nation of immigrants and refugees. Consider that today, forty-six members of the House of Commons were born outside of Canada. Our new Governor General, Adrienne Clarkson, came to Canada as a refugee during the Second World War.
>
> My grandparents were immigrants, and so were many of yours. Indeed, apart from our aboriginal population, ALL Canadians are descended from immigrants or refugees. It's really just a matter of seniority.[9]

But the anti-refugee and anti-immigrant sentiment predated the events that have taken Caplan's attention since she acquired her portfolio. The economic stresses of the 1980s and 1990s had two important consequences. First, they have played a role in a constrained but real reaction against generous refugee policies. In January 1993, MacClean's reported the results of a Maclean's/CTV survey, indicating that " regardless of age, income or level of education," four of five respondents considered increased immigration "'bad,' 'very bad' or simply 'a fact of life.'" And, the report added that there was a clear connection between those attitudes and the state of the economy.

> Thirty-two per cent of those who were pessimistic about the economy had negative opinions of visible minorities, while only 26 per cent of those who felt the economy was improving said that immigrants from Asia, the West Indies and other parts of the Third World were bad for Canada.[10]

Second, the dramatic economic cutback decisions taken by Ottawa in response to the economic challenges meant reduced support for a wide variety of social programmes, including those serving refugees and immigrants. The federal government dramatically cut a variety of programmes, including significant reductions in transfer payments to the provinces. So significant were the federal rollbacks that even a major effort in 1999 to put funds back into medical care through the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) still did not restore transfer payments for these programmes to quite the level they had been despite the return of a better financial situation.

In the face of those cuts, provincial governments in turn trimmed many of their programmes and in some cases those provincial changes were even more drastic than the changes in Ottawa. Local school boards, like Ottawa/Carleton debated resolutions to the provincial ministry asking for reconsideration of major cuts in special education and increasing restrictions on eligibility for English as a second language programmes, effectively cutting those programmes. In British Columbia, the Union of Municipalities published a study by an independent firm on the relationship between federal cuts to provinces and provincial cuts to municipalities. It found that by any measure, the cuts by the provinces were even more severe than the cuts from Ottawa.

> In 1996, BC Municipalities received $209 million in general fund transfer payments from the Province. This was cut to $129 million in 1997 and 1998 as a result of the changes announced by the Province at the end of 1996. This is a 38% reduction in the level of transfer payments.
>
> In December 1998, the Province announced a further reduction in municipal transfer payments of $39 million, to be effective in 1999. This will reduce the general fund transfer payments to $90 million. This is a further 30% reduction from the 1998 level. And it will be implemented in one year.[11]

In addition to these cuts in support for social programmes spending in the provinces and at the local government level, Ottawa cut budgets in federal ministries, including in Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). Planned spending between 1998-99 and 2001-02 is scheduled to decline by 9.6% in nominal dollars while continuing work levels at approximately the same number of immigrants and refugees. If one assumes a very conservative 3% inflation figure, the real dollar impact would be more than 17.3% reduction over that same period.[12] These cuts come at a time when CIC is asked to be more responsive, faster, and more active than ever before. Since this was written, funds were added to the CIC budget but largely for enforcement.

And, of course, all of these cuts hit hardest those at the end of the financial pipeline, the refugees and the NGOs that provide their services. The Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) summed up the situation as follows:

> In recent years, the economic climate and the governments' deficit reduction priorities have had their impact on refugees, always among the most vulnerable when time comes for cut back. Newly arrived in Canada and with very limited resources, refugees and other immigrants have faced reduced services from the Immigration Department, cuts in social assistance and job training programmes, reduced medical coverage and legal aid coverage, increased fees in many areas . . . . Organizations offering services to refugees and immigrants have had to respond to these new difficulties faced by their clients, at the same time that they are themselves often suffering funding cutbacks.[13]

A New and Even More Demanding Legal Context for Refugee Service Agencies

The other element that has been dynamic and of major importance for refugee service agencies is the changing legal context. There have been two critical dimensions to the changes in this field. First, there have been the increasing demands for intensified enforcement efforts. Second, Canada has been in a major effort at policy change.

The earlier discussion of the response to the British Columbia events underscored the government's emphasis on enforcement and attempts to speed up resulting adjudications, leading to faster exclusions if they are deemed appropriate. The pressures to intensify these enforcement efforts were exacerbated by U.S. criticisms that Canadian policies and lax enforcement efforts had made it a haven for terrorists. Even Canadian voices have been heard supporting such charges.[14]

However, long before the recent pressures began building in order to tighten Canadian policy and practices for refugees and immigrants, the trend in that direction was well established. The pressures for change came both from within Canada and from developments in other countries.

International trends toward restricting asylum and speeding up exclusions of those who do manage to enter borders have been underway for some time. Well before the Maastricht Treaty went into force, E.U. countries had been moving toward more restrictive refugee law and legal process. Ironically, the changing laws governing border control can be traced back to the time of the efforts by E.U. countries to open their borders to one another in order to ease commercial relations. The Netherlands, Luxembourg and Belgium began efforts to open their borders to each other in 1960. France and Germany entered into a similar agreement in 1984 and then joined their predecessors in an accord signed in Schengen, Luxembourg which have since come to be known as the Schengen Agreements.[15] Eventually, over a dozen countries, some of which were E.U. nations and others, joined together in the Schengen Convention and the Schengen Implementation Agreement. These agreements involved cooperation on cross-border criminal justice concerns as well as information sharing and cooperation among police and judicial officials in the signatory countries. They also required harmonization of refugee policies to block what was termed asylum shopping. With this approach of 1992, the E.U. countries entered into the Dublin Convention in 1990 which incorporated most of the elements of the Schengen agreements and added new elements. Most recently, the effort to ratify and implement the terms of the Treaty of Amsterdam signed in 1997, promises for more E.U. institutional control over refugee policy.

To many refugees, Europe was erecting legal walls around itself. The E.U. countries served notice that they would invoke the first asylum principle and the safe country of origin doctrine not only to exclude claimants, but also to exclude applicants even before their petitions were resolved.[16] The trend has also been to permit expedited determination procedures with fewer legal protections for asylum seekers and greater discretion for officials. The working party on asylum procedures of the International Association of Refugee Law Judges has examined the use of such procedures and found that while they may have the benefit of speed and efficiency, they pose serious risks that the rights of asylum seekers will be sacrificed in the bargain.[17]

The U.S. case also demonstrated similar trends. Although the United States was a major supporter of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, it did not formally join these agreements until 1968 and did not adopt a comprehensive Refugee Act until 1980.[18] Part of the original impetus for passage of the 1980 legislation came from the sad history of U.S. behaviour in Southeast Asia and the problems that emerged in dealing with refugees following the American pull-out.[19]

But before the ink was dry on the new law, the U.S. was moving to restrict entry and discriminating among applicant groups on political and according to many critics, racial grounds. Tensions grew over the handling of Cuban and Haitian asylum seekers that were ultimately addressed not through legislation, but by the executive orders issued by Presidents Reagan, Bush and Clinton.[20] The U.S. government ultimately entered into a consent decree in the case of *American Baptist Churches v. Thornburgh*,[21] effectively admitting discrimination in Central American asylum cases and agreeing to reconsider virtually all Salvadoran and Guatemalan asylum applicants during the period. In 1996, a new immigration statute was adopted that granted much greater discretion to Immigration and Naturalization Service officers. It provided for expedited summary asylum determinations at the border with little or no judicial review [22] Even the U.S. Justice Department declined to implement some of the more extreme provisions of the statute and to provide more protections than were required.[23] At this point, the best that can be said is that the U.S. had gone back to the ad hoc approach to refugees that existed decades ago. Not surprisingly, the laws and practices adopted by the European nations and the U.S. have sent signals that the doors are closed in these locations, thus making Canada an even more attractive destination than ever before.

However, Canada has moved in the same direction as its American and European allies. The contemporary line of policy development can be traced back to the late 1980s when Immigration Minister Barbara McDougall announced a major move to tighten the system, including efforts to speed up the status determination process and clear a large backlog of pending cases. It was this round of policymaking that produced C-55 in 1989 and resulted in the creation of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB). Then came C-86 in 1992 which further trimmed the hearing process and constrained appeals. These measures were intended not only to streamline but also to restrict refugee admissions and the percentage of approvals did fall, according to the then IRB General Counsel Gerald Stobo, from 76% in 1989 to 48% by late 1993.[24] Citizenship and Immigration Canada was created in 1994 and efforts have been made since then to reevaluate and replace the existing citizenship law.

Minister Lucienne Robillard appointed a Legislative Review Advisory Group in November of 1996 to review the existing Immigration Act. Its January 1998 report, entitled *Not Just Numbers: A Canadian Framework for Future Immigration*,[25] included 172 recommendations. After a year of consultation and planning, CIC issued its white paper *Building on a Strong Foundation for the 21st Century: Directions for Immigration and Refugee Policy and Legislation*.[26] Several things were clear. First, the government had heard complaints about the need to reduce delays in the refugee status determination process, calls regarding the need for greater attention to family reunification and demands that provisions be enacted that would permit CIC to respond to emergency situations abroad that called for rapid removal to Canada of threatened persons. At the same time, there is no doubt that enforcement had become the central feature of the new policymaking efforts. Whatever the motive forces, as the white paper pointed out: "No comprehensive review of the legislation has been undertaken during the past two decades. The Act has been amended, on an ad hoc basis, more than 30 times, resulting in a complex patchwork of legislative provisions that lack coherence and transparency. The logic and key principles of the Act have become difficult to discern for both immigrants and Canadians."[27] Indeed, the government eventually tabled a comprehensive legislative proposal to rewrite the Citizenship Act in November 1999 known as C-16 that embodied the concerns noted above.

It became clear from the report and in the proposed legislation that enforcement and the emphasis on exclusion of unworthy claimants are dominant themes. Thus, for example, while the chapter of the white paper entitled "Refugee Protection" presents two issues that are associated with added protections for refugees, the other six highlighted issues that had to do with enforcement and exclusion of unqualified applicants.[28] The other chapters reveal a similar emphasis, as do the Minister's speeches throughout the fall of 1999 and into the beginning of 2000.[29] Her speeches emphasize that the government's approach can be summarized in three words: Faster, but fair. Or as Peter Showler, the current Immigration and Refugee Board Chair, has put it: Fair, but faster.[30] One might suggest that the order of the words matters more than a little. From the perspective of the refugee claimant, it is fine to reduce the waiting time for decisions and to speed up family reunification. On the other hand, moves such as increasing pressure for greater identity documentation at entry, expanding the use of detention, speeding up the hearing and decision process, streamlining review processes, and tightening judicial review suggest that the "faster" is likely to prevail over the "fair." That was, as noted above, precisely what the International Association of Refugee Law Judges concluded has been happening based upon an examination of the expedited procedures now in use in a number of countries. The new provisions of the Citizenship Act proposed as C-16 not only move to implement some of these streamlining suggestions, but also grant new authority to revoke citizenship (Sec. 16), block citizenship on broad assertions of public interest (Sec. 21) or national security interest (Sec. 23) by the Minister. It also expands the list of those ineligible to apply for citizenship (Sec. 28). Since this was written the new refugee law C-31 has been tabled as well.

It must be said that even with all these steps, Canada has not moved nearly as dramatically to block or challenge asylum seekers as the U.S. or the E.U. Even so, there can be little doubt about the general direction of the efforts to change the law and the process by which it is administered in an enforcement mode with the emphasis on protecting the nation against criminal smuggling of persons, detecting and rapidly excluding illegitimate attempts to claim refugee status and building the legal capacity to apprehend and remove anyone perceived to have made it through the process but who later is determined to have been undesirable.

At a minimum, these processes in Canada, the U.S. and Europe, place a premium on the ability of newly arrived refugee claimants to be fully ready to make their legal claim, assume knowledge of the requirements for doing so and in truth demand rapid access to legal assistance. However, these expectations come at a time when legal aid has been limited. Moreover, with increasingly stringent requirements to qualify for services in some provinces, service providers require greater legal counselling in order to assist their clients.

The Move to Service Networks From Multiple Loosely Coupled Organizations: A Transformation More Real Than Apparent

These legal, financial, and political changes have all had significant effects not only on refugees and refugee claimants but also on the organizations that seek to serve them. One of the results of these increasingly challenging features of the refugee service environment has been an increasing pressure, often unspoken, to alter the structure and character of refugee service delivery from a relatively loosely coupled collection of largely independent organizations toward a highly stressed service network. It is therefore extremely important to consider the general trend in human services toward the service network model, the realities of network management and the implications of life in a highly stressed service network for refugee services.

For some time, NGOs were created and evolved relatively independently. Many grew from small groups that came together, often with some or most of their members as volunteers. Others developed from church or civil groups that decided to develop a project group to sponsor or work with refugees. Still, others emerged from refugee and immigrant communities themselves as those who had been in Canada long enough to feel settled themselves tried to help others who were facing the same daunting experience.

These groups became important parts of a service system made up of loosely coupled organizations, many of which focused on very different kinds of clients, needs and services. Many of the programmes they provided developed because of needs recognized in the schools, by medical practitioners, police agencies, child welfare officials, or employment and economic development stakeholders. Their missions varied dramatically and their funding and organization were equally diverse. In some cases, they formed relatively simple partnerships with these agencies, involving pilot programmes or modest service agreements.

However, as service demands increased and resources declined, pressures grew not only concerning how to meet new levels of service demand but also about survival itself. Pressures grew to compete more vigorously for grants and contracts. However, that often meant making one's organization look more and more like what the requests for proposals seek. As groups scrambled to look more like the fewer funding sources desired, it appeared as though there was more redundancy, a justification for further reductions. Given the fact that much of the soft money had relatively brief funding cycles, the scrambling became less of a sporadic activity than an ongoing challenge. It also meant that organizations had to consider more carefully what they could and could not deliver. From the government perspective, there has been greater pressure to eliminate redundancy, enhance efficiency and ensure greater accountability. Given these conditions, pressures and expectations, the tendency has been to move, deliberately or de facto, toward a network model of service delivery with a variety of significant consequences for all concerned.

The Critical Realities of Network Management

There was a time when citizens often looked to Governments to provide services directly. However, the range of service demands, constraints on the size of ministries and agencies and a desire for a variety of approaches to service delivery led to a growing tendency of governments to form relationships, often termed public/private partnerships, to support the missions of the various NGOs and local government agencies that actually delivered the services. Still, the relationships were often relatively loose and informal, in part at least to allow room for the not-for-profits to use their creativity and special knowledge without undue bureaucratic baggage from government. If there was a service gap, these organizations were often able to locate resources, modest though they may have been, to pick up the slack. And, since the NGO workers and volunteers were so often very committed people, they dig deep to find innovative solutions to the service issues in new ways to build trust, better communications with local agencies like police, school principals, or health care providers and more effective mechanisms for eliciting involvement by parents and others in the immigrant communities who have so much to offer. Indeed, it was in this way that some groups began to expand their operations and build their organizations. NGOs sought to remain relatively informal and loosely coupled both in terms of their internal operations and their relationships to other service providers. Management was often not regarded as particularly important, for decision making processes remaining, to one degree or another, essentially collaborative.

As financial, political, legal demands and pressures mounted, the need for all attention to management has grown. Service organizations have found themselves competing for available grants and contracts. Unfortunately, each new funding arrangement has brought new obligations that have added more stress. The irony was that at the same time that service providers saw themselves in one way or another as competitors, they were also becoming more and more interdependent and governments were becoming more interdependent with these service providers as well[31] Government could not provide directly the required services. Few NGOs possessed the slack resources to fill in gaps if other service providers failed or terminated programmes. No longer could governments, federal or provincial, think in terms of simple partnerships, a concept that conjures up a picture of two parties deciding to cooperate for a discrete purpose. Refugee services had become a network and given the increasing interdependencies among the participants, it could not be considered loosely coupled.

What is a Service Network and Why Does It Matter?

There is more involved in the rise of service networks than accidents of political and economic history. Popularized by international corporate operations, the idea of network operations has been to achieve maximum efficiency and minimum capitalization requirements by creating networks to produce and market a product or service rather than creating a single organization to do the job. It is also referred to in some settings as the concept of the "hollow corporation"[32] or in a more recent manifestation "the virtual corporation."[33]

One of the earlier and most commonly cited examples is Nike, the athletic shoe company.[34] The idea is that a company contracts with a firm in one country to make the shoes, with another to handle distribution, another to do marketing, and others to provide other necessary services. In such a network, one must manage not only each of the organizations in the network, sometimes referred to as nodes, but also the linkages among the nodes as well. If any unit in the network breaks down or if any of the relationships among units is blocked or fails, then the network manager must find a way to fill the gap and repair the system. Thus, the network is based on mutual interdependencies. The issue is not just the needs of the firm whose logo goes on the product, but the interests of all of the other participants in the process as well. The shoe manufacturer is dependent not only on the corporation that purchased the shoes for its product line, but the distributors, marketers, and others without whose contribution the buyer will fail and be unable to pay for the product or buy more. Hence the maintenance of the critical linkages among the units as well as the skills that the managers have within each of the units are essential to the success of the entire network and all of those who participate in it.

The advantages of networks seemed to be that they allow the organization that seeks a network operation two important options. First and most important for many firms, is that this mode of operation allows the network builder to shed costs, both operational and capital. The network is built with a series of contracts with each of the other units in the network. Each contractor is responsible for its own plant and equipment. More than that, it is responsible for the recruitment, training, management and compensation of its people. Indeed, even where a firm had capabilities in-house, executives often chose to spin those units off into separate businesses to shed costs and manage responsibilities. Taken far enough, this allows an organization to trim its costs to the minimum by slimming down internally to perform only those functions that could not be contracted out. Hence the firm was enhancing its own productivity and efficiency by retaining and consuming only those resources absolutely necessary to its operation. The efficiencies for the other units in the system are achieved by using the marketplace to control contractor costs. This of course assumes the existence of a competitive market in whatever goods or services required.

