

**PARTICIPATION OF INTERNATIONALLY-EDUCATED PROFESSIONALS  
IN AN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION  
BACHELOR OF EDUCATION DEGREE PROGRAM:  
CHALLENGES AND SUPPORTS<sup>1</sup>**

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This paper examines challenges and supports experienced by internationally educated immigrants who participated as adult students in an Initial Teacher Education Bachelor of Education degree program in Ontario as part of their strategy to begin new careers as teachers. The narrative of one participant, a Chinese-educated meteorologist and journalist is presented as a powerful illustration of the challenges, supports and common themes described by the study participants. Her story communicates challenges related to: time; language; the culture of the teaching profession in Ontario; intra-cultural racism; feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, isolation and invisibility related to ‘otherness’; and a competitive labour market that disadvantages immigrant teachers. Her story also describes support through: constructive mentoring, a course developed specifically for internationally educated student teachers; and, supportive peer colleagues.

Ontario is one of the most culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse regions in the world (Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine, 1997; Government of Ontario, 2005). Recent newcomers to Ontario have arrived predominantly from Somalia, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Iran, Taiwan, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Hong Kong, Romania, Philippines, and China, and do not speak English or French as their first language (City of Toronto, 1998; Government of Ontario, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2005). With rising immigration rates, an increasing number of adults

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<sup>1</sup> This research was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

living in Ontario were educated and trained outside of Canada and the United States.

Unfortunately, these newcomers bring to Ontario prior professional and academic credentials and experiences that are often not recognized by employers (Goldberg, 2005; Justus, 2004; Picot & Hou, 2003) and institutions of higher education in Ontario (Chassels, 2005).

Statistics Canada has found that having educational and professional credentials from their country of origin has done little to ensure access to professions commensurate with a newcomer's education and experience, or to mitigate an immigrant's probability of earning a substandard income (Picot & Hou, 2003). In an effort to broaden their employment opportunities, Canada's immigrants often seek education and training in new fields (Chassels, 2005). For some, teaching in Ontario is considered a respectable and financially lucrative alternative to the profession for which they were trained in their country of origin. Successful participation in an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) program, however, often proves challenging for internationally-educated student teachers (IESTs).

The research presented in this paper examines challenges and supports experienced by immigrants who participated as adult students in an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree program in Ontario. Lanying<sup>2</sup>, a Chinese-educated meteorologist and journalist who immigrated to Canada in 1990, and who, after unsuccessful attempts to gain employment in her fields of expertise, undertook a Bachelor of Education degree to pursue a career in teaching, is one participant in the study. Lanying's narrative, presented in this paper, provides a powerful illustration of the challenges, supports and common themes described by the IESTs in this study. Her story communicates instances of: loneliness; de-skilled under-employment; complex social dynamics related to perceptions of self and others founded on interpretations of English language proficiency; identity construction and re-construction;

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<sup>2</sup> Lanying is a pseudonym.

extraordinary time pressures as a parent attending to family responsibilities and the intense demands of the ITE program; strategizing to compete for entry to the labour market; networking with supportive peers; benefitting from honest, constructive and encouraging mentoring; engagement with a course and instructor explicitly framed to support internationally-educated student teachers; persistence; and, optimism common among the study participants and reflective of emerging relevant research literature in this field (Bascia, 1996a; Faez, 2006; Hutchison & Jazzar, 2007; Mawhinney & Xu, 1997; Myles, Cheng, & Wang, 2006; Rhone, 2007; Thiessen, Bascia, & Goodson, 1996). Representative of the participants in this study, Lanying's narrative provides a context from which the challenges and supports experienced by IESTs participating in an initial teacher education program can be examined. In this paper, Lanying's pre-interview questionnaire and interview data are first presented as an "actively constructed narrative" (Silverman, 2003, p.346) which is then related to current research literature in the discussion section.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guide this study:

- 1) What systemic, institutional, and individual dynamics challenge and/or support immigrant minority and English language learner participation in an Initial Teacher Education Bachelor of Education degree program in Ontario?
- 2) How do the identified systemic, institutional, and individual dynamics intersect with socially constructed complexities of race, class, gender, language and religion to challenge and/or support immigrant minority and English language learner participation in an Initial Teacher Education Bachelor of Education degree program in Ontario?

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

This study is guided by a central concern for issues of social justice and equity and is positioned within a critical integrative anti-racism framework (Dei, 2000). Critical integrative anti-racism “emerges out of the recognition of the importance of race identity, social difference and representation in educational practice” (Dei, 2000, p.33) and deconstructs what has been established as normative by dominant society. In particular, critical anti-racism examines and deconstructs the dominance, privilege, power and identity of Whiteness while maintaining that race, class, gender, language and other forms of social difference interact in complex inter-relatedness to power and powerlessness, privilege and oppression (Dei, 2000).

With regard to immigration and the opportunities available to immigrant minority and English language learners, Dei (2000) argues the need to consider the ways in which “race, class and gender conspire to determine which people are allowed into Canada, where they are permitted to work once admitted and the conditions under which they work” (p.32). Critical anti-racism deems it imperative to interrogate systemic and institutional gatekeeping as mechanisms of dominance and privilege.

### **Research Methodology**

The research questions stated above are informed primarily by pre-interview questionnaires and semi-structured interactive interviews (Appendix A) conducted in June 2006 with ten IESTs who were members of the 2006 graduating class of an ITE B.Ed. program at an Ontario College of Teachers accredited university in Southern Ontario. To provide for a deeper understanding relevant to the research questions, secondary data were collected through interviews with four student services staff and four instructors of the ITE program at the same

university (Appendices B and C). All interviews were transcribed, coded thematically and sorted into an organizational chart. The data for each IEST participant were then analyzed and articulated as an actively constructed narrative for each individual. This process provided for greater insight into the significant themes of each participant and allowed for deeper analysis across the narratives. The data from the student services staff and instructors were analyzed thematically within and across groups and in comparison to the themes identified by the IESTs.

### **The Initial Teacher Education Program Context**

The Initial Teacher Education B.Ed. program from which the study participants graduated is a Consecutive degree program accredited by the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT). Upon graduation from the program, student teachers earn a Bachelor of Education degree and are recommended to the OCT for a Certificate of Qualification required to teach in Ontario's publically-funded schools.

