

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

IN MULTI-CULTURAL SETTINGS

by

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## Abstract

This dissertation explores character development opportunities in for first-generation Nepali immigrant students, as exemplified in Ontario public school classrooms. The theoretical framework for this dissertation is derived from Aoki's conceptualisation of the 'in-between,' which relates to the experiences of people living in the binaries of East and West, communitarian/liberal, and home- and host-cultures. Metaphorically, this dissertation understands character development to occur in the negotiations that people engage in on the central portion of a "bridge" between the binaries. Written and interview data was collected from three Nepali students, representing the home-culture, and the three teachers representing the host-culture. This data was then developed into a series of Vignettes that were then analysed, following the strategy of interpretive phenomenological analysis. The discussion of the themes, which emerged from the analyses of the Vignettes, has been made using the trope of the bridge, explaining that the distant ends of the bridge are symbolic of the binaries in which people live. Ontario public school classrooms are the inclusive spaces of the 'in-between,' where people from both the ends of the bridge hold prolonged communications and use the language of virtues. The analysis shows a strong link between the lived experience of the participants and the Ontario Ministry of Education character development document. The discussion reveals that character development is the negotiation in the 'in-between' of the bridge. This dissertation concludes with implications for the credibility of the Ministry character development document, the importance of engaging in purposeful communications, and using the language of virtues in negotiations between the values of home- and host-cultures.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This dissertation explores and describes opportunities for character development in multi-cultural settings, and discusses on perceptions of character and character development. This dissertation is divided into nine chapters. The first chapter includes critical reflections of my personal and professional background, and a research statement. The second chapter is an extensive review of relevant literature. The reviewed literature includes a critique of the ‘in-between,’ and a critical analysis of the Eastern and Western conceptions of character. This leads to the critiquing of Ontario character development initiatives, and concludes with a working definition of character that I have used in this work. The third chapter provides with a comprehensive description of my research methodology and method that I have undertaken.

The fourth chapter details a series of Vignettes, composed out of the student participants’ oral and written interviews. Using the conceptual framework of the ‘in-between,’ an analysis of the themes, emerged in the Student Vignettes, is made in the fifth chapter. The sixth chapter brings the series of Vignettes, composed out of the oral and written interviews of the teacher participants. The seventh chapter includes the analysis of the themes emerged in the Teacher Vignettes. In the eighth chapter, I have made a comprehensive discussion of the findings of this research. The ninth chapter presents conclusions, and implications of the findings.

In this introductory part, I will critically reflect on my personal and professional background, and review my lived experiences as a hyphenated Nepali-Canadian. Bringing Aoki and Bhabha’s ideas into the discussion, I will reflect upon my own experiences of dwelling in the hyphen that exists between ‘Nepali’ and ‘Canadian’ of Nepali-Canadian, and position myself as a phenomenological researcher with a conceptualization that the ‘in-between’ (Aoki, 1990) as grounded in my lived experiences. I will then introduce my research plan that centers on

exploring opportunities for character development in a multi-cultural setting. I will conclude this chapter with an analytical argument of the statement of the problem of my research.

### **1.1: Personal and Professional Background**

The development of my character initially took place in a loving and caring family environment that was guided by disciplinary rules and moral principles, such as listening to, taking care of, and respecting the elderly members, following the instructions and moral directions they provide, and becoming responsible and generous in loving and caring for my younger siblings. These were based on cultural values and guided by Hindu and Buddhist moral philosophy (Morgan & Lawton, 2007). I grew up in a traditional mono-cultural Hindu Nepali family in which rules and order were highly emphasized. Buddhist moral principles, such as right action, right speech, and right livelihood, have had a lasting impact on our life style (Morgan, 2007). There was a strong sense of affection and belongingness among members of the family. In my childhood, I experienced immense love and care from both my parents and elder siblings. Underpinning that love and care was a strong sense of discipline and hierarchy. This helped in keeping unity and harmony among all members of the family. I acquired a very inclusive sense of morality from my parents' traditional lifestyle. My parents never attended formal education; and, yet, they were uncompromising regarding issues of character and morality. From my experience and observation, the important sources of morality, unity, and harmony are religious faith and cultural convictions.

Religious beliefs and cultural practices, such as going to religious places and engaging in cultural activities, have always been influential on my being and becoming, that is to grow and act as a person of character. These beliefs and practices made me aware of my relationships with others, and directed me to distinguish what is good from what is bad. I have witnessed my

parents' religious way of life: a life that was more deeply grounded than just participating in religious and ritual practices. I believe they embodied the tenets of the religion, and so lived lives that provided me with a genuine structure for moral development.

The moral principles and practical wisdom of my loving parents have always been influential on my professional and intellectual life. The way they conducted their lives embodied the key teachings of Hinduism, as both practiced and lived in our community. Looking back, I would say that my parents exemplified virtues such as respect, care, truthfulness, honesty, courage, and trustworthiness, and these teachings have worked as character guidelines for my life. My monocultural early life experiences resonate with the argument that adult values and choices are important to children, no matter which direction they take in their later lives (Beer, 2004). I acquired family values and virtues initially (and primarily) from my family, and then from social institutions including the schools and colleges I attended.

My life-world experiences, especially in family, community and educational institutions, suggest to me that education and character development are inseparable, as all education is primarily an education in character (Salls, 2007). My initial development of character was further reinforced and strengthened through my formal schooling. I acquired my elementary and secondary education in traditional learning environments. These environments, a relic of British colonialism, placed learners in a passive role and teachers in the active role. Primarily, teachers were regarded as the authentic source of knowledge. I acknowledge that most teaching in the classroom was, and even today is, somehow, Socratic in nature. However, the dialogues between students and teachers were not in much practice during my elementary and secondary education. The interactions between students and teachers did not occur as frequently as it should have been. Teaching usually was a one-way lecture accompanied by a very strict classroom discipline.

Taking notes and memorizing them would lead to success in lengthy in-class exams that were taken at regular intervals. The most common educational activities were rote learning and repetition. To sum up, the whole teaching learning experience was in sharp contrast with a more constructive education, in which “Constructivist teachers deemphasize lecturing and telling and encourage instead the active engagement of students in establishing and pursuing their learning objectives” (Noddings, 2012, p. 127).

My traditional pattern of learning heavily impacted my philosophy of teaching in the first few years of my career. I recalled the way I was taught, and mimicked this when I first started teaching in schools. I started teaching when I was just eighteen years old, some 25 years ago, not knowing much about what teaching really meant. Over these years, I have worked with students from primary to post-secondary institutions in various educational settings. These institutions include both private and public schools, community colleges, and universities. Having had several years of teachings in the capacity of a teacher of English, I gained rich learning experiences. I consider that this was an opportunity to work with, and learn from, students, who were from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

These experiences of working at a variety of contexts taught me about the need, and the importance, of establishing and maintaining personal and professional relationships with my students. When I revisit those years of teaching in the classroom and compare them with my present learning experiences, I perceive a great difference in my teaching philosophy and practice. I understand that my philosophy and practice form a continuum. However, on that continuum, I still find myself moving between, and sometimes struggling in the binary of, *then* and *now*, between my past practice and my negotiation of current practice. My past practice influences my present practice, and both shape my future practice. Dwelling in the binary of



*then* and *now*, and bridging the gap of my *past* and *present*, is what challenges me as I undertake my research. As a phenomenological researcher, I find my personal and professional life experiences well grounded in the ‘in-between,’ which is a space of both challenges and opportunities (Aoki, 1996).

## **1.2: Being Caught in Binaries**

Having spent over two decades as an educator in schools and colleges, my family and I eventually migrated from Nepal and arrived in Canada in 2010. We have undergone several ups and downs over these past six years. Confusions and uncertainties suffocated our new circumstances. A deep sense of contradictions hovered over our faculties of reasoning. The silence within was becoming loud. We were torn between the choices of *this* and *that*, trapped in the ‘in-between’ of two cultures, and compelled to live in a state of uncertainty, frequently questioning whether the choice we made was right. Meanwhile, we learned to live with the transitions between cultures, and accommodated our changing circumstances. We met with new families, made new friends, and acquired a new way of viewing ourselves and others. The choice we had was either to view our cultural background as a barrier to divide us from, or take it as a bridge to link with, others; here we chose the second path. In fact, during this time I subconsciously started re-discovering myself and re-constructing my identity. These years in Canada have been crucial to position me in the ‘in-between’ of the binary of Nepali-Canadian, a space of creativity and ambiguity (Aoki, 1996).

I have had an experience of falling into a spiral bevy of contradictions even when we were deciding to leave the country of our birth. I took this complex paradox of life as opening opportunities to learn new things. Thus, my voluntary detachment from the land where I was born, entering the community I have come to, and my biography, have made me understand the

importance of social and community health, family norms, and cultural values to a much greater depth than I thought possible. My eleven-and-seventeen-year old daughters have been Canadian public school students for the last six years. I have closely observed how they are sharing their ways of living with others, and learning from others' ways of living. They participate actively in the events of both home- and host-cultures. They were considered as students from the dominant culture as long as they were in Nepali schools, but now they have joined the minority in their present schools. This shift of my daughters' positionality (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) is also a shift in their identity. This is a phenomenal experience, a sense of living in a Nepali-Canadian fragmentation. We all are now new Canadians, shaping new identities, while retaining strong elements of our previous Nepali lives. This is, in Bhabha's (1990) term, a hybrid identity, meaning we are living in between the two lives as Nepali and Canadians, and living in between the two worlds of distinct cultural wholes, such as the Eastern and the Western (Aoki, 1996).

In this developing identity as a Nepali-Canadian, I along with my family have moved from a comfortable zone to a relatively uncomfortable one. This sense of being in tension has come because of identity shift, as we have now become a minority group within the dominant culture (Spring, 2008). This shifting identity indicates that identity is a fluid concept in terms of its meaning, a meaning that keeps changing depending upon the individual's context and structural determinants (Frideres, 2008). This leads people to a space of uncertainty and creativity; which in Aoki's (1990) term, is a location of 'tensionality.' This place is said to possess both challenges and opportunities. Viewed this way, being caught in the 'in-between' implies not only a situation of paradox, but also a multitude of opportunities. In the context of my research, I consider these opportunities as opportunities for character development. Hence, the important point, in terms of my work, is to explicate what it means to live in the tension of binaries, investigate how

contextual changes and structural determinants influencing one's being and becoming, and describe how they contribute to one's character development.

In revisiting my past experiences of being with family, present experiences of living in the binaries, and my observations of people moving between cultures, it can be said that people in a multi-cultural society are caught in the 'in-between' and living a life of paradox, and yet with opportunities for learning and growing in new ways. In the next section, I outline the direction of my study, showing the link between the personal and the research. I also introduce the major frameworks of this study by critically examining and ... developing through the literature review.

### **1:3: Linking the Personal and the Research**

The intent of my research is to explore, describe, and critique opportunities for character development in a multi-cultural classroom. These opportunities are explored through the lived experiences of research participants grounded in the 'in-between,' which, according to Aoki (1996), is a tensioned place. In the literature review chapter, I critique the 'in-between' and develop it as a major framework of my study. I critically look into the literature of character education, focusing particularly on the communitarian and liberal schools of philosophy, and develop a notion of character and character development in the 'in-between.' The insights, which I develop while critiquing the 'in-between' and looking into the literature, is then applied in analyzing and interpreting the data I collected through semi-structured phenomenological interviews. Lived experiences for phenomenological researchers are what they want to interpret and make meanings in relation to practical consequences of human living (van Manen, 1990).

To a large measure, my living has been shaped by my experiences. My personal and professional backgrounds are what guide the continuity of my being and becoming. Character

development is a progressive process, an ongoing process of being and becoming. Viewed from a phenomenological line of the argumentation, character development is a matter of personality traits that we acquire through our lived experiences, which are then reflected in daily life (Salls, 2007). My graduate studies, my background as a recent immigrant to Canada, and with my children in the public school system, have helped me understand some of the issues and challenges inherent in the conception and practice of character development in Canadian public schools. This raises questions such as: what does character mean in the changing structure of society, what attributes can be taken as universal; and, who determines, and on what basis, these attributes, in a multi-cultural setting?

There is a mass of literature on character and character development, but in the changing structure of current multi-cultural societies, what character means, and how character develops, can be approached from a new dimension, the dimension that provides a meeting point for the worlds of differences that exists in a multi-cultural society. The character document, *Finding Common Ground: Character development in Ontario schools K-12*, developed and published by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008), urges “All Ontarians to make character development a foundation of our education system” (p. 2), and defines character development as a “deliberate effort to nurture the universal attributes upon which schools and communities find consensus” (p. 3). However, in the current context of Ontario’s multi-cultural society, it is hard to name, and explain, what these ‘universal attributes’ look like in a setting where cultural convictions often remain unrecognized, and caught as they are in the tensionality of the ‘in-between.’ This tensionality can give rise to conflicts between differing values and ideals. Addressing this situation requires a deep sense of respect, which can help bring and maintain harmony within the community.

*Finding Common Ground* considers respect for diversity as a fundamental issue in character development programs. My personal and professional experiences resonate with the notion that the respect for diversity is crucial to character development. Respecting diversity implies acknowledging differences, offers an opportunity to understand one another, and provides a common ground to be with the others. This is the 'third space' that connects the differences and asks the dwellers to embrace a new identity (Bhabha, 1990). Reflecting on this argument, my position falls into the hyphenated space of 'in' and 'between' of the 'in-between.'

Off and on, I undergo an experience of Nepali-Canadian fragmentation. People with this experience belong to both and neither, a sense of being and not being, a contradictory mode of existence. My present is filled with dual values which come from the East where my character was initially shaped, and from the West where I am currently in the process of re-making myself. I am living with experiences of two worlds. While saying 'two worlds,' I mean the worlds that are basically different not only geographically, but also linguistically and culturally. Relying on my experiences, I argue that these differences, when blended together, can provide a unique opportunity for character development. This trend of thought contends that the role of family, community, and teachers becomes more challenging when issues of a migrant student's character development in a multi-cultural society are taken into account. Further, a child's character development and education are a tripartite process that involves the child, parents and teachers (Lickona, 1991).

The literature in the field of character development generally denotes the development of character traits in an individual over time (Salls, 2007). Character education is one of the major movements "in the fields of values education and moral education [and has] the goal of teaching certain 'traditional values', values which are widely regarded as the cornerstones of virtuous and

responsible conduct” (Kirschenbaum, 1995, p. 21). To obtain this ideal, all stake holders are expected to make efforts to nurture character attributes that combine morals, values, and virtues (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). There are issues in such arguments, such as how such virtues and values are determined, and how they are acquired in a multi-cultural setting. To illustrate, how we understand a virtue or what counts as virtuous changes from one cultural context to another.

These changing cultural contexts mean that our understandings of virtues are guided in part by local contexts and cultural beliefs. Each student in a multi-cultural classroom carries such contexts and beliefs. Further, when a child enters into a culturally diverse class, the child brings not only human capital, but also a world of cultural difference. The literature remains under-explored regarding the ways that the student, the class and the teacher to benefit from those differences. The literature also shows multiple-perspectives on what character means, and how character develops (Salls, 2007; Lockwood, 1997). However, recent character development initiatives in Ontario show some points of common ground for reaching consensus regarding the respect for diversity amid cultural differences. My personal and professional background leads me to question how people move between cultures in a multi-cultural society, and the location of the learning opportunities that this movement allows. Aoki’s notion of the ‘in-between’ can be such a location where people moving in-between cultures dwell together and negotiate the differences. My hybridized experiences as a Nepali-Canadian have inspired me to work on how immigrant students in Canadian public schools develop their character while dwelling in the ‘in-between,’ and investigate how they learn from, and share with, others. Keeping this in mind, this study will explore how dwelling in the ‘in-between’ is an opportunity for the dwellers to learn from one another, and develop their character.

The arguments above suggest that an important aim of all educators and educational institutes is to locate a point of reference in which people in a multi-cultural society can meet and interact. These acts of meeting and interacting help people move between cultures in a multi-cultural society, and transition through the different phases of acculturation, which, according to Spring (2008), is a “cultural change and adaptation resulting from contact between different cultures” (p. 91). I have personally experienced this transitioning, and have very closely witnessed my daughters’ travel between their Nepali home-culture and the Canadian host - culture that they have entered.

Initially, I was afraid that my daughters would be caught culturally ‘in transit’ while travelling to and fro between cultures. If I believed this, then is it possible that other migrant children, and their parents, experience similar concerns? As a parent, my concern was that my children could be stranded between two cultures, at home in neither. This sense of being caught between two cultures might cause psychological stress and physical discomfort to many migrant children (Spring, 2008). This situation in a multi-cultural society may be a growing concern to not only teachers and educational institutions, but also to parents and communities. To address these challenges, what is potentially needed is a shared zone, a common ground, or the ‘in-between’ to dwell together and provide opportunities for character development.

I assert that my multi-cultural experiences in Canadian society and observations in the last six years have brought significant changes to my initial thinking about character development in Ontario public school classrooms. My experiences and education now help me understand the multi-cultural classroom setting as being a place ‘in-between’ the home- and host- cultures that can potentially provide both students and teachers opportunities for character development. In

Aoki's (1996) arguments, this space is the 'in-between' that he considers a generative space which, I think, can offer unique opportunities for an individual to grow as a person of character.

#### **1.4: Statement of the Problem**

Canadian society is growing increasingly multi-cultural due to the flow of immigrants from across the globe. In such a society, understanding across cultures, and experiencing how cultures intersect and interact, is a common phenomenon (Spring, 2008). This multi-cultural phenomenon is prevalent in Canadian public school classrooms where students and teachers experience a world of differences. These differing experiences offer ways to explore opportunities for perceiving life and the world in a new light, which eventually contributes to character development. With these thoughts in mind, my research examines and explores issues around how a multi-cultural school setting can provide as an important opportunity for character development for both teachers and students. I will particularly focus on the 'in-between,' the hyphenated space between the *multi* and *cultural* in multi-cultural. In my work, the 'in-between' is the hyphenated space between the home- and host-cultures. I will investigate and describe how the 'in-between,' as a generative zone of the multi-cultural setting, can potentially open up opportunities for character development.

To serve the purpose of my study, I will critically examine and critique Aoki's (1996) notion of the 'in-between,' develop that notion in relation to the Ontario public school classroom as being a place 'in-between' the home- and the host-cultures, and utilize it as a conceptual framework. Then I will look into the history of character education, with a focus on the 'in-between' of Eastern and Western philosophical foundations of character education; and, develop a working definition of character development that I will operationalise within this research. This will lead to the critiquing of Aoki's conception of two worlds of curriculum, 'curriculum-as-plan



and curriculum-as-lived' (1991) in connection with the Ontario Character Development Initiatives (2008).

With these conceptual frameworks, I will investigate and describe how the 'in-between' as the third space plays a complementary role to character development within its in-built paradox. While proceeding in this direction, I consider Ontario public school multi-cultural classrooms as the sites of the 'in-between,' and explore how both the teachers and students, coming from different cultural worlds, dwell there, contribute to the construction of a friendly environment, and how they can utilize their existence in the 'in-between,' as an opportunity to learn from one another. The critical focus, of my work will be on the lived experiences of individuals living in the binary of home- and host-cultures, living with the hybrid identity of Nepali-Canadian, and living in the third space of Eastern and Western moral values. My personal background and my phenomenological experiences over the years indicate the need for more substantial studies to be conducted, which, I believe, will lead to a potential conclusion that the 'in-between' can become a unique location of opportunities for character development.

### **1.5: Conclusion**

In this introductory chapter, I reflected on my personal and professional background, and reviewed my lived experiences as a hyphenated Nepali-Canadian. Bringing Aoki and Bhabha's ideas into discussions, I reflected on my experiences of being caught in binaries. In doing so, I positioned myself as a phenomenological researcher. I also introduced Aoki's notion of the 'in-between' as providing the main conceptual framework of my study. I argued that the 'in-between' is grounded in the researcher's lived experiences. In the end, I outlined my research plan, focused on exploring opportunities for character development in a multi-cultural setting, and concluded the chapter with an analysis of the problem of my research. In the chapter to

follow, I will critically look into the literature of character development following the criteria of relevance outlined by Boote and Beile (2005), and develop a tool to understand character development in a new dimension.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature on character development, although voluminous, rarely touches on the area of the ‘in-between,’ especially when the ‘in-between’ is considered as a potential space to explore opportunities for character development. In considering the literature on the lives people lead, I noted that people often appear caught in a tension between binary oppositions, and their lived experiences are usually grounded ‘in-between’ these binaries. For example, people could be described as Nepali-Canadian, Eastern/Western, or in transit between the home- and host-cultures. This tension was often represented by these *hyphens, slashes, and ands*. This consideration led me to consider the works of authors such as Aoki and Bhabha.

In the first part of this literature review, I critique these works in order to develop a conceptual framework around the idea of Aoki’s ‘in-between.’ In the second part, I explore and critique the relevant literatures of character development, leading to a definition that will guide my particular research. Finally, the third part of this review is a critique of *Finding Common Ground: Character development in Ontario schools, K-12* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) in the light of Aoki’s (1991) idea of ‘curriculum-as-planned’ and ‘curriculum as lived.’ The frameworks I develop in this chapter is employed as tools to analyze and interpret phenomenological data that I planned to collect through phenomenological in-depth interviews.

### 2.1: The ‘In-Between’

Aoki’s the ‘in-between’ (1996) denotes the ‘third space’ that is well-argued in Bhabha’s post-colonial writings (1990; 1994). The ‘third space’ refers to a location of differences where lived experiences are shared, social and community interests are emphasized, and cultural values are negotiated. More specifically, the ‘third space’ denotes an interstice – a space that exists between people, between things, between times, and between cultures, where: “Private and

public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 13). This intimacy problematizes the binary division of East/West, past/present, and home/host. This problematization, in the context of Ontario public school classrooms, leads to an argument that, “The third space is also an emotional and relational space in which children explore their emotions and relationship with others” (Yaha & Wood, 2016, p. 12). In such emotions and relations, an interweaving of home and host cultures, a form of making negotiation through cultural transactions in the ‘in-between’ is expected to take place.

Although I employ the notions of the ‘in-between’ and the ‘third space’ interchangeably in my work, my inclinations throughout this study are more to the former than to the latter. The reason is that the hyphenated space within the ‘in’ and the ‘between’ of the ‘in-between’ is where I belong as a Nepali-Canadian. It is also because I consider the ‘in-between’ as a specific form of a bounded version of the ‘third space.’ Hence, having my experiences grounded within the ‘in-between,’ I focus more on Aoki’s works, both critiquing the idea of the ‘in-between,’ and developing it as my conceptual framework.

In most of his writing Aoki, as a Japanese-Canadian educator, critically reflects on his phenomenological observations and experiences, and shares them with his readers (Pinar & Irwin, 2005). Further, Aoki argues that teachers in a multi-cultural classroom need to dwell within the space of the ‘in-between.’ The ‘in-between’ in Aoki’s (1996) words is “A generative space of possibilities, a space wherein in tensioned ambiguity emerges” (p. 318). This implies that the ‘in-between’ is a place to reside for those displaced from their geography, torn from homes and cultures, yet looking for new opportunities. This argument also depicts how we, as immigrants, are caught within the tension of the binaries and situated to live in “A space of paradoxical ambivalence with its built-in contradiction” (Aoki, 1995, p. 310). The point Aoki

makes is that this contradictory space is assumed to offer opportunities to its dwellers to get closer, regardless of their linguistic and cultural differences

The 'in-between' stands as a bridge, a metaphysical bridge that calls people standing on the two ends for getting together and being-with-one-another. Aoki (1996) notes, "On this bridge, we are in no hurry to cross over; in fact, such bridges lure us to linger" (p. 316). Implied in this expression is an assertion that it is more important to linger on the bridge than to cross either of the ends. Aoki's lingering note further suggests that dwelling in the 'in-between' is to share one's experiences and differences with others, learn from the differences of others, and, as the golden rule suggests, treat others the way you would like to be treated by others (Gensler, 2013).

Aoki (1996) considers the 'in-between' not as a path of passing through, but as a place of dwelling for individuals who come from different linguistic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. As such the 'in-between' is then a bridge that spans a gap between two different ideas or two pre-existing concepts. Aoki (1996) holds that this bridge is not for humans to take transit to either of the ends, but a space for dwelling together. This argument implies that the hyphenated space between 'in' and 'between' of the 'in-between' functions as a paradoxical bridge that connects people of two different lands, two different worlds, and two different language speaking communities. Since the bridge is built in contradictions, one requires courage to proceed, and dwell, in this space.

Aoki (1993) presents the 'in-between' to us in "the structure of a bind, a site of tension between this and that, a site of difference that speaks of two or more things at the same time" (p. 291). Torn between choices, people, living binary lives, are compelled to choose either-or, while dwelling in ambiguity. Reflecting on what Aoki discusses, the 'in-between' is not a familiar place for people coming from each end of the bridge. The ends of the bridge represent the

binaries such as East -West, home-and host-culture, and Nepali-Canadian. The crux of Aoki's argument is that the 'in-between' possesses properties of tensionality (1996); moments of tensions and contradictions are simultaneously moments of creativity and criticality; and dwelling in the tensionality is to explore opportunities to make the best choices in terms character development.

The bounded space represented by *hyphens*, *slashes*, and *ands* of the 'in-between' is a transitional area built in paradoxes which the dwellers generally attempt to overcome. However, this space, as Buber (1970) argues, is a meeting-ground of potentiality, where one finds his/her creative aspects of both personal and communal existence. This perspective reminds us that we are separated by countries, religions, cultures, ethnicity, and professions. Our connections require a transitional space, a meeting-ground where we can experience transitional phenomena. Viewed this way, the essence of the 'in-between' is concerned with opening up the possibilities of a richer understanding of human relationships. Aoki's (1996) notion of lingering in the bounded space of the 'in-between' forms a basis for initiating dynamic relationships, and implies that to keep ourselves alive in a multi-cultural setting is to live in the tension of the 'in-between.'

As a tensioned space, Aoki (1990) urges us not to overcome the tension. Instead, he suggests we embrace the complexity of the binary and dwell within it. Here, I am drawn to a question: what does it mean to dwell in the tension of binaries? Taking Aoki's arguments into account, dwelling in the tension means to remain in an ambivalent situation, in a state of confusion, which I consider a hard reality in any modern multi-cultural community. Aoki's writings reveal the ease and difficulty of living within the dual frame of reference (Pinar & Irwin, 2005). It is argued that the 'in-between' is a location full of contradictions; a location of fluidity from where one emerges as a hybrid identity - a mixed state of identity, say in my own case, a hybridized form of

Nepali-Canadian. In answering my question, Aoki (1995) finds his own identity entrapped between the binary of a Japanese-Canadian, which according to Bhabha (1990), is a process of hybridization. Aoki's being as a Japanese-Canadian suggests that he is both a Japanese and a Canadian, yet he is neither Japanese nor Canadian; instead he is a hybrid. Having such experiences of being both and neither is the tension of dwelling in the 'in-between.' Aoki experienced the tension of the 'in-between' and reconstituted his hybrid identity as a Japanese-Canadian. Aoki's writings, and his lived experiences indicate that the 'in-between' is a metaphorical space with a multitude of possibilities for generating newness. The 'in-between' acknowledges the uniqueness of people's lived experiences, and these people are generally those living in the paradox of binaries (Aoki, 1990). To be more specific, these people are immigrants who suffer from anxiety and loss in their initial encounters with the new world, but later on, they rise up from that very sense of anxiety and loss.

Generally speaking, the 'in-between' denotes the space in-between two other spaces, the first and the second. In the context of my work, I consider the home-culture as the first space and the school-culture as the second space. The space, which lies in between home and school in a form of hyphen or a slash, is the third space where students and teachers, representing the worlds of differences, are expected to dwell together and respect one another. As the 'in-between' is grounded in the lived experiences of those living in the tension of binaries, dwelling in there connotes multiple things.

I am considering the students and teachers living in the paradox of binaries, and sharing the classroom as the 'in-between' of two or more distinct cultures. To dwell in the differences is to dwell in the tension; this tensioned space, as Aoki (1990) argues, is an inspired space for *being* and *becoming*, a mode of existence which could be construed as an ongoing process of character

development. Dwelling in the 'in-between', then, is an act of living between two distinct horizons, between two opposing entities, and more particularly, between two cultural convictions, that come from the home- and the host-cultures. Being in such a tensioned space is not only to admit the differences we have, but also to investigate endless opportunities to discuss and figure out ways of building up and maintaining relationships, developing a strong sense of respect, practicing tolerance, and learning to share the common ground to live-with-others. This argument closely aligns with the spirit of *Finding Common Ground: Character development in Ontario schools, K-12*, which states that: "character development is not a standalone initiative" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p.4). Thus, character development, as conceptualized in the document, can be tied to the building, and maintaining of, relationships. In other words, dwelling together in the common ground, which can stand as the 'in-between,' is an important initiative that opens opportunities for character development.

For Aoki, the purpose of dwelling in the 'in-between' is then to bridge the gap between two pre-existing entities, such as Eastern and Western, Nepali-Canadian, and home- and host-cultures. The 'in-between', as Aoki (1995) argues, "is a generative space of difference, an enunciatory space of becoming, a space where newness emerges" (p. 310). However, a question haunts me, that is: how challenging and complex is it to dwell in the 'in-between' and communicate with those sharing it? Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argue that the 'in-between' or the hyphen in the 'in-between' "Acts as a 'third space', a space between, a space of paradox, ambiguity, and ambivalence, as well as conjunction and disjunction" (p. 60). This argument denotes that the 'in-between' is capable in itself to conjoin and disjoin people residing on of each of the cutting edges. The positioning of the 'in-between' suggests that it is both full and empty. It



is empty when people choose to remain where they are; and becomes full when they choose to move forward and dwell in it.

The play of emptiness and fullness within the 'in-between' speaks of its own in-built contradictions. Conflicts, misunderstandings, and a sense of communication gap can often be felt. However, the more the dwellers initiate cross-cultural communications, the more fullness they find in the 'in-between.' Issues as such can also be resolved by maintaining a high degree of sensibility and flexibility, by showing respect and trustworthiness to one another, and by practicing tolerance and acknowledging the difference. Reflecting on this line of reasoning, I assert that the time has come to "embrace and explore the complexity and richness of the space between entrenched possibilities" (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 62). Dwyer and Buckle's argument indicate that there are challenges to dwell in the 'in-between,' but opportunities emerge when faced those challenges.

Challenges emerge when decisions are made in contradictions, for example, the moments of contradictions when I decided to move and settle in Canada. Moving to a new place is always challenging and stressful. Like many migrants, my family and I have under gone and witnessed such stressful experiences and moments in course of migration. However, those moments turned up as opportunities for learning new lessons and gaining a bigger confidence to cope with complexities of life. My experiences tell me that, along with the passage of time, we get grounded to the new place, the 'in-between.' Similarly, meeting a stranger is although a strange experience, a frequent conversation, when takes place between the two, turns what is strange to familiar. This turning of the strange to familiar can be considered as moving forward to dwell in the 'in-between,' the space of newness and creativity. In the context of a multi-cultural setting,

such as Ontario public school classrooms, it is important for both students and educators to dwell in the 'in-between' and acquire virtues of respect and tolerance (Aoki, 1991).

The 'in-between' considered as a bridge to linger communicates that people with hyphenated identities dwell in the midst of doubled imaginaries; in other words, living in the 'third space' is being in the tensioned space of potential opportunities for one's *being* and *becoming*. The process of *being* and *becoming* that is caught in the 'in-between' moves through fluidity and uncertainty, which in Bhabha's (1994) arguments, are the results of incommensurable cultural differences. Bhabha (1990) demonstrates how people with cultural differences live in binaries with negotiations. The conception of cultural diversity is meant to accommodate cultural differences; Bhabha (1990) critiques this argument and demonstrates some undersides of cultural diversity. According to Bhabha (1990), cultural diversity, despite being 'a bedrock of multicultural education policy,' is problematic in terms of its theory and practice. This problematization points to a hidden issue of cultural diversity, implying that there is a containment of cultural difference in the creation and promotion of cultural diversity.

Viewed from Bhabha's (1990) perspective, the promotion, encouragement, and accommodation of cultural diversity are occurring in countries like Canada, the United States, and Australia because of the continuous flow of migrated population from across the globe. Bhabha's critiquing implies that this is happening at the cost of constraining cultural differences. In Aoki's (1995) observation, accommodations of cultural diversity are not enough to acknowledge the differences between cultures; such accommodations are, instead, contributing to form "A silent norm that both contains and constrains differences on the underside of diversity" (p. 307). This argument reveals that the philosophy of multi-culturalism, that celebrates principles of cultural diversity, may be indifferent to communities as constituted with

cultural differences. Bhabha (1990) brings this to light, stating that “A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominated culture, which says that ‘these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid’” (p. 208). I consider Bhabha’s perception plausible as long as there remain problematic factors that prevent us from getting across cultures, and coming to understand different cultural values, differences, similarities, and customs. This also indicates the importance of the ‘in-between’ in a multi-cultural arena, as getting across cultures requires dwelling in the ‘in-between.’

The second problem behind the philosophy of cultural diversity that Bhabha (1990) asserts is the issue of racism that exists in implicit and explicit forms in societies where multi-culturalism is in practice. The reason is “because the universalism that paradoxically permits diversity masks ethnocentric norms, values and interests” (Bhabha, 1990, p. 208). These arguments convey a message that minority groups in multicultural communities do not have enough space to practice their norms and values because of a culture of power and systemic racism. Dei (2008) and Delpit (1988) suggest that the culture of power disproportionately impacts minority cultures and disadvantaged groups, and that systemic racism promotes oppression in a diverse society. Thinking on Dei and Delpit’s arguments, it explicates that the academy and teachers within school systems need to understand the culture of power, and their own place within it, in order to be able to share an understanding of it with their students. While Bhabha’s (1990) ‘third space’ or Aoki’s (1996) ‘in-between’ can be a location for such sharing and understanding, the covert functioning of the culture of power could also make them places of oppression.

**Critiquing racism and the culture of power in light of the ‘in-between.’** The need of the ‘in-between’ is implicit in the readings of Dei (2008) and Delpit (1988), as the authors discuss issues of how educational institutes suffer from systemic racism and a culture of power. Such

systemic racism and culture of power are indicative of the dominance of the western mainstream culture over minority cultures. For Delpit, the power of the dominant culture is enacted in the classroom in the form of curriculum and text books, since both curriculum developers and text book publishers hold and exercise power. To the contrary, students from dominated cultures may not relate and/or be represented within these published text books and developed curriculum, the curriculum that, in Aoki's (1991) argumentation, is a planned curriculum containing formal objectives and instructional methodology which stands in contrast with lived curriculum.

Delpit (1988) lays a theoretical foundation to understanding relations of power in schools as institutions, and classrooms as sites of learning. Her arguments point to a multitude of voices in multi-cultural classrooms, especially, those that have long been silenced, and put an emphasis on the need for these voices to be listened to. Viewing this argument critically from an Aokian perspective, it suggests that there are many voices going unheard because of an invisible distance between cultures. The distance between the dominant/dominated cultures further widens if people, belonging to different cultures, choose to remain within their own culture's boundaries, remaining demarcated by differences. An effective way to minimize this widening gap, as Delpit (1988) suggests, is "A very special kind of listening, listening that requires not only open eyes and ears, but open hearts and minds" (p. 297). This very much resonates with Aoki's (1996) notion of dwelling in the 'in-between' where people of different cultures speak up and listen to one another with their open hearts and minds.

Dei (2008) also points out gaps between the dominant and minority cultures, and explores how systemic racism lives, and exerts influence in, educational institutions. Dei's assertion that systemic racism is hidden and overt also resonates with Bhabha's (1994) arguments that explicate how implicitly and explicitly racism dwells and operates within multi-cultural settings.

In Dei's words, subtle and invisible racism "revolves around certain ontological, epistemological and axiological foundations" (p. 48), signifying that while an educational institute may appear fair and just to all, the reality is very different. Dei (2008) mentions different areas of systemic racism in the academy such as fabrication of whiteness, experiences of being 'Othered,' physical representation, and creation and validation of knowledge.

Dei's arguments on systemic racism assert that whiteness is a mark of the dominant culture which stands/is upheld as a symbol of excellence. Dei dissects how color matters and how bodies are perceived in both educational institutions and the academy. While doing this, Dei communicates a sense of urgency for educators and stakeholders to demonstrate their commitment to diversity, and act with a good deal of accountability and responsibility in order to address the issues of racism in educational institutions. Contemplating this argument, I consider Aoki's (1996) discussion of the 'in-between' may potentially offer an opportunity to translate such commitments into realities despite challenges about who executes the power. The reason is that the 'in-between,' despite being a vulnerable space, stands as a shared zone for those representing the dominant culture as well as for those from minority cultures, where the dwellers can get closer, and potentially develop better understandings and thus, enhance human relationships.

Bhabha (1990) argues that the 'in-between' spaces "provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (p. 1). This argument implies that issues of discrimination and racism can potentially be addressed in the 'third space.' Reflecting on Bhabha, Dei, and Delpit, I argue that they demonstrate their different perspectives on the same issue, and explore the tension of the binaries such as Eastern/Western,

home- and host-culture, and the dominant and dominated. These scholars seem to challenge the practice and philosophies of multi-culturalism, cultural diversity, cultural differences, racism, and culture of power, and seek ways to address them. Their language sounds uncompromising when they argue on the functioning of the power of the dominant culture in plural settings, including school classrooms. Bhabha, Dei, and Delpit's writings show how minority groups are divided, marginalized, and mistreated; whereas, Aoki's arguments focus on how people can be connected, and through this connection be given opportunity to learn from one another. I find Aoki's ideas more effective because he looks for good in people; I also consider Aoki's arguments more powerful than those discussed in this section in terms of connecting people of different cultures. In my research context, multi-cultural classrooms can be taken as such places of connections where students and teachers dwell together with commitments to both academic goals and character development.

Research that seems to support the value of Aoki's arguments is the qualitative study conducted in Toronto by James (2010). This work illustrates that the shared commitment of students and teachers can make a difference to student success in a school. James showed that a combination of the school's support, teachers' responsive behaviours, involvement of community, and a friendly environment, can play a significant role in meeting students' educational expectations and attainments, and potentially help develop their character. The study showed how, despite living in a working class neighbourhood, and coming from a low-income family of the 'dominated culture,' Kendra and Conrad succeeded in their educational journey. Conrad and Kendra were both students who graduated from high school and had gone onto pursue post-secondary (university) education. Their teachers' supportive role in these students' progress meant teachers being-the-students, and positioning themselves in the 'third space.' This

positionality of teachers is a potential dwelling in Aoki's generative space of opportunities for understanding one another. Within this frame of understanding, the presence of systemic racism and/or a culture of power, as argued by Dei and Delpit, can become less significant.

Interestingly, both students in James' research identified that the race of their teacher was less important than the desire on the part of teachers to connect and invest in the students.

James (2010) also showed how these students lived in the tensioned space and faced challenges while navigating and negotiating with their cultural capital (Spring, 2008). Viewing James' (2010) findings, it can be said that students with more cultural capital (namely, white, middle class, able-bodied, straight students) have a greater navigational capacity by virtue of their social status. Marginalized students, like Conrad and Kendra, may learn to exercise navigational capital and therefore experience success, but this is not guaranteed. At this point of reference, what becomes important is exploring and inhabiting the 'in-between' in order to address tensions in the binaries, such as center/margin, marginalized-, middle- and upper-class, and privileged/underprivileged.

Similarly, Kumashiro's (2000) arguments appear to be attempts at critiquing and addressing the issues of the dominant/dominated cultures, raised by Dei (2008) and Delpit (1988). Kumashiro outlines ways in which educators who desire change may work toward a broader anti-oppressive pedagogy in schools and classrooms. Kumashiro's arguments resonate with both Aoki and Bhabha and provide us with the opportunity to unite work with education in order to create change. Educators with a desire to end racism, sexism/heterosexism, classism, and others - isms within the classroom, and across schools have a vehicle to help them accomplish their goals: anti-oppressive education. Furthermore, Kumashiro argues that failing to "work against the various forms of oppression [racism, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, classism, etc] is to

be complicit with them” (p. 29). Kumashiro’s arguments suggest that in order to work toward ending oppression, we must be able to name it in order to know it. Change requires “disruptive knowledge, not simply more knowledge” (p. 34). He goes on to say that disruptive knowledge is not an end, but rather “A means toward the always-shifting end/goal of learning more” (p. 34). Kumashiro’s reading appears to be an interesting critique of Delpit, Dei, and James when he presents Britzman’s (1998) assertion that it is a post-structuralist approach that is capable of transcending relationships dominated by an *us versus them* mentality. Rupturing this binary mentality of *us/them* is what Bhabha (1994) suggests being done. The reason, as a post-structuralist approach posits, is that approaching educational transformations within the binary can prevent the change sought despite educators’ all good intentions for change and understanding marginalized ‘Others’.

To conclude, the tension in the arguments above lies in the binaries such as *us* and *them*, *center /margin*, and *dominant-dominated*; within these binaries exist the ‘in-between’ spaces represented by a ‘*slash*,’ a ‘*hyphen*,’ and an ‘*and*.’ To address this tension requires considering a bridge to linger; and on the bridge, the longer the lingering is, the healthier and more stable human relations become (Aoki, 1996). Despite having different modes of existence, what keeps our relationships stable and alive is the attempt we make to dwell in the space between ‘I-You’ mode of existence (Aoki, 1996; Buber, 1970; Bhabha, 1990). This argument leads to a conclusion that the attempt to dwell in the ‘in-between’ provides potential opportunities for us to grow, to develop our character, and to view the world with an enriched perspective; the perspective that will pay less attention to the notion of racism and power of culture, and more attention to a world of relations and humanity. This discourse of relationships and humanity



motivates people, who are caught in the tensionality of the binaries, to look for opportunities rather than see challenges.

**Implications of the ‘in-between.’** An implication of such arguments is that the ongoing acts of accommodating and promoting cultural diversity may not suffice to address issues of the dominance of a hegemonic culture. The tension exists, and continues, as long as the people living in the binary of ‘dominant’ and ‘dominated’ cultures choose to remain on the far edges of Aoki’s metaphorical bridge. Attempting to inhabit the bridge means attempting to acknowledge the differences. Cultural differences, as Bhabha (1990) argues, are not things or objects that can safely be put into a universal framework. To keep these differences alive, what is needed is the space of liminality, the ‘third space’ that provides gateways to new possibilities (Bhabha, 1990). Aoki’s notion of dwelling in the ‘in-between’ and Bhabha’s conceptualization of the ‘third space’ denote possibilities of new positions to emerge, that is without overriding the original ones. The ‘third space’ then is a location for the differences to co-exist, a place where two distinct cultures undergo a process of hybridization, an ongoing process that connects two supposed opposites, such as Eastern-Western (Johnson & Richardson, 2012).

Bhabha’s (1990) idea of ‘the third space’ is highly contested in the discourse of critical theories. He calls the ‘third space’ a hybrid space and compares it with the stairwell that conjoins the gap between upstairs and downstairs. This comparison points out to the gaps of tensions and opportunities between cultures. Bhabha (1990) explicates that the ‘third space’ has a potential to provide opportunities for cultural cross-fertilization; it also serves as a metaphorical tension that brings different cultures together in order to make negotiations. Johnston and Richardson’s (2012) arguments, which they draw from Bhabha (1990), also reinforce the tensionality of the ‘third space,’ stating that it “is an ambivalent space that opens up a cultural space of tension for

the negotiation of incommensurable differences” (p. 122). This argument denotes the point of meeting and understanding through an act of negotiation.

The term ‘negotiation’ generally refers to common human activities people in a society perform in their everyday lives; to be more specific, it is to reach an agreement between two perspectives in order to create, maintain, and strengthen human relationships (Engle, Elahee & Tatoglu, 2013). In other words, negotiation is an act of forming a consensus between the differences. To negotiate the differences, then, means to respect the modes of existence. In the context of my research, negotiation is not to be seen as a transaction between opposites, which aims to reach a definitive settlement. Rather, it is to be seen as transformative, allowing people to share experiences and thus come to a mutual respect and understanding. Negotiation, therefore, is integral to character development.

Negotiation, as I have described above, implies Buber’s (1970) discussion of ontology that explains two modes of existence: the ‘I-It,’ and the ‘I-You.’ The first mode of existence posits the world outside, which is the world of experience. The second mode denotes the world of relations, in which our encounter with nature, surrounding, and other humans, opens up and establishes the relationships necessary for human interaction. This line of argument points to a human condition, a condition that points to a mode of being in the world. This sense of being in the world embeds in, and connects with, each and everything in the world through which humans derive worldly experiences and develop human relationships. As with Aoki and Bhabha, Buber’s philosophic discussion of the world of relations implies the need and significance of the hyphenated space of the ‘in-between.’

Aoki (1996) draws from Bhabha and shows an implication of the ‘third space,’ marking “the third space as an ambivalent space of both this and that, of both East and West, wherein the

traditions of Western modernist epistemology can meet the Eastern traditions of Wisdom” (p. 319). The ‘third space’ is such a location where Eastern segments and values meet and interact with Western segments and values. While saying this, Aoki (1981) makes us think of a specific situation, that is: “what it means when two people from different land meet in a face-to-face situation to make sense together of school and curriculum” (p. 220). It is often a scenario that educators encounter within a multi-cultural setting. This scenario projects a possible situation of both hostility and unity between the two. What can work in such a projection is to dwell in the ‘third space,’ and engaging in a meaningful discourse with reciprocity of perspectives that can provide ways to understand the cultures of one another.

In multi-cultural settings, the ‘third space’ gives a sense of belongingness to multiple worlds. This perception of belongingness is crucial for human development because we all want to belong; for that, we need to be part of community. This is what Buber’s (1970) philosophy of the ‘I-You’ mode of existence implies. The ‘third space’ is where people in a community feel such belongingness. The important issue that counts is how the dwellers in the ‘third space’ conduct an ongoing pattern of communication in order to negotiate, and navigate, a prolonged and stable dwelling. Stable dwelling in the ‘third space’ occurs when dwellers from multiple worlds acknowledge cultural differences, have a sense of hybridity, and accept the challenges of a multi-cultural society. This is how hybrid identities are negotiated in the ‘third space’ (Johnston & Richardson, 2012).

While doing so, it can be argued that linguistic, ethnic, and cultural differences in the ‘third space’ remain in a live and dynamic interaction. Such interactions, according to Aoki (1996), are a process of crossing cultural borders, which I understand as a process of integrating into a wider community, a process of finding ‘We’ from ‘I’ and ‘You,’ and placing the ‘We’ in-between the

‘I-You’ mode of existence. The placing of the ‘We’ in the hyphenated space promotes an understanding of belongingness and togetherness, and encourages us to engage in authentic and meaningful dialogues. In Bhabha’s (1990) observation, those who dwell in the ‘third space’ are bound to carry on face-to-face interactions. Live and dynamic dialogues are, therefore, crucial to promoting stable democratic cultures in the third space (Dewey, 1916). Live face-to-face communication offers opportunities to navigate complexities and negotiate differences, a course which resonates with Dewey’s (1916) assertion that a meaningful pattern of communication is at the heart of all human activities; it promotes democracy; and, it makes negotiations possible while residing in the ‘third space.’

However, I question the smooth functionality of the ‘third space’. The reason is that the possibility of the emergence of conflict cannot be denied when cultures meet, intersect and collide in the designated locations of the ‘third space.’ Such possible cultural intersections and collisions occur in locations provided by the *ands*, *slashes* and *hyphens* that we find in binaries, such as Eastern *and* Western, Home / Host, and Nepali-Canadian. The struggles to emerge as hybridized identities from the ‘third space’ or from the ‘in-between’ are evidence of such complexities, which we find in Bhabha’s (1990) arguments and Aoki’s (1996) narratives. Based on these narratives, it can be argued that the ‘in-between’ is the space of unfamiliarity and uncertainty, where culturally diverse people become reluctant to dwell and negotiate. Yet, when two cultures, the home and the school, meet and interact, they provide a multitude of opportunities to negotiate, and find what works and what not to dwell together.

The connotation of multiplicity becomes evident when dwelling in the ‘in-between’ is considered as an act of living between two different persons, two different things, two different places, two different times, and with two different identities. To be more specific, it is living ‘in-

between' family and friends, between personal and professional life, between private and public zones, between now and then, between Nepal and Canada, between reality and fantasy, between hope and fear, between a sense of being secured and unsecured, between spiritual and material, and between liberal and communitarian. These multiple understandings of the 'in-between' keep one in a state of ongoing paradox. These inner feelings and lived experiences ground me in the 'in-between.' The act of dwelling in the 'in-between' can be physical and metaphysical, and temporal and spatial, implying that Aoki's notion of dwelling in the 'in-between' is both rich and complex.

Reflecting on Bhabha's conception of 'the third space' and Aoki's the 'in-between,' I find them simultaneously conceptualized and contested, being abstract, metaphoric, and philosophic spaces. The 'in-between,' understood as a bridge of generative uniqueness bears challenges in its implications. My readings help me observe critical connotations and perceive challenges associated with Aoki's philosophic conception of the 'in-between.' First, it is a philosophical conception, and there lies a theory-practice gap. Second, the 'in-between' exists in delicacy and vulnerability. It is because the space simultaneously belongs to no one and everyone. This none, and everyone's belongingness, has the potential to put a willing dweller's security and safety at stake. And third, dwelling in the 'in-between' itself is a slow and subconscious process. In Aoki and Bhabha's arguments, we do not find any specific ways to approach the 'in-between,' nor do they detail its effective applicability. In my lived experiences, often the dwelling in the 'in-between' happens on its own, as everyone needs everyone to form a more human community. In the reference of hyphenated Canadian communities, attempting to dwell in, and share, the 'in-between' can generate new areas of creativity, and provide new avenues to character development.

**Summary and conclusion.** Revisiting my own six years' lived experiences on Canadian soil and in multi-cultural settings, I find myself gradually pushed into the 'in-between' and having multiple ways to perceive both life and the world. I have changed over these years, and am changing constantly. I realize that this subconscious move of mine to the 'in-between' has enabled me to live-with-others in communities that are different from the one where I was born and brought up in many respects. The more I reflect on my new realities, the better I understand my new surroundings. While doing so, I am consistently in a process of (re)discovering and (re)constructing my own identity.

In developing these arguments around the 'in-between,' I have come to a synthesis that the 'in-between' space has the potential to offer opportunities for character development in a multi-cultural classroom. Thus, my reflections on my changing identity as a Nepali-Canadian resonate with Aoki's conception of the 'in-between.' Since I am experiencing life dwelling in the hyphenated space and witnessing a process of *being* and *becoming*, I consider the 'in-between' as a space of multiple possibilities, and utilize it in my work as a conceptual framework to explore opportunities for character development in multi-cultural settings. The line of argument, that I have developed, tells me that newness is bound to emerge and flow in such a setting. In my work, the home-culture stands as the first space and the school, as the host-culture as the second; and the space between these two is the 'in-between' or the third space. Taking this in to account, I now move onto the second part of the literature review in which I will examine and critique the literature relevant to my work. I will focus on the main traditions of character development in the East and West, and explore how these different Eastern and Western traditions of character development may potentially dwell in the 'in-between.'

## 2.2: Philosophical Foundations of Character Development

Character education as a topic of research and theory is vast, but central to my doctoral studies are issues pertaining to the foundation of character education and potential opportunities for character development in multi-cultural settings. For this, I briefly review the Eastern-Western notions of character development, and explore tensions that exist in the ‘in-between’ of the ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ conceptions. I critically reflect on these conceptions, critiquing and employing a framework developed from both liberal and communitarian schools of thought. The insights I develop are utilized to explore and interpret the Nepal immigrant students’ perceptions of character development, their lived experiences in multi-cultural classrooms, and Ontario public school teachers’ experiences about the opportunities they come across in a multi-cultural classroom. Throughout this section, I use the terms ‘character’ and ‘morality’ interchangeably, however, my emphasis is on the former.

Viewing the history of moral philosophy, we often find literature that speaks of beliefs, cultural practices, morality, and character development that have long traditions in eastern and/or western religious writings (Dasgupta, 1965; Gensler, 2013; Gowans, 2015; Morgan & Lawton, 2007). Following the criteria of relevance, I draw insights from these readings, and bring them around my discussion, given the limitation of time, space, and scope of my work (Boote & Beile, 2005). So, my focus, while critiquing the selected readings, is on moral teachings and character building arguments.

**Eastern conceptions of character.** Eastern societies are communitarian in their makeup, and moral values are taken as the key to decent and successful life (Gensler, 2013). These moral values are often associated with the different religious practices in the East, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islamism, Jainism, Confucianism, and Christianity. However, Hinduism and

Buddhism, in their many forms, claim the highest numbers of adherents in Nepal. I do not intend to say that other religions are less important; they are all equally important. My choice to exclude some from this discussion is deliberate. It is because my family, and the neighborhood, schools, temples, and monasteries where I grew up have been the sources of many of the values I hold most closely. Similarly, my lived experiences resonate more with Buddhism and Hinduism. My readings and ritual practices in these religions have remained highly influential in my being and becoming. My experiences reflect Dasgupta's (1965) argument that there is an inseparable interconnection of religion, morality, and philosophy; and our morality is shaped with religious beliefs and cultural practices, and is tremendously guided by the doctrines of *Dharma* and *Karma*, meaning righteousness and right action in English translation.

***Dharma and Karma principles.*** In Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, morality is primarily concerned with *Dharma*, translated in English as 'righteousness,' and *Karma*, translated as 'right action' (Mensky, 2007). Working from the *Vedas* and the *Gita*, the ancient books of Hindu philosophy, Dasgupta (1965) states that "*Dharma* as 'duty' emphasizes the systemic duty of every individual to act, in every life situation, in such a way that righteousness is achieved; in other words, to act appropriately" (p.4). This argument places morality at the highest position, implying that no negotiation of moral values is expected, even at a difficult time of life. This notion of morality is too ideal to bring into full practice, especially in life threatening contexts. Gowans' (2015) discussion of Buddhism shows that morality is concerned with notions of meditation and sacrifice. This argument indicates the need of the renunciation of body for spiritual attainment. However, the spiritual attainments, as argued by *Dharma*, "do not come as a result of detachment or meditation. They are, rather, moments of complete engagement with what-is-there" (Noddings, 2003, p. 169). Such a stance complies with Buber's (1970) 'I-You'



mode of existence, which denotes our relationship with everything around us that we encounter. Hence, I argue that there are challenges with the implications of the principles of *Dharma* in the context of plural Canadian societies, where negotiations of moral values are made in our daily life. Yet, what is notable in the notion of *Dharma* is that it denotes a life of moral integrity.

