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A STORIED PICTURE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' HOPE IN ONLINE LEARNING

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### **Dedication**

To my husband, Jim Fitzgerald, you are my hope, my love, my light, my heart, my friend.

“When it was dark, you always carried the sun in your hand for me.”

— Sean O'Casey

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"But hoping," he said, "is how the impossible can be possible after all."

— Marissa Meyer

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### **Abstract**

My research study explored and conceptualized the role asynchronous and online learning communities have in encouraging or discouraging international students' hope and how western institutions of higher education can integrate the concept of hope into distance education. An increasing international student population in higher education and a growing interest in online offering of educational programs has led to more complex and diverse student bodies. Enrolling in higher education is a journey of hope. Hope, as a cognitive-motivational life force, can provide international students with the internal resources necessary to engage, adapt, and succeed in their educational endeavours. A narrative-photovoice methodology within an interpretivist paradigm has the potential to capture international students' lived experience of hope and the role of asynchronous and online learning communities in encouraging or discouraging hope.

*Keywords:* Asynchronous learning, hope, hope and cultural adaptation, hope in higher education, international students, international students' experience of hope, online learning, online learning communities, online teaching and learning

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## Glossary of Key Terms

*Asynchronous*: “Asynchronous Learning uses various technologies such as e-mail, blogs, discussion boards, web-supported textbooks, hypertext documents, audio-video courses, and social networking” (Hrastinski, 2008, p. 1346). It is a flexible mode of education that provides students with learning anywhere and any place.

*Distance Education*: “A field of education that focuses on teaching methods and technology to deliver teaching, often on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a traditional educational setting such as a classroom” (Bušelić, 2017, p. 24).

*English as a Second or Other Language Students (ESOL)*: These students come from various cultural backgrounds and have diverse educational, social, and personal experiences. They first learned to speak, read, and write in a language(s) other than English and whose language proficiency may preclude them from full participation in learning experiences (Alberta Education, 2009).

*Eschatological hope*: conceptualized as the anticipation that God will make all things new, raising people to everlasting life with God in joyful celebration, including people from every culture and nation, ending all personal pain and suffering, eliminating all societal evil and harm, and bringing reconciliation and healing to all of creation (Witvliet et al., 2022, p. 18).

*Faith*: Refers to a level of trust held toward a person, thing, or belief, with or without any religious connotations. It can also refer to an overall religious tradition of beliefs and practices, such as when one speaks of the Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and Buddhist faith (Ungvarsky, 2022).

*Hope:* Dufault and Martocchio, 1985, espouse *hope* as a “multidimensional life force characterized by a confident yet uncertain expectation of achieving a future good, which to the hoping person is realistically possible and personally significant” (p. 380).

Snyder et al.'s (1991) Hope Theory defines *hope* as a dynamic motivational experience that is interactively derived from two distinct types of cognitive tools in the context of goal achievement—namely, pathways and agency thinking (p.287).

*International Students:* Students who are temporary residents with study permits or refugee status, and their diversity, linguistic abilities, and cultural understandings mark them as outsiders in educational learning communities (Calder et al., 2016).

*Learning Communities:* Participatory learning environments which are “designed to help participants develop a sense of community and to provide them with opportunities to engage in collaborative discussions” (Yamagata-Lynch, 2014, p. 194).

*Online Education:* “Online education is defined as education delivered in an online environment for teaching and learning. This environment includes online learning on the part of the students that is not dependent on their physical or virtual co-location. The teaching content is delivered online, and the educators develop teaching modules that enhance learning and interactivity in the synchronous or asynchronous environment.” (Singh & Thurman, 2019, p. 302).

*Optimism:* “Optimism is an individual difference variable that reflects the extent to which people hold generalized favourable expectancies for their future.” “ Optimists are people who expect good things to happen to them” (Carver et al., 2010, pp. 879-880).

*Resilience*: “Resilience may be briefly defined as the capacity to recover or bounce back, as is inherent in its etymological origins, wherein ‘resilience’ derives from the Latin words *salire* (to leap or jump), and *resilire* (to spring back)” (Davidson et al., 2005, p. 43).

*Self-Efficacy*: “Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives” (Bandura. 1994, p. 1).

*Wishful Thinking*: “Wishful thinking involves choosing to believe that the truth is what one would like the truth to be”(Caplin & Leahy, 2019, p.2).

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

This introductory chapter presents a rationale for the research study by outlining the research problem statement, the background and significance of the problem. The purpose of my qualitative research investigation was to examine diverse international students with English as a second or other language (ESOL) participating in asynchronous and online learning communities in a western institution of higher education and their experience of hope. Hope is viewed as a positive construct that contributes to international students' ability to have well-defined goals, develop strategies to reach their goals and to ignite the motivation to successfully navigate their educational trajectories and achieve academic success. My positioning and personal context will be discussed along with the limitations and delimitations of my research study. Application of the results could potentially inform distance educational policy and practice in western higher educational institutions regarding supporting international students' hope leading to positive academic outcomes and satisfactory educational experiences.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The 1990s was a time of exponential growth for distance education, which transformed post-secondary institutions, altering the landscape of educational offerings as “the footsteps down the hallowed halls of academia are rapidly being replaced with keystrokes zipping through cyberspace” (Holder, 2007, p.245). The growing demand for higher education globally and significant developments in internet technology in distance education provided an opportunity for educational institutions to increase their international student populations (Sadykova & Dautermann, 2009). Knight (2004), an expert in the field of internationalization, defines internationalization of higher education as “the process of integrating an international,



intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of post-secondary education” (p.11).

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered how post-secondary education is offered. The global shutdown of educational institutions “precipitated the largest experiment in distance learning in history” as they moved rapidly to emergency remote teaching (ERT) as a crisis measure to meet teaching and learning needs (Kabir et al., 2021, p.3). Canada’s higher education sector has made conscientious efforts to establish workable digital learning environments by reconfiguring course requirements and providing the necessary support to faculty to transition to online learning. These efforts did not fully meet the needs or expectations of students, particularly international students as many educational institutions were unprepared to provide their services remotely (Veerasamy & Ammigan, 2022). The subsequent isolations incurred by the COVID-19 pandemic increased students’ challenges (Veerasamy & Ammigan, 2022). It is imperative that post-secondary support services meet the needs of this population in a humane and socially responsible way.

