

# **LEARNING A LANGUAGE, LEARNING THE LAND: NEWCOMERS, PARKS, AND LANGUAGE LEARNING**



## **Research and Evaluation Report**

**September 2011**

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# **Learning a Language, Learning the Land: Newcomers, Parks, and Language Learning**

## **Research and Evaluation Report**

***Submitted to:***

**Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association (ECALA)  
Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation  
Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers  
City of Edmonton, Natural Areas Conservation  
Mountain Equipment Co-op**

***Submitted by:***

**Dr. Elizabeth Lange, St. Francis Xavier University  
Dr. Peter Vogels, Grant MacEwan University  
Zenobia Jamal, M.Ed., Zenev Educational Consultants**

**September 2011**

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# Executive Summary

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## Project Overview

The **purpose** of the project *Learning a Language, Learning the Land* was to pilot an educational process with immigrant newcomers that combined language learning and environmental literacy in an outdoor park setting. This report is an evaluation of the joint project between the primary partners - Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation (Parks Division, Learning and Stewardship Services – herein called Alberta Parks), Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN, English Language Program) and the City of Edmonton (Natural Areas Conservation – herein called Edmonton Parks).

The project was initially **funded by** the Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association (ECALA) with additional funding provided by the Government of Alberta, City of Edmonton, Edmonton Centre for Newcomers, and Mountain Equipment Co-op. In-kind support was also provided by all the partners.

The evaluation and research was conducted by a **research team** from St. Francis Xavier University (originally University of Alberta), Grant McEwan University, and Zenev Educational Consultants, with combined research expertise with newcomers, adult environmental education, ecological literacy, and educational strategies for achieving equitable and respectful work environments across social differences.

In brief, the **goals** of the project partners were to assist newcomers in: accessing municipal and provincial parks; fostering a familiarity with parks leading to ongoing use; and identifying best practices for parks and language educators in an outdoor context.

Participation in the project was offered to three different *English as Another Language* (EAL) groups enrolled as adult students in language programs at the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers. Students were involved in three interrelated activities, including; **in-class activities** that enhanced literacy skills related to the environment and camping, a **day in the park** that helped familiarize students and their family members with local flora and fauna and basic camping skills at an Edmonton municipal park, Rainbow Valley. Finally, students and their family members participated in a **three day camping experience** at Miquelon Lake Provincial Park.

## Research Methods

The project partners requested both an evaluation for project improvement as well as research, to generate new knowledge that could assist a wider range of service providers. The evaluation and research methods were multifaceted, generating a significant amount of data. Initially, a **literature review** compiled the results from previous studies as well as described the context of the participants and partners. Once the project was designed, all EAL students were interviewed prior to the start of the project, to capture their initial understandings. These **interviews** focused on student experiences related to parks and camping in their country of origin as well as their expectations of parks and camping in Alberta. In order to assess learning gains, a **pre and post test** was administered before the in-class activities began and, again, at

the end of the camping weekend to measure student language skills related to flora and fauna of Alberta as well as knowledge about camping equipment and services normally found in a provincial park. At the end of the weekend camping experience, **group interviews** were conducted to assess the student's general experience and satisfaction with the camping weekend compared to their expectations. **Key project partner interviews** were also conducted to help assess the effectiveness of the project throughout the design and implementation stages. Consistent with action research, the research team was involved throughout the entire project, from design to implementation. In addition to the other data sources, the researchers kept **field notes** from **direct observation** of what occurred throughout the course of the project and on the classroom artifacts of student learning.

The **research team** has provided this evaluation to help build the capacity of the partners to offer more effective future programming. Data obtained through the various research methods has informed the recommendations in this report, with the **goals** of:

- enhancing overall program effectiveness for achieving park accessibility and long-term park participation among immigrant newcomers;
- identifying best practices as it relates to intercultural learning among all participants;
- identifying strategies for more effective working partnerships,
- offering new ways of understanding and introducing environmental literacy skills to newcomer learning groups;
- enhancing the English language learning gains, and
- informing policy-making.

## Key Findings

The *Learning a Language, Learning the Land* project was an important and innovative activity that has not been duplicated in its entirety in other jurisdictions. Overall, the project was a **groundbreaking success**, as a first time effort. In particular, the program:

- created park access for newcomers,
- resulted in substantial newcomer enjoyment,
- provided an orientation to parks and Canadian practices around camping,
- fostered the desire for return visitation in newcomers,
- initiated intercultural learning among all the participants and partners,
- stimulated interprofessional learning among the project partners, and
- resulted in modest English language gains for newcomers, particularly in language relating to camping, parks, and the flora and fauna of Alberta.

The adult newcomer participants repeatedly expressed their deep appreciation for this opportunity.

While the majority of newcomers had visited a municipal park and could name a national park, **few could identify or had visited a provincial park**. In triangulating all the data sets, it was

clear that the majority of newcomers would not have access to a provincial park or receive an orientation to municipal or provincial parks without this program.

For the most part, newcomers live in financially challenged circumstances, stressful living conditions, and often are not in nuclear family arrangements, particularly for the first 5 years. Provincial park visitation is largely based on a white, middle class, nuclear family, car culture. Therefore, the initial **barriers to parks visitation for newcomers** are lack of transportation, camping-related fees, and access to camping equipment. Over the long term, **building inclusive parks will require significant rethinking** to become welcoming spaces for a wide range of family structures and visible minorities, reflecting Canadian demographic changes. Park facilities, safety protocols, hiring practices, written materials, and park norms also require rethinking.

At least **five years is required to build the leadership capacity** of immigrant-serving agencies and ethnocultural associations to provide a first exposure opportunity to camping, to acquire camping equipment for loan, and build collective transport strategies. **Educational activities were pivotal** in illustrating the significant differences between parks and camping experiences in the country of origin and in Alberta. Education was also pivotal in building on the existing environmental awareness of newcomers to further foster environmental and stewardship practices. Finally, the educational activities resulted in modest to significant learning gains in terms of: the identification of flora and fauna; identification of parks signs, staff, and campsite equipment; and taking first steps towards fostering a sense of belonging to this land called Alberta.

**Return visitation is likely**, once a first exposure experience has occurred. For newcomers, they relished the experience as they could share in “what Canadians do,” but they also engaged with parks spaces in ways that were culturally shaped. Further, the **intercultural learning** of this project was pivotal in providing newcomers a sense of community, in some cases, through friendships that lasted beyond the experience, either with other newcomers or with parks staff. Finally, it provided **significant interprofessional and transformative learning for the project partners**.

Even with this initial success, there was more demand than resources to provide this first time parks experience for all the newcomers that wanted to participate, so there is substantial room for growth. The project has **significant potential for further effectiveness**, by:

- providing the resources to expand this program for 5 years;
- taking steps to adapt parks practices and facilities to ensure long term parks visitation and volunteerism of newcomers;
- building community outdoor leadership capacity within newcomer groups;
- supporting the environmental literacy of newcomers in this locale;
- enhancing the pedagogical and intercultural abilities of parks staff;
- adding to English language gains through better coordination among the partners; and
- assisting the social integration of immigrant newcomers using parks spaces.

The following recommendations provide ideas for enabling this potential.

## Key Recommendations

To enhance the potential for future programming by both municipal and provincial parks organizations and immigrant-serving agencies, the following 22 key recommendations are offered. A synthesis and analysis of the full findings can be found near the end of the report as well as the full recommendations.

### *Meeting the Needs of Immigrant Newcomers*

**1. *Continuing the Success.***

It is recommended that the project be continued as it is highly innovative, meets the needs of all the partners, and maximizes the support necessary for a positive and educational first time exposure for newcomer participants.

**2. *Five-year Commitment to Direct Programming.***

It is recommended that all project partners, particularly Alberta Parks, Edmonton Parks, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association, and Mountain Equipment Co-op, make a five year commitment to direct programming and collaboration of resources and financial support to provide first time experiences for newcomers who would otherwise not have access to parks or receive an orientation to parks.

**3. *Transportation Barriers.***

It is recommended that parks organizations continue to work in an innovative partnership with newcomer groups to provide transportation for first time and new user access.

**4. *Equipment Barriers.***

It is recommended that parks organizations work with community organizations to assist immigrant service organizations in procuring appropriate camping equipment and the collaborative development of permanent lending services.

**5. *Financial Barriers.***

It is recommended that user fees be adjusted for low income groups, such as newcomers, and that special weekend discounts be offered for low income groups rotating among different parks, published broadly throughout the immigrant service and ethnocultural organizations. Other creative ways of providing access for low income groups are encouraged.

**6. *Development of Inclusion Policy and Practices.***

It is recommended that Alberta Parks and Edmonton Parks develop inclusion policies that detail the philosophy and principles that will guide future practices in managing parks to become more welcoming spaces for newcomers as well as Canadian-born visible minorities and meet the identified needs of these groups.

**7. *Distinguishing Different Park Services.***

It is recommended that Alberta Parks design a marketing program that specifically reaches newcomers and also Canadian-born visible minority groups to raise their profile in the newcomer consciousness and distinguish themselves from municipal and national parks.

**8. *Learning Component Vital.***

It is recommended that a learning component always be included in programming to

familiarize newcomers with the concept of a park, current norms and guidelines in parks, alternatives for park usage, and to raise provincial parks in the newcomer consciousness. Environmental literacy is also vital to create a sense of belonging to this geographic place. This is the first step in developing a sense of stewardship.

**9. *Sequential Learning.***

It is recommended that, as much as possible, newcomers should be involved in a progression of all three activities – in-class learning, one day introduction, and weekend immersion - to build participant knowledge, safety skills, activity skills for enjoyment, and the desire for repeat visits.

**10. *Non-traditional Families and Vulnerability.***

It is highly recommended that a program format should offer the maximum support for the majority of newcomers who are non-traditional families, particularly single women and single mothers, who have additional access barriers and who feel more vulnerable in an outdoor setting.

**11. *Building Leadership Capacity.***

It is recommended that park organizations implement a long term commitment to educational workshops that build leadership capacity within immigrant serving and ethno-specific organizations. Once camping and outdoor leadership capacity is built, Alberta Parks and Edmonton Parks could then empower their regional park offices with the necessary resources to act in an ongoing supportive role for these communities and agencies.

**12. *Family Camping Partnership Registry or Network.***

It is recommended that provincial and municipal governments, as public service organizations, recognize their vital contribution to building a welcoming community by initiating family camping partnerships. A registry for Canadian-born families interested in befriending, mentoring, and camping with newcomer families could be established. This service could be hosted, on an ongoing basis, through community groups already associated with the parks.

**13. *Trust Brokers.***

In the recommended five years of direct programming, it is suggested that the language teachers and other immigrant agency workers be much more involved as partners in designing the day and weekend camping programming. Acting as trust brokers for these first experiences, the teachers will help in reducing the sense of risk and enhancing the likelihood of participation.

**14. *Adapting Parks Infrastructure.***

- a. It is recommended that facilities be adapted to enable collective cooking, particularly accommodating several large cooking pots at one time.
- b. It is also recommended that more activity areas for young children, more sports areas, tent platforms, and small rental cabins or yurts for women with very young children be provided.
- c. Finally, an interfaith room/space, such as airports provide for people of different faith practices, is recommended in high use parks. Provisions for these different usage patterns will ensure ongoing parks visitation.

## ***Meeting the Needs of Parks Staff and English-as-Another-Language Teachers***

### ***1. Intercultural Communication Training.***

It is recommended that all parks staff involved in programming and service to the public should receive intercultural training that helps sensitize them to their own culturally-shaped backgrounds, the culturally shaped needs of newcomers, and assists in the development of competencies related to intercultural communication.

### ***2. Interprofessional Learning.***

It is recommended that mutual learning between the partners would significantly enhance the quality of the programming and enable each partner to adapt their work practices with this new knowledge. Other recommendations related to learning include:

#### ***a. Workshop on Language Training.***

It is recommended that all parks staff involved in programming and service to the public should receive at least a half day workshop on English-as-an-Additional-Language learning and how to communicate to individuals at various levels of English language facility.

#### ***b. Workshop on Adult Education Principles.***

It is recommended that all parks staff involved in educational programming should receive training in the core adult education principles to better meet the learning needs of all user groups.

#### ***c. Environmental Education Training.***

It is recommended that the English language teachers should receive at least a half day workshop on environmental education, including the rationale for specific content and practices, which can facilitate a stronger partnership and more effective joint programming.

### ***3. Starting with the Knowledge and Experiences of Learners.***

a. It is recommended that frontline parks staff are provided with opportunities to understand diverse user groups, such as newcomers, to ensure that park information and learning activities are designed to be relevant.

b. It is also recommended that learning activities be developed from the existing knowledge, experiences, and interests of participants into organizational messaging, rather than the reverse approach.

### ***4. Regular Element of Workload.***

It is recommended that, in establishing this as an ongoing project for at least five years, specific individuals be identified to work in this partnership and that this work be recognized as a regular part of job descriptions and workload.

### ***5. Communication and Decision-Making Clarity.***

It is recommended that the partners work more concertedly at clarification of roles between them, that all the partners are invited to all the planning meetings, and that one leader for each organization be identified as the key communicator with appropriate decision-making authority. These leaders would be responsible for communicating information and decisions to their respective organizations.

**6. Collaborative Planning.**

It is recommended that the language teachers be more involved in the project planning with parks staff, including setting measurable program outcomes, as this would heighten the coordination between the in-class and parks-based activities and thus enhance the learning outcomes in both language gains and environmental literacy.

**7. Diversity in Hiring.**

It is recommended that municipal and provincial parks organizations expand their staff hiring practices to include members of diverse ethnocultural groups and immigrant newcomer communities to enhance their reach into these communities.

**8. Park Information Materials.**

It is recommended that simplifying all Parks documents for accessibility by adults with lower levels of English language facility, and translating key documents into other languages, be continued. Such work enables newcomers to understand parks information and do simple tasks, such as registering for a campsite. This would ensure enhanced visitation and safety in the long term.



# Introduction

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## Project Purpose

The purpose of the project *Learning a Language, Learning the Land* was to pilot an educational process created for immigrant newcomers that combined language learning and environmental literacy, in both a city park and provincial park setting. The overarching goal was to enhance park accessibility for newcomers as well as enhance their English language skills and foster a connectedness to the land that would generate parks participation and stewardship over the long term. For the partners, secondary goals for the project were to generate best practices for both parks and EAL educators wishing to engage immigrant newcomers in a park setting, to ensure safe park engagement, and to teach appreciation for local ecosystems.

The researchers agreed to generate research findings that could evaluate the strengths and challenges of the current project, identify best practices in this learning context, inform future program design, inform policy-making, and contribute to the knowledge base with findings that would benefit other educational and service providers working with immigrant newcomers.

## Project Partners

Given the important contexts for each partner and the knowledge gaps in existing theory, the project partners were eager to collaborate and explore new possibilities that would contribute to both theory and practice. The key project partners were:

- Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association (ECALA);
- Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation – Parks Division, Learning and Stewardship Services;
- Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers – ESL Programs; and
- City of Edmonton – Office of Natural Areas Conservation.

As the planning progressed, additional partners made the final activities possible. They included:

- Mountain Equipment Co-op Edmonton
- STRIX Ecological Consulting, and
- OMNI Television.

The project was initially funded by the Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association (ECALA) with additional funding provided by the Government of Alberta, City of Edmonton, Edmonton Centre for Newcomers, and Mountain Equipment Co-op. In-kind support was also provided by all the partners.

## Project Overview

The project planning began in January 2010 with regular meetings among the partners, with the goal of piloting the program during the summer of 2010. In the end, the design of the

*Learning a Language, Learning the Land* project consisted of a series of three interrelated activities. These included:

1. classroom activities that enhanced the English language facility of newcomers related to the natural environment through a camping unit developed by each language teacher for their specific class language level, carried out in May 2010;
2. *A Day in the Park* where participants visited a city park and were given the opportunity to participate in guided interpretive walks about the flora and fauna, tent set-up exercises, fire building activities, park rules and safety presentation, and a “typical” campfire lunch with hot dogs and marshmallows, carried out in June 2010; and
3. a two night/three day *Weekend Camping* experience at a provincial park one hour outside the city where learners set up their own campsite and participated in a beach visit, guided interpretive walk, bird banding demonstration, safety presentations, introduction to conservation officers/park rangers, watercolor painting, wildlife biologist presentation with a live owl, etc, carried out in June, July, and August of 2010.

The educational process was piloted with three cohort groups; cohorts 1 and 3 were EAL language students with mixed genders, ages, countries of origin and language levels, whereas cohort 2 were family groupings from a Burmese Karen community social group which was a homogenous ethnocultural group assisted by community leaders. Each cohort had language levels ranging from LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) Level 1-4. While consistency of cohort participants across all three sequential activities was preferred, there was considerable fluidity of participants from one activity to the next.

## Research Team and Research Goals

The research team was comprised of:

- Dr. Elizabeth Lange, Department of Adult Education, St. Francis Xavier University;
- Dr. Peter Vogels, Department of Social Work, Grant MacEwan University; and
- Zenobia Jamal, M.Ed., from Zenev Educational Consultants.

Together, they were employed to assess this collaborative effort that entailed both an evaluation and research component. Dr. Vogels brings extensive knowledge from his social work practice and teaching as well as research experience in ecological literacy, environmental education, the immigrant newcomer reality, and action research. Dr. Lange brings extensive knowledge in adult education, environmental and sustainability education for adults, transformative learning, and action research. Zenobia Jamal has a Master of Adult Education from the University of Alberta and works in her company, Zenev Educational Consultants, dedicated to fostering educational strategies for achieving equitable and respectful work environments across social differences.

In addition to responding to the goals of the partners, the researchers had three additional goals, to:

- examine the meaning-making process of adult learners as they learn about parks in Canada and negotiate existing meanings from their country and culture of origin,
- assess if the sense of social belonging and competence in Alberta society was enhanced for immigrant newcomers through a facilitated parks experience, and

- determine if a sense of social belonging is connected to a sense of place, through learning about and relating to a new land base.

To achieve these objectives, five research questions and numerous sub-questions shaped the direction of this inquiry:

- 1. What is the best way to offer a meaningful outdoor experience for newcomers?***
- 2. What types of nature-based activities enhance literacy skills?***
- 3. Can literacy activities in outdoor settings enhance the sense of competence and belonging of newcomers?***
- 4. What factors encourage or impede recreation activities for newcomers in Canadian parks over the long term?***
- 5. What was the learning process experienced by the parks staff as they designed and implemented this pilot project?***

This document is an evaluation report in that it provides feedback on the improvement of this specific project for future program offerings. Thus, this report will describe the project, the evaluation methods, and the findings from both the literature reviewed and the data collected during the pilot project. The report also provides recommendations for program improvement, based on the research findings.

The primary research findings are also included, with the intention of adding to the knowledge and academic theory base, with implications for a wide range of organizations that engage immigrant newcomers and diverse ethnocultural groups. The research is meant to inform the general practices of practitioners working in related fields and to provide recommendations that can inform policy-setting. Further research findings will be forthcoming in academic papers.

## **Research Methodology and Methods**

Educational action research was the methodology chosen as it allows for studying how understanding and learning develops for educators and students in the midst of an educational program (Carson & Sumara, 1997; Quigley & Kuhne, 1997). Further, it enabled the researchers to play a role in developing the educational process as well as to invite the project partners to help shape the research. In this approach, the researchers play multiple roles as educator, action participant, and observer. However, the researchers have the primary responsibility for recording the process and creating reflective spaces for participants through the interview sessions. It is hoped that this report will play an educational function for all the partners as well as foster learning and inform future program development, the purpose of educational action research.

The theoretical framework used for this study was a social psychological approach of seeking to understand how individual actors understood their educational role and bridging it to a larger analysis of immigration and the role of such educational activities in the broader society (Morrow, 1994). We also turned to transformative learning models to understand the change processes of both learners and educators. Finally, we drew upon the immigration, race and ethnic relations research to understand some of the complex realities of newcomers (please see references).

The research team collected a wide range of data, utilizing mixed methods (Wellington, 2000), resulting in six data sets. First, we used quantitative research methods, largely surveys, to measure gains in literacy, environmental knowledge, and outdoor skills. Second, we used qualitative research methods, largely group interviews, as a way to provide an indepth examination of the learning processes and how the partners and newcomers were making meaning of the activities throughout the program, particularly in relation to past knowledge and experience. We collected data in these ways, from:

1. literature reviews
2. a review of organizational documents from the various partners,
3. pre- and post-survey workbooks administered by the EAL teachers in their respective classes,
4. audio-taped semi-structured interviews of the key individuals from partner organizations during and after the pilot,
5. audiotaped pre- and post-camping semi-structured interviews with newcomer participants who were grouped according to their language proficiency, and
6. field notes from participant observation.

To provide more detail, **pre-interviews** were held with the newcomers enrolled in language programs, totalling 113. The interviews occurred largely before the official programming (such as class activities etc.) commenced.

Once in-class activities began, students were invited to complete a **pre-workbook** assessing their language competency related to environmental and camping knowledge. Given the English language challenges, many of the questions provided involved matching words to photos, drawing pictures, or filling in the blanks. In total, 212 pre- and post-survey learner workbooks were administered by the ESL teachers and used to measure gains in language, environmental knowledge, and outdoor skills. In the end, 123 pre-workbooks were completed with usable data. At the conclusion of the classroom activities and after the Day in the Park and weekend camping experience, 58 students completed a **post-workbook**. Only 37 participants completed both a pre- and post-workbook for a comparative analysis.

In addition to the pre-interviews and the pre- and post-work books, randomly selected students from the three cohorts were invited to participate in a **group interview before they left the weekend camping site**. In total, audio-taped pre- and post-camping semi-structured interviews with 37 newcomers, grouped by language proficiency, were carried out.

Throughout the duration of the project, researchers participated in the planning meetings, the Day in the Park activities and the weekend camping experience. During these activities, researchers developed **field notes** detailing observations related to each of these activities.

Following the final weekend camping experience, the research team initiated **ten project partner interviews** which included interviewing key administrative personnel, parks staff in two organizations, language teachers and other key project partners. Six post-project interviews were carried out with the EAL teachers and administrators. Successive interviews were held with four parks staff in two organizations, including numerous informal conversations.

Given the quantity and diversity of the data, the analysis process was undertaken in three ways. For the quantitative data, a SPSS analysis of the survey was undertaken to derive statistical findings. The arts-based data (drawings) from the surveys were scored numerically to account for the presence of specific content, to yield quantitative data. A scoring matrix illustrated the complexity and content of the responses. These images were also coded and categorized according to key patterns resulting in qualitative descriptions.

For the qualitative data, all the taped interviews were transcribed and then the taped and written data were coded according to key content, and then categorized so that emergent themes were identified. Finally, all of these data sources were triangulated (compared and contrasted) and then compared against existing literature for new insights.

## Ethics

The plan for this study was reviewed by the Ethics Boards of two universities, Grant MacEwan University and St. Francis Xavier University, for its adherence to ethical guidelines that ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. We explained the project to all program participants and asked all participants to sign informed consent forms. We used clear and accessible language, and depending on the language capacity of the participant, we asked for assistance from the EAL teachers to explain the intent. We also provided an information sheet in clear and accessible language for the participants to keep, including contact information of the researchers and the university ethics boards. We clarified that the research did not impact their involvement with any of the agencies or the services they would receive. They were assured that they would be anonymous in any information shared. All photos have been used with permission. For further information on the research process, please contact the researchers Dr. Elizabeth Lange at [elange@stfx.ca](mailto:elange@stfx.ca) and 902-867-4697 or Dr. Peter Vogels at [VogelsP@macewan.ca](mailto:VogelsP@macewan.ca) and 780-497-5563.

## Outline of Report

This report is divided into nine sections. Following the **Executive Summary** and this **Introduction**, a **Literature Review** is offered that reviews the context of the participants and partners as well as details findings from other research. The **Description of Participants** details the demographic data of the newcomer participants. The next sections details what was heard in the **Data from the Participants** and **Data from Project Partners**. Each section ends with a summary explaining the data from the six different collection methods. The report concludes with a **Synthesis and Analysis of Findings** by synthesizing all the data into findings and then analyzing them and comparing them to findings from the literature review. The report ends with **Full Recommendations** and **References**. Appendices are available upon request.



## Acknowledgements

The researcher team would like to thank all the participants who willingly shared their time and experiences throughout the project. The input from all the participants was invaluable and will ensure that many groups will benefit as a result of their contributions. The researchers would like to thank the administrative staff at the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers and the EAL teachers who were instrumental in helping the researchers determine the direction and focus of their research and willingly shared their time and expertise. Alberta Parks and Edmonton Parks personnel were very supportive of the research team's efforts, regularly offering new information on developments, and demonstrating a high level of commitment and flexibility in making the project successful. The project was well organized and all of the partners were excellent in facilitating and supporting the work of the research team. The research team would like to thank the Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association (ECALA) for placing their trust in the research group and to thank ECALA and all other funders for financially supporting both the evaluation and research efforts. We thank David MacDonald, Angela Stewart and Denise Morrow for their research assistance. Finally, we thank Alberta Parks staff for their photos of this project.

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# Literature Review

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## Learning from Each Other

### Newcomer Context

A landed or recent immigrant is typically considered a person who has come to Canada up to 5 years prior to a given census year (Statistics Canada, 2006i). Research on the experiences of immigrants new to Canada over the past 10 years, reveals a wide spectrum of ethnic cultures, countries of origin, factors prompting emigration, as well as economic and social status. There are three primary categories of immigrants to Canada:

- **economic class immigrants** – from professionals with degrees and certificates to practice in their chosen field, to business people, to live-in caregivers (60.3%);
- **family class immigrants**, usually sponsored (26.5%) , and
- **protected persons** such as refugees accepted on humanitarian grounds (8.8%) (from Government of Canada cited in Gogia & Slade, 2011).
- The **“other”** category includes international students and temporary foreign workers, that now exceed the total number of immigrants accepted for permanent status.

**Leading source countries** for immigration in the past 15 years are: China (12%), Philippines (11%), India (10%), USA (4%), UK (4%), and France (3%) (Gogia & Slade, 2011; Government of Canada, 2010). Other leading source countries include Pakistan, Iran, Korea, Hong Kong, and Morocco. Immigrants are evaluated according to a point system that evaluates their education, language ability, work experience, age, adaptability, and arranged employment, in which they must receive a passing number of points (67/100). The current focus is on highly skilled workers and to this end, specific occupations are identified by the government as priority areas to fill. Therefore, the most recent immigrants are usually highly educated professionals who are economic class immigrants. Canada accepts approximately 250,000 immigrants a year. For 2011, the federal government expects to accept between 240,000 and 265,000 immigrants (Government of Canada, 2010).

On one end of the **spectrum of immigrant realities**, economic immigrants may be well educated professionals and business people attracted to Canada as a land of opportunity. They come for better work, education, and security, particularly for their children. On the other end of the spectrum of immigrant types, refugees have exhibited tremendous courage and determination to reach safety and freedom, illustrating their incredible resiliency. They may live with painful and terrifying memories of war and escape from the home country, as well as harsh living conditions in refugee camps. Children may have been born in refugee camps and know no other reality, until arriving in Canada.

Across all immigrant types, expectations for life in Canada are high. Yet, the settlement experience – from application, acceptance, landing, surviving the process of establishing a new home and new life, learning a new language, and making a cultural transition – is a long, rigorous, and **highly stressful experience**. Only much later do newcomer families realize that opportunities for appropriate employment and public services are much less than they imagined, fuelling feelings of disappointment and frustration. As one report asserts, “Canada’s track record in successfully integrating immigrants is slipping. On average, immigrants arrive in

this country better educated, in better health, and at a similar stage of their careers as those born in the country but the evidence suggests that during the past two decades, they have been much less successful in achieving success than earlier waves of immigration...[and] are having a harder time reaching Canadian income levels (RBC Financial Group cited in Wayland, 2006). As well, many refugees are dealing with post-traumatic stress syndrome which further complicates their settlement process.

**Integration** of newcomers typically refers to the “ongoing process of mutual accommodation between an individual and society” (Government of Canada, 2010). This definition acknowledges that integration requires change among both Canadian-born citizens as well as newcomers, not just the adaptation or assimilation of newcomers to Canadian ways. In other words, “Canada has transformed its immigrants, but they too have transformed Canada” (Thompson & Weinfeld cited in Li, 1999). Social engagement, civic engagement, community connections, and labour market participation all assist in the integration of newcomers. An often used measure of immigrant integration is the level of social interaction with dominant groups (Li, 1999) and levels of efficacy and trust (Driedger, 2003).

Yet, one of the most pressing and commonly recognized integration issues that newcomers face is **not finding work** in their area of expertise, as professional qualifications are often unrecognized and even treated as suspicious or inferior. Further, newcomers lack information on the accreditation procedures that do exist (Guo, 2006). In another study (Basran & Zong cited in Guo, 2006), it was found that less than 20% of highly educated professionals actually find work as professionals. Thus, they are pressured into unskilled jobs (Guo, 2006). Further, they face wage discrimination in the work they do obtain. This accounts for the rise in poverty and the dependence on social assistance among immigrant newcomers in recent years. Overall, across all types of immigrants, the economic well-being of newcomers tends to decline after arrival, due to a host of external factors resulting in their unemployment or underemployment. To address this, the *Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications* has just been launched between the provincial, territorial, and federal governments (Government of Canada, 2010).

Further stress is added to the settlement process when the adopted country is experienced as unwelcoming – through racialization and **discriminatory, exclusionary practices** (Tan, 2004). Newcomers tend to find that navigating educational and social services are much more difficult than expected. Particularly if the families are visible minorities (in Canada) and if English (or French) is not their first language, they are more likely to experience racism, discrimination, and exclusion from basic services. Often, there may be a host of intersecting factors, particularly institutional, that create barriers to services. Together, poor health, lack of affordable and safe housing, lack of work or a living wage, school issues for children, health issues, and family relationship breakdown all contribute to already challenging circumstances. In sum, immigrant newcomers can be considered **marginalized**, in that they are marginalized from easy and normalized access to social services – like health, education, and other services that can provide well-being – as well as marginalized from the political processes that could advocate for equitable access.

The practical difficulties of living in a foreign language and **cultural unfamiliarity** create complex circumstances. The daily encounter with values, beliefs and norms, sometimes profoundly different from their own, adds to the stress level of newcomer families. Like all families who have immigrated to Canada historically, living in the Canadian culture while attempting to maintain cultural traditions important to them, can lead to family conflict – across

the generations and between genders. Similarly, each person, and families together, must struggle to re-define relationships and personal identities in their adopted “homeland”. Newcomers may express a range of responses – rejecting the new culture, resisting specific elements in the new culture, selectively integrating, or completely assimilating – depending on personal, familial, cultural and religious characteristics. Loneliness and isolation typically emerge as many individuals and families are separated from extended family and familiar social networks (Creese, Dyck & McLaren, 1999). They are often unaware of their rights and therefore have low levels of civic engagement.

In sum, many newcomers yearn to feel a part of Canadian culture and to **take part in Canadian customs, while respecting and honouring their own cultural traditions** and imparting these traditions to their children. It is this give-and-take between cultural groups in Canada that characterize successful integration processes.

## Canada’s Changing Demographics

In the 2006 census, over 200 ethnic origins were reported in Canada. Over 5 million people of Canada’s total of 31.6 million are visible minorities (16.2%) (Statistics Canada, 2006a). **Visible minorities** refer to “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in color” (Statistics Canada, 2006a). Between 2001 and 2006, Canada’s visible minority population increased by 27% which is growing five times faster than the total population (Statistics Canada, 2006a). This is due to immigrant newcomers who primarily belong to visible minority groups. For instance, between 2001 and 2006, 75% of immigrant newcomers were visible minorities. Eastern Asians (primarily Chinese) and South Asians (East Indian, Pakistani, etc.) are the largest visible minority groups making up approximately 4% each of the total population, with Blacks both from the Caribbean (52%) and from Africa (42%) the third largest visible minority group accounting for 2.5% of the total population.

This demographic diversity is concentrated in metropolitan areas (almost 96%), with Toronto having the largest visible minority population (nearly 43% of the total city population) followed by Vancouver (42 %), and Montreal ( 16.5 %) (Statistics Canada, 2006g, h). As a province, **Alberta has the third highest proportion of visible minorities** in the country, comprising between 14% and 15% of the population, depending on the year. The largest visible minority group is Chinese, while almost half (48.8%) of the Alberta population reports some European ancestry, largely English, Scottish, German, Ukrainian, Dutch, Polish and Norwegian (Statistics Canada, 2006e,j). The second most numerous visible minority is South Asian. Calgary has the highest visible minority population in Alberta with 237,890 persons or almost 1 in 4 (22%), with Chinese comprising 6% and South Asians comprising 5% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2006b,j). Edmonton has 175, 295 visible minority persons.

However, it is misleading to think that all visible minorities are foreign-born. People of visible minorities are often asked “So, where are you from?” This question can be insulting as **30% of visible minority groups are born in Canada**. Numerous groups have long histories in Canada – the Chinese, the African diaspora, and Japanese. For instance, 66% of Japanese, 44% of Black Canadians, and 25% of Chinese were born in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2006c).

Finally, the median age of the visible minority population is 33 years old, **substantially younger** than the total Canadian population at almost 40 years old (Statistics Canada, 2006f).

## The Immigrant-Serving Context

During the 1970s and 80s, many non-governmental organizations emerged to bridge the gap in settlement services, particularly as Vietnamese and Chinese immigrants and refugees arrived in Canada. Settlement services are often largely government funded, but **settlement agencies** have a difficult task of coordinating funding from many different levels of government as well as community organizations, such as United Way, and philanthropic foundations (Wayland, 2006). Often, the funding is not multi-year and funding cutbacks have stretched the capacity to provide services. Many agencies now offer cost recovery services to mainstream organizations, such as consultation services or intercultural competency training (Burstein, 2010).

Typically, settlement agencies offer various **types of services**, including language learning and language translation, basic settlement and information, community connections and support services finding other services, citizenship training, career counselling, job search, and employment bridging services (Guo & Guo, 2007). In the settlement process alone, they provide services such as: reception and orientation, information and referral, translation and interpretation, counselling and advocacy, educational programs, community development, employment and career services, and facilitating client access to mainstream services (Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies, no date). Settlement issues range “from securing meaningful employment to improving language skills to accessing culturally appropriate health, [education,] and social services” (Gogia & Slade, 2011), issues that can intersect in complex ways. Thus, many agencies such as the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, take a “**holistic integrated practice**” approach to their work as they try to map out family strengths and a path toward successful integration (Gurnett, 2009).