The conception of *Karma*, which is concerned with a moral law of cause and effect, is dominant in both Hindu and Buddhist morality (Gensler, 2013). The entire doctrine of *Karma* “teaches that ‘what you sow you shall reap’, if not in this life then in future rebirths when the fruit of Karma ripens” (Morgan, 2007, p. 61). To avoid ills in life, or after life, Buddhism suggests to follow “the eightfold paths: living rightly about beliefs, intentions, speech, actions, work, effort, mindfulness, and concentration” (Gensler, 2013, p. 51). It is believed that virtues such as peace of mind and compassion can be acquired through these paths. The crux of these teachings is to make our thoughts and actions just and righteous. Wisdom is considered a core value in Buddhism. To show the importance of wisdom, “Buddhists say that a wise enemy might do you less harm than a foolish friend” (Morgan, 2007, p. 69). Analyzing these teachings and beliefs of Buddhism, it can be said that morality is central to all human activities; morality is the key to maintaining harmony and order in both the family and community. This explains why the principles of *Dharma* and *Karma* are relevant to what we think and what we do in our personal and community life. The discussion suggests that both Hindu and Buddhist moral philosophies are inclined to communitarianism in their practices, in which righteousness and right actions are directed to construct a just and fair community.

This conception of communitarianism is also reflected in Confucianism that recognizes the importance of wisdom, and the significance of relationships among members in a community (Hall & Ames, 1999). Readings of Confucius imply that the family serves as the foundation of

society, as a sense of love, care, respect, and humanity begins with family life (Gensler, 2013). In other words, character is forged within the family, continues to develop in community, and reflects in a person's daily thoughts and actions. Here is what Confucius says about a man of humanity and character:

A man of humanity, wishing to establish his own character, also establishes the character of others, and wishing to be prominent himself, also helps others to be prominent (Analects 6:28, in W. Chan 1963:31, as cited in Gensler, 2013, p. 53).

This argument connotes that Confucianism promotes habits of cooperation, encourages members in a community to work not only for their good, but also for community benefits, and motivates every member to perform intelligent actions for community progress.

Confucian moral philosophy, as argued by Hall and Ames (1999), is concerned with the self-ordering community, where the "priority of morality over penal law is a bedrock value in any viable form of communitarian democracy" (p. 171). The argument asserts that morality is a major tool of building up, and sustaining, social harmony with an ideal of cultivating personal and communal life. Like Hindu and Buddhist moral philosophy, Confucianism believes in the harmonious relation between the binaries of the heaven and earth, form and matter, and body and mind. The arguments of Yao (2000) on Confucianism show a very clear connection with Buddhism in terms of their strong spiritual dimensions. Yao's discussion demonstrates that both consider compassion, humanistic education, and cultivation of human potential as central elements to a community's flourishing. However, Buddhism, understood as a philosophy of impermanence, is concerned with the cycle of life and death, whereas Confucianism, perceived as a philosophy of secular humanism, is more attentive to life than death. Character to Buddhism is to follow the doctrines of *Karma*, whereas character to Confucianism is the promotion of a

self-cultivation that leads to a frame of moral integrity. Hall and Ames (1999) connect the idea of humanness and righteousness, stating that “The way of humans is essentially the way of moral life, and that is why it is said that in human terms the way is called humanness and righteousness” (p. 154).

The religious moral doctrines discussed above give priority to spiritual devotion in connection with righteousness and right actions (Gowans, 2015), implying that this is the source of a meaningful life with virtuous roots. However, this is not to say that all human beings are predetermined to follow a course of what is good and wise. I argue that how an individual grows and develops is more a matter of how he/she builds connections and cultivates character in changing contexts. The East, with its communitarian beliefs, and the West with its liberal democratic principles need to share their commonalities.

**Western conceptions of character.** Discussions about the Western conception of character development takes us back to Aristotle’s ethics, Kant’s moral reasoning, and Kohlberg’s developmental psychology, as they provide insights for character education programs (Salls, 2007). However, they also fall short of resolving issues of character and morality, especially when character development comes to a debate in a situation where students come from diverse cultures. Generally, in moral philosophy, character is concerned with the moral dimensions that an individual possesses over time (Sandel, 2011). Moral dimensions differ from person to person, and from community to community. This appears to be more complex in a multi-cultural community where communicating between cultures is a common phenomenon. One particular approach to learning as well as character development in a multi-cultural setting may, therefore, not be enough in itself. The existing literature shows different models of morality, character education programs, and approaches. The question is how they fit in an increasingly multi-

cultural Canadian society. What follows is a brief critical reflection on the main thoughts of character and character development in the West.

*Aristotle on character and Kant on morality.* While discussing the major thinking on character, it is important to explore what “character” means in Western moral philosophy. Homiak (2011), in *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* states:

The English word “character” is derived from the Greek *charaktêr*, which was originally used of a mark impressed upon a coin. Later and more generally, “character” came to mean a distinctive mark by which one thing was distinguished from others, and then primarily to mean the assemblage of qualities that distinguish one individual from another.

The above argument suggests that the term “character” originally meant distinguishing qualities. One might also assume a kind of integrity implied in the argument, but that is not necessarily moral. An individual with a good moral character is someone who is not only ethical but also in a settled condition (Aristotle, Trans., 2012). The principle of ethics is concerned with human flourishing and virtues; virtues are ends in themselves; they are central to a person’s well-lived life; and they are acquired not through mere arguments and reasoning, but through practice and habituation. (Aristotle, Trans., 2012). Aristotle’s notion of human flourishing implies the importance of human happiness that “should apply to the whole life” (Noddings, 2003, p. 10) in order to attain human excellences which are required to live a virtuous life.

Aristotle talks of two kinds of human excellences: excellences of thought and excellences of character (Aristotle, Trans., 2012). To be virtuous means, then, to be in an excellent state and perform rational activity for which the performer should be guided by practical wisdom. This argument projects an image of the supremacy of contemplative thought, marked by the fullest exercise of rationality. What Aristotle argues is too abstract since our everyday life experiences

hardly take this course. What humans need to be happy is the community of companions with shared beliefs and responsibilities. Our relations to the community, attachment to the family, and interactions with friends and colleagues make significant contributions to our flourishing and develop character.

Human flourishing and happiness are considered the ultimate goal of education in the Aristotelian discussion of ethics (Howie, 1968). Although the meanings, and the sources of happiness, or human flourishing, differ from person to person, virtue, which can be defined as the right conduct, and simultaneously classified as intellectual and moral, is a means to happiness (Howie, 1968). Aristotle's thoughts on education serve as the foundation of all contemporary educational theories and practices (Salls, 2007). This is because one of the important principles of education, even today, is to encourage students to practice and reflect on what is ethical, which "is a matter of doing the right things to the right people for the right motive in the right way" (Howie, 1968, p.51). Yet, the issue in Aristotle's notion of character is whether it remains relevant with contemporary, complex pluralistic societies, where locating the base of morality and identifying common virtues is highly problematic (Haidt, 2012).

While saying this, I do not deny that practical wisdom is crucial to both learning new things and forming character. However, we learn and grow more through our connections and relations with everything that surrounds us. These manifestations of our relations suggest that "there is a necessary connection between education, character formation and social ideals" (Howie, 1968, p.25). What is remarkable in his argument is that the cultivation of human intellect takes place in our local surroundings and social institutions and, thereby, provides ways to achieve moral excellence.

The discussion on Aristotelian virtue ethics indicates that character development is a species of virtue ethics which is distinct from Kantian arguments on morality. The point is that the Kantian paradigm of morality is seen in contrast with the Aristotelian notion of virtue ethics, and a connection is usually not made between the two. However, I have reflected on the Kantian domain of morality in this section in order to deepen my understanding of moral philosophy, which eventually connects to the discussion of character education, as character formation is often seen in connection with moral development (Salls, 2007; Kirschenbaum, 1995). It is also because “The history of moral education – not only in Western Cultures but in most Eastern cultures as well – has been dominated by character education” (Noddings & Slote, 2003, p. 350).

Kant’s arguments on morality rest on the performance of human duties, primarily guided by reason. Homiak (2011) refers Kant in *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* and states, “In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant divides moral philosophy into two domains, that of justice or law on the one hand (the *Doctrine of Right*), and that of ethics or virtue on the other (the *Doctrine of Virtue*).” Johnson (2011), drawing on Kant, also notes that the autonomy of a rational will provides a base to morality; moral actions are virtuous; and virtuous actions offer strength to a person in fulfilling his/her civic duty. In Kant’s moral philosophy, human beings are not merely the means to achieve ends; instead they are ends in themselves (Salls, 2007). In fact, “Kantian ethics stresses the autonomy and dignity of every person” (Noddings & Slote, 2003, p. 342). This argument promotes individual freedom and embraces a liberal democratic ideal.

The general Kantian paradigm of morality, that is, the law of reason that makes the actions right, is in contrast with an Aristotelian theory of virtues, that is, that actions are said to be right when they become virtuous. Kant gives due importance to human autonomy, universal principles, and individual rights and duties, which have been questioned by communitarians,

including MacIntyre (1984). In terms of moral development, communitarians have pointed to the importance of the “centrality of communities, social contexts, webs of interlocution, and different ways of life” (Noddings & Slote, 2003, p. 342). This argument, I believe, aligns with Eastern Confucian and Buddhist notions of communal morality. Communitarianism is, I would argue, an important aspect of modern Canadian plural society, in which people are expected to show respect for diversity.

Kant’s focus on autonomy, will, duty, pure reasoning, and his notion of universality (Johnson, 2011) not only miss the attributes of multicultural society, but also downplays, some important aspects of moral development. These include aspects such as shared values that maintain community harmony (MacIntyre, 1984), shared beliefs that promote the respect for cultural diversity (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008), and importance of working together that strengthens democratic culture (Dewey, 1916). In addition, we find hardly any room for human emotions and passions in the Kantian paradigm of morality (Haidt, 2012). This downplay of emotions and passions is also evident in Kohlberg’s (1975) arguments that identify developmental moral stages, and considers character development as being closely tied to the development of reason. This conception of moral development as reasoning development contrasts with Aristotelian notion of virtues.

***Kohlberg and values clarifications.*** Aristotle (Trans., 2012) has provided a list of eleven moral virtues, including courage, friendliness, truthfulness, and justice. In a stable and homogeneous society, it may not be challenging to choose and practice these virtues. However, in a culturally diverse society, such a practice may fail to work effectively, as: “There are problems about whose values and whose traditions should form the basis for public moral education” (Noddings & Slote, 2003, p. 350). Thus, there is space in multi-cultural societies for

developing other value systems. Kohlberg's model of moral growth is one of these, through which he denies the virtue approach to character education and rejects the modality of values clarification.

Kohlberg's (1975) work is largely premised on a Kantian understanding of morality in terms of reasoning about the application of moral principles. Hence, following what Kant has postulated and Piaget has claimed, Kohlberg (1975) emphasizes the connection between cognitive development and moral stages, and asserts the role of human rationality in forming the foundation of morality. However, Kohlberg differs from Kant and Aristotle as he affirms that moral reasoning is a person's current stage of logical reasoning (Salls, 2007). Kohlberg's (1975) claim is that the more advanced the logical reasoning is, the more advanced the moral reasoning becomes. This leads to an argument that the highest form of moral development in an individual manifests when she/he begins to practice general principles of rights, and universal justice.

Kohlberg's research on developmental stages in the 1960s became a well-executed model of character education in the 1970s (Salls, 2007). Ironically, Kohlberg (1975), based on his notion of moral stages, dismissed the idea of character education and called it a "bag of virtues" approach. Although Kohlberg's developmental moral approach to education had a remarkable influence on educational institutions and educators in the 1970s and 80s, the values clarification movement gained increasing traction over these two decades (Kirschenbaum, 2000). This movement was a departure from traditional theories, and religious approaches, to moral education.

Values clarification brought noticeable changes to North American society and educational institutions. The goal, as Salls (2007) notes, "was to help students to live in a world where one set of values could not hold true for all people, all times, and all places" (p. 15). By



focusing on process, it was claimed that indoctrination could be avoided. Values clarification theory, however, was not intended to imply that the society is “values neutral” or “value free” (Kirschenbaum, 2000). Instead, what was contained in the values clarification movement was a belief that societies are value laden: a contextualization of contemporary Canadian multi-cultural society where differing people with differing values and ideals co-exist.

However, a widely recognized problem with values clarification is that it does not lead to making judgments about other values we come in contact with, which is relativistic and logical to a great extent if we perceive society from socio-cultural and political points of view.

Reflecting on the traditional and communitarian schools, it is argued that youth receive a set of values from their families and communities, and convert them into virtues as they grow up, a process that values clarification fundamentally ignored (Salls, 2007). The values clarification movement neither helps one make better decisions, nor does it lead one to better ways of life. In the Canadian social context, the values clarification movement fails to lead one to respect for others or other cultures, among other values. Instead, it provides room for an individual to live with highly individual, and potentially dangerous, ideas but does not suggest one steer clear of adopting those ideas for oneself. Despite such shortcomings, the literature shows that the rise and fall of the values clarification movement gave not only rise to character education programs, but also showed its importance in public schools (Lockwood, 1997; Salls, 2007).

The above discussions reflect that Aristotle’s virtue ethics can still be taken as the foundation of character education. Despite being in contrast with Aristotle, the Kantian ground of morality provided room for Kohlberg, and other later moral philosophers to conduct experiments on the stages of moral development that eventually promoted the need and importance of character

education. The values clarification movement paved the way for character education programs. Yet, issues of character education are still extant and need to be addressed.

***Dewey and MacIntyre on democracy and tradition.*** Dewey (1916) takes education as a continuous development, considers democracy as a way of life, focuses on the need for a democratic learning environment, and argues that education and learning are essentially the results of social interactions. This implies that character has social and cultural roots, is reflected in our words and deeds, and matures through one's lifelong practice. While looking at Dewey's philosophy of moral education, we find it in contrast with Kant and Kohlberg. Noddings and Slote (2003) state that "Dewey disagreed explicitly with the Kantian approach to morality, criticizing the separation of moral reasoning from empirical life" (p. 351). In Dewey's philosophy of education, human experiences derived through empirical life reside at the center of learning. Dewey (1916) also considers democracy as a way of life, and affirms that "character formation is an integral part of democratic education" (Salls, 2007, p. 53). Education, being a necessity of life, is as important to social life as nutrition is to physiological life (Dewey, 1916). This suggests that education functions in social agencies. These agencies have a role in preparing students in such a way that they become capable of not only coping with the challenges of life and meeting the pace of social change, but also become prepared for leading the society in the right way (Salls, 2007).

For Dewey, what matters, however, is not who you educate but how you educate, and within what environment. A learning experience takes place when learners actively engage in interactions in a friendly setting and democratic environment (Dewey, 1938). As learning is an experiential continuum, Dewey (1938) asserts that to educate a student means to help the student grow continuously, not only physically but also intellectually and morally. Experiences can be

both positive and negative, so the task of an educator is to see and guide the direction of experience. In other words, the type of environment provided to the learners while engaged in learning activities determines the direction of experience, which in itself is a moving force (Dewey, 1938). In this context, examining immigrant students' experiences in a multicultural classroom is crucial to understanding the opportunities and challenges to character development.

Dewey's pragmatism aligns with Confucianism in terms of promoting democratic culture and social engagement (Hall & Ames, 1999). This idea of social engagement suggests that a healthy society becomes viable when there is a continuous dialogue in order to create a dynamic community that ensures the participation of its members. According to Confucianism, community primarily means an extended family where manifestations of relations are highly valued. This concept of community is very close to MacIntyre (1984) and Dewey's (1916) ideas of community traditions, which enhance the idea that building character is more a matter of cultures and traditions, families and communities.

Deducing from the arguments of communitarians, like Dewey and MacIntyre, it can be said that character development takes place only in the context of community traditions and family ideals. This suggests that character development is primarily a local, rather than universal, issue. It is because the history of person is the series of embedded local narratives, and these local narratives are detrimental to his/her character.

In the arguments above, the point to be accounted for is that "there can be no universal enlightened morality grounded in an appeal to forms of reason" (Noddings & Slote, 2003, p.342). Drawing from Dewey (1916), Hall and Ames (1999) reinforce the need of participatory democracy in which intelligent actions emerge through a self-cultivating educative process, a process that captures and promotes an individual's moral domain. Dewey's arguments also assert

that all education is basically a form of moral education that aims at promoting habits of cooperation, performing virtuous actions, enhancing community progress, cultivating one's potential, and conserving a society's best traditions and cultural heritage. Hence, in Dewey's arguments, the expression of democracy is best seen not in social democratic institutions, but in peoples' thoughts and actions. This is a challenging task to be performed in a multi-cultural society where people may be hesitant to come closer and manifest relational actions. This hesitancy is caused, at times, by power dynamics, and at other times, by cultural differences. Arguments such as these indicate both the intensity and complexity of character development in a culturally and linguistically diverse community.

MacIntyre's (1984) reading of moral philosophy in the context of modern liberal society is distinct from Dewey's. MacIntyre accuses Enlightenment moral philosophers of downplaying the importance of socio-cultural contexts in a person's character formation. He sees modern industrial societies founded on the principles of liberalism as the key to moral decline. He advocates for the revival of Aristotelian virtue ethics and the practice of them in small American communities. MacIntyre (1984) contends that a community's traditions and narrative structures are central to our character development, and deplores the ongoing Western pursuit of individualism and family fragmentation, which, he believes, causes a decline in a person's character. According to communitarian vision, community is "one of the basic conceptual building blocks to be shaped and defined" (Kymlicka, 2002, p. 208).

Although Dewey and MacIntyre stand at two different vantage points in terms of understanding modern individualistic liberal society, they come to the same point while highlighting the importance of character education. The cultural and social life of an individual is at the center of Dewey's and MacIntyre's arguments as "both think that the individual is

intimately linked to society and unable to develop properly outside of a social framework” (Salls, 2007, p. 85). Yet, what their arguments fail to address is the complex nature of multi-cultural societies, with their multiple value systems, in which educative processes and character forging are not homogenous.

*Ethics of caring.* Amid these differing approaches and philosophies of moral education, Noddings’ arguments rest on an ethic of caring. Noddings and Slote (2003) critique Kantian rationalism and modern liberalism, and demonstrate how the communitarian theorists have raised questions of the Kantian philosophical notion of individualism, autonomy, and universalism. Care theorists stand in sharp contrast with the contemporary theories of justice that “concentrate more on determining correct principles than on explaining how individuals become equipped to act morally” (Kymlicka, 2002, p. 401). Learning moral principles, applying these principles to solve problems, and attending to right and fairness go with justice, whereas developing moral dispositions, seeking appropriate responses to particular case, and attending to responsibilities and relationships align with an ethic of care (Kymlicka, 2002).

Instead of giving high emphasis to reasoning, thinking, and applying universal principles as Kant claims, care theorists are more concerned with caring relationships between members in families, schools and communities. What is important is the centrality of communities, social contexts, practices and traditions. The revival of virtue ethics and a feminist ethic of caring are close to communitarianism to a large extent, as they consider human relations, interactions, and caring to be crucial factors to character development (Salls, 2007). Care theorists do acknowledge the importance of reasoning, but they do not consider pure reasoning as the source of morality. Care theorists are also not interested in making a list of virtues, “instead, they

concentrate on how children are treated and on the practice provided – what is modeled, discussed, and confirmed in daily interaction (Noddings & Slote, 2003, p. 353).

Noddings (1992) considers care as an alternative approach to moral education, placing the act of caring at the center of present educational debates on accountability and standardization. Teachers' genuine care, not only help students develop character, but also meet achievement gaps., Noddings focuses on the need to create an environment of caring where students can cultivate their potential and foster their creativity to the fullest extent, and contends that caring is all about cooperation, relationship, modeling, dialogue, and collective actions. Caring favours a differentiated curriculum, and pays attention to different interests and needs of different students. Although Noddings' (1992) alternative vision emphasizes that students should learn to care for selves, Schultz (1998) critiques Noddings' philosophy of caring and argues that caring alone is not enough to resist the culture of power in the present schooling system.

Schultz (1998) examines the theory of care and explores its limitations, contending that circumstances sometimes compel us not to care. In a multi-cultural society, both ambiguities and difficulties lie in maintaining our web of relationships, as there is danger in excluding the neediest from such relationship webs (Kymlicka, 2002). However, the theory of care has been a much-contested area of scholarship among educators over the last twenty years. In fact, caring has come to be considered a foundation for school-community partnerships. So, the main question is about how caring has been conceptualized by the broader learning community. Despite Noddings' (1992) ideals and optimism in arguments in defense of caring, the complexity lies in how far it is possible for educators and institutions to enable students to practice the value of caring across a broader multi-cultural spectrum.

Although a care approach is distinct from the arguments of moral and character education, it can potentially contribute to character development, especially in a multi-cultural setting. The challenge, however, lies in creating and promoting caring environments in order to cultivate caring relationships between students, and also between educators and students.

*Summary.* The arguments made thus far clearly indicate an ongoing liberal-communitarian debate. Character building is neither just a matter of searching for happiness as Aristotle claimed, nor is rationality alone the exclusive source of morality as Kant, Piaget, and Kohlberg believed. Modern multi-cultural societies are by nature values laden. Multi-cultural society is a reality in contemporary Canada. In such a multi-cultural society, cognitive development alone falls short of addressing the issues around morality and character development. What really counts is how we cultivate and promote a democratic culture while participating in community activities (Dewey, 1916), where we witness, and engage with, cultural intersections.

We can also see how philosophers differ from one another in their arguments, even as they are concerned with the same issue of education and character. What I found remarkable in Dewey's, MacIntyre's and Noddings' conceptions of education and character development is that they all emphasize the importance of families, communities, collaborative works, and democratic cultures that are founded and promoted through mutuality and solidarity. These major philosophical strands on character education support the idea that schools and educators cannot afford to ignore the need to help students acquire virtues and grow up as a person of character. Yet, the questions are: how far can these arguments accommodate and address issues of character development in multi-cultural classrooms? Can these debates address the tension of those living in the binaries?" One way to address these questions can be to bring both the communitarian and liberal debates closer.

**Critiquing liberal and communitarian debates.** Liberalism and communitarianism are alternate political conceptualizations; they are descriptions and arguments about what constitutes our political life. Viewing these schools of thought in connection with the societal moral domain, we find both the schools very much concerned with peoples' conceptions of the good. I describe some key aspects of liberal and communitarian philosophies in this section in order to provide descriptions to help understand and describe how immigrants from Eastern communitarian traditions confront Western liberal traditions upon their arrival in Canada, and also how such immigrants not only overcome, but also benefit, from this conflicting situation. The intent is to critique how the binary of communitarian/liberal traditions provides opportunities for character development in the context of a multi-cultural setting. I reflect on my own lived experiences of being caught in the 'in-between' of Eastern and Western values while building up the arguments in the paragraphs to follow.

The literature reviewed above discusses development broadly understood from two standpoints: the Eastern moral traditions, which tend to reflect communitarian values, and Western democratic traditions that are based upon liberal political beliefs. Categorizing the major moral philosophical projects, we find that Kant's philosophy of autonomy and Kohlberg's idea of developmental moral stages form a basis for liberal notions of moral development, whereas Eastern moral philosophical traditions, Aristotle's virtues, Dewey's growth and experience, MacIntyre's emphasis on traditions and community, and Noddings' ethics of caring can be seen as constituting a frame for communitarian conceptions (Aristotle, 2012; Dasgupta, 1965; Dewey, 1916; Gensler, 2013; Gowans, 2015; Hall & Ames, 1999; Kymlicka, 2002; MacIntyre, 1984; Morgan & Lawton, 2007; Salls, 2007) . Thinking about these arguments, it is important to investigate the distinctiveness and commonalities of the liberal and communitarian



traditions. This leads to an investigation of the experiences of those who are living in the shared zone of these contrasting traditions, focusing on how values that can be described as liberal and communitarian influence and shape immigrants' ways of life.

Immigrants, when they arrive in Canada, come with cultural capital, including their mother language, historical narratives, traditions, and conventions; simultaneously, they not only leave "behind the set of institutionalized practices" that they practiced in their homeland, but also uproot themselves both geographically and culturally (Kymlicka, 1995). They are entering a new socio-cultural space. This very much resonates with my experience; to me, it is a process of entering into the 'in-between' space, the space that lies between traditions that can be viewed as liberal and communitarian. In doing so, there are challenges to be faced, and opportunities to be taken in terms of choosing and managing life in a new way. A paradoxical situation as such provides potential opportunities for generating newness and creativity (Aoki, 1996).

Freedom of choice, a fundamental principle of liberalism, is key to generating such newness and creativity. This suggests that we, in the light of new information and experiences, are free not only to retain our beliefs and perceptions of the good life, but also to revise and change them as felt. It is because a liberal democratic society allows newcomers to retain their cultural heritage on the one hand and, on the other, it provides access to a flourishing civil-society. This leads to an interpretation that each individual in a liberal democratic society has the right to choose, assess, criticize, and revise the conception of the good. Kymlicka (1995) states:

The defining feature of liberalism is that it ascribes certain fundamental freedoms to each individual. In particular, it grants people a very wide freedom of choice in terms of how they lead their lives. It allows people to choose a conception of the good life, and then allows them to reconsider that decision, and adopt a new and hopefully better plan of life (p. 80).

This exemplifies what liberal society looks like. From the point of view of morality or character, immigrants, to a liberal society, often fall in the 'in-between' of two commitments: a commitment to communitarian way of life that considers family and community as a source of moral learning, and the commitment to freedom and equality that is taken as a measure of moral worth of an individual.

Kymlicka's (2002) descriptions show that there is an ongoing debate between liberal and communitarian schools, particularly on such central topics as social justice, individual rights, and community responsibilities. Liberal philosophy claims that people in a community should be free to choose their own good because they are autonomous beings. However, being free to choose our own good does not necessarily entail an unbridled freedom. Nor does it need to deny the fact that our conceptions of, and preferences for, the good life arise in families and communities.

Based on the Kantian notion of autonomy and universalism, liberal political philosophy is committed to valuing social justice, protecting and balancing certain individual rights and freedoms, and promoting autonomy and democracy. In Rawls' (1971) formulation, the idea of justice is that "All central primary goods – liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self respect – are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any or all of these goods is to the advantage of the least favoured" (p. 303, as cited in Kymlicka, 2002, p. 55). This idea of justice implies that the certain rights of individuals, regardless of their ideology, origin, race, culture, ethnicity, colour, and gender, are paramount to any society and state. While saying this, liberal philosophy envisions a framework of democratic society with components of freedom, equality, and dignity. I value the importance of these components for an individual's growth and progress in a liberal democratic society. However, reflecting on communitarian conceptions of a moral life, I suggest that moral recognition is more a matter of communal life.

In contrast to liberalism, communitarianism rejects the principle of individual autonomy, or at least its status as primary in making moral decisions.

Appearing as a reaction to liberalism, communitarian philosophies accuse liberalism of being and practicing an extreme form of individuality in the name of personal autonomy, seeming to give more value to the individual and less to a community's traditions. To put it in other words, communitarian philosophies give more moral recognition to the community, over an individual's autonomous self. To the communitarian, what counts as moral depends at least in part on the community context. This leads to the argument that the standards of justice and base of morality are found in forms of life and the traditions of the different communities we live in; and the notion and application of morality can vary from one particular context to the another (Bell, 2012). Communitarians thus do not forefront the individual's self-governing capacity, and do not demand universalizable criteria for justice. In contrast, liberalism gives moral recognition only to the individual. The liberal school of thought, premised upon rationality, asserts that every person, as an autonomous being, is responsible for deciding for him or herself what is good and what is right.

A well-known defence of communitarian thought claims that we make sense of our lives in narrative terms (MacIntyre, 1984). In a narrative conception of the self, our stories, history, culture, traditions, narratives, attachments and unity occupy a central place. This narrative conception of the self as embedded in roles, relationships and communities, contradicts the liberal conception of the self as autonomous. One result of this for communitarians is a fear of losing meaningful ties to our communities due to the excessive practice of autonomy. Communitarian schools of thought often deplore at the potential decline of family values, community traditions, public spaces, and civic organizations. Liberalism also claims that human

beings are rational beings, and they can reach their full potential only when they exercise their rights and freedoms to the fullest extent (Bell, 2012). However, “A freedom of choice is not a one-shot affair” (Kymlicka, 1995, p.91-92), instead, it requires revisiting many socio-cultural limitations before making choices in life.

In this ongoing debate, the issue of morality seems to be lost in the conflict between liberal and communitarian traditions. To illustrate, newcomers to Canada wish to retain their communitarian values, but when they start their new life, they take the state’s liberal underpinnings into account. Their commitments to community and freedom as discussed in the foregoing paragraphs place them in an uncertain situation of contradiction. In the context of Canadian plural societies, they may feel that their traditions come into conflict with, and contradict, public norms. However, reviewing my own six years in Canada, I find that this experience of conflict has the potential to make a substantial contribution to our understanding of moral perceptions by people caught in such a changing scenario. I now focus on how liberal-communitarian thoughts contradict and complement each other, explore what these schools have in common, and critique their commonalities.

The liberal conception of the self as autonomous, and the communitarian conception of the self as constituted by narrative, leads to two different conceptualizations of the self. For liberalism, the self is autonomous, meaning that a person is understood to be responsible for the choices they make, whereas for communitarianism, self is narrative, suggesting that part of a person’s role is to discover how one’s life is embedded in one’s history and narratives. In drawing these arguments together, what is crucial in making choice, or leading to a self-discovery process, depends on how well an individual exercises rationality and embraces practical reasoning. Despite their distinct philosophical stand, both liberal and communitarian

schools of thought agree on the welfare of people and communities. These stands are important in the context of my research, especially while bringing them in connection with people living in the binary of their legacies and concrete realities. By legacies, I point to the traditions they are committed to, and by realities, I mean the current life-world they have plunged into. Liberal democracy asserts that everyone is free to make choices and live a life of freedom, and considers rationality, the practical reasoning, as the key to a process of making choices (Kymlicka, 2002).

In my experience, this autonomous process of making choice enables us to review the values within our cultures, and also learn values from other cultures. This is truer in multi-cultural societies as values of one culture may overlap the other and vice versa. To me, this is the beauty of living in a plural society and learning from one another. My own experience suggests to me that intermingling with other cultures helps us question our convictions, and develop new perspectives on life and the world. The process of intermingling with other cultures can be long and challenging. A way to work out is to dwell in the 'third space,' and keep a balance between home-and host-values (Bhabha, 1990). In other words, it is to move forward to the 'in-between' of liberal and communitarian traditions and benefit from each. People, who live in the binary of two cultures, with two worldviews, can find support and benefit from both liberal and communitarian values. So, what counts is the search of what these two alternate schools of thought work together within a context of tensions and disagreements.

Revisiting the literature that I have discussed here, I claim that a useful way to frame questions of character for many immigrants to the West is through a binary of Eastern communitarian and Western liberal values. In other words, character development must find philosophical support in both the liberal and communitarian traditions. For example, South Asian immigrants like my family and I come to Canada with communitarian values that emphasize

family integrity, communal solidarity, narratives, and the community interconnectedness. I have lived and internalized these values; they have been a part and parcel of my moral life. However, these communitarian values, by and large, conflict with liberal values. To illustrate, my family and I have experienced and lived the values of individualism and autonomy to a large extent over the last six years. We have reviewed our past, reflected on the present situations, and made choices depending upon the circumstances. These experiences suggest to me that changes in the circumstances bring change to our moral perceptions.

Some of the important moral issues confronting many immigrants to Canada, and presumably other Western democracies, are best thought about in terms of the conflict between liberal and communitarian traditions. Based on my experiences, conflicts arise when newcomers to Canada initially confront liberal values of individuality and freedom. Due to these conflicts, many immigrants feel a sense of discomfort with what they experience in their everyday life. However, they can also benefit from new surroundings and the changing socio-cultural atmosphere, and begin to live with and internalize new values as time passes by. When communitarian eastern traditions remain in the background of immigrants' lives, liberal traditions overwhelmingly begin to influence their thoughts and actions. As a result, they struggle to protect their traditions on the one hand and, on the other, move forward to embrace liberal values. In such an 'in-between' situation, the challenge lies in maintaining a balance between the values we have carried while migrating to Canada and the values we are practicing in our day to day life. This 'in-between' situation of preserving and embracing two different traditions, as Aoki (1996) asserts, offers not only challenges but also opportunities for learning, and this learning suggests that an interaction within a multi-cultural setting leads to share the values with one another.

Conclusion. As discussed in the first section of my literature review, people dwelling in the ‘in-between’ of two world views such as the East and West, and of two cultures such as the home- and host-, are often caught in tension. However, people caught in these binaries do not necessarily continue living in a world of constant dichotomy. Instead, “Acculturation occurs when there is firsthand and continuous interaction between cultures” (Yahya & Wood, 2016, p. 3). This interaction leads to a process of negotiation. The discussion and my experiences also demonstrate that first generation immigrants and their children live in a fluid state, and experience a sense of difference from the community they live in, from the work place, and within educational institutions. This can happen in part because of the real or perceived conflict between the values that they carry, and the values reflected in the society they are entering. This gives rise to a conflicting situation, a situation of living in contradictions. This is described as a situation with generative and creative possibility in Aoki (1996) and Bhabha’s (1990) arguments. The importance of connections and negotiations is implied in their argumentation as the ‘in-between’ is described to be “An inspired site of being and becoming” (Pinar, 2005, p. 73).

Building connections and trust are key to progress and creativity. Character development is a work-together-initiative; and to meet this goal, people are required to connect themselves with new people and surroundings. The discussions show that the liberal traditions place a person’s rights and freedoms at the center. In contrast, the communitarian traditions consider community as a way of life. What is more important is to acknowledge the interdependence of an individual and their community. Freedom of choice is made only in a community context; and the progress of community becomes possible in the progress of members in that community.

The liberal description of the individual as a self-sufficient entity, an autonomous being, leads me to raise questions such as: what sort of person do I wish to become? What sort of life

should I lead? Who should I be? The ability to ask such questions depends upon a framework of liberty, freedom, equality, choice, autonomy, duty, reasoning, dignity, and law that one gives to oneself. However, a person from communitarian traditions would ask questions such as: how am I to understand myself? What are my connections? Who and what do I inherit? What are my obligations to others? These questions promote discussions on community traditions, communal companionships, and building connections.

There are conflicts, tensions, and contradictions in the debates of liberal and communitarian philosophies regarding the conception of the self. The conflict is also seen in the conception of the good. What constitutes the good is usually an individual matter in liberal philosophy, whereas what constitutes the good in communitarian philosophy is a community thing. This leads to a conclusion that the conception of the good can be both a shared and an individual one. In the formulation of the good, I consider changing contexts and circumstances as decisive; and they are potential to change our moral perceptions. Holding these arguments, I now move on to critiquing Ontario character development initiatives, using the lenses of curriculum as planned and curriculum as lived (Aoki, 1991). Then, I will employ the idea of ‘in-between’ in order to bridge the gap between these two forms of curriculum.

### **2.3: A Critique of Finding Common Ground**

Discussions in the second section of the literature review showed major strands of thought on character development which can be put into three approaches identified by Howard, Berkowitz and Schaeffer (2004). These approaches are: traditional and religious approaches, developmental approaches, and care approaches. Reflecting on the literature discussed, religious moral philosophy and Aristotle’s virtue ethics fall into traditional approaches as they prescribe a set of defined character traits and instructional pedagogy; Kant’s arguments on autonomy, Dewey’s



growth and experience, and Kohlberg's moral stages are concerned with developmental processes, experiential learning, and critical thinking as their focus rests on democratic education and liberal principles; and the arguments on caring constitute a care approach which views caring relationships as the foundation of character development (Winton, 2010). Communitarian beliefs, such as MacIntyre's (1984), fall somewhere 'in-between' advocating for a democratic community true to its traditional values. All these approaches to character development are implied in *Finding Common Ground: Character development in Ontario schools, K – 12* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008).

However, an important question is: does *Finding Common Ground* adequately address challenges of character development in rapidly changing multi-cultural classrooms? Keeping this question in mind, I argue that *Finding Common Ground*, understood as a policy document, needs to be examined in a new light. This policy document can be considered the curriculum-as-plan, which Aoki (1991) distinguishes from the curriculum-as-lived-experience. Aoki's arguments do not deny the importance of the curriculum-as-plan, but provide a new key to view curriculum-as-lived-experience. In the next section I provide a brief analysis of these two curriculum worlds.

**Curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived-experience.** Aoki's conception of the curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived-experience projects an image of two worlds of curriculum, the one represented by the prescribed curriculum and the other by a student's lived experiences. I critique and describe this notion of curriculum in relation to the *Finding Common Ground* policy document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). *Finding Common Ground* is a prescribed policy document, a document that stands and functions as the curriculum-as-plan, with its origin outside educational institutions (Aoki, 1991). In Aoki's conception, the planned curriculum involves "the works of curriculum planners, usually selected teachers from the field,

under the direction of some ministry official often designated as the curriculum director of a subject or a group of subjects” (p. 160). This implies a seamless interplay of social, political, cultural, and economic elements in the process of curriculum development. This argument shows a formal process of curriculum development, which upon completion comes to the classroom as a text book or a printed material with defined objectives and instructional methodology.

Traditionally, teachers have been expected to enact curriculum reforms in order to achieve the objectives established by curriculum planners. Such an expectation denies teachers’ professionalism, personal creativity and critical thinking: “whatever curriculum writers, politicians, administrators and academics say are the aims of the course, what actually happens is in the hands of teachers” (White 1988, p. 10). This line of thought resonates with Aoki’s (1991) argument: “Within this scheme of things, teachers are asked to be doers, and often they are asked to participate in implementation workshops” which ignore the skills of teachers that “emerge from reflection on their experiences of teaching” (p.160). Stating this, Aoki explicates that classroom teaching involves live activities and both teachers and students perform teaching learning activities in a situated world. The point Aoki makes is that the formally constructed curriculum remains unaware of the fact that “teaching is fundamentally a mode of being” (p. 160). To address this lack of awareness regarding the curriculum-as-plan, Aoki proposes the curriculum-as-lived-experience.

Aoki’s idea of the curriculum-as-lived-experience denotes a world of living, a world of being, and a world with live experiences. Considering curriculum-as-lived-experience is to acknowledge it as a phenomenological text that presents “multi-vocality, multi-perspectivity, and ‘lived’ aspects of textbooks and of classrooms” (Pinar & Reynolds, 1992, p. 7). This argument reflects a picture of an actual world of the classroom, where teachers and students interact and

converse face-to-face in order to create a community of trust and relationships. Aoki calls it a “situated world of curriculum-as-lived” as exemplified by how Miss O, Aoki’s imaginary teacher, and her students, dwell and work together to gain unique experiences of being with, and knowing, one another.

Teachers have defined roles to perform as far as curriculum-as-plan is concerned. Putting any teacher in Miss O’s place suggests that the teacher is primarily concerned with what s/he is bound to do to meet the educational goals designated in the planned curriculum. However, the teacher is surrounded with her students; she hears stories of her students; she observes her students’ smiles and upsets, their friendliness with others, their sense of being at ease or in difficulties, and their spontaneous actions and reactions in the learning process. Surrounded by her students, she develops a sense of working not only with the curriculum-as-planned, but more with the curriculum-as-lived, involving dynamic human beings, and sharing the space with opportunities for learning from one another. In this context, Aoki’s arguments show the ambiguous and tensional position of the teacher when these two worlds of curriculum are in operation.

Understanding lived-curriculum as phenomenological text asserts that a teacher in a busy classroom is “surrounded by layers of voices, some loud, some shrill, that claim to know what teaching is” (Aoki, 1992, p. 17). The silent voices, as Aoki argues, go unnoticed, and an important task of the teacher is to explore and visit where these silent voices dwell. Aoki exemplifies three narratives, critiques them, and shows how important narratives are in teaching. His interpretation concludes with an important theme of teaching, that is teaching is both ‘watchfulness’ and ‘thoughtfulness.’ Aoki’s emphasis on narratives reminds me of White’s (1980) argument about the value of narrativity in representing reality. If we are to understand

lived experiences in multi-cultural classrooms, then we need to listen to the importance of narratives.

**Importance of narrative.** Story is a portal through which a person enters the curriculum and by which his/her experience-of-curriculum is interpreted and made meaningful (Connelly & Xu, 2008). This suggests that every story we tell, and retell, is a process of construction and reconstruction of the knowledge, along with the experience of the people who are telling and retelling the story. This aligns with White's (1981) arguments that a narrative understanding of life is important for us to live in a landscape of diversity and in a changing world when diverse cultural narratives intersect. Narratives help us understand people's lives in their own terms, not in our defined categories, terms, assumptions, beliefs and bias, or the lenses, as may be used differently by different people. Their lived stories bring in insightful discussions in an enlightening curriculum-making journey for all of us involved.

I believe that the willing involvement of both students and teachers in narrating their lived stories can contribute to character development as it offers opportunities of connections and relational manifestations. This claim is supported by White's (1981) concluding question, "Could we ever narrativize without moralizing?" (p. 20), indicating the power of culture in shaping one's character. This entails that character develops through a meaningful exchange of our lived stories, which are shaped by our cultural convictions (Hunter, 2000).

However, my experiences tell me that our convictions are never static; they change along with our position in time and place. Despite having this constant change in our beliefs, and in life, our identity/reality, by and large, depends on what our stories and cultures have made us. The most important point of White's (1981) assertion is that questions of narrative are fundamentally questions of culture and humanity. This is because narrative is a term that applies

to all cultures. Focusing on the importance of narrative, White writes that: “We are not able to fully comprehend specific thought patterns of another culture, but we have relatively less difficulty understanding a story coming from another culture” (p. 5). Thus, to explore narrative is to explore the nature of what it means to be human and to open the door for cross-cultural understanding. This argument is evidently supported by Milner’s (2007) study, in which he adopts a narrative approach to the relevance and centrality of race and racism in society. From Milner’s work, we may find answers not only to the question: “what is the value of narrative in representing reality?” but also to the question: “what is the value of narrative in curriculum studies and character development?”

Curriculum-as-lived-experience aligns with Milner’s (2007) assertion that “curriculum is a verb and a noun” (p. 587). This indicates the dual role of curriculum, that is, curriculum is simultaneously an object and an action. This active state of the curriculum implies that it can act upon individuals in the classroom. Using narrative to connect with students is a powerful way to enact [the verb] ‘the curriculum’ in the classroom. Furthermore, the reciprocity of sharing one’s lived experiences (narrative), while meeting curriculum objectives, might contribute to form a participatory classroom. This suggests that learning takes place in mutual interactions in a democratic environment, and narratives are important to serve this purpose (Dewey, 1916). It is commonly agreed that we are humans because we have storied lives.

However, as teachers we can be overwhelmed by the responsibility and expectation to tell students their stories, or only listen to the stories we want to hear, and effectively ignore those who struggle to be heard. Narratives, at least those worth telling and listening to, necessitate vulnerability (perhaps even a damaging vulnerability) on the part of the teller, so how do we honour the sacredness of a story? And how do we protect our own stories, especially those that

no doubt hinge on another's story as well? Yet, the stories students and teachers carry into the classroom have tremendous potential to shape the curriculum. I agree with Milner that teachers essentially are the curriculum, and at the same time, students and live classroom environments contribute to make it mature and rich. The point is that the way we edit, modify, and negotiate meaning is always filtered through our own values, beliefs, and philosophy, and is unique to each teacher.

To conclude, narrative speaks only of the events an individual chooses to include, which can create stories that lead the readers (or the listeners) somewhere for a specific purpose. As Milner (2007) states, narrative can provide information and knowledge that is not available in the formal curricula for student learning. Milner was presuming that his students would have difficulty “critiquing (their) own assumptions about the world especially if (they) believe the world works for (them)” (p.88). A key message to draw from this argument is that the traditional meanings associated with subjectivity and objectivity, and their relationship to - or value in discerning - what's real are undeniably in transformation. I consider that narratives shared in the hyphenated zone of the ‘in-between’ can bridge the gap between the planned and lived curriculum.

**Bridging the gap between the two curriculum worlds.** The discussion on Aoki's two worlds of curriculum and the importance of narratives demonstrates a paradoxical situation that teachers face every day in their culturally diverse classroom. The world of curriculum-as-plan sets the guidelines and teachers are traditionally bound to follow in order to achieve the set goals. In the context of *Finding Common Ground*, character educators are expected to execute their assigned roles and responsibilities. Some of these include modeling the character attributes, ensuring safe learning environments, valuing caring relationships, using the attributes identified

in Ontario curriculum, fostering a sense of belonging, promoting democratic cultures, embedding character development in their subject areas, and ensuring respect for diversity.

To meet these expectations, teachers need to plan, act, and review the curriculum-as-plan constantly. This may overshadow Aoki's suggested teaching as 'thoughtfulness' and 'watchfulness.' Enactment of the curriculum requires that teachers are the curriculum; students are the curriculum; classrooms are the curriculum; and, everything that happens inside or outside the classroom is the curriculum. In other words, this is the curriculum-as-lived that constitutes what teachers and students together do in the classroom. In this world of curriculum, what teachers do is not always dictated by the curriculum-as-plan. In fact, teachers are 'in-between' these two worlds of curriculum – the worlds of planned curriculum and lived curriculum; a place of ambiguity and uncertainty, yet with generative and creative possibility (Aoki, 1996). Dwelling in this scenario can be more problematic in a multi-cultural classroom, where multiplicity of narratives and layers of voices can complicate the situation. Aoki (1991) suggests that in such an environment, teachers need to acknowledge the importance of dwelling in the 'in-between', and the opportunities that their position affords for developing an environment that positively impacts character development.

Aoki (1990) argues for the 'tensionality' of dwelling in the 'in-between' two different curriculum worlds, however, a teacher like Miss O, understands "that this tensionality in her pedagogical situation is a mode of being a teacher, a mode that could be oppressive and depressive, marked by despair and hopelessness, and at other times, challenging and stimulating, evoking hopefulness for venturing forth" (p. 162). Aoki's teacher, Miss O, is described as maintaining a balance as she "indwells between two horizons – the horizon of the curriculum-as-plan as she understands it and the horizon of the curriculum-as-lived-experience with her pupils"

(p. 161). What do we understand by this argument while taking this in relation to *Finding Common Ground*?

*Finding Common Ground*, a designated character development initiative, fails to state the roles of teachers and students in the light of curriculum-as-lived, despite the initiative clearly states, in its key beliefs and principles, that “Character development is not a new curriculum. It requires an integrated, cross-curriculum to learning. It is in everything that we do in schools and is embedded into policies, programs, processes, practices and interactions” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p.5), it fails to envision the paradoxical tensionality of teachers’ lived experiences. The initiative, taken as the curriculum-as-plan, contains many important visions with notable guidelines. However, this needs to be approached in connection with the reality of what happens in a dynamic classroom where sharing of cultural capital and lived stories reflects the curriculum-as-lived.

The arguments of White and Milner highlight the gaps between peoples’ cultures, thoughts, and ways of life; there are gaps, in many respects, between students and teachers, between their worldviews, between non-living instructional objects like textbooks and living human beings; and there are gaps between different narratives that students and teachers bring into classrooms. Here, Aoki’s philosophic bridge is what is needed to linger and close the gap. Dwelling in the ‘in-between’ of these binaries is to “open ourselves to this fundamental way in which we all experience life” (p. 164). To reinforce, this dwelling in the ‘in-between’ is not to ignore the one and to embrace the other, but to promote connections, build relations, and value the existence of something that is different from us. This, I believe, provides opportunities for understanding the Other and consequently positively impacting on character.



Based on the arguments made above, I believe that *Finding Common Ground*, as curriculum-as-planned, needs to be enacted in concert with the curriculum-as-lived. An effective way to do this is to bridge the gap that exists between the two curricula by dwelling in the ‘in-between.’ In the section to follow, I now make a critical review of definitions of character and character development, with a special focus on *Finding Common Ground*, and develop a working definition that I will operationalise in my work.

#### **2.4: Defining Character**

The literature reviewed in the foregoing sections reveals that character matters in all aspects of our life. Discussions demonstrate that all thinkers, from Greek philosophers to contemporary character educators, seem to land and dwell in the point that all education is primarily a moral education. However, there is no consensus in their arguments about what character is, and how character develops. Keeping these diverse and rich thoughts in mind, I, in this section, critically explore the main definitions of character as defined by character educators, and critique the meaning of character development as outlined in *Finding Common Ground*. The aim is to investigate and describe what character development is concerned with in terms of Ontario’s increasingly multi-cultural societies. This will lead me to develop a working definition of character that I will make use of in my work.

According to Aristotle, virtues are habits that manifest themselves in actions; and character is a disposition of those virtuous actions in a state when the soul remains in a stable equilibrium (Howie, 1968). This indicates that virtues, unless and until they are translated into human actions, are of no value in themselves. Their value as constituents of character lies in being active and manifesting themselves in an individual’s daily life. This argument shows how intricately virtues and character are connected. Aristotle’s definition asserts that character is a combination

and reflection of virtues in a person's words and actions. To illustrate, a person becomes known as courageous by showing courage at a difficult time, and respectful by respecting others.

Aristotle argues that "good character is founded not on ethical precepts derived from formal instruction but on continuous practice in making intelligent judgments based on realistic assessments of particular situations" (Howie, 1968, p. 51). This implies that character is concerned with what a person is in totality.

Aristotle's definition of character suggests that a person is to be rational in order to live a life of right conduct. For this, what is required is the cultivation of both moral and intellectual virtues. Curran (2007) makes an analogy of Aristotle's account of virtue and shows how moral virtue differs from intellectual virtue. Curran states that moral virtue cannot be taught through a set of instructions. Instead, it can be acquired through the right and consistent practice.

Aristotle's assertion, as Curran (2007) has mentioned, is that there lie some interdependencies between moral and intellectual virtues which together constitute a good character. Here arises a question: what does good character look like?

In Lickona's (1991) words, "Good character is what we want for our children" (p. 50). This definition of character is suggestive to how we think of character and how we wish to see our children behave. In a multi-cultural community, perspectives vary regarding what is good and what it consists of. However, it is important to know the sources and elements of good character. Considering these resources and elements, Lickona (1991) notes "Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good—habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action" (p. 51), and to me, the primary sources of these human goods are family values, human traditions, and cultures. Thinking about this, it can be argued that the

controversy lies in deciding what the good means. To illustrate, what is good in Canadian context may not necessarily mean the same in the Nepali context, and vice-versa.

Drawing from Dewey, Salls (2007) also notes that “good character springs from social involvement and is the result of membership in a social group” (p.53). This can be accepted in the sense that an individual’s social involvement promotes her connections, which can eventually offer opportunities for building character by learning new things. However, making connections is not an easy task in a culturally heterogeneous setting. Modern North-American multi-cultural societies are diverse and rich in terms of their linguistic and cultural diversity (Spring, 2008), which are in contrast with MacIntyre’s (1984) framework for how values arise within smallish communities. MacIntyre provides a notion of morality as virtues, or character, within a community tradition and cultural framework, and by doing so, he intends his notion to be fairly universal. What is implied in these arguments on defining character are inter-dependencies and inter-connections between culture and character.

**Culture and character.** Generally, culture can be “viewed as that pattern of knowledge, skills, behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs, as well as material artifacts, produced by a human society and transmitted from one generation to another” (Pai, Adler, and Shadiow, 2006, p. 19). Culture in its broad sense is concerned with moral, political, social, religious, technological, and economic issues in which a person comes across, fully immerses, and grows up as a character (Pai et al, 2006). Entailing the dynamic aspect of character and culture, this argument explains that people have their own ways of viewing, understanding, and interpreting the world, and these unique ways of interrelating with the world keep one distinct from others. Such a cultural influence in character development suggests that character is not limited to a mere set of personality traits, as Aristotle states, nor is it confined to an embodiment of ideals, as Buddhist

and Confucius moral philosophy exemplifies. There is another perception of character, derived from social-cultural point of view, which suggests that character and culture are inter-connected and inter-dependent (Hutcheon, 1999; Hunter, 2000).

Hunter's (2000) arguments inform that character develops within cultural foundations and declines with a diminution of cultural depth and stability. This implies the significance of cultural values in shaping character, but does not necessarily mean that these values and foundations ever remain the same, especially in the context of a plural society. This leads to an argument that human beings are always in a continuum of making and remaking culture and character (Hutcheon, 1999). I argue that, depending upon our surroundings and new realities, our self becomes autonomous at one time; and at other time, it becomes narrative. Kant's autonomous, and MacIntyre's narrative conceptions of the self, in my experience, reveal more vividly in a multi-cultural society, where cultural convictions are constantly being shaped and reshaped. This changing of the self drives an individual to engage in both personal and social life of morality.

Hutcheon's (1999) arguments show how humans can "be both a creator and creature of culture" (p. 23), and illustrates how the decline in cultural value can contribute to a character crisis for both individuals and the wider community. Hutcheon (1999) explicates the importance of social order, family norms, parental caring, and cultural convictions in a child's character formation. These positives, Hutcheon (1999) argues, can only be sustained if humans are guided by their traditions and cultures. I agree that our traditions and cultures are valuable to guide us; however, the problem in Hutcheon's argument is how such homogeneous traditions function in heterogeneous societies. Further, my concern is how people, living with bi-cultural identities, accommodate and practice their values and beliefs. What really counts is how we make the

choices, interact with others, and socialize ourselves in the changing reality, and thereby shape and reshape our beliefs and ideals. This discussion leads me to a point that what good means in one context changes its meaning in another context. For example, it is generally considered to be impolite to use the left hand while passing things to someone in Nepali culture, whereas, doing that is not taken to be impolite in western culture. Thus, the definition of good, as discussed above, varies from one culture to the other, and from one local narrative to the other.

The implication in such arguments is that cultural differences deepen the complexity of character development in multi-cultural societies (Haidt, 2012). *Finding Common Ground* acknowledges this complexity while defining character development, and elaborating its key beliefs and principles (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008)

**What is character development?** Stating that “Character development is education at its best,” *Finding Common Ground* invites “All Ontarians to make character development a foundation of our education system” (p. 2). This highlights the rationale behind the importance of character education in Ontario’s publicly funded schools where students of diverse cultural background are bound to dwell together. This public school classroom diversity potentially indicates the possibility of both conflict and learning opportunities. How character develops in this scenario is an important area of study. Taking these learning opportunities and conflicting possibilities into account, *Finding Common Ground* defines character development as:

the deliberate effort to nurture the universal attributes upon which schools and communities find consensus. These attributes provide a standard for behaviour against which we hold ourselves accountable. They permeate all that happens in schools. They bind us together across the lines that often divide us in society. They form the basis of our relationships and of responsible citizenship. They are a foundation for excellence and equity in education, and for

our vision of learning cultures and school communities that are respectful, safe, caring and inclusive (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p.3).

This notion of character development implies neither a form of indoctrination, nor is its goal analogous to religious education. The emphasis lies in a shared vision, caring relationships, mutual respect, and community building which is what students in a multicultural classroom should be encouraged to practice. However, an important and challenging task is to determine these character attributes, and reflect elements that we all commonly value.

Canada is such a multicultural country where people generally feel proud of their citizenship (Ungerleider, 2007). Many new Canadians (like my family and I) definitely experienced an overwhelming feeling knowing that “people retain their heritage languages and their cultural identifications while enjoying the full benefits of a citizenship founded on shared rights, freedoms, and obligations” (Ungerleider, 2007, p. ix). In contrast to this, Egbo (2009) makes a criticism, claiming that there is a contradiction between advocacy and action. Egbo remarks that the contradiction between the celebration of multiculturalism and the implied emphasis of assimilationist approach are still in practice, which contrasts my lived experiences in Canada.

