

## Student Research Podcast - Promise of Home SCRIPT

**Abbey LeJeune:** Promise of Home’s narrative inquiry focuses on a holistic, ground-up approach to welcoming, supporting, and retaining immigrants in a place where they can feel comfortable and at home. We propose that barriers to community building can be overcome by incorporating the stories of both recent immigrants and other Frederictonians to restructure settlement policies. We pursue this approach through four lines of inquiry that embrace Fredericton as a place where: immigrant youth aspire to belong; immigrant families find a sense of belonging; people share hope towards a more inclusive community; and these aspirations inform effective grassroots policies. Our project involves storytelling, performances, a visioning forum, a Web-based collection of stories and visions, town-hall meetings and policy workshops to develop community-driven recommendations regarding student integration, accessibility to social services and immigrant retention.

**Aaron Beaumont:** Promise of Home is a community-based research project in four phases. In Phase One, we have worked with high school students who shared their experiences since immigrating to Fredericton. We have had nine participants thus far, but this phase will continue to evolve in the spring and summer as we find more youth who want to get involved. Phase Two will look for immigrant families to share the same, while Phase Three will include everyone in the community who wants to share their hopes and aspirations for a more inclusive community. Phase Four will use all of the stories gathered to help make policy recommendations on how to make Fredericton more inclusive to anyone who is new. The research questions that drove each phase are as follows: Phase One, immigrant youth narratives, asks, “How do school communities

address contradictions between the aspirations of immigrant youth and the school system's policies?"; Phase Two, intergenerational immigration stories, reflects on, "How do different parties involved interpret and negotiate the contradictions between the expectations of immigrant families and settlement policies?"; Phase Three, community-enrichment narrative visioning, asks, "What are the shared hopes and aspirations, between immigrants and Frederictonians, for a more inclusive community?"; and Phase Four, grassroots policy proposals, asks, "What grassroots policy proposals emerge from these narrative-making activities?".

**Abbey:** Promise of Home's four-phase research project aims to address three concerns: (1) that newcomers have complex attachments to other places besides Fredericton and that labour migration programs (such as the Provincial Nominee Program and the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Project) often ignore these nostalgic attachments and fail to explicitly address immigrant families' aspirations for social attachments; (2) Fredericton's marketing campaigns strive to project a welcoming, multicultural environment. However, research done by Allain, Crath and Çalışkan (2019) and Wilson-Forsberg (2012) demonstrate that the reality is often far less welcoming; and (3) many stakeholders are working to build the skills and resources for meeting the challenges of retention and integration of newcomers, and by creating community-based policies that actually serve immigrants, integration efforts regarding different policies and community efforts will be more effective for all parties involved.

**Aaron:** This project is a collaboration between the researchers and the participants, where participants are included in the data collection and analysis process through storytelling, written narratives, and performances. As the research shows, action research, and particularly a

participatory approach, “include the researched in defining the questions, in data collection and analysis, and in interpreting and taking action based on research findings”. Participants will have an active role in generating information and knowledge that will be used later to initiate and create policy proposals relating to the resettlement of newcomers in Fredericton. As evidence of a participatory approach, the objective of this project is to allow participants to hold a major stake in data collection and analysis that is focused on community-based action.

**Abbey:** Promise of Home is a collaborative work between St. Thomas University, the City of Fredericton, and the NB Innovation Fund. We have had support from the Multicultural Association of Fredericton, local high schools, Jacqueline Cormier at St. Thomas University, and a few others, whom we are very grateful for their work and support. This project was created by Dr. Gül Çalışkan, Associate Professor of Sociology at St. Thomas University. She received her PhD from York University in Toronto, where her dissertation focused on the diasporic citizenship of Turkish-background residents of Berlin, Germany. Gül joined Sociology Department at STU in 2013. Her research and teaching focus on the broad areas of citizenship (as a social practice) and global social justice within global and transnational sociology. Postcolonial Studies and Postcolonial Feminism inform her research and teaching. In her research, she engages in the narrative inquiry to examine the complex relations between global processes and everyday realities.

**Aaron:** We are both Sociology students at St. Thomas University, and are the research assistants for the Promise of Home project. As Sociology majors, we both work on being heavily involved in social activism in Fredericton around the topics of queerness, reproductive justice,

racialization, Indigenous rights, climate justice, and immigrant and refugee issues. Kyle Reissner, also a Sociology student at STU, was the initial research assistant who helped Dr. Gül Çalışkan come up with this project but is no longer involved. He plans on going to graduate studies for social work and his passion for social issues and inequality has allowed him the opportunity to have worked on the Promise of Home project. Patricia Saad, Journalism student at STU, is the cinematographer, and thus far has recorded and edited the Phase One participant stories. The initial workshops and performances were facilitated by Anthazia Kadir, an incredible educator, narrative researcher, and writer. As mentioned, the City of Fredericton is a partner in this project. Sebastián Salazar, community and social policy planner for the City of Fredericton, focuses on reconnecting people face-to-face in public places and participatory spaces, particularly in light of social isolation and the increasing dependency on technology. In his current role as community liaison, Sebastián is involved in community development by focusing on the areas of social inclusion, immigration and cultural diversity, post-secondary relations, and improving access to municipal services. We are all incredibly thankful to have had this opportunity to work together thus far and are looking forward to our continued partnerships.