The second advantage cited by advocates for network operations is flexibility. At its best, the network relies upon all its units to use their creativity to address problems as they arise, as opposed to an integrated organization that must find solutions for all problems that come through the doors. If the contractors are unable to meet the new challenges, then one could simply drop that contractor and enter into an agreement with a new one. Supply and demand would presumably generate new potential contractors with the necessary capabilities and with employees possessing the needed skill sets to deal with the changing environment.

The public sector counterpart of these developments is what has been referred to as the "Hollow Government" pushed by politicians around the world bent on cutting the size of government ministries and budgets, privatizing to the greatest degree possible and employing as many private sector management tools as possible.[35] And these moves were supported by advocates of what has been termed the New Public Management.[36] Although contracting out for goods and services was an important part of governance for many years, it dramatically expanded during the 1980s and 1990s to the point where governments have become dependent upon not-for-profit and for-profit organizations to deliver most of its services and in which governments no longer have the capability of delivering any significant portion of many of the services it is mandated to make available.[37] The hope was that these public service networks would bring the same kinds of benefits as their private sector counterparts.

Caution! Network Management Is Different

However, some of the early advocates for network operations failed to recognize some of the challenges that such an approach entailed. Even those in the private sector found that the model posed "real risks," including the loss of control, dependence upon other organizations that might "drop the ball," the danger that a firm could become involved with organizations that could tarnish its reputation, the need to share sensitive information and the more complex the entanglements of the network, the more likely it is that participating units might "stumble."[38] Above all, the network mode of operation meant "new challenges for management."[39]

If the operation of tight networks posed difficulties for private sector groups, it meant even more complicated challenges for public service organizations. Looking back on early experiences with network efforts, Agranoff and McGuire concluded:

> One realization is becoming increasingly clear: the capacities required to operate successfully in network settings are different from the capabilities needed to succeed at managing a single organization. The classical, mostly intra-organizational inspired management perspective that has guided public administration for more than a century is simply inapplicable for multi-organizational, multi-governmental, and multi-sectoral forms of governing.[40]

And they added that "there are many more questions than answers in network management."[41] In addition to the planning, organizing, staffing, budgeting and other traditional functions within their own organizations, managers in networks must also be engaged in such specialized activities as "activation,", "framing," "mobilizing," and "synthesizing."[42] At a minimum, it is essential to recognize the level of sophistication and capabilities necessary to network management. However, many of the organizations involved in networks do not even have really effective contract management capabilities, let alone the more sophisticated requirements of network management. Building that kind of capability not only means assigning people now attending to direct service or direct supervision to new tasks, but requires the development of new skills or the hiring of people with the kinds of specialized knowledge necessary to meet the evolving challenges posed by network operations.

There are other challenges that are more complex for the public sector networks as well. Since the programmes involved are sometimes mandated services for needy clients, network failures mean that someone must be able to step in rapidly. Where government does not have the capability to do that, it must be able to find alternate providers, which is not always easy. For one thing, there may be important controls to be satisfied concerning access to and use of confidential client information, particularly where children or health care issues are involved as is common in refugee services.

Of course, the ability to take advantage of the claimed flexibility of networks requires that there be multiple suppliers available. However, as networks become tighter and more interdependent (some might say more efficient) there are often relative few alternates available. This is one of the reasons that those who have studied the matter have found that networks work best in resource rich environments, not the other way around.[43] Resource poor environments can increase competition among some network participants which, in turn, can undermine the levels of trust that are so essential to the effective operation of the network. Unfortunately, it has generally been the case in Canada in recent years that public service networks are anything but resource rich.

Clearly, networks in the public service arena, particularly in the world of refugee services, are very different from for-profit private sector networks. For one thing, they must respond to values other than economic efficiency and their success cannot be measured by profits. In addition to efficiency, public sector operations must meet obligations of economy, effectiveness, equity, responsiveness and responsibility.

Moreover, the people who provide the human resources that are at the very core of refugee service delivery are in a very different situation from private sector employees. Many refugee service organizations depend upon volunteer programmes to provide important elements of their programmes and also as a recruitment device for future employees. Development and operation of such volunteer programmes requires significant investment of time and energy because volunteer work is a concept that is not well known in many other countries. Employees may be paid, but they are often expected to provide far more hours and effort than a similar employee in a private firm. They are expected to do multiple duty in both direct service delivery and also in organizational maintenance and support. Moreover, they are expected to devote a significant amount of time and effort to participation in community programmes and projects within the immigrant and refugee communities they serve. All of these challenges shape the notion of leadership and management of the refugee service agencies, the other agencies, local governments and ministries that depend upon them, complex and challenging.

Leaders are stressed to spend more time on boundary spanning and fundraising at a time when the stresses within their organizations require more hands-on effort. If those within the organization or their board of directors feel that management and leadership are no longer attentive to concerns at the point of service and within their organization, that situation can fuel tension and even conflict within these NGOs.[44]

These are only some of the reasons why public service networks are more complex than their private sector analogs. With these differences in mind, let us turn to some of the more specific implications of increasing pressure to move into tightly interdependent service networks in the area of refugee services.

The Implications of Networks for Refugee Services

There are a number of implications that flow from the trends discussed thus far. The discussion of network issues to this point or the more pointed observations to follow are not intended to say that the idea of networks should be abandoned or that efforts should not be made to ensure that refugee service systems should be less than efficient. After all, there are increasing demands and decreasing resources to provide critically important services. And it is unlikely that we will move backward to a time of relatively autonomous organizations operating in loosely coupled partnerships. It is, however, necessary that we come to grips with what is required to lead and operate service networks. It is also important not to push the network model too far in ways that do not recognize the differences between the private, for-profit model and the realities of refugee service delivery in the public arena that is not about profit that is not solely concerned with efficiency.

The following preliminary observations about refugee service networks are not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, they are intended to indicate why it is important for all those who participate in refugee services to think further about the realities of life in the network. These illustrative issues include the importance of networks by design and not accident, the importance of capacity building for all participants, the challenges of governance of the network, the need to address resources in the network, the critical importance of accountability and the internal impacts on NGO service providers in the network.

Networks as Deliberate Choices

If government wants to have refugee services provided by a network instead of a group of loosely coupled NGO partners, that decision is best made forthrightly and should not be the result of uncontrolled policy drift. On the one hand, such networks cannot work well if the approach to their management is merely to seek to turn NGOs into standard units of ministries. The strength of refugee service organizations in Canada is that they are very different in nature, function and operation. On the other hand, the structure of networks and the processes by which they function matter.[45] At some point, it becomes important for all of the participants in the service networks to understand what the networks are, who is in the network, how it is structured and what formal or informal understandings guide the operation of the network.

In some instances, of course, the networks are relatively formal and are established in part at least by legislation, regulations, grants, or contracts. In other instances, they are much more informal. For example, while police departments are often not formally part of a network that centres on school based programmes, law enforcement agencies can often be helpful to or problematic for the refugee community in a variety of ways. The object of attempting to be clear in understanding networks is not to formalize them to the point where they lose their flexibility, but to ensure that it is clear that there is a network and to be clear how it works, or for that matter does not work.

Of course, if the networks are to be understood and their operation supported, the focus of effort must be clear. It is unlikely that the network challenges can be met and the basic goals of refugee services can be achieved if the focus on decision making is shifted primarily to law enforcement concerns such as efforts to block immigrant smuggling or illegal refugee claims. If the refugee networks become confused about the primary purpose, and focus only on stamping out ailments in the system, they may succeed in curing the disease only to have killed or seriously weakened the patient, the larger society that has benefited so much from the strength, intelligence, and creativity contributed by refugees and other new arrivals.

Capacity Building: An Essential Element for Ensuring Effective Service Network Operations

If the object is to create and rely upon a network to provide public services, then it is essential to consciously determine who will provide the resources for network maintenance and the management capabilities to ensure its effectiveness. It is in everyone's best interest to ensure that all of the units participating in the network have the requisite capabilities. In relatively tightly linked networks with high levels of interdependency, **the entire network is only as strong as its weakest component.**

In particular, there are several factors that require attention in capacity building for network operations. First, public service network management requires a fairly high degree of sophistication. In the first place, the backbone of most networks is a set of contracts or grants in the nature of contracts. Few organizations will claim that they have substantial contract management capabilities. Beyond that, while each participant in the network must manage its own internal operations, each must also participate in the management of the network and networks are subject to a host of uncertainties and contingencies.[46]

The resources to build the capacity to function in networks must come from somewhere. While associations of provider organizations can support some of the work, it is clear that governments must accept responsibility for a significant part of the capacity building effort. Just as the government must provide resources for network management, so do ministries, both federal and provincial must be provided with the types and amounts of resources needed to perform their roles. It is not possible to push more demands and large amounts of resources through ministries that have been cut to the point where they no longer have the capacity to perform their base functions, let alone new obligations. The first casualty of that kind of behaviour is decreasing support from those ministries to the NGOs for the delivery of services. The second will be loss of accountability.

Governance is a Critical Fact of Life: Whether It is Recognized as Such or Not

Attention must also be paid to the governance of such networks. As Milward puts it:

> The fact that a hollow state relies on networks is a weakness as well as a strength. . . Networks, the mainstay of the hollow state, are inherently weaker forms of social action. Because of the need to coordinate joint production, networks are inherently unstable over time. Managers continually are faced with problems that can lead to instability negotiating, coordinating, monitoring, holding third parties accountable and writing and enforcing contracts . . .[47]

Networks do not respond well to simple overhead controls. Besides, the creativity and drive that make NGOs such constructive partners for the provision of public services can easily be lost if they are not afforded an active role in the governance of the network.

All this having been said, there are power relationships among the units of a network and not simply from government to NGOs. Those who have studied the matter find that governance issues relating to power are often overlooked because it is assumed that the very idea of networks implies mutual cooperation and the assumption that special interests are to be "checked at the door."[48] However, anyone who has participated in meetings involving schools, refugee service agencies, provincial authorities and city officials knows that the representatives of each of these organizations come to the meeting with a sense of his or her specific mission and of the interests of the organization each represents in addition to their common concern for the needs of refugees.

While the lessons of the private sector networks may be of some assistance, such issues as accountability and the critical importance of high levels of trust between clients and service providers make the refugee service context very different. Among other reasons, the kinds of incentive systems that are often used to manage private operations are very different from the public setting. For all these reasons, it is important to consider how the networks in which one operates is governed. That means not only a consideration of cooperative efforts, but also a willingness to consider what happens when conflicts arise. It also requires thought about the kinds of issues that each of the participants in the refugee service network brings to the table.

The Nagging Problem of Resource Scarcity and Interdependence

One of the serious problems facing refugee service networks is the difficulty of resource shortages amidst increasing demands for services. The kinds of cuts in federal funding, in transfer payments to the provinces and reductions in support at the provincial level for local service providers and local units of government have presented precisely the kinds of circumstances, that those who study networks suggest, are counterproductive. They are counterproductive in part because they provide incentives for NGOs to compete with one another for resources in the form of more limited number of grants and contracts. Moreover, where the funds for existing grants or contracts are reduced, providers are faced with a need to seek a larger number of grants or contracts to yield the same level of funding, which is essential if those organizations are to be able to support their paid staff and their operations. Of course, each of those grants or contracts comes with administrative costs and reporting obligations as well as the need to perform the specific activities set forth in the funding agreement. Thus, the NGO is leveraged to produce more for the same amount of funding or less. Not only that, but the organization must find a way to release officers to do the additional work on the funding applications as well as administration of the additional programmes if the applications are successful.

There is the additional problem that the issue of resources in a network context is not simply a question of the resources available to a particular service provider organization. It also has to do with the cumulative resources available to the network. Thus, the dramatic reductions in funds from the provincial level in British Columbia to municipalities primarily affects police and fire agencies. That, in turn, means that there are fewer training dollars and less time available for programmes that refugee groups would like to operate with those emergency services units. Similarly, the issue of resources in Ontario includes educational funding cuts, changes in English as a Second Language (ESL) programme eligibility that in effect are programme cuts and the crisis in the health care programmes, as well as restrictions on access to certain kinds of benefit programmes for applicants at certain stages of the refugee claimant process. All of these funding issues affect, for example, multicultural liaison officers based in the schools.

The ironic fact is that a reduction in available services can intensify the pressures within refugee families and ultimately produce greater demand if the family moves into crisis or if the children begin to manifest behavioural difficulties in school or even find themselves in trouble with law enforcement authorities. It is important to consider not only the resource base of a particular unit of a network, but also the general resource picture of the network relative to its responsibilities and the population it is expected to serve. Another irony arises from the fact that resource needs are increased when an enforcement oriented emphasis is undertaken, since it requires more application materials and more record keeping to ensure that applicants are truly qualified to receive the services and to protect against misuse of the system. Hence, the costs of service delivery in the network increase for the same level of services.

Of course, one of these network-wide resource issues has to do with the problem of network management. For reasons noted earlier, successful network operations require capacity building. That capacity must include the wherewithal to conduct network governance, to carry out essential coordination and buffering among network units. Then there is the need for the capacity in the network to handle accountability concerns which become increasingly complex in network operations.

The Accountability Challenge

Virtually everyone who has studied networks agrees that accountability in such settings is particularly difficult. There are several reasons. For one thing, it has been argued that "The leakage of accountability in the hollow state and the lack of government capability or willingness to effectively manage its contracts with nonprofits is a major problem."[49] This issue of "leakage" is a concept popularized by Bardach and Lesser who argue that the fact the "leakage of authority" that occurs when networks are created and operated collaboratively offers flexibility, but it also makes accountability much more complex.[50] Because authority and responsibility are parcelled out within the network, it is difficult to get a clear picture of how well the network is performing as well as the effectiveness of individual units within the network. The NGOs within the network are accountable not to only the governments and private funding agencies at all levels who provide resources, but also to their boards of directors, to the other member units of the network and ultimately to the refugees and their families for whom the entire system was created in the first place. The ministries, in turn, face other accountability requirements for the operation of the network, as the recent debates over the operation of Human Resources Development Canada indicate.

With regard to ministries, one of the problems is that the nature of discussions of accountability within the context of the New Public Management have become more complex generally, quite apart from the additional issues presented by service delivery networks. It is clear that while ministerial responsibility is a very positive concept that is central to Canadian democracy, there seem to have been changes in the way that this traditional mechanism of accountability operates in the contemporary environment.[51] Beyond that there has been an increasing tendency in Canada to employ legal tools of accountability. It is ironic that during the very period when Canadians were increasingly using the courts to test government policy and behaviour, efforts have been made to restrict access by refugee claimants and other new arrivals to call upon the courts for substantive judicial review. In the midst of this set of dynamics, administrative reform efforts called for market oriented tools of accountability to be employed, such as outcome measures, customer satisfaction assessments and broad performance management techniques. However, there is a good deal to be done to consider how these various devices apply to public service networks.

Internal Impacts on Refugee Service Organizations

All of these factors add up to produce a variety of impacts within individual refugee service organizations. The facts of life in service networks add stresses as executives spend more time on boundary spanning obligations and funding issues which takes them away from the organization's primary mission, straining relationships with workers and sometimes with boards of directors.[52] It is often the case that networks expect that member organizations will, as one private sector network advocate recommends, "offer the best and brightest. Put your best people into these relationships."[53] However, doing so frequently brings stress inside the home organization.

Even more than that, however, is the importance of the presence of leverage pressures in the networks. The fact is that the use of grants and contracts with not-for-profit is viewed in part at least as a way of leveraging greater impact from the same dollars than what could be developed in a government organization and competition for resources makes it possible to leverage more.[54] That additional impact must come from the organization and its people. And because refugee service workers are so committed to their mission, they often willingly accept obligations to attend evening meetings, invitations to weekend events in the refugee and immigrant communities and emergency requests for help at virtually any time. However, there are costs to the service providers and their families for this commitment and responsiveness.

Unfortunately, however, there is often a tendency to underestimate these and other real costs relative to actual revenue that comes into a service organization from grants and contracts in addition to the costs mentioned earlier having to do with the actual preparation of proposals and administration of grants or contracts. Failing to incorporate the investments of time and energy required for grant writing and contract administration in assessments of resource commitment for service delivery is a serious miscalculation of true cost. Similarly, assuming contributions from other units of the network that may not in reality be able to continue support at current levels let alone to enhance is a further problem. These errors may produce overestimated resources and underestimated obligations. And just as ministries and local government agencies cannot contribute funds that they do not have, NGOs cannot provide service commitments that they cannot support without damaging their people and their organizations. These extraordinary efforts can be mounted during emergencies or for relatively limited periods, but if they continue for too long, they will take a toll.

Even assuming that a network participant is not overextended, it is still important that the people within the organization be equipped by training and support to deal with the stresses that the network is producing. For example, as programme eligibility rules become more stringent, it is important that personnel be trained to meet those new situations in order to better serve refugee clients. It is particularly helpful if people from other parts of the network, including government units, can be trained together. Unfortunately, in organizations, both governmental and nongovernmental, that are under financial stress, training and professional development is often one of the first areas to be cut if indeed such support was ever available. Moreover, apart from training programmes, few organizations in the network provide organizational renewal support. It should be no surprise to find that burnout is a problem even among committed service providers. That accumulated stress can manifest in increased conflict within organizations as well as in more personal ways.

Of course, one of the dangers that can come from network stresses is a sense by service workers of a loss of identity. In the refugee service arena, many workers came to particular organizations because of a strong commitment to what the agency does. If the organization alters its directions or seeks to change its mission and character because of the demands of networks, there is a danger of internal conflict. The same is true if a board of trustees, believing that it should focus primarily on the demands of the network, hires executives who are, or who are perceived to be, more committed to the network than they are to their own organization and the people it was designed to serve. If the executive decides to focus primary attention on entrepreneurial efforts to entertain new programmes as opportunities for the organization, the message may be that the existing programmes are not important. That can be devastating to paid employees or volunteers who have worked long and hard to develop the ongoing programmes and make them work in the face of challenges. These kinds of changes are particularly difficult in refugee services where successful performance depends upon trust that takes years to build in the refugee and immigrant communities. Success also depends upon a sense of continuity and continuing service even though it is clear that the network context and the larger environment within which service networks function is turbulent.