Even if Egbo’s arguments are taken for granted, “it is increasingly accepted that this assimilationist approach is neither necessary nor justifiable” (Kymlicka, 2002, p. 354). I argue that it is more a matter of making connections with people from diverse cultures, and promoting integrations through commonalities that we all value. The point to be considered is that this process of integration into the mainstream society itself is a very slow process that operates intergenerationally (Kymlicka, 2002).

The above arguments are oriented more to theories rather than to practice. Viewing their implications, it can be argued that there are efforts constantly made to promote respect for

diversity in Canadian classrooms. However, translating this philosophy into action requires sincere educational, social, and political will. Challenges lie in acknowledging the differences that students bring into the classroom. These differences manifest in the classroom both implicitly and explicitly as a situated curriculum (Aoki, 1991). This situatedness, which the curriculum-as-plan lacks, is the curriculum-as-lived-experience. This first-order-curriculum world can provide opportunities for character development. In other words, a sense of respect and responsibility can emerge in the curriculum-as-lived. Respect is a fundamental character virtue; highlighting its importance in a multicultural classroom, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) states:

Character development is an avenue through which students develop respect for self, others, property, the environment, diversity, human rights and other attributes upon which we find common ground as Canadians. It creates and expands opportunities for students to learn about, analyze, question, and contribute to, the building of their communities, our nation and the world. They develop an understanding of the interconnectedness and linkages that underlie social cohesion. Citizenship development is a deliberate effort to nurture these democratic ideals (p. 22).

This assertion recognizes civic virtues of responsibility of an individual who is expected to contribute in community and nation building process. The ideals, mentioned in the argument, align with the principles of both liberalism and communitarianism, as the emphasis lies in critical thinking, community building, and making connections. This notion of character development integrates character development with citizenship development.

The character document argues that “Developing character is a shared responsibility” (p.9), expecting that schools and families connect themselves and work together in order to forge

students' character. This shows the need of parent-school alliances, but fails to indicate the barriers in building such alliances. These barriers may exist because of linguistic and cultural diversity among parents. I argue that parents' unity and solidarity with schools may be a key to students' academic achievement and character building. This argument resonates with Aoki's (1991) conception of dwelling in the differences.

Aoki (1991) argues that multi-culturalism is a reality in Canadian classrooms, and dwelling in the midst of inter-culturalism is what people living in the binaries are to initiate. Aoki's arguments assume that the complexities deepened by cultural diversity can be approached and addressed when people move forward to the zone of differences in order to dwell in the '*inter*' of 'inter-culturalism.' Aoki writes, "Indwelling here is a dwelling in the midst of differences, often trying and difficult" (p. 382), yet with unique opportunities for character development. The implication in this argument is that people living in the binary are cross-cultural as Nepali-Canadian, have multiple identities as Japanese-Canadian, and their dwelling amidst the differences is an opportunity for forging consensus and making negotiations. My concern in this discussion is that the dwelling in the differences can help the dwellers learn from one another, respect differences of one another, and share space for one another.

The discussions on what character means, and how character develops assert that conceptualizing character development in connection with a multi-cultural setting is a complex task. Character is more than what is the right thing to do (Sandel, 2011), and is not limited to pure reasoning, human intuitions, and educational institutions (Haidt, 2012). Despite these paradoxical arguments about what character is, and how character develops, character education continues to generate interest from philosophers and educators, as education for character is what



most educators and educational institutions strive for (Dewey, 1916; Howie, 1968; Lickona, 1991; MacIntyre, 1984; Salls, 2007).

Reflecting on the arguments above, character can be defined as *a set of collective attributes of personhood that an individual manifests to oneself, to others, and to the broader community. Character development, in a multi-cultural context, is concerned with dwelling in the 'in-between,' making connections, building relations, and developing a sense of respect and responsibility through the cultivation of democratic culture. To be more precise, character development is a process of building relationships, and making negotiations.*

The collective attributes of personhood include caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and respect for self and others, and taken together, these form the basis of desired character (Lickona, Schaps & Lewis, 2002). I argue that these attributes are meant to be developed and acquired through connections and negotiations. As an individual connected to the community, I respect and exercise the fundamental individual right and, at the same time, I firmly believe in the power of community to enhance my relationships with others, which I consider an important aspect of character development. Similarly, I assert that character flourishes in caring community founded in a democratic environment. The more we cultivate democratic culture, the more responsible we become, and the better we respect one another. The point is to make a just and better world, and “the way to a better world is more likely to depend on better people than on better principles” (Noddings & Slote, 2003, p. 355).

**Conclusion.** To conclude, character flourishes in an environment where similarities are shared, and differences are respected; where people dwell in the ‘in-between’ of different worldviews, teachers dwell in the ‘in-between’ of two curriculum worlds in order to help students connect with and build trust, and develop a true sense of respect, tolerance, and

responsibility. Such in-dwelling can contribute in cultivating democratic culture and promoting human relations.

What is needed, perhaps, is more substantial research of Canada's social and cultural milieu in relation to character development and multicultural societies. My proposed research in this context is important as it aims to explore immigrant students' experiences and perceptions of character development, teachers' experiences in a multicultural classroom. Examining their lived experiences, I anticipate revealing the opportunities for character development in a multi-cultural setting.

### **2.5: Research Question**

After having briefly analysed the literature of character and character development, two curriculum worlds, and character education policies and practices, it has been clear that character development can potentially take place in the 'in-between' of cultural differences. The 'in-between' is described as the 'third space' of in-built contradictions and tensionality. However, this bounded space is also described as having the possibility of generating new things and new possibilities. In this point of reference, character building in a multicultural setting is more an opportunity than a challenge. Taking this into account, my research aims to explore opportunities for character development in multi-cultural settings. To meet this aim, I will explore Nepali immigrant students' perceptions of character and their experiences in multi-cultural classrooms, and look into the opportunities for character development that Ontario public school teachers have experienced in a culturally diverse classroom. The guiding question of my research is: *What are the opportunities for character development in multi-cultural settings?* This guiding question will be further explored through these subsidiary questions:

1. Based on the lived experiences, what are Nepali immigrant students' perceptions of character development?
2. What are the experiences of Ontario public school teachers while dwelling in the 'in-between' of the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived?

To explore the answers to the above questions, I will employ phenomenology as an appropriate research methodology, and use phenomenological interviews as the most suitable method to collect data.

### Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

According to Savin-Baden and Major (2013), qualitative research is defined “As social research that is aimed at investigating the way in which people make sense of their ideas and experiences” (p. 11). Qualitative research is exploratory and descriptive; it is concerned with process; and data is analysed inductively (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Regarding the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research, Creswell (2009) contends that social constructivism is such a perspective as it explores how individuals seek an understanding of the world in which they live and work. Patton (2002) also emphasizes the constructivist way in which human beings experience, and interpret, the world. In qualitative research, the goal is, therefore, to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied. In fact, “Qualitative research is an umbrella cross- and interdisciplinary term, unifying very diverse methods with often contracting assumptions, which defies simple definitions” (Gabrielian 1997, p. 178, as cited in Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 11). What is remarkable here is that there are multiple lines to approaching qualitative research.

Regarding qualitative research design, Wallen and Fraenkel (2001) state that many researchers are more interested in the quality of a particular activity than in how often it occurs. They further note that “research studies that investigate the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials are frequently referred to as qualitative research” (p. 432). According to Wallen and Fraenkel (2001), qualitative research has several particular characteristics. It utilizes emergent designs with a descriptive and explorative focus; it follows a purposive sample that takes place in a natural setting; it regards the researcher as an instrument, and data as people’s words and actions; and, it embraces an ongoing and inductive data analysis. So, under the frame

of qualitative research design, I will apply phenomenology both as a guiding philosophy and as a strategy of inquiry (van Manen, 1990).

The philosophical worldviews, the strategies, and the methods all make significant contributions to a qualitative research design (Creswell, 2009). Savin-Baden and Major (2013) explain that philosophical worldviews guide the entire research process; and they contend that a research technique might become an empty process without a philosophical underpinning. So, how to research is necessarily a philosophical question (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Taking this into account, I will draw philosophical insights from phenomenology, anticipating that this will guide the entire process of my proposed research.

### **3.1: Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is a philosophical movement founded in the middle of the twentieth century by Husserl (1889-1976), who was influenced by Kant, Hegel, and Descartes (Ozmon, 2012). Husserl focused on the primordial consciousness and emphasized the need of *bracketing*: a process that suspends the researcher's experiences in order to see things as they are. Heidegger later rejected the notion of bracketing, and argued that suspension is not possible, as the researcher cannot stand outside the pre-reflections (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Heidegger adopted and extended Husserl's methodology with the hermeneutic philosophy that primarily deals with the interpretation of lived experience (Ozmon, 2012). Regarding the history and origin of phenomenology as a philosophy, Smith (2011) in *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (2011) states:

Phenomenology came into its own with Husserl, much as epistemology came into its own with Descartes, and ontology or metaphysics came into its own with Aristotle on the heels of Plato. Yet phenomenology has been practiced, with or without the name, for many centuries.

When Hindu and Buddhist philosophers reflected on states of consciousness achieved in a variety of meditative states, they were practicing phenomenology. When Descartes, Hume, and Kant characterized states of perception, thought, and imagination, they were practicing phenomenology. When Brentano classified varieties of mental phenomena (defined by the directedness of consciousness), he was practicing phenomenology. When William James appraised kinds of mental activity in the stream of consciousness (including their embodiment and their dependence on habit), he too was practicing phenomenology.

Phenomenological practice, as mentioned above, concerns itself with issues of intentionality, temporality, inter-subjectivity, and all human activities that take place within socio-cultural contexts. This suggests that the essence of phenomenology lies in both ontological and epistemological issues. This is because phenomenology, as a philosophy, is a study of the individual's lived experiences (Creswell, 2009). In Noddings' (2012) words, phenomenology is "A descriptive science concerned primarily with the objects and structures of consciousness" (p.70). Phenomenology as a philosophy, thus, seeks a systematic description of the objects of consciousness (Ozmon, 2012). Consciousness always means the consciousness of the objects around us and the consciousness of surroundings, which, in the language of the phenomenologist is termed *intentionality*: a basic characteristic of consciousness (Noddings, 2012).

To know the world means to be in the world, and this is an intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world. This inseparable connection to the world in phenomenology is called the principle of intentionality (van Manen, 1990). To develop a deeper understanding of the underlying structures of phenomenology, it is essential to understand what the human experiences are like (ontological), and how they can be known (epistemological) because the emphasis on human *being* means an emphasis on *becoming* since human consciousness can

never remain in a static position (Ozmon & Craver, 2003). With this in mind, my research will inquire into the lived experiences of the participants in connection to opportunities for character development in multi-cultural settings. The focus will be on the research participants' perceptions of character, and character development while dwelling in the 'in-between' of the binaries of the Eastern-Western values, the Nepali-Canadian identities, and the host-home cultures.

According to Bogdan & Biklen (2007), the process of phenomenological research design is based on certain theoretical assumptions. Such assumptions focus on human values, stories, and behaviours, and explore their meanings within a socio-cultural context. Hence, in education and educational research, human experiences, narrative inquiry, and storytelling are highly significant. While following the methodological processes, I will explore and interpret the meaning and significance of participants' perceptions and experiences about character development opportunities in multi-cultural settings by applying phenomenology as a strategy of inquiry (Creswell, 2009).

Although there is no consensus about how knowledge may best be obtained, phenomenological researchers value human experience (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Under the broader umbrella of qualitative research design, I will employ phenomenological insight to inquire, collect and analyze data (Creswell, 2009). Phenomenological research aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the meaning of our everyday experiences (van Manen, 1990). In addition, phenomenological research makes a distinction between appearance and essence. "From phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, and to want to know the world in which we live as human beings" (van

Manen, 1990, p. 9), which further enhances the significance of employing the phenomenological research methodology in order for meeting my research objective.

To conclude, exploring lived experiences and perceptions with their substantial interpretation is the key to phenomenological research. This is because phenomenal experiences are “understood in the perspectives of being-in-the-world” (Merleau-Ponty, Trans., 1962). This perspective of being in the mode of living implies an existential notion impacted by temporal and spatial consciousness. Merleau-Ponty writes, “there are two modes of being, and two only: being in itself, which is that of objects arrayed in space, and being for itself, which is that of consciousness” (p. 349). This existential mode of *being* and *becoming* captures the phenomena an individual’s encounters with ones’ surroundings. Experiences with encountering the surroundings, and dwelling in the ‘*inter*’ of inter-culturalism in relation to character development, will hold the spirit of my research. With this point of reference, I claim that the phenomenological research design is the most appropriate tool to address my research question.

### **3.2: Method**

Philosophically, phenomenology is a highly technical methodology in social research (Noddings, 2012). Phenomenological research is systematic, explicit, and self-critical because it employs specific modes of questioning and reflecting; it attempts to come up with the layers of meanings with an in-depth analysis of human experiences; it keeps examining its goals and exploring new possibilities; and, it assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the entire process and achievements (van Manen, 1990). The researcher seeks to interpret the phenomena from the views of participants and, the best approach to investigate participants’ perceptions and experiences is through interviews (Creswell, 2009; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).



Since my research explores Nepali immigrant students' perceptions on character, their experiences in multicultural classrooms, and teachers' experiences regarding their dwelling in the 'in-between' of the two worlds of curriculum, while dealing with culturally different students, I consider a guided interview approach in general and, a phenomenological interview in particular to be central to data collection (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Patton, 2002). The reason to choose this interview approach is for exploring the world of participants' lived experiences (van Manen, 1990). It is also to acknowledge that "At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth" (Seidman, 1990, p. 3). The detail of the phenomenological interview is found in the sections to follow.

**Ethics considerations.** Before any data collection procedure took place, ethical approval was received from the Lakehead University Research Ethic Board, with approval number 1465323 (see Appendix A). Appendix B contains the cover letters and informed consent letters that were provided to both the teacher and student participants. In designing qualitative research, ethical standards deserve high importance, so in everything I do, I will "consider ethics from a design, participant, process, and product perspective" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 221). Punch (2000) states that "Data collection procedures need to be organized both to maximize the quality of data, and to deal with the related issues of access and ethics" (p. 59). Taking this into account, I consider the main recurrent ethical issues to include the participants' informed consent, privacy, confidentiality and anonymity, ownership of data and conclusions, and the sensible use of the results (Punch, 2000). I explained the purpose of the study to the participants before obtaining their informed consent. My research has very minimal possibility of harm and risk factor to the participants; however, every measure was taken to ensure the safety and security of the

respondents, maintaining a high degree of respect and dignity for both the participants and the process.

**Data collection.** Qualitative research “involves holding objects and events up to the sensitive instrument of your mind to discern their value as data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 159). There are various strategies for data collection, but phenomenological interview is central to data collection in my research (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Following the essence of phenomenology (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) and the guidelines of qualitative research design (Creswell, 2009), I have embraced the interview guide approach (Patton, 2002) and conducted in-depth phenomenological interviews with the participants. As “phenomenological research is the study of lived experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 9), interviews are the most appropriate approach to collect phenomenological data. This approach is concerned with establishing the context of the lived experience of the participants, putting their stories within the context of socio-cultural setting, and reflecting on the meaning of their stories (Seidman, 1990).

In phenomenological study, interviews are appropriated as tools to explore the lived experience, for they “enable the researcher to gain complex in-depth information” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 358) about the lived life of participants. When participants narrate their lived stories, “they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness” (Seidman, 1991, p. 1), which is one of the salient features of phenomenological study. Taking this into account, I carefully designed written structured open-ended questions for both the teacher and student participants, which are provided in Appendix C.

The purpose of designing open-ended interview questions was to unfold the rich experiences of the participants. I also designed semi-structured interview questions for both the teacher and student participants (see also Appendix C) in order to take the participants into the depth of their

lived experiences in a more relaxed and relatively less formal manner. Both the structured and semi-structured interview questions were utilized to explore the participants' perceptions of, and opportunity for, character development, based on their lived experiences. I interviewed the participants using semi-structured interviews with an unforced flow of questions (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013), lasting 60 minutes. Since a phenomenological qualitative study embraces a small sample size, I conducted interviews with three Nepali migrant students who have graduated from Ontario public schools, and three educators who have been teaching in culturally diverse Ontario public schools.

Applying the snowball sampling technique (Patton, 2002), I anticipated meeting volunteer participants. I came from Nepal, a country in South Asia, and know many South Asian migrant families in Thunder Bay and Toronto. I have specifically maintained a good rapport with Nepali migrant families whose children have graduated from Ontario public high schools, and are presently studying in Canadian post-secondary institutions. I believe that my personal background, community involvement, and contacts with the family and educators helped me meet with the voluntary participants.

I began the data collection October 2016 after receiving ethical approval, and completed the process in January 2017. I collected data through both written and oral interviews. At no time did any of the participants know who the other participants were. I emailed the open-ended, structured interview questions individually to each of the participants in advance, and received written responses from them. This enabled me to collect data in the participants' own words. In conducting the semi-structured oral interviews, dates, times, and locations were mutually chosen. I conducted the face-to-face interview with one of the student participants in Thunder Bay. For other participants, I held interviews on Skype as per the choice and convenience of each

participant. All interviews were taken in English, including the ones with the student participants from Nepali migrant families. Each oral interview was held only once, and lasted approximately for an hour.

During the interviews, I carefully maintained the wording of each question, and observed the actions of each participant, because, as a qualitative researcher, I am interested in exploring and describing the phenomena of the participants (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001). I audio recorded the interviews, and also made notes throughout, in order to use them while analyzing the data. I made notes of what each participant stated during the semi-structured interviews, keeping the principle in mind that nothing that the participant says is trivial (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In addition, everything the participant said has the potential to be a clue and unlock a comprehensive understanding of what is being studied in a phenomenological study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

**Data analysis and interpretation.** A data analysis and interpretation plan might include several components because the process involves making sense out of text and image data (Creswell, 2009). Analyzing the data involves organizing it, breaking it into manageable units and then synthesizing it in order to search for patterns. Interpretation, on the other hand, means developing ideas from the findings, and relating these to the literature and to broader concepts and concerns (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). There are two important aspects of qualitative data analysis: (a) it is an ongoing activity; and (b) it is primarily inductive (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001). As soon as data is accumulated, analysis begins. The researcher looks for patterns and themes. As a result, the salient aspects of the phenomena emerge. Wallen and Fraenkel (2001) further remark that “The data are studied for what is meaningful to the participants in the study, not to the researcher” (p. 435). The process of data analysis involves understanding the data,

representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data (Creswell, 2009).

In phenomenological study, data analysis process begins as soon as the data are collected, and the process keeps going through to the submission of the final product (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Creswell, 2009). In organizing and preparing the data for analysis, I repeatedly read the data, located the main information, and wrote notes in the margins. The process continues with coding: “the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, as cited in Creswell, 2009, p.186). The coding was done on the basis of patterns and recurring themes, thereby making sense of the whole. I also kept logs and records in order to keep track of codes and their meanings (Savin-Baden, 2013). For example, while exploring transitional experiences of the student participants, I went through the transcripts multiple times, marked the years, and different places they moved to, and lived in, coded their purpose of moving to these places, and unfolded the essence of their transitional experiences. Working from a phenomenological position, I developed themes for both the student and teacher participants on their lived experiences, and their perceptions on character development. The two sets of themes were then compared for common themes, which were then explored further.

Data analysis involves a systematic search for meanings that include content, domain, and thematic analysis (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The coded themes and patterns will then be brought to the established frame of analysis. To ensure the accuracy of coded themes and differences, I double-checked the coded data, also conducted member checks and asked for, and received, peer reviews. I received a few minor changes after the member check was done, and reviewed the Vignettes as required. I also incorporated the feedback received from peer reviews.

Finally, with the interconnected themes and differences that I deduced from the data, inductive analysis and interpretation was used to exploring the meaning (Creswell, 2009).

More importantly, my phenomenological analysis of the data concentrated on identifying common textures and structures of the experiences (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). While analyzing the interview transcripts to discern patterns and recurring themes, I used an ongoing and inductive data analysis process (Creswell, 2009; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The process involves a systematic search of meanings that includes content and domain (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) that were coded and sorted thematically. Particular care was taken of all materials such as interview transcripts, log forms, and field notes that serve as data, in line with Lakehead University policies and procedures.

The analysis of data was concluded by making an interpretation, or discerning the meaning of, the data (Creswell, 2009). Phenomenological research tends to examine and describe “what the phenomenon means to the person, just as he or she sees and experiences it” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 221). This research embraced interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a tool, while presenting the analysis of the data (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This data analysis strategy aims “to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p.51). This is a phenomenological approach “in that it involves detailed examination of the participant’s lifeworld” (p. 51). According to Savin-Baden and Major (2013), interpretative phenomenology “involves the analysis and interpretation of social events and their meanings to participants” (p. 448). The presentation of data analysis was, therefore, included the careful plotting of the themes in a logical order.

**Strategies for ensuring quality.** In phenomenological research, it is challenging to ensure quality throughout the process of data collection and analysis, as the researcher needs to maintain

authenticity between the findings and interpretations (Creswell, 2012; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). However, this challenge can be addressed in order to enrich the research quality by choosing the suitable criteria, and employing the most appropriate strategies based upon the needs and design of the research. To ensure the quality of my research, I employed the criteria of authenticity that “seems congruent with interpretivist philosophical positioning which asserts that reality is constructed inter-subjectively through socially and experientially developed meanings” (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013, p. 470).

To check the authenticity of my entire research process and product, I utilized strategies that include: methodological coherence, triangulation, and member checking (Savin-Baden and Major 13; Creswell, 2009). Methodological congruence involves maintaining suitability between the research question and the method, emphasizing data collection and analysis procedures; however, the challenge in this strategy is that both the research question and the method may change and need modification along with the progress of the qualitative research ((Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). Triangulation means a process of drawing information from multiple sources such as interviews, field notes, and observations that promote the degree of authenticity (Creswell, 2012). While conducting interviews, I also observed the body language and tone of the respondents, which were recorded in my notes. I utilized these notes while analysing the data in order to attempt to understand where the participants gave confident, or at times hesitant, answers. To ensure the accuracy of data interpretation, I asked the participants to review the changes that were made, and received their approval. According to Savin-Baden and Major (2013), member checking “involves checking with participants for feedback or verification of interpretation” (p. 477). I applied this strategy with an expectation that I would need to rectify

any possible misinterpretations. Some refinements were made after the member checking; however, I took all necessary precautions to maintain the meanings of the interview transcripts.

**Limitations.** In phenomenological research, it is assumed that knowledge is rooted in human experiences (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). This assumption is likely to allow a generous degree of flexibility which might challenge its findings in terms of maintaining authenticity, and ensuring quality (Creswell, 2009). In this point of reference, this research has its own limitations in terms of its research design, sample size, time frame, setting and context, and limited number of interview questions. The themes, that I have analysed and discussed in this work, should not be generalized, since they have been developed within a specific context. This research is limited in terms of its scope and purpose as well. Thus, I have taken every methodological measure in the entire research process and data interpretation.

**Dissemination.** A critical part of the qualitative research process is to disseminate findings to the intended audience (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Dissemination of research findings is an important task in terms of modifying policies and implementing them in an actual classroom teaching. Hence, I plan to attend relevant conferences and present my findings. I will also work towards publishing my work in appropriate peer-reviewed journals.

### **3.3: Conclusion**

In this section I have outlined the details of the research methodology and methods that I have employed for attaining the purpose of my research. I am confident that a phenomenological approach, that proceeds with the structured and semi-structured interview questions to dig into the participants' lived experiences, is the most appropriate method for my studies. I have also described how the procedures of working with the participants took place, and also how the



entire process of collecting, interpreting, and analyzing the data began, continued, and ended. I have concluded this section by discussing the strategies for ensuring quality, and acknowledging the limitations of the study. The chapter to follow presents the Student Vignettes that were composed from the transcripts of the oral and written interviews.

## Chapter 4: Students Vignettes

The Vignettes constructed in my work are the structured narratives of both the student and teacher participants' lived experiences and their meanings. In the construction of these Vignettes, I have synthesised data into stories, using a plot or framework (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). It is my intention to employ both in the construction of my thesis, as I believe that they offer advantages for an in-depth analysis of the data.

There are three Vignettes detailed in this section. They were composed from the transcripts of three student participants' oral and written interviews held in the months of October 2016 through January, 2017. The Vignettes focus on participants' experiences of being and working in Ontario multi-cultural classrooms, and their perceptions to character and character development.

### **4.1: Vignette 1 Anil: I Had Some Great Teachers throughout my Academic Career.**

The Vignette described in this section is composed from the transcripts of the oral and written interviews taken in the month of October 2016. This Vignette details Anil's experiences living through transitions, describes his lived experiences in multi-cultural classrooms, and relates to his perceptions of character and character development. The term 'transition' is employed to mean a critical period of time during which an individual negotiates the differences between different experiences, cultures and places, and thereby, adapts to a new way of life. In other words, this is a critical period in the work of finding ways to live in the spaces 'in-between' two cultures (Aoki, 1996).

The Vignette relates to the transitions that Anil experienced, and the negotiations he made across a range of different contexts, such as geographical, educational, linguistic, and cultural. It does this by narrating Anil's early childhood in Nepal, and his migration to Canada in

2008 with his parents. Anil's experiences include negotiating between the home- and host-cultures, and between the different geographies of rural Nepal and urban Canada. Anil's experiences show that there is a strong connection between the geography he comes from, and the culture he practices. The Vignette also relates to the transition between two different languages - Nepali and English, and two different educational systems and their attendant philosophies that he observed and experienced in Nepal and in Canada.

**Background.** Anil was born in a family that lived in the beautiful countryside of the Western Region of Nepal. He spent his early childhood in a rural setting. Anil was brought up with the love and care of his mother and grandparents in a joint family, while his father was working in Canada: *"I spent my childhood in the village, and was brought up mostly by my grandparents. I have two brothers, one younger and one older."* Anil spent his childhood in the company of his brothers, and experienced a life of living in the quiet countryside. There, along with his elder and younger brothers, Anil saw his mother and grandparents working on the farm where they grew vegetables and grains for their living. As he grew, he also worked with them, as well as helped with household tasks.

Despite the happiness of his early life, Anil was waiting for the time, and very much longing to see, and live, with his father in Canada. The time came, and he moved to Canada in 2008 along with his mother and siblings, while leaving his grandparents in Nepal with other relatives. Upon his arrival in Canada, Anil joined a public school from which he graduated: *"I studied till grade 10 in Nepal. I came to Canada in 2008 and continued my education from grade 10...I studied three years in a high school around Toronto."* After graduating from high school, Anil "wanted to study electrical engineering," and joined the electrical engineering program at an Ontario post-secondary institution.

Apart from staying together as a family, Anil's main reason to come to Canada was to gain better education and work opportunities. As he arrived, Anil was made aware of the opportunities that Canada could offer to its citizens: *"My parents kept reminding me that Canada has more opportunities."* Anil was attentive to his parents, so he listened to his parents' advice, and started perceiving things in Canada in a different way. This was a different scenario from what he had seen in Nepal, which offered him both a sense of confusion and excitement

Living in transitions. Migrating to Canada from Nepal was a big decision. In Anil's early years in Canada, Anil felt both excitement and confusion as everything was new to him: This confusion arose in Anil's mind because he had moved from a Nepali speaking small rural community to an English speaking urban community, where he would meet people from different cultures. In his high school in Toronto, Anil met and *"worked with friends from India, china, European countries, and Africa."* Initially, he was confused with the diversity of Ontario public school classrooms: *"I didn't know Canada was so diverse."* However, as the time passed, he came out of his confusion, and found this diversity a great learning opportunity: *I [got] to learn about [other people's] culture and values and so did they about mine."*

Nepal is a developing country and provides limited opportunities. The educational system is conventional in terms of classroom settings, teaching approaches, and evaluation system. Mostly, the classroom setting includes desks and benches facing the blackboard; common teaching techniques include the active teachers talking all the time in class; and evaluation system includes taking in-class tests in a certain interval of times. However, progress is gradually being made in the system. Many privately run schools in the city are introducing, activity-based teaching, and are gaining increasing popularity. These days, many government-funded schools

are also attempting to introduce new teaching approaches. Although the pace of change is slow, reform is steady and making its way to all parts of the country.

Teachers are considered to have the most important role to play to make these changes happen. Students have great faith in teachers, and Nepali society holds teachers in high regard. There is a huge impact of Eastern history and philosophy regarding the position of teachers in communities. Teachers were the sages, the learned and most respected human beings, in the ancient time, and were compared to gods. With this impression, teachers are considered as authoritative figures; their voices are central in the classroom. Teachers are expected to be ideal members in the communities, maintain high moral values, and reflect the virtues of honesty and truthfulness in their sayings and doings. Mostly, what the teachers say is what students are expected to listen and follow.

In the above educational context, Anil's primary education took place in a strict disciplinary environment. Students were to remain quiet in the classroom and listen to the teachers. The teachers rewarded better grades to those students who completed and submitted their written assignments and participated in classroom question answer tasks. The teachers would send those students to the Principal's office who could not complete and submit their tasks on the due dates. The school then would call their parents to the school for discussion. The purpose was to provide support to these students and help them meet the expectations. This reward and punishment system prevails in most of the schools in Nepal. Within this education system, Anil worked hard, completed his written tasks and memorized facts.

The school had limited library resources and laboratory equipment. Due to these limited resources, Anil, like his friends in the class, largely depended on teachers' notes and lectures while studying different subjects such as Science, Mathematics, Nepali, English, Social Studies, Environmental Education, and Account. Anil's teachers were authoritative, strict, but they were also encouraging and helpful even to the students who would not complete their task on times. Grades nine and ten were challenging classes for Anil, as Nepal had a high-stakes national examination system. All grade ten students across Nepal took the standardized national exam called the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exam. A passing grade in this exam was needed to get to the next grade. Failing this exam would prevent Anil from promoted to grade eleven. Anil experienced a lot of pressure while he was in grades nine and ten, as he had to prepare for, and pass, the SLC exam, which included contents from both grades nine and ten.

In contrast to such educational settings and examination system in Nepal, Anil's school in Toronto was more student-centered. The school environment was welcoming, and multi-cultural friendly. The teaching and learning approach was more inclusive, and participatory, with both students and teachers sharing their lived stories:

*My school had a total multi-cultural environment, and I felt no discrimination in the class. In my ESL class, the teacher asked every student to share their background and traditions. My ESL teacher used to ask me: what is the good food in Nepal? What is the main tradition? This brought us closer. It was an advantage to be with other students, share our cultures and tradition, and know how they mean the same thing but in different ways.*

Anil found the classroom activities in his school in Canada more open and interactive: *“I have experienced differences in teaching and learning between Nepal and Canada. Teaching in Nepali schools is more theoretical, but in Canada it is more practice based.”* In Canadian classrooms, for examples, *“student presentations and group works are very common.”* Anil found Canadian multi-cultural classrooms more engaging, lively, and student-centered. Students were offered opportunities to participate in, and contribute to, discussions held in the classrooms. Anil also experienced more freedom of choice while writing papers and making presentations. He *“chose his own topics of interest and presented in the class with the guidance of his teachers.”* Anil learned a lot from group activities and class presentations. Anil’s lived experience of working with teachers and friends from culturally diverse group made him reflect on what educational goals meant to him: *“To me, the goal of education is to unite all together, and develop a sense of respect for each other. It is also to help people become independent, and leading a balanced life.”*

Anil expressed that goal of education because of his connectedness with friends, a democratic school environment, and considerate teachers. In his new school, Anil found both his friends and teachers friendly and supportive. He said that the teachers were loyal, honest, and helpful to students; they were fair, and provided help to him whenever needed.

*My teachers were friendly and helpful. To me, teachers are the role models. Students listen to the teachers, and follow what they do. Teachers in my school wanted to know about students; they were considerate and accommodating when students could not meet the due dates of assignments.*

Anil was used to listening to his parents at home. He took his teachers' advice and followed them while studying in Nepal. Through the value he placed, on listening to, and respecting the words of teachers and elders, Anil built up a good rapport with his teachers in his new school in Toronto. Anil felt that he could approach his teachers, ask for help when he needed, and keep learning. He was attentive during classroom instruction, and open to the suggestions of his teachers. Teachers for him were examples to follow; what the teachers said, and did, meant a lot to him: *"I learn best by seeing somebody doing something."* Anil was pleased to have caring teachers and a friendly school environment, as he stated: *"My teachers were gentle and wanted to know more about me."* Anil lived in a context of geographical, cultural, linguistic, and educational transitions. These transitions were a challenge in his early years in Canada, but later he considered them an opportunity: *"Despite having challenges in the new land, there are opportunities as well."*

**Experiences in multi-cultural classrooms.** Having come to such a friendly school environment, Anil kept pursuing his education. Despite being new to the school and school environment, he felt at home while in school: *"I did not feel discriminated [against] in the class."* Instead, he found the entire atmosphere fairly welcoming and multi-cultural. As time passed, Anil began to feel more familiar with the school environment. Anil saw this supportive multi-cultural school environment as an opportunity to engage, talk, and develop friendships from across diverse cultural groups.

Unlike his initial thought about Canada and Canadian classrooms, Anil saw and experienced many good things:



*Before attending classes, I thought there [would] be few foreigners and many Canadian background students, but when I attended I saw the opposite. I didn't know Canada was so diverse. I didn't know how people look(ed) like from different parts of the world, so I am glad that I came to know.*

Anil was interested in knowing more about his friends, their history, and about the countries they are from: *"I get to learn about their religion, culture and values and so did they about mine. People would want to know more about the country you are from."* To Anil, it was a good opportunity to share with, and learn from, one another. Anil experienced this learning specifically from his interactions with his friends in the English as a Second Language (ESL) class that he enrolled in, and from the school clubs he participated in. English was Anil's second language. To improve both written and communication skills in English, he took a number of ESL classes with students from different parts of the world. Joining the ESL class in the school allowed him to build his friendships with students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The ESL teacher was very helpful and encouraging of these relationships, with each student in the class being provided with an opportunity to share their stories and traditions. Through his communication with the ESL teacher, Anil became aware of the differences of value that people have, as he stated: *"You know what they value, and they know what you value."*

Anil considered that the activities managed and run by the school clubs were important means to engage in sharing one's stories and traditions. One of such clubs in his school was the Multi-Cultural Club to which Anil himself was connected:

*I was associated with the Multi-Cultural Club in my school. This club carried multi-cultural activities at different times. I served the club as a member from*

*Nepali student. This club brought everyone together, and provided opportunities of learning from one another.*

Anil and his team actively organized “*different events such as food sale, and cultural shows, representing different cultures.*” Anil participated in the club activities and took the opportunity to view the differences that people from different cultures carry. Anil stated that cultural displays and performances offered the participants “*an opportunity to see the world in different perspective...so that they won’t be limited to their own cultures and values.*” Anil explained that his active involvement in such events provided him an opportunity to talk and share his stories. Such an engagement with friends from different cultural background offered Anil a unique experience of being not only respectful and working together, but also punctual and responsible, as he noticed how the club members maintained punctuality and performed their duties on time.

For Anil, the advantages of working with the multi-cultural group included coming to know one another, developing friendships, and coming to understand their ways of knowing. An example of such sharing was that they would talk about their festive activities, and ask what they would mean in the context of their own cultures. Anil listened to his friends talk about their festivals and cultural activities, and shared his experiences with them: “*When we had a festival, and when we had conversations, I told them about what our festivals meant to us.*” In turn, Anil’s friends also explained what their festivals and activities meant to them. While doing this, Anil saw the differences that his friends brought to the classroom and learned from them. He said that the multi-cultural environment in his school provided an opportunity for “*learning about other peoples’ religion, cultures, and values*” Like Anil, his friends were also interested in knowing his history, origin, religion, and cultural practices. To Anil, these learnings were important as they “*bind us together.*”

**Support from family and school.** To Anil, the support he received from his family and school was crucial to his graduation from high school. He met and made many friends during his high school, supported them at times, and got supported by them at other times. To Anil, the support, care, and friendship of parents, teachers, and friends meant a lot, and helped him succeed in his high school education.

Anil's elder brother provided support in his studies, and his parents provided him moral and emotional supports:

*I did not get much academic support from my parents, as my parents were not well-educated. However, my parents provided enough moral support of doing excellent in my studies." My elder brother also helped me at times in my study.*

Anil carried the suggestions of his parents and elder brother into his daily life. His parents and siblings always encouraged him to pursue academic excellence and good work: *"When I went to school and came back home, they knew that I was mentally tired, and they gave me some food."* The members of his family often said to him, *"do not waste your time, and try to do your best, make friends, and try to be ahead of everybody."* Anil carried these suggestions and applied them in his everyday life. To Anil, *"It was good in Canada that tuition is free in school education."* Apart from free tuition, students benefitted from club activities, tutorial classes, and teacher-parents' interaction. Anil's school used to *"manage and have teachers-parents' conversations two times a year."* Anil considered these interactions very important for parents to know how their children were doing in school. The school then would manage remedial classes to help needy students in different subjects.

Anil's school managed and ran tutorial classes on different subjects, which Anil thought was a needed support to get assistance in subjects like Math, Science, and English. Anil was willing to get assistance from both teachers and friends in different courses. These tutorial classes helped him improve his essay writing skills. Anil was good in solving mathematical problems; he tutored friends who needed support in mathematics: *"I was also a tutor for Math tutorial class; I tutored a friend from Africa. She would come to me with a math problem and I worked out the problem. I also used to go to English tutorial class and get help in essay writing. There were places to go to get help. I got help from teachers in writing essays whenever I needed it."*

This reciprocal tutoring and learning, through the school's tutorial classes helped Anil and his friends get better connected and develop stronger relationships. Reflecting on those tutorial classes, he stated that it was nice to help others, as helping other *"[gave]- [me] a big sense of satisfaction."* Anil's involvement in the tutorial classes helped him gain many rich experiences.

Volunteering is an important way of gaining work experience in Canada. It may be considered a part of community culture. As a high school student, Anil volunteered in the community, and had great pleasure in doing that. Anil considered his volunteering in the community as one of the memorable experiences. *"I always remember my volunteer work in the community; volunteering in the community has always been a memorable experience. I am happy to work with people from different cultural background."* To Anil, it was an opportunity to mix with the community and work together with other volunteers.

Over all, Anil had a pleasant memory of volunteering in the community, a very rich experience of being and learning in a multi-cultural classroom, of working with his friends and

teachers, and getting his high school education. In responding to the question about recalling any unpleasant experience during his high school, he replied: *“To be honest, I do not have any such experience.”* Anil completed his high school education with excellent grades, which allowed him to pursue his chosen career path. Anil attributed his success to the support of his parents at home, and teachers and friends in schools. Anil also learned a great deal from his intermingling with those who were culturally different. To him, *“It was about knowing one’s history and culture, and building relations with [others through a mutual] understanding.”*

**Cultural activities and practices.** For Anil, cultural activities and ritual practices were important to keep people disciplined, building up relations, and promote understandings. While living in the village of Nepal, Anil was used to participating in cultural activities, and learning the virtues of love and respect. Anil’s family carried these practices in Canada Brought up in a communitarian family, Anil has observed cultural and religious events both at home, and in the community, he was brought up. Going to temples and worshipping Gods and Goddesses is very common in Nepali communities. Young children participate with parents in the worshipping and develop a sense of love, compassion and respect.

Anil had observed his mother and grandparents waking up early morning and praying to God since his childhood. Waking up early in the morning and praying has been his family tradition even in Canada: *“In my family, waking up early morning and praying are very common. Praying gives us peace and satisfaction.”* Performance of early morning prayers becomes more frequent during festivals in Nepal, as every festival is seen and understood in connection with the God or Goddess. One of such festivals celebrated across the country is called the Dashain which is connected with the female God, Durga, and is marked as the victory of good over evil. Anil

reflected on the celebration of the Dashain and remarked: *“The celebration of Dashain makes us forget the sad part of life, and offers happiness.”*

The Dashain is the biggest festival celebrated in Nepal, mostly by Hindus. Non-resident Nepali people celebrate this festival in the countries they live in. Since moving to Canada, Anil has observed and participated in the celebration of the Dashain. For Anil, celebrating this festival every year with friends and families has always been entertaining. During this festival, it is common to wear new clothes, prepare various delicious food items, and go to elders to get Tika. In Hindu tradition, Tika, prepared by mixing rice grains (Aksheta) and red powder (vermillion/Abir) with a few drops of water, is a sacred mark that is put on the forehead. Young people, including children, visit their elders to receive Tika and blessings from them: *“Receiving and giving blessings is the main part of the Dashain,”* which is a very much practiced tradition during this festival. People travel and visit their close relatives; they cherish the moments with family and relatives. Celebrating the Dashain influences children to develop a strong sense of love and respect. For Anil, the Dashain reinforced the values of respect, love, and care that he learned from his parents and grandparents. It also promoted relationship building and maintaining community bonds among families.

During the Dashain, the community gathers in a place and engages in cultural activities, such as singing and dancing. People take time off from their work in order to meet and greet their families and friends. In Toronto, *“A place [was]set where everybody met, people tried to get days off from work, they [prepared]good food, and organized cultural shows.”* This was a cheerful occasion that provided an opportunity to listen to, and share stories of different community members. Anil believed that the more people engaged in the festive events, the more

they gained from each other. He believed that this festival helped close the gap in people's relationships as they shared activities.

Festivals are important in terms of making new friends and having greater connections with other. Festivals like the Dashain bring, and bind, people together in a joyous atmosphere. It promotes the values of love and respect. Anil shared that festive activities, and ritual practices in his family and community both in Canada and back home in Nepal meant an opportunity to receive love and blessings from elders in Toronto as well. These activities and practices, to him, were important to maintain cultural elements in the family and community which ultimately promoted character building:

*“It is nice to go to elders, respect them, and get blessings from them.” These activities are grounded in family traditions and communitarian values, which eventually “help foster our character. For example, visiting someone in the festival is a way to have good bonding.”*

**Perceptions of character and character development.** For Anil, character was concerned with our habits; it was concerned with how we conduct our day- to -day activities:

*“character development depend[ed] on various aspects such as surroundings, education, culture, life goals, and so on.”* As an example, Anil spoke of the learned values of honesty, truthfulness, and hard work which he acquired from his grandparents: *“I was mostly around my grandparents in my childhood. I saw them working hard, saw their behaviours, and their lifestyle which together influenced me in such a way that these things have become part of me.”* Anil explained that he acquired these character attributes from his grandparents; and these attributes had always been a motivational drive for him to succeed in life and work: *“I was taught never to lie, never to*

*cheat, and not be afraid if I have not done anything wrong...I carry these thoughts with me all the times.*” This generated a sense of faith in and respect for his elders. Anil had a deep sense of respect, not only for his parents and grandparents, but also for his teachers. Anil took teachers as role models; he believed what the teachers said, and did, could have a lasting impact on students.

Having seen both his Nepali and Canadian teachers, who modeled values such as respect and commitment, Anil showed great faith in them. During Anil’s schooling in both Nepal and Canada, teachers had a great influence on him: *“I had some great teachers throughout my academic career. The effort and the excitement they had in teaching subjects would make me respect them more.”* It also made Anil to honour the true passion the teachers had towards their job: The efforts that Anil’s teacher made, the enthusiasm they had in teaching, and the way they helped students, made Anil respect and trust them more. From such teachers, Anil said, students learned not only the subject matter, but also the virtues of *“respect, honesty, and hard work.”* Based on his experiences, regardless of the geographical location, he considered teachers as role models and explained that every aspect of a teacher’s work had a potential to impact students: *“students look up to their teachers for any suggestions, and hints [ to choose] their career path.”* Anil had a good relationship with his teachers, and received both support and care from them.

Anil’s experiences of working for the Multi-Cultural Club in school made him consider that character development was about punctuality and responsibility. Anil observed how each member of the club carried their responsibility and accomplished their tasks on time. Character development is also concerned with knowing about what other people value. Anil believed that lively and friendly conversations helped people understand and respect one another’s cultural values: *“My friend once showed me food and asked if I liked that particular food. I said, ‘No,’ and he never asked me thereafter.”* Informal conversations open up new avenues to dwell



together with the reciprocal respect and tolerance to the differences we hold: “*You know what they value, and they know what you value.*” Anil’s perception to character was grounded on his family values, cultural activities, religious practices, and the supportive roles that his school and teachers played. Anil believed that, as a student, he had learnt virtues, and became successful in his studies, because of his supportive surroundings.

That supportive surrounding constituted a caring family, helpful friends, friendly teachers, an inclusive school, and a tolerant community. With the consistent support of his family, teachers, and school, Anil completed his high school education and graduated in 2011. Anil was pleased to have received such supports in school, and appreciated the friendly environment in Canada: “*I am glad that I am in Canada.*” At the end, Anil expressed his happiness that young people in Canada started working when they were in high school, and learned to be independent. Anil appreciated this working culture in Canada which was different from his experience in Nepal supporting his mother and grandparents in their farming and household works: “*I had no working experience till I was sixteen in Nepal,*” however, in Canada Anil gained valuable work experiences in the formal workplace at the age of seventeen. Apart from making a little money, Anil came to know the work-culture in a Canadian workplace. This is explicitly reflected in Anil’s narrative:

*After I came to Canada I realized or I understood that people at the young age try to look for work, some kind of part time job that I like. If I were in Nepal, I would not have worked at the age of sixteen or seventeen, I would have waited for my post-secondary education to finish, and then I would work. When I came to Canada, I saw people working at the age of sixteen and seventeen at places like Tim Horton’s and McDonalds.*

*When I saw my friends in school working, I felt that I should work; then I also started working.*

Anil was motivated by his friends who used to work after school or in the weekends. Anil expressed that this formal working experience gave him a sense of maturity and independence. Anil concluded by thanking Canada, which is because he has gained both educational achievement and valuable work experience over the years in multi-cultural settings. Currently, Anil is a university student, enrolled in the electrical engineering program, and in his university class, he has friends from different cultural backgrounds.

#### **4.2: Vignette 2 Anu: I Have Overwhelmingly Positive Experiences in Multi-Cultural Classrooms.**

The Vignette described in this section is composed from the transcripts of the oral and written interviews taken in the month of October, 2016. The Vignette accounts for Anu's experiences of living in transitions, her perceptions of character and character development, and her lived experiences in multi-cultural classrooms. The Vignette also demonstrates how the support from family and school becomes a key to achieve academic excellence.

This Vignette identifies Anu's experiences of moving to, and living in, a number of places. The narratives of relocating at different places across different countries are indicative of her transitional experiences. The Vignette also demonstrates Anu's experience of living with, and learning from, people who were different from Anu and her family, both linguistically and culturally.

**Moving to and living at different places.** Kathmandu, the birthplace of Anu, is in a scenic valley situated in the Central Region of Nepal. The city is surrounded by beautiful hills. Kathmandu, as the capital city of the country, is the center of attraction for many Nepali people and foreign visitors. It is a densely populated metropolitan city where more than four million people from various ethnicities reside. Anu spent her early childhood in this big and beautiful city with her parents and grandparents: *"I was born in Kathmandu, Nepal, a beautiful country where I lived for the first five years of my life."*

Having spent her first five years in Kathmandu, she moved to the US with her parents and younger brother. The reason for this migration was that Anu's father had received a scholarship to study in Indiana. Since then, Anu and her family have been living in North America. They

lived for three years in different places like Lafayette, Indiana, and San Diego and Duarte, California. Anu started her elementary education in the schools of these places. Then, Anu, along with her parents and younger brother, migrated to Mississauga, Canada in (2003). Anu's family had heard that Canada was a better place to live and settle. With this impression, they came to Canada and lived in the city of Mississauga, where Anu spent most of her childhood: "*I lived in Mississauga for the majority of my childhood.*" Mississauga is a highly multi-cultural city in southern Ontario. There is a big Nepali community in Mississauga; and Anu and her family have many close family friends. For Anu, it is nice to be with these Nepali family friends, for they could eat Nepali food and talk in their native language when they visit each other's homes.

Anu studied and completed her elementary schooling, and then attended a public secondary school in Mississauga. The schools in which she studied were very multi-cultural, with students from many different communities. These communities included Nepali, Chinese, Indians, Africans, and Caucasian Canadians. Anu had made friends with members of many communities, and worked together whenever she had group assignments and presentations.

In the secondary school environment, Anu was happy, and did well in all grades. At the same time, Anu and her family were having great times with the Nepali community in Mississauga. This changed in 2009, when Anu's family moved to the city of Thunder Bay, a beautiful city in Northern Ontario. It was because Anu's father was offered a professional engineering job in Thunder Bay. To Anu, it was a moving from a big and busy urban city of Toronto to a relatively small city of Thunder Bay. In Thunder Bay, she joined the public school near by her home, where she studied grades ten, eleven, and twelve.

After she graduated from high school in Thunder Bay in 2012, Anu moved back to Mississauga with her brother and parents, where they once again connected with their family friends. One of the reasons to move back to Mississauga was Anu's undergraduate studies. She was offered a scholarship to study in one of the universities in the Greater Toronto Area. Anu joined the Business School, and completed her Bachelors of Business Administration. She is currently pursuing her Masters in Accounting. Like in the high school, Anu's university friends come from different countries and different language speaking communities. Anu said that this diversity was very important in terms of becoming open-minded to the differences that others had, becoming helpful to others, and promoting a bond of friendship. Anu's narratives of moving and living in multiple places demonstrated the impact of these moves had in her personal and school life.

**School experiences.** Anu acquired the virtues of open-mindedness, helpfulness, and friendliness in the course of her high school education. She gained rich experiences from the Ontario public schools where she studied. When Anu started to live and study in Thunder Bay, she came to know that there was more diversity in the school of Mississauga than the one in Thunder Bay; also, the former was more crowded than the latter. However, in Anu's experience, both the schools were multi-cultural, as "*students and teachers came from different cultural backgrounds*". Anu's secondary schools provided a nice and friendly environment to students, and they had a professional team of caring and supportive teachers. Anu considered a multi-cultural classroom to be a place where students from diverse cultures shared their stories through informal conversations. These conversations provided an opportunity to learn about the misconceptions of other cultures:

*I have had overwhelmingly positive experiences being, and learning, in a multi-cultural classroom. When I was in high school, my best friends were from China. From my Chinese friends, I learned about Confucius, tried new foods (they convinced me to try raw fish), and became familiar with Chinese history and politics. I learned about common misconceptions about China, and grew attached to the country, feeling upset when I encountered Chinese stereotypes that I felt were inaccurate.*

Anu's regular interactions with her Chinese friends made her notice not only the differences, but also the similarities. Anu had many informal conversations with her friends, which made her aware of Chinese food, history, and their family dynamics: *"I also learned about Chinese family dynamics and cultural values, some of which resonated deeply with me."* Anu saw the differences when she looked at her own values. Anu believes that *"knowing about other cultures makes us question our own cultural values."*

Anu came from a Hindu family; she was used to eating unique Nepali food items in the evening that her mother prepared. These foods such as Daal (lentil), Bhat (steamed rice), Achar (pickle made in a special way), and Tarkari (mixed vegetables/curry) are different from those of her Chinese friends in terms of the way they were cooked, or the taste they had. Amid these differences in foods and cultural values, Anu noticed many similarities when things were seen in the light of humanity and perceived in the light of basic human desire for certain things: *"I learned that despite being from different countries, we were overwhelmingly similar in our basic human desire for friendship, closeness, and affection."* In Anu's experiences in school, these virtues of closeness and affection promoted a sense of supporting and caring for, one another, leading to educational success. To have this success, Anu believed that the teachers' role was crucial.

**Support and care lead to success.** Anu believed that a large part of a students' success depended on teachers' concern and care on the one hand, and on the other, parents' advice and support. Anu received tremendous support and care from both her parents and teachers. During secondary school, she found her teachers showing deep concern for her academic performance, and supported her accordingly.

Anu recalled several fruitful and productive moments with her teachers. Anu was consistently provided with support when she needed the most from her teachers. Anu approached the teachers, discussed the difficulties that she had in the subjects like Chemistry, took their guidance, and followed that advice sincerely. This not only gave her a confidence to excel in the exams, but also helped her to build a good relationship with the teachers:

*Teachers also supported me in my high school, showed concern, gave me a cookie, they were there for the emotional side as well. I did have very close personal connections with teachers. Grade 12 was a very stressful year...my chemistry teacher was very supportive.*

Anu said that her parents always encouraged her to seek the support she needed from her teachers, and that her parents highly appreciated the work of teachers. *"The support I got from school and teachers was largely because I had maintained a very good relationship with them."* Anu said that it was important to communicate time and again with people around us in order to build and maintain strong connections. Anu took the appointments with the teachers, met them in person, interacted through emails, and established a strong rapport with them. With these, Anu said, *"I had strong connections with many of my high school teachers."*

Anu appreciated the support and care that she was provided not only from her teachers and friends, but also from the school administration: *"I also got support from school*

*administration, specifically in finding and applying for scholarships. They suggested me to think of what I am interested in while deciding to post-secondary education.”* These suggestions were crucial to winning the scholarship for Anu’s post-secondary education. To Anu, it was important to listen to, and follow, the advice of her parents and seniors. Listening to the advice of the seniors was a part of the culture in Anu’s family, and a strong part of Nepali culture.

Like her teachers’ advice, Anu listened to, and followed, the suggestions of her parents. Anu was thankful to her parents for their love, care, and educational support:

*I received tremendous amount of support from my parents. Helping me get up in the morning, preparing food, my dad driving me to school, talking to me and asking me about my day in school; my dad helped me in physics, my parents provided me with incredible moral and emotional supports. I got every help needed including the academic one.*

Anu said that while these supports, and help, seemed little things, they could leave a great positive impact on children. To her, the support, and care, that she got from her parents and teachers have always been motivational drivers. Anu recalled her talking and sharing with her parents while taking supper together, and with her teachers, during recess.

**Conversations lead to trust building.** Anu said it was important to talk with the family members after school, especially while taking supper together. This was the time to share with one another about how everyone’s day was. This strengthened the family tie and promoted the frequency of informal talks. Anu explained that building human connections, and establishing good relationships, are important to live a happy and successful life. The more we talk, even with the strangers, the closer we get. It is the conversation that minimizes the gap between the



strangers. Anu considered this to be true when trust and connections between friends, and also between the teachers and the students, were concerned: *“Conversation, jokes, and humour bring people closer. I learnt quite a lot from school environment; it was really great.”*

Conversations are tools to help people open up themselves and build up friendship. Anu took informal communications as a key to build connections with others. In her schools in Mississauga, Anu had many friends who were from different ethnicity, origin, and cultures. Each of her friends carried their different ways to know and understand the world: *“My friends were Indians, Chinese, Europeans, and Caucasians, and, they had different values and mindsets.”* Anu believed that their frequent conversations helped them come closer, and understand each other better, despite coming from different countries. Anu was happy to have friends from diverse families that constituted a unique multi-cultural classroom. This classroom environment was, at times, a challenge, but, at many other times, it was an opportunity for Anu in terms of learning from cultural differences, and bridging the gaps that people hold due to such differences: *“There were challenges, but it was more a huge opportunity. Having friends with different values and mindsets helped me open up, and question our own values.”* Anu learnt to be accommodating with the friends from different cultures despite the differences and the gaps that they had.