Enrolling in post-secondary education is an act of hope (Kasworm, 2008). Historically, international students have sought opportunities in western institutions of higher education with the hope of getting an advanced education that will allow them to be contemporaries among their peers (Akanwa, 2015). When students enroll in higher education, they hope to obtain the training and skills that will allow them to build relationships, find employment that provides a sustainable living, and contribute to their families and their communities (Burke & Johnston, 2004). International students as sojourners, rather than migrants, hope to obtain social capital that is translatable to obtaining an edge on the job market through improved employability and globally recognized qualifications (Page & Chahboun, 2019).

International students hope for academic success to improve their life situations through higher education, and these hopes are fundamental to student success. Research demonstrates that hope is likely the most crucial ingredient for student success (Lopez, 2013; Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 2002b). Hope is a dynamic motivational system that can enhance students' abilities to conceptualize goals, think along multiple paths, and it instills the motivation to accomplish their objectives, leading to improved academic outcomes and persistence in asynchronous and online learning communities (Lopez, 2013; Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 2002b; Snyder et al., 2002a).

As multimedia becomes increasingly accessible and new technologies less costly, there is the capacity for asynchronous and online education to meet the needs of students' lifestyles. It affords them the means of juggling personal commitments, managing time conflicts, and providing access to course materials from different sources and locations (Zhang & Kenny, 2010). Asynchronous and online learning permits geographically distributed students to enroll in courses that expose them to learning experiences that reflect varied cultural conditions and expectations (Zhang & Kenny, 2010).

International students, as do domestic students enter western educational learning experiences from many frames of emotion and cognitive beliefs. They each view this experience as the purposeful choice for a new and different future, a future of hope and possibilities (Kasworm, 2008). Students' motivation, learning strategies, cognitive resources, academic self-concept, and academic achievement are significantly tied to academic emotions (Valiente et al., 2012). Hope as a cognitive, motivational resource can facilitate cognitive momentum that translates into the ability to achieve valued academic goals (Snyder et al., 2002b).

Kasworm (2008) delineates four acts of hope that facilitate goal achievement for students entering higher education. The first is seeking entry to higher education; the second is an ongoing engagement in the academic environment; the third is active engagement in learning new and different knowledge; and the final act of hope involves the challenges these students face in gaining a place, a voice, and a sense of value in the cultural worlds of higher education. These acts of hope support the negotiation of positional and relational agency relative to their peers, their educators, their learning communities and the institution leading to academic satisfaction and success (Kasworm, 2008).

International students have trouble negotiating space in learning communities in higher education (Mann, 2008). Learning communities are the organization of individuals into a social group that works together towards a desired goal. Norms are established for uniformity and conformity. There can be tensions that exist between the various social structures that are present within learning communities. Learning communities are predicated on a sense of sharing and belonging and require participants as members to homogenize their identity, purpose, and values creating a restrictive space where questioning and critique are diminished. Restrictive spaces build boundaries rather than bridges, which makes it difficult for international students to negotiate the interpersonal and positional agency to support their hope, keeping them at a distance and is exclusionary in nature (Mann, 2008)

Research is accumulating on the relationship between high hope and better academic performance and success (Feldman & Kubota, 2015; Gallagher, 2017; Marques et al., 2017; Rand et al., 2020; Snyder et al., 2002b). However, there are gaps in the substantive knowledge base that specifically addresses the significance of hope for diverse ESOL international students and their experience in asynchronous and online learning communities in western institutions of

higher education. This scarcity of research leaves room for additional exploration into what role asynchronous and online learning communities have in encouraging or discouraging international students' hope and how western institutions of higher education can integrate the concept of hope into distance education initiatives. It is essential to understand how students' hope helps them cope with stressful events and how hope, as a construct, supports students in the pursuit of their educational goals. Hope is critical to ensure students have a positive educational experience.

### **Background of the Problem**

Over the past two decades, Canadian higher education institutions have been rapidly internationalizing (Knight, 2000). Internationalization of education has become an edubusiness with the priority being the financial bottom line. This perspective has displaced the ethically driven educational and ideological intents of social justice, social responsibility, and human rights embedded in traditional academia (Luke, 2010). Internationalization is a major focus for Canadian higher education, and Canada's federal and provincial policies emphasize international students as a market (King, 2020). Governments are pushing higher education to be more competitive in international student recruitment, as internationalization is a priority for both government and education. International student tuition is used as revenue to mitigate financial shortfalls due to reduced government funding and declining domestic student enrollment (Guo & Guo, 2020). Internationalization is important to the Canadian government as an economic and trade benefit and to compete globally to attract top talent to Canada (Trilokekar & Jones, 2015).

This internationalization of education has led to more complex and diverse student bodies that are heterogeneous in cultural history, language and dialect, religion, social class, background knowledge, and motivational constructions (Luke, 2010). The majority of these international

students attend a western institution of higher education to assist themselves and their families financially and socioeconomically through immigration or improved employment opportunities at home (Calder et al., 2016).

International students who come to Canada to improve their socio-economic and financial status are offered competitive packages in Canada to facilitate their ability to become permanent residents. For example, they are allowed to work full-time during their programs of study to acquire post-graduate work permits, and immigration pathways are available to encourage them to create new lives here (El-Assal, 2018). The Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship has temporarily lifted the 20-hour work week cap for international students as of October 7, 2022, to help sustain Canada's post-pandemic growth (Government of Canada, 2022). International students have been positioned by Canadian immigration policy as prospective immigrants, hoping to retain them as economic migrants and eventually permanent residents. These international students are often referred to as "designer immigrants" with the assumption that their Canadian credentials will facilitate their integration into the Canadian labour market (Gates-Gasse, 2012, p.272).

However, international students I encounter as an educator at a western Canadian institution of higher education are isolated on many fronts. Isolation from family, home, friends, and an inability to fit in are barriers to hope. According to Snyder et al. (1997a), social support and positive interactions are linked to hope. Support from others has also been shown to increase hopefulness in individuals (Bishop & Willis, 2014). Furthermore, Fruht (2015) discovered that having supportive adult relationships or mentoring relationships is a predictor of hope in college students, with parents often being nominated as a supportive other for these students. Without the necessary agency and pathway thoughts to attain their goals, international students with low hope

cannot overcome the challenges and barriers they face (Snyder, 2000). Agency thought is the ability to begin and sustain movement along a pathway, while pathway thought is the ability an individual has to create different routes to reach their desired goals (Snyder et al., 2002b).