To qualify for admission to the ITE B.Ed. program, all applicants are required to hold at least one approved undergraduate degree from an acceptable granting university with a minimum grade average in the 'B' (3.0) range. Additionally, applicants who have a first language other than English and did not engage in at least three years of successful study at a university where English is the language of instruction and examination are required to demonstrate English language proficiency measured by sufficient scores on standardized language tests acceptable to the university. The standard for English language proficiency is the equivalent of an overall IELTS (International English Language Testing System) band score of 7 with no band score less than 6.5.

The Consecutive ITE B.Ed. program is a 9-month, five days per week full-time program consisting of five academic course components and two practical field experience components comprising two four-week practice teaching blocks and one five-week self-directed internship. Typical of many OCT accredited initial teacher education programs, the academic courses provide opportunities for student teachers to develop their understanding of: the transformative purposes of education; teacher identity and professionalism; educational law; psychological foundations of child development and learning; pedagogy; curriculum content knowledge; assessment and evaluation; and, social constructions of teaching and learning in contexts of diversity, dis/advantage, and inequality. The two four-week practice teaching blocks in partnership schools under the mentorship and supervision of an associate classroom teacher are intended to provide opportunities for student teachers to: observe the school and community context; develop and teach lessons in consultation with their associate teacher; become increasingly independent in their work as a teacher throughout the practice teaching blocks; assess student progress; and, reflect on their effectiveness as a teacher. The five-week self-directed internship at the end of the program provides an opportunity for student teachers to engage in continued professional development in schools or other education-related sites (e.g., museums, curriculum development organizations, early childhood centres).

The Consecutive ITE B.Ed. program is rigorous and requires significant time and effort from its student teachers. In keeping with research examining student engagement in initial teacher education programs (e.g., Faez, 2006), the faculty members and student services staff participating in this study indicated that many participants in the program experience periods of exhaustion, feelings of being overwhelmed, time-deprivation, challenging power dynamics with their associate mentor teachers during the practice teaching blocks, and an arduous learning

curve in developing skills in program planning and delivery, assessing student progress, and managing student behaviour. The IESTs participating in this study described facing similar challenges in the ITE B.Ed. program but felt that as IESTs their struggles were amplified as they navigated unique circumstances that Canadian-educated and native-English speaking student teachers did not encounter. Lanying's narrative provides insight into the experiences of IESTs in an ITE B.Ed. program and maps themes of settlement and training for new careers that are common among many Canadian immigrants (Justus, 2004).

### **“I'm a come from behind runner.” – Lanying's Story**

In China, Lanying graduated university as the top student in her class. She says she was “the lucky one” because entrance exams and limited spaces in China's universities meant a 1 in 25 chance of being accepted to an undergraduate degree program. Lanying studied mathematics and sciences and earned a degree in Meteorology. As the top student, she was assigned by the government to work for China's Meteorology Centre in a prestigious position as Editor of the country's Meteorological Press. She worked in this capacity for 7 years until an opportunity for professional development in Canada was offered in 1990. At the age of 30, Lanying began to plan her trip to Canada. For three years, she saved money and studied English so she could pass the required English proficiency test.

Lanying describes her early days in Canada as a “dream come true” – “a honeymoon”. As part of a visiting delegation from China, she traveled to Niagara Falls and other tourist destinations and enjoyed the beauty of Canada and the camaraderie of the group. She felt during those early months that she was living her dream and she decided that she would build a future in Canada for herself and her husband, who she had left behind in China. After 6 months, the rest of

her delegation returned to China and Lanying moved in with a “Canadian family” and worked as their nanny and housekeeper so she could save money to fund her future plans in Canada. In particular, Lanying was determined to save money so she could pay tuition to attend university in Canada.

Domestic work was difficult for Lanying. Not only did she feel de-skilled and under-employed, she also felt that she didn’t have enough experience to do the job well. In China, as the youngest child of 3, she was not required or invited to help with household chores and when she married and moved into her husband’s home, her mother-in-law and grandmother-in-law managed the household. Living with the Canadian family and working as their nanny and housekeeper was demeaning to Lanying: “I have to clean the floors – it was a really big adjustment – in China, I worked in an office in a very respected job but here, all of a sudden I change my job and I feel like I’m at the bottom of the world.”

Lanying worked as a nanny and housekeeper from Monday to Friday and to supplement her income, she sold flowers in the streets of Toronto on weekends. It was her experience as a street vendor that brought her first success as a journalist in Canada. After two years in Canada, Lanying took a journalism course at an Ontario university. As part of her course, she wrote an article about her experiences selling flowers on the street and her article was published in the Toronto Star. She believes that her story was unique because most street vendors do not have her level of education.

People here who have very good education don’t usually sell flowers... they don’t write articles so I was in a unique position. That’s why the editor said my article is fresh because I spoke in a way people don’t expect – I wrote about how I felt during the four seasons – what people I meet when I sell flowers.

Selling flowers on the street was a very difficult job, especially as inclement weather started to take its toll:

I remember in the winter – Valentine’s Day is a big day for us and everything was frozen. We put the flower in the bucket and the water would freeze. I had to keep kicking the bucket because I didn’t want the water to freeze. My hands were so numb that day. There was lots of money, but it’s a hard time to count because it’s so cold.

Loneliness, deskilled underemployment, persistence, and optimism are enduring themes throughout Lanying’s narrative. She was in Canada for almost five years, “waiting in separation”, before she was granted landed immigrant status and was able to sponsor her husband’s immigration to Canada. During those five years, Lanying worked as a domestic labourer, sold flowers on the street, and studied journalism at universities in Ontario and Manitoba. She saved her money to pay tuition fees; without landed immigrant status she did not qualify for financial aid. She also paid \$6000 to an immigration counselor, a service and fee she later learned was not necessary. When she found that tuition fees and the cost of living were cheaper in Manitoba, Lanying left Ontario and studied for one year in Manitoba. She describes her year in Manitoba as “the worse year”:

Maybe that’s why I have four children – I don’t want them to feel lonely like I did in Manitoba in the middle of the night when all I could hear was the train whistle – very lonely – so lonely – all alone. But everything has a good side and a bad side – it makes you stronger. You could easily break.