There are gaps between cultures, and to Anu, it *“was nice to discover ways to bridge the gaps.”* No communication between people generally indicates potential gaps in human connections. Anu interacted with her friends quite often, not only about the courses and subject matter, but also about informal topics such as films and festivals. For Anu, such interactions became tremendously helpful in strengthening the bond of friendship:

*For example, I had a friend (named Dan), he was a white guy, he didn't really like school very much, he was a very much bright guy, liked partying a lot, but we were very good friends despite having different mindsets and values. The gap was just that, but we were able to laugh about the differences, we were able to come up with similarities. We watched a ridiculous English movie together and engaged in discussions about the movie.*

The conversations between Anu and her friend helped them open up more to the causal talks. In their meetings, both Anu and her friend were used to engage in making jokes, coming up with humorous topics, and making each other laugh. In her perception, these informal discussions on any topic are really great to promote a sense of togetherness between and among friends.

Anu had many good friends while studying in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades. These friends were with different perspectives, as they came from different countries. Having had the friendship of such friends, Anu not only learned to be open, tolerant, friendly, helpful, and compassionate, but also find ways to overcome challenges at times:

*I became more open-minded, as I was exposed to different perspectives. I learned from my Chinese friends slowly and subtly, through interactions while working on group assignments, studying together for tests, and making quick jokes while our teacher taught up at the front. We certainly had challenges (for example, it was sometimes difficult to communicate because of our different levels of English fluency), but such challenges were easily overcome.*

Both formal and informal interactions are important to building trust, and having a prolonged friendship. In Anu's experience, another effective way to promote friendship was working together in the school clubs, or in the groups while accomplishing assigned tasks. Developing a culture of working together not only energizes the members in the group, but also provides ways to overcome the challenges caused by the cultural differences. Anu found that the participation in co-curricular activities was a way to understand and learn from such differences.

**Participating in co-curricular activities.** Apart from concentrating on her studies, Anu persistently participated in various co-curricular activities run by different clubs in the school. Anu believed that these activities were supportive of, not only one's personal growth, but also to achieve academic excellence. One club that Anu thoroughly engaged in during her high school education was the Newspaper Club. She founded the club, recruited the executives, managed it well, and published students' creative pieces in the timely manner:

*I started the Newspaper Club and had to run it; I worked to run it, I did lot of work to continue it. I explained the theme of the club, set the dead line for submission, recruited people for the team, people came with their own topics, we edited the submissions, then reviewed and formatted the articles to publish in the newspaper.*

Starting and working with this club was a great experience for Anu. She remembered how the club members interacted, planned, worked, and met the deadlines: *“Working in the newspaper brought the team involved in its production closer. Everything was done collaboratively.”*

Anu considered that her involvement in the Newspaper Club was one of the best memories. Anu gained, and sharpened, her management and leadership skills through this

involvement, which gave her access to the Principal, and the Vice-Principal. Anu was pleased to have had this opportunity:

*One of my favourite memories is getting involved in cross-curricular activities, that is, involving in club activities. This was great because it gave me access to talking to Principal and Vice-Principal. You are there and have people interested in you.*

Anu's close connections with the teachers and informal interactions with the friends, made her feel at home in the school. Anu acquired the virtues of respect, love, and trustworthiness through this sense of belongingness to her school, her friends, and her teachers. She considered these to be important character attributes.

**Perception of character and character development.** Anu perceived character as the possession of intangible qualities, and character development as the core of humanity. To Anu, character development is a process that begins at an early age, and then continues through one's entire life:

*I perceive character and character development to be the very core of humanity. Character and character development are about being a refined, developed human being with values, a sense of identity, and a larger, overarching sense of community. Having a strong character is about possessing admirable, intangible qualities that highlight compassion, understanding, and ethics. Character development is the steps one takes to develop "character." It is a life-long process that begins when one is young.*

Anu also related character development to knowledge, wisdom, and one's lived experiences. These experiences included Anu's meeting and talking with her friends, interacting with her teachers, and visiting her family friends, and celebrating festivals:

*I also think that character development is closely associated with knowledge and experience. For example, my English teacher from high school is someone I deeply admire and look up to. She is incredibly knowledgeable, has a rich understanding of people, places, and the world, and is able to use this to mould her character. She has developed a personal code of ethics to live her life, and I find that her character development is linked to her vast knowledge base.*

Anu had high regards for her teachers for the care and concern they showed, the commitment to teaching they had, and the support they provided.

Teaching is both a challenging and a rewarding career. Teachers can help students shape their future. In Anu's perception, teachers occupied the most prestigious place in the community. Having had both family and cultural influences in her upbringing and education, Anu had great faith in her teachers. She considered the role of teachers to be very crucial to help students develop character. Teachers were the ones who could provide safe and inclusive environments in the classrooms. In such classrooms, students could have their voices heard. The teachers, hearing the voices of students, could motivate them in the class and show them a morally justifiable path to follow:

*I think that teachers can help students develop character by building a classroom where students feel safe to share their thoughts and opinions, discuss character development with students, and finally, encourage students to develop their character in their day-to-day life.*

Anu believed that character could be developed in school: *"One such way is daily reflections or journal entries that encourage students to actively evaluate their character development."* Anu explained that this could be applied to all subjects, for character development was an important aspect of academic excellence: *"Character development could*

*also be tied into more academic settings, rather than being segregated as one particular topic.”*

For Anu, teachers could have a profound impact on students’ character building. Students, she believed, did listen to what the teachers said, observed what they did, and later, might come to apply what they had learned. Anu described an example of conceptualizing character development:

*As a personal aside, when I was in grade 6, I remember a character education class where we discussed “ambition.” The teacher talked about how having goals, striving to push yourself towards excellence, and having a clear vision was an important part of developing character. Prior to this class, I hadn’t associated ambition with character development, because I had linked character development with ethics. But after our class discussion and the journal entries we completed, I saw the value of being an ambitious person, of being motivated, of inspiring others to push themselves. It was a powerful character education class that has always stayed with me. As such, I think teachers have a profound impact on character education, and that character education lessons in school can resonate deeply with students.*

Anu reinforced that it was important to understand the concept of character: *“The concept of character is very important to me. Understanding my character, my values, and my perspectives helps guide me through my day-to-day. It helps me make decisions and assess my actions.”* Anu related character to actions, and believed that our actions were guided by our character. She also noticed, at times, the contradictions between what people said, and what they did, and also between what they believed in, and what they practically did, in their daily lives: *“Personally, I am fascinated by human contradictions (for example, when a person espouses one belief but acts in a manner that is contradictory to it).”*

Anu explained that her thoughts and actions are very much guided by her understanding of character: *“As such, the concept of character keeps me grounded, serves as my moral base, and helps me act in a way that is not hypocritical or contradictory, but is in-line with my more rational, thoughtful self.”* Anu had come across situations of conflict with friends and people in her contact. Conflicting situations and contradictory thoughts keep taking place in human life. Anu considered this to be very natural. What mattered to her was how conflicts were resolved, and contradictions were managed:

*For example, sometimes I may experience conflict with my best friend. When I am angry, I think about my character. Do I want to be someone that is easily angered by my best friend? What do I value more – my anger or my friendship? What does this say about my character if I express my anger? What does it say about my character if I calm down and discuss my concerns with my friend? Thus, the concept of character for me is linked to actions. I often reflect on my actions and what such actions say about my character. If such actions are not in-line with the character I believe myself to be (or the character I strive to become), then I try not to act in that particular manner.*

For Anu, who we were got defined by what we did, and most of what we did, come from our cultural convictions and family values. Activities like going to temple, worshipping Gods, and performing rituals were common phenomena in Anu’s family. Such cultural practices became more frequent in the big festivals such as the Dashain, the Tihar, and the Teej.

**Festivals are important.** The Dashain is the greatest festival of Hindus, and is widely celebrated in Nepali communities across the globe. The Tihar is the Festival of Light, also known as the ‘Dipawali.’ Houses are illuminated in the evenings during this festival. The

Goddess Lakshmi, famously known as the goddesses of wealth, is worshipped in every home. Prayers and rituals are common but performed in special ways. Anu has seen her “*mother pray every morning.*” Anu watched her mother pray, and participated in the act of praying, which, she believed, was very important to keep the virtues of discipline, respect, and honesty.

These virtues are reflected in the broader communal life during festive occasions. For example, when the Dashain began, Anu wore new clothes, visited the close family friends, and received Tika with blessings from the seniors. It is understood that those who give blessings are respected and honoured all the times by those who are blessed. Anu considered this an important cultural practice in the community and had many benefits:

*Celebrating the Dashain with family...speaking in Nepali and talking with community people get us closer. Arranging and gathering at a place for dinner and celebrating together is a big joy, and going to my grandparents' house, getting Tika from them and getting blessings from them...you also get blessings from your extended families. Also, it is a festival during which we get blessings from friends, wishing good luck, hoping good future, and one of my favourite memories is going to my grandparents.*

Nepali communities get together at a place, and celebrate this festival with nice food and cultural shows. Anu participated in such community activities, and celebrated the festivals every year: “*we have pulao [a delicious rice dish cooked during special occasions], meet close families, put Tika and give and receive blessings. In community, we hold cultural shows that include singing and dancing.*” These festive activities brought one closer to other people. Anu also celebrated the Teej, a festival of women in Nepali culture. Wearing red dresses, usually the



red coloured blouse and sari, singing songs, dancing, and fasting were what usually happened during this festival: “*We celebrate Teej, a festival of Women.*”

Having spent several years in Canadian multi-cultural society, Anu, while keeping her cultural values, engaged in the celebration of the Christmas: “*We also celebrate Christmas; celebrating Christmas helps different groups of people come closer; it is important for the integration of cultural differences.*” This integration, Anu believed, was also an important step to character building in a multi-cultural society.

### **4.3: Vignette 3 Reena: Character Development Does Not Just Happen Instantly.**

The Vignette described in this section is composed from the transcripts of the oral and written interviews taken in the month of January 2017. The Vignette accounts for Reena's biographical and educational background, her experiences of living in transitions, her perceptions of character and character development, and her lived experiences of being, and learning, in multi-cultural classrooms. The Vignette demonstrates how the supportive role of teachers in school, and of parents at home, impacted Reena in succeeding her high school education.

This Vignette identifies Reena's experiences of transitional living in different places and studying at different schools. Reena's narratives imply these transitions as she has moved to, and lived in, multiple countries. The Vignette also details Reena's experience of being connected with culturally diverse groups of people, building trust with them, and learning from having interactions with them. It also details the significance of collaborative works, festive celebrations, and cultural activities in terms of building relationships and making connections between people and families.

**Biographical and educational background.** Reena is a Nepal-born Canadian. She spent her early childhood in the city of Bharatpur, Chitwan, situated in the Central Region of Nepal. At the age of three she moved to the United Kingdom with her parents, as her father was offered an admission to study in a post-secondary institution in London. She grew up there, she studied until the middle of grade six. Meanwhile, Anu along with her parents migrated to Thunder Bay, Ontario, in 2010 as landed immigrants for better opportunities. Anu's father completed his post-secondary education in Thunder Bay, and decided to move to a big city, Toronto. So, having

studied until the middle of grade nine in Thunder Bay public schools, Reena moved to Toronto in 2012 with her parents. She continued her studies in Toronto public school and graduated from high school in 2016. Currently, Reena is pursuing her post-secondary education in Toronto. She has joined a business school: *“I graduated from high school with the OSSD (Ontario Secondary School Certificate) and the IB (International Baccalaureate) Diploma from Toronto in 2016. I am currently pursuing a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in a business school in Toronto.”*

**Experiences of living in transitions.** Reena has had an extensive experience of moving to different places and living in transitions. She began her childhood in a traditional Nepali community. Bharatpur, the birthplace of Reena is a sub-metropolitan city with warm weather even in the winter: *“I am an 18-year-old female born in Bharatpur, Chitwan, Nepal.”* Reena spent her first three years with parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles in Nepal. Meanwhile, her father got an opportunity to study in the United Kingdom. Then she moved to London with her parents where she began her early childhood education: *“When I was three, I moved to Reading, England in the year of 2001.”* Reading is a small city, where Reena began her schooling: *“The first school I attended in England was a primary school; it was in Reading; and it’s a small city,”* where about *“forty percent residents are immigrants.”* Reena had a nice stay in England, and had a good time in the primary school. She considered that the weekly assemblies in the school were important as they would bring stories with moral endings to the students:

*I stayed in England for nine years, and continued my education up until half term of grade 6 of primary school. During my time at primary school, we would have weekly assemblies that were around values and their importance through story telling. The principal would read out stories, that had a moral ending, and be engaging to the*

*students. We would hear stories around Jesus to Gandhi. In them, values such as honesty and loyalty would be expressed.*

Having lived nearly a decade in the United Kingdom, Reena's parents decided to move to Canada, which brought Reena to Thunder Bay: *"In the year of 2010, I moved to Thunder Bay, Canada with my family for greater opportunities."* Reena was excited to know about the place, about the weather, and about the community in Thunder Bay. It was the month of January when Reena and her family landed in Canada. They saw snow all around which, Reena considered, was a great experience: *I came in January, so it was snowing and cold, it was kind of a shock to me.*" She had not seen such snow while living in England; *"Usually it rains and even if it snows, it snows maybe 5-10 cm the most"* in England. While reflecting on weather in Reading and in Thunder Bay, Reena said, *"It is really much colder and snowier in Canada than in England,"* which she says was *"the biggest difference."*

Like the cold and snowy weather, Reena was equally curious about meeting and making new friends in her new school: *"I was very anxious at this point in terms of making friends."* In England, she had friends from different cultural background and *"had learnt to be kind and respectful to new people and cultures."* This experience of living in a diverse community made Reena feel comfortable in her new school classrooms in Thunder Bay: *"Since I was exposed to new cultures and religion apart from my own, such as in England, where I was made familiar with Christianity, I was used to accepting differences."*

**People were very friendly.** In her school in Thunder Bay, Reena *"met a lot of good friends"* and teachers who were nice, supportive, and helpful: *"Both the students and teachers in Thunder Bay schools were very friendly, and they were also curious about from where I came*

*from.*” Even in the transitioning period, Reena was comfortable in the community she lived in, and in the school, she studied: *“people were very friendly.”* She found herself in a more open environment, and felt welcome in her class: *“When I came to Thunder Bay for my school, I received a lot of openness. Everyone was very open. I didn’t experience any negative comments from my friends and teachers. They were very welcoming.”* In her first day, Reena introduced herself, and participated *“in the class as other students.”*

To Reena, the school environment in Thunder Bay *“was more open with less restriction.”* It is because during her primary school in England, Reena had experienced a stricter school climate: *“In Reading, it was very close; we even had a very high security everywhere. So, the children weren’t allowed to go outside.”* This was very different from her experience in her school in Thunder Bay. Reena states, *“In Thunder Bay, it was freer; you could go out for lunch once you were in grades 6 and seven. I thought that was pretty new for me.”*

Reena and her parents were pleased to be received by Nepali families in Thunder Bay. The Nepali community in Thunder Bay was very small. Most of them were University students, studying in different programs: *“There weren’t as many Nepali as there were in Reading,”* yet Reena found the Nepali community in Thunder Bay to be united and supportive to the new families, which *“made the transition much easier.”* She said,

*In Thunder Bay, when I first came, my parents knew one family from Nepali community, from their time in Nepal. From there, we met other loving and welcoming Nepali families. The families that we met in Thunder Bay were very open, friendly, and helpful to each other. We can still say that they are close family and friends to us. We treated each other as families, since we were a small group of Nepali in Thunder Bay. So, we would*

*meet up with each other weekly. Since everyone had children around the same age, everyone would bond really well.*

Reena and her parents got support and help from Nepali families in their initial settlement. With these experiences in the new place, Reena joined a public school as a sixth grade student and continued studying until the mid of her ninth grade. Compared to the City of Reading in England in terms of the size of population, Reena found the City of Thunder Bay smaller: *“I studied from grade 6 to mid-way of grade 9 in Thunder Bay, where I experienced the middle school and high school life. This was a much smaller town compared to Reading in terms of the population.”* During her elementary schooling in Thunder Bay, Reena *“was able to get a new perspective of Canadian education.”* Reena met and made friends, and *“learned a lot more about the First Nations”* in Thunder Bay.

**I valued the friendly behaviour from my classmates.** Having completed her elementary school, Reena joined a public high school. Moving to, and living, in different places, Reena has developed her confidence of becoming familiar with, and feeling comfortable in, new environments, meeting and mixing with teachers and friends in the school, and helping new students as required:

*By the time I moved from primary school to high school here, I had already gotten familiar with making new friends, and fitting into a new environment. I was fond of helping out new students in my classes, since I had experience of moving to countries and schools. I valued the friendly behaviour from my classmates' when I was new, so I wanted to share my experience to help others adjust into a new school environment.*

With these valuable learning and helping experiences that she gained during her living and studying in Thunder Bay, Reena moved to Toronto, a large metropolitan city. She joined a public school in Toronto as a grade nine student, and continued her high school education. The scenario in her new high school was much more diverse and competitive. Reena noticed the challenge to compete, and so through planning and hard work, successfully graduated from her high school. Reena stated:

*In 2012, I moved to the Greater Toronto Area and started school mid-way of grade 9. Again, this was a new environment, which was much more metropolitan than Thunder Bay. I could immediately feel the competitiveness in the air, with over 1000 students unlike the 400 students in the Thunder Bay high school. There was a noticeable diversity, with a dominating student population from an Asian background. There were many clubs, with many opportunities to participate in competitions. I learned to adapt, and challenged myself even more to fit into the competitive air. As my peers set high expectations, I was also influenced, and saw my potential.*

Reena reviewed her studies in Thunder Bay public school, and said that there were significant differences between schools in Thunder Bay and Toronto. These differences were seen especially in “*school population, school extracurricular activities, in the number of activities, and the extent of the activities.*” Reena further narrated: “*there were numerous clubs and activities that would go to regional, then national, and international*” levels of competition. Reena felt a tough competition in school academics in Toronto, while: “*I didn’t feel that much pressure in Thunder Bay.*” In the Toronto environment she described, Reena carried both her academic journey, and her participation in club activities hand-in-hand: “*I participated in Red Cross in high school.*” Reena saw her friends in Red Cross since their grade nine. As they moved

to the upper grades, they became the part of Regional Red Cross. Seeing this, Reena also joined her friends in Regional Red Cross: *“I looked into going to the regional Red Cross group, and I joined them.”* Reena carried her responsibility *“to partake in planning events and making impacts in the community.”*

**Learning hands-on skills.** Club activities are important to enhance hands-on skills. Reena gained a rich experience from her participation in club activities. She said that this was an opportunity to meet people, interact with them, and know each other. She stated:

*I was also in Brain Bee, which is a competition in neuroscience and I partook in the regional one. We went downtown with various other schools. Since we were in Toronto, a lot of competitions would happen here, so it was very convenient as well. So, everyone seems to know all these events. It's like regular yearly annual events that go on in the school. They encourage people to take part, and they help organize these clubs.*

Reena said, apart from meeting new people and connecting with them, there were many valuable skills students could learn by participating in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that were run by various clubs in schools. In her experience: *“the best part of learning in clubs would be learning more hands-on skills.”* These skills included: *“Applying some of the theoretical things that you may have learned or you may have talked about in class, or learned them in real life.”* While taking part in the regional and national competitions, the participant got an opportunity to *“learn more technical skills, and the logistics of making event and how you can make it work.”*

In all these competitions and participations, the support from family, from school, and from teachers played a vital role in achieving success. Reena received the needed support and



care both from her family and her school. However, *“the school support may not be always visible because there were so many students.”* So, Reena was aware that not all teachers and people in administration knew all students. Yet, Reena reinforced that the school provided opportunities for all students to participate in the clubs they were interested in, and enhanced their hand-on skills: *“there were a lot of groups and events that made sure that students were able to participate in the school spirit, make them feel that they were part of something, that they can learn in a friendly environment.”* During her time in high school, Reena saw her friends joining different groups and events as *“there are clubs for all different types of people.”* Reena further stated that the school even let students *“plan out to form a new club, and start running it.”*

**Schools are an important place to learn morals and values.** Reena related her learning from working with clubs to the goal of education. She believed that an educational process should make people learn about *“how the world works.”* A school is a center for the educational process where interactions between students and teachers take place. These interactions are important in terms of building trust and making connections. Reena said that *“schools bring you to meet different types of teachers, I have learned from them, and not only from academics.”* Reena acknowledged different ways of learning in school: *“Especially as you grow up, you don’t just learn from textbooks, you learn from interactions. The first person interaction has a lot of value.”* Schools are an important place to learn morals and values: *“I think you learn most of the morals and values, like honesty, if you’re at a high school.”* The learning of these values occurs in an indirect way both at home and at school:

*Most of them would be learnt indirectly from teachers; teachers observe how students work, and seeing that they teach us values like being honest, helping out, and caring. And*

*from home, my parents would give me an advice or teach me 'that was not the best thing to do in terms of being honest, and being persistent in your interest.*

Reena was attentive to her parents; she applied their suggestions to her everyday life. She also remained watchful to what her teachers and friends said, and did, and learnt from their sayings and doings:

*I learn by seeing, observing, and doing things: once I see it, how it's done, then I learn the best. I would see things happening; I would experience how it feels to be respectful or be honest, and remember that feeling, and I would grow from that."*

Reena experienced this while being and working with culturally diverse students in her high school classes.

**Experience of working and learning together.** Reena spent most of her school life in Ontario public schools working with friends from various backgrounds. She has had a very good experience in Ontario public school classrooms: *"Everything was pretty positive in primary and middle school in Thunder Bay, and high school in Toronto. It's pretty supportive."* She appreciated the education system she experienced during her schooling. Reena complimented her teachers' caring, and supportive roles as *"they would always be friendly, and encourage checking out different activities."* Reena said that there was a huge support provided to students from teachers and school while preparing of tests: *"A lot of support is available for students in Ontario public schools"* to prepare and face big tests like the EQAO (Education Quality and Accountability Office). Reena preferred working in groups while preparing to take these tests.

This working together culture was more prominent in her school in Toronto *"because there were a lot of students who came from Asian countries."* In each high school class, *"there*

*would be a group at each table,” and group members would come from different countries such as China, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and so on. Reena said, “My friends and group members were very diverse although the majority would be from China.” Working with each member in the group was always a great experience of knowing about their food and working culture: “The food would be different. Everyone would bring the type of food that they eat at home.”*

The close group members sometimes planned and spent time together, eating outside the school: *“We would go together to restaurants. We would try different types of restaurants and we would bond over that.”* Reena was also influenced by her friends’ work habits: *“Most of those from Chinese backgrounds would be known for really hardworking.”* Reena related how this hardworking habit of her friends motivated and encouraged herself to do well in her academic performance. Reena saw her friends working on their set plans to achieve their defined goals, which drove Reena also to put more efforts and achieve her own goals. Reena believed that one’s company makes a big difference in one’s life. In Reena’s experience and observation, most of her friends:

*Would plan in advance; most of them would want to go to high profile schools after high school. They would prepare from a very young age. Starting grade 10, they would apply for extracurricular activities, become executive members, and then try to become the president of the club by the time they apply. So, you could feel the rush and the intention in the air as people achieve all these achievements and fulfill their goals. I would also get influenced to stay working so hard. I would feel that I should also start applying to groups, clubs, and have more achievements throughout my high school career. My friends were also interested in planning events, and more of extracurricular activities.*

*We also planned a community event together to raise awareness of depression during winter.*

Reena held that planning events, and launching them in the community, could potentially enhance to build and promote one's personality, and building personality, in turn, provided a basis for character development.

**Nurturing values in childhood.** Reena believed *“that character is built from one's personality, and the values around which are nurtured during childhood”* The role of the school and the teachers, and the role of parents and family in one's upbringing are central to one's character building. Reena has been deeply influenced of her parents' life style, and has acquired the virtue of honesty and truthfulness from their teachings. Reena stated:

*With honesty, you gain respect and confidence in your own work, as I have seen from my parents. They have always encouraged honesty, from which I have created friendships or helped other people. It has always brought a warm feeling of righteousness and peace when opportunities arise to demonstrate honesty.*

For Reena, the supportive role of teachers has also been a key to understand and practice the virtue of tolerance: *“Tolerating cultural and individual difference is a part of character.”* Reena was influenced by her *“teachers because they have to deal with making class content relatable to the different types of students.”* Reena perceived *“character in many ways, as different people have different values.”* More specifically, *“integrity in one's work”* was what Reena meant by character. Reena said that students in school learn to be respectful to others, and developing a sense of respect is another important aspect of character. Reena referred to her class, and said:

*I was given various types of projects to convey our assignments where it might be a painting, or a piece of writing. It allows one to choose their strengths to portray their knowledge, although projects like this are rare. Helping others in their time of difficulty is always respectful in my point of view, and I have learned to have a “pay it forward” mindset. It is an important, yet a long process.*

**Character building: A long process.** Reena considered character building a long and steady process which begins from home and continues in school: *“Character development does not just happen instantly. Character attributes are developed over a long period of time.”* Reena held that people in their life come across different situations, including the conflicting ones. Facing these situations offer them a valuable experience. She stated: *“When one gets exposed to different experiences and conflicts, their way of dealing with these conflicts show signs of their character.”* Reena saw connections between one’s character and actions; it is because actions generally speak of one’s character: *“For me, I question my actions daily and ask myself what type of person I am, or the type of character I possess.”* To Reena, it was necessary to reflect on and justify her *“decisions and actions. Character is important in influencing the daily decisions I make, and how I present myself.”* Reena believes *“that a clear understanding of character is very important especially in the long term, as it is reflected in the creation of one’s goals in life.”*

Reena said that it was important for her to understand what different character attributes meant to her. She found their value when applied in life and work. Reena related her understanding of character to everyday work. For Reena, discipline, honesty, hard work, and trust counted a lot in the achievements she made. She stated:

*By understanding the importance of discipline, I get myself to give it my best in my assignments by getting myself to understand and study in a regular manner. I have stayed over at a library to finish my assignment, since I know it is the place I work best, and doing well is a priority. Being honest is also important in my everyday life in school where plagiarism is forbidden, and for me I naturally want to improve my work, so I submit my original work for feedback. At work, I need to honestly count my cash revenue at the end of every shift, ensuring no money has gone missing from my till. There is faith between the manager and I, and I value that trust, so I continue to uphold my actions to my values. As mentioned, there are many opportunities where I can apply character thus, it is important to understand it precisely. Without being persistent, my hard working habits wouldn't last long for me to do well throughout the course. Discipline makes me carry out the necessary work in the allocated time and not procrastinate, although I still need to improve it.*

Reena gave credit to both school and home for helping her acquire such character attributes: *“Based on my experiences, the teachers play an important role as they are an important figure in our teen years when we are exploring our character.”* She believed that she has nurtured her character through her meetings and interactions with people who were present around her. She said: *“Teachers are one of the major influencers after parents, so during school, teachers can incorporate the values, such as punctuality through rewards and points for those who show the value.”* Small everyday activities facilitated by teachers can help students to be open and come closer: *“My teachers, especially my principal teacher, read up stories based around values and I still remember some of them to this day. Teachers help us learn new content and bring in inspiration.”* Reena has gained an inspiring experience from those teachers, who

not only taught her the subject matter, but also motivated and encouraged to participate in different activities, and provided the required help to do well in her academic performance.

Reena said:

*The teachers in Thunder Bay were very approachable, and would get the class friendly and open through respect of each other. In Toronto, my high school teachers would emphasize the importance of time management, and we were used to prioritizing multiple assignments we had to juggle.*

At times, the teachers provided Reena an opportunity to rate her group members after they would finish a group project, which “*motivates each individual to learn to discipline themselves and take the initiative to lead.*” Reena insisted on the importance of project work that demanded creativity. Generally, the assignments focus “*on the academic curriculum,*” however; creative teachers plan and encourage students to do projects that require more thinking and creativity. Reena said that these projects encouraged students to show their character:

*When my teacher assigned group projects or a creative assignment, I had to reflect on my personal qualities to create the painting or collage. It was not just a formulated essay; it required me to show a part of who I am.*

For Reena, working in a group was both very much engaging, and entertaining in a multicultural classroom.

**Experience of being and learning in a multi-cultural classroom.** Reena has gained a long experience of working and learning in multi-cultural classrooms: “*I have been in a multicultural classroom throughout my academic years; some were more diverse than others.*” The diversity offers everyone to learn something from others. Reena said that, “*when the class is*

*multi-cultural, students are more accepting of new ideas since everyone has something different to contribute.”* Students in multi-cultural settings, according to Reena, had opportunities to *“grow with both the qualities of acceptance and tolerance that eventually help them prepare for the real world outside of their school and home.”*

Reena said that the sharing of one’s background and preferred learning styles commonly happened when there were students from different countries and cultural backgrounds. Reena experienced the celebrations of cultural events and festivals that were held in her school. She knew about Chinese New Year when she celebrated it with her Chinese friends: *“Chinese New Year was a huge holiday. If you did go to my high school, you would know some traditions about Chinese New Year. You would know it as a huge event since everyone basically celebrated it.”* In the same way, Reena explained her friends about the festivals she celebrated at home and in the Nepali community: *“I would tell them that I had a festival, so it was a Nepali festival like Dashain, and I would explain it to them as well, and they would be accepting of it.”*

Reena said that the sharing of cultural activities and stories helps students get connected with others. This was an advantage for newly migrated students to be involved and participants in class activities. Reena recalled *“A time when there was a newly landed immigrant student who joined my class in the eighth grade. The class heard this student’s story in terms of schooling back home, and how this student used to solve the math problem.”* Reena noticed in the class that *“Everyone was fond of this student.”* Reena perceived a potential learning opportunity in such a sharing of one’s experiences with others in the class.

The diversity of students in the class generates diverse ways to know the world, and provides multiple perspectives on discussion topics. Reena’s experience of being with friends



from diverse cultures has enabled her to be open-minded and accepting of differences. In her perception:

*This opens a new perspective for the class, and makes learning outside the box common. It reflects how diverse the world is, and brings the global community into a learning setting. I have always been familiar with being around different cultures, and I enjoy learning them. I feel more knowledgeable and less narrow-minded. My friends are diverse, and they are all very different individuals.*

**Learning from friends.** As an IB graduate, Reena has experienced working with different individuals from different cultural backgrounds. She has undergone the pressure of intense academic work while accomplishing her diploma. While running projects in groups, Reena saw each group member showing their commitments to get the task done on time:

*I was in the IB program; most of them had similar characteristics in terms of work ethic. They were very hard working, and many would go out of their way to join extracurricular and organize events, alongside their heavy academics. My peers had different backgrounds and we all learnt from each other. Being in this intensive program, we learnt how to handle all the pressure from work for the years. We had endured together in this intensive program, assignment after assignment and exam, so we also had formed a sense of community.*

To Reena, the forming of community to help each other in academics was more effective in the school in Toronto in comparison to the one in Thunder Bay. She felt that this was because of the greater diversity in the former compared to the latter. That said, Reena expressed her appreciation for the great learning opportunities in both the places:

*The biggest impact from diversity was felt in Toronto since everyone is affiliated with immigration. In a casual setting people would express their own characters. I developed friendships after sharing classes with my friends, who have different backgrounds. They were Chinese, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, and Singaporean. We bonded over getting through tough assignments, and through a mixture of culture, that is sharing foods during lunch and music. However, I could experience the values in Thunder Bay. My many First Nations friends have a strong sense of responsibility towards Mother Earth and their families. I have learnt a lot more with a diverse class, more in my time socializing with them, than from the school work.*

Reena enjoyed her schooling and learned varied things from the diversity she experienced in her schools. Overall, her schools provided “*A very comfortable environment to learning,*” where she received tremendous support from schools and teachers to excel her high school education. Reena believed that the support from both the school and family was key to succeed high school studies.

**Support from family and school.** Academic success by and large depends on family environment. Reena said she had a supportive and caring family environment during her high school years. Reena was thankful to her parents for their encouragement and continuous support to her studies. She shared how she was boosted up by her parents to keep going and making progress:

*They would really push me to do my best. Even sometimes, when I did not do that well on tests and stuff, they would always have the support ready like saying “don’t worry about this one. You can try again in next one. Maybe we can help you have a better*

*environment for studying,” and they would really offer to do anything to provide that environment.*

Reena received emotional, moral and physical supports from her parents: *“If I needed any support, or if I did any extracurricular activities during high school, they would help me get to it, get from it, and support me in any way they could.”* Reena went ahead and stated:

*My dad often picked me up and dropped me off during my high school. He would provide me help with the homework I had after school, sometimes at home when I needed help. My mom would always cook food, and have it prepared for lunch and dinner, so I wouldn't really have to worry about it.*

Having had this care and support from family, Reena could save time and utilize it in her studies. She told her parents about her work in school during dinner time. It was a part of culture to take food together and talk in Reena's family: *“We eat as a family; we talk and share things around the table.”* Reena took suggestions from her parents before joining clubs or planning and launching any events: *“For example, if I were to join another club I would ask my parents if I could join.”* Reena did it so that her parents would manage their time and offer to help:

*I joined Dragon Boat racing and they would offer help to drive me to the pool and back. Sometimes at school we would have a potluck where we would have a small picnic, and my mom would help me make food and bring it to the event. Even during my extracurricular events, such as setting up a community event, my mom and sister came to participate to support our cause.*

Reena said that her father had an expertise in the subjects like math and science. She was helped in doing assignments of these subjects:

*Generally, it was math or science, like chemistry. My dad had a good background in that, and he was pretty proficient. So, if I had any problems I could just go to my dad instead of waiting for the next day to go to my teacher. Even after my dad taught, he would also encourage me to ask the teacher if I still didn't understand properly. Mostly, it was chemistry: the equations and the reactions. And he would often tell me to read more to gain a better understanding.*

As suggested by her father, Reena approached her teachers and sought their help. She found the teachers often ready to help: *“Even after class they would help. If it was lunch period after class, they would stay behind to talk about any questions.”* Reena was glad to have her questions answered. She said, *“The teachers would make sure that we were really prepared for the tests.”* After the tests, *“they would personally come up to you, talk to you, and ask you how you did on the test. They would be genuinely caring.”* For Reena, this caring role of teachers promoted a good relationship with students. Reena said this was important for a student to be proactive in taking appointments and meeting teachers.

While working on her Extended Essay (EE), Reena had her teacher help in editing the essay: *“I asked my economics teacher to be my mentor for my EE. So, I did receive a lot of support in editing. She edited my work; she provided advice on how to go about with my essay.”* Reena said, *“that's a huge responsibility”* on the part of teachers, but students need to be proactive to approach them. Teachers, not only during in-class teaching, but also in their planning time, were found *“volunteering their time”* to help students in their assignments. Reena recalled an important occasion in which she was well-guided and supported by her teacher: *“I went on to do interviews, and she helped me with the questions, and how to approach people. So,*

*that's one of the projects where I received tremendous support.*” Reena was respectful to her teachers, felt comfortable to *“Approach them during lunch, and get to talk to them one-on-one.”*

Like parents and teachers, Reena helped her friends and received help and support from them. This reciprocal help was common when Reena worked as a tutor in her school. She said that there was a friendly atmosphere to help one another in the tutoring sessions after schools: *“Students who are comfortable with a subject would sign up to become tutors.”* To Reena, it was nice to *“support each other by sharing notes.”* This enhanced their helping culture, encouraged to study in groups, and strengthened their friendship: *“With my close friends, I would go to group study sessions, and study in those groups.”* Reena had a strong bond of friendship with her friends. Reena said, *“I would meet my friends not just in school but also out of school, doing some extracurricular work together.”* This offered them an experience of knowing each other: *“In order to come closer, I would also feel the need to join them in their birthdays of course, and going out on events, like going to restaurants.”*

For Reena, it was a great experience to have friends from different language speaking communities. In her school, *“There is Public Ambassador Club where students can speak different languages.”* She said that all second language speaking individuals were welcome to this club, and the club members *“would encourage people with diverse backgrounds to join; they would promote that they could speak many languages. They would host events and galas to accept the diversity.”* Reena considered this a big opportunity for everyone to know about different languages, cultures, and traditions, which were reflected through cultural shows and events.

**Festival and community activities connect people.** According to Reena, cultural shows and events brought students together in the school, and cultural activities connected people in a

community. Nepali people in Toronto celebrate Nepali festivals in families and in communities. Reena said that *“the most prominent ones throughout the year would be celebrating our festivals as a family. So, it would include the Dashain, Dipawali, and the Teej.”* Reena said that she celebrated Christmas as well at home: *“We do celebrate Christmas. Everyone has a day off during Christmas; it’s also like a time for family.”* Reena says, *“We do not celebrate it as strongly as the Dashain, it’s more a cultural adaption. We do set up a small tree to get into spirit. It’s mostly like a family time together for us.”* Reena has witnessed and experienced that the participation of her family and Nepali community even in Canada is quite intensive during festivals like Teej and Dashain.

Dashain is the biggest Hindu festival which is celebrated in every Hindu family and community. People travel to meet their close relatives: *“The younger usually go to the elders to get blessings from them. We put red coloured rice on foreheads, called rato tika: a form of a blessing given to the youngsters.”* These blessings were followed by small gifts: *“the youngsters would receive a monetary token as well, or some sort of gift alongside.”* Reena said this was a great festive occasion to get together. In Toronto, Reena and her younger sister visited their close family friends, got *Tika* with blessings, and received gifts: *“We’ll go to their houses and they’ll come to ours, and my parents would bless their children, and we would get blessings from them.”* Apart from receiving blessings, *“we help to cook, and eat together. We talk and let everyone know what’s happening in our day to day lives.”* There went a lot of informal conversations between families and relatives.

Another festival that Reena celebrated was the Teej, *“which is known as a festival of women.”* Usually, women and young girls gather at a place and perform cultural shows: *“There we tend to go a bit far; we go to our friends, invite our friends, and have fun.”* Women in this

festival wear red blouse and saris, go fasting, sing and dance. Reena continued, *“My mom would celebrate with them mostly. We would take part in the cultural events; me and my sister would both participate and learn about it.”* Reena shared her experience of living in Thunder Bay and participating in the festival of women:

*I mentioned Teej, the festival of women. In Thunder Bay, every year someone would host the party and they would invite all the Nepali women and their family to their house. Since this is the festival of women, mostly the women would gather in one household. They would wear special dress up, and enjoy the day together. They would fast during the day, and support each other; even the children would be involved. Usually the men would gather together with their group and spend time, and women spent time together in their own group. It was just like a family getting together, since everyone was very close with each other, and everyone would just enjoy each other’s company.*

The wearing of red saris was accompanied by jewellery: *“They would wear a lot of jewellery as well”* to match their dresses. Reena said,

*I personally enjoy watching them get ready since they transform wearing the beautiful saris. I would also most of the time like to. I would ask my mom if I could wear it, and then I would wear my cultural clothes during that time. It was really fun of wearing those clothes since you don’t wear that day to day. In that special day you got a chance to wear it and fully experience that culture.*

This festival has had a well-accepted cultural significance: *“It’s a festival of women. It’s more like the married women fast for the well-being of their husbands. At the end of the day when they*

*break the fast, they get their blessings from their husbands.*” Reena saw a deep bond of love and affection that this festival had to offer to married couple.

Besides, these special festivals, Reena has watched her mother praying and worshipping gods and goddess at other occasions as well: *“My mom would fast during full moons or certain days and we would partake in that when she finishes her fast. On Saturday mornings, she often prays and does a little ritual.”* There were a few Hindu temples in Toronto area where Reena and her family occasionally visited: *“We go to the temple. We used to go more often before but because of school and my parents’ work schedule, now we usually go on Saturday morning.”* There they met Hindu followers from other Asian countries: *“We have an Indian temple a bit further down, but we have a closer one that’s more based on Hindu from Sri Lanka very close by. So, we do visit both temples and meet many other people.”*

Reena believed that going to temples and celebrating festivals in community could enhance our relationship and expand our networking. Young people learn about their cultural values through their active participation in these events and occasions. Reena stated:

*For me, I learn from the diversity; I learn from my culture. I also understand that our cultural events are important. Instead of just hearing about it, when you actually do it, I learn a lot of values such as caring for each other. When we see people from our community, sharing the love and appreciating everyone, we all really learn from each other, learn from each family. Since everyone was so close, you would really feel the connection.*



Reena asserted that celebrations of festivals were important to connect people; and they were crucial for youth to learn cultural values. In her experience, participating in a cultural event was an opportunity to take care of one another.

In this chapter, I described the experiences of the student participants in multi-cultural classrooms, their living through cultural and geographical transitions, and their perceptions of character development, composing series of Vignettes based on the oral and written interviews. In the chapter to come, I make a comprehensive analysis of these Vignettes, focusing on the themes that they emerge

## Chapter 5: Analysis of Student Vignettes

Analysis of the Vignettes employs paradigmatic cognition to study and uncover the situated meaning of the participants' lifeworld. (Sabin-Baden & Major, 2013; van Manen, 1990). This chapter provides an analysis of the written and audio-taped data of student participants, which have been synthesized into the series of Vignettes found in Chapter 4. The analysis of the Vignettes is based on the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) strategy that involves close reading of the Vignettes, and arriving at a group of common themes (Sabin Baden & Howell 2013; Smith & Osborn, 2003), and the themes are interrogated and discussed within the framework of the 'in-between,' as per the discussion made in Chapter 3.

The IPA strategy "attempts to explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 51). A researcher utilizing IPA is interested in learning something about the participant's world in the forms of their beliefs, and constructs, which have been manifested during interviews and other data collection. Taking this into account, I interrogate the Vignettes (as representations of the participants' experiences) to reveal the essence of the participants' lifeworld, and their perceptions of character and character development.

The IPA involves a step-by-step approach to the analysis, which I employed in the analysis of both student and teacher Vignettes. I read both set of narratives, interpreted and re-interpreted them, and from that work I annotated significant items, documented emerging themes, connected and clustered the themes that were common to both sets, and translated them into a narrative account (Smith & Osborn, 2003). For example, while coming up with the theme of transition, I sought student participants' common experiences of migration. Anil's migration from Nepal to Canada is direct, whereas, Anu first moved to the USA, and Reena to England,

and then they migrated to settle in Canada. They all have undergone geographical, linguistic, and cultural transitions within their own family circumstances. However, their narratives share common experiences of moving to, living in, and moving out of transitional experiences. Similarly, the narratives of the teacher participants are also seen in this theme. For example, I explored how the teacher participants approached to immigrant students in their first meetings. In contacting these students and building relationships, Laura insisted on the need for a teacher's openness, John emphasised the identification of students' learning needs and selection of culturally relevant readings, and Sally showed her interest in finding what these migrant students would bring with them. From these examples, we see how both the student and teacher vignettes can be interpreted in the light of the theme of transition, as both sets of participants negotiate their place in the classroom. The theme of transition is explicit in the student vignettes, whereas, the same is implicit in the teacher vignettes.

Hence, looking out over the foregoing Vignettes with the lens of the IPA, there are five key themes that emerged: the theme of *transition*, the theme of *negotiation*, the theme of *support and care*, the theme of *connection*, and the theme of *perception*. While analysing the Vignettes, it is found that these themes have strong connections with character development. To illustrate, the theme of transition relates to participants' courage, the theme of negotiation relates to trust, ethics, and morality, and the theme of connection relates to founding relationships and practicing the virtue of respect. In the analyses, transitions, negotiations, and connections are seen as important themes to contribute to create, maintain, and strengthen human relationships (Engle, Elahee & Tatoglu, 2013). I consider this creating, maintaining, and strengthening human relationships a process of shaping and reshaping one's character. The process of character building becomes stronger with the ongoing support and care from both family and school.

In developing the above mentioned themes, there were a number of other themes that emerged from the data. However, I am particularly interested in the themes that are common to both students and teachers, as it is these common themes that allow negotiations to occur within the tensioned space of the ‘in-between.’ It is because phenomenological research attempts to reveal what the participants have in common in their lived experiences (Creswell, 2009). In focusing on these common themes, I also acknowledge that I am not capturing the entire lived experiences of the participants, but reiterate that I am interested in their shared experiences within multi-cultural classrooms.

Having selected these common themes, they were critically analysed with substantial supporting details from the Vignettes in the sections to follow. Values and virtues acquired and learned from home-host cultures are employed as tools to underpin these themes.

### **5.1: Theme of Transition**

The theme of transition is dominant in the Student Vignettes. The Vignettes demonstrate the participants’ lived experiences of being, and living in, geographical and cultural transitions when they migrate to Canada from different countries, including the country of their birth. The virtue of courage is implied in their moving to, living in, and getting through these transitions. The Vignettes also illustrate how these transitions are overcome, and how negotiations are made between places and cultures in order to begin a new and effective way of living. Their stories with transitional experiences reflect that they have grown to be more confident, more open, and more accommodating to new places and people. The participants’ transitional experiences vary from one another due to their age, family background, and the time of migration.

**Anil.** Anil was from a rural village of Western Nepal where he lived a simple and quiet life with his mother and grandparents. A big geographical transition is evident in his coming to Toronto, a modern metropolitan city at the age of sixteen: “Anil was born in the beautiful countryside of the Western Region of Nepal ... [and] moved to Canada at the age of sixteen with feelings of excitement and confusion” (Vignette 1). Anil’s narrative illustrates a sense of uncertainty in the new place. In his expression of uncertainty, what implies is Anil’s courage and honesty. Yet, he was aware of better educational opportunities in Canada despite the initial challenges. In the Vignette, a sense of opportunity amid the challenges became clear: “Apart from staying together as a family, Anil’s main reason to come to Canada was for gaining better education and opportunities: *‘My parents kept reminding me that Canada has more opportunities’*” (Vignette 1). Being attentive to his parents, Anil showed his commitment to doing good in studies, and then exploring these opportunities. His Vignette implies that opportunities are meant to come along with the challenges.

Anil’s narrative describes a critical time of geographical and cultural transitioning in his first years in Toronto. What Anil thought was not what he saw and experienced in his new school:

*Before attending classes, I thought there [would] be few foreigners and many Canadian background students, but when I attended I saw the opposite. I didn’t know Canada was so diverse. I didn’t know how people look like from different parts of the world (Vignette 1).*

This excerpt reveals how Anil’s initial thought changed along with his first day in his new school in Toronto. This change is an indication of knowing about the space Anil came in, and the people

he met with. The diversity in the classroom made him feel more at home as Anil found his friends in the class from diverse cultural background. This made him aware of the fact that his *“high school in Canada was totally multicultural”* (Vignette 1). Working within the multi-cultural classroom environment, Anil learned to interact with friends and teachers despite the cultural differences: *“Anil met and ‘worked with friends from India, china, European countries, and Africa.’”* This entails how the perceived challenges during transitions can turn into opportunities for learning.

Anil completed the tenth grade in Nepal, where teaching approach and classroom environment were different from those in Canada. These differences required Anil to transition between different educational philosophies, a move that Anil responded to positively: *“Anil’s primary education took place in a strict disciplinary environment. Students were to remain quiet in the classroom and listen to the teachers. Anil ... largely depended on teachers’ notes and lectures while studying different subjects,”* because *“Teaching in Nepali schools is more theoretical.”* (Vignette1). In contrast to his learning experience in Nepal, Anil experienced *“more practice based”* learning in Canada. Anil’s lived classroom learning experiences make an assertion that *“Canadian multi-cultural classrooms [are] more engaging, lively, and student-centered. Students [are] offered opportunities to participate in, and contribute to, discussions held in the classrooms”* (Vignette 1). The Vignette shows how Anil negotiated the ‘in-between’ through the transitions in education, culture and geography. Anil’s acts of making new friends, interacting with them, and forming a new community in a new learning environment are found in his narrative. Anil’s joining of the English as Second Language (ESL) class exemplifies his negotiations of the transition:

English was Anil's second language. To improve both his written and communication skills ... he took a number of ESL classes with students from different parts of the world. Joining the ESL class in the school allowed him to build his friendships with students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Vignette 1).

What is evident in the above excerpts is Anil's living and experiencing the transition in two educational systems. Anil's friendship with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, and his involvement in different classroom activities can be taken as some of the ways that Anil entertained to overcome the transitions, and thus benefit from the opportunities that his migration afforded him.

**Anu.** In comparison to Anil's Vignette, the Vignette for Anu shows a smoother and more gradual process of transitioning between cultures. She is described to have left the country of her birth at early age: migrating at an early age is generally considered to be less challenging to migration later in life. Anu transitional experiences are more concerned with cultural and geographical transitions, as she has lived in different places and cultures from her early ages.

Anu's Vignette describes how she left the country of birth during her early childhood, and lived in different cities across the USA and Canada:

*"I was born in Kathmandu, Nepal, a beautiful country where I lived for the first five years of my life."* Having spent her first five years in Kathmandu, she moved to the United States of America ... [where her] father had received a scholarship to study in Indiana. [From there] Anu's family ... came to Canada and lived in the city of Mississauga, where Anu spent most of her childhood life (Vignette 2).

Over the course of her life, Anu has undergone transitional experiences every time when she moved to a new place. Moving to a new city or town is leaving the community of comfort. Challenges are described to be common in migration; however, these challenges, when faced, give valuable experiences.

The narration of Anu's migration to multiple places suggests that changing a place is also becoming prepared to negotiate the difference. Anu's living in transitions suggests that she has learnt the value of working through the transition:

Anu studied and completed her elementary schooling, and then attended a public secondary school in Mississauga. The schools in which she studied were very multicultural, with students from many different communities. These communities include Nepali, Chinese, Indians, Africans, and Caucasian Canadians. Anu made friends with members of many communities, and worked together whenever she had group assignments and presentations (Vignette 2).

Implied in the excerpt is Anu's exposure to cultural diversity. This leads to a position that people observe and absorb values and practices in their new surroundings. Common values are identified, and negotiations are made for the differences. This changes one's life style and perception to the world.

The Vignette shows connections of Anu's family with other families from Nepal. Meetings and interactions of Nepali families in one another's home are described to be an important opportunity "to eat Nepali food and talk in native language" (Vignette 2). Values, which are acquired from home-culture, are likely to collide with values in host-culture. However, Anu's experience of moving to and fro between home-host cultures is an opportunity for



identifying commonalities and differences that exist between cultures. Schools are the crucial places where students learn to share what they have in common, and respect what they differ.

Public schools, where Anu studied in Thunder Bay and Mississauga, are acknowledged to be multi-cultural in their overall settings; however, “there was more diversity in the school of Mississauga than the one in Thunder Bay; also, the former was more crowded than the latter” (Vignette 2). The implication of Anu’s experience of studying in different settings lies in broadening the perspective and opening up her mind. This eventually eased the process of transitioning. It is implied in Anu’s narratives that geographical transitions are associated with cultural transitions. Willingness to integrate is what matters in one’s initial settlement when choosing to come across a new geography.

**Reena.** Family migration is demonstrated to involve a course from initial challenges to a potential transformation in Reena’s narratives. The theme of transition is evident in the Vignette, as it states that Reena has gained rich “experiences of transitional living in different places and studying at different schools.” This resonates with Anu’s experiences of living in transitions. Transitional experiences are complex in their structures. This complexity comes from a sense of living in an uncertain and contradictory situation. However, along with the time’s lapse, complex situations begin to unfold. This unfolding of complexity eases the process of transition. The excerpts below demonstrate Reena’s living and overcoming the transitions:

Reena has an extensive experience of moving to different places and living in transitions. She began her childhood in a traditional Nepali community...spent her three years with parents and grandparents...Then she moved to London [UK] with her parents in

2001...Having lived [for] nearly a decade in the United Kingdom ... [in] 2010, *“I moved to Thunder Bay, Canada with my family for greater opportunities”* (Vignette 3).

The excerpt indicates not only Reena’s living and undergoing transitional complexity, but also learning to handle transitions at challenging times. These transitional experiences can be taken as turning points in Reena’s life.

Moving to a new location is an intermingling with a community that potentially practices different values. This argument aligns with Reena’s experience of moving in, and living at, multiple places. A remarkable aspect of this analysis is that the more we move to, and reside in, a multi-cultural community, the more we understand one another and accept the differences:

This experience of living in a diverse community made Reena feel comfortable in her new school classrooms in Thunder Bay: *“Since I was exposed to new cultures and religion apart from my own, such as in England, where I was made familiar with Christianity, I was used to accepting differences.”* Reena believes that accepting the differences means being respectful to others (Vignette 3).

This excerpt implies the benefits of being exposed to different cultures. Reena is shown to have learnt to live comfortably within the spaces of differences. This argument suggests that there are inherent opportunities in transitional challenges; they come to surface, when the challenges are welcomed and faced.

Recapping the theme of transition, it is found that Anil, Anu and Reena are used to facing the challenges of moving to, living in the new places. Negotiations are evident during the transitions. Their narratives suggest that they have gained better skills to handle the transitional period. Looking across all three Student Vignettes, Anil’s experience of overcoming and

negotiating the transitions appears more adventurous than Anu and Reena's. This is seen when Anil displays a significant sense of curiosity, alongside a sense of uncertainty about Canadian multi-cultural society: "In Anil's early time in Canada, he felt both excitement and confusion as everything was new to him: *'I didn't know how people would look like from different parts of the world'*" (Vignette 1).

Transitional experiences of Anu and Reena are demonstrated to have commonalities as their migration has taken place at early ages. It is implied in their narratives that they have undergone a smooth linguistic transition. Anu and Reena are projected to be the competent users of both English and Nepali languages. On the contrary, it took a good deal of time for Anil to be a competent user of English. Yet, the point is that they all faced the challenges in their settlement in the new land despite their different degree of intensity.

Learning to face upcoming challenges and negotiating values of new community is seen to be an important aspect of the theme of transition. Student participants are demonstrated to have gained a rich experience of living in the 'in-between' of Eastern-Western ways of life in general, and in particular, Nepali-Canadian ways of life. In other words, it is the negotiation made between geographical and cultural differences.

## **5.2: Theme of Negotiation**

Living in a culturally diverse environment denotes to living in a negotiable environment, about which I have discussed in Chapter 2 (see page 29). Hence, while analysing the theme of negotiation, my emphasis rests not more on seeing consensus of the contesting views, but on viewing the participants dwelling in the 'in-between' space of the bridge. This means not only accepting the differences that exist in a multi-cultural society, but also learning from these

differences. This learning emerges from a challenging situation, and leads the learner to creativity and innovation. The theme of negotiation, which is evident in Student Vignettes, is concerned with how all the participants find the space in the ‘in-between’ of home-host cultures, and how they negotiate the differences between cultures, along with a strong sense of trust and respect.

The Vignettes describe that Anil, Anu and Reena were initially caught in the ‘in-between’ of eastern and western values; to be more specific, they were caught in the binaries of home-host cultures. However, the support from family and school, and their communication with friends and teachers enabled their connections with the larger community, facilitated their navigation from culture to culture, and encouraged the negotiation of the differences, by being respectful to one another. There is a strong presence of virtues in all negotiations they make. The Vignettes imply the travel the participants make between the zones of home and host cultures. The experiences, which are narrated by the participants, show both the similarities and the differences between cultures. The narratives in the Vignettes exhibit that the experience of travelling and communicating across cultures is valuable in terms of enhancing skills of negotiations. These skills are seen in connection with the lived experiences of the participants in multi-cultural settings.