Snyder (1995) discovered that 'high-hope' students have greater problem-solving abilities and use fewer disengagement strategies to cope with stressful academic situations. Snyder et al. (2002b) define high-hope students as having an increased ability to problem-solve, generate alternate plans to reach their goals, and execute plans to succeed in their academic tasks. High-hope individuals view barriers as challenges to be overcome, while low-hope individuals, who encounter barriers to goals, may give up as they cannot determine pathways to overcome obstacles. These barriers can result in frustration, decreased confidence, and diminished self-esteem resulting in low hope levels (Snyder et al., 1997b; Snyder et al., 2002b).

Atik and Atik (2017) studied hope levels of high school students in Turkey, finding that higher hope scores were significantly related to better problem-solving skills. As problems developed, high hopeful thinking primes individuals to become searchers of knowledge and develop preventative strategies for their well-being (Atik & Atik, 2017). Atik and Atik (2017) indicated that self-efficacy and problem-solving are important predictors of hope, and increased hope levels lead to a greater problem-solving ability. Stressful academic situations are important factors in low retention, high attrition, and poor performance (Kausar, 2010). Pathway thinking and agency were found to be vital mechanisms for coping with major academic stressors such as "academic pressure, social and financial issues, information and input overload, inter-personal issues at the institution or within the family, and lack of leisure time" (Naidoo et al., 2014, p. 258). Students with high hope are able to cope with stressful academic situations leading to

academic and interpersonal life satisfaction (Chang, 1998; O'Sullivan, 2011; Rand et al., 2011; Snyder, 2002).

Research demonstrates that international students face stressful acculturation difficulties, which may profoundly affect their psychological adjustment (Marks et al., 2018). Although coming to a foreign country to obtain an education is often an exciting and enriching event, an act of hope, it can also be traumatic due to uncertainty and the confusion inherent in navigating a different and new culture and unfamiliar social expectations. It is therefore essential to understand factors within institutions of higher education that scaffold international students' agency and pathway, or many will be at risk of failing to attain their educational potential when facing barriers (Snyder et al., 2002b).

### **Significance of the Problem**

To respond to economic, social, and labour market demands impacted by the demographic shifts of an ageing population, access to higher education is expanding for untapped segments of the potential student market population, particularly international students. The Association of Universities and Colleges Canada (2011) states that international students value a Canadian education and will be important drivers of future growth in Canadian universities. A growing body of research provides evidence that students with high levels of hope achieve better grades and graduate at higher rates, and the presence of hope is a better predictor of grades and class standing than standardized test scores (Collins, 2009; Holder, 2007; O'Sullivan, 2011; Snyder et. al., 2002b). The underlying assumption of this research study was that high-quality learning experiences that support hope would result in more engaged and productive students who will achieve their education initiatives.

### **Researchers Positionality**

The stories heard, how they are told, and the narratives that the qualitative researcher constructs in narrative inquiry, are influenced by researcher positioning and experience and researcher epistemology, the doing of research in relation to the participants. Positionality describes the researcher's worldview or paradigm, their ontological assumptions, the nature of social reality, and their epistemological assumptions, the nature of knowledge (Holmes, 2020). Researcher perception in qualitative research is paradoxical. The researcher must be in tune with the experiences and meaning systems of their participants while simultaneously being acutely aware of researcher bias and preconceptions that potentially influence understanding (Corlett & Mavin, 2018). As the researcher, it was important for me to position myself within the research to familiarize both the participants and the reader with a personal understanding of myself and my motivation for this work. Positioning of the researcher as insider or outsider to the group being studied is "understood to mean the degree to which a researcher is located within or outside a group being researched" (Gair, 2012, p. 137).

### **Personal Context**

I contextualize myself within a Canadian College in western Canada. My positionality is a white middle-class woman from Canada, a doctoral student at an institution of higher education. At the time of this research study, I moved from my nursing educator role to the role of Associate Dean for the School of Allied Health. These classifications have granted me privilege and had the potential to affect relationships with the participants in my study. My privilege is that I have been raised in socioeconomic conditions that are more stable and advantaged than my participants. As associate dean and a nursing educator, I have witnessed an increase in international student populations at the Canadian college where I work. In the past



decade, Lethbridge College welcomed 684 international students in 2019 in degree, diploma, or certificate programs from 132 different countries, compared to 231 in 2017. Lethbridge College also declares that the college is a home away from home for international students (Lethbridge College, 2020). The reality of the struggles and challenges these students face, such as exclusion, prejudice, hostility, discrimination, and the questioning of their academic credibility, can make it difficult for international students to feel at home in Canada (Zhou & Zhang, 2014).

I have noticed the exclusion of international students by domestic students. It is not active or overtly hostile but an indifference that shrouds the international students in invisibility like a cloak. International students of various cultures and nationalities sit alone and are not selected by local Canadian students for group work or extracurricular activities. It was a student from Ghana with English as a second language that sparked my interest in this research study. This student, whom I will call Joan to ensure her anonymity, had failed her medical surgical class in the fall term of her second year and was repeating it in my class. Joan was an invested learner, never missing class, always sitting at the front and diligent about her note-taking. I spoke to her previous educator to determine if there were any areas where I could support this student. The educator stated that I should not waste my time as this student did not get it and did not belong in the nursing profession. This educator also expressed their shock at the students' emotional collapse when informed of her failure the previous term. Faculty are influential in ensuring international students meet their academic outcomes, and those who are dismissive or unaware of these students' needs will have a negative impact on academic performance (Bartosik, 2017).

I set up a meeting to speak to Joan and help her find strategies to potentiate her academic success. The student was very fearful when she met with me, was uncommunicative and would not make eye contact. I told Joan I wanted to help her meet her outcomes and pass the course. I

also told her that I had noticed her commitment to her studies. Joan told me that she was not used to faculty assisting students on a personal level. Western pedagogies in higher education emphasize critical thinking, self-expression, debate, and self-directed learning (Newsome & Cooper, 2016). These instructional methods varied from Joan's culture, whose pedagogical approaches promote student passivity, are teacher-centred and favour rote learning (Newsome & Cooper, 2016). I discovered that using culturally specific medical examples and colloquialisms that, although understood by domestic students, created challenges for Joan. It was a new understanding for me to realize that even though international students can progress to their second year of nursing, they still require support in knowing how to think, read, write essay assignments, and understand course directions, as instructions are not always transparent and self-explanatory.