Conclusion

To those who work in the schools, clinics, settlement offices, or legal settings, it may sometimes appear that they operate almost alone. For those who work in local NGOs providing particular types of services, it can appear that they are struggling to create and deliver services out of what is available locally to meet a great need with little assistance. From the perspective of government officials at the provincial level or in Ottawa, the challenge is to address some 25,000 new refugee arrivals each year and to provide some level of support for the service systems on which those new Canadians must depend for their settlement and integration into society. But the reality is that all of these people are participants in refugee service networks. And what each can or cannot accomplish on behalf of refugees is in very important respects related to how those service networks function.

Certainly the networks are affected by the political, economic and legal pressures in their environment. There is little question that political pressures to constrain grants of asylum and to take an approach that is heavily oriented toward enforcement complicates the tasks of both the refugees and the service providers who seek to assist them. The set of economic cutbacks at all levels and across the full range of agencies and services has placed a severe strain on those providers as well. And certainly, the possibility of significantly more complex and restrictive policies at the federal and provincial levels in a variety of social service programmes adds to the pressure on the organizations within the service networks.

All that having been said, the mission is very much worth the effort. Surely everyone involved can agree that it is critical that the emphasis must be on how to provide the best quality services in the requisite quantity to ensure that new Canadians can build their new lives and make the kind of constructive contributions to the society that so many refugees and immigrants have before. Challenges have always brought out the very best in the kinds of people who dedicate their time and talents to refugee services.

However, in order to perform that mission in the contemporary environment, it is important to recognize that the people and the individual organizations are indeed parts of service networks, that those networks have a variety of common characteristics and those characteristics in turn have consequences. Without losing sight of one's own objectives and those of the home organization, it is important to consider those networks and their consequences in the day-to-day challenge to welcome new Canadians.

Those of us who have been in a position to learn so much from Canadian refugee service providers continue to watch and to learn as the dedicated public servants, NGO members, and individual providers meet these challenges. ■

Notes

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3. Elinor Caplan, "Remarks to the Canadian Club," Vancouver, British Columbia, September 9, 1999, http://cicnet.ci.gc.ca/english/ press/speech/canclub-e.html, p. 4.
4. Elinor Caplan, "Remarks to a News Conference on Year 2000 Immigration Levels," November 1, 1999, http://cicnet.ci.gc.ca/english/press/levels2000-e.html, p. 2.
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16. See Rosemary Byrne and Andrew Shacknove, "The Safe Country Notion in European Asylum Law," Harvard Human Rights Journal, 9 (Spring) 1996, pp. 185-228.
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44.See Saidel and Sharon Harlan, "Contracting and Patterns of Nonprofit Governance", Nonprofit Management and Leadership 8 (3), pp. 243-259.

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46. "In brief, network contexts increase the range of potentially manipulable variables subject to influence by public managers thus apparently enhancing the importance of management. At the same time, however, networks also increase uncertainty and decrease institutional fixedness for all actors in the setting. Managers have more levers available, but so do others." Ibid.

47.H. Brinton Milward, "Introduction to Symposium on the Hollow State: Capacity, Control, and Performance in Interorganizational Settings," Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory 6 (April 1996): 194

48. Agranoff and McGuire, op. cit., p. 18.

49.Milward, The Changing Character of the Public Sector, op. cit., p. 87.

50.Eugene Bardach and Cara Lesser, Accountability in Human Service Collaboratives For What? And To Whom? Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory 6 (April) 1996, pp. 197-224.

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52. See Saidel, "Contracting and Patterns of Nonprovit Governance."

53. See Byrne, op. cit. p. 98.

54.Laurence O'Toole discusses a variation on the concept of leveraging, but one that is quite different from the refugee services case. "Hollowing the Infrastructure: Revolving Loan Programmes and Network Dynamics in the American States," Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory 6 (April 1996: 225 at 233-239). □

Background Information on the Centre for Refugee Studies

The Centre for Refugee Studies (CRS) is an organized research unit of York University. Founded in 1988, the Centre for Refugee Studies is successor to the Refugee Documentation Project created in 1981 for the conservation and analysis of research documents and data collected by Operation Lifeline during the crisis of Indochinese Boat People. In 1991, CRS was designated as a Centre of Excellence by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

The Centre for Refugee Studies fosters interdisciplinary and collaborative research in all of its undertakings. The efforts of CRS are focused in areas related to a comprehensive research programme expanding from theoretical to institutional research. In carrying out this research, CRS networks with Canadian and international development agencies and academic institutes. CRS invites scholars from abroad to participate in the research. Canadian and international students are supported by CRS to undertake field studies and conduct related research. Joint research activities with institutions in the developing counties are underway. CRS plays a significant role in an advisory capacity with Canadian government and other agencies.

Creating a "Community of Learners" Through Cultural Mediation: A School's Perspective

Patricia Irving and Claudia María Vargas

Abstract

Schools in diverse settings pose leadership challenges with the principal. They also afford opportunities. A principal who asserts a leadership role and takes the risk of reculturing the school engages students and teachers as well as the community at large in the educational endeavor. Through a case study of Rideau High School, Ottawa, this article explores interventions that help build a "community of learners." In this case, the principal taps on the uniqueness of the community by linking outside and inside resources in the school through cultural interpreters.

Résumé

Les écoles situées dans des environnements multiculturels posent des défis de leadership aux directeurs d'école. Elles fournissent aussi des opportunités. Un directeur qui impose un rôle de leader et prend le risque de remodeler la culture de l'école, entraîne avec lui les élèves et les enseignants, ainsi que la communauté en général, dans la belle aventure de l'éducation. À travers l'étude du cas de l'école secondaire Rideau (High School), située à Ottawa, cet article examine les interventions qui aident à construire une « communauté d'apprenants ». Dans ce cas précis, la directrice exploite le caractère unique de la communauté en reliant les ressources externes et internes, à l'intérieur de l'école, par le truchement d'interprètes culturels.

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Introduction

According to Nieto (2000), education for a culturally diverse community is a process and it is pervasive. It affects all school structures and because schools are so much at the heart of what we call community, virtually all other aspects of social, political and economic life as well. Of course, districts and schools experiencing increases in linguistic and cultural diversity may and do respond differently to those challenges and opportunities. In this, as in other aspects of educational life, principals can play important leadership roles and are faced with important responsibilities.

This article discusses one school and its principal's efforts to meet these challenges. It is a case study of the programmes and leadership approach developed at Rideau High School in Ottawa. It focuses on the fact that meeting the challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities presented by growing numbers of refugees and immigrants requires leadership efforts beyond business as usual. It is critical to create a community of learners built upon the strengths of diversity and the involvement of students, parents, teachers and community organizations working together in new ways. In our efforts to achieve these results, we have found that Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLOs) have played a significant role in promoting and supporting a community of learners among immigrant and refugee students and their families (Vargas 1998, 1999, 1999a).

First, this article introduces the community of Rideau High School. Second, we visit the community of learners concept and the interventions we have developed in cooperation with the Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLOs) to achieve that goal. Finally, we present a brief analysis of what works and why. While recognizing the role of the principal, it is important to address the need to expand MLO resources as well.

Based on this discussion, we conclude that school principals who embrace a leadership role with certain features contribute to a community of learners in schools with significant numbers of refugee and immigrant students. Among those leadership features that contribute to a community of learners are: a) tapping creativity among staff; b) taking risks to reculture the school culture (Hargreaves and Fullan 1998); c) daring to "fight for lost causes" while holding on to hope (Hargreaves and Fullan 1998); d) upholding cultural competence; and e) building on the ability to deal with complexity.

Welcome to Rideau High School

Rideau is an "inner-city" school of 800 students in the northeast end of Ottawa. It has been designated as a "Focus" school and as such receives funding to provide breakfast, bus tickets and other staples for needy students. The population is diverse both culturally (with 45 language groups represented—the three languages most commonly spoken after English are Arabic, Somali and Portuguese) and economically. Some students come from the Vanier area, where 70 percent of the population lives below the poverty line and others are from families associated with embassies. Many students are self-supporting; some are single parents. These latter students feel fortunate to have their children in a pre-school programme in the Rideau Child Care Centre, a facility governed by the Day Care Act, attached to the school. Many of these students proceed to college and university after high school and without exception, all maintain that they feel that by continuing their education and by giving their children a head-start on literacy they will be able to "break the cycle."

As well, Rideau is home to five classes of Adult ESL (English as a Second Language) students. Their programme is funded by the federal government. Our students occasionally assist in these classes as "reading buddies" or computer advisors.

For the past year and a half, Patricia Irving has held the position as principal at Rideau High School.[1] "My mission was to transform the image, but most important the culture of the school so that it would be inviting to all community members and would encourage all of us inside to become actively involved in the school and out as learners." The young learn from elders (as well as from teachers) while elders play an active role imparting their knowledge and experience to young ones. Although there is a great deal of overlap in the liaison work with various parties in this complex learning enterprise, the work of the Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLOs) is apparent and significant throughout. What is evident is that their work is always for the good of students—to keep them in school and then to provide them with equality of opportunity. They are also aware of the importance of the special needs and challenges some students face and help us to address these equity issues.

What is the Principal's Challenge and What is Required to Meet It?

Before turning to the specific ways in which we have worked to develop a learning community at Rideau, let us consider briefly what the literature suggests is important to this kind of change process: first, in terms of the changes involved and second, in terms of the attitudes and skills required to meet them.

Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) argue that in responding to such challenges with sensitivity and commitment, principals may have to explore management approaches other than "business as usual." Buffering and fostering a community of learners calls for a principal who can integrate certain components—tapping creativity among staff, taking risks to reculture the school culture and daring to fight for lost causes while holding on to hope (Hargreaves and Fullan 1998). Although seemingly a risky proposition, the challenge of stimulating the creative talent of administrators, teachers, parents and learners to foster a community of learners among immigrant and refugee students is essential to advance the Canadian policy of a multicultural society (Elliot and Fleras 1992). Above all, it is essential if we are to meet the needs of all students, including refugees and immigrants. Although there is uncertainty and insecurity in dealing with new cultures, new languages and new world views, the prospects of doing nothing are unthinkable. From a more positive viewpoint, meeting the needs of refugees is a way of putting our moral and ethical principles to work towards social justice (Freire 1970, 1998, 1998a; McLaren 1998). Engaging the community means that all of us reap benefits from the contributions of the many ethnocultural groups represented by our students. As Hargreaves and Fullan put it,

> [T]he principal's task is to combat cultures of fear and hopelessness. . . this can be achieved by developing strong collaborative cultures among the staff and with the community to build a sense of hope, security and strategy in which good things can be achieved educationally despite the conditions. (1998, p. 110)

Batsis (1987) points to several characteristics common to principals in successful culturally diverse schools. They include: "high levels of job satisfaction, being involved with the teaching staff, and concerned about and involved with the future direction of education," (Batsis 1987, p. 7). More specifically, the effort to re-culture the school calls for school principals to exert leadership to implement changes in curriculum, school climate and pedagogy (Lee 1993). Of course, for principals to deal effectively in diverse school settings, they need to have cultural competence. That does not mean detailed knowledge of all cultures, but respect for and sensitivity to differences among cultures. They also need to work toward developing communication skills appropriate to deal with the complexity posed by representation of non-western world views in the school community (Batsis 1987). Reculturing, in sum, is a process by which principals integrate rational as well as social processes.

> Reculturing by contrast [to restructuring], involves changing the norms, values, incentives, skills and relationships in an organization to support (and prod) people to work differently together. The goal is to create more collaborative work cultures. Reculturing does make a difference in teaching and learning. The cumulative evidence is that students learn much better when principals, teachers and others develop a professional learning community among themselves, focus on improving teaching and learning, examine and act on assessment data in relation to what students are learning, and connect with external communities and resources to support them in their efforts. (Hargreaves and Fullan 1998, pp. 118-119)

To be sure, in the current environment school administrators must meet the challenge to implement change and generate opportunities for growth in the face of difficult barriers that include: decreased funding; increase in demands for services beyond standard schooling; the needs to offer English as a second language classes; pressures to ensure availability of child care; and the urgency to gain the trust of a sometimes disenchanted community. Such a setting calls for a leadership style infused with "hope" and a willingness to "fight for lost causes."

From a practitioner's perspective, Pat Irving identifies other equally important challenges to school principals. Among them, she considers the following crucial: supporting ongoing communication with parents and guardians; creating and fostering a safe environment for all learners and staff; providing opportunities for professional development and in-service (around issues of diversity and community outreach for staff); ensuring that no student falls through the cracks; and accountability to staff, students and parents. These elements call on a principal "to operate within parameters of funding, resources and school board backing for initiatives." As a school leader, Irving sees her responsibilities to include "embe[dding] a philosophy of acceptance, equity and accountability into all aspects of school life." Just as important to her is "to foster school-community relations and partnerships."

According to Hargreaves and Fullan, "principals will be much more effective (and healthier) if they develop and pursue high hopes as they re-culture their schools and their relationships to the outside" (1998, p. 120). This need for a hopeful climate calls upon principals to be leaders who project, as well as embrace, and convey hope to their students, teachers, parents and the extended community. Such an approach is particularly important when working with refugees who have often felt betrayed, disenfranchised and violated by government officials in their homelands and sometimes even in their new country. What factors, then, facilitate engaging the school community and the community at large? The next section explores four areas in which we have restructured the school community to integrate the MLO Programme as a way to promote and support a community of learners: a) interaction with families; b) staff; c) students; and d) other social service professionals—efforts supported and endorsed by school principals.

Building "A Community of Learners"

What is a community of learners and how has Rideau sought to achieve it? Let us consider first the elements of a learning community, the voices of families in it, the critical participation of students, the role of school staff and essential relationships with other service providers.

The Elements of a Community of Learners

In a community of learners, everyone's talents are tapped--parents, community members and leaders, teachers and non-teaching staff—to collaborate in the educational enterprise (Kahin 1998; Phuntsog 1998; Richman 1998). It is a fluid and permeable conception of schools. Instead of viewing schools as closed and impervious to the surrounding environment, an open systems approach is embraced. What goes on outside the school clearly affects what happens inside it. Educators cannot do the job alone. And, beyond that, it is clear that in a rapidly changing and complex world: "To educate an increasingly diverse student population, schools must look to families and communities to help in fostering academic success" (Osterling et al. 1999, p. 64).

In such a community view, the deficit approach that sees students and parents who do not speak English as deficient is abandoned in favour of a growth model. In a growth model, parents and students who speak languages other than the dominant language are viewed as community members who bring to the school their knowledge and experience as experts of their native languages and cultures. Not only can first language skills be used to foster second language learning, but refugees from diverse backgrounds can help each other acquire or improve literacy. "Immigrant families are eager to participate in the education of their children by using their language abilities, skills and funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez, cited in Osterling et al. 1999, p. 64). Although refugee and immigrant students' educational needs differ, a learning organization is flexible in serving those needs while benefiting from the wealth of experiences and know-how or professional expertise they bring.

A principal whose leadership style views his or her school as a learning community is open to input and contributions from any representative of the community. Rather than a top-down approach in which top management dictates, the principal is a leader who invites everyone to join and partake in the educational journey. In such a context, the human and personal interaction is decisive, whether it is with parents or students who bring with them other frames of reference, talents, expertise, as well as baggage from their refugee experience. The principal sends a message of a welcoming environment in many subtle ways, but may trigger the opposite effect just as strongly. How then, can principals re-culture their organizations to maintain high academic standards and ongoing programmes while accommodating the needs of refugee and immigrant students and their families as well as gain from their talents? The next section explores the ways that Rideau High School does it.

Giving Voice to the Voiceless: Interactions with Families

Creating a welcoming and inviting environment for parents and families plays a significant role in engaging parental participation in the school (Holman 1997). According to Holman this can be accomplished by "Lessening [the] intimidation factor and removing the language [and culture] barrier" (Ibid, p. 37). There are a number of ways that MLOs champion parents' input and dreams and desires for their children's education. Though not an exhaustive list, these are some of their interventions. They organize "parent discussion groups" and suggest reading materials for discussion. Second, "MLOs help us to be proactive, telephoning parents of ninth grade students to welcome them to the school." This contact also helps in anticipating specific cultural and religious concerns. Third, to ensure a broad representation of the families in the school MLOs encourage parental involvement in School Council.

Fourth, due to their excellent communication skills and insightfulness, MLOs identify issues of concern, e.g. police presence in schools in order that we can clarify, explain and allay fears. Fifth, they assist in explaining the Canadian school system and the differences in schooling in their home country and Canada. Since some of our parents are refugees and have little or no experience with a school system, MLOs can help explain equivalency determinations. This means that the teacher-counsellorsors sometimes have to determine whether the student has the language skills and the pre-requisite knowledge to be successful in the courses that they select. In some instances they have to make hard (difficult) decisions when the learning that had occurred in their own country does not align with the prior learning of their Canadian counterparts. MLOs also help ease the reluctance of parents to send their children to vocational schools, for example. The reluctance is often due to a sincere desire to give their children every opportunity to take courses that lead to post-secondary education. There appears to be somewhat more reluctance among immigrant parents than most other parents towards sending their children to a vocational school. There is also the (erroneous) perception that all students attending vocational schools have behavioural problems

In general, they help parents make informed educational decisions by explaining streamed courses and course selection. They can call home to explain the permission form required for testing before it arrives home, as well as interpret test results to parents. To help children with special needs and their families, MLOs attend, as integral team members, the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process to determine whether children need special education services, or placement in a gifted programme. Teachers benefit from the help of the MLOs when ESL issues need to be addressed and the parents' input is also necessary.

Other ways in which MLOs facilitate communication with parents are in conveying educational or behavioural concerns to the parents in an ethically sensitive and respectful manner in which confidentiality is protected. MLOs explain effective discipline practices used in Canadian schools. If a child is experiencing problems or off the school yard, MLOs assist in getting a plan of action in place that the parents can understand and support. Seventh, MLOs help school officials ensure the general well-being of the child. For instance, informing parents that their child has bumped his or her head on the play structure and, although the child may appear to be fine, he or she should be monitored at home.

By lending assistance in bridging the cultural as well as linguistic gap between parents and children, MLOs also translate the desire of the adolescent to enjoy a social life away from the home (as illustrated in some of the examples described below). They explain custody policies to parents in conflict. Last, but equally important, MLOs provide counselling when a student is self-supporting.