**Anil.** My analysis of Anil’s Vignette reveals that live and dynamic communication is key to building trust and relationships. Anil’s interactions with friends in ESL class, and his participation in activities, that are managed and run by school clubs, strengthen the trust and relationship building process. In his Vignette, Anil’s learning about building relationship is shown to have come “from his interactions with his friends in the ESL class that he enrolled in, and from the school clubs he participated in.” The Vignette reports that the students in the ESL

class come from different cultural background, where they share their lived experiences, and cultural content with one another. Sharing is an important way to understand others way of life that involves making negotiations. Anil's Vignette clearly stated that "Joining the ESL class in the school allowed him to build his friendships with students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds."

In the Vignette the teacher's role is indicated to be central to bring all students together so that they can stand in the space of differences, from where they share their stories and traditions. The space to stand, while sharing, is the 'in-between;' a point of location to negotiate. In Anil's narrative, it is pointed out that his ESL teacher "*asked every student to share their background and traditions. My ESL teacher used to ask me: what is the good food in Nepal? What is the main tradition*"? The asking and addressing of these questions shows a willingness to engage in a meaningful communication that leads the communicators to share their stories with one another.

Anil's narrative acknowledges the importance of opportunities that the teacher provides to every student to have their say in the class. Students feel valued and included to have their space to interact with others in the class. This resonates with Anil's growth as a person with a broader perspective. What is crucial to have such a perspective is one's mingling and conversing with diverse members in a group which helps an individual "... understand different ways of life," and encourages "everyone come closer and build stronger personal relationships" (Vignette 1). To have a bond of relationship, it requires both telling stories, and listening to others' stories. To hear someone telling stories with respect is a mark of negotiation. It indicates that a trusting relationship is on the way of making.

Coming closure and working together require the virtues of trust and respect that provide foundations to promote stable and ongoing relationships. This leads to an analogy that persistent interactions in a culturally diverse group contribute in forming and promoting a search for wider perspectives to know what we do not know. It is explained that "... the advantages of working with the multi-cultural group include coming to know one another, developing friendships, and coming to understand their ways of knowing" (Vignette 1). There are clear examples in Anil's narrative about how everyone benefits from sharing their cultural activities, and explaining what they mean in their particular contexts:

An example of such sharing was that they would talk about their festive activities, and ask what they would mean in the context of their own cultures. Anil listened to his friends talk about their festivals and cultural activities, and shared his experiences with them: "*When we had a festival, and when we had conversations, I told them about what our festivals meant to us.*" In turn, Anil's friends also explained what their festivals meant to them (Vignette 1).

Implied in the excerpt is a sign of negotiation that emerges through conversations, the conversations that are directed to forming and establishing more human relationships. Turn taking is important in a conversation since it is a two-way-traffic. Respect is implied while listening to others' stories. Respect promotes humility that makes negotiations workable. This process refers to a give and take approach with mutual understanding. In other words, the sign of negotiation in the conversation resonates with the notion of character development in terms of making friends, deepening friendship, and getting included in a community that is culturally diverse.

Each student in a culturally diverse class has many things to offer and receive from each other. A multi-cultural setting provides this opportunity to exchange what every student in the class comes with. Vignette 1 illustrates how Anil grows with benefits from such a setting in the schools he studied in:

Anil saw the differences that his friends carried to the classroom and learned from them. ...the multi-cultural environment in his school provided an opportunity for *'learning about other peoples' religion, cultures, and values.'* Like Anil, his friends were also interested in knowing his history, origin, religion, and cultural practices.

The excerpt reveals the virtues of humility and tolerance in the sharing of one's historical background, place of origin, religious beliefs, and cultural practices with others. Deep down, there we find an implication of negotiation between the differences. This suggests that Anil's successful overcoming from the transition, as discussed under the theme of transition, is an obvious indication of the point of negotiation, which offered him "A good experience while accomplishing his high school education" (Vignette 1).

In Anil's case, it is his art of negotiation that made him feel comfortable in his school years. The art of negotiation is seen in his willingness to listen to, and learn from others. The value that he placed on listening and learning helped Anil avoid having unpleasant experiences: *"To be honest, I do not have any such experience."* Anil made the best use of his school years in terms of both informal learning and formal academic excellence. A cultivation of character is seen in the narrative: "Anil ended up his high school education with an experience of achieving not only academic excellence, but also learning from those who were culturally different. To him: *'It was about knowing one's history and culture, and building relations with*

*understandings.*’” Implied in the narrative comprise of opportunities for learning by working in a multi-cultural school environment.

**Anu.** In Anu’s experience, a multi-cultural classroom is “A place where students from diverse cultures share their stories through informal conversations” (Vignette 2). The home culture of Anu is Nepali culture, which is different from her school culture. Misconceptions might arise between cultures, but informal conversations between and among students and teachers, as expressed in Anu’s narrative, “provide an opportunity to learn about the misconceptions of other cultures.” It is evident in her Vignette that *“knowing about other cultures makes us question our own cultural values.”* It refers to many things that can be learned from other cultures. In other words, it is a readiness to acknowledge and negotiate the differences between cultures.

Conversations are of high importance in negotiations. Anu’s experience shows that “The more we talk, even with the strangers, the closer we get. It is the conversation that minimizes the gap between the strangers” (Vignette 2). In the context of a multi-cultural community like ours “...building human connections, and establishing good relationships, are important to live a happy and successful life” (Vignette 2). The Vignette identifies both the challenges and opportunities in multi-cultural classrooms:

[Anu’s] classroom environment was, at times, a challenge, but, at many other times, it was an opportunity for [her] in terms of learning from cultural differences, and bridging the gaps that people hold due to such differences: *“There were challenges, but it was more a huge opportunity. Having friends with different values and mindsets helped me open up, and question our own values.”*



This extract implies the negotiations Anu made, and indicates the benefit that one can have from cultural diversity, which is what made Anu open-minded.

A sense of being creative and innovative revealed in the expression that “There are gaps between cultures, and to Anu, it *‘was nice to discover ways to bridge the gaps’*” (Vignette 2). Bridging the gap between values and beliefs is an indication of negotiation through communications: “Anu interacted with her friends quite often, not only about the courses and subject matter, but also about informal topics such as films and festivals” (Vignette 2). This expression suggests that “interactions become tremendously helpful in strengthening the bond of friendship” (Vignette 2).

In the maximization of meetings and interactions, gaps are minimized, and relationships are enhanced. Casual talks and humours help us become social, and to be social is an important aspect of character development. Anu’s Vignette exemplifies how trust is built, and openness works to negotiate the differences:

*For example, I had a friend, he was a white guy, he didn’t really like school very much, he was a very much bright guy, liked partying a lot, but we were very good friends despite having different mindsets and values. The gap was just that, but we were able to laugh about the differences, we were able to come up with similarities. We watched a ridiculous English movie together and engaged in discussions about the movie.*

Anu’s narrative recognizes that it is important “to be accommodating with the friends from different cultures” (Vignette 2). Her experience resonates with Anil’s as she believes that an “effective way to promote friendship is working together in the school clubs, or in the groups while accomplishing different assigned tasks” (Vignette 2). Working in groups, engaging in club

events, and participating in co-curricular activities are believed to be important to get in touch with others and navigate the challenges:

Developing a culture of working together not only energizes the members in the group, but also provides ways to overcome the challenges caused by the cultural differences.

Anu found that the participation in co-curricular activities is an important way to understand and learn from such differences (Vignette 2).

Anu's narrative shows the importance of tolerance in a multi-cultural setting. This tolerance is seen in negotiating the values expressed by different cultures. A deep sense of respect is evident in Anu's celebration of both home and host cultures' major festive events:

Having spent several years in Canadian multi-cultural society, Anu, while keeping her cultural values, engages in the celebration of the Christmas: *"We also celebrate Christmas; celebrating Christmas helps different groups of people come closer; it is important for the integration of cultural differences."*

What is concealed in the excerpt is the significance of integration, which is recognized to be "An important step to character building in a multi-cultural society." The focus is on the "Attributes of virtues" that "get consolidated in the times of festive celebrations, and frequent cultural practices both at home, and in the community" (Vignette 2).

**Reena.** Moving to a new place, and joining a new school, usually gives rise to mounting tensions. These tensions include making friends in a new setting, finding one's way around the school, knowing and approaching teachers, and understanding the school's administrative and educational system. Discussions in the Vignette 3 indicate how Reena comes across, and gets through these tensions along with the passage of time. The theme of negotiation is central in the

discussions that are made throughout the Vignette. It is evident in Reena's narratives that an open and welcoming class environment is crucial for setting a context for negotiations. When Reena joined the school in Thunder Bay,

*She found herself in a more open environment, and felt welcome in her class: "When I came to Thunder Bay for my school, I received a lot of openness. Everyone was very open. I didn't experience any negative comments from my friends and teachers. They were very welcoming" (Vignette3).*

This clearly suggests that individuals with openness to others' experiences, and tolerance to differences, can have a diverse friend circle: Because of her own character trait of openness, "Reena met and made friends, and 'learned a lot more about the First Nations' in Thunder Bay" (Vignette 3). Openness helps in developing "confidence of becoming familiar with, and feeling comfortable in, new environments, meeting and mixing with teachers and friends in the school, and helping new students as required" (Vignette 3).

Reena's experience of being open-minded relates to the virtue of tolerance, which leads her to valuing and helping others. Implied in this argument are Reena's openness, and her capacity of making negotiations. In making negotiations, experiences are described to play a vital role. This is clearly demonstrated in Reena's expression:

*By the time I moved from primary school to high school here, I had already gotten familiar with making new friends, and fitting into a new environment. I was fond of helping out new students in my classes, since I had experience of moving to countries and schools. I valued the friendly behaviour from my classmates' when I was new, so I wanted to share my experience to help others adjust into a new school environment (Vignette 3).*

This excerpt depicts that openness to experiences gives courage to an individual to fit in a new setting. This also refers to a desire for developing friendship despite being positioned in a new situation. Once embraced the situation with courage, this positioning unfolds many new possibilities.

To dwell in a multi-cultural setting is to be prepared for negotiating the negotiable. A sign of negotiation is obvious in Reena's being in such a setting: *"I have been in a multicultural classroom throughout my academic years; some were more diverse than others"* (Vignette 3). This diversity, not only requires negotiations between members, but also "offers everyone to learn something from others," which is because *"when the class is multi-cultural, students are more accepting of new ideas since everyone has something different to contribute"* (Vignette 3). The reciprocal learning is an opportunity for students in terms of growing *"with both the qualities of acceptance and tolerance that eventually help them prepare for the real world outside of their school and home."*

Reena's narratives line up with those of Anu's (Vignette 2) and Anil's (Vignette 1) in terms of considering a multi-cultural classroom a place to dwell together, share stories with one another, know one another's cultures and traditions, and grow thereby with broader perspectives. This strongly supports the idea that character development is concerned with making negotiations between the differences. Reena's Vignette takes us to an assertion that each member brings an alternative viewpoint in a multi-cultural classroom. It is because a multi-cultural classroom,

*opens a new perspective for the class, and makes learning outside the box common. It reflects how diverse the world is, and brings the global community into a learning*

*setting. I have always been familiar with being around different cultures, and I enjoy learning them. I feel more knowledgeable and less narrow-minded. My friends are diverse, and they are all very different individuals (Vignette 3).*

Reena's acknowledgement of learning by living, and communicating across cultures is an indication of potential growth with multiple perspectives. The Vignettes show the growth of all student participants with such perspectives.

Negotiations consist of two sides, and at times they become challenging, but the ability to negotiate comes from different perceptions. In the case of Reena, Anu, and Anil, they are described to have grown with different perspectives as they have gained an ample amount of experience while being and working in multi-cultural settings. The support from home and school also appears to occupy the central place to make negotiations between the differences of home and host cultures. The narratives of all student participants demonstrate that there is a significant role of home culture to negotiate with the values of host cultures. The participants' stories exemplify that they entertain the values of host cultures while keeping their home values. This is a balanced practice which is ongoing. Character development is a continuous process that takes place in the mutual support of both home-host cultures. Implied in this analogy is the need of support and care to nurture one's character.

### **5.3: Theme of Support and Care**

The theme of support and care, that is well-expressed in Student Vignettes, is associated with human relationships, and these relationships are fundamental to character development. The narratives of all student participants display that a caring and supportive environment plays an important role to help an individual grow both socially and personally. An interconnection

between self and other is implicit in parents' care to children, and in teachers' support to students. This is shown to be more relevant when teaching and learning in a multi-cultural classroom is concerned. It is demonstrated in the Vignettes that Anil, Anu and Reena have grown with a valued learning experience of accepting and respecting the differences. It leads to the point that practice of acceptance and respect in a multi-cultural class promotes a sense of belongingness that makes each student feel valued, included, and protected.

Student Vignettes assert that respect is learned first from home; and it gets further consolidated through an inclusive educative process in a democratic environment. In the same way, a culturally diverse setting provides opportunities to identify and accept the differences. The role of support and care from school and family is shown to be essential for one's academic excellence and social growth. In exploring the Student Vignettes, it is found that the support and care, from both home and school, have played a significant role in the participants' successful completion of high school education. The narratives discussed in Student Vignettes exemplify that the impetus behind their personal growth and academic success includes the supportive and caring role of both parents at home and teachers in school.

**Anil.** It is identified that the practice of family support and care occupies a central space in Eastern communitarian societies. The narrative about Anil's childhood and his upbringing clearly indicates that he comes from a communitarian family, which clearly suggests that there is a significant influence of communitarian values, as discussed in Chapter 3, in Anil's way of life. It is expressed in his narrative that parents have thoroughly engaged in Anil's educational life. In Nepali family, it is considered that educating a child is first and foremost a family responsibility. In Anil's achievements, we find a persistent support and care from his parents and siblings: "Anil's parents and his brothers provided him moral and emotional supports" (Vignette 1)

throughout his high school education. A strong sense of respect, and an element of discipline are found in Anil's lived stories that he has learned from family. It is evident that Anil not only listens to his parents and siblings, but also carries them as words of wisdom in his life. The Vignette states:

Anil listened to his family and carried their suggestions into his daily life. His parents and siblings always encouraged him to pursue academic excellence and good work: "*When I went to school and came back home, they knew that I was mentally tired, and they gave me some food.*" The members of his family often said to him, "*do not waste your time, and try to do your best, make friends, and try to be ahead of everybody.*" Anil carried these suggestions and applied them in his everyday life.

What is implied in this excerpt is Anil's grounding in the values that he practices at home. These values include respect, care, closeness, diligence, faith, friendliness, humility, kindness, and inspiration. Having grounded in these values, the Vignette shows Anil replicating them while having interactions with friends and teachers in school.

It is shown in the Vignette that students need support from teachers in schools to have an overall development of their personality. Anil's experience suggests that within a supportive and caring classroom climate, a new student adapts the environment more comfortably, and makes new friends more enthusiastically. This is clearly demonstrated in the expression: "In his new school, Anil soon found not only his friends, but also the teachers, quite friendly... and provided help to him when needed" (Vignette 1). A two-way traffic of support is indicated in the Vignette: "Anil met and made many friends during his high school, supported them at times, and got supported by them at other times."

Academic support in the subjects like science and mathematics is seen to be felt by high school students. The Vignette details evidences of such supports which were provided through after school tutorial classes: “The school supported [Anil] by managing and conducting different tutorial classes. Anil was willing to get assistance from both teachers and friends in different courses. These tutorial classes helped him improve his essay writing skills.” Implied in this expression is the appropriate learning environment that suits the need of different learners.

It is reiterated in the Vignette that a supporting and caring classroom scenario not only contributes in building trust and relationship, but also promotes a sense of helping one another. Helping people in need is getting connected with them. This connection is founded on trust and understanding. Anil’s narrative amplifies the satisfaction he derives by helping his fellow classmates:

Anil was good in solving mathematical problems; he tutored friends who needed support in mathematics: “*I was also a tutor for Math tutorial class; I tutored a friend from Africa. She would come to me with math problems and I worked out the problem,*” which helped them get better connected and know each other. Reflecting on those tutorial classes, he stated that it is nice to help others, as helping other “*gives us a big sense of satisfaction*” (Vignette 1).

Anil’s tutoring experience implies the benefits for both self and others as his “involvement in the tutorial classes helped him gain many rich experiences.

Tutoring and being tutored both have connections with the ethics of caring. This discussion situates the need of support and care not only from teachers and parents, but also from friends. This leads to the analogy that it is important to consider constituting a supporting and



caring surrounding for everyone to feel valued and included. Anil's Vignette asserts that a "supportive surrounding is constituted with a caring family, helpful friends, friendly teachers, an inclusive school, and a tolerant community." It is acknowledged in Anil's lived experience that Canadian schools are supportive, and communities have friendly environment: "Anil is pleased to have received such supports in school, and appreciates the friendly environment in Canada: "*I am glad that I am in Canada.*" (Vignette 1)

**Anu.** Looking out over Anu's experience, it is acknowledged that care and support are important aspects of character development. Care and support are demonstrated to consist of elements of interdependent human relationships. This is shown in Anu's emotional attachment with parents, supportive connections with teachers, and her interdependencies with friends. It is shown in the description that a continuous support and care from home and school is central to a student's academic excellence, and academic excellence is a part of character development.

Character is shown to build on the foundation of care for one another. This caring of one another is a part of Anu's family value. Parents take a serious concern about their children's moral well-being. Children in Nepali culture not only expect parents' concern and suggestions; but they are also expected to follow what the parents suggest. A sign of family value is seen in Anu's expression that "it is important to listen to, and follow, the advice of her parents and seniors." In fact, "Listening to the advice of the seniors is a part of the culture in Anu's family, and a strong part of Nepali culture" (Vignette 2). This resonates with Anil's modesty of listening to parents and following what they suggest.

Family is the first institution where a child is raised and educated. Anu's narratives reflect the importance of parents' engagement in children's educational process. This

engagement includes taking care of children, providing them moral and emotional support, interacting with them while taking supper together, helping them in their assignments, and motivating and encouraging them at difficult times. This is expressed in Anu's narration:

*I received tremendous amount of support from my parents. Helping me get up in the morning, preparing food, my dad driving me to school, talking to me and asking me about my day in school; my dad helped me in physics, my parents provided me with incredible moral and emotional supports. I got every help needed including the academic one (Vignette 2).*

This narration reveals that an ongoing communication between parents and children plays a pivotal role for student success. It is believed in the Vignette that a regular interaction between family members “strengthens the family tie, and promotes the frequency of informal talks.” What students do in their school is usually the reflections of what they practice at home. This leads to a point that support and care matter the most when one's personal and academic growths are concerned.

Anu's Vignette demonstrates that “...a large part of a students' success depends on teachers' concern and care on the one hand, and on the other, parents' advice and support.” Teacher's support and care is explicit in Anu's achievements in school, as it is narrated in the Vignette that “During secondary school, she found her teachers showing deep concern for her academic performance, and supported her accordingly” (Vignette 2). Support and care in the part of teachers can help students not only to perform well in their studies, but also in building trust and relationships between students and teachers. It is described in the Vignette that “Anu approached the teachers, discussed the difficulties that she had in the subjects like Chemistry,

took their guidance, and followed that advice sincerely.” This demonstrates the importance of teacher-student relationships. With this, Anu is found to have excelled in both educational performance and relationship building.

The Vignette identifies that building trust and maintaining relationship give more room for students to gain more support and care from teachers: *“The support I got from school and teachers was largely because I had maintained a very good relationship with them.”* Anu’s Vignette depicts “that while these supports, and help, seem little things, they can leave a great positive impact on children. To Anu, “the support, and care, that she got from her parents and teachers have always been motivational drivers,” which suggests that education is a sincere and combined effort of school, parents, and children. It is also demonstrated that a caring and supportive home-school environment is crucial for education. This argument aligns with the expression in the Vignette: “Anu’s secondary schools provided a nice and friendly environment to students, and they have a professional team of caring and supportive teachers.”

**Reena.** In exploring Vignette 3, it is clearly demonstrated that the support and care from school and family have played a dominant role in Reena’s growth as a person, and her success as a student. The Vignette narrates that she “had a supportive and caring family environment during her high school years” (Vignette 3). Similarly, the narratives about Reena’s migration to Thunder Bay, and her joining to a public school have been followed by the support and care, provided by her school, her parents, and Thunder Bay Nepali community. These supports, and care have eased Reena’s transitioning and negotiating processes, about which I have discussed and analysed under the themes of transition, and negotiation. It is believed in Reena’s Vignette “that the support from both the school and family is key to succeed high school studies.”

Reena's experiences make parallel with those of Anu and Anil, when the role of family is concerned regarding a student's successful high school completion: "Academic success by and large depends on family environment" (Vignette 3). Acknowledging and valuing the parents' involvement in her education, the Vignette shows Reena's gratitude and thankfulness "to her parents for their encouragement and continuous support to her studies." The excerpt below illustrates how parents can motivate children by taking interest and concern about their achievements in schools:

*They would really push me to do my best. Even sometimes, when I did not do that well on tests and stuff, they would always have the support ready like saying "don't worry about this one. You can try again in next one. Maybe we can help you have a better environment for studying," And they would really offer to do anything to provide that environment.*

Implied in the excerpt is not only the motivation and encouragement for better academic performance, but also an implicitly steady formation of character. An expression of love, care, and comfort is evident in the excerpt. Love and care are powerful things to provide moral and emotional strength.

It is clearly stated in the Vignette that Reena received every possible support from her parents, including the physical one: "*If I needed any support, or if I did any extracurricular activities during high school, they would help me get to it, get from it, and support me in any way they could.*" It is apparent that parents support contributes to promote students' overall development. The Vignette shows a tremendous support and care of parents behind Reena's attainment of developmental and academic goals: "*My dad often picked me up and dropped me*

*off during my high school. He would provide me help with the homework I had after school, sometimes at home when I needed help.”* It is also shown that small works such as cooking food, and preparing lunch for school, when done by parents for children, makes a big difference.

The Vignette demonstrates a tremendous amount of family help and care. These dispositions of parents are influential to shape character of children. Reena’s expression indicates how she remains worry free, and utilizes the saved time in her studies, while having accomplished those small looking works by her parents: *“My mom would always cook food, and have it prepared for lunch and dinner, so I wouldn’t really have to worry about it”* This informs that the value of parents’ support to their children’s success depends on how meaningful and objective the parents-children engagement is.

The support from family becomes more essential when a student is enrolled in a strong academic program. It is implied in Reena’s expression that many students struggle in the subjects like math and chemistry, and not all parents can have an expertise on them. However, Reena’s situation is described to be different in that her father had an expertise in both math and chemistry, and she was happy to get assistance from him. This appears to be evident as Reena narrates:

*Generally, it was math or science, like chemistry. My dad had a good background in that, and he was pretty proficient. So, if I had any problems I could just go to my dad instead of waiting for the next day to go to my teacher. Even after my dad taught, he would also encourage me to ask the teacher if I still didn’t understand properly. Mostly, it was chemistry: the equations and the reactions. And he would often tell me to read more to gain a better understanding.*

Reena's stories reflect not only the academic support that Reena is provided, but also demonstrate her family culture of listening to elder's suggestions, and applying them in different aspects of life. It is remarkable that this cultural of listening to elders echoes with that of Anu and Anil's.

A mark of self-discipline and family understanding is seen in the Vignette when it says, "Reena takes suggestions from her parents before joining clubs or planning and launching any events: *'For example, if I were to join another club I would ask my parents if I could join'*" (Vignette 3). Asking for permission in the expression implies not only family rules and order, but also Reena's maintaining of self-discipline. This supports a belief that moral development takes its shape in the family that is founded on rules, respect, support, and care.

A great deal of parental support is believed to come with little things they do for their children. It is revealed that the role of parents in children's character development has always been a central focus. The role of Reena's mother and sister in the excerpt below further reveals the importance of maintaining and applying family love and care:

*Sometimes at school we would have a potluck where we would have a small picnic, and my mom would help me make food and bring it to the event. Even during my extracurricular events, such as setting up a community event, my mom and sister came to participate to support our cause.*

Evident in the excerpt is a strong connection between members of the family. It also reveals that a family that is founded on love, respect, care, and reciprocal support has a lot to offer to those living together.

In the Vignette, suggestions and guidance from parents are discussed to have an important impact on students in terms of mingling with friends and approaching teachers. In Reena's experience, it becomes evident that teachers' support and care can be seen as a key to achieve excellence in all aspects of educational activities. It is implied in her narration that approachable and caring teachers leave a lasting impression on formal schooling experiences of students: *"Even after class they would help. If it was lunch period after class, they would stay behind to talk about any questions"* (Vignette 3). This leads to situation where trust and connections between students and teachers are built.

It is expressed in Reena's experience that the concern shown by teachers in students' progress amplifies the relationship built. Care is implied in the concern shown. Reena's narrative that *"The teachers would make sure that we were really prepared for the tests...they would personally come up to you, talk to you, and ask you how you did on the test. They would be genuinely caring,"* suggests that schools are supportive places where students feel cared of. This sense of being in a supportive space with caring teachers motivates students to engage in learning. However, it is also depicted in the Vignette that *"the school support may not be always visible"* because of higher student number. This is indicated in Reena's experience: *"The teachers in Thunder Bay were very approachable, and would get the class friendly and open through respect of each other,"* whereas *"In Toronto, my high school teachers would emphasize the importance of time management, and we were used to prioritizing multiple assignments we had to juggle"* (Vignette 3). This leads to an analysis that the intensity of support and priority differs from one school to another.

Reviewing the theme of support and care based on the phenomenal experiences of Anil, Anu and Reena, it is investigated that a supportive and caring environment both at school and

home is important for character building and educational excellence. It is also examined that support and care promote culture of relationships, and endorse connections.

#### **5.4: Theme of Connection**

Connection is another important theme illustrated within Student Vignettes. The theme of connection is explored and analysed in relation to character development, as character develops through one's contact and connection with the larger community. The participants are found to acquire the virtues of respect and openness through their strong connections with families, friends, and teachers. Hence, the analyses of the theme of connection is made in the light of participants' grounding in home values, engagement in cultural activities and community events, participation in club activities in school, experiences of building trusting relationships with friends and teachers, and their preparedness to dwell in the spaces of differences. It is shown in the narratives that Anil, Anu and Reena connect themselves with friends, families, teachers, and communities. On the one hand, these connections keep them proactive, energetic, and happy, and on the other, encourage them to grow thereby with new learning experiences. The Vignettes demonstrate that connections are vital to enhance relationship between people from different cultures.

**Anil.** It is discussed in the Vignette that Anil's life style is shaped by primarily family culture. The important aspects of family culture are values, norms, and traditions which Anil has inherited from his parents and grandparents. Anil was born and brought up in rural village of Nepal, where he "has observed cultural and religious events." Anil's Vignette implies that the participation in these events leads to the cultivation of virtues: "While living in the village of Nepal, Anil was used to participating in cultural activities, and learning the virtues of love and respect. Anil's family carried these practices in Canada as well" (Vignette 1). This narration



indicates that Anil's growth as a person is grounded in family ritual, and religious practices. In these practices, what is seen is a strong connection between the self and other members of family.

It is considered in Anil's narrative that "cultural activities and ritual practices are important to keep people disciplined," And get them connected in larger circles. These circles are formed while organizing and celebrating festive events. One of the occasions to organize such events is the time of celebrating Dashain, a big festival that is widely celebrated in Nepali communities across the globe. This festival connects people in overseas with families and relatives back home. Implied in any festive gathering are human connections that spread and deepen the bonds of relationships. The Vignette describes the celebration of this festival of Dashain as in the excerpt below:

the community gathers in a place and engages in cultural activities, such as singing and dancing. People take off from their work in order to meet and greet their families and friends: In Toronto, *"A place is set where everybody meets, people try to get days off from work, they make good food, and organize cultural shows."* This is a cheerful occasion that provides an opportunity to listen to, and share with, the stories of different community members. Anil believes that the more people engage in the festive events, the more the participants gain from each other, as the gap one has in their relationships can be closed by engaging in shared activities (Vignette 1).

In the excerpt, a flow of love, blessing, and happiness is evident; gaps are believed to be bridged; relations are said to be enhanced; and negotiations are suggested to be made.

Anil's Vignette ascertains that "Festivals are important in terms of making new friends and having greater connections with other." This exhibits that ritual practices and festival celebrations not only connect people with family, friends, and communities, but also instill important values in youth and children, which they carry with them to school. These instilled family values are considered to play supporting roles to cultivate wider human cultivations. The impact of family and home culture is noticed in Anil's connections with friends and teachers in school.

Anil grew up with a conviction that teachers are the models to be followed; he "has a great faith in them," which is evident in his Vignette:

Anil was used to listening to his teachers and following their advice while studying in the village school of Western Nepal. In Toronto, Anil felt that he could approach his teachers, ask for help when he needed, and keep going ahead with his education.

In this extract, trust and communication are shown to be important. Anil's strong grounding in home culture supports him connect with the host culture. The inherited family values serve as the impetus behind Anil's ongoing connections with teachers: "He was attentive during the times of classroom instruction, and open to the suggestions of his teachers" (Vignette 3). In this statement, Anil is shown to have acquired the host culture value of openness, which eventually leads him to dwell in the spaces of difference. Negotiations, as discussed under one of the foregoing themes, are evident in such dwellings.

Differences are described to be common in a multi-cultural class, where connections are important to recognize them. Connections with one another in the class are what make the learning environment learner's friendly. The Vignette depicts that the more connections we

make, the more motivated we become and the more safety we experience in a new environment. Anil's trusting relationships with people around makes him feel at home while in school: "*It was an advantage to be with other students, share our cultures and tradition, and know how they mean the same thing but in different ways.*" (Vignette 1). It is recognized that a supportive school environment provides "An opportunity to engage, talk, and develop friendships from across diverse cultural groups." Events run by different clubs in school are demonstrated to be remarkable for engaging, talking, and developing relationships: "Anil found the school activities, including those run by different clubs, very helpful to mingle with others and develop skills and relationships."

Communicating culture is shown in Anil's connection with these clubs: "There were different clubs in the school, and one of them was the Multi-Cultural Club in which he involved actively as a Nepali representative." Anil working experience in the club claims itself to be an opportunity of learning about other cultures. The Vignette states, "It was a great learning moment for Anil when the Multi-Cultural Club organized different events such as *food sales and cultural shows,*" representing different cultures." Anil's representation in the club covertly acknowledges his connectivity with other club members, and dynamic interactions between cultures: "*I was associated with the Multi-Cultural Club in my school. This club carried multi-cultural activities at different times. I served as a member from Nepali student*" (Vignette 1). These connections and interactions "*brought everyone together, and provided opportunities of learning from one another*" (Vignette 1).

The theme of connection is also discerned in Anil's volunteering in the community as well. Volunteering is considered to be important in terms of coming out and working on larger connections. Anil's experience suggests that volunteering promotes a strong human connection

that leads to happiness: *“I always remember my volunteer work in the community; volunteering in the community has always been a memorable experience. I am happy to work with people from different cultural backgrounds”* (Vignette 1). Anil’s expression of satisfaction in volunteering, and involvement in the school club activities evidently show the importance of the theme of connection.

**Anu.** The theme of connection is predominantly present in Anu’s narratives in the Vignette. It is portrayed that her connections with family culture, friends, teachers, and community are what motivate and drive Anu to excellent performance during her schooling. The expressions in the Vignette imply that a person living in a society needs to be connected with other humans in order to be functional. This leads to a statement that connecting with other human beings means connecting with other cultures. Negotiations within and between cultures, as analysed in one of foregoing thematic sections, are what humans need to exist, sustain, thrive, and succeed. For this, home culture and family values are shown to be significant in Anu’s phenomenal experiences.

Vignette 2 demonstrates a considerable impact of home culture in Anu’s make-up. In her experience, “who we are, is defined by what we do, and most of what we do comes from our cultural convictions and family values” (Vignette 2). These convictions and values of Anu’s family are congruent with the ritual practices that are carried in Anil’s family. The Vignettes of both Anu and Anil show that the activities like going to temple, meditating, praying and worshipping Gods, and performing rituals are common phenomena in both families. The narration that “Anu has seen her *‘mother pray every morning’*... watches her mother pray, and participates in the act of praying” reveals Anu’s home grown beliefs and convictions. These

beliefs and convictions are “important to keep the virtues of discipline, respect, and honesty,” which are believed to be transferred and reflected in a broader social life (Vignette 2).

Anu’s narrative makes it clear that the celebration of the festival Dashain is one of the important occasions for cultural practices. Showers of love, care, blessings, and good luck wishes are entailed in Anu’s observation and experience during Dashain:

*Celebrating the Dashain with family...speaking in Nepali and talking with community people get us closer. Arranging and gathering at a place for dinner and celebrating together is a big joy, and going to my grandparents’ house, getting Tika from them and getting blessings from them...you also get blessings from your extended families. Also, it is a festival during which we get blessings from friends, wishing good luck, hoping good future, and one of my favourite memories is going to my grandparents.*

Connections between family and friends are traced out while reading between the lines of the excerpt. The support from these connections is vital to sustaining relationships, which enhances social and personal wellbeing of an individual. It leads to an analogy that the values acquired through participation in rituals and festive events support the point that our thoughts and actions are shaped and determined, at large, by our home environment.

A fine thread of connection is perceived in the Vignette that relates to Anu’s friendship with, and learning from, those who represent diverse cultural background. In her narratives of communicating and knowing cultures, there lies a seamless connectedness:

*I have had overwhelmingly positive experiences being, and learning, in a multi-cultural classroom. When I was in high school, my best friends were from China. From my Chinese friends, I learned about Confucius, tried new foods (they convinced me to try*

*raw fish), and became familiar with Chinese history and politics. I learned about common misconceptions about China, and grew attached to the country, feeling upset when I encountered Chinese stereotypes that I felt were inaccurate.*

Implied in this acknowledgement of Anu's learning about Chinese culture is the value of open-mindedness. The narrative suggests that to be open to other cultures is to build the bridge between cultures, and accept the differences.

It is also affirmed in Vignette 2 that similarities between cultures become evident, when examined "in the light of humanity and perceived in the light of basic human desire for certain things: *I learned that despite being from different countries, we were overwhelmingly similar in our basic human desire for friendship, closeness, and affection.*" This expression emphasizes the importance of dwelling in the 'in-between' spaces to make out both the similarities and differences. Anu's willingness to dwell in the cultural spaces signifies her readiness to connect and negotiate.

Family support and parental role is shown to be important to enhance the skills to connect and negotiate. The Vignette states that Anu's "parents always encouraged her to seek the support she needed from her teachers, and that her parents highly appreciated the work of teachers." This suggests that the appreciative parents-teachers relation paves the way for forming students-teachers closeness. Anu's working experience with her teachers demonstrate that parents-teachers connectedness, family support to students, students' connectedness with teachers, and teachers' care to students together contribute to maximize academic growth, and minimize the level of stress caused by exams and assignment due dates. Anu justifies it, and reveals her connections with teacher by stating:

*Teachers also supported me in my high school, showed concern, gave me a cookie, they were there for the emotional side as well. I did have very close personal connections with teachers. Grade 12 was a very stressful year...my chemistry teacher was very supportive (Vignette 2).*

Communications are shown to be vital in this expression. It is demonstrated that the more frequent the communication is held, the stronger we keep connected: “Anu took the appointments with the teachers, met them in person, interacted through emails, and established a strong rapport with them. With these, Anu says, *‘I had strong connections with many of my high school teachers’*” (Vignette 2).

Importance of connection is proven in the Vignette when Anu narrates, *“I also got support from school administration, specifically in finding and applying for scholarships. They suggested me to think of what I am interested in while deciding to post-secondary education.”* It is recognized that the suggestions from the school administration “were crucial to winning the scholarship for Anu’s post-secondary education.” Implied in these expressions is the role of interaction. In fact, communication is at the heart of all human activities; the more frequent the communication is held between people, the more trusting relationship between them is built to dwell together.

Culture of dwelling and working together is elucidated in Anu’s joining and working in the Newspaper Club. This resonates with Anil’s joining and working in the Multicultural Club. School clubs are viewed as centers of connections between students as the events conducted by the clubs in public schools bring people together. The working experiences of both Anil in Vignette 1, and Anu in Vignette 2, explicate that the events and activities run by these clubs “Are

supportive of, not only one's personal growth, but also to achieve academic excellence” (Vignette 2). This is implied in Anu's experience of establishing and running the club:

*I started the Newspaper Club and had to run it; I worked to run it, I did lot of work to continue it. I explained the theme of the club, set the dead line for submission, recruited people for the team, people came with their own topics, we edited the submissions, then reviewed and formatted the articles to publish in the newspaper.*

The process of publishing described in the narrative implies several layers of connections and interactions between the executives. These layers of connections and interactions are manifested in collecting and selecting the articles, editing them forming a team of editors, and publishing them within the assigned time frame. The Vignette states that *“Working in the newspaper brought the team involved in its production closer. Everything was done collaboratively.”* Implied in Anu's narratives is the importance of human connectivity in promoting the culture of working together.

Anu's lived experience clearly demonstrates her connections with parents, friends, teachers, and community. These connections are stressed to be important for both academic excellence and character development. The presence of values and virtues is found throughout in the Vignette.

**Reena.** There are many ways shown in Vignette 3 about how people connect with families, friends, communities. Reena's experiences demonstrate her ties with family, friends, teachers, and community. Her migration to Thunder Bay first connects to Nepali community, then to friends and teachers in schools. Reena reaches out to the broader community by the time



she graduates from high school. It is implied that the connections Reena makes, and the relationships she develops with people, have a deep influence on her shaping as a person.

It is shown that people within the community that Reena connects in Thunder Bay have trust with each other. Connections and interactions enhance the initial trust built. It is described that Reena and her family's transition was made easier because of their connection with *“loving and welcoming Nepali families. The families that we met in Thunder Bay were very open, friendly, and helpful to each other.”* This connects with the theme of support and care that provides newcomers a sense of being protected. These connections are illustrated to become stronger along with the participation in cultural activities and community events.

The description of the celebration of the festival of Dashain in Reena's Vignette matches those in the Vignettes of Anu and Anil. In Reena's expression too, a seamless flow of love and blessing is seen when she said: *“The younger usually go to the elders to get blessings from them. We put red coloured rice on foreheads, called rato tika: a form of a blessing given to the youngsters.”* This reinforces the importance of festive celebrations to connect and maintain the connectedness with people in the community. It suggests that the role of cultural activities is important in shaping and influencing the youth and children.

Rituals such as praying, and fasting are shown to be crucial for children to acquire the values of truthfulness and honesty. Reena's narrative- *“My mom would fast during full moons or certain days and we would partake in that when she finishes her fast. On Saturday mornings, she often prays and does a little ritual,”* implies that she has a deep influence of family values that are reflected in her connections and relationships with our day to day family life.

It is described that causal family talks are meaningful. Dinner time family interaction is revealed to be significant to keep family values of unity and solidarity. Sharing of the achievements made or the works accomplished entwines connections with emotions. Dinning together is described as a part of cultural in Nepali families, which is evident in Reena's expression: "*We eat as a family; we talk and share things around the table.*" This simple sounding practice of eating together has its implication of strengthening a sense of closeness and intimacy within and beyond the family. Reflections of these intrinsic values are seen in Reena's is connections with teachers. The Vignette states, "Reena is respectful to her teachers, feels comfortable to "*Approach them during lunch, and get to talk to them one-on-one.*" Reena's grounding in her family values are shown to be supportive in maintaining rapport with teachers and friends in school.

Schools are taken as the places to meet and interact. Interactions between students promote their helping and sharing culture, which leads to trusting friendships. It is described that "Reena has a strong bond of friendship with her friends... *I would meet my friends not just in school but also out of school, doing some extracurricular work together.*" Supporting to, and learning from, one another is understandable in the culture of working together. These semi-formal connections become informal ones when frequency of meeting and interacting multiplies. In Reena's narrative, this provides "An experience of knowing each other: *In order to come closer, I would also feel the need to join them in their birthdays of course, and going out on events, like going to restaurants*" (Vignette 3). These activities can be examined in the sense of enhancing the values of respect and openness to one another.

Volunteering for after school tutoring is another important thread of connection. This is described as an opportunity to assist one another in areas of course difficulties. It is designated

that tutoring requires an inclusive and welcoming environment where one feels comfortable to assist the needy. In Reena's school, "there was a friendly atmosphere to help one another in the tutoring sessions after schools: '*Students who are comfortable with a subject would sign up to become tutors.*'" Reena's experience of tutoring resonates with Anil's experience of assisting his African friend in solving the maths problem. What counts in these activities is how open and democratic the environment prevails in Ontario public school classrooms.

Reena's joining in, and learning from, club events also align with Anu's association with the Newspaper Club, and Anil's with Multi-Cultural Club. This illustrates all student participants' involvement in the school events, and their connectivity with other representatives of the clubs. The narratives in the Vignettes show these students' leadership growths through the connections they had with the clubs. Reena's association with the clubs provided her opportunities for competing and excelling in the events run by her schools. Reena's learning is seen when she said: "*there were numerous clubs and activities that would go to regional, then national, and international*" levels of competition," and she took part in them. The implication in the expression is that the participation in competition drives the level of confidence forward. The Vignette describes the influence Reena had from those connected with the Red Cross group: "*I looked into going to the regional Red Cross group, and I joined them*" Reena carried her responsibility '*to partake in planning events and making impacts in the community*'" (Vignette 3).

Reflecting on the narratives of Student Vignettes in connection with the theme of connection, it is found that human beings by nature want to be seen, noticed, heard, and valued. The narratives imply that this desire to be seen and heard becomes more challenging and prominent when people migrate and settle in a new land. The most important thing noticed in the

discussion is one's willingness to connect with the community. With our connections and interactions with people and places around us, significant leanings are believed to begin, the leanings that offer a richer perspective to view and understand the world. The point of the theme of connection is that it leads us to a new perception that makes us question our being and becoming. This analogy resounds with a notion that character development is a life-long process.

### **5.5: Theme of Perception**

The theme of perception is seen and analysed in connection with character, and character development, as described in Student Vignettes. It is manifested in the Vignettes that character consists of specific characteristics that are inherent in a person. These characteristics are described to be acquired through one's connections with family, friends, schools, and communities. It is entailed that one's attachments with surroundings, engagements in cultural and community activities, and interactions with larger community contribute to shape character. Anil, Anu and Reena's perceptions of character, and character development are shown to have a huge influence of their home culture values, their openness to host cultures, and their persistent travel between the zones of home-host cultures. In exploring the Vignettes, it is found that character development is concerned with transitions, negotiations, support, care, and connections.

**Anil.** It is illuminated in Anil's perception that character begins to take its shape in the exposure to the values of family culture. These values, as seen in Anil's narratives, include "honesty, truthfulness, and hard work which he acquired from his grandparents" (Vignette 1). This leads to an analysis that the beliefs and ethics demonstrated in the life styles of parents and grandparents leave a strong influence on their children and grandchildren. The narration of Anil's childhood experience in the Vignette affirms that teachings of grandparents lead youth to

the right path: *“I was mostly around my grandparents in my childhood. I saw them working hard, saw their behaviours, and their lifestyle which together influenced me in such a way that these things have become part of me.”* This suggests that children learn important values in life by observing the behaviour and actions of their seniors.

Anil’s perception identifies other factors that are concerned with character. It is stated that “character is concerned with our habits; it is concerned with how we conduct our day to day activities: *‘character development depends on various aspects such as surroundings, education, culture, life goals, and so on’*” (Vignette 1). This expression implies that character development is a long process; and the process of building and re-building of character is influenced by what we do in the family, what we are surrounded with, and what our life goals are. These are explained to be “A motivational drive for [Anil] to succeed in life and work: *‘I was taught never to lie, never to cheat, and not be afraid if I have not done anything wrong...I carry these thoughts with me all the times.’*” Commitment to honesty and truthfulness is evident in the expression. Learning from family, and teachings of grandparents are narrated to be guiding principles of both life and work.

An important thing implied in Anil’s narration is “A sense of faith in and respect to his elders.” This sense of faith and respect is seen in Anil’s relationship with his friends and teachers in school. This explicates that our childhood learning, and experiences affect our adult behaviour. Teachers are considered as examples in Anil’s perception, as “he believes what the teachers say and do can have a lasting impact on students” (Vignette 1). This signifies the role of teacher in shaping a student’s character. Teachers in Nepali culture are considered to occupy central spaces in the community; they are believed to be fair and just to all students despite their differences.

Home-culture influence is noticed in Anil's words and actions either in approaching the teachers or working with friends in clubs and groups. Conversations are considered to be key to these meetings and workings, as "Informal conversations open up new avenues to dwell together with the reciprocal respect and tolerance to the differences we hold: *"You know what they value, and they know what you value."* Evident in the expression are negotiations of knowing and acknowledging different values.

Another perspective of character comes from "Anil's experiences of working for the Multi-Cultural Club in school," according to which, "character development is concerned with punctuality and responsibility" (Vignette 1). The implication in this perceptive suggests that one's company makes a big difference in one's character. The Vignette discloses Anil's learning of to punctual and responsible while undertaking and accomplishing a work: "Anil observed how each member of the club carried their responsibility and accomplished their tasks on time."

Need of integrity is shown in Anil's perception of character. This indicates that an integration of values, learnt and acquired from family, friends, teachers, and community, is what matters the most. The justification of integration is seen in the Vignette when it stays:

Anil's perception to character is grounded on his family values, cultural activities, religious practices, and the supportive roles that his school and teachers played. Anil believes that, as a student, he has learnt virtues, and become successful in his studies, because of his supportive surroundings (Vignette 1).

Influence of parents and peers, and school and community, and culture and religion are seen in one's make up. It shows a person's requirement to build and keep a web of connections, which is considered to be truer in the context of multi-cultural community like ours in Ontario.

**Anu.** The theme of perception in regard to character and character education relates to Anu's lived family values, experiences of living in and overcoming transitions, making negotiations, and building connections with people and community. The Vignette demonstrates that character development is to be seen in relation with our ritual and cultural practices. It is narrated that a child gets exposures to these rituals right from early years at home, and home is where the first step of character development begins: "*Character development is the steps one takes to develop "character". It is a life-long process that begins when one is young*" (Vignette 2). This suggests that the process of building character continues with the child's meeting with relatives, involving in communities, and interacting with friends and teachers in schools.

In Anu's family, receiving blessings from elders during festival is demonstrated to be very common. Virtues of respect and honour "Are reflected in the broader communal life during festive occasions." It is believed that "those who give blessings are respected and honoured all the times by those who are blessed" (Vignette 2). Character development is thus shown to have a strong connection with mixing and mingling with human beings around us. It can be deduced from discussions in the Vignette that people we meet and interact, places we visit and live, festivals we participate and celebrate- all provide us rich experiences. These experiences are crucial in multi-cultural societies in the context of acquiring intangible values such as adaptability and open-mindedness.

In Anu's expression, character is perceived "As the possession of intangible qualities, and character development as the core of humanity," which is believed to begin "At an early age, and then continues through one's entire life" (Vignette 2). This clearly points out that character development is a developmental process that is shaped by an integrated influence of family, school, and community. Anu's perception of character development resonates with Anil's

acknowledgement of the importance of family, friends, teachers, community, and surroundings in the making up of a person.

In a multi-cultural social surrounding, Anu's perception of character leads to an explication of human values, beliefs, and cultures grounded in the notion of humanity. It is demonstrated in her perception that being a good human being is what it means by character development: *"I perceive character and character development to be the very core of humanity. Character and character development are about being a refined, developed human being with values, a sense of identity, and a larger, overarching sense of community"* (Vignette 2). This expression suggests that a person with character shows respect for self and others, acknowledges the inherent dignity of people in the community, and values the convictions people have.

Knowledge and wisdom are shown to be associated with character development. Experience is counted to be the main source of knowledge. It is explained that a person with experience, knowledge, and wisdom *"is incredibly knowledgeable, has a rich understanding of people, places, and the world, and is able to use this to mould her character"* (Vignette 2). This reveals the importance of connections with peoples and places. Implied in the analogy is that our wider connections to places and peoples give us wider knowledge with richer experiences, as said above that *"character development is closely associated with knowledge and experience."*

Anu's example in the Vignette includes the role of experienced teachers in helping *"students develop character by building a classroom where students feel safe to share their thoughts and opinions, discuss character development with students, and finally, encourage students to develop their character in their day-to-day life."* Anu is shown to have a deep admiration and faith in her English teacher, who is appreciated to have *"developed a personal code of ethics to*



*live her life;*” and, *“development is linked to her vast knowledge base”* (Vignette 2). This expression shows students’ trust and respect to teachers, who, by “hearing the voices of students, can motivate them in the class and show them a morally justifiable path to follow.”

In going over the Vignettes of students, it is reiterated that school serves as an important place for character development after family. Character is a matter of everything done within the school. Friendly environment in the school, and teachers’ words and actions in the classroom are described to have a profound impact on students’ character development process. This can also be considered a process of socialization that makes negotiations possible. A correlation between character and action is shown in Anu’s Vignette, and it is stated that “that our actions are guided by our character.”

Character development is shown to have its association with an academic excellence. It is implied in Anu’s experience that character matters in the academics, especially when setting goals, and having a clear vision to achieve them. Anu’s expression- *“Understanding my character, my values, and my perspectives helps guide me through my day-to-day,”* implies that character is concerned with self-reflection, and knowing about what is deep inside. These reflections are seen to be important in terms of making decisions and assessing actions. This importance is recognized when Anus states that *“the concept of character keeps me grounded, serves as my moral base, and helps me act in a way that is not hypocritical or contradictory, but is in-line with my more rational, thoughtful self”* (Vignette 2).

Character in the above expression is concerned with the cultivation of rationality, which is about behaving well and doing the right thing. The cultivation of rationality is believed to take place in both formal academic discussions, and informal interactions. What counts is one’s connections and communications with people around. Club activities and group works are

examined to be crucial for both cultivating reasoning, and connecting with others. Anu states, “*One of my favourite memories is getting involved in cross-curricular activities, that is, involving in club activities. This was great because it gave me access to talking to Principal and Vice-Principal. You are there and have people interested in you*” (Vignette 2). Implied in this excerpt are the pleasure of participating in activities, and the pride of connecting with the top level school administration. This reinforces the perception that character is concerned with dwelling in, and negotiating the spaces of differences.

**Reena.** In Vignette 3, character is perceived as an acquisition of values and virtues from family, school, and community over a long span of time. This perception of character relates to the discussions in Anil and Anu’s Vignettes. It is considered in Reena’s narratives that nurturing values and virtues is “A long and steady process which begins from home and continues in school: *‘Character development does not just happen instantly. Character attributes are developed over a long period of time.’*” This denotes that there are several contributing factors in the shaping of a person’s character, and there are conflicting situations that everyone comes across in the making of one’s maturity. People are usually bound to face these situations, which “offer them a valuable experience” (Vignette 3). With such an experience, people grow and mature developing their own unique way of addressing and negotiating the conflicts, in which a sign of character is reflected. Implied in the argument is the formation of integrated personality, because “*integrity in one’s work*” is what means by character.

Reena’s expression shows “connections between one’s character and actions; it is because actions generally speak of one’s character” (Vignette 3). It is asserted that the decisions people make are often influenced by their character. Conceptualization of character attributes is described to be essential before bringing them into application. It is credited that “discipline,

honesty, hard work, and trust count a lot in the achievements” people make. It is indicated in the Vignette that home is where the nurturing of these attributes begins. Reena’s statement- *“character is built from one’s personality, and the values around which are nurtured during childhood,”* clearly indicates the role of parents in a child’s up-bringing. Reena’s learning from her parents’ lifestyle implies that family teachings have a lot to do for a child’s thriving in life.

Informal teachings of parents and elders, and support and encouragement of teachers and friends are exemplified to be vital to character development. Such teachings and encouragement promote a sense of respect and tolerance in a multi-cultural setting. It is stated that *“Tolerating cultural and individual difference is a part of character”* (Vignette 3). Learning to be tolerant comes from family and consolidates in community. Classroom as a community is an important place to learn to be both respectful and tolerant. Teachers are described to be crucial figures to help students learn and practice these values in a culturally diverse class.

Reena’s classroom experience admits that *“teachers play an important role as they are an important figure in our teen years when we are exploring our character.”* This statement implies that teachers can become a source of inspiration for students. In Reena’s Vignette, teachers are considered to be *“one of the major influencers after parents”* to motivate and inspire students. This argument resonates with Anu and Anil’s trust and faith in teachers. The impact of home culture, that highly values the position of teachers in societies, is evident in the narratives of participants.

After parents at home and teachers in school, connections with friends in classroom are considered to be an important aspect of growing with open-mindedness. Trusting friendship leads to sustainable relationship. Working in groups, and conversations among friends are demonstrated to be key ways to connect and negotiate, by standing in the spaces of differences.

In Reena's experience, Toronto public schools are described to have prominent culture of working together. A picture of diversity and an experience of working together can be seen in her narrative:

In each high school class, *"there would be a group at each table,"* and group members would come from different countries such as China, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and so on... *"My friends and group members were very diverse although the majority would be from China."* Working with each member in the group was always a great experience of knowing about their food and working culture: *"The food would be different. Everyone would bring the type of food that they eat at home."*

Implied in the excerpt include conversations, connections, understanding, respect, tolerance, and experiences of communicating cultures.

A great influence of company is evident in Reena's acknowledgment that "hardworking habit of her friends motivated and encouraged herself to do well in her academic performance. Reena saw her friends working on their set plans to achieve their defined goals, which drove herself to put more effort and achieve" (Vignette 3). This leads to an analogy that the value of hard work is learned from company; and also "that one's company makes a big difference in one's life." Achievements made by a member in a group are described as motivational drives for others.

Desire of academic excellence involves an important aspect of character development, which is seen in Reena's Chinese friends who *"would want to go to high profile schools after high school. They would prepare from a very young age."* This displays a sign of competition between and among students. Reena is described to have learned the values of honesty from her

parents, and hard work from her friends. How we live our lives is grossly influenced by our connections with home-host cultures; and these connections shape and reshape our perception.

Recapping the explorations made in Student Vignettes, it is found that one's perception of character has its root in home culture. This perception expands, and reshapes itself along with one's moving and settling in a new place, integrating with a new community, and mingling and sharing the values of home culture with the values of host culture. This implicates one's connections to a broader community, including schools and neighbourhoods, which lead an individual to a seamless process of character development. Having said this, I move onto the sixth chapter, which describes key responses of the teacher participants that are detailed in the series of Vignettes.

## Chapter 6: Teacher Vignettes

This chapter includes the Teacher Vignettes, composed out of the oral and written interviews. There are three Vignettes, which describe the teacher participants' experiences of working with, and learning from, students from diverse cultural backgrounds, and their perceptions of character development.

### 6.1: Vignette 4 Laura: Character is all of the Pieces that Make up a Person.

The Vignette described in this section is composed from the transcripts of the oral and written interviews conducted in the month of November 2016. This Vignette details Laura's experiences of working as an elementary teacher in Ontario catholic and public school classrooms. It does this by describing Laura's most important moments of working with youth and children, with special needs students, and the support she got from her co-workers and school administration.

The Vignette relates to Laura's skills in identifying the learning needs of students, and states what she has learned from students. The Vignette narrates Laura's lived stories in her classrooms, accounts for the importance of communications while working together with students and colleagues, and the significance of festive celebrations. It also describes Laura's perceptions of character and character development.