Joan also stated that her whole family had come together to fund her education in Canada and that the expectation was for her to obtain her degree, allowing her to support others in the family in their educational pursuits with the goal of increasing the family's socioeconomic status. The obligation to her family put a great deal of pressure on Joan. Financial pressure is a stressor for international students adjusting to new environments (Araiza & Kutugata, 2013). The quality of international students' relationships with their educators can counter this stress, and if this relationship is negative or nonexistent, it can impact a students' ability to succeed (Olivas & Li, 2006).

Joan's inability to connect with her previous educator and her difficulty adjusting to the academic environment as well as her obligations to her family, and the pressure to succeed, ultimately diminished Joan's hope, resulting in her inability to meet her academic outcomes. In the academic setting, research indicates that hope positively correlates with higher academic

achievement (Barlow, 2002; Feldman et al., 2009; Snyder et al., 2002b). Snyder et al. (1997a) discovered that hope flourishes when strong bonds develop between individuals. Hope is communal and is shaped by social, environmental, and contextual factors (Bishop & Willis, 2014). With support and mentorship, Joan met her academic outcomes and is now a registered nurse helping others in her family to achieve financial and social security.

Throughout my career as a registered nurse and as an educator, I have observed hope's positive impact as a cognitive motivational force, providing individuals with the agency and pathway to attain essential life goals. These personal observations have encouraged me in the pursuit of hope research. My personal approach to Joan strengthened her agency and pathway thinking, which fostered a positive outcome for Joan, allowing her to achieve her goal and build the life she chose. Although this research serves a tangible purpose of fulfilling the requirements of a doctoral program, I hope that it will turn into something more meaningful and increase awareness of the importance of hope in facilitating the successful educational experiences for ESOL international students participating in asynchronous and online learning communities in western institutions of higher education.

### **Insider-outsider Research**

The researcher stands as an outsider or as an insider in narrative inquiry. This positioning, the researcher to the researched, is analogous and has many different terms, "endogenous or exogenous, native and the colonizer, the observer and observed, and participant-observer and the participant" (Johnson-Bailey, 2004, p. 129). Positioning is not permanent and can change from insider to outsider or vice versa, depending on the setting and perspective. There is a benefit for the researcher to be a member of the group under study as this can provide a commonality of understanding that automatically promotes trust and openness. The issue that can arise as the

research evolves is an assumption of similarity, potentiating a failure to explain the individual experience fully (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Johnson-Bailey (2004) proposes that insider status can potentially cause the researcher to forfeit objectivity adopting the participant's viewpoint providing a platform to promote the moral right of the participant's perspectives.

Although subjectivity is the sine qua non of qualitative research, there is also an objectivist piece. Objectivity informs the researcher's subjectivity, which allows an understanding of "the world as it exists in itself" (Ratner, 2002, p. 3). It is not inevitable that subjectivity can bias researcher objectivity. By recognizing subjectivity, the researcher can reflect on whether it hinders or enables objective understanding and replace biased values with values that enhance objectivity which facilitates an accurate interpretation of the research participants' reality as meaningful and important (Ratner, 2002).

My positioning for this study is outsider to the group under investigation due to a difference in ethnic background and perceived representation of western institutional philosophies. This positioning proceeds from an ontological position that "lies in curiosity with the unfamiliar, the ability to ask taboo questions, and being seen as non-aligned with subgroups, thus getting more information" (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 411). This ontological perspective is relational in nature and the foundation for the epistemological positioning that experience is knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Therefore, the narrative nature of experience demands "considerations of relational being and knowing" as well as attention and sensitivity to the intersecting stories that unite individuals together in research interactions (Caine et al., 2013, p.584)

Merriam et al. (2001) propose three themes that outline the researcher insider/outsider debate: positionality, representation, and power. Positionality, where the researcher stands in

relation to the participant, can shift due to dynamic factors such as education, gender, class, race, sexual orientation, or length of time spent with participants, and can mitigate the cultural identity associated with insider or outsider status (Merriam et al., 2001). Representation is in the truth of the research findings that encourage the participants' voices to be heard (Merriam et al., 2001). The power inherent in my outsider position is age, older and more experienced, as well as having advanced academic achievements, possibly appearing to have a higher status and greater knowledge than the participants. An extensive personal experience in asynchronous and online learning environments provided me with a position of insider status for this investigation.

Researcher positioning is complex. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) challenge the dichotomy of the insider, outsider position, proposing a space between where the researcher position is with their participants suggesting a tensioned space. This tensioned space exists as a positionality of the researcher, how we are positioned by our participants, and how we position ourselves within the research experience. Tensioned space can also appear during the data analysis phase, where the researcher is at times an outsider: them and they; or an insider: we and us; acknowledging that not every experience is shared by any given population (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). The authors recommend abandoning the premise of two opposing sides and attempt to understand the complexity of the space between perspectives. Qualitative research is intimate, and therefore, I did not qualify for true outsider positioning to the experience studied. The role inherent in my positioning within this study is not dichotomous but occupies the space between (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). These concepts will be further developed in Chapter 3, Methodology.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore ESOL international students' experience of hope while participating in asynchronous and online learning communities at a post-secondary

institution in western Canada. ESOL international students were chosen as participants for this study as language is an important component of their academic and social success.

Academically, ESOL international students have difficulty with writing, reading, and comprehension (Poyrazli, 2003). Socially ESOL international students who cannot communicate effectively in English find it difficult to interact and socialize with local students (Wright & Schartner, 2013). In asynchronous and online learning environments, ESOL international students may be unsure of their communication abilities and isolated due to a lack of verbal cues and social presence (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005). Liu et al. (2010) found that language is a prevailing barrier for ESOL students studying in an environment where English is the dominant language.

### **Research to Practice**

The findings of this narrative-photovoice study provide information that can be used to design interventions in asynchronous and online learning that can support and enhance international students' hope with a focus on eliminating barriers to hope that interfere with academics. Within these learning communities, diverse ESOL international students face barriers, which include pedagogical and curricular adjustment difficulties and isolation from their counterparts in learner groups (Williams, 2008).