Lanying often speaks of strength and perseverance. She completed several university courses in journalism but set her dreams of being a journalist in Canada aside to start a family with her husband when he joined her in Canada. Their four children are a constant source of pride and activity for Lanying and she is very involved in their schooling. It was through her volunteer work at her children’s school that the idea of becoming a teacher started to resonate with Lanying. The principal and several teachers at the school mentioned to Lanying that she would be a good teacher and that she should become a teacher. While she didn’t immediately agree with their suggestion, Lanying recalled her mother’s work as a teacher in China and the

time she spent as a teenager helping her mother in her classroom. She also enjoyed the school environment where her children attended school and started to see where she had something to offer. With her degree in meteorology and her university credits from universities in Canada, Lanying did not have difficulty being accepted to an Initial Teacher Education program in Ontario. The difficulties, and Lanying's need to call on her strength and perseverance, began on the first day of classes in her B.Ed. program and intensified right up until the final days of classes.

Lanying's program of study started before the school year began for her children and this presented a problem in terms of childcare. Lanying's husband was not able to take a day off work to stay home with the children and Lanying did not have childcare arrangements for her children during the summer months. As a result, Lanying arrived at her first class accompanied by her four children aged 4 to 10. While Lanying didn't need to bring her children to class with her after that first day, being a mother presented significant challenges to her in other ways, particularly with regard to the amount of time she had available for her studies and to prepare lessons and materials for her practice teaching activities. After school, Lanying would help her children with their homework and prepare the family meal. After cleaning up from the evening meal, Lanying would devote one to one time to her oldest child who, in grade 5, found his homework challenging:

Sometimes I have to stay up with him until 10:30 or 11:00. It's so stressful. After I put them to sleep, I stay up late until around 3:30, have two hours sleep, and then get up again. Time. I don't have any time. Like two minutes is a lot – whenever I have two minutes, I think, OK – I can do something. I'm always on the run.

Lanying is an English Language Learner (ELL) and although she has been in Canada for 15 years and has studied English for almost 20 years, she still struggles to communicate verbally

in English and she described language as something that really challenged her participation in the ITE B.Ed. program:

...especially spoken language and listening. When you talk to each other, not talk to me, when you talk to each other, it's fast to me – too fast. I only get an idea. Written language and reading, I don't have too much trouble. Just spoken English. How to express – sometimes it makes me frustrated when I say something and people didn't get it. That's when I feel – oh, my – that's when I feel really frustrated. My children correct me – 'My teacher didn't pronounce like that'. All the time.

Language also presented challenges for Lanying during her practice teaching. As she describes:

Courses – I can take a bit of time – I can finish an 8-page report – I can do it tomorrow – but in the class, they are coming. Kind of, oh my God, they're coming and it makes me so nervous and you have to be able to act fast. The students will ask you questions and how do you answer correctly?

Lanying also found cultural challenges that she hadn't expected, particularly the culture of teaching and the conventions of professional relationships between teachers and students:

Like here, you read the professional magazine and they say they accuse of professional misconduct and even the teacher pat on the back is not good. In our culture, teachers come visit my family and we can visit them. It's very close. ...here, I always have second thoughts. I'm too close to a student – oh my God, I need to remember I'm in Canada. Very scary stuff.

Lanying was cautioned during her second practicum that she was at risk of receiving a failing evaluation for that component of the program. Although she was told that she would be assigned another four-week practicum and would have another opportunity to be successful should she fail this second practicum, she was very upset by the prospect of failing – failing was not something that she had experience with. When Lanying talks about this time in her program, her strength, persistence, and optimism shine through:

I had a mental set. I came here and I wanted success – I don't want to fail. I will be strong. Things happen. It's not the end of the world. Like the last practicum, when I might fail, I was heartbroken. That time, I tell myself, you can, you have

to try harder. You have to work harder than other people and just be strong.  
Never give up. Never.

Lanying's narrative is an underdog story as she relates these themes repeatedly throughout her discussion of her year in the ITE B.Ed. program. Most of her stories are sports analogies:

Never give up. Never. Miracles do happen. I like sports. I like running. I'm a come from behind runner. In the 1500 metre, I don't have speed so I let them go. Go, go, go. Fast. One by one, I eat them up. I know we're not at the same level but I still think I will make it if I try my best. Right now I'm watching the [World Cup] soccer and I'm watching the underdogs and the longshots. But the longshots do win, right? So I think I'm a longshot. Like in horse racing, the longshots do beat the favourites, right. Sports help me to keep my spirits up. If I don't do a good job this time, maybe next time.

Lanying sees herself as an underdog in the ITE B.Ed. program, and in the highly competitive job market. She believes that she has disadvantages (e.g. cultural understanding of teaching and learning in Ontario because she wasn't a student in Ontario) and shortcomings (e.g. difficulty with verbal English – speaking and listening) that Canadian-born student teachers don't have. Regardless of her perceived shortcomings, Lanying believes that she has strengths that she can capitalize on and that with hard work and persistence she will succeed in the job market and as a teacher. In particular, Lanying believes that her strong academic knowledge of mathematics and science – subjects where specialists are in high demand – puts her at an advantage as does the current rhetoric within school Boards in Southern Ontario that they are committed to diversity and diversifying the teacher population. Lanying also believes that her fluency in Mandarin and Cantonese will be regarded favourably in some school communities. But still, as optimistic as she tries to be, with four children to support, maintaining a positive focus on her strengths is difficult:

We [IESTs] all feel insecure and still feel we're not good enough – inadequate.  
This morning, with another class, my math teacher said never put yourself down.

We always put ourselves down. We put down our English all the time. We always think about it automatically – like if two people try for a job, we always think that we’re definitely not the first choice. If you read the professional magazine, it says that internationally educated teachers don’t have enough respect to those people, like us, who are educated elsewhere. They have a higher percentage of working as a supply teacher. I know. I feel. That’s the reality we have to deal with. ...I need to work to my advantage. You want to work confidently. I feel badly. Not as good as others. I struggle with that daily – all the time.