**I have been teaching in classrooms for about fifteen years.** Laura identified herself as an experienced teacher who had spent about fifteen years teaching students across different elementary grade levels. She had worked in both public and catholic schools situated in Southern Ontario. Laura taught both special education, and inclusive classes, focusing on specific areas of themes. These themes included not only *“academic, but also social and communication skills.”*

The students in the inclusive classes were from grade three to eight. These classes were named as “Strategies & Social Skills Class, which went from grades 5 to 8, and the “*Autism Spectrum Disorder Class, which went from grades 3 to 5.*” Laura worked with these classes as a full time teacher.

Working in special education helped her gain an expertise in taking care of, and supporting, students with “*emotional challenges, attention problems, and learning disabilities.*” Laura considered herself a good fit to work with inclusive classes: “*I feel that it probably takes a certain kind of personality to teach a class like that and I probably have that personality.*” Laura also recalled her working with, and learning from, an experienced child and youth worker: “*I had a really phenomenal child and youth worker who had lots of experience, who was working with me. I learned so much from her.*” As part of her teaching load, Laura also “*worked on social skills and anger management in order to help students to be reintegrated into their regular school.*” Laura’s academic background experience was helpful in preparing her to teach, as her “*undergrad was in child and youth studies.*”

Laura believed in learning from her experiences. She acknowledged that she had had a great learning experience as a child and youth worker before starting career as a teacher. Laura identified herself as a dedicated worker who got a good deal of support from others: “*I had a lot of support from my colleagues and my administrator.*” In her teaching, Laura’s main concern was the progress of her students, and she always stood for supporting students. Laura even had to fight sometimes for getting more support, and that was entirely for the sake of students: “*I felt like all I did that one year was fight for more support. And it wasn’t for me, it was for the kids, they needed support.*”

Having gained 15 years of rich classroom experience, Laura had enrolled as a graduate doctoral student in an Ontario university. Apart from her doctoral journey in educational studies, Laura also worked as a faculty, and did occasional substitute teaching for different schools in Southern Ontario.

**Learning from working with students.** Laura has worked in both Catholic and public school classrooms. Catholic schools in Ontario are less diverse, whereas public schools are generally more diverse. Laura's own schooling took place at Catholic schools: *"As a student myself, I grew up in mostly white catholic schools for elementary and secondary, and was never challenged with issues surrounding culture, or diversity until I came to university."* In her undergraduate university studies, Laura saw a lot of diversity, met and interacted with friends and educators from diverse cultural backgrounds.

While working as a full-time teacher, Laura worked with diverse students. She explained that two of the classes where she had opportunities to learn from students who came from a diverse community: *"When I was in the Autism Class, and Kindergarten class, my classes were very diverse as I was in a diverse community. It was most important to me to be open to learn about my students' cultures and experiences."* Laura believed that students and teachers learn from one another: *"The thing that I love the most in teaching is that I love learning from my students."* Laura drew motivation while working with, and learning from, students: *"The times when I learned from students on a regular basis keep me driven."* Laura let the students know what she has learned from them, which she thinks *"helps students feel valued."* This encouraged students to participate in learning activities and have their say, as they *"know that what they have to say is important."*



For Laura, the teachers' role is always important to motivate students to share what they come to the class with. Students come to the class with their cultures, stories, and lived experiences. Teachers, according to Laura, have responsibilities to set a safe and inclusive classroom climate so that all students can share what they come with more comfortably. Laura acknowledged the importance of sharing with others in a multi-cultural classroom, and stated:

*I think [sharing] is the starting point to everything, because that's what students are coming into the classroom with. Recognizing that gives them chances to feel safe and comfortable sharing their experiences, and recognizing that everyone has different experience, and that's beautiful. I think you have to set the climate first in the classroom so that students feel safe to use their experience, and use what is in their backpack to benefit their learning.*

Laura saw the challenges in doing that in the classroom: *"I think, in a lot of times, the way our system is structured does not allow for that to occur naturally."* Laura provided a scenario and raises an important concern:

*Students who are in a situation where they are the only students in the class that have different experiences from the rest of the class, how do we make them feel that their experiences are valuable and important without making them feel different?*

For Laura, there are structural problems in the education systems in which she has taught: *"The structure of our systems is that we categorize people and children into being different and normal or outside of the norm and inside of the norm and that is dangerous."*

As a teacher, Laura believed in the power of the positive role of teachers to make students aware of who they are and what they can do, which echoes the point made by the

student participants. To Laura, it is important to be aware of one's rights and duties, and it is teachers who can help children know their basic rights:

*I have tried to do in my classrooms by teaching kids about the charter of human rights. It is important [for both teachers and students] to know about human rights, we are trying to create citizens that are accepting the people with different experiences. It is to let them understand that everyone has right, everyone has different experiences, and everyone's experience is valued.*

Laura insisted on helping students to become aware of their experiences, their roles, and their responsibilities in the class, the value of their being in the class, and their different learning needs.

**Identifying learning needs.** Relating the differences that she noticed in her students and their learning needs is important to Laura. Not all students in her classes learned the same way. As they had different experiences and came from different family background, they also had different learning needs. Laura was watchful about these needs that each student required:

*I had some students that came from some tough situations at home, and that was in their backpack, and some students had a lot of extra responsibilities that lots of ten years old don't have, and that was in their backpack. And some students are quite privileged.*

Laura stated that a student's situation determines the kind of support to be provided. For her, identifying what each student in the class needs is important in the work of teaching: *"I think that all students should receive what they need. And so, if a student requires additional support or accommodations or modifications to the program, they should receive that."* From her experience, she explained that, while there was not lot of diversity in a class, there was

diversity in students' needs: *"In grade five, there were lots of students that had lots of different needs, such as different learning needs."*

Reinforcing the need for creating an inclusive classroom in order to identify and provide what students need was important to Laura. She considered creating a really good inclusive classroom as a goal of education:

*Based on my own personal journey, my PhD journey, and my fifteen years teaching experience, the goal of education should be to show how you can make a really good inclusive classroom, show how you have a great classroom culture, show how you have students working together, and supporting each other. I think this should be the goal of education, and it directly relates to character building.*

She also made a point that creating such a classroom is a challenging task for teachers, as they need support from different professionals, who are working in the school and wider community. In one case, the support provided by the principal was very encouraging: *"The principal that I was working for was very supportive of the different ways that I was doing things in the classrooms. The class was very dynamic, as there was a lot of need in the class."* Laura was not worried about doing new thing to help students and provide the supports they needed. For her, the work of teachers is to make their students feel valued, included, and accepted in the classroom despite their ages, grades, and background:

*I had one student who had lots of identifications. He had really a very hard time focusing like sitting still that impacted his learning. I also had students working below grade level. For those kinds of learning needs, I had one student, who was identified as global developmental delay, so he was working at kindergarten level in most areas. So just*

*trying to create a classroom where there all felt confident, accepted, and important. They should feel important; they should feel that their contribution to their classroom is valuable. And I see lots of time that the kids do not feel valuable; they don't feel valued at school. They should feel valued at school. So, getting them to understand, you are valued just like everyone else because you have the right to be here just like everyone else. We should teach kids about that. We have to give them permission to recognize that they have rights and values.*

Laura was also aware of the problems that teachers come across in their professional life: “*sometimes teachers have to grapple with their own experiences of being, for example, whatever their privileges, and how that impacts the way they teach the class.*” Reflecting on her experience, Laura said that it is okay to have problems, even to make mistakes; what counts is how properly one addresses the problems, and how well one reflects, and learns from, the mistakes.

*I can recognize when I make mistakes, or maybe when I should have done the same thing differently. I think that is important for teachers to recognize that it's okay that we make mistakes sometimes because we are human beings, with unique character traits.*

**Character is all of the pieces that make up a person.** For Laura, identifying problems and solving them, and reflecting on mistakes that we make, and learning from them, can constitute an important aspect of character development. Human beings have to undergo various ups and downs in life; they need help and provide help; they meet different people and learn many things about them by having conversations with them; they participate in family,

community, and school activities and gain valuable experiences. To Laura, all these “bits” of life’s experiences make up a person:

*I think character is all of the pieces that make up a person. That is something that starts when they are very small, babies probably. And so, all of those little pieces of experience they have had helps; it contributes to who they are as persons in their character. When we get them in school, we have to recognize what they are bringing with them, and figure out how to move them forward.*

Students come to school with certain character attributes, and for knowing what these attributes are, there should be conversations between, and among, students and teachers: *“Being able to have conversations, and feeling comfortable having conversations is important.”*

Teachers should create an environment where everybody feels comfortable to have conversations. As Laura said, *“It is important to empower kids to have conversations,”* and festive celebrations often provide room for such conversations. For this teacher, *“celebrations are about people coming together and celebrate something whatever it’s called.”* Laura said that dialogues and informal interactions are dominant in all kinds of celebrations, but settings and situations are also important: *“It depends; it depends on where you are at; and I think it depends on how you are going about it.”*

Laura believed that there is a strong connection between festive gatherings and character development. She insisted on contextualizing the festivities, and the activities performed during such occasions:

*When I am working in catholic schools, we can celebrate catholic holidays like Christmas and Easter in schools, because it’s a part of that culture, and so by doing that*

*we can do things to help build character, or help contribute to the character by what we do in Christmas times to give back. But it needs to be done so the students can contextualize and understand. I am bringing cans of food and we are going to pack that and we are going to give it to somebody, not just I am bringing cans of food to school and they don't know what happens after.*

Public schools, Laura suggested, also have to provide students opportunities to celebrate their festivals in some ways so that they learn from one another about their diverse cultures and traditions. In diverse classrooms Laura believed that celebrations not only contribute to learning, but also promote character building:

*In many public schools I know here, they do not celebrate; they go the opposite way, no celebrations. And I feel like we should be able to have all celebrations and that contribute to the whole piece on learning about other people, learning about other traditions, and I think it does contribute to bits of that character building.*

For Laura, the Ontario character development document is a guideline which needs collaborative work to be implemented effectively. Laura said that the settings of classrooms differ from one school to another, and from one district board to another, so the document provides the framework of character development and provides guidelines to teachers:

*The way character education program tries to change the character and I think what character development should look like from classroom to classroom is very different because you have different groups of kids; different schools, and different districts. So, this document is a guideline.*

By way of explanation, Laura said that there are differences between students, between schools, between school boards, and between classroom settings, and despite having all these differences, what matters is creating inclusive classrooms. Inclusivity is directly related to character education: *“I perceive character education as a very important component to creating inclusive classrooms.”* Inclusive classrooms are not only *“for students with exceptionalities, but also for students who may be marginalized for other reasons, race, culture, and gender.”* Further, Laura believed that, in an inclusive environment, students develop an emotional sense of belongingness, and show their hidden potentials: *“When we teach kids about being good people by recognizing their gifts, talents and strengths and celebrate those of others, we provide students with the skills to be empathetic, understanding and brave.”*

Laura said that character attributes are important, and teachers need to be aware of their importance. This would help teachers design a variety of activities that can suit different students, given each student comes to the class with unique experiences:

*I think it is really important to understand it [the concept of character] so that I can model and teach it to my students. For example; not everyone is compassionate by nature. By understanding what types of activities and experiences can help to develop compassion in kids will provide a more authentic and worthwhile learning experience, that will resonate with the students.*

For Laura, teachers can make a difference in lives of several students; teachers can present themselves as examples. She believed that students usually trusted their teachers and listened to them, so teachers should provide their students all possible learning opportunities to help them excel in their performance. Teachers could do this:

*By providing students with authentic learning opportunities where they can learn about something, try it out, and see the direct results of their work. That is key to developing character. It's not really hard to do this with young people because generally they are more open to it and can really be impressed by their impact on another person.*

While she kept in mind that there were curriculum expectations to be met while introducing such authentic learning opportunities, Laura also believed that many of such opportunities might fall outside the curriculum-as-plan.

**Curriculum as plan.** While providing learning opportunities to students, teachers are mostly guided by the objectives stated in the curriculum. There are clearly stated expectations that teachers strive to cover in their teaching. Referring to her experiences of working with her co-workers, Laura, while responding the question on curriculum-as-plan, perceived curriculum-as-plan as a tool, a guideline, and a very useful recourse:

*It's a guideline, and should be used as a guideline. [Some] teachers take the curriculum as the holy word in education, but in my perception, it's not the case. I have friends that are teachers, they think that the curriculum is a golden guide book, and say I have to cover this and I have to cover that. I do not think that is what the curriculum is for; I do not think education should be so rigid and structured and stuck to those documents. To me, the curriculum is a good tool, an important resource. It gives a lot of information.*

While Laura acknowledged the importance of curriculum-as-plan, she also knew that sometimes some teachers fall into problems by making efforts to cover every expectation mentioned in the curriculum: *“But sometimes teachers get caught; they get trapped, needing to cover all of the expectations rather than using the document as an amazing resource, a guide.”*



Laura insisted in using the curriculum document as an important tool; she believed in running informal activities that supported the curriculum. One of such activities Laura and her friend did was pen pals:

*I did not have that much diversity in the classroom. A good friend of mine teaches in Peel. The demographic of her class was very different than mine was. So, we did pen pals where they could learn about each other.*

Laura and her friend facilitated students from both the schools in writing and exchanging letters. In this exchange of letters, students from both schools were eager to know about their pen pals:

*It was really interesting because the first time we did letters, we had matched them up. I sent her a list of students in which they wrote one sentence interest about them just to try to match them up with another student. The first comment that was made in my class was about the different names that the students had.*

Laura said that there was a greater diversity in the public school where her friend works. This diversity was reflected in the names of students which “*My students had never heard of them. They were talking about the names because the names were different, and my students did not understand them.*” Laura held discussions about this difference in the class: “*People are given their names based on part of their cultures, and part of their parents, like your parents, choose your names for you. They choose names based on something, because they mean something; names have meanings.*” Finding the class curious about their pen pals’ names, Laura suggested them to ask their pen pals what their names meant:

*Names have meanings. If you are curious about your pan pal’s name, why don’t you ask them what their names mean? It is because they mean something. And you can look at*

*and find out what your name means. What your name means and how that represents you as a person.*

Laura considered this an opportunity for students to do something with interest and connect with friends who were culturally different. She said,

*So, giving students opportunities like that, they can have conversations; we can have conversations about things. It becomes something where they can look at the world in different ways. They are recognizing that that has something to do with your heritage or cultural background. It was a simple example, but it was important and meaningful for their learning. And you can extend that into other areas.*

The students in public school were interested to know about Catholic school: *“My friend told me that her students were interested in learning about the catholic faith from my students.”* In the letters, there were interesting questions about: *“So you go to a catholic school, what does that mean? How does that look different than a public school? Or what different things do you do? Do you pray?”* Reading the responses of these questions *“was something they were able to learn about. That was also a cultural thing that we take granted.”* In her observation, Laura found her students well engaged and learned from their exchange of letters with their pen pals.

While doing the pen pals, Laura *“used curriculum as a tool because they were writing letters and that’s a part of the curriculum.”* She held that this skill of writing letters could be applied to other areas as well: *“They could write letters to their parents, they could write letters to their best friends, and we could still cover those same expectations.”* Laura further said, *“Taking the curriculum as a tool, we can write letters to someone we have never met before,”*

and build our connections. For her, *“It is easy to facilitate that exchange, and through that they are getting so much out of it than just the act of writing the letter.”*

Reflecting on the discussion in the class, Laura related the pen pals activity to both the curriculum as plan and the curriculum as lived. Students feel valued when they are provided opportunities to share their experiences with the class; through sharing, students know about one another’s culture and background. In her perception, it is necessary to reinforce the idea of valuing others, and being valued by others: *“It goes back to the whole idea of feeling valued, feeling important, and feeling that they have a sense of belonging, that is this is my classroom, and this is my community.”* What counts is how teachers read and understand their students, and support them to make them feel valued:

*For some kids, it is really easy to feel valued because they have a higher sense of self-esteem, but you can’t expect those assumptions, you can’t make an assumption that, a student who is very popular, always does well in sports or whatever still feels valued, because they might not feel valued.*

Each individual is different. What each person needs is to provide opportunities to have their say, do things, and feel valued in the classroom community. Laura narrated:

*I had a student who was very good at athletics. I had conversations with him where he really wasn’t sure about specially that age. It was a really critical age, because the changing and moving from being a child - he is not a child anymore - and he is not quite a teenager yet, and this is trying to figure out his need to feel valued, and I needed to provide him opportunities where he felt valued and maybe that was him helping me set up the smart board. There are lots of things that students can do that they feel valued.*

Teachers need a good length of time to study every student in the class, and identify who needs what. Laura said that the teachers need to observe their students, investigate their needs, and support them accordingly. As a teacher, she not only carefully did it, but also suggested and encouraged her colleagues for the same:

*It takes a lot of time and it takes a lot of observing, and you know at the end of the year, there is one kid and I feel huh... I should have done more for that kid because I just didn't feel that I got him. I feel like he was the one who kind of just slipped through. I should have been more...so I told the next teacher to make sure that you are on him right away from the beginning, make sure that you figure him out, and you figured out about how to get him to be included and don't let him slip by because I felt that maybe he's slipped by me. Otherwise, tried a few times and I used to feel that it was not as effective as it could have been.*

Loving and taking care of students was Laura's part of teaching. She had "a student with global developmental delay," and she wanted to figure out ways to include him more in the classroom. Involving students in group work helps to promote connections and to build relationships with others. Laura exemplified how she worked with her students, and developed activities for different students:

*And so, one of the things that we did was we figured out ways to have him more included in the classroom. And we did that through one of the assignments. I had them create activities specifically geared towards students that might have physical disabilities and to other kids of the school as well. In their own groups, they created obstacle courses basically to focus on specific skills that we talked about. And then they had the*

*opportunities to teach their obstacle course to everyone else in the class and they also had the opportunity to teach the obstacle course to other kids in the school. And what that did that I found was it gave them a sense of, of course, being valued; but it also was little bit of leadership thing. It also allowed them to connect with, and build relationship with other kids in the school. When we had a last play day in the school, one of the things I noticed about my students was that they showed the same leadership role in the team.*

Laura firmly believed that working together enhances character building. She was also mindful of the challenges that keep coming in the profession of teaching. Laura has also come across difficult situations while working with different students. She has dealt with the challenges sensitively and resolved them. She narrated an event which she had undergone and resolved:

*My greatest challenge was when I was teaching grade five in a very white school with little diversity. I had one racialized student and at the time I was still working through my own privilege as a white teacher and trying to understand her reality as the only child in her class with brown skin. I wondered how she saw herself represented in our class, school, and community. Some students in my class were very judgmental and I would say racist, based of course on ideas from the media but also from home. Tackling this was tricky in that I felt at the time that I wanted to address these important issues with these students without centering anyone out.*

Laura considered teaching both a challenging and rewarding profession. She persevered in overcoming the challenges and utilizing the opportunities. For her, the important thing was: both gave valuable experiences. Recalling her experiences of teaching over the years, she stated:

*“The first two years I was there were awesome. I learned a lot, the kids were great; they made lots of really good games.”* For Laura, learning from other was a great way to derive pleasure and satisfaction as a teacher. She connected this learning with character development, and said that: *“In relation to character, culture became a piece of our classroom that was day to day. And honestly Kindergarteners do not recognize cultural differences as being anything but ordinary.”* In her reading, children bring a sense of innocence with them in the class and *“seek care and support from teachers.”*

**6.2: Vignette 5 John: Students Need to See the Relevance of what they are being Taught.**

The Vignette described in this section is composed from the transcripts of the oral and written interviews held in the month of November 2016. This Vignette details John's experiences of working as a high school teacher in Ontario public school classrooms, and relates to his perceptions of character, and character development.

The Vignette demonstrates how John used his creative freedom to choose teaching materials, and how he made the chosen materials relevant to the learners so that the learners find themselves in what was being taught. The Vignette explains the importance of inclusiveness, which is an indispensable aspect of character development. The Vignette also states John's gratification as an Ontario public school teacher, and his learning by working with culturally diverse groups of students.

**I am a high school English and History teacher.** John identified himself as *“an English and History teacher in a public secondary school in Southern Ontario.”* John has had an experience of working as a teacher for over a decade in an Ontario public school: *“I have been teaching for a period of eleven years.”* Apart from working as a full-time teacher, John was pursuing his doctoral studies in an Ontario University. During the last decade, John had come across many students, and had gained valuable experiences in working with them.

John's school runs classes from grades nine to twelve and students are generally from fourteen to eighteen years of age. The students in his school come from the surrounding neighbourhoods, which are dominated by middle and upper middle-class families. John recognized this affluence: *“we draw students from these neighbourhoods, the areas that are economically advantaged. We have our elementary feeder schools in the area.”*

Ontario society is becoming increasingly diverse because of the continuous flow of immigrants from across the globe. This diversity is seen more prominently in the public schools of the Greater Toronto Area, with Toronto itself being described as the most diverse city in the world, with 51 per cent of Toronto's population is foreign born. John has noticed the increasingly diverse nature of his school over the past ten years, and his school has also developed policies to attract students from even more diverse backgrounds:

*In my ten years working in the school, the school has become more culturally diverse. It was predominantly a white school with European ancestry, but now it is growing as a multicultural school. Students come from many different backgrounds, there is a large population of students from South East Asian background; the school is also attracting newly arrived students from China.*

In addition to this enrolment of students, which would be determined by neighbourhood, one of the stated aims of the school and its teachers is to accommodate and support these students.

As an educator, John has gained rich experiences in working with students from different language speaking communities over these years. Particularly over the last few years, John has found his classes to be increasingly multi-cultural, a change that has prompted him to reflect on the aims of education. Reflecting on his experiences, he explained three aims of education which the teachers should make all possible efforts to strive for:

*I think, as an educator, there are three aims to education. The first one is to develop character, develop the qualities of a good human being, which includes the intellectual and cultural development of students. Secondly, an aim of education should be to prepare democratic citizens; so, our goal is to teach students and instil within them the values that are required to be a citizen in a democratic society. And thirdly, it is to prepare*



*students for the world of work or for future occupations. We should strive for achieving all these goals.*

John believed that teachers have an important role to help students achieve these goals, and that teachers need to create a democratic setting for learning. As the ways of learning vary from one student to another, John said that teachers must know how their students and how they learn the best, and thereby develop and modify their instructional methodology.

**Making subject matter relevant to students.** The role of the teacher is important when students' learning is concerned. John believed that students learn the best when they see themselves in the subject matter being taught. To a large extent, it depends on the teacher's expertise and skills to accommodate every student in the class:

*I think students learn the best when teachers make the subject matter relevant to them. Students need to see the relevance of what they are being taught, and how they can connect with the subject matter and the curriculum on a personal level. If students do not see any relevance and value to what they are being taught, they will be disengaged.*

Students' engagement is important in learning. To keep every student engaged in learning, John believed in the application of the principle of differentiated instruction. Based on his decade long experience, John stated that not all students learn in the same way; they have diverse ways of learning:

*Students also learn the best when the teacher makes an effort to differentiate instruction. Everyone has their own learning style. Individual students have their own strengths. Some are visual learners; some students are tactile learners; while others are verbal learners. It is very necessary that teachers try to cater the lesson to diverse learning*

*styles. Everyone learns in a different way, and teachers need to be aware of how their students learn.*

John reinforced that it is important to change the strategy whenever students do not understand what is being taught:

*I have to change the strategy of my teaching; one way is to provide differentiated instruction. Students learn in different ways, so I always need to diversify my instructional approaches. It also involves allowing students to review their knowledge in different ways, and giving opportunities to students to express their knowledge in multiple forms, whether through artistic means, or other ways they like.*

John said that students need a good classroom climate to do well in their performance. They learn the best when teachers create a learner friendly environment: *“Students also learn best in a classroom environment that is warm, that is welcoming, that is safe-- where students feel safe in the sense that they can express their opinions freely, without being criticized or devalued.”*

John explained that students could express their understanding of a topic in different ways. For John, teachers should be flexible and give students the opportunities for conveying the information in the way they choose:

*In my history class, for example, literacy is obviously an important focus for students as they need to be able to record the historical information and convey their knowledge through clearly written forms; however, I also give them opportunities to convey the information in different ways, whether through songs, art work, or the creation of*

*models. In this regard, students can express their understanding through various means and employ their talents in creative ways.*

Language is a powerful means of conveying message to others. John developed and incorporated various literacy strategies to help students whose first language were not English. John had seen new migrant students' struggled to gain competence in English language. John was considerate to those students whose knowledge of English language needed improvement, especially while taking the tests:

*I have to make accommodations for those students who have recently arrived in Canada, and those students who speak English as their second language. I will use different strategies so that they will comprehend the subject matter and improve their English as well. There are different ways by which I accommodate. For example, I give the students extra time to work on the assignments, a lot of extra time to complete the tests; I also give them an opportunity to use a dictionary while writing tests. I also modify or change tests and assignments to meet their language level needs.*

The aim, as John said, was to provide these students the help they need. He believed that the supportive role of teachers motivates students in bringing them closer, and encourages them in asking for further help:

*I also develop and incorporate different literacy strategies and use them to help students who speak English as a second language. For example, while working on vocabulary exercises, I develop and give them a key list of vocabulary, and we examine the ways to use them in various contexts. This approach also involves giving them the passage and exploring with them what these key words mean. I also try to bring their cultures into the*

*classroom. I also apply these very same strategies to help English speaking students who are struggling with literacy.*

John explained that making the subject matter relevant, and teaching in context, are to be taken into account while working as an educator in the classroom. John derived a great sense of pleasure and gratification while working as a teacher with diverse students in the classroom.

**You make a difference in lives of several students.** John considered teaching a rewarding profession, and believed that many students appreciate their teachers. In part, John believed, this is because teachers generally have a very good impact on the lives of students. He was very much gratified with his work as an educator:

*I enjoy my job as an Ontario public school teacher. I get an immense gratification from the work I do. As a teacher, you make a difference in lives of several students. Many students are appreciative of your teaching and various suggestions you provide them. My experiences of public school teaching have been very positive, being in the classroom and interacting with the students. I am someone who enjoys teaching. In being a teacher, I am very pleased with my profession. I am happy with my job.*

John enjoyed not only teaching lessons in the classrooms but also interacting with students and knowing more about them. He believed that frequent conversations help students come closer, but it also depends on the student. John said that the nature of each student differs from another, with some students being introverted, while others are extroverts. To illustrate:

*I have a class with a few immigrant students who newly arrived to Canada two months ago. A couple of students in my class are quiet, you talk with them but still very shy.*

*Another student is very extrovert; he participates in class, and joins different clubs. So, it depends on the individual.*

John insisted on identifying the nature of the student and providing any assistance accordingly. With this support and assistance, a shy natured student moves forward and becomes less hesitant to ask questions and participate in conversations. John further said:

*In terms of opening up, you make an effort to reach out to the shy students. In the first month, they were very shy when it came to asking questions and seeking assistance. But, they are more forthcoming now, they take more initiative, they are not hesitant to ask for help. That is the change; a connection has been made, and they recognize that they should not hesitate to ask for help or to seek assistance from me; and that I am approachable.*

John managed and conducted group work in his class. He was also aware of making sure that every student was included in the activity, and had their say in the collaborative work. When opportunities are provided to all, in John's experience, each student is capable of contributing to the class with their unique experiences:

*It is very important that students feel included in the classroom. You need to set up activities where everyone is collaborating, where everyone has an opportunity to speak, and where opportunities for speaking are given, whether in smaller and larger groups, to those voices that are often silent in the classroom. Everyone is encouraged to contribute to the group activity.*

To John, teachers need to be open, friendly, and easily approachable. Students feel more comfortable to approach such teachers. Many students, who come from diverse cultural

backgrounds, feel reluctant to move forward, share their problems, and seek help and support from teachers. The openness and friendliness of teachers can help in having students connected with them.

In a multi-cultural classroom, students come from different cultures. John stated that the role of teacher differs in these cultures: *“In some cultures, the role of the teacher is more authoritarian,”* whereas in many other cultures the role of teacher is more supportive. John explained that teachers’ proper understanding of their students’ background is important. To make students feel included, John accommodated and incorporated reading materials in such a way in his course so that the discussions would encourage each student to share their stories with the class. John has done this over the years while teaching different courses to different classes by making a careful selection of the works of literature. John stated:

*My classrooms have become increasingly multicultural over the last few years. As a teacher, I am impressed with the tolerance and respect that my students show to cultural, linguistic, and religious difference. In my classroom, I try to foster cultural awareness, tolerance, and respect by presenting students with a multiplicity of perspectives. In other words, I try to incorporate the literary works of diverse writers and the historical experiences of all cultural groups within my courses.*

John was respectful and empathetic to his students: *“my conversation with the student always involves the notions of respect and empathy.”* John related these notions to character and character development.

**Character development is one of the main aims of education.** John perceived “character and character development as encompassing one of the main aims of education, in

addition to those of preparing students for democratic citizenship and economic participation.” For John, character is concerned with acquiring attributes such as empathy, care, and compassion that are necessary for one to maintain healthy and respectful relationships with others: “I believe that character development entails instilling students with the attributes that are necessary for healthy and respectful relationships. For me, character development involves learning and acquiring the qualities of empathy, care, and compassion.”

John said that it is important for every teacher to model the attributes of good character, and for this, the teacher needs to know the concept of character and character development. John was aware of the significance of healthy, respectful, and inclusive classroom environment. He considered that this environment is equally important to work with the colleagues in a professional way:

*For me, it is important to understand the concept of character because I wish to model the attributes of good character to my students. As a teacher, I need to model the qualities of empathy, care, and compassion if I wish my students to develop them. I also need to have a strong awareness of this concept to ensure that my classrooms are inclusive and respectful. In terms of my professional life, I need to have a strong understanding of character to develop collaborative, healthy, and respectful relations with my colleagues. My teacher colleagues and I are concerned with enhancing the social and emotional development of students, and this goal can only be achieved if we have healthy professional relationships.*

In John’s experience and perception, the role of a teacher is important in helping students develop their character. Students observe what the teachers do and learn from their actions; their

observation makes them understand and apply the attributes in their own lives: *“I believe that teachers can help students develop character by modeling the attributes of care, empathy, and compassion.”* In order for doing this, John incorporated character development in the curriculum, encouraged students to participate in volunteer activities, and motivated them to take part in extra-curricular activities:

*Teachers can also develop character through its incorporation in the curriculum. As an English teacher, I may assist students in developing character by examining theme and character development in literary texts. With the subject of History, teachers can develop character by exploring different historical events or figures from the lens of empathy, tolerance, care, and compassion. Teachers can also develop character through extra-curricular activities such as athletics. Through athletics, teacher coaches can shape students’ understanding of the qualities associated with good sportsmanship. Teachers can also help students develop character through co-curricular volunteer and charitable initiatives that seek to assist disadvantaged or vulnerable members of our local or global community.*

Working together is important for character development, as it builds stronger relationships, and helps in closing the gap between students and teachers: *“teachers can help develop character by working together to enforce and expect certain standards of behaviour within the classroom and wider level of the school.”* John said that communication is vital while working together; this provides opportunity to know one another which eventually contributes to *“the enforcement of proper behaviour”* that is very much expected within a school. John emphasized the power of conversation, and stated that *“character can be truly developed*



*through dialogue.*” John explained that these dialogues may fall in both the curriculum as plan and the curriculum as lived.

**I have the creative freedom.** Curriculum-as-plan for John “is the curriculum that I have to follow. I have to follow the document’s strengths and expectations.” John further explained:

*My understanding of curriculum as plan is the policy document that I have to follow as a teacher, the expectations that are placed on me as a teacher, what I am required to teach students, what skills are required to impart our students. This is what I understand by the curriculum document, the curriculum as plan.*

Curriculum documents provide general guidelines which the teacher teaching the particular course needs to follow: “*In the English curriculum document for example, there are certain expectations that I am required to fulfill in terms of writing, in terms of media literacy, in terms of oral skills*” However, John was well-informed that the curriculum provides room for teachers to utilize their creative freedom regarding what to choose to teach to the class: “*the curriculum is open in the sense that, as an English teacher, the Ministry of Education does not tell me which texts, which poems or which short stories I should teach my class.*” John said that he was concerned about aligning his text selection with the expectations of the curriculum document:

*So as a teacher, I have the creative freedom and the autonomy to select the texts by which my students will acquire those skills and expectations that are outlined in the curriculum documents. I have to teach my students these specific skills and meet certain expectations, but I have the freedom to choose the texts that I teach my students.*

John considered the relevance of the chosen text books, and made efforts to relate them to student lived experiences. He said, “[I make]an effort to choose literary works that reflect different cultures and the different experiences of students in my classrooms. Learning involves making things relevant to students. I select the texts relevant to students’ background and their experiences.” While doing this, John took the notion of curriculum-as-lived into account: “I incorporate texts written by the authors from different parts of the world. The authors I select come from different cultural backgrounds; they present multiple views.” John found that students from different cultural background would see themselves in the chosen materials to a large extent and they could relate their learning with their lived experiences: “Students see themselves in the literature they have studied, and students see themselves in the history that’s being studied.”

Students in a multicultural classroom feel valued and included in the learning process when they are heard. John explained that the role of a teacher becomes crucial to ensure that no one is excluded: “In a multicultural classroom, we have many different voices, and as teachers we need to make an effort to ensure that all those voices are heard through the texts they use and through dialogues in the class.” Through dialogues and careful selection of teaching materials, lived “experiences and voices of the students are heard and accepted.” For example:

*I look at themes such as justice, injustice, privilege, and oppression, the various forms of oppression in the contexts of the literary works we study. The lived experiences of the students are heard or reflected in the contexts of the literary works taught and studied in the classroom. We talk about these themes in the historical context; I look at different historical perspectives such as the marginalization of different groups in the society at different points.*

John, by making sure that the unheard voices are heard, learned quite many things from students. He said, *“You learn about cultural awareness, you learn about holidays, you learn about their experiences, students are exposed to different languages and different perspectives...they give us different experiences.”* Students bring to the classroom their rich experiences; both teachers and students learn when they are shared in the class: *“Some students share experiences, some have rich experiences...the difficulty of immigration, learning new culture and new language. These experiences are rich, and we learn hearing them.”* To hear these stories, John designed suitable activities which he thought were important to be respectful to one another: *“Activities are important to develop a sense of respect. In terms of being and growing as a good human being, you need to be able listen to other people, and to hear their perspectives”*. John said that students usually opened up themselves when they worked in the groups, and shared their perspective more freely on a topic with the group members.

### 6.3: Vignette 6 Sally: They are Angels that Come from another Realm.

The Vignette presented in this section is composed from the transcripts of the oral and written interviews conducted in the month of December 2016. This Vignette describes Sally's experience of working as a teacher in Ontario school classrooms. It does this by detailing Sally's most important moments of working with students of different ages and grades. The Vignette illustrates Sally's experience of working as an arts teacher, as a yoga teacher, and as a drama teacher.

The Vignette then relates to Sally's perception of character and character development, her understanding of curriculum-as-plan, and her perspective to the importance of the hidden curriculum. The Vignette demonstrates Sally's focus on the need for an inclusive and welcoming environment for newly immigrant students. Finally, the vignette offers what we can learn from Sally's perspectives on traditions.

**My entire career has been in education.** Sally is an arts-educator with a long working experience in Ontario public schools. She has worked with diverse groups of students across many fields: *"I am an arts-educator. I have worked for school boards, in a diversity of settings, art forms, and curricula, as well as numerous arts organizations: national, provincial and regional."* Sally has a Bachelor of Education degree and is registered with the Ontario College of Teachers in the Primary Junior Division. Through her extensive experience, Sally has worked:

*with all ages of learners from preschool to seniors. I have shared storytelling with Early Childhood Educators, drama with youth diagnosed with psychoses, perspective drawing with brain injury survivors, yoga with fit and not-so-fit adults, concrete poetry with seniors with dementia, and collaborative drama with thousands of grade school students.*

Sally applied an arts-based approach while delivering core curriculum subjects. Her work focused on helping people experience, and gain, wellness: *“most of my work has centered around art for wellness: for personal development.”*

**Character is concerned with personal wellness.** Sally saw connections between personal wellness with character development. She worked on a program connected to character development for ten years. The program was known as the *“circle of wellness, and that was through the Thunder Bay children center foundation.”* The idea of this program was to increase the awareness of personal wellness, as issues of wellness can occur at any age: *“A lot of mental health issues do arise in high school [as a result] many school boards now have a full-time mental health worker.”*

Sally has worked with different professionals, including social workers, mental health workers, artists, and educators. The focus of their work was always on personal development, which for Sally *“is character development.”* In all this work, the emphasis was on the overall development of students: *“We’ve looked at things, like holistic wellness, and kids get time to discuss what that means. We’ve looked at different aspects such as mindfulness, stress reduction, and what it means to be in a community.”*

Sally considered the classroom as a community, and said that teachers have to observe their students, interact with them, and to find out what they need. As an example, she worked in one class where the developmental service worker *“was so attuned to students’ individual needs.”* In Sally’s opinion, the performance of development service worker was effective because:

*She held every student responsible, didn’t matter what your situation was, whether you had recently immigrated, neurological condition, Individual Education Plan (a learning*

*program specific to a student). She held every single student accountable and responsible. They had to be a respectful member of classroom community, and their projects always focused on that. I was so impressed at the things we were able to do.*

For Sally, what was done in the classroom was a step to character development; she found no distinction between character development and personal development.

*To me, all these things are character development, they are personal development. When I think of character, as a writer, you write characters. A character is a person and all those persons have character. So therefore, to me character development is the same thing as personal development.*

**They bring innocence and a sense of humility.** Sally related her understanding of personal wellness and personal development to her working experiences with newly immigrated students: *“I always really like working with new immigrant [students].”* Sally said that it was important to notice how these students looked, and what they brought to the class in their first few weeks: *“It’s like they are angels that come from another realm; they come to this realm; and, they bring this innocence with them.”* Sally read the situation, closely observed these kids, and found meanings in their innocence:

*I think it’s because they are children, and so, through their innocence, they bring this sense of unknown, they don’t know what this realm is about, and they are very open to it, and they also, through their innocence, reflect goodness, a sense of this is just how I understand things. That can bring a sense of humility, and a reference to a situation.*

While working with students in classrooms over the years, Sally has come across several such situations. She narrated two situations and described her experience of meeting and working with immigrant students in the classrooms. The first situation:

*I was in a classroom. There was a student who had been found to have never been to school...The child was so innocent and, yet she wasn't suspicious at all. She didn't know anything of what was going on. She was in grade 5. She didn't even know her alphabet. So, it was really important to respond to her accepting who she was holistically, and accepting the gifts that she brought...That was a very touching experience. I saw her recently, now some years later, and it's interesting to see how she has adapted to being in Canada, because she's been here for number of years living with her grandfather.*

Sally presented the second situation in which there were new South Asian students in the classroom. For Sally, it was an opportunity to meet, interact, and work with them. Sally acknowledged her learning from what they modeled in the class:

*There were kids who were South Asians, I had an opportunity to work with more than one person from that family, I guess they just happened to be in different class as I was in. In this situation, I was really struck by their voice. They would come to school, and they took everything very seriously. They were very quiet because they were still figuring out language. But it was like their eyes were 10 times bigger than anybody else's in the classroom. They were so still, big eyed, and so observant of everything that went on. I think that one thing they really modeled to the whole class was stillness. But the other thing they really modeled was extreme politeness.*

Sally believed that a reciprocal learning takes place when there are students from different cultural backgrounds. She said that new immigrant students bring with them their experiences. The other students in the class can learn from the new comers. At the same time, these new comers can also learn to be open and confident by having company with other students: *“they were bringing something that the other students could learn from, and it was important for the other students to be open to them, and to learn from each other.”*

Sally believed that openness and trust between students and teachers can help in creating a friendly and inclusive environment where new immigrant students feel comfortable to participate in classroom activities. Sally had a student in grade five who was illiterate, and *“What this student needed was help and trust, from teachers and friends in the classroom.”* For Sally, teacher’s role in creating a friendly environment and engaging each student in a learning activity is important:

*It was important for somebody to make her feel like literacy isn’t just what you decode. It’s what you think, and to have somebody who was willing to say you can do this. ‘Tell me your ideas. I’m going to help you write them down.’ And the written literacy will develop, but what’s most important here is that you can engage.*

Sally was kind and supportive to the new immigrant students, and respectful to their parents: *“I loved these kids, and their family was so nice.”* Sally told that building connections between school and families is important: *“When we did our presentation, the mom took a day off work, so she could see what the kids have done, which was very impressive.”* For Sally, the role of the teacher is important in making these students feel at home when they are in school.



Sally insisted on making students feel comfortable; and giving them a sense of being honoured, and respected in the situations they were in: *“I think that the main thing they needed was respect, and honouring for who they are, and what gifts they bring.”* Sally said that those new students were hardworking, attentive to the class, had faith and trust in their teachers; and everything that the teachers said was important for them:

*They were really hardworking kids, and they didn't have problem with other students giving them respect. Other students didn't want to put as much effort as they did. It was just things like math; they took every single thing you did in school as something that was important.*

As teachers, it is *“important to think where these kids are coming from, and what they have experienced in their lives. They come from one particular cultural background, and when they go to school, the school becomes another culture for them.”* Sally believed that their lived experiences affect their attitudes and behaviours. So, it was important to figure out who they were, and what they needed in their new school environment. For Sally, teachers need to have *“empathy and compassion”* for these students; teachers' support, care, and compassion bring students and teachers closer. Openness and helpfulness can connect one student with others. In Sally's perception, sports and class activities are strong connective forces between students:

*I noticed that a lot of connections were made through exposure of a big thing. So, kids who could share an activity together that would be really big. So, you notice kids often talk about activities; they join together like soccer or hockey. If someone came in and they were able to join those sports, that was obviously, for the boys, a big bonding opportunity.*

Regarding girls, Sally has noticed some situations that bring the girls closer to talk with one another. She states:

*I noticed some situations where, I know, there's an Indian dance. There's a whole Indian culture here in town. There's a group that does Indian dancing, and some of the kids, I've seen some kids I work with are in those groups. I have seen kids in class who aren't in the same dance group talking about their different dance forms.*

In her observation in the classroom, Sally has noticed how girls share their experiences of dancing and body moves: *"there's one girl, who was in the Indian dance group. She was showing some dance moves, and these other girls, who were in other dance groups, they would have been in ballet or jazz, were finding that really cool. They were copying those moves."* Like sports, cultural performances are important tools to connect people.

In Sally's classroom experiences, students usually do not concern about issues of their cultures and differences: *"I generally found kids didn't have cultural issues with other kids, and I didn't actually hear it in the class."* Sally identified that students like to talk most of the times with one another when they are at leisure or in the class. She said that boys mostly liked to have conversations about sports, and girls about dance, and jewellery. These informal conversations made a *"part of the hidden curriculum."*

**Students working and learning together.** Sally explained that the most important object of any curriculum is to ensure that the students in a class are working and learning together. Curriculum-as-plan gives directions to teachers; it has a set of rules for the teachers to follow, and it states a set of objectives:

*Curriculum-as-plan to me is what is set out as being curriculum. So, for example, when I worked in schools, especially when I would do another program called learning through the arts, we were very much directed by the curriculum document... I had to demonstrate in the curriculum document what I was connecting to. That was really important.*

Sally was aware that teachers sometimes: “*would do very diverse things in the class, but it has to be grounded in the curriculum-as-plan. ... [which is] almost like the rule book, where you had to show that you were following the rules.*” Sally held that the curriculum document is important as it serves as a guide for teachers, however, at times, the document can end up forcing the teacher to be:

*a contortionist, because you knew that you really wanted to work on X but the X isn't part of the curriculum, so you had to go from X to Y. In one way, that would often come up in the art program. What we were working on is kids being able to get along in the classroom together. That would often be an unstated agenda. We're going to be working on a social science unit. Through this art program, one thing that's really important is the kids working together.*

For this teacher, there is a deeper concern about the curriculum, and that is an “*issue with the idea [of curriculum-as-plan] sometimes that everything in the curriculum has to be objectivised, because not everything can be.*” For Sally, a living classroom is a dynamic place where many different, yet meaningful, things can take place simultaneously:

*So, maybe at least the idea of hidden curriculum acknowledges that we can't create an objective, and a multiple-choice question and answer for everything we do in the*

*curriculum. There's a lot of what we do in the curriculum, that has to do with the meaning of life, and the meaning of life is myself and other people in this world.*

For Sally, the hidden curriculum includes the lived experiences of both students and teachers, and she expected those experiences to be meaningful in educational contexts:

*A meaningful lived experience is what we would expect from education. The classroom is a community and that all those individuals are bringing in to the classroom, their previous lived experiences, their concurrent lived experiences; and the classroom itself is lived experience.*

Things observed, things experienced, and things done in the school are valuable. School life is important for students where they meet and interact with others, take part in events, and learn from each other:

*I think sometimes the school is part of this like a box, but it is part of life. Kids spend a lot of time in school, it's a very important part of life and so if we think of curriculum just as events arising, then the issue becomes 'oh what are we bringing into this event? What's happening in this event? What's emerging from this event?'*

Sally said that there are certain events and occasions that connect people. Sports, music, conversations, cultural performances, group activities are signifiers of people moving closer together in community: *"Sometimes it's the teacher that needs to do the moving."* As an arts educator, she has often noticed how arts connect people: *"I see that happening all the time. That's probably because when I worked, I usually worked in arts integrated situation. We're working on things that are distancing. We're working on things that demand connection."* In

Sally's experience, a work of art generates multiple perspectives: *"In art, we are always thinking about things like perspectives, and seeing different perspectives encourages connections."*

**It's impossible not to think beyond the curriculum.** Sally reinforced that the curriculum is a guide; it prescribes rules to follow. Teachers get guided by the curriculum, and follow these rules, but *"It's impossible not to think beyond the curriculum."* She was also a yoga teacher, and related her idea of going beyond the curriculum to her teaching of yoga. Sally narrated an event in which she describes how she went beyond the curriculum.

*We were specifically doing yoga, because I'm also a yoga instructor. There was one project that I did that was very successful years ago. I actually saw a teacher recently in the community, and she said, 'You know that program you did was fabulous.' Anyways, we were working with yoga but what I did was call it east-meets-west yoga. The interesting thing is that the east part was your [Laxmi's] realm of the world. It's something that I've appropriated, and that I've learned from. The west was the First Nations. So, both of them are appropriations from me.*

Sally connected the east with the west by calling it 'east-meets-west.' She taught yoga in the classroom where *"over half the kids were First Nations."* Sally shared an experience of teaching yoga to her students:

*I gave all the yoga poses names in Anishinaabe. So, we had madea, bear, eagle, and so on. I had a boy in the class who would look at me. He kind of nodded, and he would smile when I was saying the names. I'm like 'Okay I'm not saying this properly right?' and he smiled, so I said, 'Okay you need to come and stand beside me. So, I will say it and you'll translate it into how to say it quickly and then we'll all repeat from you.' That was a*

*bridge. He hadn't done yoga before. He definitely knew all the names of those animals in Ojibwe. He would approve my pronunciation, but he has also gotten engaged in it.*

**Character is often part of hidden curriculum.** Sally believed that there are many things hidden in the process of teaching and learning yoga. She considered that teaching yoga is not only an act of teaching, but also an informal learning opportunity for both the teacher and students. For Sally, many of such informal learning go beyond the curriculum-as-plan and contribute to character building. She stated: *“As an educator, my experience is that character is often part of the hidden curriculum.”* She was constantly questioning what character is: *“What is character? Is it a quality, part of being, or an action, a doing?”* Then, she addressed these questions:

*It seems to me that character is often thought of in both ways. It's the features or qualities of a person, the uniqueness of an individual; one can be of good character, or be a strong character, or be a weak character.*

Sally said that a person's actions reflect one's character: *“To be of 'good character' is to have acted in condoned and appreciated ways. To be a strong character is to have acted firmly and decisively. To be a weak character is to not make choices for oneself.”*

Sally perceived character in relation to quality that a person possesses; she said that: *“character is like air and water quality: we expect it to be good, and we only think about it when it ain't.”* To her, what counts is how a person's actions go along with his, or her, personality traits: *“Character is both the features of a personality as well as the motivated actions of a person.”* The actions are taken to be good when they: *“are conducive to group harmony and to respect of others.”* For this, Sally saw a need of providing an inclusive situation and creating a welcoming environment. Identifying a correlation between language and actions, Sally said that

language plays an important role in building trust. She insisted on using the inclusive language, and states: “*A socially desired characteristic for example would be to use inclusive language and not insulting language or prejudice language.*” Language becomes lively when it acts:

*Language can often in itself be an action. In terms of other actions, what [students] would be looking for in a school situation was an actual action, the inclusivity. Are students actually welcoming other students into groups? Are we doing things like playing together, sharing things, creating situations like that?*

Sally linked these inclusive and welcoming situations to character development. To her, character development means: “*the inculcation and acquisition of socially desired personality characteristics and actions ... does not take a straight course ... because the expectation and judgment of what is ‘good’ depends on the social context.*”

Meanings of human actions and expressions are contextual. Sally said that socio-cultural and religious contexts should be taken into account, while thinking of what character means:

*The definitions of character, goodness of character, and goodness itself, are very contextual. They have strong cultural and religious connections. There are differences between these contextual factors, yet, what we all want from our students is the reflection of acceptable social actions and behaviours, because we want the students to learn good character.*

Sally referred to the Ministry’s mandatory character development document, and said:

*One thing I notice is that the Ministry has put out some pretty strong statements regarding what character is and how it should be developed. The Ministry strongly links*

*good character to an issue of equality amongst cultural groups and actions of respecting diversity.*

Sally saw the need to review this statement: *“The Ministry emphasizes that character development is not indoctrination, but the development of critical thinking and empathy [however] “the school boards are caught in a catch between being secular and showing respect for other cultures.”* With this perspective in mind, Sally suggested that:

*We need to take out the pretense of secular neutrality and embrace not just multiculturalism but also “multi-spiritualism” ... multi-culturalism pierces the veneer of secular neutrality, and multi-spiritualism is the next place that our school system might go in terms of inclusivity.*

*We’re already very concerned about being respectful of different gender orientation, and being respectful of different ethnic orientation. We’re starting to also realize that cultures and traditions are often inevitably associated with our religion or spiritual tradition.*

*Even though we’re a secular society, we can’t ignore that that’s an essential component of life and of culture for most people.*

Sally focused on valuing the traditions of diverse cultures, and learning to work and interact with them: *“I think that it’s a value to be aware of that and to accept ...to figure out how to work with that, to interact with that, and to dialogue with that.”* Sally realized that human cultures carry components of spiritualism: The culture has a spiritual focus...the hub of culture is a spiritual focus to life. So, we have to have connections between being respectful, and being in a dialogue with different traditions. Sally considered that a meaningful communication resides



both in curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived, and is an important way to connect with others from different cultures.

**Respect for self and other.** Communications across cultures and traditions are important to promote our respect for self and others. Sally related this to character development, and said: *“Character development should be looked at more widely, as respect for self and other.”* Sally reflected on her teachings of yoga and wellness, and admitted that she: *“was able to encourage character development in terms of respect for self and other in some of my arts programming.”* Sally related the learning of good character to respect for self and others, which in turn strongly connects with the goal of education:

*The purpose of education is that we grow up to feel like we’re worthwhile a meaningful people. We live in a community where other people are worthwhile and meaningful. We love other people, and we are in turn loved and lovable. If we think of that as the purpose of education, then to me, I would like to see that as character education.*

For Sally, character education is about knowing and doing the good; learning the good comes from doing the good, because: *“We learn how to live by living. We teach good character by providing opportunities where students can act, develop, and show good character.”* Students learn to value, and are valued, while engaging in cultural traditions. Sally believed that children’s participation in cultural tradition helps them acquire character attributes:

*When my kids were growing up, they would always have a big Christmas dinner at the school. They called it a holiday dinner or Christmas feast. The idea was that everybody would be in communion. Everybody would sit in the gym at a table, and they were all eating a meal, not just a snack but a whole meal. So, it required a lot of parents, teachers*

*worked together. We come back to the fundamental that we all ate, we all had to eat. So, it was something very special in creating a meal that many people were providing what was required, and that we were all eating the same food.*

Sally found that situation culturally significant and meaningful, as it was:

*... my tradition, and like a sacramental thing, we could all get together ... in the last week before school, the school would organize this sit-down meal that everybody, all the students would sit down and eat. So, they would have a turkey, potato, gravy, traditional meal.*

Through this event, Sally saw the opportunities for learning as everyone felt connected with others:

*In that situation, I think that the students are learning that I am not just a single person here, I'm part of a network; I have a place within this network. The participant in such a traditional event develops a sense that 'I am valued enough; somebody is willing to give me this meal. I'm also part of this network.'*

This sense of belongingness gives more meaning to life: *"And that's how life works; that we interact with each other; and that we get meaning from the situation."* For Sally, experiences like these were so important: *"[teachers] are not going to give [students] marks on the EQAO testing, but they are certainly going to help [them] realize that 'hey we're all in this together'".* Sally held that these were the valuable learning experiences adults and students gained through cultural expressions.

In this chapter, I presented the teacher participants' experience of working on multi-cultural classes, and their perceptions of character development through a series of Vignettes.

The chapter to follow makes an analysis of these Vignettes.

## Chapter 7: Analysis of Teacher Vignettes

This chapter makes an analysis of the Teacher Vignettes 4, 5 and 6, applying the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) strategy (Smith and Osborn, 2003). This strategy is concerned with unfolding the essence of the participants' experiences in the real world, and their perceptions of an event or a concept. Keeping this in mind, I uncover the meanings of the interviews held with the participants. The themes emerged in these Vignettes are seen, and interrogated within the framework of the 'in-between,' as per the discussion made in Chapter 3. As I discussed at the beginning of Chapter 6, the themes that are described here for the teachers are reflective of the themes described for the students. This is an important point, as these shared perspectives allow both teachers and students to negotiate their lived experiences in the 'in-between.' It certainly does not exclude other themes that were important to the teachers.

While examining the foregoing Vignettes of teachers, it is investigated that the role of teachers in a multi-cultural classroom is central to character development. Their role includes creating inclusive classroom climate, building trust and relationship, taking care and providing support, making the subject matter relevant to students, making students feel valued and respected, and encourage every student to participate in a learning process. This implicates that teachers in multi-cultural classrooms have responsibilities to become sensitive enough to various cultural representations. The narratives in the Vignettes also show the interconnectedness between the planned curriculum and the lived curriculum.

Based on the participants' experiences as teachers, and their perceptions of character and character development, five themes emerged from the analysis of Teacher Vignettes. They include the themes of transition, negotiation, support and care, connection, and perception. As discussed in Chapter 5 (see page 143-144), the themes of transition, negotiation, and connection

relate to character development, and the analyses of these themes have been made in the light of dwelling in the ‘in-between.’ In the section below, each of these themes is described and analysed with supporting details from the Vignettes.

### **7.1: Theme of Transition**

The theme of transition is implied in Teacher Vignettes, as it is demonstrated that the role of teachers is crucial to help students overcome the transition. Transition is seen to be a process of integration when people move to live in new locations. In Chapter 5, it has been explored and analysed that new immigrant students live in educational, geographical, and linguistic transitions. Teacher-student connections are considered to be important to help students overcome the transition. Over the transitional period, it is shown that teachers help and support to migrated students in their new school is important. The role of teachers, as described in Laura, John, and Sally’s, Vignettes, is both supportive and caring, which is considered to be important to help newcomers transition to new environment. Thus, the implied theme of transition in this section is seen and analysed in relation to teachers’ help to pupils in handling the transition.