At times, the settlement process may go smoothly, but given the many challenges facing newcomers, some families need substantial support from these agencies. Agency workers need not only a complex of unique skills in support of newcomers, but they often deal with substantial case overloads. On a weekly basis, many **crises arise** from family breakdown, abuse and violence, loss of housing, serious school issues, legal problems, and dire health emergencies. This relates to the high level of insecurity in the living arrangements of many families, which settlement workers need to respond to daily (Gurnett, 2009).

## Learning in the English-as-Another-Language Context

In nations where English is the dominant language or one of the dominant languages, language training has historically been known as ESL or *English as a Second Language* learning. For many learners, English may be a third or fourth language, so the term EAL or ***English as Another Language***, has gained currency and is used in this report.

For newcomers, the government offers language training to facilitate civic, economic and social settlement. Yet, EAL learners span a large range of cultural, ethnic and national backgrounds. They also span a large range of educational levels, from basic literacy to PhDs. They also differ across other characteristics as well, such as language spoken at home, socioeconomic status, type of immigrant experience, and family status. Thus, the **challenges that EAL teachers face** with multilevel classes and broad backgrounds, is immense. Despite this, the field aims to address the full spectrum of language needs, including reading, writing, oral language, conversational language, and professional or academic language.

Given that the immigration process is so closely tied to the structural and economic needs of the receiving nation, the educational approach to EAL is generally **related to national needs** (Auerbach, 2005). Prior to the 1960s, it was thought that language was a neutral skill and could be learned as a formal set of rules. However, after the 1960s, newcomers were coming from newly decolonizing countries or countries at war and seeking entry into countries with high labour needs due to economic expansion. These Northern hemispheric nations began to mandate that newcomers take EAL classes as a condition for settlement subsidies, partly to ensure assimilation culturally and economically, and partly to differentiate those with basic literacy needs from those with other levels of English language needs. Thus, there was a shift in the field away from grammar-based approaches to more **whole language and communicative approaches** (Auerbach, 2005). Further, there began to be some **debate** about the purpose of EAL – whether to foster assimilation, affirm cultural origins while integrating into Canadian life, or empower learners to challenge social conditions that keep them disadvantaged within Canadian society.

There are several dominant but diverse approaches to EAL (Auerbach, 2005). The first approach is the *competency-based approach*. The emphasis is not on what the students know about the language, but what they can do with the language – from reading a bus schedule to asking questions at a grocery store. Often this approach is focussed on life skills. However, it has been criticized for training immigrants for more low level jobs and for conformity to the dominant society that does not question their socio-economic positioning in our society.

A second approach emphasizes self-expression through reading and writing and thus is centered on *meaningful communication* that gives learners a voice. Free writing, journaling, poetry and story-writing help students to process their experiences and discover new meanings within their immigration process.

A third approach is to understand *culturally-shaped ways of learning* that impact the learning of additional languages. This view builds on the learner's specific knowledge and ways of knowing from the culture of origin and then bridges from this base into the new culture and ways of knowing. This helps to build affirmation for the original culture before layering on new cultural norms, values and language.

A fourth approach is to focus on the *power relations*, often using analyses of literature. From the analysis of various genres of literature and the language of power represented in them, students can build their own writing based on the genre that communicates their messages, gives them voice, and facilitates their empowerment.

A fifth approach centres on *community action and social change*. Through an analysis of social issues, language learners can assess the conditions of their lives before and after immigration and take action to change the gender, race and other relationships that silence them and compromise their well-being. This approach focuses on learning democracy in the classroom so that democracy becomes a skill enacted in society.

In Canada, the competency-based curriculum is the national standard and is focused on what learners can do (LINC Curriculum Guidelines, 2002). Learners are assessed according to the *Canadian Language Benchmark* (2000) assessment tool and are placed into one of five levels of language training until they complete all the competencies of that benchmark. These levels are called **Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) Levels 1-5**. LINC was created by the *Canada Employment and Immigration Commission* in 1992 to facilitate the settlement and

integration of immigrants and refugees into Canadian society (LINC Curriculum Guidelines, 2002) and thus free classes are usually offered to immigrants seeking permanent residency and those received as refugees. Programs are funded through *Citizenship and Immigration Canada*.

The curriculum guidelines for each level address speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities. The outcomes are divided into four competency areas – social interaction, following and giving instructions, suasion (getting things done), and information. The competencies vary from:

LINC 1 – where learners can speak very little, mostly responding to basic questions, speaking in isolated words or in two to three word combinations, in short social interactions where pronunciation may impede communication, to

LINC 5 – where learners can communicate comfortably in most common daily situations using a variety of sentence structures and common idioms, where grammar and pronunciation errors may be frequent but do not impede communication, the rate of speech is slow to normal, and where concrete as well as abstract ideas are communicated (LINC Curriculum Guidelines).

Typically, learners are divided into these levels as learning groups, but there may be wide variation within the groups. Often, EAL is **thematically-based**, despite the educational approach taken, and is **learner-centered**, although this is interpreted differently by each practitioner (Auerbach, 2005). Thus, there is space in the delivery of the curriculum for new learning units, such as a camping unit, as offered by the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers in association with Alberta Parks and Edmonton Parks.

## Parks Context

In the late 1800s, within an expanding private property system in Canada, national parks were developed as state-administered land bases, preserved **for general public access and enjoyment as well as for conservation** purposes. As settlement and development expanded across Canada, areas of pristine natural beauty were designated by legislation as sites for tourism and were generally **protected** from industrial resource extraction and commercial operations, such as mining or forestry. These sites were intended to preserve the integrity of the land and the various species within these spaces, by establishing a range of restricted activities, often promoted by upper class naturalists (O'Neill, 1996). Nineteenth century moral reformers advocated for the creation of urban parks as well as national parks, which would mimic the healthy countryside and encourage the end of more negative and morally suspect activities in cities. In sum, from the late 1800s, national and municipal parks were established in Canada, with provincial parks following in the early 1900s.

As a city, Edmonton was established in 1904 and the province of Alberta joined confederation in 1905. The **earliest park in Edmonton** was East End City Park established in 1906, later renamed Borden Park, originally encompassing 140 acres and now 20 hectares. It was a substantial attraction featuring a fairground, zoo, tea room and outdoor pool (City of Edmonton, 2011). The Edmonton Golf Club was established in 1896, eventually shifting location to the Hudson's Bay Flats in 1907. This became the first municipal golf course in Canada, later becoming known as Victoria Park.

Today, Edmonton has a metropolitan population over one million people serviced by over 460 parks, five of which are named after the “famous five” women activists and political leaders. Most unique is a 48 kilometre stretch of 22 parks along the North Saskatchewan River called

the Ribbon of Green, the **largest expanse of urban parkland in North America** (City of Edmonton, 2011). It has the highest per capita area of parkland of any Canadian city and these sites feature a large variety of programs, festivals, historic locations, playgrounds, sports as well as urban forests and publicly accessible natural areas (City of Edmonton, 2011).

The City of Edmonton sees the importance of the parks for the **social capital** that is created in these locations, the preservation of **natural capital**, the contribution to healthier citizens, and the economic and neighbourhood benefits (City of Edmonton, 2011). Management includes balancing habitat protection with accessibility and enjoyment.

**Alberta provincial parks were established in 1930** through the initial legislation, the *Provincial Parks and Protected Areas Act*. Aspen Beach Provincial Park as the first established park in 1932 with the primary goal of providing recreation sites for Albertans. The most significant growth period was between the 1950s and 70s, when over 50 new provincial parks were established (Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation, no date). This was followed in 1995 by the Special Places Program, where 81 new and 13 expanded sites added 2 million hectares to the provincial parks network.

For many advocates, national and provincial parks were considered “public pleasure grounds”, providing “exhilarating opportunities for outdoor life”, as well as ensuring unspoiled “primitive wilderness” as “museum[s] for the study of natural history” (Buckley, 1925). Further, the advent of car travel provided easier access to more remote locations where the Canadian public could “escape from the crowded city into the mountain regions, to take their food and erect their camp under the blue sky; to satisfy their craving for beauty and to enjoy the quiet and restfulness of the forests, the glory of the mountains, lakes and rivers, and to wander in the paradise of wild flowers that are to be found among the mountains” (Buckley, 1925). Today, one of the priorities is for the public to recognize and support parks as an **essential public good** and to support the role of parks in conservation, outdoor recreation, and tourism (Government of Alberta, 2009).

During the 1970s, provincial priorities began to **shift to environmental protection** and a spectrum of designations began to develop, from strictly protected wilderness areas to provincial recreational areas with intensive outdoor recreation as the primary goal. This range was intended to represent and protect lands within the six natural regions of Alberta – boreal forests, parkland, grassland, foothills, mountains, and Canadian shield (Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation, nd). There are now nearly 500 sites in the provincial park system that preserve approximately 27,500 square kilometres or nearly **4% of the total land mass of Alberta**, with 75 provincial parks, 250 provincial campgrounds, and nearly 14,000 campsites providing access to these natural areas (Alberta Tourism, Parks, and Recreation, n.d.). The diversity of areas throughout the province provides ready access to parks and protected areas for almost any community in Alberta, access which is free for day use activities.

During the 1970s and again in the 1990s, it became clear that the park system was inadequate for population growth, leading to the establishment of new park lands, resulting in “serious resource development conflicts in some parks” (Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation, n.d.). The search continues to find a **satisfactory balance between recreation and human use and protection** for each area, through ecological monitoring and public consultation (Alberta Government, 2006). Currently, the overarching goals are preservation, heritage appreciation, outdoor recreation, and heritage tourism (Government of Alberta, 2009).

The need to **maintain public support and stewardship** for Canadian national, provincial and municipal parks is important. Yet, increasing urbanization, changing family demographics and new economic realities have **changed the travel patterns** of the Canadian public. Since the 1990s, there has been a slowdown in family travel and an increase in travel by the greying baby boom generation, now largely without children residing with them (Shaienks, 2000). Family camping in tents and tent trailers has decreased in favour of adult-inhabited mobile homes and other recreational vehicles (Shaienks, 2000). Visits to museums, zoos and historic sites have been increasing, while visits to nature parks have been steadily declining, by -5.3% in 2002 (Statistics Canada, 2004). This means that revenue from admissions has also fallen (8.9% in 2002) and the volunteer work force in nature parks has also declined (Statistics Canada, 2004).

As **revenues fall**, the funding available for maintenance and improvement of facilities is also decreasing. In Alberta, most of the park facilities were built in the 1970s and are in need of upgrading and expansion for a growing population (Government of Alberta, 2009). Yet, demand for increased services and level of facilities coupled with successive government budget cutbacks have reduced effective parks management, including facility management, staffing, programming, education and research, rescue services, and new park creation (Sickle & Eagles, 1998). This has reversed somewhat since the 2000s, with higher government spending (Statistics Canada, 2004).

These circumstances have led to a **major shift in the financing of parks**, including a rise in visitor fees. New user charges include registration fees, licenses, and differential fees by season. This shift toward user fees has thereby reduced accessibility for economically challenged sectors of the population. As well, some provincial parks were closed or sold in the mid-1990s, others offered leases to private operators, and in still others, volunteer groups were established to assist in fund-raising, promotion and site maintenance. However, concerns began to emerge from the nature-based tourism industry, which is centered on these parks, as well as from environmental groups, identifying facility deterioration and the environmental damage due to lack of effective site management (Sickle & Eagles, 1998). With this changing reality, factors such as visitor satisfaction, quality of programming, return rates, and lengths of stay have increased in their relevance for parks management (Sickle & Eagles, 1998).

## Learning in the Parks Context

Learning in a parks context is typically known as “**parks interpretation**” in that it is specifically carried out in a nature park. It is also known as “personal interpretation” that engages individuals face-to-face or simply as “interpretation.” Interpretation has been defined as communication that is both an informational and inspirational process to create intellectual and emotional connections between the natural landscape and the audience (Beck & Cable, 2002). For some, it is about interpreting the technicalities of the natural sciences in a way that can be understood by a lay audience. For others, it is about bringing an audience into a powerful experience with a natural landscape that enhances not only an understanding but also an appreciation for and a desire to protect the natural and human cultural legacy bound up in any natural landscape (*National Association for Interpretation* found in Brochu & Merriam, 2002).

Interpretation follows in the historical footsteps of John Muir who was instrumental in establishing the first national park in North America, Yosemite Park, and also of Enos Mills who was a nature guide in Kansas in the late 1800s, Freeman Tilden who named the profession of interpretation in the 1950s and derived the first six **principles of interpretation** (1977), and William Lewis who wrote the seminal *Interpreting for Park Visitors* in 1980, stressing the

interactivity between the interpreter, the visitor and the unique landscape (Brochu & Merriman, 2002). Today, interpreters can be found in zoos, museums, nature centres, aquariums, and historic sites, as well as nature parks.

“Good” interpretation is not simply a one-way communication of facts or views, but a **dialogue** with audiences that offers **multiple points of view**, is entertaining, and allows the audience to develop enthusiasm as well as their own perspective or interpretation of the topic or site (Brochu & Merriman, 2002). In sum, interpretation is about helping an audience to “see” a **hidden story** behind the landscape or cultural history (Beck & Cable, 2002).

Good interpretation takes effort, significant amounts of **preparation**, thoughtfulness as to the story that is told and what is represented, and **ethics** in historical, natural, and cultural storytelling that transcend stereotypes to promote a deeper, more complex understanding. While good interpretation and good education share many characteristics, one difference is that the site for the learning generally differs – outdoor or *in situ* rather than indoor in a classroom. Further, interpretation can be classified as nonformal education, where it is planned and organized but not part of formal education, with an established curriculum and formal educational goals that are sequenced over time, although it may support formal education programming.

Typically, because of the **transitory nature** of the learning engagement – often one time with a short duration – interpretation rarely goes further than “awareness-building” and thus is not the same as environmental education which aims to build complex, action oriented learning (Brochu & Merriman, 2002). Interpretation is often intergenerational by engaging families, in addition to reaching monogenerational groups, like school groups. Finally, the audience is a voluntary audience and may flow in and out of a presentation or engagement (Taylor, 2004, 2010), adding a level of challenge to the task of engagement.

Historically, leisure and parks programming in Canada has been aimed at the dominant demographic – white and relatively affluent middle and upper class Canadians (Carruthers Den Hoed, 2008). As the **demographic shifts** in park visitorship have become clear, particularly the increasing ethnic diversity of visitors, many North American studies have sought to understand the emerging ethnocultural needs within parks. Yet, whether American or Canadian studies, they have largely focussed on the cultural preferences for leisure, group by group. There are very few studies that have examined the diversity of programming needs, the learning differences by culture, the role of parks in the social integration of immigrant newcomers, the learning processes of parks staff in adapting to diverse audiences, and the learning processes of EAL teachers outside the classroom. Parks staff across national, provincial, and municipal systems have indicated a desire to explore how accessibility can be enhanced. This study aims to add insight and knowledge to inform this desire.

## Findings from Other Studies

In a non-comprehensive review of literature from several relevant fields, namely, schools-based outdoor and environmental education, parks education, leisure sciences, environmental adult education, and literacy/EAL education, it is clear that there is little available research on environmental literacy for adults, particularly immigrant newcomers to Canada, or on using field study learning opportunities for language acquisition. No other study has recorded

innovations like this study, involving the integration of environmental literacy with language acquisition.

In this report, we use the **terms ecological literacy and environmental literacy**.

Environmental literacy is a complex concept but in its simplest form it relates to the human ability to engage the natural world and to understand the interaction between natural and human systems. In contrast, ecological literacy implies learning the “language of nature” (Nicholsen, 2001, p.28) or as David Orr (1992) suggests, it “implies an intimate knowledge of our landscapes, and an affinity for the living world...” leading them to “to see things in their wholeness” (p. 92).

Dodge (1990) suggests that building a **sense of belonging** in a new society is an important first step for newcomers, particularly ensuring newcomers have equal access to all societal resources (Spoonley, et al, 2005). While modernization tends to obscure a **sense of place**, regionalism conveys that “to be identified with space means to treat space as part of the self – not simply something to use, abuse, destroy, deface, or pollute (Wallace, 1981 in Driedger, 2003, p. 125). Therefore, one of the dimensions of ethnocultural identity is a sense of relationship to a geographic place or symbols related to that place. These places in a new land are important as they allow space for ethnic activities to occur, supporting the retention of an ethnic language and culture (Driedger, 2003). From this secure “ground”, a firm sense of cultural identification can generate a sense of well-being and openness to others (Driedger, 2003).

**Barriers of access** to natural areas such as local and national parks is considered one form of exclusion (Carruthers Den Hoed, 2008), yet access to such natural spaces meets a basic human need. Such connections with land can situate one’s identity within the context of a new natural as well as social space (Clayton & Opatow, 2003). It also has potential for creating greater engagement in community building (Dodge, 1990). Borrowing from Orr (1994), a broader long term goal for Canadian society is for immigrant newcomers to experience a deeper sense of social and environmental belonging, or rather, building a sense of place.

Many Canadian park administrations have identified that the social trends of an aging population, increased urbanization, changing tourist desires, and demographic diversity due to global migration patterns is necessitating new kinds of responsiveness (Bain, Quinn, & Rettie, 2007). In addition, national, provincial, and municipal parks are challenged in terms of maintaining visitation levels and thus continued support and advocacy from the public. Carruthers Den Hoed (2008) notes that the need to engage immigrant newcomers as part of the changing demographics is clear. North American studies are addressing the **shift in park visitorship** and related needs, but these studies have focused primarily on culturally-constructed preferences for leisure and recreation rather than the role of programming in social integration or the learning process among parks staff in adapting to diverse audiences and creating more inclusive parks. Both Scott, Herrera & Hunt (2007) and Walker & Wang (2009) assert that very little cross-cultural comparative research has been undertaken in leisure sciences and only in the early 2000s did parks education begin to trace ethnic and racial use patterns in parks. Similarly, environmental education for adults has only entered the research literature in the late 1990s (Lange, 2010; Lange & Chubb, 2009).

The most numerous North American studies have focused on **culturally-constructed preferences for leisure and recreation**. One of the first studies, Baas, Ewert & Chavez (1993) found that both African Americans and Hispanics have an affinity for more developed sites and

for recreation that has a strong social element. The Hung 2003 Vancouver study focused on the cultural nuances that shape Chinese participation in wilderness recreation. Her findings demonstrated that Chinese who have adapted most readily to mainstream culture have more extensive, intensive and earlier age use patterns in parks, including more physically demanding adventure activities. Chinese who are less adapted to mainstream culture have demonstrated higher levels of fear in a wilderness setting due to social isolation, geographic remoteness, and fears of crime, thus preferring more comfortable, convenient, clean, and safe facilities. Other factors shaping parks usage were cultural values and stigmas, which revolve around fair complexion as a sign of urban residence, rurality as poverty, and a preference for status consumption. Implied in this study is that the desire for assimilation into mainstream Canadian life enhances parks participation and that protecting one's cultural heritage is a barrier to traditional forms of park usage. Other studies are needed that illustrate how immigrant newcomers can successfully negotiate the preservation of their culture of origin, instead of assimilation, while integrating successfully into a Canadian context, including parks usage.

Walker & Wang (2009) found that leisure was perceived by Chinese Canadians as a state of mind or experience, rather than defined as free time or specific types of leisure or adventure activities. They suggest that the Chinese definition of leisure is passive, denoted by "calm or relaxed happiness," and achieved with activities calling for less effort, more sociality, and high interest. This challenges Western **constructs of leisure** – such as seeking autonomy and self-expression through active adventure, understanding wilderness as freedom, and definitions of leisure where one exerts one's freedom of choice and exhibits "excited happiness" during the activities.

The Hung (2003) and the Scott, Herrera, & Hunt (2007) studies found that minority groups consider parks as **"whites only" spaces** and, as visible minorities, they feared confrontation. These studies point to factors that have not been well explored in the Canadian research literature. While Canada does not have strongly organized anti-immigrant interest groups or ghettoized, siloed enclaves as in the USA, Canada does have residential segregation where concentrations of ethno-specific groups reside (Li, 1999). This can be understood as a barrier to integration, particularly if involuntary, or conversely as a first step to mitigating isolation and generating a strong identity that is necessary for integration. One key issue for visible minorities is visibility – whenever they are in public spaces they sense their visibility which adds to psychological stress. Ethnic jokes, name calling, derogatory remarks, being ignored or indifferent attitudes range from overt racism to polite racism. Being discriminated against on the basis of skin color and accents, whether in services or employment, further adds to the emotional strain. For this reason, visible minority newcomers tend toward social and spatial segregation away from dominant groups (Dreidger, 2003).

In the Canadian adult education literature, Tan (2004) asserts that nature-based environmental education for adults in Canada has ignored the issues of race. Seeking to **reintegrate "immigrants" into environmental discourse**, Tan advocates debunking the myth of the "ignorant immigrant" by building discourse that includes the ecological knowledge of newcomers, including their desire to often resist the culture of consumerism by maintaining habits of frugality, communality, reciprocity, and conservation of household resources, which ARE environmental practices already. Further, she suggests educators not be blinded by their own ethnocentric understandings and begin to create educational processes that start from the concrete realities of immigrant newcomers, including their poverty in Canada as well as their aspirations.

Carruthers Den Hoed (2008) concurs and highlights the need for **parks personnel to “unpack their privilege”** when working with groups with diverse needs. He also profiles the need to create more inclusive parks that can address the trend of decreasing visitation. A leader in inclusive practices, Carruthers Den Hoed has a cogent and compelling critique of the dominant model in parks interpretation and environmental education practice. Suggestions for building practices from this critique will be addressed in this report.

Potentially, parks personnel could be **allies for visible minorities** (Bishop, 2002), as part of a relationship of mutuality between parks services and immigrant newcomers. Just as park services consider visible minorities and immigrant newcomers to be a new source of political support and advocacy for parklands, participation in parks can increase the integration of immigrant newcomers if parks advocate and provide for different usage patterns. Further, they can create a culture where parks are no longer considered “whites only” spaces and where confrontation and discrimination by other campers is not tolerated and exclusionary institutional practices are eliminated. As Anne Bishop (2002) describes, allies are those who build solidarity through educational processes of mutual story-telling and collective action that addresses inequities.

Research on **informal learning sites**, such as cultural institutions like museums or natural settings like parks, has shown the importance of public sites as **“commons” or “third places,”** where diverse community members converge to dialogue and learn (Taylor, 2010). Yet, parks can and should be locations of contestation over dominant narratives and uneven power relations – in terms of whose story is told, whose voice is heard most, and whose needs are met. Parks can and should foster the inclusion of a multiplicity of voices (Taylor, 2010).

Various theorists see **environmental education as a dialogue** about the interconnectedness of the social, economic, and ecological systems in which we live, but too often environmental education has been approached as awareness-building only or as goal-directed toward a preferred outcome. Hart (1990) suggests that environmental education has the potential to **“transform values** that underlie human decision making from those that promote environmental degradation to those that support a sustainable planet in which all organisms can live with dignity” (p. 360). Such learning is considered a process of **mutual learning**, deliberative citizen inquiry, and active participation in addressing these issues (Huckle & Sterling, 1996; Hungerford & Volk, 1990). Yet, as Agyeman (1995) argues, marginalized groups, particularly immigrant newcomer groups, are often constructed by dominant groups as lacking in ecological knowledge and environmental concern.

Marouli (2002) asserts that the worldviews of marginalized peoples – primarily low income and visible minorities – have not been well represented in the environmental movement yet they disproportionately experience the brunt of environmental consequences – whether the siting of landfills, nuclear plants or extractive industries; the dumping of toxic waste; or harmful exposure at worksites. In response, under the umbrella of the environmental justice movement, **Multicultural Environmental Education** has been growing since the early 1990s as a way to increase the access of culturally diverse groups to environmental education and to increase the representation of their worldviews within it (Marouli, 2002). Multicultural Environmental Education has four foci: affirming ethnocultural diversity in the study of environmental issues; empowering marginalized groups to fight for their environmental rights; in “culturing the environment” where the environment is considered through a specific ethnocultural lens; and promoting crosscultural cooperation in environmental activism (Marouli, 2002).

In relation to this study, there is little available research literature that links environmental literacy and new language acquisition, particularly English as Another Language (EAL). However, one study (Drill, et al, 2009) found high levels of interest in adult EAL classrooms for environmental literacy.



# Description of Participants

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Three different newcomer groups participated in the project activities, with language levels ranging from LINC (language) Levels 1 to 4. The educational process was piloted with three cohort groups who participated in the three sequential activities.

## Cohort 1 – LINC Classes

This cohort consisted of students (and their families) enrolled in regular LINC classes at the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers. The total participant numbers for each activity of this cohort are below. The total number of participants indicates the full family numbers. The total of newcomer participants refers to the EAL language learners only.

Activity	Date	# Total Family Participants	# Newcomer Participants
Classroom preparation	May 24-June 4	220	200
Camping Fair	June 8	240	200
Rainbow Valley	June 6	74	60
Miquelon Lake Provincial Park	June 11-13	57	35

## Cohort 2 – Burmese (Karen) Refugee Community Group

This cohort consisted of families who participate in weekend community programming for Karen Refugees, occurring at the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers. The Karen refugees are government sponsored refugees that came from the northern regions of Burma (also known as Myanmar) and who had been exiled to Thai refugee camps over the past 20 years. The total participant numbers for each activity of this cohort are below. The pre-event preparation involved a visit from parks staff to explain the program to the Karen community.

Activity	Date	# Total Family Participants	# Newcomer Participants
Pre-event preparation	June 13 – July 11	45	40
Rainbow Valley	July 18	28*	40
Miquelon Lake Provincial Park	July 23-25	61	39

*\*This low number was due to inclement weather and a last minute scheduling change.*

### Cohort 3 – ECALA Community EAL Classes

This cohort consisted of students (and their families) enrolled in part-time community EAL classes that were funded by ECALA and held at a local church. The learners were diverse in that they were refugees, those with landed status, or those with citizen status. However, they all shared a struggle with low literacy skills and a desire to learn English as an additional language to their birth language. The total number of participants indicates the full family numbers. The total of newcomer participants refers to the EAL language learners only.

Activity	Date	# Total Family Participants	# Newcomer Participants
Classroom preparation	July 19 – Aug 6	65	60
Rainbow Valley	July 29	47	37
Miquelon Lake Provincial Park	Aug 6-9	50	40

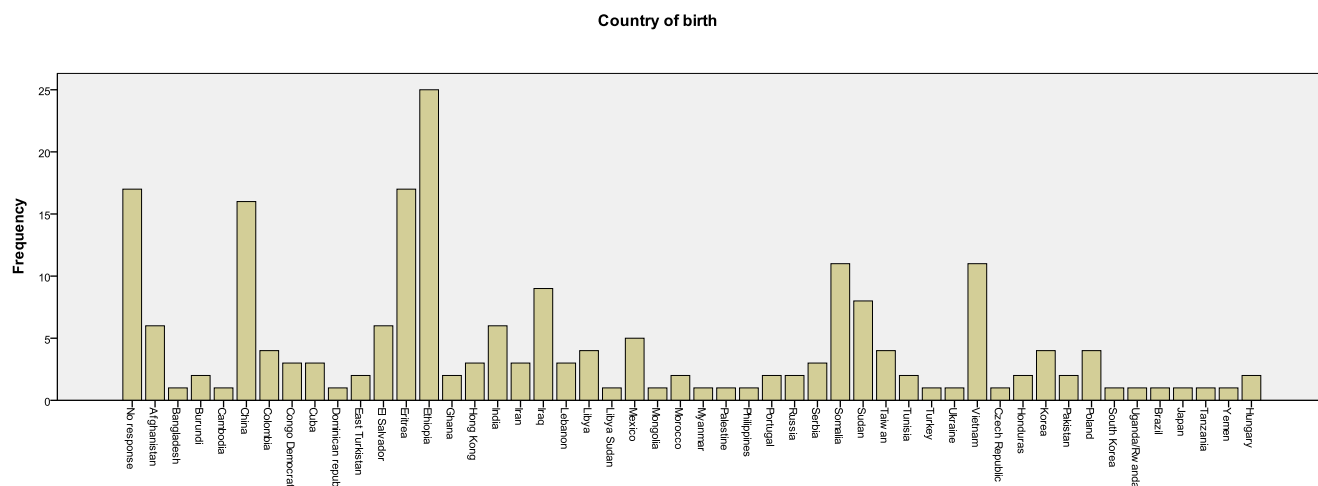
**Total Participants: 330**

### Demographic Data

Given the limited English language facility of many newcomers, the demographic data was collected using a workbook survey. The participants were asked to read the questions or the teacher to read the questions and they answered accordingly by filling in the blanks with one or several word answers. While the teachers were encouraged to assist them in understanding and correctly completing the demographic portion of the survey, it was clear that language was a barrier to completion. For classes where there was limited time, many did not respond to some questions. For added reliability, we triangulated the workbook data with the interview data and other learning artifacts from the camping unit.

The following charts express the demographic information obtained from the in-class workbooks for Cohorts 1 and 3 only. As Cohort 2 was not involved in any formal language instruction, they did not complete these workbooks and thus are not represented in this data. Participants did not answer all the questions, thus the category *No Response* indicates the number of participants who did not answer that question.

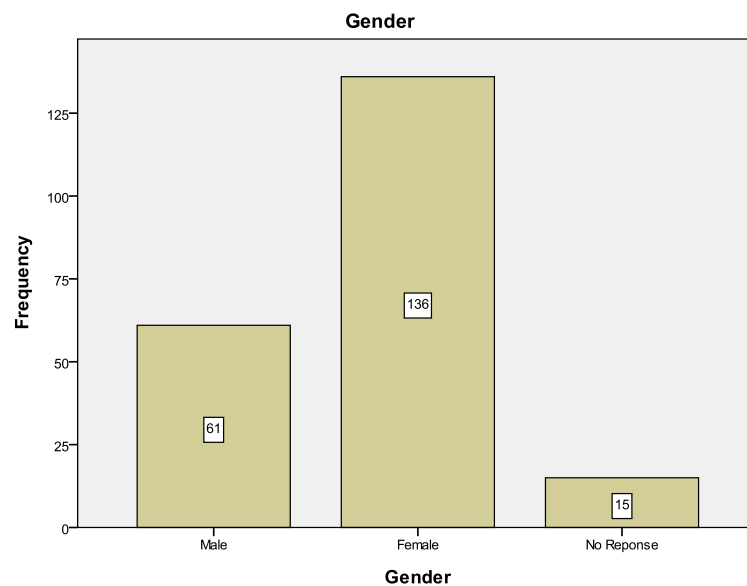
The participants came from 48 different countries. The highest number of participants were from Ethiopia (25 participants= 11.8%), Eritrea (17 = 8%), China (16 = 7.5%), Somalia (11 = 5.2%) and Vietnam (11 = 5.2%).



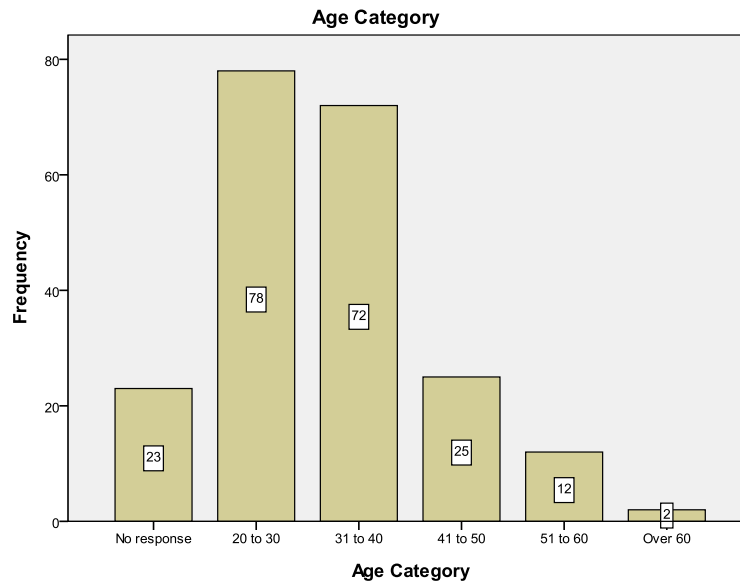
Country of birth		
	Frequency	Percent
No response	17	8.0
Ethiopia	25	11.8
Eritrea	17	8.0
China	16	7.5
Somalia	11	5.2
Vietnam	11	5.2
Iraq	9	4.2
Sudan	8	3.8
Afghanistan	6	2.8
El Salvador	6	2.8
India	6	2.8
Mexico	5	2.4
Colombia	4	1.9
Libya	4	1.9
Taiwan	4	1.9
Korea	4	1.9
Poland	4	1.9
Congo	3	1.4
Cuba	3	1.4
Hong Kong	3	1.4
Iran	3	1.4
Lebanon	3	1.4
Serbia	3	1.4
Burundi	2	.9
East Turkistan	2	.9
Ghana	2	.9
Morocco	2	.9

Portugal	2	.9
Russia	2	.9
Tunisia	2	.9
Honduras	2	.9
Pakistan	2	.9
Hungary	2	.9
Bangladesh	1	.5
Cambodia	1	.5
Dominican republic	1	.5
Libya Sudan	1	.5
Mongolia	1	.5
Myanmar	1	.5
Palestine	1	.5
Philippines	1	.5
Turkey	1	.5
Ukraine	1	.5
Czech Republic	1	.5
South Korea	1	.5
Uganda/Rwanda	1	.5
Brazil	1	.5
Japan	1	.5
Tanzania	1	.5
Yemen	1	.5

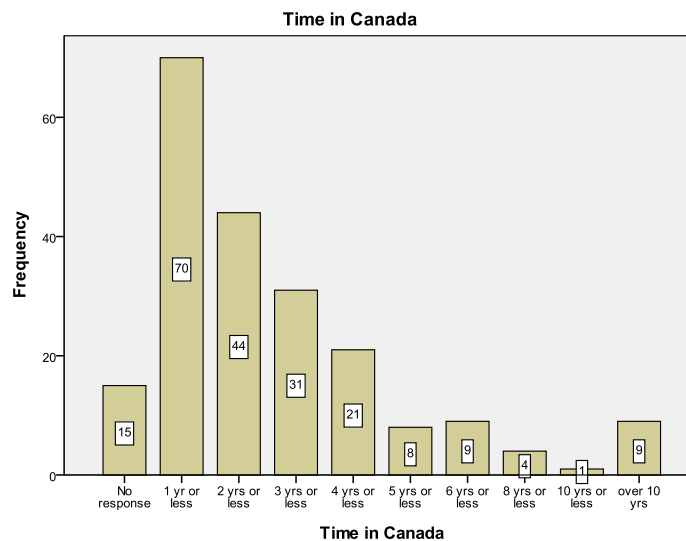
Of the participants that answered this question, there were 136 female participants (65%) and 61 male participants (29%).