Although Lanying described challenges and situations that might well be attributed to racism, linguicism, and gender inequity, when asked explicitly if she had experienced any effects of these prejudices, she only discussed what she found as a surprising source of racism from fellow TCs of Chinese heritage:

It’s funny – it’s not from people from other races – it’s actually from our own race. One student said he’s ashamed to be Chinese. I was shocked to hear that. Why would he say that? I don’t know. He was born here in Canada. Even though we’re all Chinese, we’re different. Another said, I prefer to call myself a Canadian. He doesn’t want to be called a Chinese-Canadian. I don’t know why. They should be proud to be Chinese. Look at ancient China – so many inventions. They really made a contribution to the world. Only that made me uncomfortable. Other than that, nothing because of my race.

While she didn’t articulate seeing a direct connection to racism prejudice, Lanying expressed a troubling sense of invisibility in the practicum context. To illustrate her feelings of invisibility, Lanying described a situation after graduation from the program where one of her host schools had appealed to 60 student teachers and asked them to offer their time as volunteers to help supervise students in the gym on the last day of school:

The people who are warm make our struggle less stressful. Just a smile and a few casual words – but others, they don’t even say hello. Like, I went back to one of my practicum schools to do some volunteer work – only me and another TC went – and it was such a hot day – and four classes watched a movie they didn’t want to watch and the teachers and the principal didn’t even bother to say hi. So I feel why did I come all this way – they didn’t even say thank you, they didn’t say hi. It was like I didn’t exist. That made me feel so bad. They asked 60 people to volunteer that day and only two responded. Maybe that’s the reason. I have a big heart. I helped the kids and that’s good. I’m really sensitive and it troubles me because I feel things all the time. That’s not good. Good if you’re going to write

poetry – or to write an article. But for other things it's distracting and makes you want to isolate yourself to study and just never mind.

When asked about the supports that helped her during her studies in the ITE program, Lanying talked about the importance of honest and helpful feedback from teachers in the field and from her faculty supervisors, and she pointed to her participation in a specially designed related studies course for internationally-educated student teachers as significant sources of support. During her first practice teaching experience, Lanying's host teacher was very positive about Lanying's work and did not indicate any areas for improvement. This may not have been in Lanying's best interest, however, as when her faculty supervisor from the university visited the classroom, it was clear that Lanying was not meeting even the basic expectations of the program. She was not developing and delivering lesson plans as required and she was not teaching lessons that were related to the Ontario Curriculum. Honest feedback and an action plan for improvement enabled Lanying to enter her second practicum with a more realistic concept of the expectations and workload. Although she was identified as at risk of failing her second practicum, daily and focused feedback from her host teacher and faculty supervisor, and her own efforts to deliver what was required, enabled Lanying to pass the practicum, and subsequently the program. By relating the experience of another IEST, Lanying describes the importance of a supportive host teacher: "One TC, her AT told her from the very beginning that she would fail – she didn't even teach her how to be good. We need a balance – you will succeed, but here is how you will be a success."

The related studies course developed specifically for internationally-educated students was a significant support to Lanying as it provided a safe space, a group of peers with similar challenges, and a supportive and empathetic instructor:

It felt like home – everybody like me. Speaking English with accents. We went through the same thing. We call ourselves survivors. We went through the same struggles. We felt isolation. English. The language problem – we all had that kind of fear. For example, I teach mathematics – I have to know the terms – how to pronounce. Some words are really hard – like parallelogram – and acute angle – obtuse angle – I learn how to say these words from my children.

Lanying also described the instructor of the course for IESTs as particularly helpful and sensitive to the needs of IESTs:

I think she is different. She knows our needs better. Even she speaks English slowly. Other courses, they speak normal, but she speaks very slowly and very clearly so we all don't misunderstand anything. Also, she encourages – I think she has a background teaching ESL so she knows how we feel. She encourages more.

When asked what advice she would give to future students who are in a situation similar to hers, Lanying offered the following:

Don't isolate yourself. You know, we tend to be shy – like my English is not good – they are going to laugh at me. Don't be afraid to make mistakes. We're all human beings. We all make mistakes all the time. I made a goal at the beginning to do my best. If you know the answer, raise your hand, even if your heart is beating so fast. Also, try to find somebody who is nice – patient. I found somebody – two girls in my class, they really encouraged me and helped me in the hard times. ...Talk to the teacher more. ...I wish I had done that more. Don't be too shy. That's the reality. You can't compete with native Canadians. Your English is probably always going to be with a bit of an accent and may not be perfect but if you're willing to take the risk, you will improve.

Lanying is committed to working hard and continuing her training in order to be successful in her search for a teaching job. Despite economic hardship, she paid to complete two Additional Qualifications courses (Intermediate/Senior Mathematics and ESL Part 1). In addition to persistence, optimism and playing to her strengths, Lanying believes that it's important to be prepared when opportunity strikes.

I watch the soccer and I really feel for them – they are losing but they still have to play – you have to finish – they still have to battle – we are the underdog – a longshot. I always wish the away team to win – or even a draw is better – is a victory for them. Like Trinidad – they got a draw and it felt like a win. You just have to be strong and never give up. Just keep hoping. And be prepared! If the

opportunity comes, if the ball is in front of the net and you don't have that kind of skill – you need the skill so that if the opportunity arises you can score. One to one – still they can't score because they don't have the skill – not just physically, but mentally.

### **Discussion**

Lanying's narrative tracing her journey from China, where she worked as a Meteorologist and journalist, to Canada where she worked as a nanny and street vendor, studied journalism at universities in Ontario and Manitoba, is raising four children with her husband, and has recently graduated from an ITE B.Ed. program and has earned qualifications to teach in Ontario, communicates themes of under-employment, loneliness, re-training, persistence and optimism that are common among new immigrants to Canada (Justus, 2004). Her feelings of diminished self-worth resulting from an inability to access employment related to her education and experience are particularly common among newcomers to Canada who frequently face challenges related to credential recognition (e.g. Duffy, 2004; Goar, 2004; Justus, 2004; Keung, 2004; Thompson, 2004) and intolerance of their 'accent' in the case of English language learners despite the fact that most have met language proficiency requirements (Green & Worswick, 2002; Taylor, 2008; Tollefson, 1991). Feelings of diminished self-esteem and humiliation among internationally-trained and experienced teachers throughout the credentialing process in British Columbia are articulated poignantly in the work of Beynon, Ilieva & Dichupa (2004).