In sum, the interventions of the MLOs, in general, give voice to the voiceless by creating an inviting school atmosphere for parents and community members, or supporting what Vargas (1999a) calls "institutional communications building" and "institutional adaptation." "Personal outreach in the form of home visits, phone calls and personal greetings at school events also will send a strong message of welcome" (Holman 1997, p. 37). These are ways that we infuse hope and encourage parents to overcome fears and make their voices heard in what can appear to be lost causes.

Students at the Heart of the Learning Community: Promoting Academic Success While Decreasing Racial, Ethnic, and Religious Tensions

In school, socio-cultural and religious factors affect academic performance (Zhou and Bankston III 1998; Nieto 2000; deMarrais and LeCompte 1999). The refugee experience may also affect the school experience (Leavitt and Fox 1993; Boothby 1994; Lübben1996; Hyman et al. 1996; Richman 1998; Phuntsog 1998; Bayer and Brown 1999; Vargas 1999). Since the policy of education in Canada is to afford equal educational opportunities, mainstream schooling is not enough. In working through differences, the MLOs have played a central role in resolving unintended but conflictive messages that impede or detour academic endeavours. As cultural interpreters, they are important resources for students with whom they can identify. Since some MLOs were refugees themselves, they understand the struggles in the acculturation process, which can be as difficult for immigrants also. Equally important, MLOs provide reassurance and direction when students have concerns of an academic, social, or personal nature. Thus, students seek MLOs out to get help in conveying their opinions about various issues to their teachers. Consider the following examples.

Challenges on how assignments can have meaning for the students are explained through the MLOs. For example, writing assignments on Christian holidays may be totally meaningless for students from other religions, making the assignment an insurmountable task. MLOs also help students problem solve about appropriate academic courses. Physical education for instance has been substituted for computer science courses for Muslim students with the principal's sanction.

In the North American educational context, development of leadership skills is very important. However, for newcomers, the language and culture may lead them to retreat from visible roles. Through the MLOs, students avail themselves of leadership opportunities. Among these, was a racism awareness camp organized for 25 high school students last year. Sometimes certain cultural groups ask us to recommend students to represent that group at round table discussions, community forums etc. In other instances, with the encouragement of the MLO, students will have the confidence to put their names forward for student government positions. In other cases, immigrant and refugee students who have blossomed through the interventions of the MLOs, now assist and partake in peer mediation. Since the inception of the programme, students have asserted leadership roles in doing presentations to staff on events such as Ramadan and Eid (Eid is an important and big celebration at the ending of the fasting period [Ramadan]). Last year when Christmas, Eid, and Chanukkah all fell within days of each other, our students presented the commonalities that exist among all three at a school ceremony.

Other educational considerations with which MLOs help students is in facilitating access to resources. They connect students with experts in certain fields to aid them in thinking about career choices. The library and computer resources are no longer foreign when MLOs provide tours or arrange schedules to work in the computer rooms. MLOs also encourage students to give a cultural focus to their independent study in senior courses, for their own pride and the enrichment of others. "[G]reat strides in learning, including basic skills can be expected when instruction is compatible with natal-culture . In reading instruction, for example, the inclusion of students' prior life and cultural experiences was found to enhance their comprehension and critical skills (Mason and Au, cited in Phuntsog 1993, p. 38).

But MLOs are also available to intervene when students' social or personal life affects their academic work. Interracial or interdenominational dating sometimes erupts in conflict at home. Even the idea of dating may be severely sanctioned by students from more traditional cultures. In sum, as "principal—and previously as vice-principal—I have seen the dramatic impact of the MLOs." As I quote the principal at my previous position: "The arrival of the MLO at our school resulted in a racial conflict free school within a period of three months."

Interactions with School Staff: Towards A Multicultural Pedagogy

Cultural mediators, in this case MLOs, respond to concerns and questions school staff may have around cultural issues which impact on students' participation. Through their expertise, they provide advice to teachers regarding selection of reading materials for appropriateness of content or potential for parent disapproval. Specifically, issues arise regarding dissection of frogs in biology classes. Rather than doing it on a real animal, the school has purchased computer programmes that accommodate religious precepts regarding dissecting animals. Teachers have become sensitive and understanding of feast days observed by Muslims Bhuddists, as well as Jewish or Christian holidays, by not scheduling tests or field trips on those days. Since observing Ramadan requires fasting from sunrise to sunset, teachers have learned not to place physical demands on those fasting.

An important role of the MLOs is to educate the staff. They do this by providing information regarding faith and cultural practices. Last December, Jewish, Christian, Muslim feasts coincided, so we held an information session highlighting the commonalties. MLOs often make presentations at staff meetings or provide in-service training for staff. At the same time, our staff educate students and parents about Canadian holidays and invite them to join us, for example, in Remembrance Day ceremonies.

When creating a student's individualized learning plan (ILP), MLOs are an integral part of the team. Thus, they help members of the school Multi-Disciplinary Team navigate through cultural nuances that may have important impact on the diagnosis (or course of action) made by social workers, psychologists and guidance counselors. When a need arises, they may make a home visit to the family to gain insight about what the real issue is.

The academic activities organized by teachers incorporate a crucial cultural and linguistic component. The MLOs support these activities with translation for Student-Led Conferences. In fact, MLOs of all linguistic groups attend. They provide translation for some items in the school newsletter and make signs for certain ceremonies and school events. Student leadership is tapped by helping teachers in the creation and sponsorship of Multicultural Club activities. Given that there is a police presence in our schools to educate our communities, we anticipate the responses of fear by refugee children and their parents with the assistance of the MLOs. We work with the police by explaining refugees' apprehension of authorities due to abuses they may have endured in their homeland. Sensitivities regarding the canine unit have also been worked out since routinely "drug dogs" come into the schools to check. The MLO will caution officials that Muslims are uncomfortable with dogs around.

Let us consider one other example that illustrates how MLOs' practical help can be useful in preventing difficult or potentially embarrassing situations. Irving explains: "We had planned a trust exercise at our ninth grade orientation camp. Each student was to fall backwards into the arms of a classmate. When the MLO saw how the game was to take place, she quickly and discreetly, drew to the side the Muslim girls who would not have wanted to do this exercise with boys. They all proceeded as a group to enjoy the game (girls with girls)."

In sum, MLOs positively affect the pedagogy by helping teachers in various aspects and thus avoid potential conflict. However, in order for MLOs to be accessible to teachers, MLOs must be given access to the internal e-mail system so that teachers and MLOs have ready communication.

Working Relationships with Service Providers: Services that Reinforce a Multicultural Commitment

The effort to create a community of learners entails creating linkages with community organizations and professionals in other social service arenas. Some of these liaisons are for the purpose of supporting academic endeavors while others are intended to nurture the well-being of all learners. Academic work at school is advanced through the homework groups created at community centers. MLOs have been influential in the implementation of these programmes. These efforts have been complemented by the work of cultural groups with whom MLOs have worked diligently encouraging them to recognize academic excellence. For instance, the Somali cultural group awards certificates in recognition of academic achievement and grants scholarships.

Research in support of maintaining the native language abounds (Genesse 1994; Christian et al. 1997; Nieto 2000; among many others). In this respect, MLOs have been instrumental in liaising between heritage language programmes and regular day school programmes to ensure that students maintain and strengthen their native language.

The link between good health and academic performance is one that we take seriously. However, refugee children and their families may not know where or how to access services, or may lack the language skills to communicate with health care providers. In many instances MLOs accompany parents to the doctor, dentist or hospital. They assist, according to Irving, with difficult health care issues to more common ones, "from the toothache that requires attention to making an adolescent aware of the services of the Board sexual-health clinics in schools."

It can be said that MLOs are multitalented individuals who have the capacity to manoeuvre through a number of social, psychological or emotional issues as they help students and parents find the appropriate services. Among those is providing intervention for students and parents around drug-related issues. They also help when involvement of the Children's Aid Society (CAS) becomes necessary.

Although it is more common to have separate programmes for children and for adult learners, at our school MLOs create opportunities for both age groups to interact with each other. This is done through connections for our parents in LINC (Language Instruction for New Comers) programme and our students at the school. Auerback asserts that learning "is a collective process, where participants share and analyze experiences together in order to address concerns, relying on each other's strengths and resources rather than addressing problems individually or relying on outside experts to solve them" (cited in Osterling 1999, p. 65). In our school, the presence of parents and grandparents who are students in the ESL classes, enhances the school as a learning community for all. Their presence as role models for the younger students has had a positive effect. At the same time, high school students reap the benefit of contributing to the learning of their elders as well as the children in the child care centre housed in the school.

MLOs as Role Models: The Highlight of Last Year

When the MLO at Rideau High School became a Canadian citizen, we held a party for her. Many students were thrilled to share stories of their citizenship ceremony. Others asked how to begin the process.

The Challenges Yet Before Us

For the future, we envision the opportunity to serve more students and serve them better. At the same time, our entire school community also learns, grows and develops. We see the need to serve students, but not just on a "case by case" basis. It is clear that school principals must adopt appropriate leadership styles to meet the particular challenges of diversity. Nonetheless, it is equally clear that principals and their staff, however skilled, are unlikely to succeed without help. While the contributions of students, parents and the community are important, it is also essential to address the need for cultural liaison and interpretation.

For example, it is sometimes difficult to keep our communication with families clear and consistent. In some instances, parents bring personal friends with them to help. However, there are "too many people involved," not all seeing the issues in the same light. Because of the Freedom of Information Act, we, school officials, cannot always discuss all of the details of the case. While some cultures see an individual student's issues as of concern to a group beyond the nuclear family, an ability to share information is constrained. Even more difficult, we need to preclude thorny ethical dilemmas that arise when relatives, students or community members are used to translate (See Vargas 1998). With the assistance of the MLOs, we can ensure confidentiality and effective communication. These are only a few of the many reasons we need their help.

Of course, MLO's resources are relatively limited. The availability of more MLOs could help us develop the trust that would allow parents to permit their children to avail themselves of opportunities of which they are now skeptical, such as leadership camps, educational exchange programmes, or after school programmes. As Phuntsog asserts "After school community-oriented programmes must be developed to forge stronger school-community relationships" (1993, p. 38). If more personnel were devoted to this initiative, we could capitalize more on the individual strengths of the MLOs. For example, the success of our literacy initiatives at Rideau could certainly be enhanced by the contribution of one of the MLOs who has her master's in library science. Other MLOs could go into classes to lecture on "world religions" or "world issues," if they were not so few in numbers and with such a huge mandate.

Conclusion

As with any case study, this discussion of how we have tried to build a community of learners at Rideau offers lessons for analysis and for possible use elsewhere. Even so, each school and each community is unique and it is an important lesson from this study that those elements of uniqueness are important to consider in any leadership effort. The challenge is not to homogenize each school or community but to build on their diversity and to work effectively with those inside and outside the school to address the challenges that arise along the way. The risk of reculturing opens the door to possibilities for refugee students and their families by affirming their cultures, lighting a ray of hope in what appears to be "a lost cause." ■

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Note

The thoughts expressed here also reflect the input of fellow principals at the elementary and secondary levels. ❐

The Upcoming Issues of

Refuge

- Religious Refugees
- Refugee Return

Somali Refugees in Toronto: A Profile

By Edward Opoku-Dapaah, 1995
ISBN 1-55014-278-x, 130 pp., $12.95.

This is the first comprehensive study of Somali refugees in Toronto. It examines the social, residential and linguistic characteristic of Somalis, their participation in the local economy and the activities of Somali community organizations. The report also contains valuable suggestions and recommendations concerning suitable and more efficient service delivery to this community.

Available from:
Centre for Refugee Studies

The Community Youth Outreach Programme In Delta, British Columbia, Canada: "The Personal Touch That Works"

Sherman Chan, Hardeep Thind and Lesley Lim

Abstract

With Canada's strong multicultural policy, immigrants are encouraged to maintain their cultural values and expectations while adjusting to a new country. This in mind, the, Surrey Delta Immigrant Services Society partnered with the British Columbia Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Immigration, British Columbia Ministry for Children and Families, and the Delta School District to develop a programme which assists new immigrant youth, their families and their community. It provides an innovative approach to assist with language and cultural interpretation as well as school based initiatives for all parties involved. Thus, this paper is a description of the Community Youth Outreach Programme in Delta, British Columbia and a discussion of the key features that address the needs of immigrant and refugee students and their families while affirming their culture and linguistic background in a demographically dynamic area.

Résumé

La politique multiculturelle très sérieuse du Canada encourage les immigrés à maintenir leurs valeurs et leurs attentes culturelles tout en s'adaptant à un nouveau pays. Aussi, l'Association pour services aux immigrés de Delta Surrey (Surrey Delta Immigrant Services Society), s'est-elle associée avec le ministère de la Colombie-Britannique chargé de la politique multiculturelle et de l'immigration, le ministère de l'enfant et de la famille de la Colombie-Britannique et la Delta School District pour développer un programme d'aide aux jeunes immigrés fraîchement débarqués, leurs familles et leur communauté. Ce programme propose une approche nouvelle pour soutenir les efforts en matière d'interprétation de la langue et de la culture, ainsi que les initiatives en milieu scolaire, pour toutes les parties concernées. Ce document contient donc une description du Programme communautaire d'intervention auprès de la jeunesse de Delta, en Colombie-Britannique, ainsi qu'une discussion des éléments clés qui répondent aux besoins des étudiants immigrés et réfugiés et de leurs familles tout en affirmant leur culture et leur origine linguistique dans une région à démographie très dynamique.

The Community of Delta: Rich Diversity

Delta derives its name from the fertile delta of the Fraser River. It is strategically located within a region of 1.8 million people and is linked to the Greater Vancouver Regional District, the United States of America and the Pacific Rim by road, rail, air, sea and river (Corporation of Delta 1998). Delta has a population of 95,411 and 40 percent of them are between 20 and 44 years old. Fifty percent of its population is employed in the labour force. According to the 1996 Statistics of Canada census, 20 percent of Delta's population was foreign-born. Of all the foreign born population, 25 percent is of South Asian (Punjabi, Hindi, and Urdu) ethnic origin, an increase from 11 percent in 1986 while 12 percent is Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), an increase from four percent in 1986 (BC Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Immigration 1999).

Surrey Delta Immigrant Services Society (SDISS)

SDISS is a non-profit Society whose mandate is to promote the independence of immigrants and to build strong, culturally diverse communities. It provides a range of information, counselling, language and employment services to children, youth, adults and families in Surrey, Delta and the surrounding areas in British Columbia, Canada. The adjustment which newcomers must make in immigrating to Canada can be made much easier with assistance from immigrant and refugee services delivered in the native language in a culturally sensitive manner.

A volunteer Board of Directors governs SDISS. Currently there are 71 multilingual staff, 236 interpreters and 115 volunteers who offer language and culture specific services. Last year, the Society provided more than 30,000 client contacts to immigrants and refugees. The budget for the fiscal year 1999/2000 is $3.8 million. Among the various programmes which stands out includes: the Community Youth Outreach Programme.

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The Community Youth Outreach Programme addresses the needs of immigrant and refugee youth that are new to Canada. In encountering a new land, they face barriers and problems of adjustment and integration that hinder their social development and learning. They tend to become isolated from the mainstream life of school and community activities because they are still learning English and because of differences in culture and upbringing. Some of them also face family separation due to international business ownership, resulting in arrangements in which the mother and the children live in BC but the father is based in Hong Kong; in other cases the children live in BC while both parents live in Taiwan.

The discussion in this paper is divided into four major parts. First, it introduces Canada's policy on multiculturalism. Second, it reviews the ESL policy and philosophy of the Delta School District. Third, it presents the Community Youth Outreach Programme and explores its key components. Last, it examines the innovative aspects of the programme and why it works.

Youth in Transition and Multiculturalism in Canada

A number of predominant models developed by researchers to assess the psychological adaptation of immigrants and refugees in the host society were taken into consideration in the development of the Community Youth Outreach Programme. According to Sayegh and Lasry (1993), the model of assimilation talks about the process of social transformation that promotes successful assimilation and which occurs when immigrants identify completely with the new society at the expense of their cultural identity. However, the Canadian multicultural policy is based on a "cultural mosaic" framework. The framework was developed using Berry's model of Acculturation (Berry 1980, 1984). Acculturation, according to Berry, is a broadly defined process in which the native language and culture is maintained and supported, while the second language is developed and the individual adjusts to their new culture. This model informed the design and development of the Programme. This model of acculturation identifies changes within both immigrants and host society as a result of contacts. Acculturation can be seen as the selective adaptation of value systems and processes of integration and differentiation. Berry's model suggests that immigrants and refugees must redefine themselves towards both the new culture and their own cultural values. In this model there are four possible outcomes of this identity process:

1. Assimilation -to give-up one's cultural values in order to be accepted into the dominant cultural values.
2. Integration -to retain one's cultural values as well as acquire new cultural values.
3. Separation -to only retain one's cultural values and not to accept new cultural values.
4. Marginalization -to maintain a part from one's cultural values and new cultural values. (Berry 1980, p.227)

Of these four possible outcomes, integration appears to be the preferred outcome of the Canadian multicultural policy and settlement practices. Integration is a long term, two-way process in which immigrants and refugees achieve full participation in all aspects of Canadian life and Canadian society. Newcomers can benefit from the full potential of their newly adopted land (See also Cummins 1996).

Since immigrant and refugee youths new to Canada confront difficulties in a country that, although it offers them opportunities, speaks a language they do not know. They are also unfamiliar with the way of life. Until their language skills are developed, their inability to communicate isolates them from peers and school activities (Handford et .al 1993). Some of them have experienced disruption in their education, e.g. war, refugee camp or uprooting due to emigration. Some, because of the stigma attached, keep their refugee identity and status a secret from their peers. Of course, this secrecy is a way to conceal their vulnerability. The report, "After the Door has been Opened" (Minister of Supply and Services Canada 1988) points out that children and youth must prepare themselves to be adults in Canadian society. Their opportunities come from experiences of success in school, from important adults, and their peers. However, under many circumstances, as highlighted above, instead of success, immigrant and refugee youth encounter frustration because of language difficulties, the fear of refugee stigma, the inability of the guardians to understand their needs and the demands of integrating into a new culture. Without appropriate guidance and support, the children and youth become margina-lized leading to distress, isolation and social dysfunction (Igoa 1995).