Cultural differences can have a negative impact on international students' participation in asynchronous and online learning communities, influencing their ability to meet educational outcomes (Liu et al., 2010). Research has found that international online learners feel marginalized or alienated from English-speaking online learner groups due to difficulties with communication (Shattuck, 2005). Miscommunication is enhanced in the presence of varied cultural communication patterns, and the greater the cultural differences perceived between the

participants, the greater the number of episodes of miscommunication (Reeder et al., 2004). In addition, language is an important cross-cultural variable, and language competencies can potentially enlarge other cultural difficulties when participating in asynchronous and online learning initiatives (Ku & Lohr, 2003).

Research has uncovered that the separation of educator and student in asynchronous and online courses contributes to feelings of isolation, diminishes hopeful thinking, and can negatively influence learner outcomes (Bressler, 2006; Bressler et al., 2010; Snyder et al., 2002b). This separation would be particularly impactful for international students whose diversity, linguistic abilities, and cultural understandings mark them as outsiders in educational learning communities. The findings of this study have implications for distance education policy, program makers, educators and curriculum designers to develop strategies for asynchronous and online educational initiatives and curriculum development that strengthens international students' hope.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Limitations of a study are potential weaknesses that are typically out of the researcher's control and that potentially affect the results of the study or interpretation. The limitations of my study include ambiguities inherent in human language, which can leave speech open to multiple interpretations and international students in the study population may not be representative of all international students. Researcher bias could affect the interpretations of the data. Reality is context-dependent, and the findings of one study of a particular group within a specific context may well vary in another group and context.

Delimitations define the research parameters that include the scope of participation and research sites in a study (Creswell, 2018). My research was delimited to eight international

students from diverse cultural backgrounds participating in asynchronous online learning and their experience of hope in one Canadian institution of higher education. These delimitations exist in my study due to available participant volunteers, as well as location limits and time constraints for the student-participants, and for my doctoral work.

The aim of my qualitative study is not to generalize the findings but to discover insights into how international students perceive and construct meaning into their experience of hope in online learning communities in higher education. Qualitative research seeks to provide in-depth explanations and meanings rather than generalize findings. In qualitative research, there is a focus on the setting, relationships, and hermeneutics, a practice of interpretive understanding, and therefore rather than generalization of the findings, this study has the potential to provide transferability of international students' experience of hope across the broad scope of asynchronous and online education in post-secondary institutions (Carmanati, 2018).

Transferability is the extent to which findings are applicable in various settings, and readers of the research findings determine how pertinent these findings are to their specific situations (Polit & Beck, 2018). The focus is on participants' stories which are unique to them and their situations. Transferability is founded on thick description, context, location, and the participants, through transparency in data analysis and trustworthiness.

Thick description is an accounting of the emotions, thoughts, meanings, understandings, and perceptions of the research participants and constructs an accurate representation their cultural situations and contexts (Younas et al., 2023). Trustworthiness is the extent to which confidence can be vested in the data, interpretation, and methods employed to ensure a quality study (Polit & Beck, 2018). Transferability and trustworthiness will be discussed in depth in Chapter Three: Methodology.



The discoveries of this study will contribute to advancing the narrative-photovoice methodology in understanding the experience of hope for diverse ESOL international students participating in asynchronous and online learning communities in English-speaking institutions of higher education. Narrative-photovoice has a duality in that pictures, not alone, but combined with participant's narratives, permit an exploration beyond the photograph, expanding what is not visible or defies understanding.

### **Summary**

The purpose of narrative-photovoice as a research methodology was to travel beyond a conceptual analysis of hope toward a logical understanding of its significance as a valuable construct to promote international students' agency and pathway, facilitating their ability to achieve their goals while participating in asynchronous and online learning communities in English-speaking institutions of higher education. A concept analysis involves an investigation into the characteristics of a concept with the purpose to differentiate it from other concepts (Walker & Avant, 2005). This investigation has moved beyond defining and categorizing hope towards an understanding of the experience of hope for ESOL international students as a cognitive force or, as Dufault and Martocchio (1985) propose, a "multidimensional, dynamic life force" (p. 380) that facilitates the ability of individuals to expend the mental energy to pursue their desired goals and produce effective routes to reach them. Building on the strength of existing research and investigating international students' experience of hope allowed a critical examination of factors that enhance or detract from international students' hope.

This research study affords a deeper understanding of international students' experience of hope, potentially providing a guide for the usefulness of hope as an essential concept to promote enhanced engagement, legitimation, and positive outcomes for international students

participating in learning communities in asynchronous and online education. Findings could offer guidance for educators involved in asynchronous and online education to develop strategies to promote international students' hope, producing more engaged and productive students who will achieve their educational initiatives, making successful transitions despite the challenges they face. Educational stakeholders that include the institution, faculty, and peers in academic and social spaces have the potential to create a positive context that supports hope, where educational initiatives are transformative, addressing the whole person and how they connect to themselves, others, and the world.

The assumption of my research is to increase knowledge about hope, as it exists for international students through narratives and pictorial representations. Without this knowledge, hope as experienced by international students will remain anonymous, leaving higher education bereft of a critical adjunct to support the growing populations of diverse international students in asynchronous and online learning communities in western institutions of higher education. This introductory chapter offers a window into topics that will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters, specifically in Chapter Three: Methodology.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

Research is the search for knowledge, a journey into the unknown, a process to solve problems and potentially better the human condition. An important component of significant research builds on present understandings, advances knowledge in a discipline, and can reach a broad audience, thus stimulating debate and further research. The literature review will be in two parts. The first section will include my review methods, and a review of the literature related to hope will follow. Definitions of hope, the etymology of hope, concepts related to hope, and theories and models of hope will be discussed. The second section of the literature review will analyze and evaluate the current literature regarding diverse international student populations. It will align with the conceptual framework related to context, culture, environment and community (see Figure 4). International students are emerging in more significant numbers in Canadian university populations, but knowledge is limited about what factors will enhance their learning needs and educational experience. The literature review has kept the Canadian context in view as the setting for this investigation.

