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TRANSFORMING SOCIAL WORK FIELD EDUCATION: NEW INSIGHTS FROM PRACTICE RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP

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Field Education and Immigrant Serving Sector

Vibha Kaushik

Social work has a long history of serving immigrants in Canada by responding to their needs, and by engaging in settlement practices and integration programs for newcomers, immigrants, and refugees when they first arrive in the country. Social workers provide comprehensive responses not only to the predicaments and challenges facing immigrants and refugees, but also their families including their parents, grandparents, children, and grandchildren as they continue with their lives in this country (Dumbrill, 2008; Frideres & Biles, 2012; Lundy, 2010; Sethi, 2013). To assist them efficiently and to advocate for them effectively, it is very important for social workers to have an awareness of the challenges facing immigrants, refugees, and their families; to learn about their settlement and integration experiences; to develop an increased understanding of the needs of newcomers arriving through a variety of pathways; to become familiar with the services and support offered to immigrants and refugees; and to understand the policies and programs that govern Canada's newcomer intake, and their implications for newcomer settlement and integration in the Canadian society.

Newcomer settlement and integration is multidimensional and complex. Settlement is a process through which immigrants establish themselves in their new social environment. It captures distinct activities and

processes as immigrants cross between cultures and socio-geographical locations (Valtonen, 2016). Integration, on the other hand, is a goal-oriented process through which immigrants seek full participation in the social, economic, cultural, and political life of the host society. It is also seen as the desirable outcome of a long-term process facilitated by initial settlement (Valtonen, 2016). Although certain aspects of settlement expectations and integration experiences are similar for most immigrants, there are subtle differences between different groups of immigrants. For instance, refugees are less likely to be proficient in English upon arrival, they may not always have the occupational background highly demanded in the Canadian labour market, and they are likely to have past experiences of trauma and violence. Therefore, they would expect compassionate support as they learn to build new lives against all odds. On the other hand, the immigrants within the skilled category are invited as permanent residents after a rigorous assessment of their skills, qualifications, and professional background to fulfill the labour shortage in high-demand professions in Canada. Therefore, skilled immigrants may prioritize insights and support for securing appropriate employment corresponding to their professional background in the shortest possible time (Bhayee, 2019; Drolet et al., 2017; Kaushik, 2020; Valtonen, 2016). Through this chapter, I invite attention of the social work profession to the preparation of the next generation of practitioners for addressing the complex issue of newcomer settlement and integration. Information from existing literature in the area of immigration and social work practice and education will be offered and relevant issues will be discussed. My goal in this chapter is to create a dialogue for developing immigration content in the education and training of social workers, including more field education and training opportunities in the immigrant serving sector, and to prepare future practitioners to respond to issues and challenges newcomers faced when they settle for a new life in Canada. For the sake of brevity in this chapter, I will use, henceforth, the terms "immigrants" and "immigrant" to include "refugees" and "refugee," unless a distinction needs to be made between the two groups.

The Realities of International Migration and History of Canadian Immigration

International migration, forced or voluntary, is an expression of globalization (Nash et al., 2006). Today, more people than ever live in a country other than the one in which they were born (United Nations, n.d.). Sometimes people move voluntarily in search of better economic opportunities, for personal and/or professional growth, to fulfill self-actualization needs or to rejoin their families. However, often times people are forced to migrate to escape conflict, persecution, terrorism, or human rights violations in their home countries. Many others are displaced due to the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters, or other environmental factors (Becker & Ferrara, 2019; Dohlman et al., 2019; United Nations, n.d.). In recent years, the world has witnessed major migration and displacement events resulting in an overall increase in the scale of international migration. According to United Nation's *World Migration Report,* in 2019, the number of international migrants was estimated to be approximately 272 million globally, nearly two-thirds of whom were economic migrants. This was 51 million more than in 2010. In 2019, the estimated proportion of the global population who were international migrants was 3.5% compared to 2.8% in 2000, and 2.3% in 1980 (McAuliffe & Khadria, 2020).