**Laura.** It is described in Vignette 4 that working in a culturally diverse class requires openness. Working with diverse students is considered to be an opportunity to learn about who they are, where they come from, what they bring to the class. The analysis of the Vignette showed that “Students come to the class with their cultures, stories, and lived experiences.” Laura’s narrative considered everything that a student brought to the class was valuable, and acknowledged that the openness of teachers was important to make initial contact with their students: “When I was in the Autism Class, and Kindergarten class, my classes were very diverse as I was in a diverse community. It was most important to me to be open to learn about my students’ cultures and experiences.” This narrative indicates the significance of a welcoming role

of teachers for students who are different from them both linguistically and culturally. The point is that a friendly and welcoming role of a teacher becomes supportive to overcome the transition.

Openness brings people closer, and closeness makes people share their stories with one another. Sharing of information by teachers is seen as another important way to help students transition. In Laura's Vignette, it is stated "that students and teachers learn from one another: *'The thing that I love the most in teaching is that I love learning from my students.'*" Implied in this expression is the value that Laura gives to students. Her acknowledgement of learning from students suggests that an important role of teachers is to make every student feel valued in the class: "*'The times when I learned from students on a regular basis keep me driven.'*" Laura lets the students know what she has learned from them, which she thinks *'helps students feel valued'*" (Vignette 4). A sense of being valued in the class is believed to encourage students to engage in class activities, open themselves to the class, and take their turn and have their say. This engagement makes them *"know that what they have to say is important."* The focal point implied in this expression is to ease a student's transitional experience.

In Laura's Vignette, inclusivity and a sense of comfort in the classroom are demonstrated to be important helping tools to transition. It has been explained in Student Vignettes that moving involves emotional experience caused by new things, new surroundings, and new people. This emotional experience causes a state of uncertainty, especially in those students who are entering into a new school. This leads to an argument that the caring role of both administrative staff, and teachers is essential to make new students feel at home, when they are within the school premises. Laura's focus on setting "A safe and inclusive classroom climate," where "All students can share what they come with more comfortably" entails another notable

step to help students overcome the transitional complexity. In Laura's expression, it is affirmed that safe and inclusive classrooms are where one can share with, and take care of others:

*I think it is the starting point to everything, because that's what students are coming into the classroom with. Recognizing that gives them chances to feel safe and comfortable sharing their experiences, and recognizing that everyone has different experience, and that's beautiful. I think you have to set the climate first in the classroom so that students feel safe to use their experience, and use what is in their backpack to benefit their learning.*

This excerpt depicts the need for creating a student friendly environment, reveals the importance of lived experiences, and conveys a message that these experiences be valued. For doing this, it is explicated that the role of teacher is valuable.

It is implied in the discussion that transition is a crucial time. During transition, a student needs a mentoring relationship from teachers. This can be challenging for teachers, especially when there is a student who is with different linguistic and cultural experiences. Transition becomes more challenging for such a student. To help the student overcome the transition, teachers' careful and sensitive handling is considered to be very necessary:

*Students who are in a situation where they are the only students in the class that have different experiences from the rest of the class, how do we make them feel that their experiences are valuable and important without making them feel different?*

Laura's question in the expression leads to an analogy that teachers have a huge role to play in order to value the experiences of each student. Teachers are understood to be those figures, who can "make students aware of who they are and what they can do" (Vignette 4).

In Vignette 4, it is accounted for that teachers are required to help “students become aware of their experiences, their roles, and their responsibilities in the class.” This suggests that their “being in the class” is important for the entire class. The description in the Vignette implies that each student is different from all the others in terms of learning needs, and “identifying [students’] different learning needs” is an important task in the part of a teacher. Laura’s experience tells us that different students have their different ways of learning. Also, the learning need of one student can differ from others. It is suggested that teachers should recognize the family background of every student and identify what they require. Laura recalls her experience and narrates:

*I had some students that came from some tough situations at home, and that was in their backpack, and some students had a lot of extra responsibilities that lots of ten years old don’t have, and that was in their backpack. And some students are quite privileged (Vignette 4).*

This narration implicates a commonly felt situation of a newly migrated family. A student from this family undergoes a complex experience. The discussion asserts that the identification of such a situation is crucial in teaching, which is because “A student’s situation determines the kind of support to be provided” (Vignette 4). In Laura’s narration, it is clearly admitted that teachers are positioned to hold an important task to touch the lives of those in transition and provide help as needed.

**John.** The discussions made in Vignette 5 imply the theme of transition that resounds with the discussion in Laura’s. John’s narratives focus on dialogues, interactions, group works, relevance of teaching materials, readiness to hear stories of students, safe, inclusive, and



welcoming school climate, and teachers' awareness of students' background. In the Vignette, teachers' role is considered to be central in creating the safe and welcoming environment, designing and running activities, interacting with students and knowing about their background, and ensuring inclusivity for everyone's comfort.

In John's Vignette, it is affirmed "that students need a good classroom climate to do well in their performance." This affirmation is said to take place "*in a classroom environment that is warm, that is welcoming, that is safe-- where students feel safe in the sense that they can express their opinions freely, without being criticized or devalued*" (Vignette 5). This argument leads to make an analogy that many students in a culturally diverse class feel confused, and remain hesitant to open up. They might think of a situation in which they feel scared of being unattended, and criticized in the class. It is believed that alleviation of fear from the side of teachers is an important step to encourage these students to overcome the transition. This can happen only if teachers ensure, as discussed in John's expression, to create safe and welcoming environment.

The school where John works is described to run grades from nine to twelve. The neighbouring elementary schools are referred to be the sources of students. This affluence is recognized in John's description: "*we draw students from these neighbourhoods, the areas that are economically advantaged. We have our elementary feeder schools in the area*" (Vignette 5). This suggests that students, who are entering the high school after completing their elementary level, undergo transitions, and the role of teachers to help students overcome the transition is considered to be central. The theme of transition is also evident as John is described to have "noticed the increasingly diverse nature of his school over the past ten years."

The vignette details that new policies in John's school have been developed in order "to attract students from even more diverse backgrounds" over the years:

*In my ten years working in the school, the school has become more culturally diverse. It was predominantly a white school with European ancestry, but now it is growing as a multicultural school. Students come from many different backgrounds, there is a large population of students from South East Asian background; the school is also attracting newly arrived students from China.*

This excerpt clearly indicates the enrolment of new students from a variety of linguistic and cultural background. This implies that these students undergo an experience of geographical, linguistic, educational, and cultural transitions. All forms of transitions are believed to offer life changing experiences. This implication of transition, experienced by newly arrived students, aligns with those discussed and analysed in Student Vignettes under Chapters 4 and 5.

It is suggested in John's Vignette that the entire school family need to help the recruited students to get through the integrative process. The reason is that transitions require adjustments and accommodations. These are evident in John's expression: "*I have a class with a few immigrant students who newly arrived to Canada two months ago. A couple of students in my class are quiet, you talk with them but still very shy*" (Vignette 5). Hence, an important objective "of the school and its teachers is to accommodate and support these students" (Vignette 5).

Like Anil in Vignette 1, many Asian immigrant students struggle with literacy; they undergo an experience of transitions in language and culture. In this situation, teachers teaching English are shown to "*develop and incorporate different literacy strategies and use them to help*

*students who speak English as a second language”* (Vignette 5). As an experienced English teacher, John is shown to be concerned with accommodating culture-friendly materials:

*For example, while working on vocabulary exercises, I develop and give them a key list of vocabulary, and we examine the ways to use them in various contexts. This approach also involves giving them the passage and exploring with them what these key words mean. I also try to bring their cultures into the classroom. I also apply these very same strategies to help English speaking students who are struggling with literacy.*

It is acknowledged in John’s strategy that teachers’ involvement in transition is crucial to help students open up, and enrich their confidence in learning. Designing learner-friendly materials, engaging shy students in group conversations, conducting group works, and making them feel included in the class are recognized to be important strategies:

*It is very important that students feel included in the classroom. You need to set up activities where everyone is collaborating, where everyone has an opportunity to speak, and where opportunities for speaking are given, whether in smaller and larger groups, to those voices that are often silent in the classroom. Everyone is encouraged to contribute to the group activity.*

The crux in the excerpt lies in teachers’ role and responsibility to decide, and implement plans that work for all students. The discussion in the Vignette suggests that “teachers need to be open, friendly, and easily approachable. Students feel more comfortable to approach such teachers.” Implied in the argument is that open and friendly teachers encourage students to move through complexities, and navigate their transitional experiences.

**Sally.** In course of exploring Sally's experiences as discussed in Vignette 6, the theme of transition is evident in the support and care she provides to students. It is exhibited that helping students to achieve 'personal wellness' is what Sally strives for as an educator. The Vignette "relates her understanding of personal wellness and personal development to her working experiences with newly immigrated students: *'I always really like working with new immigrant [students].'*" This refers to a curiosity about "how these students look, and what they bring to the class in their first few weeks" (Vignette 6). An important characteristic hidden in the part of new students is the transition they are experiencing in their new school.

Sally's affirmation that these new immigrant students "*Are angels that come from another realm; they come to this realm; and, they bring this innocence with them,*" suggests that transition is a critical time of change that students experience. Signs of uncertainties and innocence in students are usually noticed during transitions. The reason is, as noted in the Vignette, is:

*because they are children, and so, through their innocence, they bring this sense of unknown, they don't know what this realm is about, and they are very open to it, and they also, through their innocence, reflect goodness, a sense of this is just how I understand things. That can bring a sense of humility, and a reference to a situation (Vignette 6).*

Ignorance about the realm on the one hand, and openness to know it on the other, are displayed in this extract. It is clearly indicated that these students are in need of care, empathy, and compassion, from teachers. This argument is very much in the line of John's argument discussed in Vignette 5.

It is described in the Vignette that teachers come across different situations in course of teaching students from diverse background. Teachers are suggested to read the situations, acknowledge the diversity, and help students meet their expectations. The Vignette illustrates a situation narrated by Sally:

*I was in a classroom. There was a student who had been found to have never been to school...The child was so innocent and yet she wasn't suspicious at all. She didn't know anything of what was going on. She was in grade 5. She didn't even know her alphabet. So, it was really important to respond to her accepting who she was holistically, and accepting the gifts that she brought...That was a very touching experience.*

This narration depicts Sally's in depth reading of the child's situation. The child is shown to be unfamiliar to the things happening around. This suggests that students in transition are left in an ambiguous situation.

In Sally's narrative, it is shown that transition causes a state of both uncertainty and creativity. Uncertainty is felt when moving in the transition, and creativity is seen while moving out of it. This is because a sense of living in an uncertain situation stirs one's mind, makes an individual think, and drives the person forward to find a way out. Such a state is implied in the narratives of the student participants. To help students move out of the transition, teachers are supposed to approach them, know their challenges, and assist them accordingly. It is believed "that openness and trust between students and teachers can help" navigate the transition. This conviction is shown to be well grounded in an illustration that is stated in the Vignette: "Sally had a student in grade five who was illiterate, and *"What this student needed was help and trust, from teachers and friends in the classroom"*" (Vignette 6). The point to be considered is that

trust, help, care, and support are valuable devices to ease the transition. These devices are demonstrated to be vital in all the Vignettes.

Friendly and inclusive environment are said to be essential for successful transitions. Students in transitions are acknowledged to be hard working, and an inclusive classroom is supposed to provide working environment. Reflecting on the working culture of immigrant students, Sally notes:

*They were really hardworking kids, and they didn't have problem with other students giving them respect. Other students didn't want to put as much effort as they did. It was just things like math; they took every single thing you did in school as something that was important.*

A commitment to work is shown in the narrative. Hardworking and dedication to work are presented to be essential qualities to respond the transitional change. Responses to the transition are believed to become more effective when students are given “A sense of being honoured, and respected in the situations they are in: *I think that the main thing they needed was respect, and honouring for who they are, and what gifts they bring*” (Vignette 6). It is evident in this expression that respect to, and acceptance of, what students offer to the class, are suggested to be taken into consideration.

## **7.2: Theme of Negotiation**

Virtues of respect and acceptance are explicated to make a significant impact on making negotiation. The theme of negotiation is seen and analysed in Teacher Vignettes in the light of recognition to, acknowledgement of, and respect for the differences that exist between and among people. A negotiation between students and teacher is shown to be essential in the

narratives of teachers. Negotiations in a culturally diverse class involve mutual understanding, values of experiences, and reciprocal respect. These are recognized and described in the Vignettes of Sally, John and Laura.

**Laura.** The theme of negotiation is both evident and implied in Laura's Vignette. Acceptance of differences is an indication of flexibility that leads to negotiation. This is clearly demonstrated in Laura's articulation: "*we are trying to create citizens that are accepting the people with different experiences. It is to let them understand that everyone has right, everyone has different experiences, and everyone's experience is valued.*" In this expression, the individuality of an individual is taken into consideration. It denotes a strong implication of recognition and acknowledgement of differences.

In a multi-cultural classroom, negotiation is counted as an important skill of teachers. Problems in both personal and professional life require negotiations. Laura's Vignette suggests teachers to be aware of their professional problems, which generally take place in the class: "*sometimes teachers have to grapple with their own experiences of being, for example, whatever their privileges, and how that impacts the way they teach the class*" (Vignette 4). A clear sign of negotiation is implied in the Vignette when it states, "it is okay to have problems, even to make mistakes; what counts is how properly one addresses the problems, and how well one reflects and learns from the mistakes." This ideal illuminates that negotiations within professional life, and between others, both are important in teaching.

There is an indication of the need of negotiation, when the importance of inclusivity is brought to the light in the Vignette. It is asserted that "there are differences between students, between schools, between school boards, and between classroom settings," Taking these

differences into account, it can be claimed that students feel safe to have their differences valued in an inclusive classroom setting: “Inclusive classrooms are not only *‘for students with exceptionalities, but also for students who may be marginalized for other reasons, race, culture, and gender’*” (Vignette 4). What is important in inclusivity is the sense of comfort and belongingness it gives to students in transition.

It is shown in Vignette 4 that “teachers can make a difference in lives of several students; teachers can present themselves as examples.” This leads to an analysis that everything that the teachers say and do becomes a guideline for many students. Students in transition benefit from teachers’ care and support to them. Transitioning becomes less complicated when teachers “provide their students all possible learning opportunities to help them excel in their performance” (Vignette 4). The need for negotiation is implied in both teachers’ doings and students’ learning. It is demonstrated in the Vignette “that students usually trust their teachers and listen to them.” Listening is considered as an act of becoming both respectful and negotiable to what others say.

The theme of negotiation is implicated in Laura’s understanding of curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived, about which I have discussed in Chapter 2. Her perception of curriculum, in fact, is shown to capture the crux of the theme of negotiation. It is discussed in Laura’s Vignette that not all teaching and learning activities necessarily fall into the curriculum as plan. Teachers introduce learning opportunities in the classroom, and many of them “might fall outside the curriculum-as-plan.” Learning activities based on learners’ lived experiences reside within the lived curriculum. This suggests that teaching is an act of negotiation between these two curricula.



Curriculum-as-plan is understood as “A tool, a guideline, and a very useful recourse: *‘It’s a guideline, and should be used as a guideline... an important resource. It gives a lot of information’*” (Vignette 4). The Vignette illustrates an activity that was jointly conducted by Laura and her friend, who was working in a public school that had a huge diversity. The activity was called the pen pals:

*I did not have that much diversity in the classroom. A good friend of mine teaches in Peel. The demographic of her class was very different than mine was. So, we did pen pals where they could learn about each other.*

In this activity, the focus was on “writing and exchanging letters” (Vignette 4). Laura’s students, who were from Catholic school, had curiosity “About their pen pals’ names,” which was because “*the names were different and [Laura’s) students did not understand them.*” Instead of addressing their curiosity, Laura encouraged her students to correspond with their pen pals and ask what their names stand for:

*Names have meanings. If you are curious about your pan pal’s name, why don’t you ask them what their names mean? It is because they mean something. And you can look at and find out what your name means. What your name means and how that represents you as a person (Vignette 4).*

It is described that the students from the public schools were eager to know about Catholic school. The questions such as “*So you go to a catholic school, what does that mean? How does that look different than a public school? Or what different things do you do? Do you pray?*” were asked in the letters, and “Reading the responses of these questions *‘was something they were able to learn about. That was also a cultural thing that we take granted.’*” Implied in

these questions and their responses include both the engagement and learning. Curriculum in this activity is described to have been employed “*As a tool because [students] were writing letters and that’s a part of the curriculum*” (Vignette 4). However, the content of these informal activities reflects the lived experiences of participants. This indicates an intimacy between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived, and Laura’s position is situated in the ‘in-between’ of these two curriculum worlds, which resonates with Aoki’s (1991) fictional teacher, Miss O’s situatedness, which I have discussed in Chapter 2.

Laura’s Vignettes show that she is guided by the curriculum-as-plan, however, her teaching is driven forward by the curriculum-as-lived: “Students feel valued when they are provided opportunities to share their experiences with the class; through sharing, students know about one another’s culture and background.” Driven by this moral concern, it is evident that her Vignettes relate activities such as the pen pals to both the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived. This leads to a conclusion that the art of negotiation, on the part of teachers, is essential. Negotiations between the planned and lived curricula are essential to incorporate class activities that are relevant to the lives of participating students. This signifies that the act of negotiation positions the teacher in the ‘in-between’ of lived and planned curricula.

**John.** The theme of negotiation is implied in the discussions of John’s Vignette. Negotiations are viewed to be essential when there are culturally diverse people living together. In Ontario, the society is recognized to be “increasingly diverse because of the continuous flow of immigrants from across the globe. This diversity is seen more prominently in the public schools of the Greater Toronto Area” (Vignette 5). It is asserted in the Vignette that John’s school has become increasingly multi-cultural over the last few years, which was once

“predominantly a white school with European ancestry.” The diversity of students in the school suggests “that not all students learn in the same way; they have diverse ways of learning.”

John’s acknowledgement of diverse ways of learning resonates with Laura’s identification of learning needs. This reveals the need of negotiation that teachers have to make while designing and implementing teaching materials. In John’s experience,

*Students also learn the best when the teacher makes an effort to differentiate instruction. Everyone has their own learning style. Individual students have their own strengths. Some are visual learners; some students are tactile learners; while others are verbal learners. It is very necessary that teachers try to cater the lesson to diverse learning styles. Everyone learns in a different way, and teachers need to be aware of how their students learn (Vignette).*

This extract clearly indicates learning transitions since ways of learning is accepted to differ from student to student. This leads to a point that the overcoming of these transitions depends on teachers’ negotiations to identify what works and what not in the class.

The theme of negotiation is seen when the Vignette states, “it is important to change the strategy whenever students do not understand what is being taught” (Vignette 5). It is further reinforced when John states:

*I have to change the strategy of my teaching; one way is to provide differentiated instruction. Students learn in different ways, so I always need to diversify my instructional approaches. It also involves allowing students to review their knowledge in different ways, and giving opportunities to students to express their knowledge in multiple forms, whether through artistic means, or other ways they like.*

Flexibility, implied in the excerpt, is an important sign of negotiation. Freedom of expression, and autonomy of choosing the medium of expression, is also taken into account in the description of John's teaching experience.

John's Vignette allows students to choose the freedom of expression within the classroom context. The excerpt below proves that John is not only caring and supportive, but also negotiable in the context of helping students learn and articulate their learning:

*In my history class, for example, literacy is obviously an important focus for students as they need to be able to record the historical information and convey their knowledge through clearly written forms; however, I also give them opportunities to convey the information in different ways, whether through songs, art work, or the creation of models. In this regard, students can express their understanding through various means and employ their talents in creative ways (Vignette 5).*

John is also shown to be "considerate to those students whose knowledge of English language needs improvement, especially while taking the tests" (Vignette 5). Negotiating the complexity of transition is resonated with John's readiness "to make accommodations for those students who have recently arrived in Canada, and those students who speak English as their second language." This resembles Anil's experience of learning English as Second Language. An indication of negotiation is seen to be evident in the test conducting strategy that informs modifications and accommodations as per a test taker's needs:

*I give the students extra time to work on the assignments, a lot of extra time to complete the tests; I also give them an opportunity to use a dictionary while writing tests. I also modify or change tests and assignments to meet their language level needs (Vignette 5).*

The role of teachers, as described in the excerpt, is believed to be highly effective in building a connection bridge between students and teachers. It is recognized that the focal aspect of teaching is to begin, continue, and end in the successful learning of students.

Students' learning is seen to take place in the negotiation between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived. It is acknowledged that "students from different cultural background see themselves in the chosen materials to a large extent and they can relate their learning with their lived experiences" (Vignette 5). This reveals the importance of stories that each student has lived: "*Students see themselves in the literature they have studied, and students see themselves in the history that's being studied.*" The explication in this expression is the negotiation made between the two curricula.

Regular dialogues and conversations are considered to be decisive tools of negotiations. Communication is taken to be a key means of persuading people in the exchange of ideas. It is implicated "that frequent conversations help students come closer," and connect them stronger with one another. Strong connections are said to be central to make reliable negotiations. Teachers' motivational role is asserted to be influential "*in terms of opening up*" new students, for which teachers are said to make "*An effort to reach out to the shy students*" (Vignette 5). An act of negotiation is implied in the efforts teachers make, and the roles they play to help those in crucial situation.

**Sally.** Getting out of the crucial time requires skills of negotiation, which is demonstrated in the description of Sally's wide range of connection and work experience. Vignette 6 demonstrates "Sally's experience of working as a teacher in Ontario school classrooms. It does this by detailing Sally's most important moments of working with students of different ages and

grades.” This wide experience of working with students from diverse backgrounds implies the theme of negotiation. Resonating with both John and Laura’s Vignette, “the need for an inclusive and welcoming environment for newly immigrant students” is reinforced in Sally’s expressions as well.

It is expounded that each student from a newly immigrated family needs to negotiate their home cultures with the host culture in Ontario public schools. This negotiation between cultures in a multi-cultural classroom community is believed to lead to an environment for “A reciprocal learning” (Vignette 6). It is expressed that “new immigrant students bring with them their experiences,” which they share with others. The other students in the class can learn from the new comers.” Implied in this expression is an ongoing negotiation. Teachers, as guides and facilitators, are anticipated to provide a safe and open environment.

It has been reflected in the discussion that new students during transition are quiet and feel shy to open up. However, their mingling with other students, under the care and support of teachers, is thought to be important. It is acclaimed that “newcomers can learn to be open and confident by having company with other students (Vignette 6). In Sally’s narrative, “*[immigrant students] were bringing something that the other students could learn from, and it was important for the other students to be open to them, and to learn from each other.*” The point to be noted in analyzing this narrative is that negotiation is inevitable in the reciprocity of learning.

Conversations and engagements are depicted to be pivotal for building a trusting relationship that contributes in alleviating fear. Alleviation of fear, during transitional experience, is taken to be an important step to help students in negotiations. Sally notes:

*It was important for somebody to make her feel like literacy isn't just what you decode. It's what you think, and to have somebody who was willing to say you can do this. 'Tell me your ideas. I'm going to help you write them down.' And the written literacy will develop, but what's most important here is that you can engage (Vignette 6).*

Implicated in this note is teachers' caring and motivating role to open up those students who remain quiet in their initial days of schooling.

It is implicit in the Vignette that negotiations become smoother when teachers are respectful and accommodating to what immigrant students bring in the class: *"they were bringing something that the other students could learn from, and it was important for the other students to be open to them, and to learn from each other."* Sally's observations to these students are indicative of helping them get included, in the classroom and share what they come with. Her expression, *"I loved these kids, and their family was so nice"* suggests that teachers can help students feel at home in the class. To have a sense of feeling at home means to be more open to friends and teachers, to be more active to participate in learning, and to be more engaging in class interactions. These together can be considered to unfold the complexity of negotiations.

School life is considered to be a precious time during which students live and experience two or more than two cultures. Many life-enhancing things are believed to happen during schooling. It is stated that "Things observed, things experienced, and things done in the school are valuable. School life is important for students where they meet and interact with others, take part in events, and learn from each other" (Vignette 6). The implication in this statement is that the acceptance of learning from one another's contact and interaction leads to form an integrated

community, where everyone is respected, has a space, and feels protected. Character is believed to foster along with this integrity.

Sally's expression, on dialectical tensions between past and present experiences, is also shown to denote the implied theme of negotiation. All human experiences are accepted to be meaningful whether they are past or present. It is mentioned that:

*A meaningful lived experience is what we would expect from education. The classroom is a community and that all those individuals are bringing in to the classroom, their previous lived experiences, their concurrent lived experiences; and the classroom itself is lived experience.*

This excerpt reveals the importance of the lived life of each student, and the significance of their individual narratives, suggesting that these narratives have valuable implications in a classroom community. This analysis takes to the connection between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived. Teaching and learning is an activity that is primarily guided by the planned curriculum, but not all things that take place in the classroom fall within what the document says. The point of this analysis is that many of the activities that take place in the classroom fall within the space of curriculum-as-lived.

Teachers are asked to work, following the guidelines of the planned curriculum; “however, at times, the document can end up forcing the teacher to be ‘a contortionist, because you knew that you really wanted to work on X but the X isn’t part of the curriculum, so you had to go from X to Y... that would often come up in the art program ’” (Vignette 6). The implication in this argument is the negotiation to be made between the curricula. It is seen that the connection between lived and concurrent experiences takes place when negotiations between the



difference of one's past and present are made. It is evident in Sally's narratives that the role of teachers is important whether it is in terms of making negotiations of what they plan, and what they do in the class, or providing support and care to help students to negotiate the differences they experience in a new learning environment.

### **7.3: Theme of Support and Care**

The narratives in Teacher Vignettes describe the need of teachers' support and care to help students in their overall well-being. The theme of support and care is implied in John's expression on making the subject matter relevant to students, Laura's focus on inclusivity and valuing students' experiences, and Sally's emphasis on getting to each student and listening to their stories. It is demonstrated in teachers' narratives that support and care are a key to students' emotional well-being and educational success.

**Laura.** It is identified in Vignette 4 that Laura is a supportive and caring teacher, who has "An expertise in taking care of, and supporting, students with *'emotional challenges, attention problems, and learning disabilities.'*" Support and care are recognized to be important human values. Teachers with these values are believed to build up trusting relationships with students, which in turn, contribute for students' personal and educational well-being. This suggests that the caring and supportive role of teachers is essential to all students to develop their potential. This is truer when students with multiple challenges of learning are concerned.

The need of support and care between coworkers is also demonstrated to be important in the Vignette. This promotes a culture of sharing and working together as a team. Laura's satisfaction as a teacher is described to have come not only from her dedication to her profession of teaching, but also from a caring and safe working environment. The Vignette states that she

“got a good deal of support from others: *‘I had a lot of support from my colleagues and my administrator.’* In her teaching, Laura’s main concern was the progress of her students, and she always stood for supporting students.” This experience of Laura implies that the concerns and efforts of teachers directly influence the progress of students.

Support and care are concerned with students’ learning needs. It is acknowledged in the Vignette that students in a class “have different experiences and come from different family background, they also have different learning needs” (Vignette 4). Identification of these needs is shown to be a central aspect of teaching. Addressing these needs requires teachers’ commitment and sincerity:

Laura even had to fight sometimes for getting more support, and that was entirely for the sake of students: *“I felt like all I did that one year was fight for more support. And it wasn’t for me, it was for the kids, they needed support”* (Vignette 4).

In the above excerpt, Laura’s commitment to identify each student’s learning needs, and to make these needs available to students, clearly relates to the theme of support and care. The motif implied in the analysis is to enhance the potential of students. It is admitted in Laura’s expression *“that all students should receive what they need. And so, if a student requires additional support or accommodations or modifications to the program, they should receive that”* (Vignette 4). Evident in this expression is an indication that every student deserves a safe and caring learning environment.

Virtues of respect and kindness are implied in this environment. This analysis generates and promotes a belief that the support and care are to be seen as an essential precondition of learning for all in a school. Discussions in Vignette 6 demonstrate that a safe, caring, and

inclusive learning environment should be considered as a goal of education. It is believed that an inclusive environment provides spaces to all students where they can foster an important culture of working and learning together. Based on Laura's lived experiences of working with students from different grades and school, it is clearly stated that:

*the goal of education should be to show how you can make a really good inclusive classroom, show how you have a great classroom culture, show how you have students working together, and supporting each other. I think this should be the goal of education, and it directly relates to character building.*

In this excerpt, character development is taken in connection with support and care. It is important to take into consideration that the goal of education and character development are shown to be interrelated.

Laura's Vignette expounds the centrality of safe and welcoming environment where students are shown to acquire the values of open mindedness, and have a sense of being valued. It is demonstrated that caring and supportive teachers "*create a classroom where there all felt confident, accepted, and important. They should feel important; they should feel that their contribution to their classroom is valuable*" (Vignette 4). This leads to the enhancement of teacher-student relationship that is founded on care and trust.

It is clearly suggested in Laura's stories that care and trust strengthens and promotes human relationships, and these relationships are fundamental to character development. Laura observes "*lots of time that the kids do not feel valuable; they don't feel valued at school.*" This observation entails that the respect for self leads to the respect for others. Supportive and caring teachers ensure their students that they are respected and "*valued at school,*" and communicate

with them stating: *“you are valued just like everyone else because you have the right to be here just like everyone else”* (Vignette 4).

**John.** A sense of equity and equality is discerned in recognizing and valuing students’ learning needs. In John’s Vignette, the theme of support and care is seen and examined in relation to students’ needs and teachers’ efforts to help them meet. It is acknowledged that different students have different learning needs; every student is a special person and has their own ways of learning. Care is evident in this acknowledgement. John’s experience suggests that “teachers must explore how their students “learn the best, and thereby develop and modify their instructional methodology” (Vignette 5). This modification needs to be directed to students’ learning needs. It is accounted for in the Vignette that “students learn the best when they see themselves in the subject matter being taught.” Support and care are noticed when teachers use their “expertise and skills to accommodate every student in the class.”

One way of accommodation is described to *“make the subject matter relevant to”* every student. The theme of support and care is transmitted in John’s strategy of teaching:

*Students need to see the relevance of what they are being taught, and how they can connect with the subject matter and the curriculum on a personal level. If students do not see any relevance and value to what they are being taught, they will be disengaged* (Vignette 5).

This excerpt demonstrates the centrality of students’ engagement in learning. Connection of subject matter with learners’ life is examined to be a requirement of connected learning. This carries on the idea that supportive and caring teachers are concerned with students’ meaningful participation in learning.

The need of support and care is shown to be more essential when new immigrant students' struggles to learn ESL is concerned. Their struggle involves both linguistic and cultural transition. To put in other words, "new migrant students' struggles to gain competence in English language" directly implicates the need of teachers' support and care to help students improve their language skills. In John's narrative, what really counts is how teachers plan, and do the accommodations, following the necessity of every student. For effectively doing it, teachers are anticipated take every possible measure, as John states, "*There are different ways by which I accommodate*" (Vignette 5).

Caring and supportive teachers are shown to be accustomed to flexibility. Confidence and flexibility are explicit in John's expression about how ESL students can be supported: "*I will use different strategies so that they will comprehend the subject matter and improve their English as well.*" This leads to an assertion that teaching, which is based on students' need and preferences, entails both care and support. It is affirmed that "the supportive role of teachers motivates students in bringing them closer, and encourages them in asking for further help" (Vignette 5). This expounds that caring, helpful, supporting, and approachable teachers not only make a difference in lives of students, but also attain a big sense of satisfaction and pleasure in their own life. The excerpt below demonstrates John's pleasure of working as a teacher over the years:

*I enjoy my job as an Ontario public school teacher. I get an immense gratification from the work I do. As a teacher, you make a difference in lives of several students. Many students are appreciative of your teaching and various suggestions you provide them. My experiences of public school teaching have been very positive, being in the classroom and interacting with the students. I am someone who enjoys teaching. In being a teacher, I am very pleased with my profession. I am happy with my job* (Vignette 5).

The excerpt reveals the trusting relationship John had with students. The support and care that he provided to his students are implied. The reason is that students usually remember those who cared them; and teachers become immensely gratified in the success and achievements of students. Care is revealed when teachers identify and reach out to those students who remain quiet in the class. It is narrated in the Vignette that there were students who “*were very shy when it came to asking questions and seeking assistance*” (Vignette 5) in John’s class. Along with the progress of the time, a significant change is noticed in those students because of the support and care they received from teachers:

*they are more forthcoming now, they take more initiative, [and] they are not hesitant to ask for help. That is the change; a connection has been made, and they recognize that they should not hesitate to ask for help or to seek assistance from me; and that I am approachable.*

It is suggested in the extract that students feel more comfortable in asking questions, and interacting with caring and approachable teachers. These teachers make it “sure that every student is included in the activity, and has their say in the collaborative work” (Vignette 5). It is admitted in the Vignette that supporting teachers recognize the ability of students. They acknowledge that “each student is capable of contributing to the class with their unique experiences.” The theme of care is well entailed in this expression.

The need of support and care is evident when “Many students, who come from diverse cultural backgrounds, feel reluctant to move forward, share their problems, and seek help and support from teachers” (Vignette 5). It is insisted that the role of teachers differs in different cultures: “*In some cultures, the role of the teacher is more authoritarian,*” whereas in many

other cultures the role of teacher is more supportive.” This leads to an important concern about who assigns the role of teachers, since it is also about what roles are expected in other cultures of teachers. This takes us to the point “that teachers’ proper understanding of their students’ background is important.”

**Sally.** Teachers’ understanding of students’ background is believed to enhance a better learning environment. Learning is shown to take place within “A friendly and inclusive environment where new immigrant students feel comfortable to participate in classroom activities.” This discussion in Vignette 6 resonates with those in Vignette 4 and 5. The theme of support and care is evident in this argument. The need of support and care from teachers is implied in Sally’s consideration of teachers’ attention “*to students’ individual needs*” (Vignette 6). Considering “the classroom as a community,” it is explained “that teachers have to observe their students, interact with them, and to find out what they need.” This leads to a process of relationship building between students and teachers.

It is suggested in Sally’s narrative that a caring and supportive relationship engages students in, and motivates them to, active learning. The point is that the emphasis of teachers should be “on the overall development of students: “*We’ve looked at things, like holistic wellness, and kids get time to discuss what that means. We’ve looked at different aspects such as mindfulness, stress reduction, and what it means to be in a community.*” This narrative makes it clear that care is required to support students for their overall wellness. It also leads to a point that the intensity and nature of challenges varies from one student to another, depending upon their socio-cultural background.

Sally’s Vignette re-insists on the centrality of teachers’ awareness of their students’ socio-cultural background. Supportive and caring teachers are shown “*to think where these*

*[students] are coming from, and what they have experienced in their lives”* (Vignette 6). In this expression, the background of new students is acknowledged and their past experiences are valued. Cultural differences are also taken into consideration, as it is noted: *“They come from one particular cultural background, and when they go to school, the school becomes another culture for them.”* Students are shown to have a critical experience in the process of integrating the differences of host and home cultures.

There are discussions in Vignette 6 which expounds that a person’s attitudes and behaviours are heavily influenced, and shaped by one’s cultural beliefs and practices, “So it is important to figure out who [these new students] are, and what they need in their new school environment.” A portrait of this argument is shown in Sally’s narration of a situation:

*There were kids who were South Asians, I had an opportunity to work with more than one person from that family, I guess they just happened to be in different class as I was in. In this situation, I was really struck by their voice. They would come to school, and they took everything very seriously. They were very quiet because they were still figuring out language* (Vignette 6).

This excerpt explicates how students in transition perceive the things happening around them in the school. They are shown to be in a dire need of teachers’ care and support from every possible respect. It is clearly suggested that teachers are required “to have *“empathy and compassion”* for these students.” Learning is believed to flourish in an environment where the virtues of empathy and compassion prevail, the environment that can respectfully “bring students and teachers closer” (Vignette 6). This directs to an important point that these students bring



differences with them, and these differences are not only to be acknowledged, but also to be respected.

An assurance of togetherness is seen when differences are acknowledged and respected. It is frequently entailed in the discussion of Sally's Vignette that care and support from teachers are essential in order to help new students feel included, protected, and safe in the class. This notion is linked "*An issue of equality amongst cultural groups and actions of respecting diversity*" (Vignette 6). Caring and safe environment is what every student deserves in a situation where diversity is seen as a reality. Implied in this discussion is the transition; and, navigating from the transition requires both support and care in the part of teacher. What counts in this analogy is how the school functions, what the teachers do, and how the students feel. It is affirmed that a caring classroom culture is considered as an influencing factor on students' learning and growth.

The discussion in Vignette 6 also reinforces the importance of inclusivity in terms of "teacher's role in creating a friendly environment and engaging each student in a learning activity." Identified as an arts, yoga, and drama teacher, Sally has worked with diverse group of learners. She is demonstrated to have gained a rich experience of designing and launching programs in her art class. The intent was to help students "*get along in the classroom together.*" The implication in getting along is that it makes the classroom both welcoming and all-encompassing. In fact, "A living classroom is depicted to be a dynamic place, where many different, yet meaningful, things can take place simultaneously." Teachers' supportive role and school's caring environment are thus considered to be a most for getting everyone along in all learning activities.

#### 7.4: Theme of Connection

Support and care are recognized to be essential for teacher-student connections, and connections are considered to be the key to build trust, and confidence between teachers and students. In exploring out Teacher Vignettes, connection is another dominant theme emerged. In the section to follow, the theme of connection is seen and analysed in relation to participants' lived relationships with students, and their lived experiences of working with students in a diverse class.

**Laura.** Connections are demonstrated to be obvious while interacting and working with people around us. Laura is shown to have her connections “with youth and children, with special needs students,” and with “co-workers and school administration” in the discussion of Vignette 4. Conversations, festive celebrations, and group works are depicted to be important means of connections. It is shown that we learn from people we are connected with. Learning from one's professional connection is demonstrated when Laura says, “*I had a really phenomenal child and youth worker who had lots of experience, who was working with me. I learned so much from her*” (Vignette 4). In the discussion, teachers are shown to have both formal and informal connections with their coworkers and students.

The theme of connection is explicit when the Vignette states that human beings “need help and provide help; they meet different people and learn many things about them by having conversations with them; they participate in family, community, and school activities and gain valuable experiences.” This statement distinguishes the connection of self with others in various forms. A student's self is connected with family as a child, with school as a pupil, with friends as a friend, and with community as a member of it. These larger human connections are described to be important in the making of a person's character.

Connection is implied in the pen pals activity. This activity was about the exchange of letters, which was jointly managed by Laura and her friend, and was conducted between students from Catholic and public schools. This activity of writing and exchanging of letters connected students, and aroused curiosity to know about one another. In Laura's Vignette, the pen pals activity has been considered as "An opportunity for students to do something with interest and connect with friends who are culturally different." Their connections lead to conversations "*where they can look at the world in different ways,*" and broaden their perspectives. These perspectives enrich a feeling of interconnectedness in which the spaces 'in-between' are filled with human stories and experiences.

It is also revealed that the pen pals activity connects the curriculum-as-plan with the curriculum-as-lived. Writing a letter is a defined skill in the curriculum-as-plan that teachers are required to teach their students. At the same time, while reading letters from pen pals, students know one another's culture and background which aligns with the curriculum-as-lived. Implied in this connection is: "*it goes back to the whole idea of feeling valued, feeling important, and feeling that they have a sense of belonging, that is this is my classroom and this is my community*" (vignette 4). This suggests that a classroom be understood as a space for such feelings of connection to hold.

It is asserted in the Vignette that "Students come to school with certain character attributes," which are acquired through their home culture. Their connection with the host cultures is described to add some more attributes to the list, which usually happens through "conversations between, and among, students and teachers." Classrooms, as discussed above, are the spaces to mingle together; and these spaces are to be inclusive enough for everyone to feel safe and comfortable to have their say: "*Being able to have conversations, and feeling*

*comfortable having conversations is important*” (Vignette 4). A sense of comfort to interact with the class is recognized in a caring relationship between students and teachers. This leads us to a point that teachers’ sayings and doings in the class make a huge impact in students’ participation of group activities.

Laura’s narrative- *“When I am working in catholic schools, we can celebrate catholic holidays like Christmas and Easter in schools, because it’s a part of that culture,”* suggests that cultural activities and festive celebrations offer a strong sense of connections between people. This resounds with the celebrations of the festival of Dashain in Hindu families, as discussed and analysed under Student Vignettes. The theme of connection is dominant in this analogy because *“Celebrations are about people coming together and celebrate”* the specific event that is defined by a particular culture.

It is suggested in Laura’s expression that all schools, whether Catholic or public, have to create occasions so that students from different cultural background can celebrate the main festive occasions: *“I feel like we should be able to have all celebrations and that contributes to the whole piece on learning about other people, learning about other traditions”* (Vignette 4). Learning about other people and their traditions has an implication of being open to negotiation. The implication in this expression is also that human connections are tools to unfold not only the series of similarity, but also the layers of differences. Acceptance of, and respect to these differences are what make a multi-cultural classroom both safe and inclusive. Through a sense of interconnectedness, one’s stories and traditions become meaningful along with their recognition and acknowledgement.

**John.** Academic achievements and student-teacher connections are considered to be correlated in Vignette 5. This consideration resonates with the experiences of students discussed in Chapter 5. John's experience of working as a teacher over a decade suggests that he has established a wide connection with many students and coworkers. Over these years, he "has come across many students, and has gained valuable experiences in working with them." It is reinstated that "Students' engagement is important in learning" (Vignette 5). Implied in this indication are connections that promote learning engagements.

It is asserted in Vignette 5 that teachers' connections with students "have a very good impact on the lives of students." This impact is seen in a student's progress in studies, and involvement in class activities. Connections are considered to enhance communications, and vice versa, for which language serves as a powerful means. Apart from planning and delivering lessons, "interacting with students and knowing more about them" is essential to keep the connectedness live and dynamic. It is clearly shown in John's expression that knowing more about each student in a multi-cultural class helps teachers modify and accommodate their plans:

*My classrooms have become increasingly multicultural over the last few years. As a teacher, I am impressed with the tolerance and respect that my students show to cultural, linguistic, and religious difference. In my classroom, I try to foster cultural awareness, tolerance, and respect by presenting students with a multiplicity of perspectives. In other words, I try to incorporate the literary works of diverse writers and the historical experiences of all cultural groups within my courses.*

In this expression, John's connections and interactions with students are evident. Cultural and religious differences are respected and differing perspectives are respected. This is shown to

lead John to incorporate culturally relevant course materials so as to contextualize both teaching and learning. John's Vignette reinforces the importance of connection and communication, and urges the teachers to be "respectful and empathetic to [their] students: *'my conversation with the student always involves the notions of respect and empathy'*" (Vignette 5). Human connections are a key to display both the virtues of respect and empathy.

In John's experience, the theme of connection is shown to have its concern not only with academic achievement, but also "*with enhancing the social and emotional development of students, and this goal can only be achieved if [teachers] have healthy professional relationships*" (Vignette 5). This leads to the crucial role of teachers that helps in founding the school as a family. Teachers' connections with students are taken to be so significant that this can offer a space for many other possibilities. This might include connecting students with "*extra-curricular activities such as athletics. Through athletics, teacher coaches can shape students' understanding of the qualities associated with good sportsmanship*" (Vignette 5).

Working together is shown to be fundamental for strengthening the bond of connections. The reason is because the culture of working together "builds stronger relationships...between students and teachers" (Vignette 5). Additionally, it is affirmed "that students usually open up themselves when they work in the groups, and share their perspective more freely on a topic with the group members." Since perspectives are primarily shaped by one's culture, teachers are expected to be aware of students' backgrounds, which are full of resourceful stories. These stories, when told and re-told (Milner, 2007) the people one is connected with, provide an opportunity for learning. Examples of these sharing and learning include Anil's conversation with his ESL teacher (Vignette 1), Anu's strong connection with her English teacher (Vignette, 2), and Reena's learning from her Chinese friends:

Students bring to the classroom their rich experiences; both teachers and students learn when they are shared in the class: *“Some students share experiences, some have rich experiences ...the difficulty of immigration, learning new culture and new language. These experiences are rich and we learn hearing them”* (Vignette 5)

Entailed in the excerpt is a strong connection that leads to a turn taking procedure of sharing with, and listening to others. In this procedure, being respectful to one another is described to be the first and foremost ingredient to acknowledge. While sharing, it is affirmed in the Vignette that hidden potentials are revealed, and “unheard voices are heard.” Then, many interesting stories are believed to unfold: *“You learn about cultural awareness, you learn about holidays, you learn about their experiences, students are exposed to different languages and different perspectives ...they give us different experiences”* (Vignette 5).

Evident in John’s narrative is that connections and opportunities for communications offer spaces for all to share with. Students feel valued and included, and teachers feel motivated to update and incorporate course materials. This is acknowledged in John’s statement: *“In a multicultural classroom, we have many different voices, and as teachers we need to make an effort to ensure that all those voices are heard through the texts they use and through dialogues in the class.”* On the one hand, the reciprocal learning from what is shared with the class is shown to have its connection with the curriculum-as-lived, and on the other, the careful selection of texts to match students’ lived experience has its connection with the curriculum-as-plan.

John’s understanding of curriculum-as-plan echoes with Laura’s, as it is described to be a policy document that provides

general guidelines which the teacher teaching the particular course needs to follow: “*In the English curriculum document for example, there are certain expectations that I am required to fulfill in terms of writing, in terms of media literacy, in terms of oral skills*” (Vignette 5).

However, teachers are asserted to have “freedom regarding what to choose to teach to the class: *I have the creative freedom and the autonomy to select the texts,*” which means teachers are autonomous to choose the texts as far as the chosen materials can be used to “*Acquire those skills and expectations that are outlined in the curriculum documents*” (Vignette 5). An interconnectedness of planned curriculum is evident when the notion of lived curriculum is taken into consideration while making the selection. This clearly is shown in John’s Vignette: “*I select the texts relevant to students’ background and their experiences ... I incorporate texts written by the authors from different parts of the world...from different cultural background...they present multiple perspectives.*”

John’s statements imply the connections between teachers and students, between the chosen materials and lived experiences, between current learning and past learning, and between what the curriculum-as-plan means, and what exactly happens in the classroom. This is because “*The lived experiences of the students are heard or reflected in the contexts of the literary works taught and studied in the classroom*” (Vignette 5). Relating the contents of the teaching materials to the lived experience of students means integrating the planned curriculum with the lived curriculum. This integration provides new avenues for sharing what one student has, and negotiating with what other students have. While reading between the lines of this argument, we find an overlapping of the themes of connection and negotiation discerned in the analysis.



**Sally.** Discussions in Sally's Vignette exhibit the theme of connection that aligns, to a great extent, with the discussions made in the Vignettes of John and Laura. The illustration of "Sally's experience of working as an arts teacher, as a yoga teacher, and as a drama teacher" explicates her connection with diverse people and fields. Sally notes: *"I am an arts-educator. I have worked for school boards, in a diversity of settings...I have shared storytelling with Early Childhood Educators, drama with youth...most of my work has centered around art of wellness"* (Vignette 6). This is an indication of Sally's wide connection as a professional.

An implied interconnectedness between student and teacher is shown to be important in the description of Vignette 6. Meeting with new immigrant students is described to be an opportunity to interact with, observe, and learn from what they model. In Sally's reading, these students *"were so still, big eyed, and so observant of everything that went on. I think that one thing they really modeled to the whole class was stillness. But the other thing they really modeled was extreme politeness"* (Vignette 6). In this narration, student-teacher connection is revealed to be crucial in terms of seeking to know who these students are, what they bring with them, and what they need in the changing environment.

The acknowledgement, that "these new students are hardworking, attentive to the class, have faith and trust in their teachers; and everything that the teachers say is important for them" (Vignette 6), resonates with the character traits of explored in the Vignettes of Anu, Anil and Reena. Having faith and trust in teachers is seen and analysed in relation to one's cultural aspect, which is taken to be very true in eastern communitarian societies. It is demonstrated in the Sally's Vignette that openness and helpfulness of teachers become supportive to enhance teacher-student connection. And the important thing is that this connection can potentially facilitate the dwelling in the 'in-between' for both students and teachers.

Connections are described to be crucial to establish and maintain human relations. It is clearly demonstrated that connections are important not only between students and teachers, but also within the community of students. In the Vignette, it is displayed that “sports and class activities are strong connective forces between students,” which is exemplified in the excerpt below:

*I noticed that a lot of connections were made through exposure of a big thing. So, kids who could share an activity together that would be really big. So, you notice kids often talk about activities; they join together like soccer or hockey. If someone came in and they were able to join those sports, that was obviously...a big bonding opportunity.*

This excerpt is a clear indication of how students mix and mingle with one another when they participate in activities.

Sports and cultural shows are recognized to be strong forces to bring people together. Interactions and sharing are seen to be common among those participating in the same sport or cultural show. For example, it is usual to find dancers sharing, “their experiences of dancing and body moves” with co-dancers. It is explained in Vignette 6 that Sally has noticed how experiences are shared between co-participants:

*“there’s one girl, who was in the Indian dance group. She was showing some dance moves, and these other girls, who were in other dance groups, they would have been in ballet or jazz, were finding that really cool. They were copying those moves.”*

The informal conversations about sports and dances are shown to be very important for getting closer and know better. This leads to an analogy that students work with what they have in common, and what interests them; as a result, cultural differences become no more a barrier in

their trusting relationship. Sally's experiences suggest that "students usually do not concern about issues of their cultures and differences: *"I generally found kids didn't have cultural issues with other kids, and I didn't actually hear it in the class"* (Vignette 6). Implied in this argument is the importance of classroom culture that is inclusive, safe, and welcoming in which students share, support, and care for one another.

It is stated in the Vignette that "informal conversations make a *"part of the hidden curriculum."* Sally's Vignette shows a deep connection between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived. In the Vignette, it is described that teachers *"would do very diverse things in the class, but it has to be grounded in the curriculum-as-plan. ... [which is] almost like the rule book, where you had to show that you were following the rules."* Teachers' doing the diverse things in running the lesson might not fall into the planned curriculum, however, it is suggested that a connection has to be made between what teachers do and what the curriculum says.

In the Vignette, the planned curriculum is acknowledged as a document that "gives directions to teachers; it has a set of rules for the teachers to follow, and it states a set of objectives." In Sally's perception:

*Curriculum-as-plan to me is what is set out as being curriculum. So, for example, when I worked in schools, especially when I would do another program called learning through the arts, we were very much directed by the curriculum document... I had to demonstrate in the curriculum document what I was connecting to. That was really important (Vignette 6).*

However, it is also highlighted that “there is a deeper concern about the curriculum, and that is an *“issue with the idea [of curriculum-as-plan], sometimes that everything in the curriculum has to be objectivised, because not everything can be.”* The explication in this expression is that many things that happen in the classroom fall within the frame of hidden curriculum, also known as the lived curriculum. It is stated that *“the idea of hidden curriculum acknowledges that we can’t create an objective, and a multiple-choice question and answer for everything we do in the curriculum;”* and the most important thing to be considered is that *“There’s a lot of what we do in the curriculum, that has to do with the meaning of life, and the meaning of life is myself and other people in this world”* (Vignette 6).

In the argument above, it is clear that the things done in the classroom are the things felt, and learned, which has a deep connection with the learners’ life. This leads to an important acknowledgment that *“It’s impossible not to think beyond the curriculum”* (Vignette 6). This idea of going beyond the curriculum is shown in Sally’s teaching of yoga that was named as the

*east-meets-west yoga. The interesting thing is that the east part was your [Laxmi’s] realm of the world. It’s something that I’ve appropriated, and that I’ve learned from. The west was the First Nations. So, both of them are appropriations from me* (Vignette 6).

Evident in the teaching of yoga is a connection between east and west. This makes it clear that there are values in all communities, and in every community *“people are worthwhile and meaningful. We love other people, and we are in turn loved and lovable.”* Connections are recognized to be essential to develop a sense of comfort, and promote a sense of belonging. Connections are acknowledged to be so important that they promote multiple perspectives. It is noted in Sally’s perception that *“A work of art generates multiple perspectives: “In art, we are*

*always thinking about things like perspectives, and seeing different perspectives encourages connections.”*

Perspectives, by large, are shaped through cultural practices. It is asserted in Sally’s description that “children’s participation in cultural tradition helps them” get inter-connected with family and relatives, and encourage them to acquire the values of sharing and caring:

*When my kids were growing up, they would always have a big Christmas dinner at the school. They called it a holiday dinner or Christmas feast. The idea was that everybody would be in communion. Everybody would sit in the gym at a table, and they were all eating a meal, not just a snack but a whole meal. So, it required a lot of parents, teachers worked together. We come back to the fundamental that we all ate, we all had to eat. So, it was something very special in creating a meal that many people were providing what was required, and that we were all eating the same food.*

This excerpt recognizes the gravity of festive gathering and celebrations in the context of bringing people to a venue where sharing the food, respecting one another, and becoming the part of communal activity. This resonates with the celebration of the festival of Dashain, the festival of light, and the festival of Teej, about which I have discussed in Student Vignettes.

Importance of festival and their celebrations within family and in community are discerned to be important in terms of expanding connections. People feel proud of their cultural traditions and values that are manifested through various events during festivals. Sally’s narrative shows the pride she has in meeting, preparing, and eating together. She explains with dignity that it is a “tradition, like a sacramental thing...,” which binds people with a thread of togetherness.

Opportunities for learning are traced out of such bindings of festive and cultural events. Students indulging in these events are believed to feel connected, valued, and included:

*In that situation, I think that the students are learning that I am not just a single person here, I'm part of a network; I have a place within this network. The participant in such a traditional event develops a sense that 'I am valued enough; somebody is willing to give me this meal. I'm also part of this network (Vignette 6).*

These inter- or intra-cultural practices provide a “sense of belongingness...gives more meaning to life,” and more than that, “*that's how life works; that we interact with each other; and that we get meaning from the situation.*” It is held “that these are the valuable learning experiences we gain through cultural expressions,” which contribute to shaping our perceptions.

### **7.5: Theme of Perception**

Looking out over Teacher Vignettes, one important theme that emerges is the theme of perception, the perception that relates to character and character development. The theme of perception is viewed in connection with the participants' lived experiences of working with different students. Their perceptions of character and character development are also taken into account along with the progress of this section.

**Laura.** It is demonstrated in Vignette 4 that Laura's perception of character and character development is based on the principles of inclusivity, valuing self and others, and learning by working with others. Family, school, and community are considered to be important agencies to instill the conception of character. It is deduced that a person's experiences through connections with these agencies make up one's character. This leads to a discussion that character building is a slow and ongoing process:

*Character is all of the pieces that make up a person. That is something that starts when they are very small, babies probably. And so, all of those little pieces of experience they have had helps; it contributes to who they are as persons in their character. When we get them in school, we have to recognize what they are bringing with them, and figure out how to move them forward.*

In this excerpt, character is found to be concerned with a comprehensive growth of life. This growth includes an individual's transitions, connections, and negotiations with people and surroundings. It is also suggested that the support and care from parents at home, and friends and teachers at school, need to be seen in connection with character development. Teachers are expected to be watchful about what their students bring to the class.