### **Method of Review**

I conducted a review of the literature that provided a relevant critical assessment and evaluation of the literature related to my research questions and my topic of international students' experience of hope in online and asynchronous learning communities in higher education (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016). After reviewing the seminal works and origins/derivation of Hope Theory in the Health Disciplines, my method of review focused on education derived databases and publications. Today hope is an important construct that drives goal achievement and is a factor in emotional and psychological well-being. So much so, there are institutions dedicated to its dissemination. The Hope Foundation of Alberta, founded in 1992,

at the University of Alberta is the only research unit dedicated to the applied study of hope (Smith, 2022).

### ***Databases***

The following databases were searched: Psychological Information (PsychINFO), Educational Information Center (ERIC), Research Gate, JSTOR, Dissertation Abstracts International (DAI), ProQuest, International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning (IRRODL), Canadian and Provincial government web libraries, Google Scholar, Hope Foundation of Alberta, Hope-Lit Database Directory. The primary search focus within the Hope Foundation database included Hope Strategies and Interventions, College and University Students, Professional Disciplines, Culture and Diversity, Immigration and Refugees, and Education. Through ResearchGate I contacted scholars whose work aligned with my research study and was not available from libraires such as Karin Dufault and Benita Martocchio, Kevin Rand, John O’Hara, Jean Clandinin and Michael Connolly, Donald Polkinghorne, and Susan Chase.

### ***Search Strategy***

The following keywords and terms were chosen to scan the available literature related to my topic of study: (“online learning” or “online learning communities” or “online teaching and learning”) and (“international students in online learning” or “international students in higher education” or “international students challenges in western institutions of higher education” or “international students in asynchronous learning”) and (“international students experience of hope” or “hope in higher education” or “hope and internationalization of higher education” or “hope and teaching and learning” or “hope in online learning communities” or “hope and

academics” or “hope and persistence in higher education” or “hope and cultural adaptation” or “educators hope” or “fostering hope in higher education”).

I searched academic libraries, which included Athabasca University, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Lethbridge, using the same search terms. The literature review comprised peer-reviewed journal articles that included quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method studies, dissertations and master’s theses, texts and books related to my topic of hope in online and asynchronous learning, and international students.

### ***Journals***

Journals that were a rich source of applicable studies included the *Journal of International Students*, *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, *Journal of Advanced Nursing and Teaching in Higher Education*, *Journal of Happiness Studies*. Each peer-reviewed research article led to other seminal authors, which expanded my experience and knowledge about the literature on hope.

Seminal works conducted among diverse student samples have shown a relationship between hope and academic functioning (Gallagher et al., 2017; Rand et al., 2011; Snyder et al., 1991b; Snyder et al., 2002b). The purpose of this investigation was to move beyond the constraints of predefined criteria that measure hope to explore the lived experiences and personal meanings of hope for international students. Hope is a unique experience and should be understood and reinforced rather than assessed and measured (Wang, 2000). My literature review was ongoing throughout my study as research is neither linear nor static but an evolving and continuous process (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016). The review of the literature established a gap

in the hope literature regarding international students' experience of hope in asynchronous and online learning communities in higher education.

### **Definitions of Hope**

What is the meaning of hope? Established literature on hope has resulted in varying definitions of hope. It is important to define hope to give the reader a foundation for understanding the possible and potential influence of hope on an individual's ability to reach their goals. Definitions of hope reflect differing views that derive from diverse disciplinary fields in which the concept of hope figures. These definitions incorporate psychological, experiential, relational, and cultural components.

Hope originates from the Latin root *sperare*, which means to hope (Stephenson, 1991).

The King John Version (KJV) online dictionary defines *hope* as:

“a desire of some good, accompanied with at least a slight expectation of obtaining it, or a belief that it is obtainable. Hope differs from wish and desire as it implies some expectation of obtaining the good desired or the possibility of possessing it. Hope therefore always gives pleasure or joy; whereas wish and desire may produce or be accompanied with pain and anxiety” (n.d).

Hope creates positive emotions of joy and euphoria, accompanied by feelings of confidence, inspiration, energy, purpose and being cared for and cherished. It provides the energy to reach for personal inner and external resources. It fuels the drive necessary to fight for one's aspirations igniting the determination to endure formidable circumstances (Jevne, 1991; MacLeod & Carter, 1999; Snyder, 1995). “Hope is the expectation that despair will end, solutions will be discovered, and possibilities will create a new state of affairs” (Claibourne, 2003, p.3).

Hope has been described as a noun or a verb. Hope, as a noun, is an object of desire and is viewed as having a priori existence, which means it can be developed independently of experience. If hope already exists in an individual's life world, it carries the idea that it can be "gained, given, or discovered" (O'Hara, 2013, p. 5). As a verb, hope is often conceived as being outside an individual's control. An example would come from health care where hope is linked with a cure and is in the hands of the physician. In this case, hope is associated with the existence or deficiency of an objective or goal. Hope, as a verb, and being outside of one's control can lead to apathy (O'Hara, 2013).

Hope is described as a cognitive construct that provides the incentive to plan for personal goals and provides the motivation to pursue one's goals in various domains, including academics (Ouweneel et al., 2011; Rand et al., 2011; Snyder, 1994). Early definitions of hope stem from the social science perspective. Fromm (1968), a social psychologist, perceived hope as a shared human experience essential for life. Kubler-Ross (1975), from the perspective of psychiatry, suggested that no matter the diagnosis, a person must maintain hope of a future life where hope is normal and functional to existence. Stoner (2004), who developed the Stoner Hope Scale (SHS), was one of the earliest nurse researchers to develop an instrument that would meet the need for a reliable measure of hope. Stoner (2004) proposed three domains of hope, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and global hope, each with ten goals. Stoner and Kampfner (1985) used quantitative analysis to study the relationship between hope in cancer patients and life expectancy using the SHS scale. Stoner (2004) also proposed two views of hope, stating that hope is suitable if it is realistic and is an emotion that allows an individual to maintain emotional well-being in the face of ordinary or calamitous circumstances.