**Abbey:** In Phase One, Promise of Home sought out to understand participant's hopes, plans, and experiences in the Fredericton community as well as at their school. We did this by coaching the participants in expressing their stories using various art forms, such as story-writing, music, poetry, spoken word, drama and visual arts. The project consisted of story-creating workshops that gradually accumulated into a series of recorded performances chronicling the challenges of the participants youth, their joys, and their resentment that they harbour for living in an unfamiliar place. The participants have opportunities to learn about these creative expressive

forms, try them, and choose the one that they thought would be the best way to tell their story. Through these performances, the participants were able to build the capacity to live through their emotions as they emerged to learn that even though home is understood to be a physical place, the feeling of home can also form with more lasting effects around a sense of belonging experienced within their own selves as well as with others.

**Aaron:** In Phase One, it has been Promise of Home's intention, as researchers and academics, to create an environment that benefits all parties associated with this project. Some outcomes of the project included: the prevention of mental health issues by providing students the opportunity to share their personal experiences; dissolving imagined boundaries; building bridges and commonalities among other students; and telling stories that the public does not recognize/are not visible in order to humanize newcomers. By now, Phase One, Promise of Home has witnessed and collected engaging and thoughtful stories for various high school student immigrants who have given their time, dedication, and labour to working with us on creating change in Fredericton.

**Abbey:** COVID-19 created a variety of barriers for Phase One of our project as it had become more difficult to meet with the participants for workshops and record the stories. Originally, we had planned on facilitating four workshops with the participants, hosting a few performance practices, and then having a final performance on stage before the townhall meeting with community members and government. As the pandemic hit, we had to change around the plan for Phase One. Meetings were switched to online platforms, however this was difficult as all participants had different levels of access to internet and computer access, as well as knowledge

of technological platforms. Once the weather was warmer, the Promise of Home team and the high school participants switched out meetings to outdoors at Odell Park. This went well for the most part, and through these outdoor meetings we were able to practice and record the participants stories while maintaining physical distancing and mask-wearing. Presently, we are finalizing the recording of the participant's stories as the process has taken longer than anticipated, but we are hopeful that they will be posted and published as soon as possible. We are also hoping that we will work with more youth and amplify the stories as we start Phase Two, during the spring and summer 2021.

**Aaron:** As a preview, here are a few examples of the stories that the immigrant youth participants created:

1. Hala's hijab speech: "If I come to your house and asked you to show me your diamonds, would you willingly do that? I don't think so, (shakes head) this is one of the main reasons why I as a Muslim woman have to cover my head because in Islam women in general, are like diamonds. I am only showing you what I chose to show you, look at my personality, my identity as an individual as a fellow human regardless of what I wear upon my head."

2. Mehak's Poem titled Change:

"Because change has affected me twice.

And to heal from so much change you need time.

I was not given time.

I was not given respect.

I was not given kindness.

I was not given a voice.

I was given silence.

Silence was shoved and stuffed and clogged my windpipe.

Not only was the shock taking my breath away, but it took my voice too

Entitlement is wrong

But why is it treated like it's right?

Why does nobody effectively stand up.

And try to actually fight?

Because they don't know what they're fighting.

The person or the fear they create

The fear that drowns every idea in our mind

To make us blank slate.”

**Abbey:** As white research assistants working on this project, we do a lot of background work like emailing, running the project's social media, editing text, scheduling meetings, and taking minutes during meetings. Specifically, we meet as a team to discuss the project, edit the website, and workshop participant stories. This project has been a great opportunity for us to make connections with other academics and community members, build our researching skills, and create community, which are all very important to us for our professional and personal lives. We've enjoyed the opportunity to do narrative work and learn this type of research. It has been

particularly beneficial for Aaron Beaumont, as it is something that they are doing for their honours thesis and want to continue doing in their future endeavours.

**Aaron:** What we've liked most about the experience was the collaboration and teamwork that continued all throughout the first phase and will go on in the next three phases as well. We've learned that we are both willing and able to work collaboratively in a team setting. Often, we find ourselves resorting to working alone on projects and in other academic work, but the Promise of Home project has allowed us to come out of our comfort zones and build teamworking skills. We have learned about our own ideas and perceptions of home, as well as reflecting on our own experiences and privileges as white academics. This project reminded us of the work that needs to be done by white people in Fredericton to make Fredericton feel like home for everyone, including immigrants and refugees like the youth storytellers in this project.

**Abbey:** This project has taught us about the struggles of immigration and acceptance in a new place, a new home. Many of the participants spoke about struggling to fit into Fredericton, but also showed a lot of confidence and resilience despite their struggles. As people who have never experienced immigration, or even a move outside of New Brunswick, we really admire and respect the youth for telling their stories and being vulnerable with us, especially considering how emotionally challenging these topics can be to discuss, analyze, and work with. This reminds us of the importance of sharing your stories for connection with others, similar or different from you, and building trust and community within.

**Aaron:** Thank you all for listening. We hope that you enjoyed learning about the Promise of Home project. We wanted to give thanks to Dr. Gül Çalışkan for giving us this opportunity to work with her on this project, and a thanks to all the other team members and project partners for your continued collaboration.

**Abbey:** If you want to stay updated and support us, we are on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and have a website in the works. We will leave links in the podcast description. Thanks, again for listening!