Canada is a safe and welcoming destination for international migrants, including immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Of all countries, Canada has the sixth highest number of immigrants per capita (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2022). Canada is globally recognized for its well-established immigration policies and public discourse that view immigrants and refugees as valuable resource for the country's local, provincial, and federal economic growth and social vitality (Sidney, 2014). According to historians, large scale immigration in Canada began in the 1860s; however, for almost a century, immigration in Canada continued to be highly restrictive as only people from United Kingdom, Europe, and America were truly welcomed to the country. In the post war years, Canada's immigration policy started demonstrating a humanitarian approach as it welcomed refugees, war brides, and displaced persons, but only from United Kingdom, Europe, and America (Knowles, 2016). Between 1947 and 1957, the immigration

restrictions eased in order to admit refugees, displaced persons, and ordinary immigrants from a growing number of "white" Commonwealth countries (Knowles, 2016; Rawlyk, 1962). In 1957, facing a greater need for a much larger population (Rawlyk, 1962) and referring to the 1952 *Immigration Act*, then prime ministerial candidate John Diefenbaker famously announced, "We will overhaul the act's administration to ensure that humanity will be considered and put an end to the bureaucratic interpretations which keep out from Canada many potentially good citizens" (as cited in Knowles, 2016, p. 136). Later as prime minister, Diefenbaker declared, "Canada must populate or perish" (as cited in Knowles, 2016, p. 136) to encourage immigration to foster population growth in Canada.

By the 1960s, Canadian immigration policies began to change to offer solutions for several demographic challenges facing the country such as aging population; shrinking birth rates; declining ratio between the combined youth and senior populations (0 to 19 years and 65 years or older), and working-age people (20 to 64 years); and, skills shortages in a global, market-driven information-based economy (Boyd & Alboim, 2012; Elabor-Idemudia, 2005; Knowles, 2016). In the wake of the realization that restricting immigrant intake from the traditional source countries was insufficient to address the demographic challenges, or to meet the labour marker demands in Canada, the current points-based immigration system was established in 1967. The points-based system placed a higher emphasis on human capital and acknowledged the economic benefits of immigration. Under the points system, applicants were given points on nine factors: (1) education and training; (2) personal character; (3) occupational demand; (4) occupational skill; (5) age; (6) pre-arranged employment; (7) knowledge of French and English; (8) presence of a relative in Canada; and (9) employment opportunities in their area of destination. The points-based system was the first major step to provide explicit guidelines to the immigration officers and to limit their discretionary powers (Green & Green, 2004; Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, 2019). This shift in immigration policy facilitated intake of immigrants from developing countries in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Central and South America (Bhatta, 2017). Since then, in addition to continuing its global leadership in international refugee resettlement initiatives, Canada has adopted an immigration policy that emphasized immigration

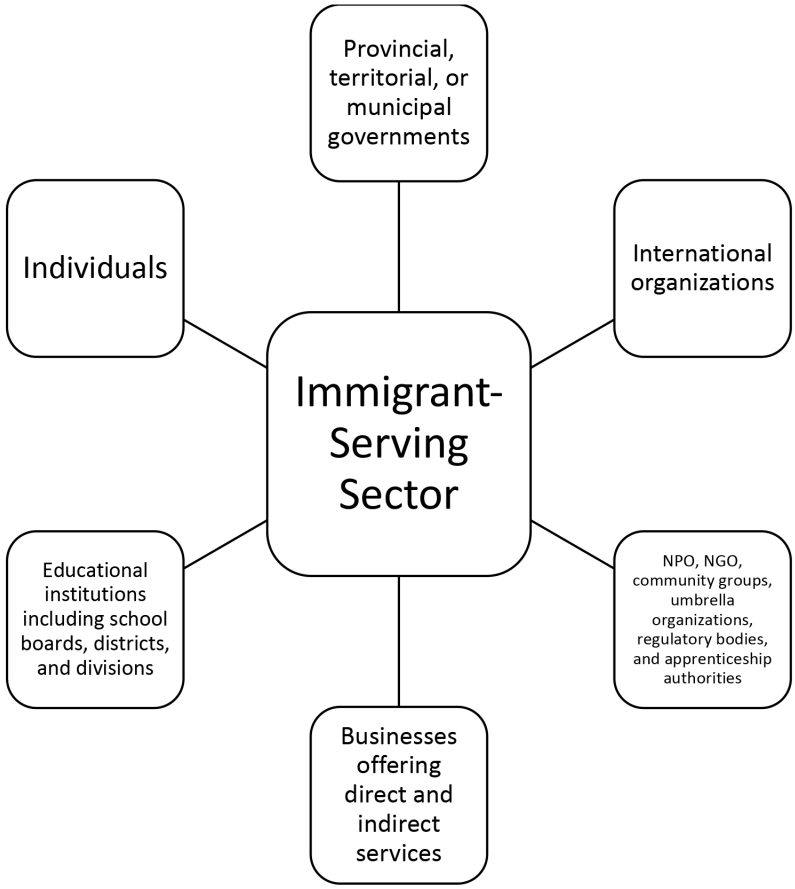
for "designated" occupations in order to attract highly skilled workers with advanced educational credentials and professional skills, and best address Canada's economic needs (Boyd & Alboim, 2012; Government of Canada, 2020; Green & Green, 2004; Henry & Tator, 2006; Reitz, 2007).