The Canadian Council for Refugees (1998) explores the meaning of settlement and integration and presents guidelines for best practices as well as examples of programmes worth emulating. The design of the Community Youth Outreach Programme incorporated these guidelines. British Columbia's Ministry for Children and Families in the Delta area was supportive of this programme because it was considered a preventive approach: the more assistance new immigrant youth and their families receive now, the less likelihood of them needing to access services in the future.

English as a Second Language (ESL) System in the Delta School District

The philosophy of the ESL programme in the Delta School District is that all students, regardless of their linguistic and cultural background, will have the opportunity to develop their potential to the fullest extent. Integration is the main focus and mutual respect between different cultures must be encouraged. The district also believes that the degree of success of the ESL programme depends, to a large extent, on the amount of interaction and understanding between the student, the school and the student's home.

Multicultural Services are offered through a multicultural worker. The multicultural worker's role differs from the Youth Integration Worker's in that she or he is involved in the assessment process and placement of ESL students while the Youth Integration Worker is not. A large part of the multicultural worker's time is spent doing such work in the district's elementary schools. She is also involved in promoting acculturation, multiculturalism, social harmony and facilitating communication between home and school.

Based on the statistics provided by the district, there were 1508 ESL students served in the 1997-1998 school year. This was the last year that such statistics were available. The north end of Delta accounted for 89 percent of the district's total ESL population (Delta School District, 1996, English as a Second Language: Population Growth and District Response Report; Delta School District, 1996, Special Programmes Resource Binder, p. 2-20). Thus, this is where the Youth Outreach Programme is focused.

The Launching of the Community Youth Outreach Programme

The fall of 1993 was the launch date for the Community Youth Outreach Programme. A Punjabi/Hindi and a Cantonese/Mandarin speaking Youth Integration Workers were stationed at two schools. The Director of Special Programmes of the Delta School District where the ESL programme resides made the decision about location. A major criterion was a high enrollment of new immigrant and refugee students. Based on this, a junior high school (grades 8-10) and a secondary school (grades 9-12) in the north end of the district benefited from the assignment of Youth Integration Workers. The junior high school provided the Youth Integration Worker with an office and a phone, which were later realized to be essential items. In addition, they were welcomed into the classroom during school time, another essential element to the programme's success, because if the workers were to build rapport with the students and the staff, thye had to be highly visible. An important strategy to this would be to spend lunch hours with the youth, visit them on the soccer field, basketball court, or walk the hallways with them. Once the immigrant youth feels comfortable with the worker, he or she will start to seek out the worker on his or her own.

The programme provides services to all new immigrant youth and their families regardless of their status. The mandate of the programmeme is to address the needs of these students and their families who are new to the community and the school. The programme assists them in overcoming adjustment and integration problems. Some have specialized problems, for example, family separations mentioned earlier.

The Youth Outreach Programme had a very successful first year (1993). This was largely due to the fact that the programme was placed in schools with administrators who are committed and accommodative of these students' school needs. The teachers and principals were extremely helpful with the extra resources they provided. They saw this as a win-win situation because they were dealing with the influx of immigrants with no additional help before.

With such a positive first year, the programme was expanded to serve three schools on a full-time basis and serve other schools on an "as needed" basis. The served schools are finally feeling that they are reaching out and connecting with parents and youth. The outcome is that all stakeholders, parents, teachers, administrators and youth, are grateful for having on site workers who do more than interpreting for them. They are very pleased with the community orientation, ethnocultural community connections and after school activities such as a field trips to the Science World, that were not being provided before. Recently, other schools in the district with a growing number of immigrant youth have been very vocal about the need for similar services.

The Programme can be divided into five categories: (a) Community Orientation; (b) School Orientation; (c) After-School Activities; (d) Individual Guidance; and (e) Parents' Group.

Community Orientation

For children who are resettled, being in a new environment can be overwhelming, particularly if this new environment is one's new country of residence. They must learn everything all over again: how to use public transportation, obtain a social insurance number and use bank services. Thus, the purpose of the community orientation is to assist the students who can, in turn, assist their parents on basic knowledge of how to use public services. One effective way to do this is through field trips. Most field trips are planned using public transportation and the students usually choose the destinations. It is an opportunity for students to go to some of the athletic games, different educational settings and points of interest that they have heard about but may not have had the means to attend. The programme subsidizes the field trips, making them more accessible for students and on a few occasions, due to the family's lack of financial resources, the expenses of the trips are fully funded by the programme. These activities allow the students to build their confidence so that subsequently they can take their families on similar trips. For instance, three years ago, a student came to school on a Monday and was excited to share what she did on the weekend. She wanted to do something special for her younger sister's birthday so she suggested to her parents that the family (about fourteen members, including her aunts and uncles) go bowling. They were quick to say that it was too expensive and dangerous. However, she pointed out: "I have gone with the school and I am still in one piece." The parents then allowed the fifteen-year-old daughter to phone the bowling alley and to make some inquiries. She explained to the owner of the bowling alley that she had come with the school and was interested in bringing her family. The gentleman remembered the group and ended up allowing her family to bowl one extra game after seeing how much fun the family was having trying out a new game. The parents were sore the next day but they mentioned, during parent teacher interviews, that they were grateful the programme introduced their children to different recreational places in the community. They expressed that they did not have the time or enough English to do these kinds of events on their own, nor would they allow their children and their friends to do so without being introduced first. Once the immigrant youth feels comfortable and knowledgeable about the resources in their community, they do not feel alienated. Breaking down the barriers or the fears of the unknown makes their surrounding community less foreign and intimidating.

School Orientation

The culture shock of being in a new country and the need to learn about the Canadian school system can be quite overwhelming. Therefore, this programme helps to bridge the gap between new and old environment for the students as well as the parents. The Youth Integration Worker also provides one-on-one guidance with the families to explain school rules, timetables and required school supplies.

For new immigrant students, school orientation is the same process as for any new student, except the Youth Integration Worker gives them a tour and information about their new school in their native language. The family is assisted with interpretation and the new student is assigned a buddy with a boy or girl from the same country or who speaks the same language. On a few occasions, when language is a barrier, the settlement counsellors from SDISS are called to the school for assistance with languages not known by the Youth Integration Worker.

The parents are very pleased with the one-on-one guidance service because schooling in Canada is different from their native country's schooling. In India, for example, students go to school six days a week, there are no co-ed classes, no bells to signal the start and end of class, and teachers are referred to as "madam" or "sir," and not by their last name. There, teachers are given the responsibility to be disciplinarians, whereas in BC, that is not the case. Often, parents have told the school to punish their child anyway they deem fit. However, the teacher and principal always inform the parents that discipline is their responsibility not the school's.

One noticeable change since the programme started has been the increase in immigrant parents attending parent-teacher conferences. The reasons are twofold. First, parents are contacted in their native language either by telephone or by sending home translated parent-teacher interview forms, to which they can respond in their native language. Second, since they know the Youth Integration Worker will be available to assist them to speak to the children's teachers, parents gain confidence in attending the sessions. A few even tried to speak for themselves and the youth worker needed only to interpret a few words. This indirectly help the parents' self-esteem. The parents feel that the Youth Integration Workers understand them and they are there to help.

After-School Activities

The after school activities component has a two-part objective: a neutral territory to gain more insight into the youth as well as an opportunity for the immigrant youth to learn something new. This neutral territory is a place where students can go freely with no expectations to share their resettlement experiences or to engage in conversation. This does not put the youth on the spot as they might feel when they are in their academic setting. It is also a venue for students to work on their social skills such as teamwork, and communication and leadership skills.

The after-school activities were designed for the purpose of connecting with the immigrant youth in a non-threatening environment. It was believed that an activity such as basketball introduced after school would attract more students. Ultimately the goal was to build trust with the youth. After the initial after school activity, it was realized that the games or sports which Canadian born students had grown up playing, were quite different from those of immigrant students. In a particular case, when a group of students were setting up the volleyball net outside after school, some of the South Asian girls started running around the field. It appeared to be tag to Canadian students but they were informed that it was "kho-kho" a form of tag that is very popular in India where all the girls get together and play. The original idea wasn't to play "kho-kho" but after having learnt the new game, other days were set aside to play it. In addition to the sports activities, time was set aside to play Chinese chess and "bhabhi" a card game that is popular in India. On these occasions, Canadian students were invited to learn games from other cultures which they enjoyed very much. Other extra-curricular programmes such as the GOAL club were also created to support the acculturation process while developing leadership skills.

"GOAL Club:" Developing Future Leaders

In addition to the after school activities, a club was started for the new immigrant students at one of the high schools. The students named it GOAL (Globe of All Languages) Club. The primary objective of the club was to assist students with their integration into school life. Many students came from their former schools as leaders but felt intimidated to join any school group in Canada. The focus of the club was to organize activities such as cultural appreciation days, publish newsletters and organize field trips. The students were full of pride and wanted to share their cultures and celebrate their festivals and other significant dates at the school. The Chinese students, for example, organized a Chinese New Year celebration, which other ethnic students helped to serve on that day. The students' enthusiasm was evident in their passion, preparing the dishes and making displays with great pride. The students felt that they were able to contribute and enhance the school life. They were also very proud to share their cultural festivals with their teachers and Canadian peers. These types of events can be a morale booster for students who are looking for a place to fit in.

A newsletter committee was established as well for students' voices to be heard. The newsletter was distributed to staff at the school and many teachers found them to be a wealth of information. Articles included topics such as: "Being New to Canada," "Seeing Snow for the First Time," and "Feelings We Had When We Got Off the Plane." Sharing cultural information, advertising for up-coming events, event summaries, and student poetry were published. An immigrant student wrote the following article.

> Snow
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> I woke up one morning and I saw snow. It was just like little pieces of crushed ice, dancing down from heaven with the wind's direction. I acted like how Israelites first saw manna. I ran to my room and wrapped myself up in order to go out. "I got to go out and feel it myself," I said to myself. "How can I describe snow to my friends in Taiwan when I did not feel it myself!" I rushed out and was amazed at how calm everything was. I tried to hold the snowflakes with my hand, but they immediately melted. — I still remember the prayer my brothers and I said that night. "Please God," we begged, "can we have more snow tomorrow?"

In two of the last three years, a multicultural programme in the evening "Talent and Fashion From Around the World" was produced by the GOAL club members. This show was an opportunity for the students to showcase their talents as well as their native attires. Students were involved in singing, dancing, modelling and playing musical instruments. Many hours went into rehearsing for the programme but, at the end, the students felt a genuine sense of school pride and were pleased with their accomplishments. The responses from the students demonstrated that these shows boosted self-esteem for the students and their parents. The audience showed their enthusiasm by asking for another show next year. In particular, many teachers were pleasantly surprised to see "their quiet, shy and reserved ESL students shining like a bright light on stage." They saw a side of the students that they would never have seen otherwise.

Ideally, it would be great for a club like this one to link up with the student council and have a joint venture. Unfortunately, it has been the experience that once the student council gets involved many of the immigrant and refugee students take on a quiet role again. The reasons may be that the student council has a wider perspective than the GOAL club and also the immigrant and refugee students may feel shy about their ability to express their views and communicate fluently in English. Slowly as the immigrant students build their English and self-esteem, a joint venture like this could be undertaken again. Immigrant and refugee students also have individual needs for emotional support. The individual guidance component serves in this area.

Individual Guidance

The majority of the Youth Integration Worker's time is spent with newcomer youth in providing individual guidance. Since the youth workers do not have a counselling background, only guidance is provided to the youth and their families. Common issues for these students are: "being afraid," "confused," "scared," or "unhappy" in the new environment. Most of these issues stem from culture shock and isolation. The youth often have a hard time adjusting to new cultural values. Their self-identity is challenged because they are now caught between two cultures. The parents' experience may not be similar because they may have limited contact outside of the home. The youth are trying hard to "fit in" as quickly as possible, sometimes giving up their own cultural beliefs and values. Thus, parents and youth often have a difficult time dealing with intergenerational conflict. Referrals are made mostly through the ESL teachers, some through other class teachers, some are self-referrals, and others are done by school administrators.

If an issue arises that requires counselling, the school counsellor is contacted and the student is referred to him or her. However, if there is a language barrier, the Youth Integration Worker is usually present in the counseling sessions. Sometimes a referral is made out of the school and the appropriate agency would be involved with the youth. The Youth Integration Worker may still assist if either the outside agency or the youth request it.

Since the Delta area office of the Ministry for Children and Families does not have any Punjabi or Chinese speaking social workers, the Youth Integration Workers have assisted them on numerous cases. Last year a 17 year old South Asian girl was apprehended due to physical abuse in her home and the Youth Integration Worker worked with the social worker advising what would be culturally appropriate while also assisting the social worker on home visits. The social worker stayed in touch with the student through the Youth Integration Worker and not the school counsellor in this case. In another incident, the immigrant youth did not speak either Punjabi or Chinese, but the Youth Integration Worker assisted with the entire removal process as well. The youth wanted a familiar person to escort her with the social worker to her home and then to foster care. The Youth Integration Workers are bound by the same legal requirements that teachers and social workers must abide by regarding confidentiality of information disclosed by a student about abuse, neglect or suicidal thoughts or intentions.

Many immigrant youth are apprehensive about going to the school counsellor. Hence, they usually get there with the assistance of the ESL staff or the Youth Integration Worker. Most eastern cultures discourage any conversation about the family to outsiders. Family issues are to be kept within the family, therefore many immigrant families have frowned upon counseling generally. However, depending on the severity of the issues, parents may be contacted and strict terms of confidentiality are afforded to the parents also. Establishing contact between the families and schools is important to start the process of trust building.

Parents' Group

In addition to providing support to the immigrant youth, the Community

Youth Outreach Programme has also focused on providing services to parents who are refugees or immigrants. The establishment of a parents' group was attempted in the first few years, but with only one successful attempt in getting the parents together. However, in the last year and a half, another parents' group has been successfully established. The group was originally developed around their needs and concerns about being more informed of their children's education. They realized that the schooling system in Canada is very different from where they come. Yet they were unable, due to the lack of understanding and language skills, to fully grasp all that they need to know about their children's education and the Canadian school system. They wanted to be informed and ultimately to be able to make informed decisions regarding their children's educational goals. Neither do they want to place complete trust or responsibility in the children to tell and explain school procedures, given that the children may act in their self-interest and alter information sent home by teachers. Thus, all parties, i.e: parents, school counsellors, ESL teachers and the Youth Integration Worker, saw the Parents' Group to be an answer.

Since the parents' group was created, all communication is done in the native language, Mandarin in this particular Parents' Group. The mandate of the parents' group is threefold. First, the parents' group serves as a support group. A monthly meeting is held for them to come meet and make new friends in a new environment so that they won't feel so isolated and alone. Second, the group organizes activities that allow the parents to do fun things, be informed and be educated. Some of the activities that have been organized so far are: workshops on the Registered Retirement Savings Plan, taxation, environmental awareness, entrance to university, weekly badminton evenings and western cooking classes. This was organized due to the numerous comments that immigrant parents have regarding unknown foods, such as squash, that they saw in the grocery store but did not know how to cook. Third, the group meetings serve as a means of communication to inform and update. This is accomplished by distributing monthly newsletters that are published by the parents to inform all parents about upcoming school events, community events and issues relating to immigration and families.

In addition, in the past year the parents have put together an "Asian New Year Teacher Appreciation Luncheon" that was a grand success. The parents' group wanted to show their appreciation and respect to the school and the teachers for their dedication, since teachers are highly respected in eastern cultures. The teachers at that particular school were given a true taste and experience of Asian culture and New Year celebrations. Many parents were professionals back home and miss the ability to contribute positively to their community and environment due to their lack of language abilities or their perception of their lack of language abilities. Loss of status and professional opportunities are two major concerns that affect immigrant parents. The parents' group indirectly assists in building their self-esteem and self-worth in a new environment and country. Many immigrant parents, similar to the "mainstream" parents have a great deal to offer to the school, however, an appropriate avenue is not always apparent. Joining the Parents' Advisory Council at their school seems to be too overwhelming for them given their language and cultural barriers.

Lessons Learnt: The Personal Touch That Works

The Youth Integration Workers have a very close working relationship with the ESL teachers. Since most immigrant students receive English support, the department was a natural tie-in with the programme. As mentioned earlier, due to the "open door policy" of the ESL department and the schools, the Youth Integration Workers have spent many hours with the youth directly in the classroom providing easy access to the students.

The obvious assistance the school knew it would receive was the interpretation services. Since the two Youth Integration Workers are able to speak the language of 88 percent of its immigrant student population (Punjabi, Hindi, Cantonese and Mandarin), communication between home and school could easily be facilitated. On site Youth Integration Workers who serve as language and cultural interpreters, are available to deal with daily school issues with the youth as well as to notify parents if issues were of concern to them. This flow of communication makes the daily routines of the schools run much smoother than ever before.

The essential ingredient to any programme's success is building a solid foundation from which the programme can continue to grow. The overwhelming positive response from the Delta School District was instrumental to the success of this programme. This was in the form of partial funding and supporting Special Programmes coordination. Due to the flexibility of the District and most certainly of the schools, the programme has been to mould itself to meet the needs of immigrant youth, their families and the schools.

Over the years, recognition for the programme has come in the form of personal testimonies from students in our annual surveys. They emphasize how the programme has enriched their lives and provided a means for a smoother integration process. Letters of support and feedback from school principals, counsellors, teachers and parents as to the "excellent and essential resource service in meeting the needs of a diverse and multi-faceted population" have served as the programme's measurement of its benefits. Consistently, the assets of the programme have been its ability to: assist with the understanding of intergenerational adaptation; alleviate potential tensions and promote understanding between different eth-nocultural communities; connect immigrant youth and their families to local community resources; help reduce incidents of conflicts between the different ethnocultural communities; serve as an early intervention of immigrant youth and their families in need of additional assistance; educate new immigrant youth and their families of Canadian society; help reduce isolation and increase self-esteem; and help in the settlement and adaptation process. The ultimate goal of parents and students is to become integrated into the Canadian community.