Approximately one-third of the participants who responded to this question were between the ages of 20 and 30 (37%), one-third between the ages of 31 and 40 (34%), and 20% were above the age of 40.



About half the participants (51%) had been in Canada for less than 2 years, and another third (28%) for between 2 and 5 years.



## Summary of Demographic Data

The study included 330 participants in total for all activities. In sum, almost 30% of the participants came from sub-Saharan Africa and 18% came from China and South East Asia. Almost 70% were under the age of 40 and almost 80% had been in Canada under 5 years. Female participants outnumbered male participants by over 2 to 1.

# Data from Participants

## Pre-Camping Data

Data was gathered in two ways, through workbooks and interviews, to determine the existing knowledge and expectations that newcomers have prior to their engagement with the camping unit and the facilitated camping experiences. The data is summarized at the end of each section and all of the data is synthesized in the section entitled Synthesis and Analysis of Findings.

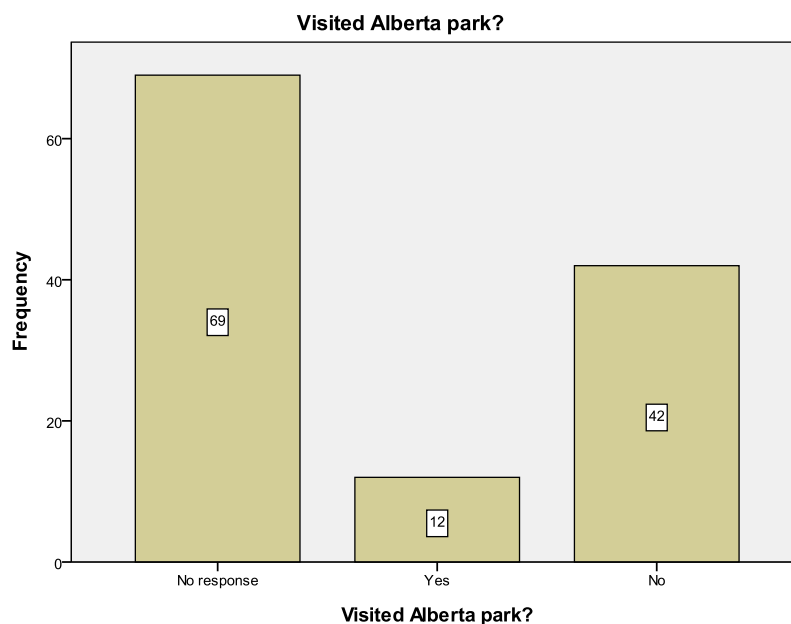
## Data from Workbooks

### Participation in Parks

The following data on park participation is based on responses from a total of 123 participants who completed all or some of the workbooks. Completion of the booklets was at teacher discretion, dependent on classroom time constraints and learner assessments. Cohort 2, who did not do any in-class activities, did not complete the workbook and is not included in the statistics. Given the large number of no responses, we have not included the 'no response' category in our statistical analyses.

#### Provincial Parks

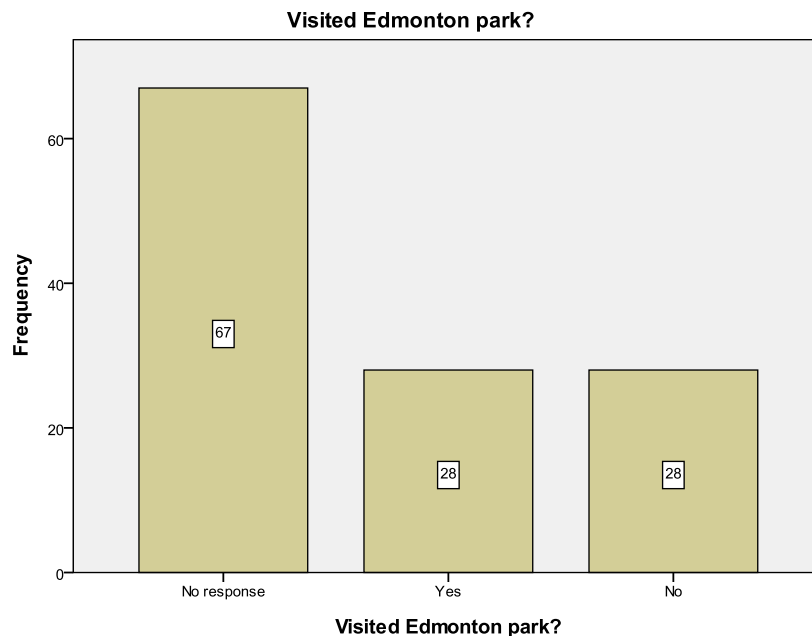
Only 12 participants (22%) of the respondents indicated that they had visited an Alberta provincial park before. The majority of participants who had visited Alberta parks visited less than 3 times. The provincial parks that participants visited were Buck Lake, Gregoire Lake, Pembina River, Slave Lake, Sylvan Lake and Wabamun Lake.



## Edmonton Parks

Of the participants who completed this question in the pre-test workbooks, 50% (28) had visited an Edmonton park before, the majority less than 3 times.

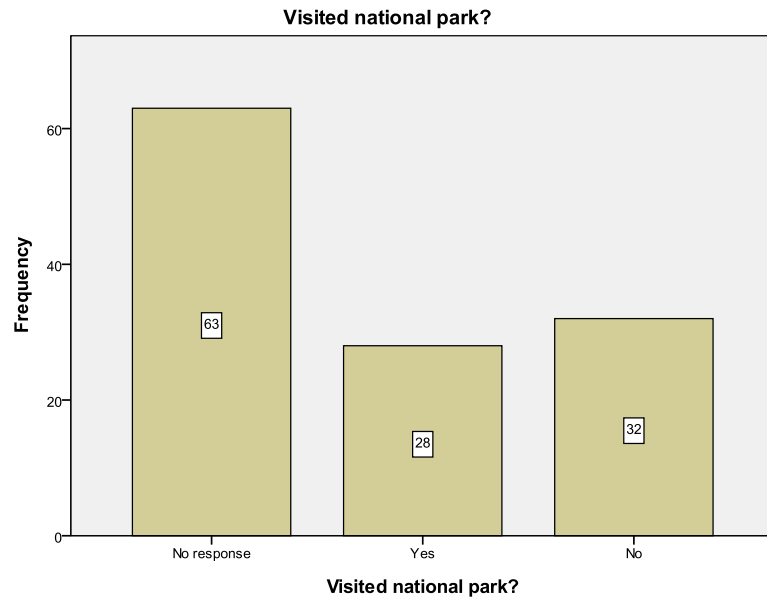
The Edmonton parks that were mentioned most frequently were Hawrelak Park (11 times) and Rundle Park (9 times). Other Edmonton parks that participants mentioned visiting were Victoria Park, Gold Bar Park, Snow Valley, Borden Park, Heritage Park and the Valley Zoo.



## National Parks

Only 47% of those participants answering the question had previously visited a national park. Of the participants who had visited a national park, most had been to the park less than 3 times.

The national parks most frequented were Banff and Jasper National Parks. Other national parks located in Alberta that participants mentioned visiting were Elk Island National Park and Waterton Lakes National Park. Many of the other parks the participants mentioned in their answer to this question were not national parks, but municipal and provincial parks, thus they are listed in the above data sets. This confusion will be addressed later in the interview findings.



## Typical Activities in Parks

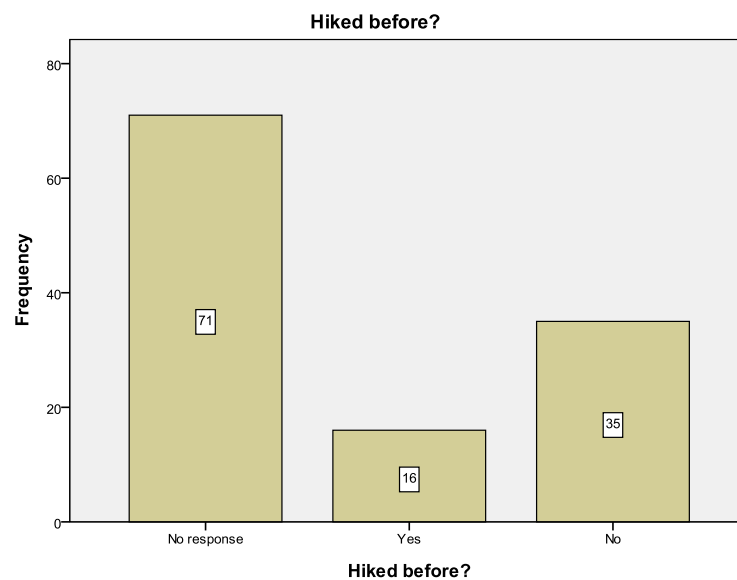
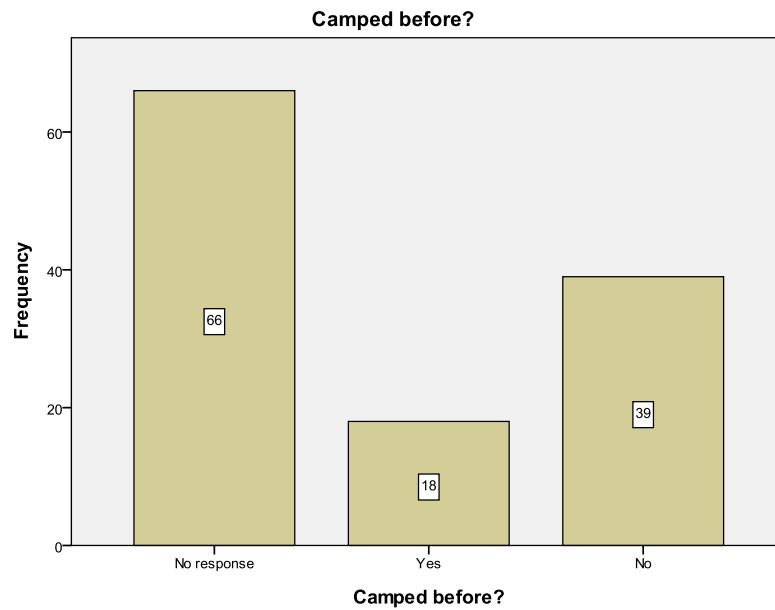
The most frequent activities in parks were walking, playing games, barbequing, jogging, biking, hiking, eating, playing with children, looking at animals, taking photos and sightseeing. Participants visited the parks mostly with family and friends. Frequency of these activities is noted in the following chart.

Activity	Frequency
Walk	12
Play games	8
Barbeque	6
Jog	6
Bike	5
Hike	5
Eat	4
Play with children	4
Look at animals	3
Take photos	3
Sightseeing	2
Boat	1
Camp	1
Drive	1
Play	1
Play golf	1
Play with dogs	1
Relax with my wife	1
Rest	1

Stay at resort	1
Swim	1
Take children to pool	1
Talk	1
Tobogganing	1

Most of the reported activities were warm weather activities; very few participants mentioned winter outdoor activities such as skiing, skating, tobogganing and skiing.

Half the participants responded to the question of hiking or camping before, and out of this population, 32% of the participants had camped before and 31% had hiked before.



## Parks in Country of Origin

Given the lack of English language facility, all students were asked to draw four specific pictures in the workbook, to assess student perceptions of parks in their country of origin and their understanding of parks in Alberta. First, newcomers were asked to draw a picture of a “park” that they may have visited in their home country, as a way to assess if their country had parks and determine the understanding of parks they brought to Canada. Newcomer students at the LINC 3 and 4 Level were also asked to draw “nature” from their country of origin in the workbooks. Students were given the opportunity to add text to their drawings. It was expected that with a higher language level, they were better equipped to respond to this more complex question. They were requested to label the plants, birds, animals and geographic features in English or their own language, to assess their level of ecological knowledge. An additional drawing was also requested to illustrate what activities they liked to do at this park and who they went with. When drawing pictures related to parks in the country of origin, students were also encouraged to ask for help from their teacher if they needed it.

The newcomer students were then asked to draw two more pictures to analyze their expectations and experiences of parks in Alberta. The fourth request asked all levels of students to draw a picture of what they think a park in Alberta looks like and the fifth request was to draw a picture of either Miquelon Lake Provincial Park or Rainbow Valley City Park after they actually visited these parks.

It is important to note that for the drawings related to their country of origin, students were encouraged to ask their language teachers for help. However for the pictures related to what the students thought a park in Alberta looked like (both before and after the parks experience), the language teachers were asked to limit the help they provided. This request was made to ensure accurate analysis between the pre and post park experience.

Drawings were analysed by identifying the various flora, fauna and landscape features represented in the drawings, and scoring the frequency with which each item was drawn. The number of times humans and human activity were depicted in each picture was also recorded. In addition to this numerical data the pictures were also assessed in terms of the various themes that stood out when examining all the pictures together.

## Nature in Country of Origin

### Students were asked to respond to the following question for picture#1:

Please draw a picture of “nature” from the place where you lived in your home country.  
Please label as many plants, birds, animals, and other things like mountains, desert, or lakes as you can. You can use your own language or English. You may ask your teacher for help. (LINC 3 and 4 students only)

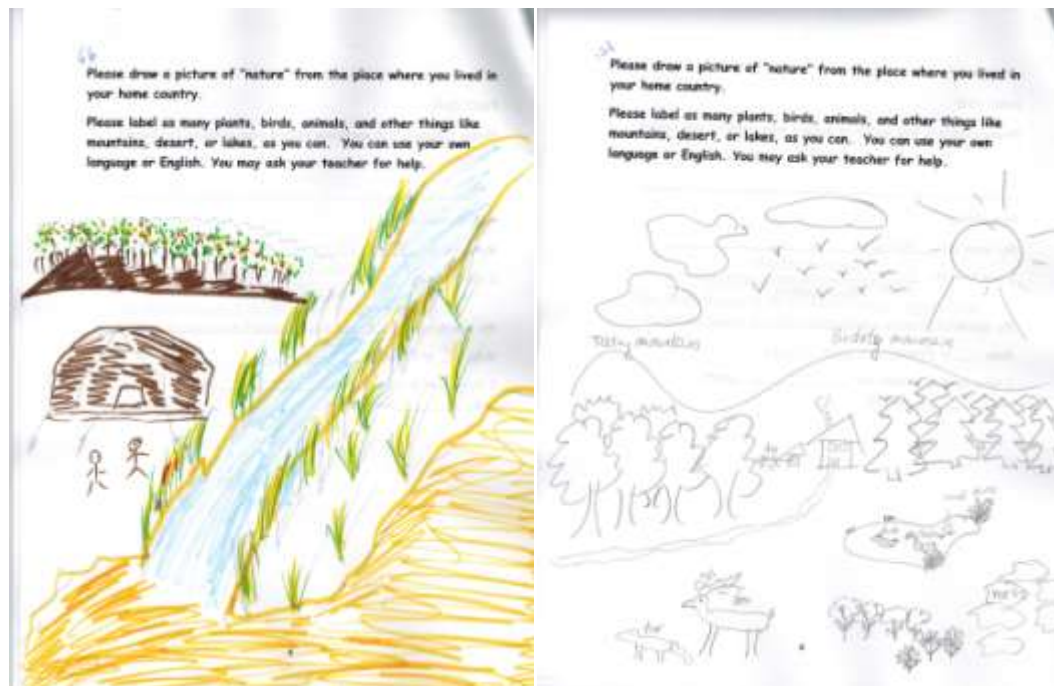
In total, 63 students drew pictures related to this question. The pictures drawn depicted a wide variety of flora and fauna. The mammal most named in these pictures was a dog (represented 10 times) and the bird most represented was a duck (represented 4 times). There were also many unnamed birds drawn in the pictures. There was a wide variety of insects drawn but no insect was drawn more than twice. Many unnamed trees and flowers were also drawn. When looking at all the pictures related to this question it was noted that trees far outnumbered

flowers. In terms of landscape, mountains (represented 18 times) were by far the most predominant feature followed by rivers (represented 12 times) and then lakes (represented 6 times).

What was most prominent about this group of pictures was the large number of people and human activity drawn into the pictures of “nature”. Humans were drawn 9 times in these pictures, and shelters that resembled homes for humans were represented 18 times. A wide variety of human activity and human-made objects were also depicted in the drawings. In these pictures people were swimming, fishing, motor biking, picnicking, and driving cars. Human activity was represented 17 times in these pictures. In terms of human-made objects there were: gardens, cultivated fields, fire pit, picnic site, rice field, storage building, playground, apartment building, dog house, and a plane.

The data from these pictures raises an interesting finding. It appears that the newcomer understanding of “nature” might be different than the traditional North American views of “nature”. Perhaps because many of the students come from an urban environment their understanding of the word “nature” includes human activities ranging from a place to live to raising animals and gardens. This is quite different than the North American version of nature that tends to depict “nature” as pristine wilderness, untouched by humans and human activity. For many newcomers “nature” is a place where they actually live, work and play.

While the analysis of these pictures requires further exploration and verification, this preliminary analysis suggests that the concept of “nature” and how it is defined/interpreted is culturally determined. While this may seem obvious, it does have ramifications for parks staff that use this word, but are not aware that it may have different meanings for the people who they are working with...especially newcomers.



## *Parks in Country of Origin*

### **Students were asked to respond to the following question for picture #2:**

Please draw a picture of a “park” that you may have visited in your home country. If you do not have parks in your home country, please write “no parks” in this space. Please label it in your own language or English. Include as many plants, birds, animals, and other things like mountains or lakes as you can. You may ask your teacher for help.

In total, 92 students (LINC Levels 1-4) responded to this question. Consistent with the data from the initial interviews and demographic data, the students drew pictures of typical urban parks. For example, there were no drawings of wild animals and most of the animals depicted were domesticated animals. Few birds were drawn and the number of trees depicted greatly outnumbered the amount of flowers drawn. Water features such as ponds, lakes and rivers were also quite prevalent.

The most striking feature in these pictures was the number of park benches and picnic tables. Similar to the initial interviews, students depicted park settings that enhanced human interaction through barbequing, picnicking, and sitting on or standing close to a park bench. Playgrounds and slides in particular were highly represented in the pictures. There was very little evidence of people engaging in activities on their own; pictures of people always had another person in close proximity.

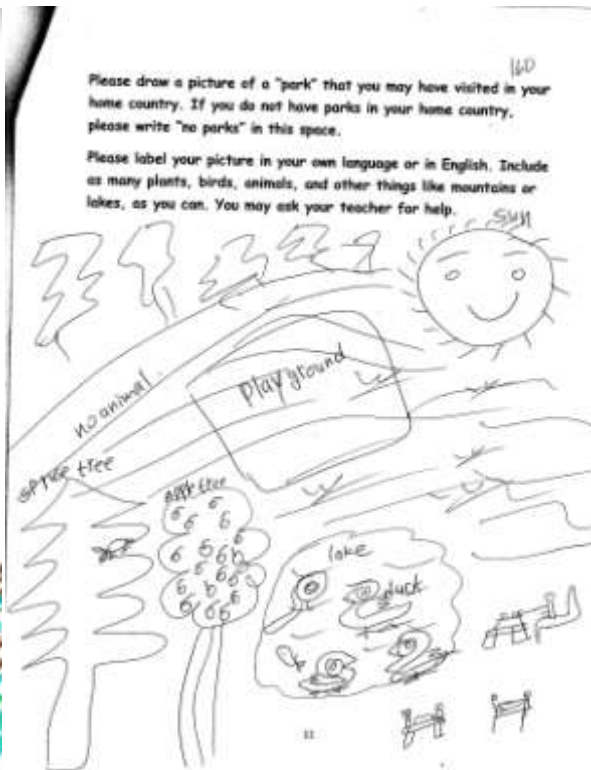
Some of the drawings did depict some traditional camping type activities, including tents, campfires and people fishing. Park staff should be aware of this discrepancy in that many newcomers relate to urban rather than nonurban parks.

As expressed in the interviews, the language students used conveyed an emotional attachment between the students and the parks in their country of origin. Once student wrote “I miss you” over their drawing of a park; another student wrote “lovely park” over their drawing; and one student wrote “beautiful park” over their drawing. Some students also shared well known geographical features such as mountain ranges, large bodies of water, volcanoes etc. that were associated with the countries they come from. The students drew pictures of specific plants and animals that were often associated with their country of origin. The research team determined that, when students drew well known symbols from their country of origin, it represented a form of emotional attachment and national pride.

The analysis of this group of pictures suggests that Parks staff might consider how they portray provincial parks to newcomer groups. If provincial parks administration wants to encourage newcomers to Canada to use parks in Alberta, it would be prudent to portray provincial parks as places where people can engage in social activities (picnics, barbequing etc.) as well as a place where there are playgrounds that children can use. Most provincial parks have these amenities, but they are not predominant in the way parks are portrayed to the general public.

Both the text and pictures drawn related to parks in country of origin suggest that the majority of newcomers have an emotional attachment to the parks they visited in their home country. While the evidence is not overwhelming, it might be prudent to consider that some of the students were experiencing a sense of loss related to these parks because of this emotional attachment. In this regard, it is important to consider how this sense of loss might hamper how

newcomers relate to and develop an affinity with parks in Alberta. The loss could be addressed by providing another place that they could potentially develop a relationship with.



## ***Park Activities in Country of Origin***

### **Students were asked to respond to the following question for picture#3:**

Please draw or write about what you like to do at this park and who you went with. If there are no parks, you can also write/draw about regular outside activities that you did in your home country. You may ask your teachers to help.

In total, 22 language students (LINC Levels 1-4) drew a picture in response to the question asking about outside activities in their country of origin and the people they shared these activities with. Generally the pictures depicted activities that were very similar to the activities the students shared elsewhere in the workbook and in the interviews – walking, playing games, barbecuing, jogging, biking, hiking, eating and playing with children were the most popular activities. Soccer was the number one sports activity identified. Visiting with family and friends and picnicking were also very popular as was photography, sightseeing and wildlife viewing.

In relation to the drawings in picture #2 (parks in country of origin), some of the student drawings revealed a bit more detail and breadth than their interview responses. In their text response, a number of students talked about relaxing in the park and a few others talked about going for long walks. As one student described “I liked to walk around and look beautiful view” while another student shared “I liked very much the untouched nature, the beautiful shore and it was good adventure to hike in the forest”. This text suggests that it would be erroneous to assume that all newcomers would want to play sports in provincial parks, but that many newcomers would also want to enjoy the park for its beauty and potential tranquility.

In terms of who accompanied the newcomers in these activities, immediate family members were by far the most represented group. Students referred continuously to engaging in park activities with their parents, children, brothers and sisters. Students shared, “I like enjoying with my family” and “I went with family, my husband and son” or “I went with my family to some garden and set there drinking tea”. Friends are also mentioned as people who join the students in parks activities, but compared to family member these numbers are quite low. This is perhaps why the park activities in both Rainbow Valley and Miquelon Lake Provincial Park were so successful. Entire family groups were allowed to participate. This can be quite instructive to those parks personnel who hope to plan future programs for newcomers.



## Expectations and Knowledge of Parks in Alberta

Given the lack of English language facility, students were asked to draw a picture of what they think an Alberta park will look like, to assess their expectations and pre-existing knowledge.

### **Students were asked to respond to the following question in picture #4:**

Please draw a picture of or write about what you think an Alberta park will look like. What do you expect to see there? Please label as many plant, birds, animals, and other things as you can. (Teachers, please limit your help with the following pages: we want to test learning before and after the unit.)

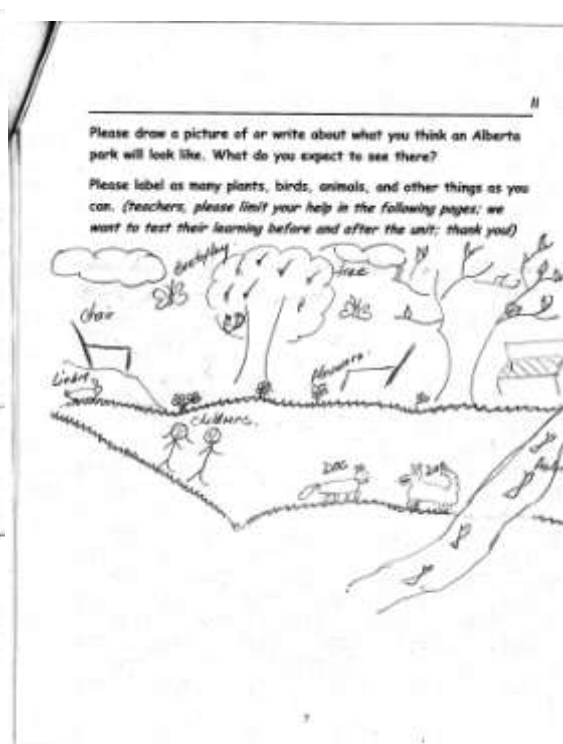
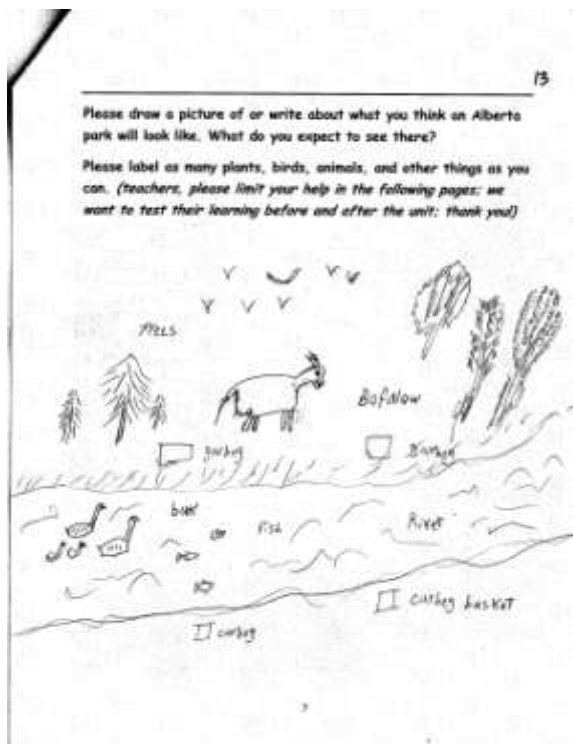
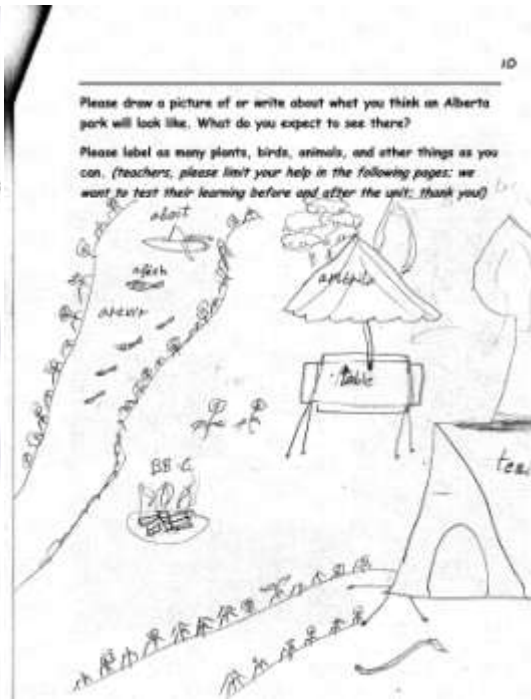
In total, 46 language students (LINC Levels 1-4) drew a picture in response to this question. Initial observations of these drawings reveal that while students have a tendency to draw parks in Alberta as having similar characteristics as parks from their country of origin, there are significant differences. While themes of picnic benches, playgrounds and related activities exist, they are drawn with much less frequency. There appears to be more balance between human activities like picnicking, barbecuing and play grounds and the natural landscape. More trees are drawn in these pictures as compared to the pictures from their country of origin and the animals drawn and named are all relevant to the local provincial context. The theme of camping, in terms of tenting, also seems to be more prevalent in previous drawings.

The quantity of text in these pictures was more than the other pictures. Students not only appropriately named many of the landscape features they might see in Alberta parks they also were able to identify a number of different animals they would likely see. Similar to the information gathered in the interviews, the students had a difficult time distinguishing a provincial park from a national park. While the question referred to provincial parks, a significant number of students referenced a national park in their answer. One theme that did emerge in the text that accompanied these drawings was the sense of anticipation and excitement many of the students for the upcoming visits to a provincial park. Many of the students referred to how Alberta parks were “beautiful, interesting, nice, important”.

The accuracy of these pictures in terms of how they reflect general provincial park settings in Alberta is noteworthy. Despite the emotional affiliation with parks in their country of origin and the fact that many of the students were not familiar with parks in Alberta, they were able to draw a reasonable accounting of a provincial park. This raises the question of “where did the students gain this understanding of a provincial park?” Through the other data collected, it is clear that newcomers have learned about parks in Alberta through a myriad of ways – from learning from each other, talking to neighbours, watching television, and reading newspapers. In these ways, new comers come into contact with a variety of “meanings” associated with parks in Alberta. Thus, each new comer comes to provincial parks with a partial but somewhat accurate understanding of an Alberta Park.

The implication of this finding underlines the importance of not making assumptions of what newcomers know or do not know about Alberta Parks. While some of the preconceived ideas newcomers have may be accurate, their pre-existing experiences shape less than accurate ideas. For example, in several drawings, the general understanding of the landscape was quite accurate, however some students thought there were poisonous snakes in Miquelon Lake Provincial Park and one student thought that alligators may live in the lake. In both these cases,

the students were reluctant to visit Miquelon Lake. In this regard it would be important for parks personnel to assess the expectations and understandings of newcomers to either validate or invalidate their understandings and dispel any myths or erroneous pieces of information that may create a barrier for them visiting a provincial park.



## Ecological Literacy

The workbooks included matching questions to measure nature and camping knowledge related to Alberta, prior to any formal learning. The questions measured recognition of the flora and fauna of Alberta (the most common plants such as trees and shrubs, and the most common birds, animals, and insects) and the natural regions of Alberta (for the higher level language learners only). The detailed findings are as follows:

- In the Tree category, rose bush was the most likely to be identified as correct (74%). Only 20% correctly identified the poplar tree.
- Aspen and poplar were confused by many people. Since only 20% of participants identified the poplar tree correctly, the overall recognition count for the Tree category was low (43%). This is a common mistake among Canadian-born residents as well.
- In the Birds category, the blue jay was identified correctly by 82 % of participants. The rest of the birds (mallard duck, crow, Canada goose and chickadee) were identified at similar rates (64-68%). Overall, 69% of the participants correctly recognized birds.
- In the Animals category, 76% of participants correctly recognized the beaver, followed by white-tailed deer (71%). The ground squirrel (gopher) was the least likely to be identified as correct (56%)
- In the Insect category, mosquitoes and ants were familiar to most participants (77 and 78%), and the dragonfly a little less familiar (65%). The bee and wasp were often confused.

In sum, of the newcomers that answered the questions, 60% were able to correctly identify the flora and fauna of Alberta, with birds being the most identified and plants being the least.

Flora and fauna	% Correct
Birds	69
Animals	66
Insects	60
Plants	43
<b>Average</b>	<b>60</b>

## Camping Knowledge

In the next section, participants were asked to identify various camping equipment items in a picture of a campsite, by matching words to pictures. Again, this measured knowledge prior to any formal learning. The results are as follows:

- In the camp site picture, the woodpile, tent, picnic table, lawn chair and axe were the most easily identified (71-88%). The flashlight, lantern and stove were less recognizable (40-47%). The fire pit was often identified as a camp stove.

Participants were then asked to demonstrate recognition of campsite signs that describe common services at a provincial park and campsites, by matching the words to the pictures. In the last section, they were asked to match the words for common campground personnel (uniformed) with their photos. The results are as follows:

- In the Park Campsite signs category, the most recognizable signs were the telephone (92%), swimming allowed (87%), shower (87%) and fishing (86%).
- Somewhat less identifiable were the signs for Wheelchair accessibility (76%), playground (70%), fire-pits (66%), tap water (64%), and electricity (60%).
- Approximately 50-56% of the participants recognized the signs for hiking trail, first aid, laundry, keep pets on leash, clean up after pet, and firewood.
- Many participants incorrectly identified the laundry sign as a stove.
- Only 45% of participants recognized the Fire ban sign, 44% recognized the 'Keep campsite clean' sign and 29% recognized the 'Day Use Only' sign.
- Regarding park personnel, 54% of participants correctly recognized the Information officer. Importantly, the conservation officer and park interpreter were often confused.

Campground related	%Correct
Campsite items	57
Parks personnel	42
<b>Average</b>	<b>49.5</b>

Campground and Parks Signs	%Correct
Telephone	92.0
Swimming sign	87.2
Shower	86.8
Fishing sign	86.2
Wheelchair	76.1
Playground	70.8
Fire pits	66.0
Tap water	64.2
Electricity	60.6
Hiking trail	56.6
First aid	56.3
Laundry	56.0
Keep pets on leash	54.1
Clean up after pet	53.3
No wood gathering	53.3
Firewood	50.5
Information sign	47.7
Fire ban	45.3
Keep camp clean	44.3
Day use only	28.8
<b>Average</b>	<b>62</b>

In sum, newcomers were able to correctly identify common campsite items almost 50% of the time and common park signs 62% of the time, prior to any classroom or field learning.

## Summary of Workbook Data

Several conclusions emerged from the workbook data, in association with the interview data and artifacts from classroom learning.

It is clear that newcomers, for the most part, do not distinguish between municipal, provincial and national parks. One of the key areas for learning is to distinguish between these parks and the differential expectations by park. While 50% of respondents had visited municipal parks and 47% had visited national parks, only 22% had visited a provincial park. This level of use contrasts to 40% of Albertans who visited a provincial park in the past 3 years (Praxis Group, 2008).

Reaching newcomers should be a priority goal for provincial marketing, given ongoing demographic changes. However, the overwhelming majority of newcomers were not aware of, could not name, and had not been to an Alberta park. Therefore, Alberta parks are not part of the newcomer consciousness. Given that provincial parks are not generally viewed as recreational and camping destinations by newcomer populations, and yet they can be found generally within one hour from most Alberta towns and cities, Alberta Parks should undertake a marketing program to encourage newcomers to visit and enjoy the same recreational experiences in provincial parks.

For newcomers, the primary challenges are cost and transportation. For this reason, the majority of newcomers find municipal parks more accessible and have visited numerous times, for day use only. Yet, in comparison to a survey of the general Alberta population (Praxis Group, 2008), where driving distance from home was less a factor for visiting, current visitorship assumes the presence of a vehicle. It was clear that many newcomers did not own a vehicle to get to a provincial park and did not have the financial resources for expensive equipment or user fees.