Recent immigration trends in Canada have brought about a rapid diversification of the population as source countries have shifted from Western regions to Asia and Africa. The dilemma for many adult immigrants is that while approximately 70 percent of adult immigrants have some level of postsecondary education (Rae, 2005), the majority do not speak English as

their first language, and they are seeing diminishing returns on their foreign credentials (Justus, 2004).

Since 2002, there has been increased media attention to the under-employment of immigrants who enter Canada as educated professionals. Articles describing rising poverty rates among immigrants, even among the highly skilled and educated appear frequently in Toronto's newspapers (e.g. Duffy, 2004; Goar, 2004; Keung, 2004; Thompson, 2004). Muhammad Ali Aziz (2004), in his letter to the editor of *The Toronto Star*, articulates the frustration often repeated in the media:

Competence apparently flies out the plane window on touchdown. Years of experience, knowledge and skills suddenly become redundant upon arrival. Confidence and self-esteem hit the concrete slabs when a landed immigrant is told his or her degrees are not worth the paper they are printed on.... The stark reality, however ugly, is that there is an invisible granite wall built into the minds of a majority of Canadian employers against landed immigrants. This calls for some serious soul searching and ethical prodding by our political, social and business leaders to change their cemented beliefs and negative perceptions toward immigrants. (p. A23)

Lanying's narrative of her settlement experience resonates with many newcomers to Canada. Similarly, her story brings to life many themes common among the IESTs participating in this study, and mirrors many challenges and supports identified by researchers who have recently examined the participation of adults (Andres, 1999; Archer, Hutchings, & Ross, 2003; Bird, 1997; Bowl, 2003; Kasworm, 1997; Longworth, 1999; Reay, Ball, & David, 2002; Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002), immigrant students (Ernst-Slavit, 2000; Gray, Vernez, & Rolph, 1996), and students who speak minority languages (Harklau, 1999) in general undergraduate degree programs. While there is limited research specifically examining dynamics influencing the participation of internationally-educated professionals in ITE B.Ed. teacher preparation programs, Lanying's experiences are echoed in research related to WES (world English

speaking) student teachers (Faez, 2006; Han & Singh, 2007; Quioco & Rios, 2000), internationally-educated teachers participating in certification bridging programs in Ontario (Mawhinney & Xu, 1997; Myles et al., 2006) and struggling to earn teaching credentials in British Columbia (Beynon et al., 2004), and practicing immigrant teachers in Canada (Bascia, 1996b; Thiessen et al., 1996).

### *Challenges*

*Time.* The ITE B.Ed. program is very demanding and presents particular challenges to adult students who have family responsibilities outside of the program. Many student teachers argue that the workload in the program is excessive and for mature students, time becomes a particular concern. As an English language learner, Lanying required additional time to complete all readings and written assignments. As an immigrant student who was not educated in Ontario schools, Lanying did not have the benefit of cultural and historical knowledge required to teach many aspects of the program and she found herself requiring additional time to teach herself curriculum content to a greater degree than her Ontario-educated colleagues. With four children and a husband at home, a very heavy workload from the university, long hours in class both at the university and in practicum, and additional time required to complete assignments, Lanying really suffered from a lack of time. As described in her narrative, every minute counted and she often came to the program with less than 4 hours of sleep.

Many adults have family responsibilities that not only impact them financially and require them to work while they study, but also impact them emotionally and physically. Like Lanying, the adults in Bowl's (2001) study described the ways in which they struggled to schedule time for work, study, household chores, and childrearing. Reay et al. (2002) found that

family responsibilities created geographical barriers that limited the learning options of many adults, particularly single mothers. Both Reay et al. (2002) and Bowl (2001) describe many adults as ‘time poor’. Systems of higher education are just now beginning to recognize the ways in which time restraints impact adult access and participation in postsecondary education (Geis et al., 2000).

*Language.* Lanying’s underdog story of survival and perseverance identifies interpersonal communication as a significant dynamic that challenged her participation in the ITE B.Ed. program. While her language facility was deemed sufficient for entry to the teacher education program, Lanying’s self-perception, confidence, and participation were impaired by her ability to process verbal English and by the way in which her pronunciation of English was considered problematic by teachers and administrators in the field. The latter was compounded by Lanying’s limited self-confidence in front of the students and her associate teacher that gave rise to classroom management issues that were attributed to a variety of factors including the volume and comprehensibility of her spoken English. As Lanying’s confidence weakened, so too did her ability to use her language skills effectively.

Through interviews with undergraduate faculty and more than 325 ESL native and non-native first and second year undergraduate students, Zamel (1995) described as an institutional concern what many faculty refer to as the “ESL Problem” (p.507). Describing a ‘polyphony’ among faculty responses, the participants in Zamel’s study described a complex institutional response to increased diversity among students where some faculty recognize the strengths, resources, experience and motivation of internationally-educated students as positive influences in their classes while others regard ESL students as “deficient and inadequate for undertaking the work in their courses” (p.507). Faculty with a deficit perspective of ESL students blame

inadequate preparation and insufficient gatekeeping for the presence of students in their classes who are incapable of doing the required work. Unfortunately for ESL students, faculty with a deficit perspective also tend to conflate language facility and intellectual ability in a way that evaluates students on the basis of their communication skills while disregarding their interaction with the course material. Lanying described the instructor of the related studies course designed specifically for IESTs as “different” suggesting that she experienced the ‘polyphony’ of faculty responses identified by Zamel (1995) and found that most instructors did not appear to adjust their communication styles or course workload to recognize or address the needs of English language learners.

Dei, James, James-Wilson, and Zine (2000) argue that the absence of critical discussions of language in the context of linguistic diversity contributes to the marginalization of minority students and “it is necessary to address the question of how oppression in schooling is engendered through the promotion and use of a standard language” (p.99).