The major obstacle the programme may face in the future will be lack of continued funding from the government. This programme has to apply for funding each year and the government may change its funding priority from preventative and support services to remedial service. In such a case, the programme would lose its funding. Another challenge for the programme is that with the addition of a third base school, the Youth Integration Workers have been busy meeting the demands of the third school as well as the many other schools calling in for service. In order for this programme to be effective and not to "spread too thin," additional resources need to be deployed at this crucial juncture.

Conclusion

Integration issues for immigrant and refugee youth vary from the initial adjustment to peer support, school life, community surroundings and to long term issues. All of them require a collaborative scheme to adequately deal with them. Language and cultural values were identified as the most important adjustment issues youth face. These make it difficult for youth to understand and adapt to the Canadian culture, the school system, or make friends. The difficulty that parents face in securing gainful employment, the change in lifestyle and parental role, which may not be positive, also play an important role in how youths get adjusted to their new homeland.

With the help of the Youth Integration Worker, immigrant and refugee youth and their families are better prepared to adapt to Canada and to live a productive life. The challenge rests with the immigrant serving agencies, schools and government agencies to collaborate so that their services support immigrant and refugee youths in their efforts to become productive members of their new country while respecting their own culture and personal integrity. ■

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Supporting Refugee and Immigrant Children: Building Bridges Programme of the International Children's Institute in Canada and Overseas

Ester Cole

Abstract

This article highlights factors concerning refugee school-aged children and their caregivers both in Canada and overseas. This article documents the impact of the International Children's Institute's Building Bridges programme, which has received validation from both qualitative and quantitative studies. It concludes with implications for authentic programmes which combine education, health and NGO (non-governmental organization) sector partnerships.

Résumé

Cest article souligne certains facteurs concernant les enfants réfugiés en âge de scolarité et leurs fournisseurs de soins, au Canada ainsi qu'à l'extérieur. L'article documente l'impact du programme de l'Institut international des enfants, intitulé « Construire des ponts », qui a reçu la validation d'études tant qualitatives que quantitatives. Pour conclure, l'article évoque les implications que cela comporte pour des programmes authentiques qui combinent des partenariats entre les secteurs de l'éducation, de la santé et des ONG (organisations non-gouvernementales).

Introduction

The demographic transformation of communities in Canada and overseas has focused attention on issues related to identification of needs and effective interventions in immigrant and refugee children as well as their families. It has been documented that the number of Canadian immigrants more than doubled in the late 1980s, and in the early 1990s three quarters of immigrant children were of school age. Moreover, of great concern are children who came from war torn countries and those who continue to experience adjustment difficulties during the resettlement phase (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 1994; Cole 1998; Vargas 1999; Beiser et al. 1995).

Surveys concerning world refugees often estimate that there are millions of displaced people throughout the world who have resettled or are in the process of applying for resettlement under safer conditions. Their needs for assistance include settlement orientation, shelter, health care, employment, legal representation, second language skills, outreach services, cultural supports and education (Cole 1996). With regard to school age children, it should be noted that migration characteristics are not always disclosed to schools. Thus, factors relating to refugee children's developmental histories including losses, malnutrition, deprivation or gaps in formal education are under-reported by families. This reluctance to reveal information relating to migration status is understandable in view of the vulnerable positions in which many families find themselves. Yet, without knowledge about background circumstances, adequate care and programmes may not be provided by education or mental health services (Ajdukovic & Ajdukovic 1993; Cole 1998).

Children who have been exposed to aversive events and losses can suffer emotional scars related to trauma. In recent years, for example, attention has been focused on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in children. Research findings estimate that up to one half of children from war-torn countries experience PTSD symptoms. In order to meet the needs of such children, significant adults in their lives need to develop appropriate knowledge and facilitate resilience building programmes (Motta 1995; Price 1995; Mason 1997).

Educators and mental health professionals who serve multicultural communities are faced with the complexities created by resettlement, disruption in support systems and communication barriers. In this context, schools have become the most significant agents of change in shaping future communities. One of the major dilemmas faced by schools, however, is that they have become intervention sites for numerous psycho-social problems affecting school-age children and their families. During an era of declining budgets, school systems have become more cognizant about the need to develop coordinated partnerships and accountable programmes which meet the needs of all involved (Cole 1995; Adelman 1996).

The object of this paper is to document an innovative programme which has brought together expertise in several areas related to children's adjustment needs. By doing so, the International Children's Institute has developed a framework for partnerships which transcends geographical boundaries and advocates for cross-sectional collaboration for the benefit of local communities.

The Building Bridges Programme: The Canadian Site

The Building Bridges programme was designed, piloted and implemented in schools in Metropolitan Toronto following its inception in 1993. It has been developed by the International Children's Institute, a non-profit humanitarian organization. The Institute has as its mandate the development and implementation of community based programmes in school systems to sup-

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port children's mental health. These programmes are designed to teach coping skills to children (especially those in elementary schools) who are experiencing stress and/or trauma resulting from war, displacement, famine or natural disasters. The Institute's programmes are also designed to enable caregivers to encourage and support children. The Institute brings together teams of parents, psychologists, educators, community health professionals communication professionals and children in order to study and identify the best methods of responding to the needs of the children. The recommendations which emerge from these studies and site assessments within each community are translated into specific programmes. Thus, facilitating communication is the core strategy of the Institute's programmes.

Although initially intended to support the integration of refugee school-age children, the programme has broadened to encompass all children. Thus, from focusing on children who may have tertiary service needs related to traumatic events, the Building Bridges programme has developed into a primary prevention programme which supports resilience and promotes adaptive coping skills for all children, including immigrant and refugee children, their teachers and parents (Cole and Sroka 1997). By employing a multi-disciplinary, whole school approach the Building Bridges programme has fostered partnerships and school-based activities, which reflect the involvement of each stakeholder group - the children, their parents and the teachers.

This multi-year programme (on average two to three years) begins its work in each site by conducting a needs assessment. Numerous assessment tools have been developed by the International Children's Institute with input from stakeholders and mental health consultants of cross-cultural services. These tools, which include among others community resource audits, needs assessment guides and school profiles, facilitate data gathering and ongoing consultation. It should be highlighted that one of the more authentic tools became the framework for focus groups and panel discussions, which promote the "voices of children" and those who support them both at school and at home. Since communication is a core strategy in all of the International Children's Institute activities, it has led to a process of fluid discovery of needs, gap analysis of services and the shaping of activities in response to the "heard voices of children."

Since the International Children's Institute advocates collective programme ownership, it has documented best practices and developed training and programme implementation guides for ongoing use. These materials have been subjected to modifications and knowledge updates as the programme expands both in Canada and overseas. Examples of materials include: assessment tools; school-based guides for in-service, Principal's guide to the Building Bridges programme; Working with families; Teacher's guide; videos and Caregivers guide to the programme. A website has been established to promote world wide communication about networking and documenting best-practices on behalf of children in stressful situations.

Classroom Based Activities

As noted earlier, in-class activities were shaped by identified stakeholder needs and by teachers' and consultants' psycho-pedagogical bodies of knowledge. All classroom activities of the Building Bridges programme have been cross-referenced with the new Ontario Ministry of Education's curriculum guidelines. Thus, these class-based activities are to be viewed as an integral part of curricular objectives. The overall aims of these activities are to promote inclusive educational day to day practices. Therefore, cooperative learning strategies, the promotion of effective communication, the enhancement of proactive social skills, coping skills and positive self-esteem are central goals supported by educators and mental health consultants alike.

The following are highlights of core classroom-based activities, which are documented in detail in the Guides of the International Children's Institute and are used in teacher inservice by schools opting to participate in the Building Bridges programme:

a) Buddy Teams: aims to promote friendships and cultural bridging. It can become a mechanism for social integration and social acceptance by peers;

b) The Change Exchange: aims to identify children's needs, their characteristics of stress and the impact of traumatic events. It can also identify best practices and provide a forum for children to share activities and problem-solving strategies;

c) Games We Like to Play: can further self-confidence through skill development in recreation. Its objectives are to promote positive self-esteem through the mastery of activities, provide a safe way for emotional release of stress and promote friendships;

d) Art is Inside Me: can help with emotional release through self-expression in visual arts. It can also aid in mastery of routine activities and skill development; and

e) Stories in the Classroom: aims to promote story telling and story bookmaking. This framework can help the adjustment of children who have to rebuild assumptions about themselves and their environment. It can put past traumatic experiences into a safer context and can help children develop a positive vision of their future.

Voices of Children, Teachers and Parents: Thematic Research Finding

Before programme implementation and throughout the development of the Building Bridges programme, panel discussions were held with stakeholders to identify goals, needs, coping skills and indicators of success (1994-1997): Children's panel discussions aimed, each year, to explore the nature of entering school; identify behaviors which impact on new students; identify strategies for dealing with stressful situations; explore maintenance of first language and cultural identity; share perceptions of the learning environment; discuss social relations and identify indicators of successful adapt- ations and school performance.

Teachers' panel discussions aimed to identify teachers' appraisal of students' needs; document required resources for working with newcomer students; develop a process for collaboration and programme development with the staff of the International Children's Institute and develop mechanisms for home-school partnerships.

Parents' panel discussions, which utilized the services of translators and cultural interpreters, centred around the identification of parental perceptions of children's needs; aimed to explore the value of retaining first language while learning English as a Second Language; assisted parents in better understanding their children's school system; identified multicultural expectations of children; discussed discipline and conflict resolution and identified indicators of success for their school-age children.

Qualitative evaluation data was collected from all stakeholder groups. In addition, quantitative psychometric data was obtained as part of the feasibility study pre and post programme implementation with the children (Fitzgerald 1997; Cole & Sroka1997). The programme evaluation sample included 147 grade 3 and 4 students in seven programme classes in four schools. As part of the study, 77 students in four additional classes in the same schools acted as control groups. The four participating schools are located in different neighbourhoods in Toronto and represent the diverse demographic makeup of the student population. For example, in one of the elementary schools, 60 percent of the student population comprised children born outside Canada.

The psychometric battery was chosen to reflect norm-referenced and culture-fair measures which have been in use with heterogeneous student populations in Canada and the United States (Fitzgerald 1997). Data were collected through child self-report questionnaires read out to students in order to minimize the impact of English as a Second Language reading proficiency. Pre-post data gathering took place in a six month interval period.

Key findings from the psychometric study highlight that: a) children in participating classes reported having more close friends by the end of the programme implementation year than their control counterparts; b) by the end of the school year, children who took part in the Building Bridges programme reported a wider range of people with whom they could communicate about their needs or problems than their counterparts in control classes. Taken together, these findings indicate that children in participating programmes demonstrated better ability to develop adaptive communication skills and better social relationships, all of which comprise key indicators of mental health.

The qualitative data were consistent with the quantitative study findings. Indeed, early in the needs identification phase, children identified language development, communication and orientation as key priorities. However, as their skills in English as a Second Language developed, other thematic issues were identified in subsequent panel discussions. Those included social needs such as friendships, welcoming other students and conflict resolution strategies. The children gave examples to support their opinions and by doing so, demonstrated an increased awareness of the process of integration in their local schools.

Parents and teacher discussion panels identified a range of needs at the early part of the programme. At that stage, they noted immediate needs including orientation related information, knowledge about resources for newcomers and avenues for communication between teachers and parents. As Building Bridges programme implementation progressed, expressed themes came to encompass issues concerning children's social integration, academic outcomes, self-esteem and maintenance of home language and cultural heritage. Since both parents and teachers aimed at strengthening home-school ties, discussion meetings shifted from problem and needs identification into a problem-solving phase. By doing so, they began to share knowledge and examples which aided the integration of children in adaptive and developmentally appropriate ways.

In summary, the Building Bridges programme documented the value of cross-sectional collaboration at the school and community level. This multi-year partnership between parents, children, school and International Children's Institute staff aided the overall improved adjustment of children. Findings through discussions, student class work, self-report questionnaires and observations demonstrated the value of combining school and community resources to support newcomer children.

Since both the process of programme development and programme implementation have been documented in user guides, it is likely to facilitate easy dissemination of knowledge to new Building Bridges sites. The International Children's Institute is currently consulting with school boards about programme expansion and development to meet local needs in concert with curriculum guidelines.

Building Bridges Overseas

> ... [A]fter five minutes we heard three more bombs. I was afraid. I could feel my blood freeze. It was too dangerous to wait for my parents to come back to the apartment, so we went to the basement... the next days of the bombing were terrible..." (written by T., a 12 year old new Canadian student)

This child's story represents many voices of traumatized children who have suffered displacement following the aftermath of war and its devastating impact. These types of experiences can be long lasting both for individuals and the communities as a whole. They require holistic interventions that move individuals and groups from a state of helplessness to a path of rebuilding of the self despite adversity (Cole 1996; 1998; Williams & Berry 1991; Jensen & Shaw 1993). The Building Bridges Programme has been implemented in recent years in Croatia, Bosnia and

Herzegovina and in Albania. The Institute is currently consulting in Kosovo. By adopting a whole community approach, similar to the framework documented in Canada, International Children's Institute teams have been able to keep core programme goals while adjusting to local needs.

In Croatia, for example, the International Children's Institute has implemented the Building Bridges programme since the early 1990s by fostering cross-sectional links to support educational programmes. As documented in the Canadian programme, discussion and focus groups with children, parents, teachers, mental health professionals and community care givers have resulted in the identification of the psycho-social and educational needs of children suffering from the effects of war. In addition to the identification of needs, the programme also documented coping strategies, knowledge and skills which represent the stakeholders effective practices during the phase of rebuilding the social fabric of the communities. A conference including participants from 13 schools and stakeholders provided a platform for exchange of experiences and application of Building Bridges solutions to common local problems.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina International Children's Institute teams conducted site visits as part of the needs assessment. A gap analysis which was coordinated with local professionals, NGOs and community representatives shaped the Building Bridges programme framework and interventions. Again, as published in Canada, a series of guidebooks were developed in order to assist professionals with future programme planning. A community conference held in 1999 provided a mechanism for sharing knowledge, learning about programme opportunities and displaying children's work in the process of rebuilding their trust in themselves and in those who support them towards a stable future.

The International Children's Institute is currently involved in developing psycho-social programmes for Kosovo refugees in Albania. Site assessments in refugee camps in and around Tirana have led to a better understanding of the living conditions and the availability of local resources. This knowledge links the assessment outcome knowledge with the development of local psychosocial programmes. For example, over 40 site visits and meetings were held with Albanian government officials, local and international humanitarian organizations, health centres, schools and municipal officials. This type of assessment process has enhanced the knowledge of those involved in providing aid and is likely to shape more authentic interventions for populations exposed to physical and psychological brutalities.

The framework and nature of the Building Bridges programme for refugees is presently being documented in a guidebook and on a video programme designed for psychosocial interventions in refugee camps. It will include the following:

a) Orientation and pre-deployment training. This training based on a "train-the-trainer" model, will be coordinated with local staff and will aim to train teachers, among others, to learn skills involved in providing psychological first aid;

b) Recreational and out of school activities. These are likely to support children's social skills and communications through organized activities modified from the Building Bridges programme. Summer programmes are a key part of this phase; and

c) Long-term programmes. These programmes are embedded in the academic year and reinforce curriculum objectives while supporting children's competence and confidence building. Whole school activities and parents' support groups will likely result in skill development towards resettlement.

Conclusion

The transformation of communities in Canada and overseas requires complementary programmes which emphasize a team approach to needs identification, design, implementation, monitoring and assessed outcomes (Cole 1996). Nevertheless, the complexities associated with funding for both NGOs and for professional services in existing systems often results in advocacy for needs identification and to a lesser extent in the documentation of sustained long-term programmes (Herman 1994; Hicks Lalonde & Pepler 1993; UNHCR 1995). The Building Bridges programme has systematically documented a framework which aims to overcome difficulties associated with over reliance on traditional services for traumatized children and their families.

Both overseas and in Canada the International Children's Institute has combined "bottom-up" with "top-down" knowledge and partnerships which have allowed for a more timely design and implementation of locally modified programmes. Identifying key people in all local sectors, has led to stronger communication patterns within a range of initiatives and a model which has linked primary, secondary and tertiary prevention services (Cole 1998). To date, qualitative and quantitative studies of the Building Bridges programme support this framework (Cole & Sroka, 1997). In line with the trend toward increased accountability in government, health, education and NGOs, there seems to be a growing need to address outcome-based measures for programmes. Major change in service orientation will consequently require modifications in thinking, planning, advocacy and utilization of resources. ■

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The Multicultural Liaison Officers' Perspective in Assessing Refugee Children in the Schools

Afarin Beglari and Huong Thai

Abstract

Any assessment, psychological, educational or speech and language, even in the native language, may pose many challenges for refugee children and their families in the schools. The Multicultural Liaison Officers are based at the schools to help families in dealing with a new educational system. One of the areas the MLOs play a major role is in assisting the schools in assessing students. This article examines the involvement of the Multicultural Liaison Officers and their perspectives on assessing refugee children with disabilities as well as some of the obstacles and possibilities the families and the professionals face in dealing with this process.

Résumé

Toute évaluation, qu'elle soit psychologique, pédagogique ou d'élocution et de langage, même dans la langue maternelle, peut poser bien des défis aux enfants réfugiés et à leurs familles dans les écoles. Les agents de liaison multiculturels (ALM) sont basés dans les écoles pour aider les familles à faire face au défi d'un système éducatif nouveau. Un des domaines où les ALM jouent un rôle important est dans l'aide qu'ils apportent aux écoles pour l'évaluation des élèves. Cet article examine la participation des ALM et leurs optiques propres sur l'évaluation des enfants réfugiés souffrant d'handicaps, ainsi que les obstacles et les possibilités auxquels les familles et les professionnels ont à faire face pendant ce processus.