The newcomers were not aware of Rainbow Valley Campground, which is a municipal park with facilities for overnight camping. They were surprised that this was available and that they could enjoy a wilderness, unmanicured area in the city, including for overnight experiences. However, access to such a municipal park is limited, given bus routes that would drop them and their camping equipment too far away for easy access.

The majority of participants were aware of national parks, particularly Banff and Jasper, and were keenly interested in visiting them. However, again, cost and transportation were significant barriers. Most of the visits had occurred with the assistance of a group or friends.

The most typical activities for newcomers in parks are: walking/jogging; games/playing with children; biking/hiking; and barbecuing/eating. As other literature has pointed out, these are not adventure or high exertion activities, and they have an important family and social component. The second tier of activities included wildlife viewing, photography, and sightseeing, which is more consistent with top mainstream Albertan interests (Praxis Group, 2008). The third tier of activities involved boating, camping, resting, relaxing, swimming, and talking. The only winter activity cited was tobogganing. Therefore, it is clear that the most frequent activities of newcomers differ from Canadian-born persons in that they are more relaxed activities with a social component. Not mentioned by newcomers were back country activities, motorized recreation, skiing, snowshoeing and canoeing/kayaking, as cited in the

Alberta survey (Praxis Group, 2008). However, the goals for the activities are similar in terms of appreciating nature, relaxing, and being with family and friends (Praxis Group, 2008).

The survey workbooks indicated that 32% of the respondents had camped before and 31% had hiked before. When we asked this question again in the interviews, we determined that participation in hiking and overnight camping prior to immigration has been experienced by a small percentage of the participants. Therefore, it can be deduced that newcomers have some familiarity with camping, but do not have extensive experience in hiking and camping as defined and practiced in Canada.

Half of the study participants had been in Canada less than 2 years and almost 80% less than 5 years. As well, 71% were under the age of 40. This coincides with the Alberta survey, where the primary participants in provincial parks are under the age of 40 (Praxis Group, 2008). Therefore, given the average age of newcomers, engagement in camping activities holds great potential for assisting in the long-term settlement process and for reaching newcomers early in their residency in Canada to build long-term visitation habits.

The majority of participants in this study are visible minorities and women. While safety and vulnerability as concerns were not well expressed in our data, this was identified in other studies and in our informal conversations. As identified in the literature, camping has traditionally been a “whites only” area and it has tended to be a male-dominated or male-accompanied activity. Comfort, safety and ease of set-up must be considered for women and visible minorities. This would be best supported with a culture shift and policy shift in parks organizations toward a concept of inclusive parks. More security services and education of Canadian-born Albertans may be necessary to avoid discriminatory behaviour toward newcomer campers and to make the area feel safe for women, particularly alone or with young children.

The drawings in the workbooks corroborated other data that newcomers come to Canada with a strong emotional attachment to parks in their home country and that there is likely some feelings of loss. Parks in the country of origin differ significantly from parks in Alberta in that humans, human-built amenities, and human activities figure more predominantly in their pre-Canada experiences of parks, likely due to more heavily populated countries and the predominance of residence in large urban areas. Their most typical activities in parks have been a variety of sports and games, eating, and walking, most generally with immediate and extended family members. Through talking to Albertans, newspapers, TV, and other media, newcomers have a largely accurate expectation of parks and camping in Alberta.

Given the difficulty of interviewing early literacy new comers, it was clear that they would need the help of an interpreter to learn about and participate in Alberta parks. Key informational materials would also need to be translated for this group.

Prior to any instruction, newcomers were able to correctly identify 60% of the most common flora and fauna of Alberta, with birds being the most well identified and plants, namely trees, being the least. They were also able to correctly identify common campsite items almost 50% of the time and common campground signs 62% of the time, prior to any classroom or field learning. Therefore, newcomers come with a store of core knowledge that can be utilized both in the language learning classroom as well as *in situ* camping and interpretation activities. Scaffolding learning activities from existing knowledge bases would add to learning gains.

## Assessment of Parks Informational Materials

A range of informational materials for the municipal and provincial parks was collected and analyzed in terms of reading level. The tool *Compleat Lexical Tutor* was used for this analysis as it is designed for second language learners. Thus, this tool is well respected by English Language Arts teachers, Special Education teachers, and English Language Learning teachers.

It was found that the various provincial parks brochures and the document *Nature as a Second Language: An Introduction to Alberta's Provincial Parks* were written consistently at a Grade 10-12+ level. While the style is richly descriptive and provokes imagination, ostensibly to entice visitorship, the word choices were elevated and unnecessarily complex. They use language and references appropriate only for language-proficient Canadian-born audiences.

For instance, the sentence "Summer season interpretive programs include guided walks and theatrical amphitheatre presentations" could be simplified by replacing the last phrase with "live outdoor theatre." Shifts in tone and style tend to confuse English language learners and those with literacy challenges. Reducing the amount of new vocabulary by repeating certain phrases also simplifies language.

Synonyms like protect and conserve also require higher level language skills. Thus the sentence "Alberta's many parks and protected areas conserve the different landscapes, plants and animals within each of these regions while providing opportunities for visitors to enjoy the outdoors and connect to the wilderness" could be simplified to "Alberta's many parks protect these unique landscapes, plants and animals while providing opportunities for visitors to enjoy the outdoors and connect to the wilderness." Another example is the confusion caused by the synonyms "power" and "electricity".

When introducing new language like ecological reserves, the phrase needs to be gradually introduced with a definition and purpose, ie. "There are many different types of parks across Alberta. Some of these parks are known as ecological reserves. Ecological reserves are landscapes that are so sensitive or rare that only research or other educational activities that do not disturb the area are allowed."

The provincial park website and the sections pertaining to campground information and campground reservation materials were written in a very user-friendly way, generally at a Grade 8 level. However, some parts of the website use language that is beyond standard vocabulary, such as the Birkebeiner Ski Festival segment. The goal is to enhance the literacy inclusivity across all sections of the website.

The topic-specific municipal brochures, *Parks for Paws*, and *Your Guide to Avoiding Coyote-Human Conflict*, were more accessible with simplified language, a consistent tone, with a range of a Grade 3 to Grade 9 reading level. However, word choices again could be simplified from "habituate" (to describe coyote behaviour) to "become too comfortable with humans and neighbourhoods." The brochure *Geese in the River Valley Parks* uses awkward and more complex language that could be simplified. As well, all newcomers will not be familiar with metric measures, so some conversions would be advisable.

An assessment of the municipal website, particularly the materials under Parks River Valley Activities, Environmental Programs, Natural Areas, and Urban Biodiversity, identified that most of the materials were again were written between a Grade 6 and 8 level. The website is highly

accessible to users of most literacy and English language levels. There is no superfluous vocabulary or convoluted syntax and the categories used for each section are appropriately written for a range of audiences.

The general principle among technical writers is: use simple language well. It is generally recommended that public documents be at a Grade 8 reading level for the most accessibility, particularly by adults with lower levels of English language facility and lower levels of literacy. For more complex information or basic information where maximum understanding is desired, it is recommended that documents be translated into the languages of the larger ethno-specific groups. This would encourage visitation and safety in the long term.

## Data from Pre-Interviews

The researchers initially planned to interview beginning literacy groups (under LINC Level 1) but it became evident that the skills possessed at this early stage made it very difficult for participants to understand concepts related to parks and camping. It was also clear that learning about parks or camping for beginning literacy groups would need to be mediated by an English Language interpreter. In the end, the researchers interviewed all learners from LINC language levels 1-4 only and did not include the literacy learners. The researchers observed that the higher the language level, the better participants were able to discuss more complex ideas related to parks and use of parks. For example, while participants in LINC levels 3 and 4 were not able to describe how they think about parks, they were on most occasions able to discuss the benefits of participating in park related activities.

The researchers conducted pre-interviews with all students who were enrolled in LINC program courses at the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, 75 in total, out of which would come the Group 1 participants. The researchers met with the 38 ECALA-funded students involved in English language classes as well, out of which would form the Group 3 participants. All of these interviews were semi-structured interviews that focused on experiences of parks in their country of origin and understanding of parks in Alberta. The interview groups consisted of 5 to 8 students at one time and were sometimes supported by the language teacher for that group, particularly at the lower language levels. At the outset of the group interviews it was evident that the students trusted their teachers and relied upon them to help interpret the expectations of the researchers and to clarify the questions that were being asked.

## Parks in Country of Origin

Overwhelmingly, the participants were **from large urban areas** in their country of origin, often well over a million inhabitants. Examples of cities of origin include Delhi, Osaka, Baghdad, Seoul, Prague, Dubai, Tunis, Beijing, Hong Kong, Khartoum, and Ulan Bator (Mongolia). Only a minority of students were from rural areas or small towns. Some may have been born in rural areas, but had most recently lived in the city. Most often, participants from China talked about the busyness of life in China and how difficult it was to relax and engage in enjoyment activities, especially outside the city. One participant said he had never been out of the city until he emigrated. In much warmer countries, participants talked about being outside all the time. Others talked about rarely going outside, so there was a range of experiences.

Consistent with the statistical data, **the majority of participants reported not having experience camping**. Many talked about camping being long day trips to special areas. Some mentioned overnight trips, but staying in hotels or trailers. However, some did talk about

camping in tents, particularly as a child or young adult. Hiking and other types of adventure or individual activities were not the most common activities mentioned. Largely Muslim women noted that camping was a mens-only activity and women never camped, thus had no familiarity.

For the most part, **newcomers did have parks in their countries of origin**, particularly city parks. They described a range of activities in several categories: social activities including celebrations, talking, eating, picnicking, drinking, storytelling, and socializing; games such as cards, hide & seek, and kite flying; playgrounds for children; sports such as soccer, volleyball, football, tennis, table tennis, badminton, baseball and cricket; music including dancing, playing music, communal singing and viewing performances or concerts; exercise such as tai chi, walking and jogging; and a site for prayers or studying. In terms of sports, soccer was the most predominant sport mentioned and badminton was second. A number of participants noted that women and men carried out separate group activities while in a park.

Many newcomers talked about longer trips with their family and friends to get to parks or **special places**, such as to hot springs, seaside beaches, mountains, local rivers, ancient forests, and caves. Most often mentioned were mountains, the seaside, and lakes. Some newcomers talked about swimming, hunting, fishing, climbing, boating, kayaking and even bungee jumping (Turkey). While the majority of newcomers identified that their countries did have larger parks outside the city, the norms and activities differed. Many visits were long day trips or a one overnight stay, given lack of affordable accommodation. Several mentioned that parks did not allow sitting on the grass. Parks may have hotels and restaurants. Many talked about these special places fondly. One man said “I love Damascus, [it is a] beautiful city. I was born in the old places and I love them; I love that place too much.” Many alluded to the “complicated reasons” they had come to Canada.

One Mexican participant described that they would hunt rabbits and geese outside the city. Here in Canada she says “animals have freedom,” notably in parks. While cats and dogs are “lovely pets here”, they roam wild in Mexico and are never inside. Similarly, in Afghanistan, participants would go into the mountains for the weekend to hunt with few restrictions. Their gun was their protection and they wanted to know what would protect them here. Some students talked about a fear of **animals** (lions, tigers, snakes, wild dogs) in their home country.

A minority of students identified that their **countries did not have parks**, particularly which protected habitat, wildlife, or a certain land base (specifically the countries of Ethiopia, Columbia, Somalia, and Afghanistan). If they wanted to leave the city, they would simply go to a favourite river and picnic there with no worries about property ownership.

When talking about experiences in their own country of origin, many students referred to parks as **sites for social activities** such as weddings, birthday parties, cultural celebrations, and so forth. In terms of social activities, students shared experiences of weddings and dances that brought back fond memories. Some of the participants described elaborate tent and floral arrangements and talked about music and dancing in the park. Participants most often visited parks with family, friends and at times, work mates during lunch or after work.

Several participants voluntarily identified parks as **protected areas** or having conservation mandates, rather than recreational spaces only.

Finally, the majority of participants **were under 40**, consistent with the statistical data.

## Parks in Canada

Students were most **familiar with the municipal parks** they lived close to. Many students were able to give the name of a municipal park in Edmonton and were able to easily share the type of activities they engaged in while visiting these parks, usually social or sports-related. They also noted the importance of festivals, such as Edmonton Heritage Days, as important for them to share and explore the realities and customs of other countries.

Most students could name Banff and Jasper as **national parks** and described these as highly desired places to visit. Some participants had visited national parks, usually through the assistance of ethno-specific organizations that sponsored the activities. Most expressed a feeling of freedom and openness in parks, whereas they felt more restricted in their activities in their home countries. Many participants were also surprised at the size of parks in Canada; “[my] whole country of El Salvador would fit into one of your parks.”

The **activities** that participants had done since being in Canada include: barbecuing/picnicking; volleyball/soccer/basketball; walking/jogging/biking; swimming; and children’s playgrounds. Some of these activities would be different from what they did in their countries of origin and most different were winter activities, such as tobogganing and one person mentioned skiing, although lamenting the cost. Many participants expressed how nice Edmonton was in the summer, “not too hot,” and how much more relaxed Edmontonians are during this time. As one participant noted, “everyone looks happy.” There was frustration, however, over how dark and cold the winter is. One mother of small children expressed that by the time she got on her outerwear and then the children’s outerwear, she was exhausted. She found the winter tiring and boring from lack of interesting activities, but indicated that it was fun for the children.

There was often **great enthusiasm** expressed when the participants were notified that they might have the opportunity to go on a camping trip. Students described camping as a quintessential Canadian activity that they had seen in videos, websites, stores, and TV and that they were highly interested in participating. “At Canadian Tire, I see many things about camping, but I don’t know how to use.” A few students noted that they often saw their Canadian neighbours heading out on a camping trip. Some students were interested in camping because “even before coming to Canada” they knew this was an activity that Canadians did. Students understood camping as an exciting activity which gave them the opportunity to do something their whole family would enjoy.

The word “**camping**” has **specific meanings** for Canadians, but this was **not always self-evident for newcomers**. “I hear camping is tenting outside, in summer, not winter.” Many seemed unfamiliar with the equipment used for camping here in Canada, such as sleeping bags instead of blankets. “We don’t...I don’t understand camping in Canada.” “Parks are very different here” implying that the expected activities and acceptable norms are different.

When asked what they wanted to **do** in parks in Alberta, they replied “**everything we can.**” Many expressed a strong sense of adventure and wanted to try out as many activities as possible, especially things that “they don’t normally do.” “[I want to] “try something different.” “I want to know everything” said a Columbian woman. A Japanese woman exclaimed, “I am so interested in this camping stuff.” “I want to travel all over” said another. Many talked about meeting new friends on the camping trip, spending time with existing friends, and communicating. “I can’t wait,” enthused another participant.

Their **expectations** of what they would see and experience in provincial parks were **realistic**. They described that parks are likely where “everything is natural” with trees and water, that it would be relaxing, beautiful, and quiet, and that there would be small animals such as geese, squirrels, beaver, deer, rabbits, and so forth. Some mentioned the possibility of rats and raccoons. They also mentioned that parks in Canada have “big animals” in contrast to some of their own countries. They said that they would see people “but not too many” and that they looked forward to learning to camp, making a fire, taking photographs, and eating new foods, like marshmallows and s’mores. They were not sure if they would be seeing mountains or a beach at a lake. They expected it would be a place “to be quieter.”

## Newcomer Questions and Concerns

In addition to student enthusiasm, a number of students raised questions and concerns related to the overnight camping. The most frequent question was whether they could bring other **family members** particularly children. The second set of concerns related to **cost**, equipment and transportation, which was allayed as all the costs were covered. A Korean man explained, “I have been in Canada for many years, but I have to support my family. I work every day, working, working, working. We get used to it...I can’t spend the extra money for camping, no money, no money.”

The third most frequent set of questions related to the location of the park and the **sleeping arrangements** such as whether they would be tenting or in cabins, needing mattresses or pillows, and how many could fit into a tent. Several women asked about bringing young babies. Many participants also asked questions about what to bring in terms of **clothing and food** and how to carry these items. They asked if there would be a stove for cooking, refrigerator for storing food, water, and electricity and whether the food was communal or not. Common concerns were about being cold at night and what they would need to stay warm, safety issues, and what programming would be offered, especially for children. The other issues mentioned were worries about washrooms particularly unclean toilets, availability of showers, finding firewood, and what to do in emergencies. There were additional questions about hunting and fishing in parks and the rules in the parks. One person was concerned about getting lost. Several were scared about the whole experience.

One of the large barriers also expressed was **getting time off work**. Given precarious work situations or numerous jobs, work appeared to be a significant barrier and thus the list of weekend camping participants changed many times. As one man said, “too busy to go to park.” They were surprised and delighted though, that they would be camping for two nights and almost three days, as that was an unusually long time away from work for many.

Logistical arrangements for families were also difficult. As one mother mused, “It’s easy for all single student because they don’t have to worry about husband and children. That’s easy for them to go for 3 days or 1 week.” Another man explained for one of the female participants, “She has 4 children, but [by] herself, it is difficult. Somebody else can help her?”

Their **fears about animals** in their country of origin translated into fears about the big wildlife here, notably coyotes, bears, wolves, and cougars. A number of students were concerned about wild animals coming into their tent and wondered about snakes. They were also concerned about insects, most notably mosquitoes. This related to their questions about how to protect themselves while in parks.

## Environmental Literacy

Students in the higher language levels (LINC levels 3 and 4) had more language facility to talk about environmental concerns and many of their examples came from the cities and regions where they had lived, prior to coming to Canada. Overall, there was a strong environmental sensibility in terms of the dynamic balance of ecosystems, passion around a sense of global crisis, consciousness of caring for parks spaces and the goals of environmental protection. Similar to Canadians (Lange, 2004), they felt limited individual efficacy to make change.

A Russian woman stated, "I think people are very unhappy about the problem with environment....we went to look at the place (in Russia)...some kind of riverside or natural parks, there was a lot of plastic bags, plastic bottles...this made me unhappy about that." She expanded, "In Russia...we dig and take a lot of stones, rock and sand for building and for our roads, we can use it. So we decide is problem, because of course everyday sand and rocks and building garbage at the bottom of the river or lakes, so we have special company to clean up."

A Chinese woman chimed in, "I think people have...broken the balance, yeah. And this is a big problem in the world. No one can prevent this problem, yeah. We don't have a solution for this; sometimes I'm very worried about this...it is getting bad, yeah....and the surrounding world's polluted. Need improve, lot of pollution, factories in China. A lot of people was hurt in China, that's what I'm worried about."

A Japanese woman talked about the exotic pets the Japanese have, often brought in from other countries. When they tire of the animal, they "release in the country, so, you know like forest is mess up with balance....Foreign raccoons is so strong...they eating the, they attacking the farmers...it is wrecking so many stuff. And also in the lake some people is buying the special fish from the pet shop and if get bored, they just releasing them wherever, in the river, lakes. It is so rude and it making it so bad."

In terms of responsibility, a participant asserted, "It is the responsibility of the government and the individuals and also the industry." A second participant summarizes, "I believe everybody have a responsibility toward our planet and we should keep our planet safe from pollution and it's a very serious problem that can affect our civilization...we have responsibilities, but we kill ourselves slowly. We kill our future slowly, somebody do something. But I don't know, we have to start in our house." Another participant agreed, "yeah, our house environment, but we have to do something more. Like take care of wildlife, take care of our future, take care of global warming. I don't know. I am really upset about this thing because you know I do my job (responsibility). I always think yes, I do my job, but how are other people?" A third participant added, "Everyone have responsibility. Even in the campaign, we have to keep the wildlife...keep the water and don't pollute the water. And keep everywhere to clear up after you use any facility, we have to keep everywhere clear for the next user of the park. So every people, everyone have responsibility to keep everywhere, to clean, to protect our environment. Yeah, this is our very important things to do."

There were mixed reviews in terms of Canada's environmental practices. "I felt here in Canada has a good facility to encourage the people and their need to protect the environment. A lot of recycling, every people is well disciplined for the environment. I feel that, because in my own country, it's not like that....We...don't have the good education." A second participant added, "I think education is very important." A third participant noted that he did not have an environmental consciousness until coming to Canada.

“So, then I saw...everybody take the bottle to the bottle depot, so I begin, began to think about the environment and the recycling. So, this is good, cause you can see everywhere the recycle facility, and recycle sign to alert people to protect the environment and things. Yeah, it is a good job. Canada government is...doing a good job....I appreciate that.”

Another participant was less positive.

“I think in my country, there is a big difference where we have to try to improve our environment...I think maybe Canada has to be a little more careful...I see we can improve a little more. Because...in the city I am walking for the street, I can see too many garbage. And for me, it's not nice because Canada for me is a very nice country, is a country of opportunity....My first impression was ‘Oh my god, why the people are throwing out the garbage’? And sometimes I am talking with friends and they are maybe drinking this coffee and they throw out, it doesn't matter. I say no, you can have your cup and the coffee but put in garbage in your house or in whatever place...we have to change about it. This is my country now!

So, newcomers feel a sense of pride and protectiveness over the geographic spaces new to them in Canada. They applaud the advances made in Canada but see that there is a distance to go. They are aware of the global dimensions of the environmental crisis and the broad-based responsibility necessary to make change.

## Summary of Data from Pre-Interviews

Surprisingly, a large majority of participants are highly urbanized and most were under the age of 40. For the most part, their countries of origin did have parks. They were most familiar with urban parks but many did talk about trips to larger parks or special places outside cities, including mountainous, seaside or lakeside destinations. For this reason, the most common associations with parks are relaxation or low energy activities and socially-based or culturally-based activities common to urban parks. To be expected, many retained fond memories of parks and special places from their country of origin.

While approximately 30% of the participants had camped, they noted that camping and parks in Canada are very different from their previous experiences. Parks are much larger in Canada, they had different levels of risk and types of safety issues, and they are more wilderness-based with fewer amenities. Also, for newcomers, camping does not necessarily relate to tenting. Camping may involve overnight stays in hotels and restaurants. Further, several Muslim women noted that camping was a men-only activity in their culture. The frequency of hiking experience was slightly less and they often distinguished between walking and hiking by the length. Many expressed animal fears from their countries of origin and in some countries, camping was dangerous due to snakes and other animals. For a small minority, their countries of origin did not have parks and they would relax near rivers or lakes without property ownership concerns.

Due to previous associations and mobility issues, students had the most experience with municipal parks. They knew very little about provincial parks and the majority had not visited one. More students had visited the national parks in Alberta than the provincial parks. While a small number of students could name a national park, no students could name a provincial park or distinguish it from municipal or national parks. In one case, Banff was referred to as an international park.

The activities of newcomers in parks were largely consistent with the activities from their countries of origin, including social activities, picnicking, sports, exercise, swimming, and children's playgrounds. Less mentioned were cultural events or performances, games, some sports, prayers and studying. In both cases, they visited parks with family and friends.

Students were enthusiastic about the opportunity to camp in a provincial park and associated camping and tenting as a Canadian activity. However, their associations with camping differ from Canadian understandings that normally involve tenting, few amenities, and specialized equipment such as sleeping bags and camping stoves. They were also enthusiastic about trying all the activities and learning as much as they could about camping and the parks.

Largely, their expectations of what they would see and do in Alberta parks were realistic. They expected a natural setting, peacefulness, and fewer people than in the city. They also could name many of the animals they expected to see. The goal for them was relaxation, learning about camping, practicing English, wildlife viewing, photography and experiencing new foods.

Student's primary concerns for the weekend camping experience related to whether or not they could bring their children and other family members. Cost was the second most cited concern and some indicated their tight economic circumstances. Sleeping arrangements were also a substantial concern as they did not necessarily understand Canadian tenting practices. How food would be organized, program scheduling and what to bring were the next set of concerns. Finally, safety, weather/coldness, and getting time off work were issues.

Very few of the students interviewed had camping equipment and very few of the students had the means of transportation to visit a provincial park outside the city. These would be significant barriers to long term visitation.

Students in the more advanced literacy programs were able to express concerns related to environmental degradation. In fact, they had a strong environmental sensibility and some important environmental and ecological knowledge, in terms of how ecosystems work and the human impact on natural places. The examples they used however came mainly from their country of origin although their observations of the environmental practices in Canada were mixed. Overall, they were supportive of the goals of protection and conservation, both in their country of origin and in Canada.



## Post-Camping Data

Data was gathered from newcomers in two ways, through workbooks and interviews, to determine the learning gains, satisfaction and newcomer responses, after engagement with the camping unit and the facilitated camping experiences.

## Data from Workbooks

### Learning Gains

To assess the learning gained from both the in-class camping units and outdoor programming combined, the workbooks with the same questions were given to students after the whole program was completed. In total, 37 participants completed both a pre and post test workbook (determined by name, or a combination of name and country if name was ambiguous).

This chart compares the number of correct responses in the pre and post test workbooks for these 37 participants.

	Pre-test Correct responses	Post-test Correct responses	Improvement
Trees	26.1%	66.4%	40.3%
Animals	51.4%	79.7%	28.3%
Birds	55.9%	80.3%	24.4%
Insects	51.4%	74.8%	23.4%
Campsite equipment	45.1%	59.4%	14.3%
Parks and Camping Signs	54.5%	66.5%	12%
Parks personnel	42.5%	51.7%	9.2%

In sum, the learning gains were the following:

- The difference between the pre and post-test scores was greatest in the trees category, with 40% more participants being able to recognize the different kinds of trees in the post-workbook.
- In the animals, birds and insects categories, participants improved their recognition by 28, 24 and 23 % respectively.
- The least improvement was seen in the recognition of campsite equipment, park signs and parks personnel.

## Pictorial Representations of Camping Experiences

Students were asked to respond to the following question in picture #5:

If you visited Rainbow Valley and/or Miquelon Park, please draw a picture of, or write about, what you saw in this Alberta Park. Please label as many plants, birds, animals, and other things as you can. (Teachers, please limit your help

with the following pages: we want to test learning before and after and after the unit.)

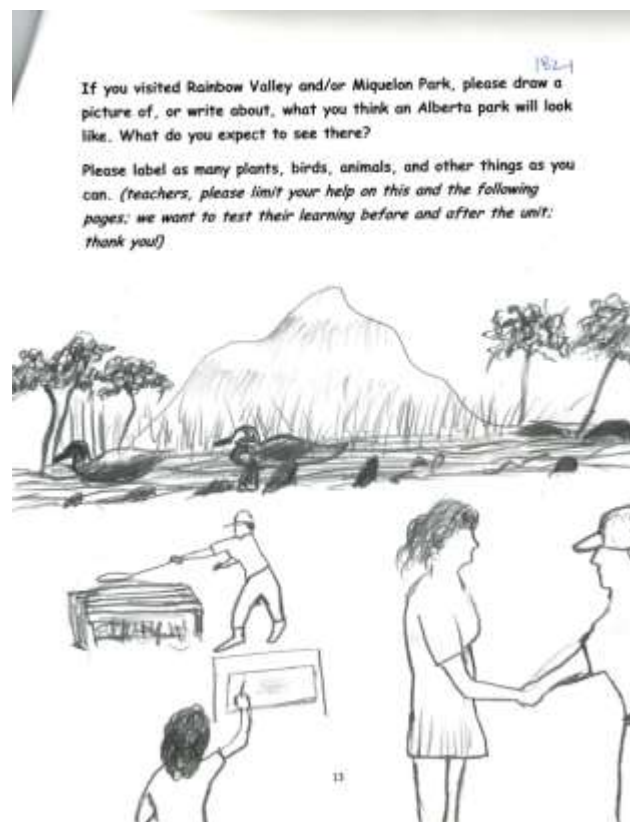
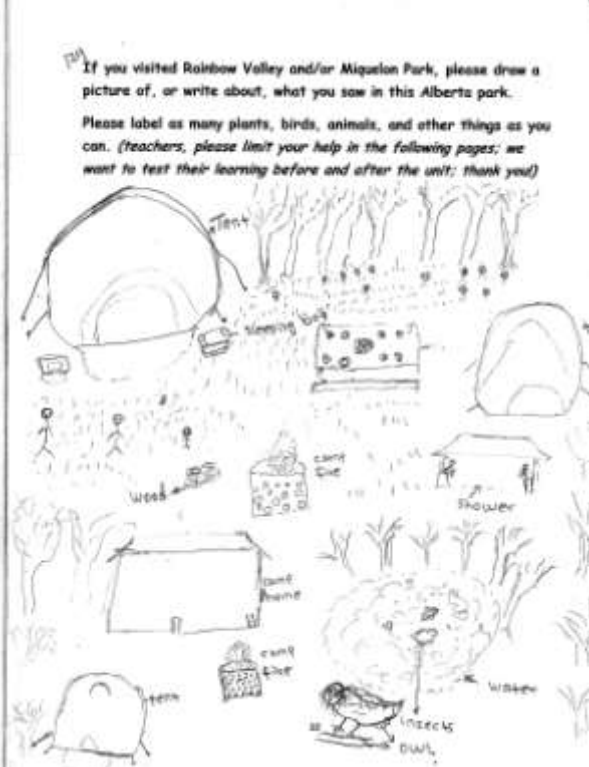
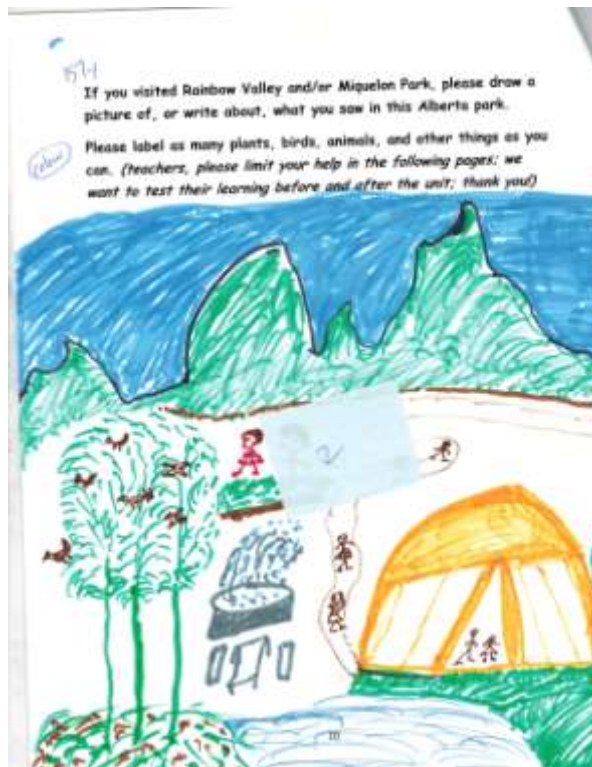
In total, 18 students (LINC Levels 1-4) responded to the question asking the students to draw a picture of an Alberta park after their experiences in either Rainbow Valley Municipal Park or Miquelon Lake Provincial Park. In general, these drawings had more detail and were more accurate than the picture of a provincial park they had previously drawn. The incidence of birds and animals increased slightly and the number of trees depicted and correctly named also increased. In contrast to all their previous drawings the students also drew fewer cars and fewer people.

One significant feature of the pictures was the use of space. In these pictures, students devoted larger amounts of space to local flora, fauna and natural landscapes. These spaces also had less signs of human facilities such as picnic sites and playgrounds. If picnic sites and playgrounds were included in the pictures, they were drawn in smaller proportion to the “open” spaces that they had given to local flora, fauna and natural landscapes. It was also noted that students generally drew people in the foreground of their pictures while the natural landscape of the park tended to be in the background of the pictures.

The text that accompanied this set of drawings was extensive. The students seemed very eager to share their experiences in the park. Many of these experiences were very positive. As one student wrote “I went to Miquelon Lake with my family we had good time there. My children love it. They had fun”. While another student shared “I went to Rainbow Valley and Miquelon Park. That was wundefull trip for me in my life.” There were many other similar comments that were made about the park. Students also provided detailed accounts of the various landscape features as well as flora and fauna they experienced in the park. For example one student wrote “I saw many plants, rose bush and cattails, poplar trees, and aspen trees, and spruce trees, Birds: blue Jay and Canada goose, and duck and crow”. Students also referred to the “beautiful lake” and commented about the “open space” that many of them had not encountered before.

Overall, these pictures do depict the newcomers developing an initial sense of identification with parks in Alberta. In examining all the pictures, the students drew their growing familiarity with the local landscape, flora and fauna. From the text provided in this last pictorial activity, the students also convey a developing appreciation for what parks in Alberta can offer them. More importantly, newcomers begin to see themselves **in** provincial parks. This was at a very initial stage however. The pictures responding to this last question still had students drawing themselves on the ‘outskirts’ of the park setting rather than engaged directly with the park.

The analysis of the pictures students drew in their workbooks do support many of the findings identified throughout this report. Students’ ability to share what they experienced in Alberta parks does improve in both a written and verbal format. In addition, what these drawings also offered was a “snapshot” of the process newcomers experience when they are introduced to Alberta Parks. Not only is the process about learning language but it also involved a more kinaesthetic process were they learned to “situate” themselves in the land. In a sense they were in the process of finding their place in the natural environment of Alberta as well as their place in the parks, specifically illustrated by the welcome received through the shaking hands of a newcomer with a parks staffperson.



## Data from Post-Interviews

Following all three of the camping weekends, 37 randomly selected students were interviewed about their experiences on the camping weekend. These interviews took place on the final day of the camping weekend at a picnic table adjacent to the campground. The students were interviewed in a small group format and were asked to talk about the weekend in terms of their expectations, satisfaction with the experience, what they liked most and least, a comparison between parks in their country of origin and Canada, if they would like to return, and what might make it possible for them to return.

### *Expectations and Satisfaction*

In the post-interviews, students in all three camping weekends enjoyed camping and **expressed great appreciation** for being able to camp at Miquelon Lake Provincial Park for the weekend. They were very positive about their experiences and were effusive with thanks. "Camping very good, managing very good, everybody good. Thank you." "I so appreciate it and I want to say thank to people who make this camping happen and who sponsored it. Thanks so much." "Thank you for the orientation and the camping. Thank you, thank you, thank you."

For the majority of students, the camping either **met or exceeded their expectations**. The first time I came camping, just before, my teacher told me to just expect [to be] excited, and then when I came here I am very happy." "I came camping in Canada, the first time. I happy. I don't forget. I remember forever. I happy, happiness." "So, I think it was excellent, what I expected." In response to the question if camping was what you imagined it would be like, one man responded "Better, and my children, first time my children,...it was better...It is very better." Finally, "To be honest, we never been in a camping as well, so we didn't know what to expect exactly, but I think it was above our expectations." Several noted that they did not expect a shower or a kitchen, so that exceeded their expectations. They also were not aware that there were group campgrounds like this, as they expected it would be for individuals or families only.