*Culture of the teaching profession in Ontario.* Lanying and the other IEST participants in this study felt that they were at a distinct disadvantage for not having the benefit of a compulsory education (elementary and/or high school) experience in Canada. In addition to an unfamiliarity with the culture of teaching and learning in Canada’s classrooms, IESTs are also unfamiliar with Canadian curriculum and its emphasis on Canadian history, geography, literature and art. For Lanying, this meant that she required additional time to learn the content material and to develop her teaching strategies to engage the students with the content. Additionally, Lanying felt ill at ease in her relationships with school colleagues, students, parents and administrators as she was unfamiliar with social protocol and appropriate interaction.

Hutchison and Jazzar (2007) argue that internationally-educated teachers, despite their prior years of teaching experience in other countries, require mentorship specifically related to the “unfamiliar ways of American culture and education” (p.368). In particular, Hutchison and Jazzar point to significant differences in educational cultures across nations that influence teacher practices related to assessment, communication, and teacher/student relations.

*Intra-cultural racism.* Lanying was puzzled to hear students of Chinese heritage disassociate themselves from their Chinese culture and emphasize that they are Canadians, not Chinese-Canadians. Another IEST participating in this study described a similar response from students who shared her ethnic heritage but were either born in Canada, or migrated to Canada as young children. In her case, the fellow students occasionally mocked her use of world English and made an overt effort to distance themselves from any shared identity with her. While little research examines the dynamics of intra-cultural racism, Werbner’s work examining diasporic estrangement of British South Asian Muslims (Werbner, 2004) and paradoxes of culture, relocation and settlement exemplified by the migration of Pakistanis to Britain (Werbner, 2005) provides insight into the phenomenon. In the case of British South Asian Muslims, Werbner (2004) describes the vulnerability of diasporas and the estrangement of some members of Muslim communities following the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Similarly, Werbner (2005) describes tension among Pakistanis in Britain as growing class distinctions and “internal competition for status” (p.751) are determined through conspicuous displays of affluence. Certainly, tensions that have prompted members of Muslim communities to disassociate themselves from more radical Islamists who promote violence to mobilize Islamic millennial discourses of “return’ to the pristine Islam” and fulfilling its “promise to become the only and final universal religion” (p.453) are different from those felt within other immigrant

groups. However, underlying concern for response from, and power relative to, the dominant group of nationals might motivate longer settled immigrants to disassociate themselves from more recent newcomers in response to their perception that newcomers are not offered the same social status as native-born or assimilated immigrants.

*Feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, isolation and invisibility – ‘otherness’.* Another factor influencing the participation of adults like Lanying in higher education is related to ‘otherness’ or ‘difference’ (Bowl, 2001; Hanafin & Lynch, 2002), a phenomenon that stems from the overt or unconscious assumption that the ‘traditional student’ is white, middle class, English speaking, and between the ages of 18 and 25 (Kasworm, 1997). Adult learners sense their status as outsiders and their feelings of difference are more acute if they belong to working class and/or minoritized groups (Bowl, 2001; Reay et al., 2002). Certainly, for student teachers like Lanying who speak ‘non-standard’ English, feelings of otherness are accompanied by feelings of invisibility and inferiority. As poignantly described by Gloria Anzaldua (quoted in Dei et al., 2000), language cannot be divorced from identity:

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language. Until I can accept as legitimate [all the languages I speak], I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself, and as long as I have to accommodate English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. I will no longer be made ashamed of existing. I will have my voice, my sexual voice, my poet’s voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence.” ( p.95)

Indeed, in her advice to future IESTs, Lanying urged them to be brave and to resist the temptation of isolation. Having completed the program, Lanying seemed to have regretted the extent to which she was silenced in the program and lamented that she did not share her ideas and questions more with the class and her instructors.

Lanying's feelings of inferiority and invisibility might also be associated with perceptions of teacher identity in Canada. In discussing the challenges faced by internationally-trained and experienced teachers struggling through the process of credentials recognition and certification to teach in British Columbia, Beynon et al. (2004) argued that teachers in post-industrial societies are commonly constructed as central players in the transmission of cultural capital and the socialization of youth to "dominant social norms" (p.430). Given that immigrant teachers often experience "painful feelings of social alienation and isolation, both within their schools and in other social contexts" (Bascia, 1996, p.156), it must be considered that teacher identity – notions of what a teacher looks like, sounds like, and brings to the classroom in terms of cultural capital – constructed by the dominant Canadian culture, is elusive to teachers who are seen through a deficit lens (Myles et al., 2006) as 'foreign-trained' and lacking familiarity with Canadian culture required of agents charged with the task of socializing youth to dominant norms.

*A competitive labour market that disadvantages immigrant teachers.* Lanying and all of the other IESTs participating in this study emphasized their concerns regarding the difficulties they would face in their efforts to enter the Ontario labour market as a qualified teacher. Indeed, annual research conducted by the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) to assess labour entry of its newly certified members has shown diminishing opportunities for English language teachers since 2002 (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006) while the employment rate among French speaking teachers continues to be very high.

In 2006, when Lanying and her fellow ITE B.Ed. graduates were applying for jobs as teachers, the OCT described outcomes of job searches as "disastrous" (p.2) and future prospects of employment as "dismal" (p.23) for immigrant teachers – a marked contrast to the levels of

employment experienced by recent graduates of Ontario faculties of education and teacher education programs in OCT-accredited border colleges. While fifty-one percent of Ontario teacher graduates were engaged in full-time employment in 2005, only eighteen percent of new Canadian teachers were employed full-time. Even qualifications in 'high-demand' fields do not significantly increase the employment rate of immigrant teachers. Sixty-four percent of Ontario graduates with high-demand qualifications in math, chemistry and French are employed as full-time teachers by the end of their first year of certification while only nineteen percent of immigrant teachers with the same high-demand qualifications are fully employed. The dismal hiring rate of immigrant teachers is described by the OCT (2006) as an "employment crisis" as "despite the fact that they are highly experienced in teaching, many of them appear shut out of the profession in Ontario" (p.23).

It appears the privileging of Canadian experience that figures prominently in many stories of limited access to employment described by immigrant professionals (Goldberg, 2005; Public Policy Forum, 2004) is also having a detrimental impact on the hiring of immigrant teachers. Goldberg (2005), in her critical analysis of labour market discourse, argues that justification of employer reluctance to employ immigrant applicants on the basis of inadequate Canadian experience and their use of 'non-standard' English does, in fact, cloak racist hiring practices.