The provisions for immigration in Canada are regulated by the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA), which came into force in 2002 to outline several basic economic, social, and cultural goals for Canada's immigration program (Government of Canada, 2021a). The major objectives of IRPA includes supplying regulations for (1) admitting skilled workers to Canada to support and develop a strong and prosperous economy; (2) fulfilling Canada's obligation to contribute to international efforts to provide protection to refugees and displaced persons; (3) reuniting families of immigrants; (4) offering settlement/resettlement assistance to all immigrants including refugees; (5) promoting successful integration of immigrants; and (6) facilitating the entry of visitors, international students, and temporary foreign workers (Government of Canada, 2021a). Since the introduction of IRPA until 2015, Canada welcomed an average of approximately 250,000 immigrants every year (Government of Canada, 2021b). This figure includes all classes of immigration such as economic class immigrants, family class immigrants, and refugees and protected persons. In subsequent years, with the increase in the intake of immigrants, the average immigration figure has gone up. For instance, in 2016, Canada accepted 296,346 immigrants while in 2019 the country welcomed 341,180 new immigrants. Between 2021 and 2023, Canada plans to admit over 1.2 million new immigrants to the country (Government of Canada, 2021b) or a number of immigrants equal to 1% of Canada's population each year (Government of Canada, 2018).

The Immigrant Serving Sector in Canada

Immigrants need efficient support as they establish themselves in the country and to overcome the challenges they face in the process (Kaushik, 2020). Cognizant of this need, the Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) funds the Settlement Program to offer a variety of services and supports that benefit immigrants and help them integrate into Canadian communities. Through the Settlement Program, IRCC works with several partners and community organizations across Canada and

Figure 9.1: Immigrant serving Sector at a Glance



internationally to provide immigrants with the information they require to make informed decisions during the settlement process, with respect to language skills adequate for their settlement and integration goals, and the support they may need to build networks within their new communities. These organizations are mandated to support immigrants until they are able to fully participate in the Canadian economy and society (Government of Canada, 2021c; Praznik & Shields, 2018; Shields et al.,

2016). The first program of this kind in Canada was launched in 1974 as the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP). Since then, countless number of immigrants have been supported through a wide range of settlement programming and services as the sector has evolved tremendously (Bhatta, 2017). The settlement sector involves a network of not-for-profit organizations, community groups, various forms of associations, umbrella organizations, regulatory bodies, and local immigration partnership councils (see Figure 9.1). The primary purpose of these associations, organizations, and partnerships is to facilitate newcomer settlement and to enhance the knowledge and capacity in the settlement sector through research, networking, and training with the ultimate goal to improve newcomer outcomes. In addition, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments; school boards, districts, and divisions; and certain businesses that offer indirect services also play an active role in facilitating newcomer settlement (Government of Canada, 2019). According to IRCC, the planned settlement program expenditure in 2021–2022 amounted to around $894.6 million (Government of Canada, 2021b).