Introduction

The Multicultural Liaison Programme was launched in 1991 as a project between the Ottawa-Carleton Immigrant Services Organization and the former Ottawa Board of Education, now called Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. The Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLOs) are based at the schools to assist refugee children and youth in adapting to their new school environment; to get parents involved in their children's education; and to help school staff learn about the different cultural backgrounds of refugee students. The MLOs provide services in areas of translation, referrals, orientation, advocacy and mediation, to name a few. We also work with the schools in assessing students as well as explaining the results and processes to the parents.

When a student is referred for assistance, one or more different types of assessments may be used in order to identify special needs such as educational, psychological, speech or language. The assessments may include: a) gathering information about the student from the parents and professionals; b) observing the student in the school or classroom setting; c) examining a student's school work; and d) most often, doing informal or formal testing. Some assessments may indicate that the student's learning needs require the intervention of an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC). For the past eight years, as Multicultural Liaison Officers, we have been involved in many IPRCs as well as in first language assessments with students from Viet Nam, Iran, Afghanistan, among others (the entire team of MLOs speaks more than 25 languages).

The method and instruments used with the IPRC has been designed in North America but, for many reasons, this method may not meet the needs of children born and raised in other parts of the world—the Middle East, Africa, Latin America or Asia. Factors such as religion, race, ethnicity and language have not been taken into consideration when designing these instruments. In language assessment tests, for example, the level of difficulty of the vocabulary designated for a particular grade level for native born students may not necessarily match that of students who are speakers of other languages. In other words, vocabulary that is considered appropriate for a first grader in Iran may be appropriate for a fourth or fifth grader in Canada and vice versa. Consequently, standardized tests may not have been designed with the intent of accommodating the diversity of the school population. Several cases are discussed to illustrate some of the difficulties we encounter. We hope these cases help professionals working with refugee children and their families in understanding some of the cultural and linguistic challenges in service delivery.

Cultural Interpretation in Assessing Children with Disabilities

Since many refugees come from countries where there is no delivery of services for children with disabilities, we face several challenges. There are other factors at play, in particular, cultural perceptions of disabilities. For instance, parents may not seek services that their child may need because, in their culture, a child with a disability is viewed as a punishment from God. Therefore, their first response may be to hide the child. In some Middle Eastern cultures, families with children with physical or mental disabilities are also stigmatized. For Buddhists, a disability is attributed to Karma (the law of cause and effect) for something done in a past life. Nonetheless, the family and the community are

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expected to treat the child with care and compassion to avoid acquiring more Karma in the present life. Thus, difficulties inevitably arise when there is a great deal of diversity within a classroom.

For teachers, the increase in the number of minority students in our school system demands from an effective educator a better understanding and acceptance of differences, especially of children with disabilities. Frustration often occurs when teachers and students feel that they are not communicating or being understood. For instance, a student from Viet Nam was asked to produce a paragraph on Christmas. Instead, he sat there for 30 minutes not writing anything down. This happened because the boy does not celebrate Christmas at home thus he has no experience of Christmas after being in Canada for only a short time. MLOs play a role in bridging these gaps. To illustrate some of the common barriers encountered, we present the following cases.

Case 1: A Child with Hearing and Speech Challenges

"It was in an elementary school when I attended the IPRC for this girl from Iran. She was seven years old and had been diagnosed with hearing and speech disorders." The special education teacher had worked with her individually through the school year. However, after a number of months, there was not much improvement observed. Although her parents were very cooperative and had tried their best to help, the child had not made any progress. Instead, she had become very stressed and irritated. An IPRC was necessary to decide her placement. The IPRC team made up of a school psychologist, a social worker, the principal, the teacher, the parents and the MLO attended the meeting. "I was involved to help translate the results of the assessment to the parents."

"This kind of meeting was new to the parents since in their home country they had never been asked to attend such meetings, especially one that involved so many people. Thus, when they were asked to express their views, they had none. They only indicated, "We have done our best to follow the teacher's instructions and have practiced with our daughter all the words and phrases that were sent home" as they had agreed prior to this meeting. One thing was clear though, when the teacher sent home pictures of different objects and asked the parents to practice them with their daughter, the parents followed the teacher's recommendations. "It was not until I made a home visit, that I discovered that, not only did the parents not speak any English, but that they were practicing the vocabulary in Farsi and Kurdish." Meanwhile at school, the teacher practiced and spoke to her only in English. This miscommunication between home and school had caused the poor girl so much confusion that she had become terribly stressed and no one knew why. Meanwhile, the parents had worried that, maybe, their daughter was having some kind of mental disorders.

This case, on one hand, was resolved once the parents understood what the problem was. On the other, the school gave up hope of the parents helping the child since they did not have the English skills to help her. Based on this case, school officials and the MLOs concluded that training for parents with children with disabilities is necessary. Especially in need of such training are newly arrived families for whom the life style, school system, the views and services on disability are so different. The principal, at the suggestion of the MLO, recognized the need to offer sign language classes for parents. In fact, a class was set up. The problem then was the cost because parents could not afford the course. The option was then left up to teachers to teach a few sessions to the parents on a voluntary basis. Although the students could communicate with the teachers, the parents were not served when, due to budget cuts more demands were placed on teachers.

Case 2: A Boy with Learning Disabilities, Mainstream or Exclusion?

A more recent case involved, Peter (a fictitious name), a twelve year old boy who had been diagnosed with learning disabilities and behavioral problems. The school had given him all the necessary tests and an IPRC was arranged to decide whether to send him to a school that offered a special education programme. After giving the explanations to the parents, they stated that there was nothing wrong with their son. According to the parents the reason for being a slow learner was that he had no help or support at home since both parents are illiterate and do not speak any English. The parents said that their son felt miserable and insisted that what he needed was a private tutor. Unfortunately, the parents could not afford one.

We also learnt from talking to the parents that the boy was very shy and because he was not able to speak English, he felt isolated and had no friends at his first school. One way he used to break his isolation was to get involved with a group of students who often get in trouble for their mischievous acts as a way to attract attention because of their lack of English proficiency. Peter expressed his frustration with his inability to speak English by being disruptive.

In September of 1999, Peter was sent to another school with a special education programme in a class with only eight students. Since this school was far away from home, the school arranged for a taxi to pick him up to and from home. To complicate matters, he shared the taxi with three other students who had profound physical and mental disabilities who were also his classmates. This presented several problems for the boy and for the family.

Peter tolerated that school for only one week. He refused to go no matter how hard his parents tried to send him back. His excuse was that he did not want to be placed in the same classroom with children who had mental or physical disabilities "because my friends [and the neighbours] are calling me retarded." His parents also admitted that they were suffering from the same problem in the neighbourhoods. According to the parents, every time the taxi arrived, neighbours who were from the same country, "point at our son, and call him names." Furthermore, the parents noticed that "He has also started making funny gestures and unusual sounds imitating the children who are in his class."

The boy insisted that he wanted to go back to his old school and be with his friends. "A second meeting was arranged and I was also asked to be involved." The parents admitted that the second school with only eight students in the class would certainly be a better place for their son. However, they preferred for Peter to go to the school near home where he could attend school with his friends rather than with the students who had developmental delays. Because disabilities carry a stigma in some cultures, the family responded: "Our reputation is at risk and we cannot ignore it." The principal of the school made them understand that by this decision, their child would no doubt fail as he would be placed in an ESL class with 25 other students. In this situation, the teacher would not be able to give extra attention to his individual needs.

In late January 2000, a meeting was held to discuss Peter's situation. The case is partly resolved, though. After missing school for two weeks, Peter is attending the special education school, because the principal sent him back with the promise that he has to stay there for only one year. At the meeting, Peter's progress was discussed. In fact, he has shown improvements both academically and behaviourally. Since his behaviour is really noticeable in a class of eight, appropriate response and fast response in a small setting has helped. The parent's situation remains unresolved. They still feel ashamed since they are still not convinced that the special education programme was better for their son. Surrounded by their ethnocultural community, they feel especially helpless to help Peter, because the principal was not welcoming and demonstrated no empathy towards the circumstances of this family. For now, Peter seems to be doing satisfactorily.

Case 3: A Child with Autism Whose Needs Got Lost in the Refugee Journey

"I have been helping a family whose child has autism." The family had moved three times before coming to Ottawa. Because of the moves, the boy had never been in school nor had he ever been diagnosed with autism. Mom brought John (a fictitious name) who was eight years old to a school near home for registration and, poor John, was placed in a regular class. The teacher immediately noticed the difference in him from other students. She suspected autism but there were no documents from home or from his family doctor. She put his name in to be tested and within a week, John was placed in a school for children who have special needs. Because of John's severe autism, he was lucky to be tested so quickly. In other cases testing and the entire process of seeking a proper placement takes months.

Besides getting the support from the school, John also receives care from the Children Treatment Centre and the Infant Development Programme. They provide speech therapy, nutrition counselling and physiotherapy. A coordinator makes arrangements with the professionals and John's Mom. "Mom feels very fortunate to get help from everybody. However, due to cultural and language barriers, Mom finds it difficult remembering 'who is who and 'what kind of help her child is getting.'" She feels overwhelmed with the number of professionals coming to her home giving her ideas and suggestions on how to work with her child. This is very common with many of our families who struggle to cope in a new homeland. They may not be able to remember the names of the people or the agencies that have visited them. Professionals also find it difficult to clarify what contact a family has had and with what agencies. Unknowingly, the agencies may be duplicating services.

"Another difficulty in working with Mom is that she is illiterate." Many of the things the specialists suggest her to do may be beyond her comprehension. For example, the specialists tell her to "have eye contact when she speaks to him, repeat words over and over again, play with him by using toys, etc. Mom had tried once but gave up because the tasks are too overwhelming." On one hand, the specialists feel that Mom is not willing to participate. On the other, Mom expects them to do it all, because she comes from a culture that holds professionals in high esteem. Clearly, it is difficult for Mom to understand the complexity of treatment for a child with autism. Patience is required to help her learn why such strategies are necessary to help her son. Professionals also need to understand that Mom comes from a culture that defers to professionals. "I helped her by explaining that she needs to be involved in her child's development by just taking a few minutes out of her busy schedule to work with her son." This effort will need time and patience. "Mom needs to look at it as a learning process for both the boy and for her."

Specialists also need to understand that everything is new for Mom and they need to give her time to learn new concepts and strategies for working with a child with autism. Home visits from so many professionals working with the family for whom "saving face" is so important has been just as challenging. Gradually, though "Mom is learning to take part and the trust we have built over time is paying off. John is doing very well at school and Mom is now enrolled in an ESL class full time."

Reflections on Cultural Interpretation

From our experience working as Multicultural Liaison Officers in the schools for the past eight years, we find that culture and language are the major barriers to communication. Using direct translation to explain the results of the assessment most often does not work. It is important that the cultural interpreter be familiar with the school system and with assessment instruments and procedures. It is also important to keep in mind that the cultural interpreter does not only interpret but his or her role is to help explain the client's values, practices, feelings and beliefs. These factors will not surface if only direct translation is done. If the interpreter is not familiar with an assessment procedure, there should be a briefing prior to the assessment. In this meeting, the assessor would have the opportunity to explain to the interpreter what to expect and what will transpire in the assessment process. Likewise, debriefing is essential. In this phase, interpreters should share with the assessor observations and comments regarding cultural values, beliefs, or norms that may influence the assessment process. Such information can be valuable when writing up the report and in making recommendations as well as considering the parents' perspective.

I have an example from one report done by a speech and language therapist on a third grade student. The therapist found that this student had difficulty in forming and reproducing sounds. She also had trouble with consonant blends, decoding and phonics, in general. If direct translation had been used to explain to the parents, they would not have understood what these terms meant, much less the purpose of the assessment. In situations such as this, the cultural interpreter should ask the assessor to give examples of the sounds or consonant blends that the child needs to practice. This way, the parents know exactly what you are talking about. With simple but useful examples, parents can work with the child at home concentrating on specific tasks.

Another obstacle that we often see is that many refugee families, especially recent arrivals, may not feel comfortable admitting that they do not understand what is being explained. Some nod and say "yes," giving the impression to teachers or professionals that they understand, when in fact, they are just being polite. It is crucial that the interpreter tactfully ask questions that will demonstrate the parents' comprehension during the meeting to avoid possible misunderstandings. Interpreters may also have to explain important information and unfamiliar terms such as IPRC, names of devices and what various specialists do. This may need to be done several times or as many as it is necessary for them to grasp the concepts. To facilitate interactions and communication, it is helpful to teach the families to pronounce the names of the professionals involved with whom they will have the most contact. If possible, to protect the trust built over a period of time, it is important to be consistent in using the same interpreter.

Conclusion

Assessing refugee students in the schools is one of the many challenges we face daily. Factors such as the student's heritage, the impact of culture on the student's development, barriers to communication and the willingness of the professionals to be culturally sensitive to the needs of the families, have to be taken into consideration. To do assessments more effectively, we need to be more flexible by acknowledging stereotypes and assumptions. A common stereotype is that parents do not care about their children's education. However, our experience shows that, in fact, parents care but do not know how to access services that may be available. We also need to become more aware of other cultures, which will help us learn to accept other people's own cultural backgrounds and beliefs. An assessment process can be an overwhelming experience for students and parents that can cause stress, anxiety, uncertainty, fear and even mistrust. By encouraging constructive communication about differences as well as taking time to deal with cultural and language concerns, we can learn from one another. Professionals can do their job with more ease, but most of all, with understanding and respect for their clients' perspective. This approach can benefit the families and serve the children well in this challenging process. ■

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The Vitality of Interconnectedness: Vast's Service Delivery Programme, First Alone, Then Together

Mahshid Esfandiari and Frances MacQueen

Abstract

Work with survivors of torture requires a delicate balance of therapeutic approaches. This article presents the work of the Vancouver Association for the Survivors of Torture (VAST) by delving into some of VAST Therapeutic Principles of Care. It surveys the various therapeutic approaches embraced by VAST which help bridge the inside and outside world of survivors of torture. Among these approaches, bodywork plays a significant role in establishing this bridging. Most of all, this article emphasizes the need to respect the leads from the survivors themselves. Culturally appropriate and sensitive treatment approaches are central. All of these salient factors contribute to the holistic approach emphasized by VAST in order to join hands with survivors on their way to building a sense of interconnectedness and human vitality.

Introduction

Résumé

Le travail avec des rescapés de la torture requiert un équilibre délicat entre diverses approches thérapeutiques. Cet essai présente le travail de l'Association des survivants de la torture de Vancouver (VAST - Vancouver Association for the Survivors of Torture), en explorant quelques-uns des Principes thérapeutiques de soin de VAST. Cette étude examine les approches thérapeutiques variées utilisées par VAST qui aident des rescapés de la torture à établir un rapprochement entre leurs univers intérieur et extérieur. Parmi toutes ces approches, les soins apportés au corps jouent un rôle significatif dans l'élaboration de ce rapprochement. Mais cet essai fait surtout ressortir le besoin de respecter les indications fournies par les rescapés eux-mêmes. Des approches thérapeutiques culturellement appropriées et sensibles, sont primordiales. Chacun de ces facteurs saillants joue un rôle dans l'approche holistique mise en oeuvre par VAST afin de tendre la main aux survivants et de les soutenir dans leurs efforts pour élaborer un sens d'interconnexion et de vitalité humaine.

The Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture (VAST), although a small NGO, plays a crucial role in serving the needs of refugees who have survived torture. In 1999, they saw over 300 people from over 50 countries as well as debriefing over 300 Kosovars. The staff comprises of a coordinator, a clinical coordinator who is a psychologist and a support staff. The clinical coordinator oversees the volunteer work of the team of psychologists and psychiatrists. Other important players in VAST are the team of six body care practitioners as well as the cultural interpreters who work closely with the clinical coordinator.

But, what brings refugee service providers to this kind of work- In this line of work, feeling that the endeavours make a difference is part of the driving force. In fact, making a difference is a sustaining value. Frances illustrates it:

> There are two things in terms of sustaining me. One is I think it's a real honour to witness somebody's story. That's sustaining. And the other is the fact that one can make a real difference in someone's life. They're very small differences, but what an honour to be able to do that. And then other times, it's really big. I can honestly say that I've saved many people's lives by getting them to a safe haven or by finding someone who could do that in the homeland.... It's these kinds of victories in this office that we get. I mean, the beautiful serendipities that happen here from time to time and moment to moment. We probably have one at least every week.

The coordinator organizes VAST's services from the outside mainly because we need to have someone who is designated to be the outside contact as well as to oversee the services from within. In this capacity, the coordinator also provides practical support for people who have survived torture, but in truth, we all provide support for each other in many ways, in structured and unstructured ways. For the coordinator, the question is why do such work? The response is:

> I think I happen to be good at it. If you ask me why am I good at it, I don't really know. It's very easy for me to make a connection with people and I feel very connected with people. I have a long history of human rights activity. I've lived in countries where human rights violations are a regular occurrence and part of the normality of life. I've lost friends to political violence, so it's part of my history.

Although the coordinator does not think of herself as a survivor of torture, she sometimes shares with refugees some of her experiences to let them know that they are not alone. "I think it's very reassuring for some people that it is not the end of the world, nor the end of the road. So I might choose to tell some people. With other people, it does not come up."

As clinical coordinator, Mahshid's role is diverse.

> If there are people who are in immediate need, I will see them. Then, I will continue with some of them for therapy. As well, I organize the therapists' team, interview the therapists and bring them to the team. I also do the referrals and arrange for the interpreters. I try to take care of the therapists' needs.

The clinical coordinator also organizes monthly meetings and invites speakers to meetings and organizes the body workers' team, since working to-

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gether is essential. To complement psychological therapy, survivors of torture (participant is the term VAST uses) are referred to the body workers. Thus, "we work alongside with them: I do the therapy and they do the body work. As well, we spend time and talk about the changes in the person."

VAST's Clinical Philosophy: Therapeutic Principles of Care

For those that may have a calling to this line of work, the question may emerge whether a particular clinical philosophy is necessary. However, there is not one that can be easily categorized. We assume that people are made of their experiences. This means that what someone may be dealing with may not be just about the torture itself. It could be related to their childhood experiences or their social experiences etc. For example, if they immigrated or are in a refugee situation, the difficulties may be connected, but it is not specifically about the torture experience. It does not matter to us, what it is connected to, or what the problem is. The main objective is to allow the persons to be. We bring them to where they can pay attention to what their needs are at this time and how we can cooperate to help each other to meet their needs, whatever it relates to. If we take care of this need, which in the present session, we may gradually take care of the layers. Along the way, we may end up facing the torture and we realize, "Oh, there it is!" That's why this person is having a hard time in this situation, of having experienced it previously elsewhere, either in childhood or in a trauma experience.