In response to what activities they **liked best**, there was a range of responses. For many it was the adventure of doing many new activities, such as sleeping in a tent for the first time, bird banding and bird watching, being out in nature, fresh air, "especially in the morning listen to the bird music", meeting new friends, touching an owl, and the surprise of having a beach, a lake to swim in, and the park being such a "beautiful place." "Most I like because it is the nature, it's in the air fresh, and it is a new experience. I like that, it is like an adventure." A common response was, "Everything was best."

Most of the respondents explained the **benefits** of being in the park. Many described feeling relaxed with no stress, "It is quiet and relax, it is good". A younger woman felt a resurgent playfulness, "I could also play with a little child and go around together and catching frogs, that kind of thing." Rekindling their connections with nature was another commonly cited benefit. "I was feeling so much nature and the relaxing" and "[This is] not the city. [Here] we can see the bird sound. The sound of the birds." Another described a grand circle, "I came from nature and then come back to nature." One father felt so much excitement the second morning after sleeping in the park, "sleepy, all of them, especially my daughter after swimming, they come back and they sleepy...When I wake up, [I said] 'wake up, wake up, wake up, today is the last day'. I saying wake up...Today woke up, they happy." Another agreed, "Wake up outside, I like it."

Parents often spoke about the **positive impact** the camping experience had **on their families** as a whole, their health, and their psychological outlook. Several adults talked about how the camping weekend gave them a break from their hectic life in the city and the sense of confinement. A translation of a Burmese woman's response was: "Yeah, also for her is the first park...first time. She feels very happy because in an apartment you stay there, in all the time there. Once you have a place like this...according to her she never like being inside and also you can breathe the fresh air and also good for the kids." A Burmese man compared his living conditions in Burma and Canada and his sense of rising hope.

"They only used to live in a rural village and just go into the forest and have fun in there. But here [in Canada]...he feel like, if you are in an apartment, there is a kind of a stink in there, you know....but when you come out, you feel okay, you have some kind of new idea, good idea that you can think of for the future."

They also found it a welcome respite after their experiences of war and violence. "Rest and enjoy. My country is very difficult."

A number of the students **had not been out of the city** since they arrived in Alberta and the experience of being in the park gave them a sense of the variety of landscapes that exist in Canada and for some, the experience helped locate themselves geographically in the broader provincial context. A few students talked about the dramatic difference between the city environment and the park environment.

Numerous people felt a **sense of freedom**. One man described the sense of freedom, feeling the "wind in my brain." For the Burmese group, they felt a different kind of freedom, a class freedom as only the wealthy could tent near the lake in Burma. They all moved their tents closer to the water to have the freedom and experience of being close to the water.

Many participants commented on the **positive effect it had on their children and family bonding**. "It is my opinion this very helpful...so we get fresh air here, you know what, seeing our children...stay away from the TV, the games." Another said, "It is good for the kids...so they can come outside of the house. It is kind of open here, so that they are more excited to play around and go around [with] their friends here." Some parents talked about how the three days of camping helped bring their family together. A Hungarian man described,

"It was our first time for long months, because we are newcomers, so we had no chance to come out of the city. And it was the first time that my family again, that we had the opportunity to have a barbecue together, just with our family....We were invited to other families, but it was nice to have our own barbecue here and just to have our own table and enjoy the sun and enjoy the evening as well. Play together and have fun in the night. That was very good."

Many of the participants felt that their **language skills improved** over the course of the weekend and that one of the key goals was improving their English facility. They felt that being exposed to the park environment helped with their English language skills. They saw the connections between the in-class activities with the outdoor experience but saw that more could have been done with signage. "Yes, the animals, they almost one month for LINC teaching, everyday a name. Friday have a test for animal." A number of students shared their appreciation for being able to practice their English skills with the parks staff. "When tenting, the language maybe after, good speak." One participant described that it was easier to practice English in this

informal context. “Three days ago I come, I know only ‘how are you.’ I don’t know complicated...Somebody talking English, I run away! More talking, more understanding, yeah.” Another suggested “I like camping...and communication, to my friends, teachers, is good.” A final comment, “This weekend and camping, we can speak together and our English...will be better.”

### **Comparison of Parks**

Participants almost uniformly agreed that **camping in their countries of origin was “very different.”** These differences varied. For some, being in a provincial park was substantially different than a city park. “It was an adventure, it was our first camping. Actually everything is new for us, like to make a day in tent, the food, and everything. We tried to do a barbecue in the park but it is not the same, totally different.” When asked if they visited any parks, the Burmese participants joked, “yeah, live in a park in a forest...already in a park.” At times, however, they would take longer trips in the forest, looking for bamboo sticks to fix their homes and hunting for food.

Some had experienced parks with **more amenities and others with much less.** Koreans talked about how “we have lots of mountains” but how expensive it was to visit their parks and even park a car. Another said, “When we go to the park in our country, we don’t have guides...people who say, here you can walk, or...you can follow this sign.” A Polish woman said: “We got worse showers and worse washrooms. In Poland...we can go and you can walk, but you can’t sit, you don’t have any tables or any chairs. That’s the difference.” A Russian woman said,

“I went camping in Russia...all the place dirty, people leave garbage there...and even the beach is dirty. When I came here, I said ‘nice place, clean you know, they have like modern washroom’. I never seen that before, you know, shower and kitchen. I see that’s good.”

In Burma, “they cook chicken or they cook curry and they brought the curry...they went outside the village and then they have picnic...they don’t have plate or anything so they just use leaves, you know for the rice.”

Quite a few participants talked about **safety** and how they were scared the first day and night particularly with all the different night sounds, but their fears eased as they realized, “Here it is safety, everywhere is safe.”

Other students talked about the similarities and differences between the landscapes in their country of origin and Miquelon Lake. Some students talked about how the lake was similar to the ocean where they once lived and others talked about the **differences or similarities between the vegetation and animal life** that exists in their country or origin and the provincial park. “Different kind of flower, different kind of trees...here like its nice weather and at night it may be raining but not too much, it’s raining but its very, very nice.” Another said: “You know what...my country, the lion, the tiger, it is dangerous. No safety.”

The Burmese noted the similarities of the flora and fauna, but having rules for engagement in Alberta parks was different. The translator says: “Like, this kind of nature for him is like home. But sometimes when they [Canadians] talk about hunting and [how] they don’t do different kind of things, not exactly like the way they use to do in Burma, slightly different.” Many of Burmese people were rural, so the translator explained. “They don’t have park, but they have their home, kind of village...so when you have a picnic you go out, close to the river, small river,

and then you fish, you cook, you eat and you come back.” Thus, the **rules** around fire, hunting and fishing were very important for them to learn. It was also observed that some participants began to break off tree limbs for a fire and children were climbing trees, a very different way of interacting with the natural world that is much more prescribed in Canada. So, these diverse life experiences are an excellent foundation that can be scaffolded into new learning, particularly about rules and norms around parks here in Canada. Their understandings can also begin to challenge conventional Canadian understandings.

### ***Organization and Parks Staff***

Many students **appreciated the parks personnel** who engaged with them and the level of organization of the camping experiences. Other students talked about the positive interaction they had with parks staff and the provincial parks representative who coordinated the weekend. They referred respectfully to all “their teachers” for the weekend; ‘we thank every teacher.’ They also recognized the amount of planning, effort, and partnership that created the weekend. A particularly articulate man said:

“It sure is different, this is the first time that I see the wildlife conservation officers and you know, Alberta government have programs in place like this. They’re pretty organized, they plan what they are doing. It’s not individual work, there is a bunch of different organizations or agencies that are working together. They had a biologist from a non-profit agency coming, who came in and gave us a presentation. Police officers are cooperating, Mennonite Centre, you know, is running the program. So, and yourself doing this research work to see how you can better the program...So it is pretty fascinating to see that and the facilities and the many things that are in place. That’s another side of it. I haven’t seen this back home. I haven’t see campsites with this much amenities on them, like showers and kitchen and you know, recycling bins. Whatever you could see around here, drinking water. I mean all of those things count, some of them are bigger, some of them are smaller, but when you put them all together, it makes it very memorable and pleasant experience. So we certainly appreciate it.”

Many also talked about “**making friends**” with the parks staff and shared their appreciation for this. Other participants indicated that the camping weekend also provided them the opportunity to meet people from other countries and apparently a number of friendships were formed as a result of the weekend of camping together between staff and participants and between the participants. The communal experience of cooking and eating together helped bring together participants that did not know each other well. This expansion of social networks is a key element for immigrant integration. The open pit fire seemed to be a central meeting place for this process to occur.

Initially, there was a tremendous amount of caution and reserve in dealing with the **conservation officers**, as the uniforms, sidearms and marked cars raised alarms through the camp. While several conservation officers visited, the visits were restrained, largely because they were perceived as police officers. Most participants did not appear to understand their role. However, one younger conservation officer stayed and took the time to engage with the adults and children – playing soccer, catching frogs and butterflies, and letting the children play with his dog and explore his truck. Many parents talked about the positive contact they had with the conservation officer who played with their children and allowed them to activate the siren in his truck. The parents highly appreciated this. One parent told a language teacher that her son had been very traumatized in the refugee camp by the sirens and uniformed officers.

Being exposed to a friendly, engaging conservation officer who let him try the siren helped to address this trauma, which the parent considered this a major step in her child's healing process.

In terms of **activities**, the students appreciated the trip to the beach although some groups found the weather and water to be extremely cold; others were less bothered by this or their weekend had fairer weather. Seeing wildlife was notable, "We saw the beavers and...I saw a moose! What an experience, I never see wildlife ever." Students shared only a little about the bird banding activity, the owl presentation, or the nature walk along the lake, usually at the prompting of the interviewer. One man was very moved by holding a petrified bone and touching an owl that is usually wild in the forest. Another woman commented that it was important for her child to touch the small owl with no harm. They appreciated all the demonstrations on using a stove, setting up the tent and making a fire as these were key learning activities to enable future camping.



In general it appeared that the appreciation for the camping weekend had more importance than the specific activities they encountered. While they expressed appreciation and enthusiasm for the activities, the **full experience appeared to be greater than the sum of the parts**. "Before I came here, I thought just for camping, just for tent, stay in the tent with somebody. But when I came here it was amazing....we went for the beach, then somebody came and make presentation. And then at night, it's amazing, somebody said some stories, some song, cook something...I have the best camping in my life."

## *Environmental Literacy*

Numerous participants emphasized the **importance of environmental education and a guided first experience**. “I like it to go to the forest and teach us about the name of the plants...” Others noted that environmental interpretation and education was a deliberate part of the planning.

“They have probably spend more money here on the employees, so there are more people who can take care of the cleanness and the rules in the park. And I notice there are some educational staff here who can help us with certain things. Just explaining about the birds, about the trees and nature and just about the park itself...it is very nice for each task, for the protection, for the education...if we had a question, we always had someone with an answer.”

They were pleased with how responsive the educational staff was. “The people is very nice....I just told them I want to see the beaver but then they take me there!” Pointing out the nuances of flora and fauna was also helpful, such as finding birds in the forest and finding “Flowers too, nice smell. Very nice”. They talked about learning about more difficult concepts as well, such as migration, wilderness and other natural areas, such as mountains. They felt one of their learnings was that Canada has much wilderness, “Canada very nature.”



To understand what newcomers valued about nature and the environment, we asked what was **most important to teach their children**. They wanted their children to understand the flora and fauna, safety precautions and park rules. “I like my children know the names of the birds, the different frogs, yeah.” “Teach them about things, about birds, about trees, animals. Bears and safety. You can feed wild animals, no.”

Yet, they wanted the education to go beyond naming to **environmental literacy and environmental protection**.

“Also it is interesting around the creature’s name or the tree’s name but also I think we need to learn about how to protect nature. Because some people do not know why we can’t throw the garbage in the tree or garbage in nature. That is going to be a problem if they do not know it.”

The landscape of the park had an impact on the students in terms of the differences and similarities between Alberta and their country of origin. Participants talked about the

**sensations**, such as the temperature of the water, the feel of the sand on their feet, and being bit by a mosquito. Participants also talked about the significant amount of day light available to them in the month of June and wondered how they would cope with the darkness that came in winter. They were beginning to express the differences and to appreciate their new setting.

Some participants talked about the **importance of park rules**, particularly restrictions on fire and dogs. They also connected the rules to conservation purposes. "Yeah, is a good rule, bad rule sometimes, you set a fire without cleaning around; it can go through the whole forest...care about the forest." However, particularly for the Burmese, rules in a park was a foreign concept. "So, the thing here is to follow the rules here...back home you can go out in the...woods but here the rules say you can't. It is the kind of thing, that conservation for the [forest]."

### ***Newcomer Recommendations***

In terms of what they liked the least and **recommendations** for the future, a number of responses addressed the organization of activities for the weekend.

In sum, while highly appreciative of the experience, they saw the potential for improving it. The most frequent request was for **more organized activities** in which they could have a choice of participation. Some thought the weekend had slow parts as there was not enough organization. "We want to have a free time, but it is kind of slow and we missed out [bird] banding stuff, we missed really great experience because so many people was sleeping. Also, we could paint together; we could do so many things for activity together." They wanted an organized weekend that offered regularly scheduled activities that they were informed of ahead of time and had a choice over. Then they could pick according to their needs for that weekend. "Give them[us] the planning stuff and if we want to join it maybe we can go there."

Some requested specific **activities for the children**, rather than just spontaneous ones. "I expected my children who meet other children, and they speak in English and they practice English." "It would actually be nice if there were children at the campsite...that we or the organizers would come up with some programs for them, just to bring them together more." Others suggested **weekends for young adults** "Maybe we can play with games more because I am young and maybe I can go to...mountains for a trip or something like that?" They appreciated the playgrounds with slides and swings as these facilities were important for keeping smaller children busy and away from unsafe areas, such as the fire pit.

For the mixed groups, numerous people suggested **ice breaker activities**. "We don't know each other...different culture and language and everything and we just know probably the [person's] name...Probably more games or activities like when know each other, and children can play more games." They felt that getting to know each other, first, would facilitate the ease of the other activities. They also suggested that their families really need family time and that unstructured time for families to determine their own activities was necessary. Others suggested that the weekend flew by and that making the trips longer would be helpful "So many things to see and not too much time."

One request, particularly from the Burmese, was to come out into the **park during winter**. This was reiterated several times.

One of the biggest **complaints** was the mosquitoes. Some joked that they would come back if there were no mosquitoes. But as one Hungarian man said, "Maybe we can complain for the

mosquitoes, but that's not help to anyone here. I think we tried to protect our skin as far as we could, so we received help with that too, so it was nice."

Another complaint was the lack of a sink to wash dishes in. They felt this would increase the sanitation of the sites. Another woman said, "Camping seems to be dirty" so there are cultural associations related to camping and being on or near the ground as well.

The printed materials displayed by the parks staff, regarding plants, animals, birds and conservation, were considered too difficult, although they felt they could understand most of the face-to-face presentation content.

### ***Possibility of Camping Again***

The Burmese participants said they would not have engaged in camping without this program. "First they don't know the place and they don't know how to go. Other thing is expenses very high." This reiterates that the **key barriers** are transportation and cost.

For many of the students, it was their first time camping and many indicated that they would certainly like to **try camping again**. Many suggested, "Yeah, of course I would like to." "I am waiting [for the next time]." Some were wary that they might not get another chance, "Everything is good. I like, maybe too much."

Many talked about returning to Miquelon Provincial Park in particular and understanding more about **what is needed to camp**. Numerous people felt they would now know how to do the basics, such as setting up a tent and the equipment needed.

"This camping experience was actually a learning experience for us. I was telling [someone] that we have seen some of the equipment that is around here and we use in the past two day. We have seen them in like market, like shopping centre, but we had no idea what they are and what they are used for. We just looked at them and passed by. But now we know...what's the application of them are so the next time we see them...we have to buy all the stuff for camping....we might not be able to afford all of them at once, but at least we have an idea what to get first, more important things, to take and then build it from there."

Another person emphasized the importance of a list of camping equipment, so that when they go, they know what they need and can slowly acquire these items.

As their work schedules are heavy and their lives hectic, several people realized that they could come to this particular **park in one day**. "You know what, I am leaving the city for Canada...I go to the park only for 2 hours, 3 hours or maybe 4 hours, after that it is finished." Another felt that weekend camping was like a full holiday. "You know what, on Friday I am taking vacation for one day, for long time I am working now at the window company and after teaching [taking English classes], the day is very long. I am taking vacation from work and come and relax." Settlement workers describe the constant pressure and stress on families, so the opportunity to relax and enjoy was most welcomed, even for short periods.

Most people **do not have the resources** to purchase camping equipment or the ability to engage in this type of activity on their own due to transportation issues. "Especially if you do not have a car, it is hard." One Burmese woman explained through an interpreter, "She said it is

kind of important for them to go out, but it is so expensive, things are expensive, so if the government support them or agency, you know can support them, like this program, it will be good. Otherwise, they always to be in an apartment.”

Newcomers often have more dire survival issues that demand their resources and others concurred that they simply do not have the money. While there was some **discussion of alternatives**, such as borrowing the equipment from the Mennonite Centre or sharing personal equipment between them, the cost of equipment was considered prohibitive. From the weekend, some people were under the impression that you could borrow the tent and sleeping bags from the Park office. The few with cars talked of driving others, taking a cab, and still others about renting a bus as a group. So, camping would **necessarily be a collective activity for newcomers** particularly in transportation and equipment. They felt that the highest likelihood for return in the near future would be if it was organized by a larger group.

In sum, they particularly enjoyed camping because it was **something “Canadians did”**. Yet, when asked if they felt like they belonged as a Canadian, they replied, “not yet.” It is important to note that many of the students were most satisfied when they were able to engage in their **own cultural activities** while at the campground, including bringing their own food and doing their most common sports. While they appreciated the opportunity to camp alongside Canadians, the way they engage with camping differs, according to previous life experiences and cultural preferences. Instead of using the tubs for washing dishes, they used them for large quantities of rice, as some groups cooked collectively. For one Muslim family, the men slept in the tent and the women and the small children slept in the cook shelter. They also used this for their prayer space. While they enjoyed being exposed to traditional camping food, the Muslim participants could not eat hot dogs and marshmallows given the pork content. However, others were enthusiastic about trying banana splits. So, newcomers will pick and choose from the offerings, including offerings that are more culturally sensitive, with alternatives available.



## Summary of Post-Camping Data

Given that the majority of the participants would likely never have had such a camping experience without the assistance of this program, the participants were effusive with appreciation for the experience. For the most part, the experience met or exceeded their expectations. As many of them live in confined and economically challenging circumstances, such an experience had multiple benefits for individuals and families, beyond the educational.

There were significant learning gains in learning around the flora and fauna with an average improvement in recognition of the most common species by 29%. This varied from a 40% improvement in the recognition of trees to a 23% improvement in the recognition of insects. Learning around the identification of species was carried out both in the in-class activities as well as the outdoor field activities. Interpretation sessions and tours deliberately addressed this content.

There were modest learning gains in recognition of campsite equipment, parks and camping signs, and identification of parks personnel. The average improvement was almost 12%. Learning around the identification of campsite equipment occurred both in the classroom as well in the field, as people handled and used this equipment. The learning gains for campsite equipment was 14%. Learning around parks and camping signs as well as parks personnel was not attended to in any deliberate manner during the outdoor field experience. Therefore, the learning gains were slightly less than 11%.

The physical benefits were the fresh air, the freedom of mind and movement, the ability to relax, time for enjoyment and play. The emotional and aesthetic benefits were feeling a reconnection with nature, taking in the beauty of the place in sight, sound and touch, and de-stressing. Such whole body experiences are important to integrated learning. While they did not yet feel a sense of belonging after 1 visit, the weekend experience established the desire to return.

Newcomers also expressed the significant psychological benefits through their sense of happiness, freedom and adventure. This was dampened for some at the outset by their fears, but as the weekend progressed and it became clear what the risks, annoyances, and safety issues were, they relaxed.

While the activities that the participants engaged in are necessary for enjoyment, group organization, and learning, as cited by the newcomers, it was the sum total of the activities as well as opportunities for family time and free time that created the most impact. Likely, the activities could vary but still maintain the same level of impact.

The informal context proved important for the development of English language conversational skills. Most newcomers appreciated this setting to practice their English with Canadian-born persons and other newcomers.

This informal context also fostered intercultural friendships between newcomers and with Canadian-born folks. Other than ethno-cultural community associations, it cannot be assumed that the newcomers attending the experience knew each other well. Introductory activities that facilitate group processes are vital to undertake. Most importantly, social capital was built during this communal experience, helping to establish a sense of Alberta and Canada as a welcoming multicultural community.

Newcomers easily compared the differences between parks in their home country and parks here in Canada. Their pre-existing experiences of parks, camping, hiking, flora and fauna were diverse – from basic to extensive, from tropical to temperate – and therefore their knowledge needs were diverse. More importantly, it is clear that newcomers needed to build on their learning from their original experiences of parks, camping and hiking that they had, and link it to the Canadian reality. Their emotional attachments to parks in their home countries mean that they are experiencing loss, but that they are open to reattaching to a new place. As one woman stated, “This is my home now!”

One important finding is that newcomers have a moderate to high environmental awareness and concern. In some cases, they have well developed environmental habits from their home countries and in others, they do not. However, a very common response was the importance of environmental education and how vital it is to teach adults and children/youth environmentally respectful practices.

While newcomers may not know park rules at the outset, once they are explained, they are supportive, particularly around rules that protect the natural ecosystems and conserve natural resources. More educational activities that connect the abstract to the tangible is necessary, such as paper maps of types of ecosystems found in Alberta and Edmonton to field learning. Educational engagements can further build ecological literacy, environmental knowledge, habits of stewardship, and a sense of belonging to this land.

Newcomer recommendations were that the hosted weekends have a higher level of organization, with optional activities. Newcomers also requested activities specific to children. There were several requests for winter camping, a detailed list of camping equipment needed, and some recommendations for additional amenities, like sinks.

As evident from all the data sets, the key barriers are transportation and cost. Alberta provincial parks assume car ownership which is often not part of the reality for newcomers. Most participants wanted to return to provincial parks either for one day, a weekend or a holiday, but did not have the financial resources for camping equipment or park fees. Camping would need to be a collectively-undertaken activity and access would need to be facilitated by organizations and agencies, until newcomers become more financially established.

Cultural sensitivity around food, prayer space, cultural differences regarding gender in relation to camping, weapons, and previous traumas need to be taken into account when planning activities. Finally, it is clear that newcomers will engage in camping in a way that suits their cultural preferences.



# Data from Project Partners

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Data was gathered from the project partners in two ways, primarily through interviews, but also through field observation.

## Interviews with Project Partners

In total, 3 English language teachers, 2 administrators, and 1 community worker were formally interviewed after project completion to gain feedback about the project, totalling 6 interviews. Four parks staff in two organizations were also interviewed. While the majority of interviews took place after the project was completed, several interviews were completed during the project. Many informal conversations with EAL teachers and other parks staff were also recorded in field notes and have been used as data as well.

## Interview Data from English Language Teachers

Overall the teachers were **very positive** about the *Learning a Language, Learning the Land* project. They felt the project offered students an excellent opportunity, one which they normally would not have access to. Teachers reported that students were enthusiastic throughout the entire project and noted that the activity had a positive impact, not only on the students but their families as well. Some of the teachers that did attend the camping weekend enjoyed the weekend and indicated that it was “nice to see the students and their families in this environment”. “There is no doubt about it, they loved every minute.” “And [Parks staff] were just wonderful, great role models and outgoing, relating to everyone.”

All the teachers interviewed indicated that it was a “**worthwhile theme** to teach to newcomers to our province and country. Many students come to Alberta to find jobs, and are often amazed at the natural beauty of Alberta.” Most indicated that they would like to teach the theme again in the future.



## Role of EAL Teachers and Role of Parks

As was indicated in the literature review, EAL teachers face **complicated classrooms**. As one teacher describes it, they have “...a range of students, Canadian citizens, refugees, landed immigrants, some VISA and working students. So quite a range there. Range of levels,

backgrounds, and so on.” In the community programs that they teach in, “we had literacy, beginner, intermediate, and advanced.” Another elaborates, “we have so many variables you know, there is language [mother tongue], there’s culture, levels of classroom.” Yet she felt that “nature seems to be a common ground...it tends to relax students.”

It was also evident that teachers played a pivotal **role in immigration settlement**. As one teacher explained, “Besides delivering material, EAL teachers also become settlement workers who can welcome students and impart our enthusiasm for the themes of nature and camping.”

One teacher saw her role as a **facilitator for learning about Alberta parks** and nature in Alberta. “Well, I see my role in the classroom, not only with this project, but with every day, more of a facilitator...on this particular project, it was to raise the students’ awareness for Provincial Parks, to nature here in Alberta, as opposed to their home country. They were exposed to camping, so that you know was more specific, that was more of a concrete learning.” She was supportive of the unit as it provided “an opportunity to connect,” “heightened interest and curiosity,” and was “fun.” “Bringing nature into the classroom is a wonderful idea and exploring Alberta Parks - giving any exposure to the parks - I’m all for it.”

Several of them **worried about Alberta Parks not continuing** their involvement. “One of the things that Park’s philosophy, for lack of better words, is, that they would try to start this, and then they would pull out over the long run...you have the equipment, now it is up to you. Is that feasible?” They felt that the experience was so much richer with the involvement of both parks organizations and their expertise. One teacher also described that:

“a lot of our staff here have never camped so, and some of us have camped more than others. The expertise that the Parks people can bring, just from their view...probably you are not working at Parks unless you enjoy camping...What the Parks people brought was...they were so friendly and helpful and they did not stand back, they were in the thick of things with everyone and that really made our students feel very welcome and very comfortable. They also have a lot of expertise about the natural world that I just don’t have...It would be sad to have Parks pull out completely.”

Given their relationship with the students, teachers played an important role in helping the students meet the many challenges (preparation, organizing, participating) associated with this project. The researchers observed that the students put a lot of trust in their teachers and relied upon them to interpret what was going on, especially in the early planning process. For example, some students were hesitant to sign the research waiver form but when they were reassured by the teacher they readily signed.

Students also turned to their teachers when they required further information or more specific detail related to the project. For example, students had many questions about the logistics of the camping trip in terms of who could come and what transportation would be used, turning to the teachers for clarification. It was obvious that it was the teachers who were able to **effectively communicate** this information to the newcomers.

The researchers observed that the teachers were often used as **informal consultants** by parks staff in terms of determining what approach was best to meet specific learning needs of the newcomers in both the day in the park and weekend camping activity. Parks staff often turned to teachers to seek information about what they might be able to expect from a particular activity they had planned or the best way to convey a set of instructions. For example, during

the day in the park, teachers were consulted about the best way to teach how to set up a tent and the best way to teach language skills related to cooking over an open fire.

At times, some of the partners, including the teachers, were not sure of their role in the project which sometimes led to confusion. It is important to note that all the teachers indicated that despite the challenges the project was “well worth it” and they would all be involved if the project were to happen again. One of the administrators noted that “some of our staff are newcomers too” who had not camped. So, many of the teachers also **learned a great deal** about camping and had an opportunity they had not had before.

### *Use of Workbook*

At the outset, there was support from all three partners about the need for a teaching tool. Yet, teachers experienced some frustration at the beginning of the project, revolving primarily around the development and implementation of the workbooks.

Initially the workbooks were quite late in getting to the teachers. Some used them early in the unit and others later into the camping unit. For this reason, the teachers suggested that the workbooks “came a little late...so I don’t think it got fair use.” Some of the teachers were confused about how to use the workbooks. Given the time pressures and their teaching goals, many of the workbooks were **not fully utilized**.

Given the late arrival of the workbooks that contained the pre-test, it is clear that in many cases, some of the unit had been covered prior to the implementation of the pre-test. Therefore, depending on what had been covered in the classroom, the statistics ended up measuring only the latter stages of classroom learning and the field-based learning. So, it is possible that the **full learning gains may not be represented** in the statistics. It is also clear that not all of the content was necessarily covered in class, depending on language level of the students and teacher educational rationale.

A number of teachers indicated that “a workbook is just a workbook. You know you need other things...other activities...to make it something....A workbook kind of confirms what you already learned. Or maybe it introduces what you are going to learn.” Consequently, there was general agreement about the level of priority the teachers put on the workbook content. They saw this material only as an addendum or support to the goals that exist in the core LINC curriculum. Therefore, they made choices about what workbook content they would cover in relation to these **curricular goals**.

One administrator explained their **competency approach to EAL**, “Our ESL is very functional. The information that they need – how to phone a doctor. And so I was looking at it from a very functional perspective. They need to know that these are rules, they need to know what a tent is called and what kind of equipment, it would be nice to know the name of it. Those kind of functional language skills was very much what I was focussing on....I was also trying to match the skills that they need to master in LINC – reading a schedule or maps. So I was trying to do the language level, the functional level.” Another teacher summarized, “The more we can connect it to that curriculum...then the happier we are, the happier your funders are. It goes all the way up to the federal government.” So, the teachers and administrators felt a strong sense of accountability for their practice.

Another teacher described her priority system, “Things like a crow they see...Canadian goose I think is important because it is a Canadian symbol. And also the Alberta rose, it is a Canadian symbol, so those are things they are going to need, and when they do their citizenship [test]...That idea of filling in the form and how you would register [for a campsite] was important because that is actually something they would have to do....that was a useful skill, I thought.” So, common sights, daily functional needs, and knowledge required for the citizenship test all figured into the **teacher’s rationale** on how to approach the camping unit and the workbook.

It was also clear that the **mixed uses for the workbook**, both as a vehicle for content and a research measurement tool, added complications for teachers. They were most worried about damaging the confidence level of newcomers by asking them to complete a pre-test on which they would know very little. Even though they explained what research was and “they were very careful to explain ‘this is where we are, you are going to learn; and this is where you are going’,” the impact of creating newcomer frustration and sense of failure worried them. In one case, “some of them just dropped their pencil, ‘I can’t do this teacher!’” In some cases, teachers taught to some of the material first before giving the pre-test. Some of them also felt that the pre-test was too difficult for lower language levels, further complicating workbook completion.

As the project progressed, however, teachers became more comfortable with the workbooks and were **very creative** about how to teach the material. One LINC 3 teacher noted,

“I thought the text was very ‘user-friendly’ and clearly written with EAL students in mind. The color photographs and illustrations were much appreciated by the students, especially when they were introduced to unfamiliar wildlife species. The exercises and lesson-building ideas were easy to use in the classroom with minimal additional preparation on my part. One of the websites suggested (“Zooming in on Alberta’s Natural Regions”) proved to be an excellent resource as well as a beautifully designed website.”

They were appreciative that they had the flexibility to teach the material in the workbook in ways that met the individual skill level of their students. For the higher language levels, one teacher said, “this was very good material that worked well in the classroom. A lot of camping/parks vocabulary was learned.”

### ***Challenges of Interprofessional Learning***

At the outset, the teacher developing the workbook in association with Alberta Parks and the researchers, felt that the big picture or purpose was not clear. “It would have been nice for me to have understood how all these pieces were fitting together.” This led to frustrations in the beginning, as it demanded a **negotiation between teacher professional knowledge, parks professional knowledge, and researcher professional knowledge** that did not occur effectively.

While each professional had their considerations, they were not always able to effectively translate that to the other professionals. “It took me awhile to understand why, from the Parks perspective, they wanted all of this. There were pages of plants and animals and insects and I was thinking holy moly, that is pretty overwhelming...for a reader, someone who English was not their first language.” The frustration appeared to centre on not having the opportunity to explain their teaching priorities and educational processes used in the classroom.

More **opportunities for discussion** needed to be created to share purposes and respective knowledge bases prior to the development of the project. As one administrator explained, “I felt like I was trying to balance two perspectives or the needs of two groups that were not balancing very well for me.” From the English language teaching perspective, she was worried about a “disconnect with the skill of the students. Their capabilities or competences or what Parks was initially assuming or wanting to do.” In retrospect, they felt that “maybe we just all saw it from our own perspective....now to sit down again, I think it would be, ‘how much time do we want to devote to this? How much time do the students want to spend on this?’” So there was recognition that more joint planning needed to occur and likely would in the future.

Yet, the importance of the role of parks was acknowledged, “I know what Parks brought...we did a lot of prep here before, but having the Parks people involved at the park made it vastly richer for our students.” So, the overall project process lacked a space for important interprofessional learning, or learning from each other, as they designed the project. While it was acknowledged that it was appropriate for the English language teachers to develop the workbook, there was a realization that there needed to be mutual dialogue and learning in terms of goals, processes, and content given that it cut across numerous professional domains.

### ***Pedagogical Approaches – Debates among EAL Teachers***

There were **diverse pedagogical approaches** among the English language teachers and the project stimulated numerous debates. For instance, some of the classroom teachers found the content related to parks problematic. A common feeling was,

“Some of it didn’t [relate], the trees, like an Aspen tree, a Popular tree, I didn’t spend much time on. But maybe it is just my, because it didn’t seem that important to me. Now that is my background I guess, like a tree is a tree is a tree, especially ‘cause there is so much to be learning.”

So, the relevance of some of the flora and fauna content to the daily context of newcomers was questioned. Yet, this turned out to be a popular activity. A further reflection from the end of the program was, “In retrospect, those were some of their favourite pages of the workbook. It was color; it was pretty fun for them. I don’t know how effective it was.” Another said,

“...this nice workbook with beautiful pictures of the animals, birds. I think it was well received. And the [park] symbols, I thought that was good. They responded well to that, the equipment they liked to know the vocabulary of all the camping equipment.”

Given that the workbook was text-based, and the lower language levels were challenged by text, teachers had to find other ways to augment the learning process. In anticipation of the difficulties with text, the workbook contained some drawing tasks and picture matching tasks. Yet, one teacher thought this would be an issue for participants.

“They had to draw a picture of their country. Oh my gosh, I had no idea; what are these guys going to do? I have mostly men, [I] didn’t know if they would be interested in coloring a picture...[but] we didn’t have time to be giving a lot of vocabulary to write what they wanted to say. So I went with the picture route. They loved drawing the picture of their country.”

Thus, non-text based activities were found to be engaging despite age and gender.

Another teacher also described the diverse ways that teachers engaged with the workbook and content, by comparing herself to another teacher.