Every child is demonstrated to make a frequent journey between home and school. Depicted in this argument includes how the child balances between home values and school values. In Laura's perception, an inclusive classroom environment is shown to be crucial to learn about and keep these values: "Inclusivity is directly related to character education: *I perceive character education as a very important component to creating inclusive classrooms*" (Vignette 4). An inclusive class is described to be a space where "students develop an emotional sense of belongingness, and show their hidden potentials." This sense of belongingness is considered to be an inherent desire that connects each individual with the larger group.

It is stated in Laura's expression that teachers *"teach kids about being good people by recognizing their gifts, talents and strengths and celebrate those of others, we provide students with the skills to be empathetic, understanding and brave"* (Vignette 4). However, before

modeling or providing these skills, teachers are said to be aware of the concept of character.

Laura says,

*I think it is really important to understand [the concept of character] so that I can model and teach it to my students. For example; not everyone is compassionate by nature. By understanding what types of activities and experiences can help to develop compassion in kids will provide a more authentic and worthwhile learning experience, that will resonate with the students.*

Designing and developing activities that suit the interests of learners are suggested to offer authentic learning experiences. This implies teachers' role of valuing every student, and recognizing their interests and preferences.

Valuing students means acknowledging their importance in the classroom. The discussion in the Vignette demonstrates the length of time teachers require "to study every student in the class, and identify who needs what," and it is suggested "that the teachers need to observe their students, investigate their needs, and support them accordingly" (Vignette 4). Time is demonstrated to be important in connecting with every student, understanding what the student needs, and helping the student meet the needs as required:

*It takes a lot of time and it takes a lot of observing, and you know at the end of the year, there is one kid and I feel huh... I should have done more for that kid because I just didn't feel that I got him. I feel like he was the one who kind of just slipped through. I should have been more...*

Valuing and inclusivity are shown to have their connections with support and care. In Laura's expression, it is affirmed that the integration of "Loving and taking care of students" is



an innermost aspect of teaching, which directly relates to character development. This conveys an impression that the stronger the bond between teachers and students is, the greater the learning opportunities they have from one another, as Laura narrates: *“The first two years I was there were awesome. I learned a lot, the kids were great”* (Vignette 4).

Connections and celebrations are seen to be important impetuses behind Laura’s learning from students. Celebrations bring people together, connect them with one another, and provides them time and space to observe and share. These happenings together contribute to learning and promote character building. This leads to a conclusion that both learning and character building are two important aspects of education. This analysis resounds with Vignette 5, where character development is considered to be an important goal of all types of education.

**John.** The theme of perception, with regards to character and character development, is seen and analysed in relation to the three main aims of education, as discussed in Vignette 5:

*The first [aim of education] is to develop character, develop the qualities of a good human being, which includes the intellectual and cultural development of students.*

*Secondly, an aim of education should be to prepare democratic citizens; so, our goal is to teach students and instill within them the values that are required to be a citizen in a democratic society. And thirdly, it is to prepare students for the world of work or for future occupations. We should strive for achieving all these goals.*

In this excerpt, character is deeply concerned with educational goal. The phrase ‘qualities of a good human being’ takes us back to Aristotle virtues such as honesty, truthfulness, and respect. Human intellect and cultural convictions are shown to be important. The importance of becoming respectful and the value of sharing of space are implied in the second aim that focuses

on preparing ‘democratic citizens.’ This relates to the third aim that suggests preparing human resources that are equipped with required skills to meet the need of workplace.

In the analogy made above, character development is perceived to be concerned with democratic citizenship and economic participation, “*Acquiring the qualities of empathy, care, and compassion*” (Vignette 5). Teachers are demonstrated as key figures to model these qualities, which are considered to be essential “to maintain healthy and respectful relationships with others. It is clearly stated in John’s expression “*that character development entails instilling students with the attributes that are necessary for healthy and respectful relationships.*” This notion of relationship relates back to the theme of support and care.

Teachers’ role is repeatedly acknowledged to be vital in creating respectful and inclusive classrooms where each student’s well-being is believed to take place. This parallels the notion of inclusivity that is prominent in Laura’s Vignette. Discussions in John’s Vignette support the conception that character development is an integrated approach. Implementing this approach requires a clear understanding of the concept of character, as John states, “*it is important to understand the concept of character because I wish to model the attributes of good character to my students*” (Vignette 5). Implied in this statement is that students have faith in teachers; they listen to, and follow teachers’ words and actions.

Teachers with clarity about character development are shown to have more potential to incorporate character attributes with the curriculum. It is stated in the discussion that “John incorporates character development in the curriculum, encourages students to participate in volunteer activities, and motivates them to take part in extra-curricular activities” (Vignette 5).

As far as the question of ‘what teachers can do to help students develop their character’ is concerned, an attention to what John has stated is essential:

*Teachers can also develop character through its incorporation in the curriculum. As an English teacher, I may assist students in developing character by examining theme and character development in literary texts. With the subject of History, teachers can develop character by exploring different historical events or figures from the lens of empathy, tolerance, care, and compassion (Vignette 5).*

This excerpt leads to an analogy that character development is not limited to with one particular subject or with one particular teacher. Instead, it is a comprehensive thing that students experience in an integrated way.

This integration is believed to come through a student’s overall learning experience of involving in diverse fields and events. This is to discern that, apart from the core practice of teaching and learning, meaningful experiences are gained “*through co-curricular, volunteer and charitable initiatives that seek to assist disadvantaged or vulnerable members of our local or global community*” (Vignette 5). These experiences are considered to be very important in terms of changing one’s perspective, and acknowledging the need of connections and negotiations. Active participation in collaborative tasks offers opportunities for relationship building, helping and trusting one another, caring and supporting one another, and sharing the space provided to accomplish the assigned task.

An important point revealed in the Vignette is that “*certain standards of behaviour within the classroom and wider level of the school*” is expected from all while working on collaborative project. As explicated in the foregoing themes, communication occupies a key space to complete

the project assigned. Personal attributes such as responsibility, accountability, punctuality, dedication, and commitment to work are revealed and enhanced in collaborations. This leads to an analogy about what we say is what we think, and what we think and do is who we are. The acts of saying, thinking, and doing entail the centrality of meaningful dialogues. It is explicated in the Vignette “*that character can be truly developed through dialogue,*” and dialogues are to be held in respectful manner. The point to be taken into account is that a connection between words and actions is what people expect from an individual.

**Sally.** Looking out over Vignette 6, character is perceived as “part of hidden curriculum,” and character development as “Respect for self and other.” This perception of character and character development is demonstrated in Sally’s experiences of working with children and youth in the capacity of an art, drama, and yoga teacher. While taking different roles, and working with students from diverse fields, Sally’s focus is shown to be on mental wellness, which is also known as the personal wellness. The discussion in Sally’s Vignette demonstrates the wellness of a person to have its connection with character development. Schools are considered to be important places for both academic excellence and personal wellness. It is expressed in the Vignette that school *is part of life. Kids spend a lot of time in school.*” This suggests that the school is a home away from home, where students spend many formative years and grow with social values, skills, and moral virtues.

Character is concerned with the development of values and virtues, which are believed to acquire through human connections. Sally’s states: “*I see that happening all the time. That’s probably because when I worked, I usually worked in arts integrated situation... We’re working on things that demand connection*” (Vignette 6). Connections are seen to become possible when people get along and move together, and “*it’s the teacher that needs to do the moving*” (Vignette

6). The moving in the expression is meant to approach students, talk to them, make them feel safe and included, and help them open up to the class. Character is believed to take its shape with the support and care of teachers. Teacher-student relationships are shown to provide a motivational drive for students.

A person's actions and personality traits are said to be taken into consideration when one's character is brought into discussion. It is stated in Vignette 6 that "*character is like air and water quality: we expect it to be good, and we only think about it when it ain't.*" Actions demonstrated by an individual are considered to be good when the actions "*Are conducive to group harmony and to respect of others.*" This indicates the need of common space that is both welcoming and inclusive. The Vignette insists on the use of inclusive language to concretize the provision of inclusive environment.

A correlation between the language people use, and the actions they demonstrate, is clearly noticed in the excerpt below:

*Language can often in itself be an action. In terms of other actions, what [students] would be looking for in a school situation was an actual action, the inclusivity. Are students actually welcoming other students into groups? Are we doing things like playing together, sharing things, creating situations like that?*

This expression reveals the essence of using the respectful and inclusive language. It is acknowledged that the act of disconnecting or connecting between people largely depends on the choice of language they use in meeting and interacting with others.

In fact, "*A socially desired characteristic for example would be to use inclusive language and not insulting language or prejudice language.*" Both the inclusive classroom climate and

language are essential to help students grow with moral values in their schooling. In this context, character development is defined as *“the inculcation and acquisition of socially desired personality characteristics and actions ... does not take a straight course ... because the expectation and judgment of what is ‘good’ depends on the social context”* (Vignette 6). In this view, social context is considered to be important in one’s thoughts and actions because *“Meanings of human actions and expressions are contextual”*

In the discussion above, character is shown to be a matter of a person’s moral aspects. These moral aspects are initially determined and shaped by family ideals, cultural practices, and religious beliefs. These aspects of morality support the communitarian school of philosophy as this school concerns with the promotion of self-ordering community, and relates to the importance of one’s history and traditions (Hall & Ame, 1999; MacIntyre, 1984). Therefore, it is logical to say that *“The definitions of character, goodness of character, and goodness itself, are very contextual. They have strong cultural and religious connections”* (Vignette 6). These connections differ from family to family in culturally diverse societies. It happens because *“There are differences between these contextual factors, yet, what we all want from our students is the reflection of acceptable social actions and behaviours, because we want the students to learn good character.”*

The reinforcement of the acceptance of differences is what provides room for character development. In Sally’s perception, *“The Ministry emphasizes that character development is not indoctrination, but the development of critical thinking and empathy [however] “the school boards are caught in a catch between being secular and showing respect for other cultures.”* A suggestion to address this contradiction is evident when the Vignette further states:

*We need to take out the pretense of secular neutrality and embrace not just multiculturalism but also “multi-spiritualism” ... multiculturalism pierces the veneer of secular neutrality, and multi-spiritualism is the next place that our school system might go in terms of inclusivity.*

*We’re already very concerned about being respectful of different gender orientation, and being respectful of different ethnic orientation. We’re starting to also realize that cultures and traditions are often inevitably associated with our religion or spiritual tradition.*

*Even though we’re a secular society, we can’t ignore that that’s an essential component of life and of culture for most people.*

Regarding the value and importance of cultures and traditions in the context of a multicultural society, a wider perspective is brought to a line of discussion in the excerpts above. Stating that “human cultures carry components of spiritualism,” the Vignette shows a deep concern about these components and states, “*it’s a value to be aware of that and to accept ...to figure out how to work with that, to interact with that, and to dialogue with that*” (Vignette 6). In the given argument, “*Character development should be looked at more widely, as respect for self and other.*” This is considered to be a fundamental goal of education in Sally’s perception which aligns with John’s consideration.

In this chapter, I analysed the themes emerged in the Vignettes. The analysis includes the themes of transition, negotiation, support and care, connection, and perception. Virtues are seen to be crucial in both underpinning the themes, and in holding communications between the dwellers in the ‘in-between.’ Having said this, now I move onto the penultimate chapter, in which, I make a discussion of the findings of this research, while keeping in mind the research question, and making a connection with Aoki’s bridge metaphor.

## Chapter 8: Discussion of Findings

The primary research question of this study was: what are the opportunities for character development in multi-cultural settings? In my work, multi-cultural settings refer to Ontario public school classrooms, as the intent was to explore, and describe, opportunities for character development in multi-cultural settings, as exemplified in Ontario school classrooms. With this intent, I set my focus on two directions; first, to investigate Nepali immigrant students' lived experiences in multi-cultural classrooms and their perceptions of character development. Second, I was interested in examining Ontario public school teachers' working experiences in multi-cultural classrooms, their experiences of dwelling in the 'in-between' of the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived, and their perceptions of character development. What my research has found is that, while the analysis focussed heavily on the multi-cultural elements of the classrooms, it is in those elements that opportunities for character development are found.

In developing my analyses of the data, the lived experiences, and the perceptions of students and teachers were captured through written, and oral interviews, which followed the transcription and translation of data into a series of Vignettes. The Vignettes were then analysed, following the strategy of interpretive phenomenological analysis (Sabin-Baden & Major, 2013; Smith & Osborn (2003). In response to my research question, the essence of experiences has been unfolded, and the meanings of perceptions, with regards to character development, uncovered.

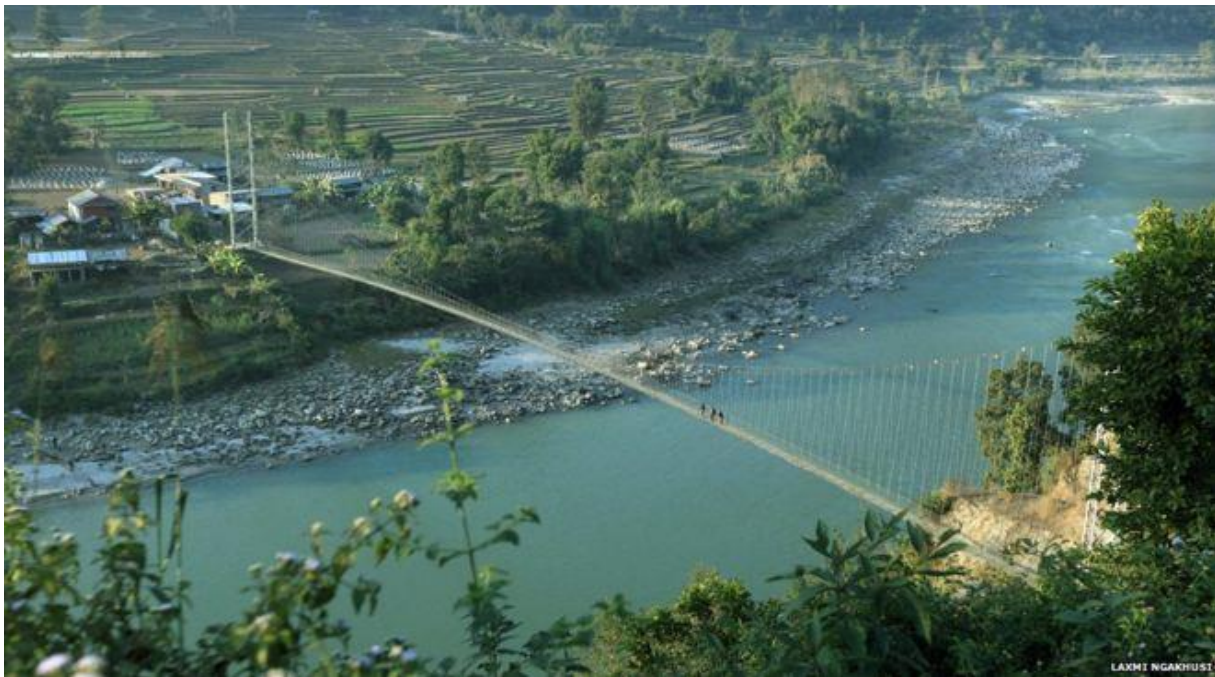
In conducting a systematic analysis of the Vignettes, five important themes emerged: the themes of transition, negotiation, support and care, connection, and perception. This penultimate chapter intertwines these themes and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, and aims to augment the body of knowledge surrounding character and character education in the context of Ontario's



multi-cultural classrooms. In working through the data, it has become evident that character philosophy in general, and Aristotelian virtues in particular (see Chapter 2), underpin the themes that have emerged from the Vignettes. In making this statement, I believe that the language of virtues is central to an understanding of the ‘in-between,’ and its relation to character development.

The section that follows details the link between the findings and the philosophy of the ‘in-between,’ under the metaphor of Aoki’s metaphorical bridge (1996). While linking these two, the discussion centers around how character development is a negotiation between the differences. I make use of the metaphor of the bridge, focusing on its two ends that are symbolic of differences, and show that a negotiation between the two ends (the ‘in-between’) of the bridge is central for character development.

### **8.1: Metaphor of the Bridge**



A bridge has a structure with two ends, and is designed to provide a smooth transition, connecting people and communities living on either side of some form of barrier. Human designed bridges can span rivers, canyons and estuaries, and are built in order to ease the movement of both objects and subjects. However, the bridge in the context of my research has a metaphorical significance. Bridging the barriers between two worlds, two cultures, and two communities is what I consider to be the function of this metaphorical bridge.

In Chapter 2, I critically reviewed Aoki's re-conceptualization of the bridge metaphor (1996). Aoki's 'in-between,' which I have developed as a conceptual framework, and employed in my research, lies between the two ends of the bridge. The two ends in the image of the bridge above represent the binaries of home-host, Nepali/Canadian, and East and West. The two ends of the bridge metaphorically stand for two entities, two philosophies, and two different cultures. The center space, that is the 'in-between,' provides room for those caught in the binaries of Eastern and Western, communitarian/liberal, and home-host cultures to negotiate the differences that exist between the ends. The 'in-between' appears as a metaphorical bridge, and calls people, standing on the two far ends, to come, and dwell together with the reciprocity of perspectives (Aoki 1981; Lee, 2017). This metaphorical bridge is the space 'in-between,' which invites people different perspectives from both ends to understand what it means to dwell together humanly (Aoki, 1996). Aligning with Aoki's bridge metaphor, Lee (2017) affirmed that the space of the bridge allows for a conversation of "reciprocity of perspectives, of ideologies, between two deep world views" (p. 23).

In the Student Vignettes, I introduced the immigrant students Anil, Anu and Reena, who initially represented the one side of the bridge. These students may be seen as symbolic of Eastern communitarian values, traditions, and entities. Their teachers in school, introduced in the

Teacher Vignettes, were initially representatives of the other end of the bridge, and are symbolic to Western liberal values, traditions, and entities. The analysis of the interviews reveals that the lived experiences of both students and teachers are closely tied to the negotiations that they engage in as they linger on the bridge. That is to say, through negotiation, neither group is caught in the dichotomy of East or West. Both students and teachers in multi-cultural classrooms are free to negotiate their position on the bridge, and this position is dynamic. Movement on the bridge for both students and teachers is never unidirectional, leading me to speculate that multi-cultural classrooms can be seen as a “conjunctive space *between* ‘East and West’, and by understanding ‘and’ as both ‘and’ and ‘not and’” (Pinar, 2005, p. 83, emphasis in original)

Working from this speculation, my interpretation of the interviews indicates that the liminal space, as discussed by Bhabha (1994), is the ‘conjunctive space’ of the bridge that allows for common values to be shared and differences respected in the ‘in-between’. Following the discussions in the Vignettes, I consider Ontario public school classrooms as the center of the bridge, the ‘in-between’ space, where students and teachers, originally representing the different ends of the bridge, come to meet and greet one another, and are beneficially transformed as a result of their negotiations, which are made along with very positive roles of families, schools, and communities. The responses of the participants reveal that the immigrant students, unlike my initial assumption that they might get stuck in the ‘in-between’ of home and host cultures while travelling back and forth, navigate the initial challenges, and negotiate with the differences.

These negotiations are considered to be so powerful that they can potentially rupture the dichotomies of East/West, home and host, and Nepali-Canadian. These negotiations take place in the ‘in-between’ along with the support and care of parents and teachers, which helps to bridge home and school discourses (Yahya & Wood, 2016). The narratives in the Student Vignette

show that the engagement of each student with different activities is important to hold these discourses. These activities, when performed on the center of the bridge, become more meaningful for which the performers, as Aoki (1996) has suggested, are to keep lingering on the bridge. The act of lingering takes place in the forms of meetings, interactions, and the knowing of one another which aligns with Anu's experience: *"I became more open-minded, as I was exposed to different perspectives. I learned from my Chinese friends slowly and subtly, through interactions while working on group assignments, [and] studying together for tests"* (Vignette, 2). This leads to a realization that human beings have desires for interacting and working together. What counts in having such desires is the willingness to dwell, and linger, in the hyphenated space of the 'in-between' for a prolonged time (Aoki, 1995). This supports the argument that both students and teachers are the dwellers of this metaphorical bridge, and "Are in no hurry to cross over; in fact, such bridges lure [them] to linger" (Aoki, 1996, p. 316) together.

The themes of transition, negotiation, support and care, connection, and perception are interwoven in the act of lingering in the 'in-between' space. The space between the two ends of the bridge refers to a location of differences. In Bhabha's (1994) words, this is the 'third space' between people, between times, between entities, between cultures, and between things. The classroom as the space of 'in-between,' that resides between the two sides of the bridge, is the meeting place for both new and existing students. Newly immigrated students *"Are angels that come from another realm; they come to this realm; and, they bring this innocence with them"* (Sally, Vignette 6). Their coming from a distant geography, and their innocence and humility corresponds to the one end of the bridge. A sense of ambiguity stirs in the minds of these

students, when they proceed to inhabit the 'in-between.' In the first few weeks of transitions, these dwellers appear to undergo a strange experience, and need support and care.

My research demonstrates that the provision of support and care is crucial to minimize the intensity of uncertainty, and maximize the possibility of 'newness to emerge' (Aoki, 1996). For this to happen, "*it's the teachers,*" standing on the other end of the bridge, "*that needs to do the moving*" (Sally, Vignette 6) to the center, to dwell and linger with the students. This indicates a direction towards a connection to be made in order for familiarizing the unfamiliar.

The findings of my study have shown that a strong connection between students and teachers is made, and maintained on the foundation of teachers' support and care. The connection, founded on caring relationship, provides students a sense of comfort in moving to the center and dwelling together with the unknown people in their first meetings (Noddings 1992). Although the 'in-between,' at our first sight, stands as "A space of tensioned ambiguity," it is potential to serve as "A generative space of possibilities" (Aoki, 1996, p. 316). A first meeting with a stranger is invariably challenging, but in the challenge, lies opportunities for learning and character development. An example of this sense of strangeness is the statement by Anil: "*I didn't know how people would look like from different parts of the world*" (Vignette 1). However, as the frequency of meeting increases, there grows an intimacy with the stranger. Along with that intimacy, conversations become more spontaneous, and dialogues livelier. Acts of listening to, and sharing with, become more common, and from there, transitions are eased. This changes the initial perception of differences in the classroom. An example of this change is: "*My high school in Canada was totally multi-cultural...I did not feel discriminated in the class*" (Anil, Vignette 1). This suggests that the more we linger in the center of the bridge, the more we ease the transition.

The ease of transition leads to meaningful negotiations. The theme of negotiation is an important finding that penetrates into human experiences at times of transitioning. We live amidst the differences; and these differences are seen and felt, when we look at our own values (Spring, 2008). This is well-acknowledged that “*knowing about other cultures makes us question our own cultural values*” (Vignette 2). This questioning is an invitation to interact, explore, and find out what can be negotiated residing in the ‘in-between’ of the two ends of the bridge. And for doing this, it is affirmed in both the analyses of the Teacher and Student Vignettes that using the language of virtues is crucial. This affirmation supports the Aristotelian concept of character, that is, the disposition of virtues in both words and actions (Aristotle, 2012).

## **8.2: Language of Virtues**

In using the bridge as metaphor, it is clear that creating a welcoming environment is key to prolong our lingering in the center of the bridge. The center of the bridge is seen to be a space of silence and emptiness, and when people move from both the ends, conversations are heard and negotiations are made. In making these negotiations, the analysis suggests that participants from both the ends need to communicate using a language of virtues. Using the language of virtues means that the dwellers of the ‘in-between’ need to demonstrate, and reciprocate respect, trust, and care (Aoki, 1981; Howie, 1968). The purpose of negotiation is to build up harmonious relations between people, representing the binaries of East and West (Hall & Aime, 1999). Harmonious relations lead to a practice of moderation, a Buddhist principle (Gensler, 2013), which is evident in the description of the student participants’ lived experiences.

In moral philosophy, the language of virtues is seen to be an important tool to build up social harmony, and has the power to connect and influence one with the other (Dasgupta, 1965; Gensler, 2013; Gowans, 2015; Morgan & Lawton, 2007). It is discerned from the responses of

the student participants that moral virtues are the key to negotiating, and living a moderate life, which supports the literature around Eastern moral philosophy (Gensler, 2013). Living a life of moderation, in the context of my work, is to be “*more accepting of new ideas*” in the ‘in-between’ space, “*since everyone has something different to offer*” (Reena, Vignette 3). How people contribute, feel, and gain in the ‘in-between’ depends partly on what environment they are in. My study aligns with the character development document, and asserts that a friendly, welcoming, and inclusive environment, founded on trusting relationships, is where people from both the ends of the bridge share their companionships (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008).

Ontario public school classrooms are places where teachers and students can display such companionship in their words and actions. This leads to a discussion that the language of virtues, in the widest sense, is concerned with ensuring students feel valued, respected, cared, protected, and included in a friendly and welcoming classroom culture (John, Vignette 5; Laura, Vignette 4; Sally, Vignette 6). This discussion is in line with the guidelines of *Finding common ground* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). Creating an inclusive classroom requires a dynamic role of teachers, especially those teachers who work with students from multi-cultural backgrounds. Approaching new students, communicating the language of virtues, and identifying their learning needs are key steps teachers can take to review, and change their strategies. In the analyses, it is suggested that the teachers are required “*to make accommodations for those students who have recently arrived in Canada, and those students who speak English as their second language*” (John, Vignette 5). This reflects teachers’ concerns with identifying the needs of those students who are transitioning, and negotiating to adjust to the transitions between the home- and host-cultures.

John's suggestion around accommodations can be considered as an important strategy that is both supportive and caring to students. The importance of this strategy is reinforced in Laura's statement: "*All students should receive what they need. And so, if a student requires additional support or accommodations or modifications to the program, they should receive that*" (Vignette 4). Teachers' care, support, empathy, and compassion to their students are implied in this argument (Noddings and Slot, 2003). In fact, the views of the teacher participants are concerned with raising students with integrity, because one of the intents of teaching is '*to create citizens that are accepting the people with different experiences*' (Laura, Vignette 4). In other words, a crucial aspect of teaching in a multi-cultural classroom is to be open, and help students become open-minded. To be open-minded entails the virtue of courage to accept and the differences that one finds in the 'in-between'.

The acceptance of differences is an indication of the capacity to lead individuals from transition to negotiation. Based on the shared views of the teacher and student participants, it is revealed that the impetus behind easing from transition to negotiation is the demonstration of the language of virtues. All of the themes that emerged from the analysis, by and large, support the reviewed literature on character education, and are interlinked with the virtues of Aristotle in particular. To illustrate, courage is needed in order to initiate negotiations on the bridge; connections between individuals become stable in the reciprocity of respect and trust; support and care relate to the safe school environment; and our perceptions change in the exposure to, and acknowledgement of, a multiplicity of perspectives. Changing perceptions necessitates an indication of learning from where people are, and what they are prepared to share with others (Aoki, 1996; MacIntyre, 1984).



It is important to acknowledge that people in a multi-cultural society have different values and perspectives (Pai et al., 2006; spring, 2008). These diverse perspectives, when shared with one another, offer an opportunity to learn, because *“when the class is multi-cultural, students are more accepting of new ideas since everyone has something different to contribute”* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008; Reena, Vignette 3). This indicates that one’s values and perspectives change over time along with the intermingling with people from different cultures: *“From my Chinese friends, I learned about Confucius...became familiar with Chinese history and politics...learned about common misconceptions about China*(Anu, Vignette, 2; Kymlicka, 1995). This learning is evident in Anu’s affirmation: *“I became more open-minded, as I was exposed to different perspectives”* (Vignette, 2), which is an important aspect of character development. The ‘in-between’ space allows these perspectives to dwell and interact with one another. Challenges do occur in this scenario, yet, it, at the same time, provides an opportunity of generative possibility through interactions with *“friends with different values and mindsets”* (Aoki, 1996; Anu, Vignette 2).

Implied in Anu’s expression is an indication of a way to negotiation, and a readiness to accept different ways of understanding the world from that developed in our home-culture. This underlines that the application of the language of virtues provides an inclusive environment, where people dwelling in the ‘in-between,’ can share the ways they understand the world. Taking the bridge metaphor into consideration, people coming from different cultural backgrounds, are required to be virtuous in order to accept, and respect, one another’s ways of living, and enter into negotiations with them. This resonates with Buber’s (1970) ‘I-You’ mode of existence, in which humans meet other humans in the hyphenated space in order for building relations.

Human relations are made on the underpinning of truth and respect. The virtues of truth and respect deepen our bond of connection. This deepening of the bond of connection is found in the analyses of the Student Vignettes. The immigrant students in this study have an immense trust, faith, and respect in their teachers. Family and community are the primary roots of these virtues; in their application, fosters character, whereas, in diminution, suffers character development (Hunter, 2000). Hence, the knowledge and application of these virtues, in the course of meeting and interacting with people around us, eases our move from connection to transition, and then negotiation. By valuing the differences of those caught in binaries, people may become not only friendly, but also appreciative of one another. The point is that the more we linger together, and engage in conversations by using the language of virtues, the worthier our relations, and stronger our connections may turn out to be.

The findings of my study assert that our connections and relations, founded on virtues, are determining factors in receiving support from people we are connected with. This is justified in Anu's narration: *"The support I got from school and teachers was largely because I had maintained a very good relationship with them"* (Vignette 2). The intensity of strength in Anu's connection with her English teacher is discerned from her comment: *"She is incredibly knowledgeable, has a rich understanding of people, places, and the world"* (Vignette 2). Implied in the comment is that students feel more comfortable to connect with, and learn from, those teachers with wider perspectives. These connections and relations make a direct impact on a student's achievement and growth.

Manifestations of relations are highly valued in Eastern communitarian families (Hall & Ames, 1999) and are more so in Nepali extended families. In these families, learning from elders, usually the grandparents, is very common. An example of this is shown in Anil's

statement: *“I was mostly around my grandparents in my childhood ... their lifestyle ... influenced me in such a way that these things have become part of me”* (Vignette 1). This asserts that one’s becoming is directly influenced by the people one is with, and the surrounding the person lives in. Our connections with people and places help us acquire, and develop, virtues of respect and honesty. Character development is a shared responsibility of parents, schools, and communities; however, family is always the first and foremost foundation to help children acquire, and apply, virtues in their day-to-day life (Lickona, 1987; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008).

An example of the learning, and application of the virtues, is found in Anil’s narrative: *“I was taught never to lie, never to cheat...I carry these thoughts with me all the times”* (Vignette 1). The virtue of honesty, which is evident in Anil’s narrative, is required in order for dwelling in the ‘in-between’ of the bridge. Application of the virtues of honesty and respect linger the lingering of the dwellers in the bridge, and thereby allows for character development by underpinning all relationships. In other words, this is an act of creating harmonious community and promoting humility (Hall & Ame, 1999). Anil’s narrative resonates with Anu and Reena’s responses that showed their learning of humility, and obedience to both parents and teachers. In time, this humility gave them a great resilience in their negotiations. Listening to what the parents suggest, and asking and taking parents’ consent, to join any event such as outing or picnic, has been a part of their disciplined life.

Character development begins in family, and what one learns at home appears to be reflected in what one does in school (Lickona, 1987). In my study, listening to teachers attentively is found to be an important character trait in these immigrant children. They listen because they are new to the environment; they are innocent; and more than this, they are used to it. Listening connotes many different things. Generally speaking, to listen is to respect, and

possess the humility and curiosity to know what is not known. Listening is an important aspect of communication, and communication, woven with the language of virtues, is what connects people with one another. Listening becomes more significant when interactions are held between people from two different ends of the bridge. In such interactions, an individual not only sounds, but also looks different from others. Yet, “A very special kind of listening, listening that requires not only open eyes and ears, but open hearts and minds” (Delpit, 1988, p. 297), makes us think how we can get along (Haidt, 2012). The way to get along, I suggest, is to dwell in the ‘in-between,’ where people of different cultures speak up, and listen to, one another with their open hearts and minds.

The above argument reflects a scenario of Ontario public school classrooms, where both immigrant students, and teachers, despite their coming from distant geography, and different cultures, are required to forge a consensus. This leads to an argument about how we want to be treated teaches us how we should treat others (Gensler, 2013). A strong presence of virtues is inherent in this statement. Examples of being virtuous, as expressed in the Teacher Vignettes, include respecting each student, recognizing and acknowledging their differences, and valuing their experiences. In doing this, teachers are required “*to set the climate first in the classroom so that students feel safe to use their experience*” (Laura, Vignette 4). Within this safe and inclusive classroom environment, the language of virtues has potential to invite people from different ends of the bridge, and cultivate a culture of character. This cultivation begins by being respectful to one another.

Being respectful to one another is an important way to deepen the bond of connection between people from different land and cultures. In the context of immigrant students, the theme of support and care, which emerged in this study, occupies an important space. It is because the

prolonged dwelling of these students in the ‘in-between’ has a direct connection with the support and care from teachers. This asserts that teachers’ being respectful, caring, and supportive to students can potentially provide a ground for them to flourish. Unquestionably, respect offers a deep sense of dignity which is an un-manifested longing of newly arrived students in Canada. This assertion is supported by Sally’s statement: *“the main thing they needed was respect, and honouring for who they are, and what gifts they bring”* (Sally, Vignette 6). This leads to an acknowledgement of their identity, and valuing their unique experiences.

This discussion of the findings has discerned that the language of virtues is a pre-requisite for dwelling in the ‘in-between,’ and engaging in conversations. The student participants are shown to lead a disciplined life, carry humility and innocence in their being, build connections and relationships with friends from diverse cultures, and show their trust and faith in teachers. Impact of family values and traditions is evident in these students’ thinking and doing, which suggests that character development, to a large extent, relates to cultural convictions (Hunter, 1999). The teacher participants are described to be caring, supportive, respectful, accommodating, and friendly to students, which implies that character development is building caring relationship (Noddings, 1992; Noddings& Slote, 2003). In their narratives, the emphasis is found on creating inclusive, safe, welcoming classroom climates in which each student feels valued, protected, and respected. These characteristics, of both teachers and students, reflect an environment of the ‘in-between,’ which they dwell together. Creating an inclusive environment in the classroom or of the ‘in-between’ means to *“show how you have a great classroom culture, show how you have students working together, and supporting each other,”* which *“directly relates to character building”* (Laura, Vignette 4). Implied in this expression is the virtuous language; this leads to a point that virtues such as respect, care, and truthfulness are central to the

interactions that occur in the ‘in-between.’ To conclude, the language of character development is the virtues, and character development is seen in the negotiation made in the ‘in-between.’ Having said this, I now move onto show the link between my findings and Ontario character development document, in the light of curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived, and teachers’ dwelling in the ‘in-between’ of these two curricula.

### **8.3: Linking the Findings to Ontario Character Development Document**

The finding of this research demonstrated that the themes of transition, negotiation, support and care, and perception are underpinned by the virtues of respect, care, and truthfulness. These virtues are also overtly emphasized in *Finding Common Ground: Character development in Ontario schools, K-12* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). This is the mandatory character document that has been implemented in all Ontario schools, both public and Catholic. Looking out over the analyses of the Vignettes, and the guidelines of character development in the Ministry document, there is seen a strong link between the findings of this research and the document. This link, that education is critical in character development, is expressed by one of the teachers as being reflected in the need “*to create citizens that are accepting [of] people with different experiences. It is to let them understand that very one has different experiences, and everyone’s experience is valued* (Laura, Vignette 4). The document expresses the same goal:

*Character development is the deliberate effort to nurture the universal attributes upon which schools and communities find consensus. These attributes ... form the basis of our relationships and of responsible citizenship. They are a foundation for excellence and equity in education, and for our vision of learning cultures and school communities that are respectful, safe, caring and inclusive (p. 3).*

Laura's expression, which includes the recognition of diverse human experiences, and the need to reciprocate respect, draws a parallel with the character development document. The diverse human experiences form a social and emotional aspect of a classroom that influences each student's learning. Here the role of teacher is crucial in balancing and incorporating the subject matter to be taught, and human experiences to be valued. This entails an emotional aspect of teaching, and positions Laura in the 'in-between' of the curriculum-as-planned and the curriculum-as-lived.

The character development document, which is defined as "*A guideline, and should be used as a guideline...the curriculum is a good tool, an important resource*" (Laura, Vignette 4), stands as the curriculum-as-plan. The past, and concurrent experiences, of both students and teachers stand as the curriculum-as-lived. Returning to the bridge metaphor, these two curricula represent the two foundations of the bridge. This is to say that both the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived are inter-connected, and inter-dependent, as each requires the support of the other to continue their existence (Aoki, 1991). In an actual classroom situation, the inter-connection and inter-dependence are seen when students participate in teaching and learning activities that are facilitated by teachers. The hyphenated space between the 'planned' and 'lived' of the 'planned-lived' curricula is where learning takes place, as Sally emphasised: "*A meaningful lived experience is what we would expect from education*" (Vignette 6). Teaching then, is considered to be a dwelling in the 'in-between' of two curriculum worlds. In other words, teaching is seen as an intertwining of both lived experiences and the curriculum (Aoki, 1991), and this intertwining is grounded in the language of respect, care, and truthfulness.

Respect, care, and truthfulness are shown to be important character attributes in both the Teacher and Student Vignettes. These virtues are considered to be the main commitments in

*Finding Common Ground*; they are construed to “bind us across the line,” and “form the basis of our relationships and of responsible citizenship” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 3).

‘Binding across the lines’ is an indication of the importance of connection, as “Mounting research shows that students who feel connected in school – to teachers, to other students, to the school itself – do better academically” (Goleman, 2006, as quoted in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 11). This echoes the responses of the participants in this research, who repeatedly emphasized that the reciprocity of respect is the key to connection between people lingering in the ‘in-between’ of the bridge, and engaging in communication, as “*character can be truly developed through dialogue*” (John, Vignette 5). John’s emphasis lies on connecting people through ongoing communications, and embedding inclusivity in diversity. This embedding of diversity is seen in John’s narrative: “I have to make accommodation for those students who have recently arrived in Canada” (Vignette 5). John’s flexibility in accommodating the needs of students from diverse background illustrates his dwelling in the ‘in-between’ of two curriculum worlds. Teachers’ flexibility, and their dwelling in the ‘in-between’ spaces of multi-cultural classrooms, promotes communication, and strengthens the connections between students and teachers.

Live and dynamic communication, which is underpinned by the language of virtues, is fundamental to strengthening our connections, and enhancing our relationships with others. In fact, “Respect for diversity must be at the heart of our policies, programs, practices, and interactions” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p.3), as it provides the foundation for building all forms of human relationships. This obligatory statement validates the centrality of connections, which allows for negotiations between people who are living in the space ‘in-between.’ The acts of negotiation and binding take place in the ‘in-between,’ and Ontario public



school classrooms are such binding places, which are required to be “respectful, safe caring and inclusive” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p.4). An important question here is: what is the role of teachers in working to create this environment?

The findings of this research assert that “*Teachers are one of the major influencers after parents*” (Reena, Vignette 3). The parents’ role at home, and teachers’ role in the school, is crucial to both students’ academic progress and character development. Teachers, from their end of the bridge are the key players in creating a respectful and inclusive environment in the ‘in-between,’ where everyone is valued and included. Valuing and including every student with respect, in every learning and growing opportunity, relies on caring teachers, which is at the heart of the character development document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). This aligns with Reena’s statement that the “*caring [and supportive] role of teachers promotes a good relationship with students*”. This assertion explicates that the teachers’ dwelling in the ‘in-between’ of home and host cultures, and of the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived is what makes the negotiation work. As Reena (Vignette 3) stated “*during school, teachers can incorporate the values*” of host-and home- cultures, and for this to happen, an inclusive classroom becomes a pre-requisite.

The discussion to this point has demonstrated that the ‘in-between,’ the center of the bridge - or Ontario public school classrooms –must be an inclusive space that allows negotiation, as one of “*the goal of education should be to show how you can make a really good inclusive classroom*” (Laura, Vignette, 4). In these spaces, both teachers and students are seen to dwell together and engage in prolonged communication (Lee, 2017). These communications are purposeful, and are bound in the language of virtues, which facilitates the participants’

transitions, negotiations, support and care, connections and perceptions. This is seen in the experiences of the participants described in the Vignettes.

Intermingling and communicating are an ongoing process that offers meaningful experiences. In one teacher's perception, "*A meaningful experience is what we would expect from education*" (Sally, Vignette 6) in an inclusive classroom environment. Newly immigrated students bring "*into the classroom their previous lived experience, and their concurrent lived experiences,*" and when activities are performed, "*the classroom itself is lived experience*" (Sally, Vignette 6). These experiences are the outcomes of the interweaving of the themes of transition, negotiation, support and care, connection, and perception. So, like the ongoing communication in the 'in-between,' character development is an iterative process of negotiation from both ends of the bridge; "*it does not just happen instantly. Character attributes are developed over a long period of time*" (Reena, Vignette 3).

To be more precise, life in the classroom is really lived in the 'in-between' spaces between and among students and teachers, and "character development strives for an ever-growing self-awareness, reflection and understanding" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 5). To sum up, negotiation in the 'in-between' is based on virtues, which bind the East and West, the Communitarian and the Liberal, and the Home- and Host-cultures. This binding of the two distant ends, as represented by the bridge, now leads me to the concluding chapter of this research.

## Chapter 9: Conclusions and Implications

This concluding chapter includes two important components: a summary of the research analysis along with conclusions, and a discussion of the implications and recommendations for future research. The chapter begins with a summation of how the research question of this work has been addressed through the data.

### 9.1: Conclusions

In undertaking this research, my stated intent was to address my research question: what are the opportunities for character development in multi-cultural settings? Having worked through the process of data collection, a series of Vignettes were written based on the interviews with the participants. The Vignettes were analysed using the conceptual framework of the ‘in-between,’ and the review of relevant literature, which were developed and discussed in Chapter 2. In conducting the systematic analyses of the Vignettes, five important themes emerged: the themes of transition, negotiation, support and care, connection, and perception. I used the trope of the bridge as an analytical tool to discuss the findings, and linked these findings to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) *Finding Common Ground* character development document.

Hence, reflecting on the process of the data collection, data analysis, and the discussion of the findings, there are the three key conclusions that arise from this research. The first of these conclusions is that character development can be located in the negotiations in the ‘in-between’ spaces. Ontario public school classrooms are the spaces of the ‘in-between;’ and these spaces must be inclusive, which allow the negotiations between the values of the home- and host-cultures. The second conclusion drawn from this research is that the ongoing communication is essential to enable negotiations between people from both the ends of the bridge. Character

neither exists nor develops in a silence; it needs communication between, and among, people, regardless of their cultural differences. The third, and final, conclusion of this research is that the reciprocity of respect is the crux to conducting and continuing meaningful communications in the pursuit of negotiations. In other words, the language of virtues is the foundation of the communications that leads to negotiation. Taken together, these conclusions are a clear indication that the multi-cultural classrooms in Ontario public schools provide opportunities for character development to both teachers and students. In drawing these conclusions from the analysis of the Vignettes, there arise several implications to be taken into consideration and new questions to be asked of future research.

## **9.2: Implications and Recommendations**

There are three major implications arise from my research, which refer to the application of the findings. The first implication is concerned with the credibility of the character development document. Both the findings of my research, and the guidelines of the document, explicitly emphasize the communication, and application, of virtues in the 'in-between.' To illustrate, respect for other is a foundational virtue for negotiation. Teachers need to be aware of, communicate, and live the moral basis of the document. If they don't, then the document, however well-intentioned or researched will be empty words on a page. To be credible, the document must be reflected in the lived experiences of teachers and students in the classroom.

The second implication is concerned with the environment for negotiation. By environment, I refer to the environment of Ontario public school classrooms, which must be respectful, safe, caring, and inclusive; this should be founded, and sustained, by reciprocating the virtues of respect, care, and truthfulness. In the inclusive environment of the 'in-between,' students, coming from one end of the metaphorical bridge, must feel welcomed, included, protected, and

cared of by both their fellow classmates, and teachers. The environment must be such that negotiations can occur that bridge the binaries that exist between people, whatever those binaries are.

The third implication is that teachers need to be mindful of differences in their classrooms, and actively shape opportunities for character development. To do this, classrooms need to be open and welcoming to students from different backgrounds, and teachers need to recognise and incorporate elements of their home culture. Recognition and incorporation of home culture elements can strengthen the ability of new immigrant students to move from transition to negotiation. For this, the role of teachers is crucial; they are required to facilitate interactions, in which the participants from both the ends share with, and care for, one another. This sharing and caring, within the classroom as the ‘in-between,’ provides a learning opportunity, leading to meaningful negotiations. This implication is an affirmation that character development is not about imposition; it is more about negotiation that embraces the language of virtues. The implications mentioned in this section lead to important recommendations, which I have discussed in the section below.

**Recommendations to students, teachers, and parents.** Based on my research and analysis, I believe the following recommendations can be made for parents, students, and teachers involved in multi-cultural settings. These recommendations are important because both Ontario communities and schools are becoming increasingly multi-cultural places where parents, students, and teachers negotiate the differences they hold, and create an inclusive and respectful environment for both living and learning. In other words, we need to work together, and build strong communities, where character develops through negotiations.

Parents are the first teachers of every child; parents are the primary character builders of their children; and, parents' meaningful engagement in modeling virtues and values leave a lasting impact on their children. On the one hand, their love, and regular care and support are crucial to their children's character development and academic achievement. On the other hand, it is also important for parents to trust their children, and recognize that their children are living, growing, and developing in multi-cultural communities, and learning to negotiate in multi-cultural environments. To allow effective negotiation, the interconnection of parents, teachers, and students need to be forged together.

Based on the analysis of the three student participants' Vignettes, it is important for students to be encouraged to be involved in both home- and host- culture activities by reciprocating the language of respect, care, and truthfulness. In Ontario public schools, classrooms are constituted from a diverse population. Every student is a member of this diversity; they bring and place the values they have acquired in their family settings; and these values are shared and negotiated with one another in an actual classroom setting. Hence, students benefit from the activities of both home- and host- cultures.

The conclusions drawn, and the implications stated, also lead to a couple of questions that fall outside the boundaries of my research. The student participants, who were interviewed in my research, were from one specific culture group, and Aoki's bridge metaphor situates within the life of every one of them. However, they do not necessarily represent other culture groups. So, here arises a question: What would be the results if a similar study were conducted with students from different cultural groups? In the same way, the teacher participants were representative of the host-culture. So, how would the findings differ if similar research were to be undertaken with teachers who are not representative of the host-culture? These questions, I believe, are important,

and deserve to be answered in future works. I propose a salient reason regarding why these recommended questions need addressing.

It is evident that the population in Ontario is getting increasingly diverse. This diversity, on the one hand, indicates an intricacy of multiple beliefs and principles, and on the other, it provides an opportunity to understand and negotiate the differences between them. Conducting similar research with students from different culture groups, and with teachers who are not from the host culture, would open up new avenues for negotiation. These avenues would further add to the knowledge base around character development in multi-cultural classrooms.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Approval Letter from Research Ethics Board (REB)



Research Ethics Board  
t (807) 343-8283  
research@lakeheadu.ca

August 05, 2016

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Wayne Melville  
**Student:** L. Pathak  
Faculty of Education  
Lakehead University  
955 Oliver Road  
Thunder Bay, ON P7B 5E1

Dear Dr. Wayne Melville and Mr. Laxmi Pathak:

**Re: REB Project #: 037 16-17 / Romeo File No: 1465323**  
**Granting Agency: N/A**  
**Agency Reference #: N/A**

On behalf of the Research Ethics Board, I am pleased to grant ethical approval to your research project titled, "Opportunities for Character Development in Ontario Public School Classrooms".

Ethics approval is valid until August 5, 2017. Please submit a Request for Renewal to the Office of Research Services via the Romeo Research Portal by July 5, 2017 if your research involving human participants will continue for longer than one year. A Final Report must be submitted promptly upon completion of the project. Access the Romeo Research Portal by logging into myInfo at:

<https://erpwp2.lakeheadu.ca/>

During the course of the study, any modifications to the protocol or forms must not be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. You must promptly notify the REB of any adverse events that may occur.

Best wishes for a successful research project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lori Chambers".

Dr. Lori Chambers  
Chair, Research Ethics Board

/tm

## Opportunities for Character Development in Ontario Public School Classrooms

### Appendix B: Cover Letters and Consent Forms Teacher Letter

Dear Potential Participant,

I am a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education of Lakehead University. I am working on my research with the guidance of my supervisor, Dr Wayne Melville. My research aims at exploring and describing opportunities for character development in a multi-cultural classroom. I invite you to participate in my research project which is part of my graduate work. I am more than happy to openly discuss the purpose of the research with you to ensure that ethical requirements are met. This discussion will also give you an opportunity to think about and consider your participation in this project. I believe there is minimal risk to your well-being and confidentiality, however, I am willing to consider the concerns if arise in the course of this research.

I would value and appreciate your involvement in this research. There are two parts to your participation. The first is a series of up to five written questions for you to complete. Following this set of questions, you will participate in a short interview that will approximately last 60 minutes. During the interview you will be asked questions relating to your experiences while working with culturally diverse groups of students, and your perceptions of character and character development. You will be provided with a set of the interview questions before the interview, and I am more than happy to discuss any issues that they raise. With your consent, I will keep field notes and audio tape the interview. However, you are free to choose not to answer any questions asked during the interview. You may also refuse to participate in or withdraw from this project at any time without penalty.

One potential benefit of this study is to further enhance our understanding and practice of character development in the changing scenario of Ontario public schools' multi-cultural classrooms. The results of this study will be disseminated in the academic community through a means of thesis, conference presentations, and journal publications. However, your name and identity will remain anonymous, and you will see drafts of all research material. At your request, I will be happy to send you a copy of any published works to an address you provide.

As per Lakehead University policy, data will be securely stored in the Faculty of Education building for a period of five years. It is assured that the data will be accessed only by the researcher and the supervisor. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact Dr. Wayne Melville, [wmelvill@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:wmelvill@lakeheadu.ca) or 807 768 4946; you can also contact me at 807-285-3390 or via email: [lppathak@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:lppathak@lakeheadu.ca)

This study has been approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact:

Sue Wright

Lakehead University Research Ethics Board; [807-343-8283](tel:807-343-8283); [research@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:research@lakeheadu.ca)

Sincerely,

Laxmi Pathak

**Opportunities for Character Development in Ontario Public School Classroom**

**Former Student Letter**

Dear Potential Participant,

I am a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education of Lakehead University. I am working on my research with the guidance of my supervisor, Dr Wayne Melville. My research aims at exploring and describing opportunities for character development in a multi-cultural classroom. I invite you to participate in my research project which is part of my graduate work. I am more than happy to openly discuss the purpose of the research with you to ensure that ethical requirements are met. This discussion will also give you an opportunity to think and consider your participation in this project. I believe there is minimal risk to your well-being and confidentiality, however, I am willing to consider the concerns if arise in the course of this research.

I would value and appreciate your involvement in this research. There are two parts to your participation. The first is a series of up to five written questions for you to complete. Following this set of questions, you will participate in a short interview that will approximately last 60 minutes. During the interview you will be asked questions relating to your experiences while working with culturally diverse groups of students, and your perceptions of character and character development. You will be provided with a set of the interview questions before the interview, and I am more than happy to discuss any issues that they raise. With your consent, I will keep field notes and audio tape the interview. However, you are free to choose not to answer any questions asked during the interview. You may also refuse to participate in or withdraw from this project at any time without penalty.

One potential benefit of this study is to further enhance our understanding and practice of character development in the changing scenario of Ontario public schools' multi-cultural classrooms. The results of this study will be disseminated in the academic community through a means of thesis, conference presentations, and journal publications. However, your name and identity will remain anonymous. At your request, a copy of any published works of this study will happily be sent to an address you provide.

As per Lakehead University policy, data will be securely stored in the Faculty of Education building for a period of five years. It is assured that the data will be accessed only by the researcher and the supervisor. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact Dr. Wayne Melville, [wmelvill@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:wmelvill@lakeheadu.ca) or 807-768-4946; you can also contact me at 807-285-3390 or via email: [lppathak@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:lppathak@lakeheadu.ca)

This study has been approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact:

Sue Wright

Lakehead University Research Ethics Board

[807-343-8283](tel:807-343-8283),

[research@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:research@lakeheadu.ca)

Sincerely,

Laxmi Pathak

### Teacher Consent Form

Having carefully read the cover letter,

- I understand the purpose of this study.
- I have been given an opportunity to openly discuss about the purpose of this study.
- I agree to participate in the study.
- I understand that my participation in this project is voluntary.
- I have the right to choose not to answer any questions.
- I agree to participate in recorded interviews for this study  Yes  No
- I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty.
- I understand that the data I provide will be securely stored at Lakehead University's Faculty of Education for a period of five years, and will only be accessible to the researcher and the supervisor.
- At my request, I understand that any publications of this work will be sent to the following address: \_\_\_\_\_
- At my request, the outcome of the study will be provided to me through an e-mail attachment when it becomes available. My email address is: \_\_\_\_\_
- I understand the potential benefits of this study.
- I understand that my name and identity will not be revealed in this project.
- I understand that a copy of this consent form will be returned to me.

I hereby give my consent to being a part of this research project.

Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Former Student Consent Form**

Having carefully read the cover letter,

- I understand the purpose of this study.
- I have been given an opportunity to openly discuss about the purpose of this study.
- I agree to participate in the study.
- I understand that my participation in this project is voluntary.
- I have the right to choose not to answer any questions.
- I agree to participate in recorded interviews for this study  Yes  No
- I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty.
- I understand that the data I provide will be securely stored at Lakehead University's Faculty of Education for a period of five years, and will only be accessible to the researcher and the supervisor.
- At my request, I understand that any publications of this work will be sent to the following address: \_\_\_\_\_
- At my request, the outcome of the study will be provided to me through an e-mail attachment when it becomes available. My email address is: \_\_\_\_\_
- I understand the potential benefits of this study.
- I understand that my name and identity will not be revealed in this project.
- I understand that a copy of this consent form will be returned to me.

I hereby give my consent to being a part of this research project.

Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C: Interview Questions**

### **Questions for Teachers**

#### **Written Questions**

- Tell me about your professional and biographical background.
- How do you perceive character and character development?
- How important is it for you to understand the concept of character in order to apply in your everyday/professional life?
- Based on your experience, in what ways can teachers help students develop character?
- What are your experiences of working and learning in a multicultural classroom?

#### **Interview Questions**

- Tell me about the school you work at present.
- What do you believe is the purpose of education?
- How do you think students learn best?
- Describe your experiences as an Ontario public school teacher.
- What is your understanding of the curriculum-as-plan?
- Based on your impression, in what ways are students' lived experiences important to a multicultural classroom?
- Do you have any questions for me?
- Final comment?

## Questions for Students

### Written Questions

- Tell me about your biographical and educational background.
- How do you perceive character and character development?
- How important is it for you to understand the concept of character in order to apply in your everyday life?
- Based on your perceptions, in what ways can teachers help students develop character?
- What are your experiences of being and learning in a multicultural classroom?

### Interview Questions

- Tell me about the school(s) you attended and graduated from.
- What do you believe is the purpose of education?
- How do you think you learn best?
- Describe your experiences as an Ontario public school student.
- Describe some cultural activities that you practice in your family/community.
- Describe the support you received, both at home and at school, for your high school education.
- Do you have any questions for me?
- Final comment?