Hope is expressed as an inner power or strength that enriches the lives of individuals and enables them to look beyond their current pain, suffering, and turmoil (Flemming, 1997; Urquhart, 1999). Hope has also been conceptualized as a dynamic and dialectical process or a changing structure (Ersek, 1991; Kim et al., 2006; Kylma & Vehvilainen-Julkunen, 1997; Parse, 1999). Hope is an essential element for life (Vellone et al., 2006), is positively linked to health (Gottschalk, 1985; Fryback, 1993; Lindholm & Eriksson, 1993) and buffers stress (Snyder, 1995; Turner & Stokes, 2006). Hope is variously viewed as a coping mechanism, a motivator and a power source that affects coping, survival and recovery (Wang, 2000).

Jevne and Miller (1999), from a psychology standpoint, state that hope is amazing; you cannot touch it or see it, but it has the power to ground, anchor, and sustain an individual through life's most difficult circumstances. Jevne and Williams (1998), state that hope is not about things turning out all right but about being all right no matter how things turn out. In the face of extreme circumstances, hope is part of the human spirit striving to endure and gives miracles a chance to happen (Groupman, 2004).

Hope is also conceived of as an emotion (Lazarus, 1999), a cognitive process (Waterworth, 2004), a state of being (Fromm, 1968), and a state of mind (Pettit, 2004). Freire, and Freire (1994), both Brazilian educators, proposed that hope is characterized by a human being's constant search for completeness and therefore the purpose of education is to guide and facilitate this search. This understanding of hope is not static nor solely emotional, but it describes hope as an active force necessary for the success of a democratic and transformational educational experience (Freire & Freire, 1994). Stotland (1969), a psychologist and educator, defined *hope* as "an expectation greater than zero of achieving a goal" (p.2) and goes on to say



that the greater the perceived expectation of goal attainment, the more likely the goal will be reached.

Dufault and Martocchio (1985), both nurse researchers, defined hope from the perspective of palliative care, stating, “Hope is a multidimensional life force characterized by a confident yet uncertain expectation of achieving a future good which, to the hoping person, is realistically possible and personally significant” (p.380). Hope is a cognitive energy that manifests as an increased mental drive founded on a sense of successful agency or goal-directed determination (Snyder, 1995). Hope drives the ability to create a pathway to reach goals, the basic building block to human learning and coping (Snyder, 1995, 2002).

Jevne (2005), whose work on hope is embedded in psychology and oncology, provides an understanding of hope as an orientation. “Hope as an orientation, and hoping as a search behaviour, as a way of orienting ourselves as we search for that which will enable the optimal physical and emotional survival” (Jevne, 2005, p. 269). According to Jevne (2005), the experience of hope is unique to each individual, and understanding hope as an orientation is inclusive rather than exclusive, making room for the multiple dimensions of hope inherent in the human experience.

### **Etymology of Hope**

Hope as a foundational human phenomenon has been the focus of inquiry throughout history for numerous disciplines, such as philosophy, theology, ethics, sociology, and psychology (Krafft & Walker, 2018). The fundamental meanings and conceptualization of hope are diverse and seen differently by each disciplinary tradition and is overlain with cultural, political, religious understandings, and the beliefs of individuals (Krafft & Walker, 2018; Scioli & Biller, 2009).

Philosophers throughout the ages have considered hope and its varied meanings and understandings. Pandora's box is the best-known and earliest Greek reference to hope. When the box is opened, a host of evils escape leaving only hope behind. Hope almost reveals itself but remains hidden under the edge of the box lid. Thus hope partly concealed creates curiosity and attraction, which, although it can deceive, can serve as an important principle of human motivation (Gravlee, 2020). Early philosophers Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle provided critiques and frameworks related to hope. Their reflections found hope bound together with some significant aspects of human life: the mystery of death, virtue and human good and hope is connected to pleasure, trust, and courage. Hope sustains us and is motivational, serving as a foundation for human agency (Gravlee, 2020).

Hope has been philosophized and discussed throughout history. In the Middle Ages, hope was perceived of as an important virtue when pagan ideology gave way to Christian desires for the Kingdom of Heaven. In his commentary of the book of Job, Pope St. Gregory the Great refers to the attributes of a moral life, which consist of faith, hope, and love. These attributes were orientated toward the Kingdom of Heaven and were suitable for the then new Christian person and society (Pinsent, 2020). In the Middle Ages, the theological virtue of hope was considered as the supernatural desire for eternal life in heaven and the enjoyment of God (Pinsent, 2016).

During the enlightenment period Descartes, Hobbes, de Spinoza, and Hume contextualized hope in the context of the affects or passions, which consist of wonderment, love, hatred, desire, joy, sadness, and hope. Hope during the enlightenment was seen as a neutral passion and a driver of both rational and irrational behaviours (Pleeging et al., 2022). These philosophers' definitions of hope are precursors of contemporary definitions: "hope consists of a

desire and a belief in the possibility, but not the certainty, of the desired outcome” (Blöser, 2016, p. 75). The understanding of hope proposed by these enlightenment philosophers segues into contemporary theories of hope as a cognitive motivational force (Pinsent, 2020).

### **Psychological Constructs Related to Hope**

Concepts exist that are related to hope but are essentially different. It is important to evaluate hope as a unique construct, and therefore the similarities, differences, and potential interactions of other psychological constructs must be assessed.

#### ***Optimism***

Hope and optimism both involve expectations about the future, however a difference is that optimism alone is defined solely in this way (Bailis & Chipperfield, 2012). Many students enter their first year of higher education filled with hope, but this hope is based on a perception that anyone can reach any desired goal without a focused idea of how this is achieved (Snyder, 2002). This kind of hope may be better described as optimism. Carver et al. (2021) defines “optimism as an individual difference variable that reflects the extent to which people hold generalized favourable expectancies for their future.... Optimists expect good things to happen to them” (p. 879-880). Optimism helps an individual avoid unwanted results (Seligman, 2002).

Hopeful individuals do not dwell on their failures; rather, they are psychologically invested and focused on working toward their goals (Snyder, 1994). On the surface, hope and optimism are similar, but both concepts have distinctive features. Optimists expect desired outcomes to happen in the future and expect that undesired outcomes will not happen. Optimists believe that life will work out and things will turn out as they wish, but they may not possess the necessary pathways to pursue the goals they wish to achieve.