Through the process of building a relationship, we do not put something aside and say, "Okay, this has nothing to do with me, and I am not going to talk with you about this, let's talk about the torture. No, that's not the way we work." This is about life, about learning how to get back again to who they were before the torture. Survivors of torture become frozen in time by the torture. Therefore, we work to maneuver around those experiences and untangle them. It is about coming to recognize that the torture was a small portion of their lives. In all of this, it is important to reawaken memories of good experiences, which are forgotten because of the torture. Thus, this is about how to be able to get back to normal life again!

VAST's service delivery programme is both constant in its aim and flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances. Every aspect relates directly to the same concepts. Frances explains: "I don't get to determine what happens, the person determines that. That's very important." When a person comes to our center, the process starts off with Frances, who does the initial intake. Over time, the process for the intake has changed. As Frances describes it, "there is no one set procedure." This has to do with a number of factors guided by years of experience in doing this work and by what is told to us. Flexibility, careful listening and looking, clarity of purpose and loads of discussion, all impact the nature of the intake. This learning process can be both invigorating and frustrating. According to Mahshid, "There is no blueprint we can look to. It's important to us all that there are some consistencies, but the only hard and fast rule is the principle of care" (see box below).

The "Usuals"

Since there is no strict set of procedures, we prefer to call them 'the usuals'. The intake takes about an hour. This is when Frances asks questions about the person's physical health, although a physician from Vancouver Hospital regularly sees people at VAST. She explains how VAST works, who the funders are and what is the range of services offered. A diverse number of options are available, from practical support such as bus tickets or a snack or bodywork such as massage therapy or psychological counselling and psychiatric services. An explanation of VAST's protocol around confidentiality and safety follows. Usually, by the end of an hour, the person has determined which services, if any, she or he wants. Generally, the follow-up meeting with Frances is also arranged at this time and such appointments are made before the person leaves.

VAST Therapeutic Principles of Care

1. Be trustworthy, recognize it takes time to build trust.
2. Stress confidentiality.
3. Avoid assessment and treatment approaches which may re-victimize survivors, such as intrusive probing into past trauma.
4. Ensure that the program participant feels a sense of control over the therapy process.
5. Be sensitive and responsive to the variety and holistic (physical, psychological, spiritual and social) needs of survivors of torture.
6. Strive to understand the individual in the context of their family and provide care to build or restore healthy family relations.
7. Be alert to "triggers" in the centre's environment, like uniforms or lengthy waiting periods.
8. Seek knowledge about the culture of individual participant and the human rights conditions and history in their country of origin.
9. Use culturally sensitive and appropriate treatment approaches.
10. Be flexible and willing to be available for survivors.
11. Focus on the strengths of the programme participant, not solely on their problems.
12. Recognize that interpreters act as cultural interpreters and are a valuable resource as part of the VAST team.
13. Be conscious and responsive to one's own reactions during care, such as counter-transference and secondary traumatization.
14. Maintain an open commitment to human rights.

"We've evolved this process to take into account that we can and must be able to let go of 'procedure,' should the situation call for it," says Frances. "We've learned that the most effective way is *people-before-administration.*" So we may or may not ever learn the story of the person's torture, their real name, country of origin. Usually we do, but not always. And that has to be accepted. Otherwise we are holding on to our agenda, instead of paying attention to their needs. Since the experience of torture is different for every person, therapists need to work with the information each person provides. During this process, the therapist needs to stay with the person in the present. Because the torture experience is so injurious, the person may avoid talking about it. The therapist may then focus on how the person is doing now, what he or she is feeling, with whom they are maintaining contact on a daily basis. However, it is in these interactions that unfolding occurs. Gradually the person unfolds glimpses that allow the therapist and the person to see the root of what is creating the situation. It is then that the survivor begins to recognize his or her needs.

As a therapist, one does not want to go to the experience of torture, because this is very uncomfortable. Sometimes the therapist does not get the whole story, but through this interaction, a participant begins to rediscover his or her needs. This is critical because the person was denied his or her needs. In fact, the person has forgotten what his or her needs are. Thus, in the therapeutic context, we teach survivors that their needs are important. The participant leads you to where you are at that particular moment. It is then that the therapist may respond with, "Let's talk about this." A therapist cannot expect to get the whole story at once, but must be extremely patient and allow the small glimpses to emerge gradually.

None of our case histories is typical. However, following VAST principles is critical, regardless of the case. The following two stories may illustrate how the principles work in practice. The true identity is concealed in order to protect the confidentiality of the persons. Any parallel with a real person is merely coincidental.

Case History 1

A Canadian Immigration officer contacted us to discuss resources for a twenty eight year old woman, "B," who had arrived very recently and had a history of trauma in her country of origin. VAST was hosting a barbecue in a local park the next day and we told the officer that she would be very welcome to attend. At the barbecue "B" played football, soccer, and ate and drank with other program participants. Conversation was very limited, but everyone made an effort to engage her in conversation. "B" spoke German very well, which was the only common language and Frances strove to convey the mandates and workings of VAST and she was invited to phone us.

After two weeks, she phoned for an intake. Since we had some knowledge of her ethnic and political background, an interpreter was arranged with similar history. During the intake conducted in her first language, she gave a false name and said that her country of origin was Germany. She presented predominant avoidance symptoms: emotional constriction, low affect and social isolation. Therapy was set-up using a female Swiss German interpreter on a weekly basis. Initial subjects for discussion were her present daily contacts and activities at her English language classes. The therapist also focused on her body posture, drawing attention to how she carried her body and how she was breathing. A concern of the staff was the apparent loss of weight. When asked about it, she answered that she ate merely for energy to carry her body around, that she experienced no enjoyment from food and had no appetite.

In a later discussion she talked about her belief that most people were bad and that there were only a very few people who were good in this world. She had not at this point discussed any of her traumatic experiences and conversation remained with present day events as well as her opinions. She was given an assignment to draw any of the good people that she had known with suggestions that she could put them in a boat, like Noah's Ark, so that they could be saved from the flood. The next session she brought in a drawing with her family members in the Ark. Her family members were all dead; her father of sickness, her siblings were killed in the war and her mother died after her health was affected by the death of "B's" siblings. This led to a discussion on the beginning of her past, her childhood with her grandmother whom she loved very much and with whom she spent most of her childhood. Discussion on her grandmother invoked happy memories and led to a conversation about her grandmother's cooking which she remembered with gusto. The therapist gave her the task of trying to remember the recipes and to re-create those foods as a comfort. She began to gain weight. After four months of therapy, she introduced herself to another program participant by her own name and country of origin.

All of the therapy was directed by "B." The therapist did not lead, "B" did. When she was numb, she was allowed to be, the therapist merely pointed out her observations with unconditional acceptance. She was not pushed to recall nor recollect and she became able to express anger and sadness. When these emotions returned, they were acknowledged. A turning point in her therapy came after about three months. She began to realize that most of her life had been positive (more good than bad had occurred in her life). Her energy returned and she began to be able to focus on her studies. Meanwhile, she came to the realization that she now had the freedom to choose a new course for her life. She chose not to return to nursing. Instead, she is continuing to explore the world that is hers, moving fast toward recovery. Comfortable in her home culture as well as the Canadian mainstream culture, she is now socializing well. The exploration and discovery of other parts and qualities in herself continues while she maintains contact with and participates in VAST's social activities.

Case History 2

"P," a male in his mid-thirties brought his sister to VAST for advice to assist her with a failed refugee claim. He came through a recommendation by another political activist, "M." Later he revealed that he had been in prison with "M" for many years. VAST services were explained to him while his sister was assisted. "P" began to bring in other people who needed immigration assistance and we advised how and when we could, or made appropriate referrals.

We joked with him and discussed the culture, politics and mutual stories or news.

After several months, he revealed that he believed that he would benefit from therapy but was hesitant to receive it, especially from someone of his own culture. Thus, he was given a choice. We explained to him that should any therapist not suit or help him, he could try others, that "therapy was a bit like marriage. Therapists worked in different ways and one had to find the right person, a person with whom he felt comfortable." All programme participants are told this. He elected to work with his original therapist, even though therapy sessions were initially hesitant and testing. Added to this dynamic was another, the influence of a political ally from another party who was receiving therapy at VAST. The ally persisted in trying to convince "P" that he should change to a Canadian-born therapist who was deeply committed to social justice.

Focus began on anger management, with a discussion on family relationships and the possible effects of being an inattentive parent. "P" was isolated into a small sub-culture from his country since he was still involved in political struggle and party activities. This was understandable since his identity was formed by his engagement as a radical activist for the poor at the age of thirteen. His parents were poor. Gradually, as a trusting relationship was built, he began to reveal glimpses of his experiences in prison and of the torture that he endured. The therapist responded to these glimpses by listening and moving away from the story without asking him to elaborate, referring him instead to pay attention to his feelings and body reactions whilst he was speaking of the trauma. The therapist conveyed to him that her interest was in him as a person and on how his experiences were affecting him now. He then discovered for himself that bodies and feelings are interconnected. At this point he was also referred to a body care practitioner, a Reiki Master with knowledge of Neurological Organizational Techniques. The body care practitioner worked in conjunction with the psychotherapist. He began to move to recovery very quickly. He and his child began to take classical music lessons arranged through VAST.

As he developed a stronger sense of himself and his internal strength, his marital relationship underwent a crisis. His trauma responses then became retriggered, but he recovered his emotional well being very quickly. This fast recovery was a surprising discovery for him, adding to his sense of self. He maintained therapy, attending approximately every two weeks whilst he struggled with the fundamental issues precipitated by his wife's desire to leave the marriage. They live separately for now but maintain some continuing intimacy, always at the wife's behest or request. He is continuing to learn and is now self-processing his emotions. The therapy has helped him as he is now able to identify his issues and process them. Meanwhile, he checks in approximately once every two months.

Implications for Therapeutic Practice

The "VAST Therapeutic Principles of Care" were taken from some research findings on survivors of torture on what may induce feelings of terror (Horowitz 1993, Martin-Baró 1994). A brief discussion follows to elaborate on a few of these principles. The discussion will be based on our own experiences as well as research findings. To open the door for programme participants to engage, two principles are essential to begin the process, *safety and confidentiality*, both of which go hand in hand. The major focus of intake is explaining to potential participants their rights and responsibilities as well as our rights and responsibilities.

Horowitz (1993) identifies several stages in the treatment of PTSD. In the first stage, it is essential to establish safety and to build trust. By trust, we say, "you can trust some people in some areas of your life. It's okay not to trust, and people are not expected to trust in all areas of their life." The most important thing is that the program participant trust his or her own feelings and instincts. This way, the program participant knows what is good for him or her at all times. He or she should listen to the inner voice and check out any personal hesitations.

When people first come to VAST, they have been hurt. An official has attempted consciously to destroy them and their ideals, perhaps has destroyed their family members or colleagues. To be more precise, another human being has acted previously in an unbelievable and unconscionable way, therefore anything becomes possible then. Consequently hypervigilance symptoms are predominant (common physical symptoms are flight, fight and freeze) and there needs to be constant reassurance to prevent triggering these responses. At the VAST office, we have signs that ask people if they experience anything which makes them feel unsafe, to please try to tell someone, any one of us, so that we can address this. In one particular case, a Nigerian saw a coat hanger which had been covered by crochet in green and white weave. He believed this had been placed there by the Nigerian Government (The flag is green and white). We immediately removed the coat hanger and promised him that he would not see it again in the office.

Among VAST Principles of Care, one recommends to "Be alert to triggers in the centre's environment, like uniforms or lengthy waiting periods." Triggers can be anything and cannot be avoided, but we can take care of what we know about. We must, as professionals, respect boundaries, be non-intrusive and allow the program participant space.

> Torture is used by repressive regimes and groups to systematically destroy an individual's personality and a society's sense of security. It plants the seeds of dismay and mistrust within a community and if given time, grows to become [an] immutable and ominous reminder of the terror that is so close at hand. Its effects are long-lasting and widespread over all realms of the survivor's life; to all those who come into contact with him or her and to the entire community. This devastation is what has become so appealing to the torturer,

> and thus torture is often used as the ultimate and most powerful means to crush the adversary and the society from which they stem. (VAST 1995, p.2)

Another point to the trust and safety issue is that most of our program participants are or were political activists. Consequently, their governments may still be interested in silencing them since there are people in our midst who do report back. One of our Iranian participants was in a demonstration and within a week the government was showing a photograph of his participation to family members back home. There are valid concerns regarding spies and there are many examples of political insecurity. Most of our Program participants are very concerned about the safety of their family members and colleagues back home. This is a valid concern and one that must be taken seriously.

The Family Context

Social isolation generally is one of the results of the official and intentional infliction of pain and suffering (See Martin-Baró 1994). As a result, family relationships become threatened. It may be that the person's experience was so horrific that she or he cannot share the experience with his or her partner, or that if shared, the partner is unable to fully integrate this knowledge for him or herself. Therefore, intimacy is broken as the survivor and his or her partner are unable to reach the intimacy that is needed in a healthy family context.

We are currently working with a couple who are both traumatized and unable to fully share their feelings and experiences with each other. Both are demanding acknowledgement and caring from the other. At this time, however, neither can summon up the resources needed to assist the other, since each one is totally occupied and absorbed with his and her own inner pain. Consequently, each one is frustrated with the other and upset with the demands placed upon him and her by the other. We are working individually with separate counsellors. In addition to the individual therapy, we are providing them 'couple counselling' in order to help them hear and to know themselves as well as each other.

In other examples, some parents have come to us because they are concerned about the behaviour of their children. In most cases, the problems experienced have been managed by working primarily with the parents. Healthy social interaction begins at home and works outward. In all of our work, our focus is to identify, acknowledge and normalize reactions to trauma. To do this, we encourage people to pay attention to their thoughts and feelings in the 'here-and-now.'

Knowledge of Culture

It is important to understand the political, religious and cultural context of any individual. However, the most important factor is then to suspend judgement and make no pre-conceived assumptions, because each person is a culture unto him or herself. VAST therapists allow the individual to teach and to inform us about his or her world scheme, according to what feels right at the time. We are also supportive about doing this at each individual's pace and wishes. Authentic interest expressed by the counsellor about the programme participant's world view and background culture are also a useful bridging to discuss values, ideas and to gain insight about inner workings.

Culturally Sensitive Treatment Approaches

Most newcomers are unfamiliar with our culture of counselling. To be effective, we believe it is important to allow the person to take the lead, to determine for him or herself "how," "when" and "what" they need to receive to move towards recovery. Thus, we modify our treatment approaches to accommodate the person's own pace and culture. We ask, "what would this person do?" Or "what would be helpful if he or she were in the country of origin?" An approach that has proven effective to VAST practitioners is bodywork.

The Bodywork Team: Healing from Inside and Outside

Torture is generally committed on the body to impact the soul or psyche. Thus body and mind both need attention. Working with survivors of torture is whole person work. Survivors are extremely vulnerable, sad and consumed with memories of being tortured. The memories are especially felt in the particular parts of the body that were injured. Furthermore, because of the trauma, survivors are not able to connect with the emotions associated with the trauma. Instead, in many cases, they endure body sensations. Therefore, bodywork is essential to give attention to the body while at the same time attending to emotions. In order to accomplish this, the survivor works with both the therapist and the bodyworker. It is a process of working both inside and outside. Each practitioner, though, has a different section to work on but provides feedback to the survivor as well as to the other practitioners. Thus, a therapeutic triangle is established. Amazingly "what you notice in therapy, the bodyworker experiences also, the same feelings."

Our body care practitioner team is being developed. It currently consists of six professionals from a variety of differing theoretical backgrounds. The team is represented by: 1) a Reiki Master with Neurological Organizational Technique (NOT) and Touch for Health theoretical knowledge; 2) a Rosen Method specialist; 3) an Alexander Technique specialist; 4) a specialist in Breema and Shiatsu; 5) a massage therapist; and 6) a physiotherapist. Consequently, the bodywork team affords a variety of healing approaches, some involve touch while others focus on transmitting energy without touching the body. Reiki and Alexander, for example, work through energy transmission by placing the hands above the body or specifically above the injured part of the body. Among those that intervene by touching the body are Breema, Rosen method, and Shiatsu. Kurdish people have made a contribution with the Breema method, which can be described as a combination of massage and chiropractic techniques. Shiatsu works by massaging certain points in the nervous system.

Thus, touch can be above the body from energy sources, light or deep tissue work. Again, VAST is careful to listen to the survivors' voices in their preferences as we make every effort to match needs to resources. Above all, we stress the need for the survivors to control what is happening to them, which is unlike their torture experiences. Now they have control of the processes that affect them. This is especially important since any bodywork may trigger traumatic memories.

Conclusion

Working with survivors of torture requires special skills and sensitivities from practitioners. Equally important is to offer a variety of therapeutic approaches and modalities that are culturally appropriate and respectful of the programme participants. Above all, a holistic approach is necessary to connect with the person at various levels. Among the therapeutic approaches, we consider bodywork complementary to more mainstream psychological ones. In order to serve survivors from diverse cultural backgrounds, we attend carefully to the selection of cultural interpreters. Regardless of the approach, the survivor must provide the lead in the therapeutic process. If the survivor chooses in an instance not to receive therapy but to just share a cup of coffee or tea with other survivors or with the coordinator, this is accepted and respected. "If survivors just want to socialize, meet others from other cultures, or meditate at the center ... or talk with one of us or a staff person, we respect the boundaries set by the survivors," asserts Esfandiari. At VAST, the therapeutic principles of care provide guidelines to practitioners but most important, is letting the survivor lead the process supported in a safe and trustworthy setting. ■

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The University of New South Wales Law Journal
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The above issues are in no way exhaustive and any article that has an impact on Refugees and asylum seekers, will be considered for publication.

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