Social Work and the Immigrant Serving Sector

With the growing number of immigrants and refugees arriving in Canada and with the improved understanding of all types of predicaments and challenges they experience, social work has increasingly become interested in immigrants as a vulnerable and marginalized population group. Furthermore, social work has also become a regular human resource provider for the immigrant serving sector, particularly for supplying practitioners with high level of service expertise to fill key leadership positions in the sector organizations (Türegün, 2013). The high number of immigrants arriving annually affirms the ongoing need for immigrant services in Canada. To ensure necessary supports to new immigrants, the demand for services for immigrants has increased and, along with it, the need for well-equipped social workers trained and experienced in serving immigrants (Kaushik, 2020; Payne, 2014). Social work's focus on the "person-in-environment" perspective, along with anti-oppressive, culturally competent, ethical, and trauma-informed practice approaches, makes its practitioners ideally suited to play a central role in the interdisciplinary team of professionals who collaboratively respond to the needs

of immigrants and their families. Social workers initiate coordinated and consolidated interventions with both the recognition and sophisticated understanding of complex issues of diversity, discrimination, exploitation, oppression, trauma, and a range of other social and emotional problems (see Chang-Muy & Congress, 2016; Kuttikat, 2012). However, the profession confronts some challenges related to education and training for its practitioners (Yan & Chan, 2010), which have been noticed and should be ironed out.

In the last several years, efforts have been made towards building capacity in the social work profession for working with immigrants in Canada; calls have also been made for considering social work with immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers as a new field of practice within the profession (Nash et al., 2006; Yan & Chan, 2010). A decade ago, researchers noted that newcomer issues were rarely included in the curriculum of different levels of social work education and field training. A handful of social work programs offered courses that were specifically focused on working with immigrants and refugees; however, almost all of them were elective courses and did not constitute the core social work curricula. Topics relevant for practice with immigrants were usually explored within courses on cross-cultural, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive practices (Yan & Chan, 2010). A quick survey of the current online information available on the websites of social work institutions shows that social work programs in Canada have since made some progress. Currently, many accredited graduate and undergraduate programs offer one or more elective courses that consider issues of immigration and refugee resettlement. Likewise in the accreditation context, authors have been drawing attention to the fact that the Canadian Association of Social Work Education - L'Association canadienne pour la formation en travail social (CASWE-ACFTS) accreditation standards do not directly pinpoint materials and information related to practice with immigrants as a requirement for social work programs; they also argue that there is a need for new accreditation standards to better prepare social work students for working with immigrants and their families (Drolet, 2012; Yan & Chan, 2010). However, little has been done in this area and the status quo continues to remain. A quick search on the CASWE-ACFTS website (https://caswe-acfts.ca/) using the search tool returned no results that could suggest a specific mandate on

the preparedness of social workers to serve immigrants and refugees or indicate CASWE-ACFTS's commitment to promote the inclusion of newcomer issues in social work education, scholarship, and practice. This lack of intentionality on the part of CASWE-ACFTS to enhance the profession's ability to deal with the changing demographic of the country, demands a critical examination of the existing focus of Canadian social work. Indeed, the new realities invite all stakeholders to both reflect on the current social work discourses that shape professional practice and begin a conversation in order to re-envision the goals and priorities of social work education in Canada.

Practice literature explicitly reveals that practitioners require specialized knowledge of the unique issues facing immigrants and refugees. Practitioners involved with this client group frequently agree that they should have sufficient information about immigration policies and regulations, laws and legal discourses surrounding immigrants, and labour market requirements and socioeconomic discourses to make informed decisions to support immigrants and to make necessary referrals. They must also have adequate knowledge of the range of factors that are of importance for immigrants such as human rights and social justice issues, local and international laws related to migrants and refugees, and service delivery systems specific to immigrants to get meaningfully engaged in advocacy and activism with and on behalf of this population. In addition, social work practitioners must also be culturally competent and informed about other key issues such as health, mental health, family dynamics, cultural diversity, language, and important socioeconomic factors including educational background and professional experience. Literature on practice with immigrants has and continues to emphasize both "knowing about policy" and "knowing about immigrants" because immigrant experiences are defined by the policy contexts. It has been argued that an understanding of immigrant experiences is important; yet, along with that, an understanding of macro-level contexts is also important because polices facilitate the nature and extent of services that social workers provide to immigrants (Düvell & Jordan, 2001; Kaushik, 2020; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Martinez-Brawley & Zorita, 2011; Padilla, 1997; Potocky-Tripodi, 2019; Sethi, 2013).