### *Supports*

*Constructive mentoring.* Lanying identified honest and balanced feedback from associate/host teachers and program faculty as particularly helpful to her development as a teacher. During her first practicum experience, Lanying's associate/host teacher considered Lanying's language and self-confidence dynamics and chose to significantly lower the

expectations of the practicum and did not provide constructive feedback to prompt Lanying to improve her performance as a student teacher. As Lanying stated, she benefited from balanced feedback that pointed out areas for growth, but maintained optimism that she had the capacity to be successful in the program. “You will succeed, but here is how you will be a success” are the words that were most helpful to Lanying.

Similarly, many researchers examining practice teaching experiences have argued that the relationship between the student teacher and the mentor teacher is vital (Cabello, Eckmier, & Baghieri, 1995; Myles et al., 2006). With particular reference to ‘foreign-trained’ teachers participating in Ontario certification bridging programs, Myles et al. (2006) describe problematic power dynamics between mentor teachers and the internationally-qualified teachers in their studies and argue the need for intercultural training for student teachers, mentor teachers, and members of the broader school community. They further argue that “schools should in fact become more inclusive and accepting of the experiences and identities of their minority teacher candidates” (p.244).

*The IEST-specific course and course instructor.* The related studies course for IESTs was newly developed by the university to provide opportunities for internationally educated student teachers to participate in learning experiences geared toward building knowledge of teaching and learning in Ontario and developing English language skills. The course builds on the regular teacher education program but does so in a small group setting of approximately twenty students and provides for guided observation experiences in various Ontario schools prior to the practicum. Lanying found this course particularly helpful as a space where she could engage in conversation with other student teachers who were experiencing the same challenges. She also appreciated the leadership of the instructor who is a respected scholar of second language

learning and initiated the development of the related studies course for internationally educated student teachers in response to a need for such support that she identified through her conversations with student teachers and faculty members working with IESTs.

Cabello & Eckmier (1995) found that peer support helped the IESTs in their study persist, reduce instances of burnout, manage feelings of isolation, and minimize feelings of being overwhelmed suggesting that the opportunity to network and meet regularly with other internationally-educated student teachers yields many positive benefits.

*Supportive colleagues.* Lanying described finding a small group of supportive classmates as particularly helpful to her as they validated her entry to the profession and provided a safe space to share her ideas and anxieties. Cabello & Eckmier (1995) found that supportive colleagues help IESTs feel understood, engage in the sharing of professional resources and strategies, and communicate their complex experiences in school environments.

### **Race, Gender, Culture, Language, and Religion**

Lanying identified very few dynamics related to race, gender, culture, language and religion during her participation in the teacher education program. When she spoke of language difficulties, she did so in terms of her own feelings of inferiority and the same feelings of inadequacy that she heard described among her peers in the related studies course for IESTs. She described considerable surprise at the only source of discrimination that she identified in the program; the discriminatory statements made by Chinese-Canadians who commented that they were ashamed to be from China.

Factors related to socially constructed concepts of difference – race (Attewell, 2000; Dei et al., 2001; Dougherty, 1997), class (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Corson, 1998; Hanafin & Lynch,

2002), gender (Davies & Quirke, 2002; Krahn & Andres, 1999), and language (Freire & Macedo, 1995; Zamel, 1995) – and particularly “the persistence of class, gender and race inequalities in access to higher education” (Bowl, 2003, p.2) – figure prominently in the literature exploring non-traditional students in higher education. Although often discussed as distinct social classifications, many researchers argue the need to recognize the interaction between and among classifications of difference (Dei & Calliste, 2000; Freire & Macedo, 1995; McLaren, 1997).

Race, class, gender and language are often considered in higher education research and practice as personal deficits of non-traditional students (Bartolome & Trueba, 2000; Bowl, 2003; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996) but little emphasis is placed on the ways in which these factors are produced, reproduced, critiqued or mitigated systemically or institutionally (Bowl, 2003). Race, for example, is often considered in terms of student identity and adjustment to majority culture and norms (Archer & Leathwood, 2003; Ernst-Slavit, 2000). Class is discussed in terms of a student’s ability to afford tuition (Hutchings, 2003) and the capacity of working class parents to guide students through academia (Archer, 2003; Jun & Colyar, 2002). Gender is often researched in terms of program choice and over/under-representation in particular fields of study (Bowl, 2003), and household division of labour that continues in a generalized sense to put additional demands on the time and energy of women (Reay et al., 2002). Language and language facility is associated with academic preparation, readiness and competence (Bartolome & Trueba, 2000; Zamel, 1995). Little research attempts the more politically charged and complex work of examining racism, classism, sexism and linguicism in higher education and the ways in which systemic and institutional prejudices result in inequitable differential treatment on the basis of social difference (Bartolome & Trueba, 2000; Dei, 1999; Zamel, 1995).

Several researchers argue that the enduring and largely unquestioned ideology of merit in higher education – “the belief that people are rewarded solely on the basis of merit” (Dei & Karumanchery, 2001, p.189) – obscures the realities of privilege, oppression and discrimination on the basis of race, class, gender and language, and gives license to those who argue equal opportunity is the appropriate and adequate response to diversity among students (Oakes, Rogers, Lipton, & Morrell, 2002).

### **Implications/Applications of the Research**

Increased social diversity has challenged institutions of higher learning (Allen, 2005; Montero-Sieburth, 2000; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996; Zamel, 1995). Indeed, “much of the higher education literature, often in the form of innuendo, [suggests] that cultural diversity is the major cause of both campus divisiveness as well as incoherent curricula” (Rhoads & Valadez, 1996, p. 5). More specifically, research in the United States suggests that “issues of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation have become central to what some see as fragmentation within today’s academy” as attention to these issues threatens “the best traditions of U.S. higher education” (Rhoads & Valadez, 1996, p.5) through inclusive practices and ideology that have corrupted the academy by lowering academic standards and compromising the quality of university education (Williams, 1997). In particular, some scholars argue that efforts to respond to cultural diversity on university campuses by introducing multicultural curriculum and providing space for “border knowledge”, “threatens the canonical knowledge upon which the dominant forces in higher education are positioned” (Rhoads & Valadez, 1996, p.6).