“I was talking together with a friend last night and she teaches here in a higher level...she immediately was drawn to the rules and that aspect of the book. And she thought, ‘who needs all those pictures of those birds and so on’, but that is the very thing that appealed to me....with the lower levels, the pictures worked well.”

As one person summed up, “different teachers, different things...are emphasized.”

Another discussion was around vocabulary labelling. In a common teaching space, a demo camp was set up with the tent and all the equipment, along with vocabulary labels. In the first Day in the Park experience, one of the teachers again matched the vocabulary signs to the items. Yet, one of the other teachers thought it was insulting to put vocabulary out during the field experience, pointing out that if you would not do this with English language speakers, why would you do it with English language learners? Another was supportive of labelling, “Those are different philosophies on teaching...I am a very visual learner. If I hear something, if I don’t write it down, I do not remember.” Another said, “We do a lot of that [labelling] in the classroom...so I think we really don’t have to do that [in the field], [the learning] just happens.”

### ***Creative Approaches to Parks, Camping and Language Learning***

The teachers engaged with the camping unit and the workbook in numerous creative ways. A **LINC Level 1 teacher** worked on distinguishing between city parks and provincial parks and “just talking about parks in general, moving to the different animals and camping equipment...We did spend time with the rules and the registration, [but] again with the lower levels, that was a bit more difficult...a little slow going.” The focus was on vocabulary that would be connected to experiences of the parks. “Then when we went to the park, we tried to see an aspen leaf and a poplar leaf.”

A **LINC Level 2 teacher** concentrated on contractions, what you “should and shouldn’t do” by exploring park rules. She had them build a camping scene and “we brainstormed the problems you would have camping and then they came up with the rules, what they thought the rules should be....But then I helped them because they didn’t always come up with the correct rules so I told them what the rule actually was.” She explored modal verbs, “you must, you should, you could and you must not, should not” and assisted them in determining how strong the suggestion or obligation is. “So we used the theme of camping but we used the grammar that we needed to be covering...We had a lot of fun, yeah. It worked really well.”

A **LINC Level 3 teacher** related the camping theme to a novel and film on “Grey Owl, the 1930s conservationist and early ambassador for Canadian national parks.” For the camping fair, her students made instructional posters about Grey Owl. She worked on verbs and noun-phrases, such as “to pitch – a tent”. She also explored vocabulary like “relax” and asked them to write a journal on how they relax at home. She asked students to use present perfect and simple future tenses to write sentences describing a camping set-up picture. They read passages about common parkland birds and clarified vocabulary and meaning. Her practicum student was from Jasper so, after a lesson on the animals in the park, they played a vocabulary game using the animals of Jasper Park and did a crossword puzzle. They set up an actual campsite and what to bring camping for the collective camping fair.

At the end of the camping unit, all the classes from LINC levels 1-4 participated in a **camping fair** “with 6 or 7 different stations and the students moved from one to another, having to answer certain questions and it generated a lot of conversations and it was very well done.” They found that the camping fair was “confidence-building” for students who took on the role of peer teacher. Teachers shared that this was a wonderful opportunity to integrate student learning. They also pointed out that students enjoyed this activity and demonstrated a great deal of pride in their projects.

### *Teachable Moments for Environmental Literacy*

As described above, the **goals of ecological and environmental literacy were not clear** for the English language teachers and administrators. Opportunities to explore these goals were not undertaken as part of the learning process between the EAL teachers and parks staff. This was a **teachable moment for Parks staff** and could have facilitated the ecological literacy of the teachers by explaining how larger ecosystems work and how a park is not simply a container for human activity, but a living system itself. Further, teaching around the concept of environmental literacy, including the impact of people on natural systems, the importance of natural systems for human well-being, and ways of living that can mitigate negative impact could also have been introduced at this moment, as was requested by the newcomers.

As was revealed through the drawings of home countries, the importance of beginning an educational process with existing knowledge and experience was evident. As one teacher explained, “That was fabulous...the stories and things that they had to say. They’re interested and motivated. I was surprised. But they were all engaged, they wanted to show what their country looked like.” One teacher explains the pedagogy, “It is getting them to start where they’re at, where we’re at [in the class]. They’re understanding, and then augmenting it with the right information, but they could [now] use the correct language.” Beyond the language gains, however, this process of **telling stories about parks in their home countries** and then connecting that to parks in Canada, is a vital process of attachment to a new geography informed through ecological literacy.

### *Mutual Learning between Teachers and Learners*

One teacher, in particular, emphasized learning from her students and the mutuality of this process, typical of adult education processes.

“This is an adult program and I learn more from my students every day than they learn from me, I’m sure. They bring a lot to the class and it is more of an exchange in adult education. I think in one class the two students from Palestine were in a refugee camp for years and they participated. At the end of the program, they brought back their slides from the trip and showed our class. And shared their stories...and made me realize who is teaching who, here. It was just an opportunity for me to learn.”

Thus, starting with learner stories and experiences is part of not only teaching peers but it is a **mutual exchange of learning** with all the teachers and parks staff involved as well. It does not assume that newcomers are a blank slate or that their lives have just begun in Canada.

This kind of mutual learning generates motivation and releases energy. Another teacher says,

“the stories and the things that they had to say. Their interest and motivation, I was very surprised. But they were all engaged, they wanted to show what their country looked like....They had a lot to say about their own country. A lot of pride and a lot of good memories and a lot of stories coming from that, about what they did, mostly as children.”

This was also a **teachable moment for the EAL teachers** teaching at the higher LINC levels, to explore newcomer knowledge of how ecosystems work in their country, how different species and landscapes interact, the role of humans in ecosystems, and how this relates to human well-being. That dialogue could then have been transferred to the Canadian context.

### ***Newcomer Understandings of Parks***

Consistent with other research data, this teacher felt that newcomers had a **different understandings of parks** from the Canadian understanding.

“It is the whole Canadian way, you know, doing nature in a Tupperware container, going camping, organization planning - that’s how, we’re Canadian, we do this. Whereas, many of the students from different cultures have a very different perspective. Going to a park is about ‘being’, you know. You just go there to be, to listen to the trees and ocean or the water and so, it’s important for us to realize that you know we don’t have to have an agenda the whole time we are there.”

A LINC Level 3 teacher began her camping unit on these different understandings of parks. “We brainstormed ‘parks.’ What kind? What you can do in a park?” Then she introduced the camping trips and clarified vocabulary in the text piece on “Visiting a Park” (in Canada). She then asked students to interview a partner and record their findings in writing. Later in the unit, she set up discussion groups around the question, “Where do people in your country go on vacation?” and then she introduced the history on the establishment of national parks in Canada.

This is a beautiful example of **scaffolding learning** from the existing knowledge and experience of participants. She began with their pre-immigration experiences of camping and nature and bridged from the familiar into what is the same and different in Canadian parks. This is not only more relevant to newcomers’ existing knowledge base and legitimizing for the students who may be feeling loss, but also energizing as participants can share memories and experiences from their home country.



## *Day in the Park and Inclusiveness*

Teachers were very positive about the Day in the Park. “I saw a lot of happy faces and a lot of families of those kids, it was a tremendous experience.” Just getting to a park “to think about nature” was a key aspect.

The most important element almost all the teachers noted was the inclusiveness of the day, as **many more newcomers were able to attend a one day activity** and could include their whole multi-generational family. They felt that because people’s lives were so busy, this was a more accessible experience. They talked about the issues with the first Day in the Park, and how they adapted the Day in the Park offerings for the succeeding groups - by shortening it, adding more activities, and having sports equipment and games in reserve if needed.

Teachers also noted that many newcomers and teachers were surprised that they could camp in the city. “Some of them were quite interested in the fact that Rainbow Valley was a campground, they could actually camp there, which was pretty cool...[While] it was not as long and maybe not as rich of an experience as Miquelon...they still got a taste and had a lot of fun.”

Teachers also noted that the Day in the Park experience stayed more focussed on **language learning and key camping skills**, like setting up a tent, compared to the weekend event.

## *Camping Weekend and Language Gains*

While there were no specific complaints or concerns about the camping weekend, a number of pedagogical questions were raised. Some of the EAL teachers were confused about the role of the parks staff. As one partner shared, “at times they seemed quite uninvolved” although this varied among the three different weekends.

Teachers also noted that the camping weekend seemed to **focus more on recreation than language learning**, which was more the focus in the Day in the Park and classroom activities. The language learning seemed to get lost to the logistical challenges the EAL teachers faced for the weekend activity.

A teacher wondered about the ‘wonderful stories’ students had to share. In this regard she questioned if the parks staff could have spent more time with the students listening to them and learning about their unique perspectives on everything from camping to the various cultural meanings associated with nature. One teacher did suggest that the camping weekend might have been a “**lost opportunity**” to build community by helping people get to know each other by sharing their stories. It was also felt that the opportunity to use the context of the natural environment for more meaningful activities, such as enhancing a sense of belonging and identity formation was missed.

Another teacher enjoyed the **relaxed pace**. “I like that they had their choice to do things, it was fairly laid back, there was no real pressure...it was nice that they had time just to be on their own...they could come and be part of a group, if they decided...that being part of a group, that community, is important.”

Another EAL teacher suggested, “Some students felt that they would have liked more ‘at one o’clock we are doing this, at two o’clock we are doing this, and at three o’clock we are doing this’” although she acknowledge that it varied by group. When the group was a homogenous

group, like the Burmese Karen group, less formality was possible. When the groups have more diverse populations, **formal activities that help mix people and add structure** are necessary.

Overall, the teachers noted some special elements to the weekend, such as the beach, wildlife viewing such as bird watching and bird banding, the live owl presentation, and the campfires in the evening. For the teachers, there “was little I did not like.”

Several issues arose with students. One teacher noted that some of the newcomers were very cold, that “someone had their ski jacket on” while on the beach. Another got too much sun, was tired and had to go home. “And she learned, you know, that’s not for her, and if she goes again, she will take precautions.”

In sum, however, in terms of learning gains, “I think there was a new vocabulary learned...a greater comfort with certain phrases and expressions, greater awareness.” Several teachers noted the **gains in conversational language**.



### ***Camping and Benefits for Families***

Several of the teachers told a story about a single Afghani woman and her two boys, 7 and 10. At the Day in the Park, a teacher said to the boys, “make sure you learn how to do this, so you can help your mom. And so it was fun to watch them very seriously try to figure out how to set these tents up.”

Another teacher said,

“I drove them out so I got to know them a bit and...when I saw those boys, they really thought they had died and gone to heaven. ...I picked them up on a hot summer day and they were sitting on the step outside the apartment building in the sun, waiting for me for quite some time. Not because I was late, but because they were anxious to go and their Mom said they only have TV - and there is a lot of kids there like that. When...the littlest one woke up in the morning, he is quite young, he forgot that he was camping and he woke up and opened his eyes and saw where he was. She told me he started kissing her all over. ‘Oh, thank you Mom, thank you Mom. Thank you for bringing me camping; thank you for bringing me camping’. So, I mean, really, those two boys, if nobody else enjoyed it, it was worth it for them.”

The first teacher noted,

“We went to the beach on Saturday, you...walk through the trees and then the beach opens up and the older one said to his little brother, ‘Oh, look, it is just like on TV; there is sand and water and umbrellas.’ They had never been to a beach...it was so exciting for them to see something that they had only ever seen on TV....It was their first time being able to leave Edmonton, their first holiday as a family...since they arrived...a couple of years [ago].”

She went on to describe the huge barriers for this family who had to come on the camping trip with no food because they had none. “That made it worth it for me.”

Teachers also indicated that there was more demand than they could meet. “We had students from the first group who were begging to go on the last trip and we just did not have room. If they could have gotten there themselves - but we just did not have room on the bus...the second trip, it was packed actually.”

### **Increased Workload**

While the teachers were all very positive about the project, a few concerns were raised. The **workload for the project was immense**. Organizing all the campers, as family plans kept changing, then planning and packing the gear to suit each family, along with dealing with other logistics was a challenge. This workload was generally ‘placed on top of’ regular workloads. One of the administrators said, “figuring out who was going, organizing a bus, getting food...get[ting] the camping kits...The second time...it was better....I did a lot of dishwashing! Holy man!...I washed everything before we went, when we came back...4 times...[it was] labour intensive!”

She also described, “You have to be in two places or have a lot of people, someone to get people on the bus, someone to haul things, someone to be there early to set up.” So having several organizations attend to different tasks eased the load, and the teachers were thankful for the Parks folks who were there early in both parks to set up.

One administrator felt that it was unfair to ask the teachers to volunteer their time on the weekend. Some teachers did say they would not volunteer again, as it was more work than they expected. Nevertheless, the administrator said, “I would do it again, but I was pretty burnt out. It was a lot more work than I thought it would be.”

The teachers’ responses seemed to relate to their family situation and their experience and enjoyment of camping. One teacher was sanguine, “We had a choice of whether to volunteer to go. But I happen to like camping and I happen not to have little children...so it was a fun adventure for me...we could get as involved as we wanted.”



## *Camping, Sense of Place, and Immigrant Integration*

One teacher explained how camping related to immigration integration.

“Well...camping and parks, nature is a Canadian thing and newcomers like to learn about Canadians, to help them feel more a part of our country. Recreation is a big part of settlement. I think it’s helpful for newcomers to understand what camping is all about...learning the rules, how to camp, feeling comfortable going to a park.”

When other teachers were asked about if the **camping experiences enhanced a sense of belonging**, they commented on the building of friendships and language. One teacher suggested,

“I don’t know if [the camping unit] was enough [to build a sense of belonging], other than the fact that they might have some vocabulary or words or some idea what this camping was about. But the ones that went, that was a different story....Definitely for the ones that went, I would say that that would be a goal because they knew their way around. They walked around that lake, they had a sense of the little tadpoles, and you know the buffalo bones and all that kind of stuff, the lake, yeah. Then they take ownership, that’s mine...I was there, that’s my place.”

Teachers introduced the idea of **storytelling as a way to acquire language and meaning associated with the Alberta landscape**. Some of the teachers thought that the camping weekend could have been used to learn more about the participants themselves, by asking them to share their experiences of the land in their own country of origin and possibly start a “new story” about their relationship with their new geographic context. A more **reciprocal dialogue** in terms of discovering what concepts such as *land, nature, camping*, etc. meant to participants could have occurred. This would have been a rich learning experience for all involved.

Another teacher noted that people enjoyed the **social time as a time of bonding across cultures** and realities. “I think it was very nice to have that sit-around time, being around the campfire in the evening. People wanted to be there, whether singing songs, they had fun.” Another teacher noted that this was a great opportunity for crosscultural learning, for learning “different ways of life.” Another teacher concurred,

“I heard some of them talking to other students. ‘It’s a very beautiful country.’ This is where they live now. Some of them can’t go back. A lot of them have chosen to make their life here. So you know, it is one thing to be in Edmonton. It is a very, very different thing to be in, for them, what felt like wilderness really! I think to understand the scope of this country, how big it is.”

So, the sense of the land helps to build familiarity, pride, and a sense of place.

This represents the **first stages of feeling a sense of belonging to the land**, which simply would not be experienced in daily urban living. This teacher had a sense that a first time introductory experience is needed for newcomers to reduce the fear of the unknown.

“I think one thing it would have done for the ones that went, and maybe even the ones that heard about it, is you can tell people to do a million things, but there’s a little bit of hesitancy because you are afraid....it takes away that little bit of...fear...it opens the door

for them, just to walk through it. Otherwise they may never try it. It makes it easier to overcome that kind of anxiety...At work...they hear about camping, that's what people do in Alberta. So then they have an idea, what is this camping all about? What does that mean when they say they are going camping?"

One teacher noticed a Romanian woman,

"was very, almost teary. I think...there was some community there, that she hadn't felt yet. And so, you know when you are sitting around the campfire and breakfast, there was a bit of community and she was very homesick. And so I thought...good for her...."

Often, this was also the first experience of social community in Canada and helped to overcome the isolation that families feel. So, building **social belonging and a sense of place appear to develop in tandem through the camping experience.**

One teacher said that on other field trips,

"I have seen students just with their noses pressed against the glass. Because they are stuck in inner city Edmonton, they don't get out. And I saw one little boy when we went out to a farm just north of here. All of a sudden he just jumped up and he said 'this is like home' cause he saw farms. He was from Afghanistan and his eyes, he was just delighted. So that kind of thing they saw on the way out there."

This connection between the home country and Canada also initiates the process of belonging through finding familiarity.

In addition to building familiarity, a parks orientation assists in learning parks norms. A teacher noted that she has been in campgrounds where she saw "immigrants do all the wrong things." She felt if they have a guided introduction to parks and park rules, it avoided judgmental situations between the Canadian-born and newcomer, facilitating better park relations.

"You feel uncomfortable, you can't approach them, it is not your job to go and say 'hey, you are not supposed to be doing that.' Especially I want to tell them, because I know that they are doing it, because they don't know. But other people are being critical. You know they are judging them, 'can't they read the signs, don't they know they're not supposed to do that'. So, I think it helps because the ones that can go, will know what to expect, what the expectations are and it will save embarrassment on their part."

In summary then, according to the teachers, the beginnings of both a sense of social belonging and a sense of belonging to the land did begin to develop.

### ***Possibility of Return Visits***

One teacher suggested that the possibility of newcomers returning to camp in provincial parks in the short term was **not high**.

"I know you could argue that these students, these people have far more on their plate. That camping is not something that they are going to be doing....I would say camping is something they hear about and they might not do it this year, but they might do it....A lot of them don't have cars, they're not zipping out to Jasper or anything."

However, one teacher heard an Ethiopian man say, “Now I know what to do, I will go again...I thank them from my heart because I will never forget.” As one administrator said, “I truly hoped they would discover it and realize that they could continue on their own and that they would.”

The largest barrier noted was **transportation**. “Some of the families did have cars...other families did not. They have no way of...although a couple of them asked me about renting a car, how to go about that...do I need an international license?” So it became apparent to newcomers and the EAL teachers, that “in order to do that camping bit, I **need to have a friend**.”

### ***Recommendations from EAL Teachers***

There were several recommendations during the course of the interviews. One was for Parks to assemble a **box of curricular materials**, like they do for the school system, that might include bird cards, a tape of sounds, photos, maps, perhaps a video, worksheets at different levels, and a list of possible activities, that, no matter what the teacher wants to teach, “she can use all those materials the way she wants...the teacher is free to pick what language points she wants to use.” This teacher indicated that this would help reach the double goals of “connection to the landscape but also it is really augmenting the language learning.”

A second recommendation was to do day **field trips during class time** to ensure that the experience is inclusive of the whole class and is a shared experience that could be debriefed when they return. This could be to a city or provincial park. This would also be more inclusive in that people are not excluded due to work obligations.

A third recommendation was to **organize volunteers** who could accompany the weekend trips as they felt short-handed and did not want to pressure teachers to participate. If these people became familiar with the newcomer centre, that familiarity would put the newcomers at ease, just as the teachers did.

A final recommendation was that **former camping participants become peer teachers** who are invited back, to show their pictures and explain camping to the new students.

### **Summary of Interview Data from English Language Teachers**

In summary, the EAL teachers and administrative staff provided the following findings.

Overall, the teachers were **very supportive** of the project and played a number of major roles. They designed and taught the camping unit, encouraged the participation of newcomers who were unsure about the experience, acted as consultants in terms of appropriate activities and structure for the field experiences, and gave exposure to nature in Alberta and Alberta municipal and provincial parks. They felt that parks and camping was a worthwhile theme and they were interested in teaching it again.

While there were **frustrations** in the development of the workbook, the majority of the teachers found an effective way to work with it and generated many creative activities to bring life to the camping unit. They each developed activities and utilized the workbook most appropriately for the LINC level they were teaching. One of the primary difficulties was the dual purpose as a vehicle for content as well as a tool for measurement. This dual purpose would likely not occur again, as it was in support of this research only.

The teachers agreed that the camping language skills being introduced to the students through the project should be used to **augment and enhance the LINC curriculum, but not replace it**. In this regard the teachers were suggesting that the immediate functional needs of the students living in an urban environment need to be given first priority.

There was a disconnect between the work of the EAL teachers and the learning goals of the Park staff. In other words, **interprofessional learning was a major challenge**. They all worked hard to bridge across professional knowledges in a way that met each other's learning goals but more appropriate and deliberate dialogue could have facilitated this more effectively.

There were numerous **pedagogical debates** among the teachers regarding how to approach the unit. Each individual approach was shaped by the teacher's interests, student needs, LINC level, curricular goals, and their experience with camping and parks. While numerous concerns were raised about the workbook content, in most cases, the students enjoyed the activities. In sum, teachers devised creative approaches to camping and parks that facilitated language learning.

Several teachers noted that **newcomers had different understandings and expectations of parks**. Thus, they utilized several common adult education approaches – starting with the knowledge and experience of the learners, and emphasizing mutual learning between peers as well as between teacher and learners. **Laddering learning from pre-immigration memories** of camping, nature and parks to new experiences in Canada, fostered energy, pride and belonging.

Teachers raised many important questions related to the place ecoliteracy had in the English as a Second Language curriculum. Generally teachers agreed that the ecoliteracy skills introduced to the students should be used to augment and enhance the LINC curriculum but not replace it. Teachers felt the ecoliteracy skills could be introduced during class time but should be reinforced during the day in the park and camping weekend. It was also clear that the majority of the teachers **did not fully understand the ecological literacy and environmental literacy goals** for the project. This was a teachable moment where Parks staff could have facilitated the learning of the EAL teachers.

Generally teachers were very positive with the **link between classroom activities and the Day in the Park activities**. As one teacher shared, “they seemed to flow together quite nicely” particularly between the classroom and the field day. The one-day event was more inclusive of all newcomers in a class and their families, and it gave a taste of camping to those who could not take a whole weekend for the experience.

Teachers raised some questions about the link between the classroom learning and the camping weekend. While there were no critical comments made, teachers did notice that during the camping weekend the “literacy part was lost” and gave way to the recreational aspects of camping. Nevertheless, they noted the **gains in conversational language** as well as vocabulary. They suggested that the weekends could have had more structure with optional activities. They also noted the benefits for families that have large barriers, such as poverty, inadequate food, and confined living quarters.

In terms of the language learning, some of the teachers suggested **reemphasizing the language component for the camping weekend** and that the more formal approaches used in the classroom could be reinforced by the use of storytelling during the camping weekend. This

appears to be an appropriate and practical suggestion because students could use the language skills gained in the classroom and Day in the Park to tell “their story” on the camping weekend.

The workload for teachers and administrators increased substantially for the weekend event, through the logistical challenges, preparation of the camping kits, and the weekend volunteer time. Hundreds of extra hours were donated by the teachers and administrators, leading to **burnout** in some.

Most importantly, the camping experience was a **step toward a sense of social belonging** in feeling a sense of community with other campers, parks staff and teaching staff. They also became aware of the vastness of the country beyond the city, to gain a sense of geographic place. By learning about the flora and fauna and having a whole sensory body experience of this place, a sense of familiarity and belonging to this land was initiated. The teachers noted that a guided first introduction helped to reduce the fear and anxiety that might otherwise prevent a first visit. An introduction to park norms also reduced the likelihood of newcomers being judged by other park visitors as flagrantly violating park rules.

While the **key barriers** of transportation and cost may prevent some newcomers from returning any time soon, the newcomers themselves discussed ways they could pool their resources to make a return visit possible.

**Recommendations** were to assemble a box of curricular materials that the EAL teachers could use in building their unit. A second recommendation was to do more day field trips to both city and provincial parks for the inclusion of as many students as possible. Volunteers who have worked with the language students could assist on the weekend trips, and experienced newcomers could become peer teachers in future years.



## Interview Data from Parks Staff

One provincial parks staff was interviewed four times with an additional six informal conversations, one provincial parks staff was interviewed once with an additional informal conversation, and one municipal parks staff was interviewed once after the first cohort. Informal conversations were also held with other parks staff and interpreters at both municipal and provincial campground sites. All formal interviews were taped and all informal interviews were recorded in field notes. All the formal interviews were transcribed for analysis. The provincial parks staff were also asked to keep a journal as they went through the experience, but minimal notes were kept as they preferred to touch base by phone. Finally, the researchers went to every planning meeting. They worked closely with all parks staff and the EAL administrators in designing the survey workbook.

After the process unfolded and we examined the data from each stage, it was evident that the key parks staff experienced **elements of transformative learning**, as they navigated the 8 month planning and implementation process and adapted their strategies from one cohort to the next. Especially at the early stages of the project, **the learning was difficult** and demanded some substantial shifts in thinking and planning. This report tries to capture the awkward moments and learning trajectories of the parks staff, by describing the stages of learning that occurred. While the **final outcome was very successful** and the parks staff went through very meaningful, even transformative learning, the more difficult and stressful aspects of this learning could be ameliorated for other staff in the future, as will be described in the conclusions and recommendations.

### *Initial Assumptions of Park Staff*

As the project partners engaged with each other, misunderstandings occurred based on different organizational cultures, assumptions about work, and the typical audiences for adult learning. The most important collaborative decisions initially were which groups of people would comprise the cohorts, the overall structure and plan of the campground visits, and the use of a workbook. The eventual choice of cohorts, the three tiered engagement structure, and the workbook were very thoughtful and highly effective. However, it was evident throughout the planning meetings and project implementation, that the parks staff held several assumptions and goals that initially guided their project design and shaped the outcomes.

**Short and Long Term Goals.** The goals established by the parks staff (taken from the funding proposal) were:

1. *Participants would become comfortable in nature and be aware of nature in the greater Edmonton region.*
2. *Participants would grow their literacy skills and develop nature and outdoor recreation vocabulary.*
3. *Participants would acquire an understanding of issues related to the environment.*

The long term outcomes, in three years, was that the participants would return to the parks with family and friends as well as other newcomers, they would be aware of volunteer activities, they would be familiar with basic ecological principles, and they might choose to become stewards by volunteering and advocating for Alberta's natural heritage.

**Business as usual.** The first key assumption of both provincial and city park staff was that they considered immigrant newcomer groups as “just another audience” and that they could do their “**stock presentations**”, with little adaptation or significant preparation. Even though they anticipated some differences, as described below, in the end they did not make substantive changes to their presentations for the first cohort of participants. In conversation, numerous parks staff identified heavy workloads, busy schedules, underfunding, and lack of resources as the key factors shaping their business-as-usual approach.

**Limited crosscultural exposure.** In several interviews, park staff said they knew the groups would be different from traditional audiences and they expressed concern about their ability to communicate. It was also clear from all the interviews, that none of the staff had significant exposure to diverse ethnocultural groups, particularly in their work.

As they were not initially aware of what the differences would be or what these groups would be like, none of them took *significant* steps to address the specific needs of the newcomer groups. In one case, one staff person did read some research papers and some research on similar programs in British Columbia where outdoor programming was offered in a bilingual or mother tongue language. This person did circulate a powerpoint on crosscultural communication for all participating staff. Another staff person described their approach to newcomer groups by making “things concrete and visible for them...us[ing] visual hands-on tools, that they could see, use and touch.” Given the lower level of English language capacity, this person was suggesting the need for touchables, field guides, visuals, and experiential activities, rather than requiring newcomers to do a lot of listening. Yet another staff person planned the first contact talk to be quite basic in describing parks as a protected area, appropriately not assuming all newcomers would understand what a park was, from a Canadian understanding. As preparation continued, there was recognition that some adaptation would need to occur.

**Best intentions for special guests.** As this was a new initiative, the intention was also to provide “red carpet treatment” for the newcomers as special guests, through a highly orchestrated event that utilized the best resources of the two park organizations. Knowing how meaningful some experiential activities have been for traditional audiences, they “wanted to give them that gift.” Initial plans included energetic, interactive activities such as a guided nature walk as well as guest speakers and hands-on practice with camping equipment and tent set-up.

**Biggest Concern.** The biggest concern expressed by all staff in both organizations was “not knowing how to communicate” with the newcomers so they would be understood. One person was unsure of the knowledge base of newcomers and was not sure how to adapt, concerned that they may have some subject knowledge already. These worries led all of them to admit they were more reserved in their interactions than expected, compounded by their unfamiliarity with newcomer habits and cultural traditions. They also knew that their spoken language would be very complex for newcomers, but again they were not sure how to adapt.

**Starting Point as Organizational Messaging.** Despite numerous meetings between the partners and the immigrant serving organization, the starting point for the programming was the organizational messaging for both park systems – from park rules, common park practices and personnel, explanation of local ecology, the difference between natural areas and manicured areas, to the protection and conservation mandates of parks organizations. Some of the information that was to be presented met the learning goals of explaining the concept of a

park as a protected but public area, explaining the role of natural areas for preserving habitat and human health, park safety, and explaining the roles of different parks staff. These were all planned as initial information sessions, where a parks person, often uniformed, would give a short talk.

The activities that were originally planned for the first cohort and their families, in both the city and provincial park locations, included guided nature walks, nature journaling, nature art activities, demonstration campsite or tent set-up assistance, and a shared lunch of “typical Canadian” camp food - a hot dog and marshmallow roast. The weekend camping had additional activities such as a bird banding demonstration, fireside time, addressing myths about various animals, swimming, a live owl presentation with slide show, sports and games, and a possible children’s nature walk. This was considered to be an interactive, experiential learning approach. These plans were encapsulated in a color coded chart for discussion among the project partners.

**Questioned Assumptions.** The initial proposals were written late in 2009 and funding received by early 2010. Planning meetings began in earnest in January and February 2010. With each successive meeting of the partners, various approaches and activities were questioned and discussed as a way to explore the needs of newcomer audiences. This represented an initial steep learning curve for Parks staff.

In February and March, the primary concern was the level of structure being planned. As parks staff learned that highly structured activity time slots may not work well with newcomers, they adjusted the plans as they “did not want to shoehorn them into a program structure”. As they expressed it, they were learning “to adjust to the needs of the newcomer groups” through the explanations of the other partners.

Further, Parks staff began to learn that there were subgroups with different needs among the newcomers and that one plan would not necessarily meet all the diverse group needs. Therefore, the 3 cohort plan emerged – EAL learners with a mix of LINC language levels, a Burmese community group, and a mix of language learners funded by ECALA.

Discussion also focussed on the writing journal activity proposed by Parks. While this was a very successful activity with other audiences, and while the higher level EAL teachers seemed comfortable with journaling as part of their classes, several community group leaders for cohort 2 said this “will hurt the group”. They were most concerned about triggering feelings of inadequacy and incompetence given lack of English language facility and low literacy levels. The community leaders felt the journaling activity would “hurt their pride as they don’t like to do something wrong and are eager to please”. Various iterations were proposed before the final workbook format was agreed upon.

**Logistical frustrations.** A key frustration for the Parks staff was the constantly fluctuating logistical arrangements. Not yet understanding the challenging circumstances of newcomers and immigrant-serving agencies, they were unable to understand why the agency contacts were changing, the names and numbers of camping participants were constantly changing, and the dates were constantly changing. The other partners asked them numerous times to increase the numbers of participants, which meant increased expenditures and equipment. Parks staff felt like their careful plans were deteriorating. They were concerned that it would become “just another Heritage Days...now just a community social event” rather than an educational event. They felt the logistics were becoming “a moving target”. The Parks response was to “do the bare

minimum of planning as the rest is really in the air.” One staff person acknowledged, “Yes, I’ve made assumptions, but I’m waiting for feedback.” It was recognized that a “mind shift” was necessary and that some of their operational assumptions were creating issues, but it did not seem clear to Parks what the newcomers groups wanted... a “recreation or a directed experience”? The traditional way of working for Parks staff, with a structured plan and highly directed educational experiences, was challenged by the newcomer groups. The concern that remained, however, was the “need to know who is getting off the bus” so that they could adjust in time for audience composition, needs, and challenges.

**Adaptations.** At this point, the immigrant-serving agency indicated that they were developing camping units prior to the camping field experience...as a chance to build excitement, knowledge, and language skills. The workbook idea was discussed among the EAL teachers, action researchers and Parks staff, as a way to encapsulate the needs of each partner. It was thought that the journaling idea might work if it was in a workbook that the EAL teachers used in the classroom, appropriate to each level, and that could then be transported into the field experience. The EAL teachers also thought a workbook would be helpful as it was closer to their regular practice. The researchers decided to insert their pre and post survey questions into this workbook as well. Thus, this was a significant point when interprofessional negotiation occurred.

The development of this workbook was very complex. It was developed in association with the EAL teachers to ensure that it was appropriate to the LINC levels. The researchers developed the pre- and post-survey tools in association with the Parks staff by focussing on the most prominent flora and fauna, camping site elements, campground signs, and campsite personnel. This represented an opportunity for Parks to insert their knowledge of environmental literacy and use of parks into the educational process for newcomers. Communications were complicated and what was not incorporated in the end, was how to register for a campsite and the journal writing prompts provided by Parks for field use. While many adaptations were made by all the project partners, further interprofessional discussion, particularly around rationale for the inclusion and exclusion of specific information, did not occur at this time.

### ***Learning throughout the Programming Process***

Once the realities of working with newcomer groups became apparent through dialogue with EAL administrators, teachers and researchers, staff in both park organizations worked hard to adapt. Particularly, once Parks staff had their first experience with newcomers, they began to experience **many elements of transformative learning**. The following describes these stages, which cohere to a conventional transformative learning model to a large extent. The typical stages of transformative learning are: disorientation, self-examination, critical review of assumptions, exploration of new options, planning a new course of action, acquiring new knowledge and skill, enacting provisional new roles, building competence and confidence, and re-integration (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Most of the stages were in evidence for the Parks staff, as they learned their way into understanding how to work across diverse cultures.

**Disorientation.** During pre-program planning, parks staff said that they felt “challenged” to do their regular planning in the regular way, amidst constant changes of plans, contact people, and numbers and ages of registrants. The logistics of providing camping equipment, booking group sites, and activity planning remained difficult throughout the pilot. Unaware of the tremendous challenges that immigrant newcomers face on a daily basis, often juggling low income jobs, language classes, public transportation, children and extended family, it was hard for them to

understand why there was no firm attendance commitments. What Parks staff also did not understand were the complex relationships between groups associated with the immigrant serving agency, further confusing planning. The different forms of resistance to their planning began to create a sense of disorientation among the parks staff, unsure of how to continue and in what role.

This disorientation continued when meeting the newcomers for the first time, on a sunny June day. The bus pulled up a bit late with the first cohort at the municipal park, and a melee of adults, grandparents, very young children and adolescents poured off the bus with strollers, baby seats, countless large bags, heavy clothing, full coolers, and many cameras. Faced with the first large cohort of newcomers, all the parks staff reported that their immediate reaction was feeling “flustered” and “uncertain.” They “feared lecturing” and had “reservations about inappropriate preparation.” They described “lacking self confidence” and “feeling nervous” as they realized that the challenges of communicating cross-culturally with limited English speakers would be significant. Most importantly, they did not know how to connect this population to the information they had prepared, sensing that the information would be inaccessible for most of the participants. “I found myself a little hesitant...not knowing how to act or behave because of their customs or their traditions and not being familiar with them.” In the immediacy of the moment, most of the Parks staff realized it needed to be as simple as possible.