Social Work Field Education in the Immigrant Serving Sector

Field education has a critical role in social work education. It is considered a central component in social work training as it offers students a distinct perspective of the profession by integrating classroom knowledge with social work values and skills in the context of field. Specifically, CASWE-ACFTS (2020) outlines that "The purpose of field education is to connect the theoretical/conceptual contributions of the academic setting with the practice setting, enabling the student to acquire practice skills that reflect the learning objectives for students identified in the Standards" (para 7). It enables students to learn from experienced social workers in a variety of practice settings and gain practical knowledge and skills through experiential learning. Field education provides students with opportunities to develop skills beyond those obtained in a classroom-learning environment; therefore, students find their field education experience to be the most important element in becoming a competent practitioner. On the other hand, faculty and field instructors find it important as it allows them to evaluate students' suitability and preparedness for professional practice (Bogo, 2015; McConnell et al., 2013; Poulin et al., 2006).

Every year, a large number of social work students complete their field education placement in immigrant serving agencies and organizations that provide services to immigrants in Canada. Besides offering necessary support to immigrants, these immigrant serving agencies and organizations also provide an important learning site for social work students, specifically for those who plan to work with newcomer clients and client systems, as well as those who are interested in developing practice knowledge and skills in the related area of immigration practice (Drolet, 2012). As students complete their field placements, they learn about publicly-funded settlement services and programs; they understand the role of community-based partnerships in promoting immigrant settlement and integration at different levels; they gain first-hand experience of the challenges and struggles experienced by immigrants in their integration journeys; they receive opportunities to get engaged with social action and social justice for immigrants; and they improve their understanding of the historical, political, economic, and social factors associated with

immigration, including both forced and voluntary international migration (Drolet, 2012).

The onsite experiential learning under the supervision of field instructors and mentors equips students to play a more central role in serving immigrants at the micro level in the direct practice arena, as they hone their problem-solving skills, case work, counselling, and therapeutic skills. At the mezzo level, the fieldwork experience offers students the opportunity to gain necessary knowledge to get productively engaged in community development to create welcoming and inclusive spaces where immigrants feel safe, develop a sense of belonging and connection, and can thrive and achieve their full potential. Last but not the least, the knowledge gained in the field also places students in a good position to foster deliberation and to influence the macro level discourse on human rights, social policy, social justice, and advocacy (Drolet et al., 2017; Martinez-Brawley & Zorita, 2010; Nash et al., 2006; Westoby, 2008).

In practice literature, we have evidence that in-person contact of students with marginalized and vulnerable populations on the one hand, predicts more understanding and favourable attitudes towards the people they serve and, on the other hand, reduces misinformation which leads to stereotypes and prejudices (see Bhuyan et al., 2012). Sometimes, while working with immigrants and being under the pressures and constraints of everyday practice, practitioners tend to make biased decisions which, potentially influenced by intersectional identities, culture-based stereotyping, and categorisation of service users, deeply affect the merits of casework (see Barberis & Boccagni, 2014; Bhuyan et al., 2012; Chang-Muy & Congress, 2016). However, students who receive field education practice with immigrant clientele or in immigration policies-related areas are found to significantly improve their attitudes towards immigrant service users. Through placements in the sector, they are given the opportunities of in-person contact which enhance their general knowledge of immigrants and immigration-related topics (Bhuyan et al., 2012). In the field, students begin not only to identify and challenge their personal biases, assumptions, views, and stereotypes about diversity, but they also learn how their personal circumstances and social locations may influence their practice with immigrant clients and communities. Students begin to understand that immigrants are not a homogenous group as they experience the

diversity within the immigrant population. Students gain insight into how immigrant serving agencies respond to the needs of diverse immigrant clients and communities. The field experience helps students understand the role of social workers as immigrants navigate through the process of settlement and integration (Barberis & Boccagni, 2014; Drolet, 2012).