Increased diversity on university campuses has prompted some institutions to reconsider and remodel the services they provide to students, including those from immigrant, minority, and

minority-language backgrounds (Oakes et al., 2002; Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). Additionally, some scholars have responded with a call for critical recognition of cultural and linguistic hegemony in higher education in the United States, Canada, England, New Zealand, and Australia and argue the need for multilingual higher education (Friedenberg, 2002; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996).

Lanying's narrative provides a starting point for discussions aiming to provide policy makers and program developers in the area of Initial Teacher Education with insight relevant to the challenges and supports that influence immigrant English language learner student teachers participating in Teacher Education Bachelor of Education university degree programs.

Lanying's experience is one among many but the themes of her narrative are echoed by participants in this study and in the emerging literature examining the experiences of immigrant teachers which suggests that teacher educators have something to learn from Lanying that can inform their practice. In particular, the following recommendations are suggested by this study:

- 1) Policy makers, faculty and student services staff should consider the challenges faced by internationally-educated student teachers and consider ways in which they can mitigate these challenges, especially those related to workload and field responses to immigrant teachers.
- 2) IESTs, faculty, student services staff and field partners should engage in professional development and dialogue to de-construct hegemonic discourses of teacher identity and deficit conceptions of immigrant teachers.
- 3) Faculty and student services staff should provide opportunities for all student teachers, including IESTs to engage in critical dialogue related to the power imbalance that student teachers face in their practice teaching placements. All student teachers require the opportunity to develop strategies for navigating their relationships with mentor teachers and school administrators.
- 4) Faculties of education should provide space for internationally-educated student teachers to network and meet on a regular basis be it in the form of an elective course or a frequently scheduled conversation group.

5) Faculty should recognize the tendency for IESTs to feel silenced and reluctant to participate in class and develop strategies to create a safe learning environment that values all voices and diverse perspectives. Additionally, faculty should consider slightly slowing their rate of speech to facilitate deeper understanding.

6) Teacher education programs should provide opportunities for all student teachers to gain a deep understanding of the ways in which race, gender, culture, language, religion and other socially constructed discourses of difference have a profound influence on social, physical, psychological, educational, and economic outcomes.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Interviews with Internationally-Educated Student Teachers who have Recently Completed an Initial Teacher Education Bachelor of Education Degree Program at an Ontario University**

The following questions outline a semi-structured interactive interview protocol.

- 1) I see from your survey that you have been in Canada for (X) years. Tell me a bit about your experience as an immigrant. (Probes: How have you adjusted to living in a new country? Have you adjusted? Are there aspects of your life that are still in a period of adjustment? How has your immigration experience compared to what you expected when you started this journey?)
- 2) Tell me a bit about your teaching and teaching related experience in (your country of origin). How many years of teaching experience do you have? What were your teaching assignments? What education and certification did you require to do that work?
- 3) You have spent the last year studying at X university in the Initial Teacher Education program. Was it your goal to attend a teacher education program when you made the decision to immigrate to Canada? Why/Why not? What was your goal? What are your goals now?
- 4) What challenges did you face during your studies at X university?
- 5) What kind of support did you receive that helped you during your studies at X university?
- 6) What advice would you give to future students who are in a situation similar to yours? (Probe: What strategies were most effective for you? Would you recommend this program to others in a situation similar to yours?)
- 7) What opportunities and challenges do you see as you move toward beginning a teaching career in Ontario? (Or goals from question 2 if participant does not plan to pursue a career in teaching.)
- 8) Did you see or experience any effects of the following during your studies at X university: Effects related Race? Class? Gender? Language? If so, how did you perceive them? How did they have an effect on you? On others? How did you, or others, deal with the effects?
- 9) How did the students, staff, instructors and teachers in the field seem to respond to you? What kind of impression did you get from students, staff, instructors, and/or teachers regarding their views on diversity? Did this seem similar or different to how you felt you were treated by them?

- 10) Can you think of anything else that that affected your studies at X university and influenced your experience there in some way? Are there any other challenges and/or supports that you experienced as part of your work to become a certified teacher in Ontario?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Interviews with Student Services Staff an Ontario University**

The following questions outline a semi-structured interactive interview protocol.

- 1) Let's begin with a brief overview of your role and your work here at X university.
- 2) What issues do you think are significant to teacher education students at X university who are: Immigrants? Members of visible minority groups? English language learners?
- 3) How do you and your department support immigrant teacher education students? Teacher education students who are members of visible minority groups? Teacher education students who are English language learners?
- 4) Do you believe, or have you found the following to have an impact on immigrant minority and English language learner teacher students: Social class? Race? Language? Gender? If so, how do they have an effect and what are the effects?
- 5) What or who supports you in your work with immigrant minority and English language learner student teachers?
- 6) What departmental, institutional and/or systemic policies guide the work you do?
- 7) Based on your experience, what more can be done to improve or enhance assistance to immigrant and minority English language learner student teachers?
- 8) What are some of the challenges you and your department face in providing support to immigrant student teachers?
- 9) What are the benefits of supporting immigrant students at X university? How can these benefits be increased?

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Interviews with Instructors of the Initial Teacher Education Bachelor of Education Degree Program at an Ontario university**

The following questions outline a semi-structured interactive interview protocol.

- 1) Let's begin with a brief overview of your role and your work here at X university.
- 2) What issues do you think are significant to teacher education students at X university who are: Immigrants? Members of visible minority groups? English language learners?
- 3) How do you and your department support immigrant teacher education students? Teacher education student teachers who are members of visible minority groups? Teacher education students who are English language learners?
- 4) Do you believe, or have you found the following to have an impact on immigrant minority and English language learner student teachers: Social class? Race? Language? Gender? If so, how do they have an effect and what are the effects?
- 5) What or who supports you in your work with immigrant minority and English language learner student teachers?
- 6) What departmental, institutional and/or systemic policies guide the work you do?
- 7) Based on your experience, what more can be done to improve or enhance assistance to immigrant and minority English language learner student teachers?
- 8) What are some of the challenges you and your department face in providing support to immigrant student teachers?
- 9) What are the benefits of supporting immigrant students at X university? How can these benefits be increased?