In this state of disorientation, rather than abbreviating or adapting their presentations on the spot, the various leaders decided to “let it go” and abandoned their plans, “I had a presentation planned but just didn’t do it”. While they tried to do a welcome and formal introduction to the park, the large amount of people and commotion made the planned presentation feel untenable. There were times of confusion, waiting at picnic tables, and confused leadership. While Parks staff in both organizations did attempt some basic introductions, the agency director and some EAL teachers stepped in to help organize some of the planned activities. However, the group was not effectively divided into smaller groups for the rotating rounds of activities.

Eventually, a nature hike did occur, but it was challenging for the guide, as it was a long hike that was unmanageable by families with small children. The overly large group was strung out along the trail and many issues arose – from not being able to hear, not understanding the detailed descriptions of flora and fauna in scientific language or English, participants leaving the group, as well as not knowing basic information, such as where their children could go to the bathroom along the route. Many families had one person stronger in English, so they translated for the family unit, often providing an opportunity for school children to teach their elders. Several newcomers indicated that they had degrees and a good education and that they knew some of the trees, but they wanted to know their English common names. Overall, the engagement was one of passive observation by the newcomer audience.

Many of the other newcomers spontaneously started their own activities, such as a soccer game. Without waiting for instruction, they used the painting materials, examined the tents, or started preparation of their traditional food. The EAL teachers helped the parks staff by rephrasing many of the instructions for tent set up and putting labels on items they had studied in class. Rather than following the planned structure, the newcomers shaped the activities by their interests and culturally shaped interactions with parks.

While the newcomers were willing to try “typical Canadian” campfire food, they also came well prepared with traditional foods that respected religious practices, sharing liberally with the

parks staff, representing a thank you for the opportunity. This proved to be a significant turning point, as the newcomers invited parks staff to join them in their food, conversation and activities, acting as reverse hosts. Later, in the first weekend camping experience, one highly experienced staff person did adapt the plans on the spot, simply relying on energetic enthusiasm and non-verbal communication to cross the language divide.

**Self-Examination and Critical Review of Assumptions.** After the first municipal park experience, the five parks staff and EAL teachers all contributed recommendations for improving the next experience. More attention to a large communal eating area, smaller groups for the nature walk with more naturalists walking less distance, more sports options, more children's options, and shorter overall time lengths were all suggested. There was recognition by numerous parks staff that they should "ask people what it is they are interested in, to adjust the walk to accommodate their needs" and provide different options. There was also a recognition that they could rely on the EAL teachers to help them in their communication with the newcomer audience prior to, and during, the event.

After this initial experience, the staff realized they were "outside my comfort zone" and began to observe the EAL teachers and community leaders, who acted as cultural brokers. The teachers explained the ethnocultural backgrounds of various participants and invited parks staff to classroom or community events. In return, parks staff began to talk about what pre-teaching needed to occur before the camping days.



With the second cohort, the parks staff adopted a more responsive "open-endedness" approach and began planning a "suite of options" for activities. They began to think about ways the newcomers could practice English and began to be bolder about proceeding with some plans, with assistance. One parks staff informed other presenters that they were not teaching vocabulary or bird names, but enjoying a family day with an immigrant newcomer community – a significant shift in assumptions. Even though the parks staff had areas of expertise, they shied away from sharing this, allowing the community leaders to make the majority of the decisions. This created other issues in the next event, such as a lack of formal presentations and a confused flow of events where parks leaders were waiting for cues from the community leaders and vice versa.

Nevertheless, the focus began to shift towards a relaxed, organic process of getting to know names, hearing the stories of flora and fauna from countries of origin, and hearing the immigration and refugee stories. One staff person noted that "I learned a lot from the families. I did not realize that some of them had such hardships and such barriers to get out of these

places, when they wanted to come [to Canada].” Nature walks occurred again, but with the second cohort, ages were divided and the walks were much less structured, shorter, and family friendly.

Parks staff began to acknowledge the “language mountains” in terms of the barriers present in crosscultural and multilingual communication. They described their “blind spots” in terms of letting go of a heavily planned agenda and “suspending” their own expectations to just “allow them [newcomers] to be themselves and allow [them] just to be able to be in the park.” The parks staff began to find parallels in human behaviour, such as the behaviour of teenagers, through which they could make a human connection and reach across the common ground of humanity. However, they felt constrained to enforce park rules when families were breaking branches and using deadfall for campfire, climbing trees, burning too much wood, or occupying undesignated areas, concerned that they would be impolite to special guests.

**Exploration of New Options.** As parks staff worked with the second cohort, which was a homogenous ethnocultural group, they themselves were learning experientially and trying new communication options. They began learning names, families, immigration stories, and cultural characteristics. Parks staff described learning flexibility and how to shift plans at the last minute, leaving out some activities and adding in others. However, parks staff were still reluctant to implement the overall plan, thus the program lacked important structure.

Some staff indicated they were learning from the EAL teachers how to communicate slowly, in more accessible English and with appropriate phrasing, leaving behind the bureaucratic and scientific language that commonly infuses park discourse. They found website tips for ESL communication and circulated these documents among themselves. Some staff continued to rely on their enthusiasm, energy, and non-verbal communication skills to connect, breaking through the language mountain.

Simply enjoying frog and butterfly hunting or soccer games, which did not require language, began to build relationships with families. Engaging the children built relationships with the parents and facilitated the language learning of parents, whose children often translated. In one case, the parents were astounded as their young child, traumatized by the military in a refugee camp, warmed to a fully uniformed conservation officer who let him explore in his truck and activate the siren – part of his healing process moving “from fear to friendship.” Other families noted that this natural setting helped ease tensions with their teenager children and created some moments of shared enjoyment. For single mothers, who had lost their husbands in their countries of origin, the activities kept their children occupied, affording them a time of relaxation. These elements of informal learning proved to be the most important relational links in a constant interchange of responsiveness between the parks staff, EAL teachers, and immigrant newcomers.

**Shifting Assumptions and New Knowledge.** Many of the original assumptions of the parks staff began to shift, particularly regarding structure and the roles of the partners. Originally, the idea was that the immigrant serving agency and EAL teachers would “prepare their students” through the language training related to camping to “make it more meaningful.” The parks staff would develop the outdoor program, draft a schedule, book the space and bring in guests and activities. Now, the program goal shifted to more basic outcomes, such as enabling newcomers to be “comfortable with camping.” One staff person began to reason that more structured learning activities might occur in subsequent visits but that it would be balanced with getting to know the newcomers and their interests.

As well, ideas of leadership shifted. Parks staff explained that while they were the official leaders, their task had “switched to almost a supportive role...allow[ing] them [newcomers] to feel they are in control and leading and owning the program while at the same time I am behind the scenes looking ahead to the big picture of this event”. Originally, one parks person understood the role as a didactic teacher – giving out information in a formal session - but that evolved to understanding the role as a logistical supporter, later shifting further to a collaborative planner and mutual learner. “There is a growing on both sides, parks learning about them and being aware...and them getting to know the limitations of [parks].”

The models of learning were also shifting. One parks staff person explained that planning for such a wide range of younger children, teenagers, parents, and grandparents all with different English language and literacy levels, challenged their traditional model of educating. It was recognized that the “paradigm of education” they were working from was “the leaders tells, it is part of the kind of teacher I am.” One parks person recalled being a classroom teacher, “it was very structured...I always thought I would explore and be more open but I found this control side kept coming out of me” in trying to keep all learners active and engaged. “It is a very difficult program for me to be honest with you. I do want it to be structured and I want everyone to get off the bus and [I want] these pieces I have had to work really hard at [to work].” Yet, Parks staff learned that the planned pieces could work, but from within a different framework of assumptions.

In conversation with one of the EAL administrators, it was explained that the language program deliberately does not hire classroom teachers who have been “indoctrinated into that kind of education, [so] they can be more open and creative”. This prompted thinking by Parks staff that programming would need to change from a “more structured program” to be “more open about letting them [newcomers] grow ownership of it and if they have ownership of it, they will feel empowered and they will want to come back again...rather than them coming and getting off the bus and everything is done for them, like a traditional interpretive program.” Thus, the traditional programming model was now being reinterpreted as “being a bit of a machine of a program” in reusing tried and true activities, rather than working to “slow time, explore and learn” to see what is “resonating.” They began to realize that this does not devalue their expertise, but connects the language classroom with experiential learning in the parks, recognizing the necessary give and take between the partners and learners.

After the first cohort, various presenters began working on their presentations and consulted with each other to determine what language might be confusing and what might not relate. One staff person summed up, “It is camping, it is simple, but at the same time I know that there is lots of rich learning...[because] they have time.” They began to recognize the warming up process of the newcomers over the weekend - where as newcomers began to feel more safe and comfortable - their curiosity bloomed and they opened to learning. Parks staff found themselves responding to questions about the meaning of idiomatic phrases, even though they felt “completely caught off guard” by this need to assist in the language learning.

Finally, there was also a shift in who was doing the learning: “We are learning a lot about how the [immigrant serving] centre works.” Parks staff learned from the EAL teachers that the goal was “to empower [newcomers] to do it themselves.” New ideas were percolating, like hiring interpreters and using a peer teaching method from year to year. The parks staff appreciated that the immigrant newcomer families were gaining a rapport with them and also a familiarity with the surroundings just by being there. “[We want them to know] we value them and we want to support them coming out to the park.” They acknowledged that the EAL teachers taught

them about the newcomer population and key practices about working with different literacy and English language levels. In sum, one staff person said,

“I am a [person] under change right now daily...it is ongoing. My comfort zone is changing, excitement really, making that human connection with some of the *Karen* [Burmese] people. I learned...to try and get to know them and not be the distant observer which I found myself doing...the learning for me is to just keep learning how can I teach that [interpret the cultural norms and practices here in Canada].”

**New Actions, Roles, and Competency.** The next phase in their change process was the focus on rapport-building. Several parks staff indicated that one of their key learnings was “growing the rapport” with immigrant newcomer communities and “learn[ing] just my own patience”. Numerous staff people learned about the refugee and immigrant stories of the newcomers, particularly what camping meant to them. “They just shared with me that the last time they saw camping equipment piled up like this was when they were fleeing the Burmese army.” So, the global literacy of the parks staff was growing:

“One of the little girls was saying back in Thailand we have big trees, but she was with the Karen [Burmese], so I was trying to figure out where they had fled from and who they were fleeing from and just where Burma is. These are just places on maps to me and I found it just sort of brought out my own understanding of the world.”

Another staff person noted “I started to listen to more what they were saying, to what they wanted to learn, rather than me...let[ting] a million words ramble out.” Both staff people realized that “there is lots of that kind of learning for me about just being approachable.”

In an unplanned way, the learning occurred as newcomers were able to make connections from their country of origin to Canada. Thus their learning was built from their existing knowledge base. For instance, some of the children had found some snake skins, prompting a conversation about “snakes back home. And one of the young girls was telling me what it was like back home and the forest and things like that.” He realized that he had missed an opportunity to find out what “a park [is] like back home” and thus how he could have build the learning from existing understandings. The Burmese later explained to Parks staff, that they did not have parks back home. “They would go camping, they would just go across the road, chop some firewood, kill a pig, and live off the land.” This gap in understanding was recognized, when the park conservation officer gave a talk about not picking flowers, not walking into other campsites, and protecting certain areas. One parks person said that the Burmese explained, that in Canada “they were really aware of rules...that there’s sort of a formal presence in this natural area...[but] they all like it and they all think it is for a good cause, that they get it, that you are protecting for us to come and enjoy.”

As parks staff were now offering much less structure, they began to be asked by the newcomers for certain activities. By the third cohort, all the staff noted that they had learned that less structure was good to facilitate the rapport building, but that they still needed to offer some structured activities. So, they began announcing the time and place of specific activities, inviting participation, but allowing freedom of choice, dependent on learner and family needs. The activities were spread out during the day to allow for family time, unstructured time, and space for spontaneous activities. They were careful to ensure that a welcome and site orientation were given immediately upon arrival to ensure a sense of comfort and safety.

It was the spontaneous activities that became the most meaningful and memorable activities – from sharing cultural songs and stories around the campfire, to making banana boats together, to impromptu soccer games, frog hunting and butterfly chasing. It also enabled the parks staff to reconnect with their own family immigration stories, such as Portuguese parents learning to speak English or a Scottish grandmother’s boat trip across the ocean. The newcomers facilitated these ancestral connections, making a powerful impact on parks staff. In sum, all the parks staff talked about “bonding” with the participants, leading to ongoing relationships.



**Re-integration by Becoming Advocates and Mentors.** Finally, Parks staff began to become advocates for newcomers. They began to shift standard park practices to accommodate the newcomers. In retrospect, they were able to name their own learning process and advocate for changed practices within their organization to benefit newcomers.

For instance, they realized that “being able to have the demographics of the audience before the weekend” is important so that a range of activities could be prepared and other planning, such as translators, anticipated. They tried to adapt facilities for communal cooking, gendered tenting arrangements, and realized the need for converting information into multiple languages and easier English. They began to be attentive to food preferences emanating from religious needs, for instance replacing hot dogs and marshmallows with nonpork products for Muslims. Arms-length staff began to be alarmed when large amounts of fire wood were being consumed in the fire pit and for the large communal cooking pots. When the EAL director explained “They’re freezing, they are from Ethiopia!” the parks staff person said, “I remember the Ethiopian families in their snow suits on the beach in 28 degrees. And I said, okay, fine.” So, they began to advocate for newcomers with other parks colleagues.

The Parks staff most closely involved in this project also became mentors for their other colleagues. By the last cohort, they learned to speak slowly or partner different levels of English speakers. One person could identify what issues were arising with the presentations of their parks colleagues, “As far as ESL and new Canadians, what the Rangers said would have been called inappropriate. It was very thick language, it wasn’t watered down, it was very fast.” Therefore, the parks staff identified the need for mentoring among their own staff. They responded to the EAL teachers, ie. “make sure you mention Aspen and trees because that is what they did in the classes, to try to connect your talk to real things.” It was also recognized that many newcomers were wary and uncertain and that the first day-long event was a testing ground for whether newcomers wanted to go on the weekend event. So, parks staff began to see their programming through the eyes and experiences of newcomers. Parks staff also noted the issues that might arise when newcomers want to return to the parks and normal barriers are not removed, such as cost and transportation, or they are not in a group campground. They

worked to help other parks staff understand the context of newcomers and to identify the learning needs of their own organization.



Many friendships were created that lasted beyond this pilot project, children of parks staff and newcomers continue friendships by email, Facebook, phone and visiting. Sharing of other outdoor adventures between park staff and newcomer families has continued. Numerous parks staff kept in contact with newcomers, particularly those who wanted to seek employment with the parks, as naturalists, interpreters, or conservation officers, or who wanted to share new camping adventures. Plans for winter camping and events the following summer were discussed and planning was initiated. The excitement of this program spread throughout the government office, with many families asking to join the weekends as volunteers, illustrating the profound potential of this program for intercultural relationship building, social integration, and language growth.

### Summary of Interview Data from Parks Staff

The Parks staff most involved in this project, went through the various stages of a transformative learning process. This learning process was difficult, but overall, the Parks staff were able to learn their way into intercultural learning and interprofessional learning that resulted in a successful pilot project.

The Parks staff saw themselves as the coordinators of the camping experience, which was affirmed by the other partners. Initially, in their enthusiasm, they had several assumptions that created issues as they worked with the partners. In particular, given workload pressures and other factors, they expected they could do their traditional interpretation activities and start from Parks organizational messaging, as usual. Despite good intentions, parks staff did not understand the key realities of newcomers, the diversity among newcomers, and the realities of immigrant-serving agencies, leading to a steep learning curve throughout the project. These issues and their experience of working with newcomers challenged their standard ways of working and created a sense of disorientation and being outside their comfort zone. This learning process is not uncommon for organizations and their personnel making the shift to inclusive workplaces and programming that reaches culturally diverse populations.

The traditional planning of parks, including the implementation of the expert model, includes executing a learning experience in a fairly controlled environment and with readily understood audiences, such as school groups. The unpredictability of the realities of newcomers and immigrant serving agencies caused Parks staff to examine their practices and review operating assumptions. Through experiential learning, they rose to the challenge by becoming much more

flexible and responsive in their standard planning practices and using a more organic, “open-ended pace” that considered what was meaningful for the newcomers.

Originally, Parks staff assumed that the in-class teaching of the EAL teachers was a discrete, stand-alone element that did not involve them and thus, they did not draw upon the experiences and knowledge of the EAL teachers. However, the Parks staff view of leadership shifted, where they began to understand leadership as supporting newcomers, being collaborative planners with the other partners, and being mutual learners alongside the newcomers and EAL teachers.

In future programming, working in tandem with the teachers even further, understanding the different LINC levels, and providing important curricular materials to the teachers would help integrate the material that Parks wished to convey to newcomers and would expand their own capacities to communicate. While the curricular units were successful and modest learning gains resulted, both partners could have worked more concertedly and explicitly toward their program goals. Discussions about pedagogy and about the nature of the learners would also have occurred naturally. Further, the EAL teachers would have felt more freedom to assist in communication *in situ* and they could have been more explicitly part of the planning processes.

Originally, Parks staff did not understand who the participants would be but they wanted to provide the best Parks had to offer, assuming they could do this within their regular structure using tried and true activities. However, as their models of learning began to change, their paradigm of learning moved toward less structured and more active, exploratory engagement to see what resonated with this new group of participants. They also realized that they were doing the learning – about newcomers by listening to their histories and interests, about the immigrant-serving centre, and about EAL language teaching.

The stress of this new learning experience could have been alleviated with a needs assessment of newcomer backgrounds and learning needs (including language and literacy levels, ethnocultural or religious background, pre-immigration urban or rural residency, types of immigration stories, previous nature experiences, pre-existing environmental knowledge, and pre-existing traumas) as well as relationship building with newcomers and interprofessionally with the immigrant-serving agency. In the end, Parks staff learned patience, listening, rapport, responsiveness, spontaneity, and approachability with newcomers as well as receiving a strong global education in return.

Originally, the planned activities were heavily language dependent – either verbal or written – but the Parks staff learned that this had potential for anxiety among some newcomers. While Parks staff did learn about the characteristics and the interests of different groups of newcomers, the next step would be to more effectively build programming on the existing knowledge, life experiences and skills of the newcomers. More strategically choosing activities in relation to the level of functionality in the English language or literacy levels in any language would create greater learning gains. Offering structure in the programming but doing so from these transformed assumptions while retaining the opportunity for spontaneity, would also take programming the next step. Working more closely with the EAL teachers would yield much stronger learning gains both in language and environmental literacy.

Originally, Parks staff assumed that newcomers just needed information and thus did not think about whether that immigrant newcomers had significant connections to land, what their understanding of parks might be, or the existence of environmental commitments. In fact, the

newcomers had substantial environmental knowledge, commitments and practices, and thus their main issues were different than expected. The next step for Parks staff is to bridge from these existing understandings to create new meanings about parks and park practices here in Canada. In actuality, their educational role is one of meaning-making – making meaning of the landscapes that newcomers encounter and making meaning of the process of integration socially. Camping and parks in Alberta are privileged settings for learning through storytelling, that creates a sense of belonging geographically and socially.

Now that some Parks staff have had this transformative learning experience through their educational engagement with newcomers, they began to become advocates for newcomers within their own organization as well as mentors for other Parks staff in adapting their practices appropriately. Connecting this to policy changes for creating inclusive workplaces and for creating all parks in Alberta as welcoming places for peoples across all diverse cultural backgrounds is the next step.



# Synthesis and Analysis of Findings

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## ***Project Success***

Overall, the *Learning a Language, Learning the Land* project was a groundbreaking success. As an innovative initiative between a group of partners who had never worked together previously, the results were very positive. In particular, the project offered newcomers access to parks that otherwise would not have occurred. It also offered a learning experience for newcomers - about municipal and provincial parks, an orientation to camping and camping skills, and a guided introduction to local ecosystems - thus lowering the risks of a first time experience and facilitating access for newcomers through the provision of transportation, camping equipment, and group camping sites.

The levels of newcomer enjoyment were high and they consistently and enthusiastically expressed their appreciation for the learning opportunity and the camping experience. Important learning gains and significant intercultural learning was realized between all the partners and participants.

There was more newcomer demand than ability to provide this first time exposure to parks. It was concluded that there is significant potential for expansion of this first-exposure program to additional immigrant-serving agencies and additional parks organizations.

## ***Newcomer Profile***

In total, 330 newcomers participated in one or more of the activities. Almost 30% of the participants came from sub-Saharan Africa and 18% came from China and South East Asia. The majority of the newcomers had been in Canada less than 5 years (79%), were female (65%), were under the age of 40 (71%), came from large urbanized centres, and were visible minorities.

## ***Barriers for Newcomers in Accessing Parks***

It was clear from all the data sets, that the majority of newcomers would not have access to provincial parks or ever receive an orientation to municipal and provincial parks without such a guided experience. Only 22% of the participants had ever visited an Alberta provincial park, although 50% had visited municipal parks and 47% had visited national parks. This contrasts to 40% of Albertans who have visited a provincial park in the last three years. However, once this first visit has occurred for newcomers, it was evident that the desire for repeat visitation had been fostered. Nevertheless, there are several significant barriers that prevent first-time visits as well as repeat visitation after first exposure.

The most significant barrier was transportation. Particularly provincial parks, but also some municipal parks, assume a car culture. The majority of newcomers who have been in Canada under 5 years, do not own a car. Thus, municipal parks are far more accessible for newcomers through a public transportation system. The collaboration of partners to provide transportation made it possible for newcomers to make a first visit particularly to a provincial park. It was clear to the newcomers and to the partners involved, that collectively arranged transportation

would be necessary for repeat visits, until newcomers become more financially established. The newcomers all expressed that they would return if transportation was available. For less accessible municipal parks, advocating for bus service that enhances access closer to these sites and for transporting camping equipment is important.

The second most significant barrier is access to camping equipment. Most newcomers live within very sparse financial circumstances and they do not have disposable income for non-essentials like camping equipment. This pilot program provided the equipment permanently to the immigrant-serving agency, which could then be accessed by immigrant newcomers at any time. Continuing to purchase camping equipment for immigrant-serving agencies to create a permanent lending service, is one step toward alleviating this barrier and creating access.

These two barriers point to an underlying barrier – the low income of newcomers. In the past, typical park users have been middle class and often well educated, as cited in the literature. Yet, also evident in the literature, most newcomers are better educated with more established careers than previous migrants. Yet, they find that their income levels fall after reaching Canada, largely from the inability to find work in their area of training. To make sufficient income, many newcomers work long hours or multiple jobs, reducing the time for recreational activities. Many newcomers live in inner city neighbourhoods or neighbourhoods with other vulnerable populations. Given inherent safety issues, the mobility of newcomers and the freedom of movement for children are curtailed. Thus, the need for recreation is high. However, for many newcomers in the first five years, recreation must be cost-free or minimal cost.

The third barrier relates to the cost of park usage. Currently, park user fees and other service expenses related to parks and camping, such as showers and firewood, are further barriers to newcomer access. One of the greatest challenges for parks, then, is to adjust policies and practices to accommodate low income groups. While parks are themselves financially stretched, variable policies for different income groups would be one step to equalize opportunities for access.

### ***Building Inclusive Parks***

The cost of access to recreational opportunities is a significant challenge for the inclusivity of Albertan society. To retain rates of visitorship, all parks need to be welcoming places for an increasingly diverse Alberta population. Inclusion can best be initiated through an articulation of the philosophy, policy, and principles that will guide future practices. It is also best initiated by identifying what creates welcoming spaces for new user groups, as well as identifying how their needs in park spaces will be met.

Many of the newcomer participants were not traditional nuclear families but rather extended families, single young women, single mothers with young children, siblings, or significant persons who act as kin. The majority of participants were women, illustrating that this kind of safe environment and guided experience provides a conduit to an experience that many non-traditional families would not otherwise have, or be able to facilitate for themselves. Night time security, parallel programming for children of single mothers, single mother weekends, and youth programming are all program formats to be considered, perhaps with other partners, as a way to build inclusivity for more vulnerable and low-income groups.

As camping has generally been a male-accompanied activity and most often for younger, middle class, able-bodied, white groups, a culture shift is required to make provincial parks accessible

for more vulnerable groups, including women, seniors, visible minorities and the differently-abled. This will require changes in hiring practices, the extension of any existing inclusion policies, and the implementation of extensive practices that make parks welcoming places.

Through this research, it was clear that newcomers wish to visit parks but that they will engage with these spaces in ways that are culturally appropriate for them. While willing to try more common Canadian activities and partaking in typical sightseeing activities, the use of parks by newcomers will change the engagement patterns toward more social-oriented, more sports-oriented, more multi-generational, and lower energy usage patterns that favour relaxation over adventure activities. Over the long term, this will require more safety services, services for babies and young children, a wider diversity of sports facilities, more collective cooking facilities, more sitting areas, tent platforms for mothers with young children so they are off the ground, access for the differently abled, and attention to spaces like interfaith prayer spaces. One area of challenge is also attempting to engage newcomers and visible minorities in winter recreational activities.

While exclusivity was a hidden reality in this research, the literature speaks to parks as traditionally “whites only” spaces and the fears that visible minorities have around discriminatory attitudes or racist behaviours, especially what is called polite racism. In this study, this was mentioned in the context of how Canadian-born folks regard newcomers who do not understand or practice the accepted rules in parks. Therefore, the likelihood of discrimination and racism occurring in parks can be alleviated by more accessible information for newcomers around park rules and norms, so that newcomers do not unwittingly provoke such attitudes or behaviours. Education around park rules had less emphasis in this project and therefore the learning gains were modest, at 10%. This is an area where more education would be highly valuable. Newcomers were very supportive of the park rules once they understood the larger purpose, such as protection and conservation.

One easier area where inclusion can be implemented, is in the written materials. In the assessment of provincial parks informational materials, it was found that the reading level was over a Grade 10 level or even beyond a high school reading level, which is inaccessible for low literacy or new English language learners. The municipal park materials were inconsistent in terms of accessibility and varied from a Grade 3 to 9 reading level. Website or paper-based information, particularly vital documents such as registration materials, can be more effectively and simply rewritten with English language learners in mind, at no more than a Grade 8 reading level. For basic information and particularly safety information, it is highly recommended that the materials be translated into the languages of the larger ethnocultural groups, for broad dissemination.

Hiring practices that reflect growing demographic diversity is also a sign of inclusive policies. The majority of staff involved in this program were white, Canadian-born, middle class and often men. Several young newcomers, particularly women, indicated a career interest in parks and others were interested in volunteering. Thus, reaching out to diverse ethnocultural communities with employment opportunities, career days, and volunteer opportunities, would help to attract young newcomers to volunteer or work in the parks system, as fulltime and seasonal staff.

A collective effort that creates welcoming places of employment and recreation, where newcomers feel valued and included and have access to a full range of social and recreational services, employment, and leadership opportunities, defines the essence of inclusivity.



### ***Capacity Building among Newcomer Groups***

Sufficient time will be required to build community capacity among newcomer organizations for camping. Time will also be required for disseminating knowledge and skills into these communities in a way that will build regular visitation habits. To enhance park usership over the long term, leadership needs to be built within various ethnocultural immigrant communities and among immigrant serving agencies, to enable them to facilitate camping for their own communities and clients. Thus, it is also important to continue this particular program for at least another five years to ensure that sufficient capacity has been built within the newcomer communities and agencies to self-generate repeat visitation.

Given the interest of specific participants, it was clear that leadership development workshops for peer leaders in newcomer communities would help to sustain the capacity to self-direct a variety of outdoor activities. The model of sequential learning used in this project could be packaged as part of a leadership training process, progressively building the knowledge and skills for outdoor leadership. The parks organizations could then move into an ongoing supportive role after five years of building capacity among newcomer groups, training leaders, and immigrant serving agencies.

It was also clear that visits to municipal parks are a stepping stone to provincial parks and national parks visitation. This succession of visitation can be coordinated between parks organizations, as it was in this project, to progressively build skills, knowledge, and comfort.

### ***Previous Park Experiences***

Even though only 32% of the newcomers had some previous experience of camping, camping as a concept holds a wide range of meaning for newcomers, dependent on their country of origin. For many newcomers, a park does not signify a protected area that is regulated by state rules and personnel. Parks in various countries of origin may not have been as large in size and may include tracts of wilderness. Rather, their use of the term parks may refer to recreational locations, such as beaches, rivers, lakes, and mountains, and may include amenities such as hotels and restaurants. Regular activities would have been picnicking, sports, games, swimming,

children's playgrounds and communal eating with large groups of families and friends. Camping may not necessarily relate to tenting, but rather sleeping away from home. In some Muslim cultures, camping is a male-only activity. A small minority came from countries with no concept of parks. In this case, these areas would have been the sites for hunting, cooking, and gathering of materials for building or foodstuffs. So, a shared meaning of camping and parks cannot be assumed.

In most cases, newcomers have very fond memories of these recreational sites and parks in their countries of origin, and were eager to reminisce about these experiences. Some were feeling a sense of loss but they were very open to developing new attachments to the land they now call home. Students provided many examples of the types of activities they engaged in while living in their country of origin, generally family oriented activities with a strong social and cultural focus. For example, many of the students shared that while visiting parks in their country of origin they engaged in cultural celebrations, dances, weddings, and a variety of cultural community activities. There was also evidence to suggest that students understood parks as a place in which they could engage in sports activities. Many students talked about playing sports in parks in their country of origin, with badminton and soccer being the two most named sports activities. In light of this evidence, it suggests that Alberta Parks should make it clear to newcomer groups that these types of sports and cultural activities can take place in the many parks of Alberta as well. This would of course require that the appropriate amenities would be available for these types of activities.

It is important to note that, in the pre-interviews, a wide variety of thoughts and attitudes were shared about camping. In many cases the comments made by newcomers were positive but in some cases, they were negative. Some newcomers talked about the discomfiting associations of camping in refugee camps. Others talked about the challenges associated with this type of close living arrangement and or with cultural associations, such as being dirty, being on the ground, or tanned skin connoting manual labour or rural residence, signs of lower status. Newcomers also talked about some of the dangers associated with camping in their country of origin, such as dangerous animals that prevented them from camping or their feelings of vulnerability related to being attacked by other humans. While comments like these were rare, it is important to consider that not all newcomers relish the opportunity to camp or at least they bring some initial fears with them to any camping experience.

Given negative associations with armed officers, particularly for refugees, personnel with sidearms can raise serious alarms for newcomers. It was not clear to most newcomers, even at the end of the field experiences, the difference between a conservation officer and a police officer. Had that been explained, the level of tension when they appeared would have dissipated. While the newcomers understood the interpreters to be educational staff, it was apparent from the pre- and post-surveys, that they could not connect the uniforms and titles of parks personnel to the function. Thus, these distinctions need more systematic instruction.

As many of the newcomers were highly urbanized, they talked about urban parks that had no natural areas but were sites with significant amounts of cultural events and performances as well as sports, exercise, picnicking, and socializing. With these associations, wilderness and camping may be intimidating.

## ***Expectations of Parks in Alberta***

Despite previous experiences of parks in their countries of origin, newcomers had quite realistic expectations of parks in Alberta. Informed by TV and other mainline media, they expected a natural, wilderness setting, although they did not necessarily expect the size. Their goals were relaxation, sightseeing, enjoying nature, viewing wildlife, learning about camping and Canadian practices, and practicing their English.

It is important to note the variable use of the word “park” in Canadian discourse. When used in a municipal context, it usually refers to a manicured, lawn-based area surrounded by natural wild areas, while parks used in the provincial context, connotes a wilderness area with varying degrees of amenities. Distinguishing between these two types of parks and their distinct rules as well as the commonalities across all public parks, in terms of protecting habitat and ecosystems while still allowing for human recreational activity, is important for newcomer clarity.

The primary concerns of newcomers for a first exposure visit were, if family members could accompany them, the costs, and the sleeping arrangements. Secondary to this was what food and clothing would be needed and how to stay warm and safe from animals.

Newcomers were taken to group campsites with more amenities than individual campsite areas. This may inadvertently raise expectations of what newcomers will find upon a return visit to an individual site. Therefore, clarifying the different types of sites for newcomers will avoid future disappointment and help to ensure proper preparation.

## ***Environmental Awareness***

Only the students in the higher level language programs could express their views about environmental topics, generally in LINC levels 3-4. There was a high level of awareness and even passion around environmental topics and our environmental challenges. They understood the goals of protection and conservation and could easily give examples from their countries of origin or from Canada where people were not respectful of the natural world. They had a basic degree of ecoliteracy as they discussed how the balance between the natural and human world has been broken. They could give examples of how human actions have compromised natural ecosystems, through the introduction of exotic species or industrialization. They were concerned about climate change and the slow demise of so many living systems. Finally, they had a high sense of responsibility to take personal action, even though they explained that large scale systemic change was primarily needed. Some found Canadian practices to be exemplary but others found Canada lagging behind practices in their own countries.

## ***Major Learning Gains***

One of the primary findings is that newcomers do not distinguish between municipal, provincial and national parks. The large majority of newcomers were not aware of, could not name, and had not been to a provincial park. Despite the lack of awareness of provincial parks, there was still a “latent” interest in visiting provincial parks and great excitement in the possibility of this orientation to camping at a provincial park. If Alberta Parks is interested in attracting newcomers to provincial parks, it is apparent that a clear communication strategy is required to inform newcomers about provincial parks, about the recreational opportunities within commuting distance of most urbanized centres, and represent newcomers engaging with more

culturally-shaped activities. Given that 30% of visible minority groups are born in Canada and some of these groups are likely more financially stable than newcomers, marketing should also include these groups.

Without any previous instruction, newcomers were able to correctly identify 60% of the most common flora and fauna in Alberta, with birds the most well identified and trees the least. They were able to correctly identify common campsite items almost 50% of the time and common campground signs 62% of the time. While the language teachers were not clear on the significance of ecoliteracy and flora and fauna knowledge, the newcomers enjoyed these identification activities both in the classroom and in the field, as it helped them to create a sense of belonging to a new land. They made comparisons between the flora and fauna in their own country to the natural elements in Alberta, which can be used to scaffold learning.