Competent Practice with Immigrant Clients and Communities

Two major learning objectives for social work students in today's highly globalized and diversified world is to develop practice competence with diversity and to learn to provide effective services to diverse service users. In relation to these objectives, the Canadian Association of Social Workers has made some broad references to social work principles such as cultural competence, cultural sensitivity and awareness, diversity and discrimination, social justice, and social action in their 2005 *Code of Ethics* and 2005 *Guidelines for Ethical Practice*. However, I would argue that those can hardly be regarded as sufficient or meaningful guidelines for practice with immigrants. Perhaps this is the reason why Yan and Chan (2010) stated that social workers are "less than fully prepared to serve newcomers effectively" (p. 16). In their British Columbia Association of Social Workers' (BCASW) organized survey-based exploratory study, only a handful of respondents (social workers registered with BCASW) reported that they had received education and training specific to working with immigrants in their academic programs; a vast majority additionally reported that they either had not heard about *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* or knew nothing of the details it contained. Most respondents in the study suggested that if cross-cultural and anti-oppressive practice training is helpful, it is not sufficient for preparing students to work with immigrants. An overwhelming majority of respondents reported that their social work education and training lacked content on policies and programs unique to immigrants. They did not receive knowledge either about the specific needs of immigrants and the difficulties, challenges, and issues they face (see Yan & Chan, 2010).

Interestingly, this situation is not unique to social workers in Canada. Studies from other parts of the world such as the US, Italy, and Britain

have concluded that practitioners in the immigrant serving sector learn by practice. They do not get the practice tools from their social work school training; instead, they train themselves through practice and in-person contact with immigrant service users, and by relying on other staff members. The literature reveals that at the grass roots level, the staff lack preparation and do not receive much guidance at work (Barberis & Boccagni, 2014; Duvel & Jordan, 2001; Martinez-Brawley & Zorita, 2010; Nash et al., 2006). This situation demands an expansive analysis and a comprehensive examination of the current state of preparedness of social workers for serving immigrants and their practice competence with immigrant service users. Furthermore, when the staff at the immigrant serving agencies, who also serve as field supervisors for student interns, themselves lack the necessary training, it invites a discussion on how we offer quality field training to social work students, in order for them to develop and enhance appropriate practice skills to service immigrants.

Conclusion

Immigrant service delivery is based on the fundamental criterion of addressing the needs experienced by immigrants in their immigration journey. Immigrant serving agencies often function as a bridge between immigrants and the host society. The availability of adequate services and professional support is critical for immigrants as they move through the stages of initial settlement to long-term integration. To provide appropriate services, it is important that practitioners are sufficiently equipped to work with, and work for immigrants at all levels of practice. As a profession, social work is diligent towards culturally sensitive and anti-oppressive practice. However, I would argue that the challenges and issues that immigrants face are often beyond cultural or ethnicity-based discrimination or racism, which social work education and training must consider. Owing to the rapid influx of immigrants, the changing demographic realities in Canada demand that the social work academic programs offer appropriate knowledge and experience on the range of issues experienced by the immigrants, and not just limit the focus on diversity and cultural competence.

The research completed for this chapter reveals that there is very limited to no scholarship or information available on this topic. As a social

work researcher and academic who is highly interested in immigrant issues, I often come across the narrative that students want to complete their placements in the immigrant serving sector; however, there are not enough social workers in the sector to offer them field supervision. Is it just a narrative or a possibility backed by evidence? We must address this contention. We need updated research to establish whether we have appropriate capacity to offer field supervision to social work interns in the sector; if not, would receiving interdisciplinary supervision be a more effective strategy? We must also explore new models of field education so that the gap in field education is addressed. This chapter aims to draw attention of the profession to these important questions.

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