Together, the in-class learning and then field learning during the camping experiences, resulted in modest to significant learning gains. The average improvement in the recognition of the most common flora and fauna was 29% (resulting in almost 90% recognition), varying from a 40% improvement in tree identification to a 23% improvement in insect identification. The average improvement in recognition of common campsite equipment, parks signs, and parks personnel was 12%. As participants worked with campsite equipment, the learning gains were 14% but improvement in parks signs and personnel was only 10%, as this was not systematically profiled in the field activities.

The learning activities, both in-class and field learning, were vital to familiarize newcomers with norms, practices, and rules associated with parks. One of the participant groups did not have the in-class learning preparation and were much less aware of the norms, practices and rules, although they did learn some basic camping skills. Combining classroom learning with experiential activities proved to have a powerful impact on learning, with the field learning accentuating the more abstract learning in the classroom. Therefore, it is important to have some organized pre-camping learning activities to heighten the overall learning and create a higher level of readiness for the field experience.

More importantly, the conversational practice of English in an informal setting and the use of camping vocabulary *in situ* resulted in a rising sense of confidence, vocabulary use, and colloquial expression, according to the newcomers and the language teachers.



## ***Benefits of Camping and Environmental Literacy***

The overall assessment of the camping experience by newcomers was that it met or exceeded their expectations. They recounted the many benefits – from physical and psychological benefits such as fresh air, relaxation and de-stressing to a sense of adventure. They expressed the emotional and aesthetic benefits such as reconnecting with nature and appreciating beauty, to the positive impact on families in terms of freedom of movement, new experiences, family bonding, and a sense of hope in the midst of the stressful process of settlement.

The literature indicates that the immigration experience often leads to alienation between teenagers and their parents. This alienation can lead to teenagers joining gangs for a sense of belonging. Various parent participants reported that the park setting enabled them to relax and communicate more freely with their adolescents. Some of the newer literature supports the impact of natural settings on soothing stressful relations, reducing adult aggression, and enhancing cognitive, social, and emotional functioning. Thus, the setting is ideal for family bonding and is critical for families under tremendous amounts of stress. For adults and children confined to small apartments or houses with little freedom of movement in their neighbourhoods, they could also be experiencing what Richard Louv calls “nature-deficit disorder.” In recounting the effect on their children, newcomer parents were keenly aware of the importance of this kind of nature connection for the health of their family.

Environmental literacy is a complex concept but in its simplest form it relates to the human ability to engage the natural world in a way which leads us “to see things in their wholeness” (Orr, 1994). In other words, seeing Miquelon Lake as a parkland ecosystem in which all the elements are held in a dynamic balance to maintain health, is an important learning for humans who need to learn to mimic these systems in their human-made systems if they hope to create sustainable communities. Thus, environmental literacy is about understanding this interaction between the natural and human systems.

In addition to the ability to read and write, ecological literacy implies an intimate knowledge of our landscapes, and an affinity for the living world. In ecological literacy, the focus changes from the spoken word as it is in EAL learning to the “language of nature” (Nicholsen 2002, p.28). This encourages participants to move from the idea that they are only verbal speakers, to the notion that they in fact need to be listeners, especially as it relates to what nature has to tell them. The call of the coyote (which some students heard), cry of a gull (a common sound at Miquelon Lake,) and the wind in the trees (often heard at the campsite) all had something to say to each and every one of the participants. Giving newcomers the formal opportunity to listen, share their stories about what they were experiencing, and what it meant to them would have more effectively helped initiate a dialogue of connection, belonging and ecological knowledge.

As the newcomers shared their stories of their direct experiences in the park, the potential to develop an ecological identity emerged (Clayton and Opatow, 2003). An ecological identity refers to the myriad of ways in which humans can construe themselves in light of their relationship with the natural world (Tomashow, 1995). Developing an ecological identity is a highly relational process impacted by the unique cultural context in which an individual lives. Each participant comes with a whole relational history from their country of origin that they started to describe, ie. the similarities between the lakes or how only the wealthy had access to camping next to the water and their sense of exclusion. In terms of the participants, each newcomer has the potential to develop an ecological identity in this new land which would be unique to their personal disposition and cultural experience. An ecological identity does not

deny or usurp other personal identities but may help anchor their identity to the landscapes in which they live. An ecological identity is at its core a 'place identity' which evokes strong feelings of belonging and connection. It is not difficult to see how developing an ecological identity may prove to be a benefit for individuals who are experiencing the unique challenges associated with the immigration process.

Finally, all landscapes are storied. Hearing newcomer stories of landscapes from their home countries and telling stories of their experiences within the landscapes here, builds a sense of belonging both socially and environmentally. Park interpreters who tell other kinds of stories about these landscapes, scientific or cultural, help to assign meaning to a new geography for newcomers. This sense of place is vital for immigrant integration.

### **Best Practices**

As Taylor found (2006), when learning activities are offered in public, informal locations such as parks and museums in free flow situations, the adult educator typically takes the role of "purveyor of knowledge" (p. 301) rather than a relationship-building or a knowledge construction role. While the activities may be fun, relaxed, engaging and hands-on, they are often still undertaken within a transmission model of teaching. We found that parks staff in both organizations moved between either an expert model or a helping model, but both focussed on the transmission of information.

However, this kind of project offers a rich opportunity for relationship-building and knowledge construction. This did evolve over time, when parks staff took the time to understand the newcomer population, hear their immigration stories, and learn about their backgrounds and experiential knowledge.

In terms of best practices in adult education, the **first principle is to start with the existing knowledge and experience of the learners**, rather than with organizational messaging or expert knowledge. An effective way to facilitate this is through storytelling. Offering newcomers the opportunity to describe parks in their countries of origin and their favourite activities builds bridges across what is known and what is becoming known. Storytelling is also a community building activity as newcomers, language teachers and parks staff learn about each other at a human level.

Rather than seeing newcomers as visitors or a new audience, which reinforces their sense of not belonging and passivity, seeing each other as fellow explorers or travellers, helps to build mutual learning. Further, the parks staff are not really the interpreters, but they facilitate the interpretation and meaning-making activities of newcomers – this is an important difference. Their job is to provide meaningful contact with nature, ask more open ended questions, and listen to responses as newcomers make meaning, rather than only providing information.

The **second principle for best practices is to know your audience**. It was found that parks personnel only minimally engaged the participants prior to the programming. A key adult education principle that should be integrated into parks programming is to understand the context of the learners before planning any programs. Understanding the language background, level of English language, level of education, ethnocultural or religious background, urban and rural residency prior to immigration, types of immigration/refugee stories, previous nature experiences, previous traumas, and pre-existing environmental knowledge would contribute to

building more effective learning activities. EAL teachers, community leaders, and immigrant agency events can all provide opportunities for exposure.

In terms of best practices, a **third principle is to foster interprofessional learning** between the language teachers and the parks staff.

It was found that the English as a Second Language (EAL) teachers and administrators were not familiar with the principles and processes of environmental education or the working knowledge of the parks educators. Thus, the parks staff could facilitate the environmental literacy learning of the language teachers.

It was found that the majority of municipal and provincial parks staff were not aware of *English as Another Language* training processes, the various language levels, and what they could expect in terms of the English language facility of newcomers. Thus, the language teachers could facilitate the learning of parks staff in terms of the processes related to English-as-an-Additional Language.

It was found that the educational approaches used by parks staff do not correspond to general adult learning principles and, in this case, the educational levels of the participants. Therefore, a **fourth principle is for parks educational staff to learn about adult education principles**, to move beyond a lively transmission model toward dialogue, mutuality and responsiveness, as described in existing parks interpretation research. While the parks staff learned the basic principles of adult education experientially, the principles of participatory planning, self-directedness, situated cognition, and holistic learning could intentionally be used to design the pedagogical engagement.

Similarly, by integrating more audience interaction into all of their programs, they would create more opportunities for intercultural relationships in relaxed park settings.

**A fifth best practices principle is the importance of sequential and experiential learning.**

The model that the partners developed of three segments – in-class learning, Day in the Park, and weekend camping – coheres well with adult education principles and was found to be very effective in yielding modest to significant learning gains in knowledge and skills. Laddering learning from student stories to in-class learning to a day park exposure to a weekend park exposure is important for the progressive building of knowledge and skills. This model involved a developmental process that met student learning needs and adequately prepared them for each consecutive activity. This also helped inspire confidence and pride in the students.

Students also gained significantly from those activities that were more “hands on” and gave them the opportunity to learn experientially. Where the outdoor learning reinforced the classroom learning, there were much more significant learning gains. Most important seemed to be experiential learning. When the participants handled an item or witnessed flora and fauna in their natural elements, the learning was enhanced. If objects of study, such as signs and personnel, were passively present in the field but not accompanied with systematic interpretation, the learning gains were much less.

In terms of the three camping experiences, students appeared to enjoy activities that involved more experiential type learning. One group spoke very positively about the time they spent beside a pond searching for tadpoles and using magnifying glasses to observe various things they found in the pond. In a number of the groups, students talked enthusiastically about the

opportunity to go swimming in the lake. It is difficult to determine exactly why students liked these activities so much. Perhaps they provided a break from the effort it took to speak English all the time or it provided direct physical contact with the environment - a visceral yet unique experience for many learners since being in Canada. For these reasons it seems that these types of activities should be included in other programs of this nature.

**A sixth best practices principle is to link learning goals and desired outcomes with learning activities.** It was found that the established learning goals did not guide program development and thus the activities chosen did not specifically correspond to any learning outcomes. This is one of the reasons that the learning gains were not as robust as they could have been. Appropriate learning activities related to each set of outcomes should be offered to ensure the desired outcomes in skills and knowledge are reached. Learning outcomes related to the three day camping experience need to be more clearly defined and prioritized to assist with appropriate activity planning.

To some extent, this began to happen near the end of the process as both the language teachers and parks educators became more familiar with each other. Therefore, the learning gains would be much more substantive if the partners worked more collaboratively, building upon each other's strengths. For instance, naming and explaining the camping equipment more deliberately as it is used and explaining the parks signs and personnel as they were encountered would also have enhanced the learning. One final example is to follow-up the camping weekend with deliberate in-class activities to solidify the learning gains.

**A seventh best practices principle is to build a range of intergenerational and age appropriate activities and offer choices** throughout the weekend camping event. Families were concerned that the weekend camping experience be shared with all their family members, as they would eventually return with their families, so that the whole family will have built skills and knowledge.

Often, children are able to assist the adults in language translation just as adults share their memories and knowledge, all part of multi-generational learning. Parents also indicated the importance of age separate activities more attuned to children's needs while offering parents, especially single parents, some respite and personal enjoyment. Single parents noted that the camping experience was beneficial for younger children, in enabling their safe, independent exploration outside, with few needed constraints. One parent noted the experience helped heal emotional wounds and fears from refugee camps. It was reported that children benefitted through interacting with and learning from the new landscape, as well as sharing food and song across various cultural groups.

Families were requesting more structured activities but also to have some choices among those structured activities to meet their own needs at that moment. In particular, designating core experiences and optional experiences would help to offer sufficient structure with additional time for newcomers to pursue individual and family interests.

Participants also noted that guided interpretation walks were not appropriate for the diversity found within the participant groups – including babies to elderly and school children to PhD-trained adults. The initial groups were too large, the walks used extensive scientific language/concepts, and they demanded too much walking, leaving groups strung out over a very long distance. Some participants were left behind or surged ahead, creating safety issues. The walks did not seek to make connections between the ecological knowledge of participants

and the local ecology, thereby drawing in audience participation. Rather they were traditional information-giving sessions. As was planned for later cohorts, adding additional educators for smaller, more interactive groups would alleviate these facilitation issues.

**An eighth best practices principle is to adjust the goals regarding environmental literacy according to the language capacity** of newcomers. Learners at the literacy level or LINC levels 1-3 do have not sufficient language abilities to engage with environmental concepts, even though they may have this capacity in their own language. Thus, recognizing the limitations and developing environmental literacy activities at each language level would lead to more learning gains, particularly regarding environmental literacy.

### ***Return Visitation***

By the end of the camping weekend, a majority of the students indicated that they had enjoyed themselves and were keen to “try it again”. It was clear that enabling the families of newcomers to attend the Day in the Park and the weekend camping activity ensured high attendance for each activity. At the end of the camping experience many students talked about the positive impact the project had on their families and identified these positive factors as the main reason why they would want to visit an Alberta Park again. Apparently some students had started to plan for sharing resources like cars, food, etc. for them to revisit Miquelon Lake. It is important to note that the students desire to revisit Miquelon Lake came from the positive impact the camping experiences had on both themselves *and their families*. The positive family experience that the camping weekend offered seemed to be the catalyst to try camping again. This suggests that when encouraging newcomers to visit provincial parks, the focus should be placed upon the important role provincial parks can play in enhancing family connections and experiences.

It was found in the literature and by our observation that parks infrastructure and programming is oriented to white, middle class, male-accompanied, nuclear families and small groups of individuals interested in more solitary and adventure activities. Yet, the typical “Canadian” camping experience is not what newcomer groups are necessarily looking for. Newcomers enjoyed doing “what Canadians did” but also the freedom to enact their own ideas of recreation and camping, a delicate balance-finding that characterizes the settlement process.

The literature and our data confirm that parks usage is determined by cultural preferences, requiring a wider understanding of camping and park practices by parks staff and Canadians generally. We found that park usage patterns within newcomer communities tend to focus more on social activities and large group events, requiring more extensive cooking facilities, more services for the activities of small children, and more sports areas. As well, spaces are required for religious needs, such as Muslim prayer five times daily. Similarly, other cultures not predicated on a nuclear family arrangement may not conform to nuclear family tenting arrangements. In one instance, women and young children slept separately from men in the cook shelter, to be off the ground. A number of family groupings were single mothers and children. As well, comfort needs vary and it must be expected that more wood will be consumed and equipment needed for warmth, such as warmer sleeping bags.

### ***Building Sense of Belonging and Integration***

Building more welcoming communities for newcomers in Canada requires attention to the long-term integration of immigrants into all aspects of Canadian society. For many participants, being able to camp in Canadian campgrounds alongside Canadian-born folks was a sign of

integration into Canadian society. Therefore, access to the camping experience helps to meet the settlement needs of immigrant newcomers by building a sense of social belonging and belonging to this new geographic place. They began to build a sense of ownership and connection to this new place – “THIS is my home now!” – with the desire to protect it.

The participants noted that one of the most important aspects of the camping experience was the opportunity to speak English to native English language speakers. This effectively facilitated their learning about Canadian norms, provided an opportunity to practice their language skills particularly related to parks and camping, and provided an enjoyable setting for intercultural relationships. It was found that these relationships between parks staff and immigrant newcomers extended beyond the program, enhancing intercultural learning and a sense of belonging in Alberta. Extending this to more deliberately planned partnerships between Canadian-born campers and newcomers would also enhance the sense of safety and enjoyment for newcomers. Given response from within the parks office, there is a high level of interest among Canadian-born campers to volunteer to mentor and join newcomers in camping expeditions.

The camping experience gave the students an opportunity to meet other students (and their families) in the language program, which facilitated the beginnings of a supportive community and intercultural friendships between newcomers. Many of the newcomers were working together and talking about pooling resources to make a return visit.

In regards to the language learning that took place in the classroom, there was not enough preliminary work done in determining why it was important for students to develop literacy skills related to the environment. For example, why was it important for students to learn the names of common plants, trees, insects and mammals in Alberta? Parks staff can assist the learning of the EAL teachers and newcomers on this importance. Expressing relationships to the land helps gain a familiarity with the English language, but more importantly it helps participants share their stories as well as to hear stories of Alberta, develop their own “new story” and thus begin creating a new sense of ecological identity. “Learning a language” helped students share stories about being active participants in a new society and “learning the land” helped students share stories of highly dynamic landscapes in which they felt they belonged. Students in fact did share that they enjoyed talking with the parks staff about their experiences in the parks. It is through these stories and sharing them with others, that community is developed and a sense of belonging begins.

Part of an icebreaker activity could be story sharing...and the resulting information would enable the interpreters and educators to build from existing knowledge and trigger peer teaching as well. Some of the newcomers had brought equipment with them into Canada and others had already camped somewhere in Canada and Alberta, in particular. This could be acknowledged and built upon. With an understanding of environmental literacy and ecological identity, activities could be designed that met the complex goal of enhancing a sense of belonging and connection.

Overall, it was not the individual activities but the sum total of the activities that created such a powerful impact for newcomers. Therefore, the activities could be rotated and experimented with, to determine which have higher levels of enjoyment and foster learning. Also, a variety of activities should be included for a range of choice, including: high adventure to low adventure, high energy to low energy activities, various modalities, typical park activities like swimming

and sports, typical interpretation activities like walks and pond studies, experiential and presentation-based, and both adult and child/youth-specific activities.

### ***Role of English Language Teachers***

The language teachers played an essential role in the *Learning a Language, Learning the Land* project and, overall, were very supportive of the camping theme and field experience. It was evident that the students trusted their teachers and as a result relied upon them to meet the various challenges associated with the project. It was found that trust is a major issue among immigrant newcomers, often related to previous life experiences, including government officials and enforcement officers in other countries. It was also found that trust around safety was an important consideration for choosing to engage in a camping experience. Newcomers often chose to participate because their EAL teachers encouraged them to do so, thus making it a more acceptable risk.

Teachers played a wide variety of roles including; support, interpreter, organizer and information provider. Teachers provided EAL expertise to parks staff in helping them develop effective programming for newcomers. Teachers also created the learning context in which the workbook content was used and helped set priorities in terms of what learning outcomes were most important for students, adjusting it to the learning level of their students and the LINC curriculum. It is also clear, however, that their efforts would have been more effective if they would have participated in formalized interprofessional learning during project planning and if the in-class learning goals had been connected to the field learning goals.

### ***Transformative Learning among Parks Staff***

It was found that the majority of municipal and provincial parks staff had little previous exposure to immigrant newcomer groups and their learning needs. It was also found that while staff knew this would be a different audience, they did not have the training or experience to adapt their practices for this population and initially offered standard programming. Parks staff in both organizations underwent a significant growth experience learning how to adapt to differing language and cultural needs when developing their campground programming.

Parks staff brought a great deal of dedication and enthusiasm to the *Learning a Language, Learning the Land* project. They worked collaboratively and respectfully with all the other partners and had access to a number of resources that were crucial in determining the project's success.

As the project progressed it became clear that the intercultural and interprofessional nature of the work was challenging. On a number of occasions it was difficult for them to develop activities that met the specific needs of new comers. One of the key ideas utilized in other parks programming was to engage the newcomers in ongoing journaling, evidence that parks staff lacked awareness of the challenges of lower level language learners. It was also difficult for parks staff to understand their role with immigrant serving agencies. In the end it was obvious that parks staff had learned how to work with a diversity of newcomers and agencies.

The learning process of the parks staff demonstrates clearly the dialectical processes of transformative learning when conflicting interpretations and cultures of working among the partners come into contact, prompting a rethinking of assumptions. This led to parks staff feeling disoriented, initially. However, this disorientation enabled the parks staff to slow down,

observe and be more responsive to newcomers and study the interactions of the language teachers, who acted as cultural brokers. This was a form of experiential learning as much as the newcomers were learning experientially during the field experiences. Assumptions about the role of parks staff, leadership, and models of learning also shifted. Parks staff learned a rapport with newcomers and received a strong global education from listening to immigrant stories.

In the end, parks staff became aware of two key newcomer needs – the desire for improved language facility and ongoing connections with Canadian-born families – which they responded to. In sum, parks staff have the potential to be important advocates for newcomers as vital conduits for enhancing a sense of place to the land of Alberta, a sense of social belonging through intercultural friendships, and catalyzing vital organizational learning within parks organizations, to enhance their ability to create welcoming and inclusive public places.

Additional observations revealed several contradictions in parks discourse. Despite the goal of parks to encourage engagement with the natural world, parks were actually more like a museum – where you could look but not touch. Rules were challenged when children climbed trees and limbs were broken for fires, highlighting a contradiction in environmental education which advocates free play as well as direct engagement in the natural world. Secondly, despite their best intentions to provide the best experience they could for newcomers, there was an underlying assumption of assimilation, that newcomers would learn how to do camping the Canadian way. Instead, they learned that newcomers will have differentiated forms of parks engagement, based on their own cultural preferences and previous experiences and understandings.

### ***Collaborative Planning and Mutual Learning***

The relationship between the two parks organizations and the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers was deeply reciprocal. The parks organizations were able to gain access to a population that they hoped would increase visitation rates. In return, parks staff, in both organizations, were offered the expertise and resources to help newcomers engage in an activity they would likely have not been able to do on their own. The language teachers also played an important mediator role in helping students as they prepared and engaged in the various activities associated with this project. In this way, the staff at the immigrant serving agency provided expertise in the theory and practice of English as second language learning.

Because both groups have so much to offer each other, it would have been helpful if preliminary planning for the project had involved more direct face to face time between these two parties before the actual project took place. The expertise of the teachers could have been used more effectively at this stage and the parks goals could have been more clearly spelled out. This may have averted some frustration that occurred at the beginning of the project related to role confusion and clarity about “what was actually going to be accomplished”.

Throughout the project, it was found that all of the partners experienced significant learning, some of it transformative learning, about their everyday assumptions, particularly regarding how they do their work. At times, each partner questioned the actions and decisions of the other partners. This helped each partner to rethink their assumptions and working premises. Recognizing that this project involved mutual learning between all the partners in learning how to adapt their work practices is important. Learning from each partner, by each partner, is recommended and a brief orientation to each partner has been offered in this report.

It was found that the roles and lines of communication, particularly around leadership and decision-making regarding different program components, were unclear between the partners. All decisions taken should ideally draw upon the strengths and knowledge of each organization, rather than decisions defaulting to one person or organization. This sense of mutuality and co-ownership would then permeate the program.

The additional workload for individuals in all organizations involved in this project was stressful and at times, frustrating. Tasking specific individuals with responsibility within the partnership and recognizing this project as a regular part of the workload would provide more time and energy needed for the challenges of planning across the partnership organizations.



# Full Recommendations

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To enhance the potential of future programming by both municipal and provincial parks organizations and the immigrant-serving agency, the following recommendations are offered.

## *Meeting the Needs of Immigrant Newcomers*

### **1. *Continuing the Success.***

It is recommended that the project be continued as it is highly innovative, meets the needs of all the partners, and maximizes the support necessary for a positive and educational first time exposure for newcomer participants.

### **2. *Five-year Commitment to Direct Programming.***

It is recommended that all project partners, particularly Alberta Parks, Edmonton Parks, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association, and Mountain Equipment Co-op, make a five year commitment to direct programming and collaboration of resources and financial support to provide first time experiences for newcomers who would otherwise not have access to parks or receive an orientation to parks.

### **3. *Transportation Barriers.***

It is recommended that parks organizations continue to work in an innovative partnership with newcomer groups to provide transportation for first time and new user access.

### **4. *Equipment Barriers.***

It is recommended that parks organizations work with community organizations to assist immigrant service organizations in procuring appropriate camping equipment and the collaborative development of permanent lending services.

### **5. *Financial Barriers.***

It is recommended that user fees be adjusted for low income groups, such as newcomers, and that special weekend discounts be offered for low income groups rotating among different parks, published broadly throughout the immigrant service and ethnocultural organizations. Other creative ways of providing access for low income groups are encouraged.

### **6. *Expansion among Parks Organizations.***

It is recommended that this program be expanded to other park services and other immigrant service providers, given the significance of the experience for immigrant integration and expanding park usage across the province.

### **7. *Development of Inclusion Policy and Practices.***

It is recommended that Alberta Parks and Edmonton Parks develop an inclusion policies that detail the philosophy and principles that will guide future practices in managing parks to become more welcoming spaces for newcomers as well as Canadian-born visible minorities and meet the identified needs of these groups.

### **8. *Coordination among Parks Organizations.***

It is recommended that parks organizations coordinate some of their programming

so that first time exposure to camping in municipal parks can be bridged into provincial parks visits, progressively building skills and knowledge.

**9. *Distinguishing Park Services.***

- a. It is recommended that parks organizations at the federal, provincial and municipal levels coordinate programming but distinguish their services, so that newcomers understand that their recreational and social activities can be carried out in all parks in Alberta, but that they also understand the differences between the three types of public parks.
- b. It is recommended that Alberta Parks design a marketing program that specifically reaches newcomers and also Canadian-born visible minority groups to raise their profile in the newcomer consciousness and distinguish themselves from municipal and national parks.

**10. *Learning Component Vital.***

It is recommended that a learning component always be included in programming to familiarize newcomers with the concept of a park, current norms and guidelines in parks, alternatives for park usage, and to raise provincial parks in the newcomer consciousness. Environmental literacy is also vital to create a sense of belonging to this geographic place. This is the first step in developing a sense of stewardship.

**11. *Learning Program for Community Groups.***

It is recommended that community groups be encouraged to have some organized pre-camping learning activities to enhance newcomer safety, understanding of park guidelines, and abilities to engage in self-directed camping after the initial exposure.

**12. *Sequential Learning.***

It is recommended that, as much as possible, newcomers should be involved in a progression of all three activities – in-class learning, one day introduction, and weekend immersion - to ensure participant knowledge, safety skills, activity skills for enjoyment, and the desire for repeat visits.

**13. *Enhancing Learning Gains.***

- a. It is recommended, that the EAL teachers and parks staff need to clearly identify their shared and individual goals and build program activities to reach these goals. They need to differentiate more clearly between learning outcomes related to camping skills, ecological knowledge, environmental literacy, knowledge of parks, and English language gains.
- b. It is recommended that the EAL teachers are best positioned to integrate parks information into their in-class camping unit at the appropriate levels, requiring the partners to heighten their level of coordination.
- c. It is recommended that more classroom and field concentration on parks personnel and parks rules will facilitate important learning to avoid potential problematic relations with other campers.
- d. It is recommended that a curriculum box be assembled by Parks staff for EAL teachers that would include a range of possible activities and include items like a list of camping equipment.
- e. It is recommended that former camping participants be used as peer teachers both for in-class and field experiences.

- f. It is recommended that more one day field trips and field trips during class time be created as they are more inclusive experiences and would reach a broader population than the weekend experiences.

**14. Content on Environmental Literacy.**

- a. It is recommended that parks staff consider the limitations for teaching environmental literacy at each language development stage. For environmental literacy activities, it is recommended that they be developed with specific language levels in mind.
- b. For environmental literacy activities with the lower LINC levels, it is recommended that a translator be involved to enhance the educational engagement.

**15. Interpretation Walks.**

It is recommended that interpretation tours be smaller, have two interpreters at the beginning and end of the group, go less distance, begin with the knowledge in the group, and encourage finding parallels to home country ecologies, talk slower, and simplify the language for newer English language speakers.

**16. Camping as a Shared Generational Experience.**

It is recommended that the camping activities continue generally to be family and community-oriented as well as multi-generational.

**17. Age-Parallel Programming and Addressing Possible Nature-Deficit.**

- a. It is recommended that some parallel programming, specially designed as children-only and youth-only, is an important direction to explore, within multi-age weekend camping experiences.
- b. It is recommended that new weekend programs be designed specifically for children or youth.
- c. It is recommended that programming for children and youth be predicated on the work of Richard Louv and the *Children and Nature Movement* focused on alleviating possible nature-deficit disorder from lack of contact with nature.
- d. It is recommended that field trips introducing newcomers to winter sports and activities in parks be initiated, as this lack of familiarity results in winter confinement for many families. This is particularly appropriate for young adults.

**18. Non-traditional Families and Vulnerability.**

It is highly recommended that a program format should offer the maximum support for non-traditional families, particularly single women and single mothers who have additional access issues and who may feel more vulnerable in an outdoor setting. One example would be to have single mother camping weekends at rotating parks, perhaps with transportation provided. Another example would be to enhance nighttime security in parks to increase the sense of safety for women.

**19. Building Leadership Capacity.**

It is recommended that the park organizations implement a long term commitment to offering educational workshops that build leadership capacity within immigrant serving and ethno-specific organizations. Once camping and outdoor leadership capacity is built, Alberta Parks and Edmonton Parks could then empower their

regional park offices with the necessary resources to act in an ongoing supportive role for these communities and agencies.

**20. Leadership Development Weekends.**

It is recommended that the three components of in-class learning, day camping, and weekend camping, should be packaged as a leadership development experience and offered annually to leaders within the newcomer and visible minority communities.

**21. Family Camping Partnership Registry or Network.**

- a. It is recommended that provincial and municipal governments, as public service organizations, recognize their vital contribution to building a welcoming community by initiating family camping partnerships. A registry for Canadian-born families interested in befriending, mentoring and camping with newcomer families can be established. This service could be hosted, on an ongoing basis, through community groups already associated with the parks. Special weekends could be offered for partnership camping.
- b. It is recommended that volunteers with the immigrant-serving agencies be invited to be camping companions on the weekend field trips, to replace teachers who are unable to attend.

**22. Trust Brokers.**

In the recommended five years of direct programming, it is suggested that the language teachers and other immigrant agency workers be much more involved as partners in designing the day and weekend camping programming. Acting as trust brokers for these first experiences, the teachers will help in reducing the sense of risk and enhance the likelihood of participation.

**23. Interdisciplinary Teams in Outdoor Settings.**

It is recommended that parks services offer their facilities and enter into programming partnerships with interdisciplinary teams (social workers, teachers, police, and immigrant service providers) aimed at newcomer families experiencing difficulties. A foundation could be established to support this work.

**24. Adapting Parks Infrastructure.**

- a. It is recommended that facilities be adapted to enable collective cooking, particularly accommodating several large cooking pots at one time.
- b. It is also recommended that more activity areas for young children, more sports areas, tent platforms, and small rental cabins, yurts for groups of women with very young children be provided.
- c. Finally, an interfaith room/space, such as airports provide, is recommended in high use parks. Provisions for these different usage patterns will ensure ongoing parks visitation.

***Meeting the Needs of Parks Staff and English-as-Another-Language Teachers***

**1. Intercultural Communication Training.**

It is recommended that all parks staff involved in programming and service to the public should receive intercultural training that helps sensitize them to their own culturally-shaped backgrounds, the culturally shaped needs of newcomers, and

assists in the development of competencies related to intercultural communication. There are various consultants, often associated with immigrant service agencies, which offer this service.

**2. *Interprofessional Learning.***

It is recommended that mutual learning between the partners would significantly enhance the quality of this programming and enable each partner to adapt their work practices with this new knowledge. A brief orientation to each partner has been offered in this report, entitled "Learning from Each Other." Other suggestions follow below.

**3. *Workshop on Language Training.***

It is recommended that all parks staff involved in programming and service to the public should receive at least a half day workshop on English-as-an-Additional Language learning and how to communicate to individuals at various levels of English language facility. This could be provided by the EMCN.

**4. *Workshop on Adult Education Principles.***

It is recommended that all parks staff involved in this programming should receive training in the core adult education principles to better meet the learning needs of all user groups. Institutions with adult education programs or adult education consultants can potentially provide such workshops.

**5. *Environmental Education Training.***

It is recommended that the English language teachers should receive at least a half day workshop on environmental education, including the rationale for specific content and practices, which can facilitate a stronger partnership and more effective joint programming. This could be provided by the parks organizations.

**6. *Starting with the Knowledge of Learners.***

- a.** It is recommended that frontline parks staff are provided with opportunities to understand diverse user groups, such as newcomers, to ensure that park information and learning activities are designed to be relevant.
- b.** It is also recommended that learning activities be developed from the existing knowledge, experiences, and interests of the participants into organizational messaging, rather than the reverse approach.

**7. *Understanding the Ethnocultural Backgrounds of Newcomers.***

It is recommended that all parks staff working with newcomer groups take time to familiarize themselves with the diversity within newcomer groups. EAL teachers, ethnocultural community leaders, as well as documents and events hosted by immigrant service agencies can provide learning opportunities.

**8. *Regular Element of Workload.***

It is recommended that, in establishing this as an ongoing project for at least five years, specific individuals be identified to work in this partnership and that this work be recognized as a regular part of job descriptions and workload.

**9. *Communication and Decision-Making Clarity.***

It is recommended that the partners work more concertedly at clarification of roles between them, that all the partners be invited to all the planning meetings, and that one leader for each organization be identified who will be the key communicator

with appropriate decision-making authority. These leaders would be responsible for communicating information and decisions to their respective organizations.

**10. Collaborative Planning.**

It is recommended that the EAL teachers be more involved in the project planning with parks staff, including setting measurable program outcomes, as this would heighten the coordination between the in-class and parks-based activities and thus enhance the learning outcomes in both language gains and environmental literacy.

**11. Appropriate Levels of Event Structure.**

- a. It is recommended that parks staff designate core experiences and optional experiences for each camping experience as a way to offer sufficient structure but allow for additional time for individuals and families to pursue individual interests. For the optional activities, simply stating a time and place for an activity to start will facilitate this choice. Clear and simple descriptions of activities will enable people to determine if the activity is appropriate to their family's skill levels and interests.
- b. It is recommended that ice breaker activities be utilized for groups who do not know each other well.

**12. Diversity in Hiring.**

It is recommended that municipal and provincial parks organizations expand their staff hiring practices to include members of diverse ethnocultural groups and immigrant newcomer communities to enhance their reach into these communities.

**13. Career Fairs.** Participation in presentations and career days at immigrant service organizations is recommended as are career fairs on university campuses.

**14. Park Information Materials.**

It is recommended that simplifying all Parks documents for accessibility by adults with lower levels of English language facility, and translating key documents into other languages, be continued. Such work enables newcomers to understand parks information and do simple tasks, such as registering for a campsite. This would ensure enhanced visitation and safety in the long term.

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# Appendices

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Ethics Approvals, Letter of Invitation, Consent Forms, Interview Schedules, and Workbook Surveys are all available from the authors at [elange@stfx.ca](mailto:elange@stfx.ca) or [VogelsP@macewan.ca](mailto:VogelsP@macewan.ca).

For further information, contact:

***Elizabeth Lange, PhD***

Assistant Professor  
Department of Adult Education  
St. Francis Xavier University  
Xavier Hall, 4545 Alumni Crescent  
PO Box 5000 Antigonish, NS  
CANADA B2G 2W5  
Ph 902-867-4697  
Toll free 1-866-203-1086  
[elange@stfx.ca](mailto:elange@stfx.ca)

***Peter Vogels, PhD***

Assistant Professor  
Department of Social Work  
Grant MacEwan University  
South Campus  
7319 - 29 Avenue  
Edmonton, Alberta  
T6K 2P1  
Ph 780-497-5563  
[vogelsp@macewan.ca](mailto:vogelsp@macewan.ca)