On the other hand, hope involves intrinsic beliefs about the self and one's actions as they relate to the achievement of a desired outcome (Bailis & Chipperfield, 2012). High hope individuals think about different pathways to reach their goals, can specify what these alternative routes are, and often tell themselves they can reach their goals (Bailis & Chipperfield, 2012). Optimism is broadly focused on the quality of future outcomes, and optimists often struggle with creating alternative pathways to overcome obstacles they encounter. Hope, in turn, focuses on the personal attainment of pursued goals and the belief in their capability to reach these goals (Wider et al., 2022).

### ***Self-Efficacy***

According to Bandura (1994), “*self-efficacy* is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that influence events that affect their lives” (p. 1). Bandura (1977), in his expectancy theory, differentiates between efficacy and outcome expectancies. In this definition, self-efficacy expectancy is the belief that an individual can perform a certain behaviour. In contrast, outcome expectancy is the belief that this behaviour will produce a specific result (Bandura, 1977). There are two conceptual differences between hope and self-efficacy. Firstly, self-efficacy is concerned with behaviours that one can perform, while hope is concerned with the expectation that one can attain goals. Self-efficacy is the belief that a certain behaviour will produce a certain result. Hope theory, as viewed from Snyder's context, suggests that agency thinking is closely related to self-efficacy expectancy, while pathway thinking is related to outcome expectancy (Snyder et al, 2002b).

Bandura (1997) states that expectations of outcome and efficacy are different as individuals are capable of believing that a particular action will produce an outcome. However, if there is serious doubt about their ability to perform the activities necessary, this knowledge does

not influence their behaviour. Therefore it is not always a surety that action will lead to achieving a goal, while hope is the expectation that one can achieve their goals through goal-directed planning and motivation (Feldman & Kubota, 2015). Self-efficacy differs from hope in that self-efficacy is expectancy only, while hope theory suggests that the interaction between both efficacy and outcome expectancies are necessary for individual action.

### ***Resilience***

Resilience is also a concept often linked to hope. Luthans (2002) defines *resilience* as the capacity to rebound from adversity, conflict, and failure. Resilience theory has its foundations in the study of adversity and how adverse life events negatively impact individuals (van Breda, 2018). There are similarities in the descriptions of hope and resilience; the two are often defined as a components in a conceptual framework (Munoz, 2020). Snyder (2000) agreed that both hope and resilience have protective characteristics in the face of adversity. However, Snyder (2000) stated hope is more practical as it “offers a succinct two-component model” (p.30). These two components consist of a perceived capability to generate pathways to reach desired goals and the ability to motivate oneself by agentic thinking to start and sustain movement along those pathways. (Snyder, 2000). Resilience is a reaction to one’s environment, while hope is proactive and is more of a daily way of approaching and working toward one’s goals. Hope allows resilience to flourish, kindling the initial thinking necessary to establish goals and discover routes that allow a response to disruptive life events.

### ***Eschatological Hope***

Central to the Christian tradition is eschatological hope. The term is not applied widely in the academic literature nor used by many religious believers who refer to it as Christian hope (Witvliet, 2022).

Eschatological hope was conceptualized as the anticipation that God will make all things new, raising people to everlasting life with God in joyful celebration, including people from every culture and nation, ending all personal pain and suffering, eliminating all societal evil and harm, and bringing reconciliation and healing to all of creation (Witvliet et al., 2022, p. 18).

Hope is valued as a virtue in Christianity and is ontologically grounded in conceptualizations of the Judaic-Christian God (Yiu & Vorster, 2013). In Christianity, hope is theorized as providing the sustaining power necessary to persevere, endure, and commit to moral values. Ultimately, this understanding of hope is not focused on a future goal in this life but on faith, that life will reach its fullest expression in the next life (Selvam & Poulson, 2012). The mere presence of hope is the foundation for obtaining a future goal, different from the conceptualization of hope as a cognitive multidimensional life force that ignites an individual's agency to develop pathways to pursue their goals in this life, as espoused by Snyder (2000).

### ***Wishful Thinking***

Hope is often associated with wishful thinking. Wishful thinking is the sense that something you desire will happen, however unlikely that can be. It is without depth or substance. Wishful thinking can be attuned to winning a prize in a lottery, for example. According to Dufault and Martocchio (1985), wishing is “not perceived within the realm of possibility in the present or future” (p. 385). A pragmatic vision of hope is significant for understanding international students' experience of hope in my research study. This type of hope is the ability to “act thoughtfully and creatively in the present” in order to achieve future goals, “a hope that is resourceful, engaged, and communal” (Hyttén, 2011, p. 1). Wishing is passive, while hoping is active (Jevne, 1999).

## Hope as Affect

Affect theorists have studied hope and its potential as an emotion. Affect theory is the study of affects or feelings. It is about what individuals feel, how we create feelings in others, and how these feelings incentivize us to and from action (Li-Wang, 2021). Affect is connected to emotions, passions, and moods and is a subjective experience with varying intensities that can change the body's capacity to act (Li-Wang, 2021). Individuals cannot consciously control affect, which can be entirely outside their awareness and may be a compulsion (Schaefer, 2016). The affectual is experienced through those intimate, distinctly personal ways of being understood as emotions (Anderson, 2006). Hope does not fit the criteria as an emotion. The criteria for emotions are that they are automatic and reflexive. Emotions cause physical and emotional changes as a result of nervous system responses. Emotions provide the individual with immediate information that leads to action in certain situations. Hope provides individuals with the ability to expend the energy necessary to pursue their goals and produce routes to reach them (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985).

Affect theory conceptualizes hope as an automatic response to a situation, an emotion rather than a cognitive process. Scholars who perceive hope as a cognition assert that it is a product of cognitive processes and is within an individual's control and thinking (Rustøen, 1995; Snyder et al., 1991). Others conceive of hope as an emotion that is beyond an individual's volition. For affect theorists, hope is considered a "point of threat between the vectors of joy and sadness, or enhancement and diminishment" rather than a positive cognition that stands alone (Anderson, 2006, p. 742). This understanding of hope depends upon outside influence rather than an internal life force (Anderson, 2006).

Hope, as an affect, exists as a counter to negative feelings. It requires something tangible that potentiates a better way of being or induces the affective presence of something better, for example, moving from despair to hope (Anderson, 2006). Despair is the antithesis to hope and resides in inevitability rather than possibility. Despair as an emotion or affect is passive, while hope as a cognition is active (Jacobs, 2005).

Hope allows individuals to look at the present and simultaneously towards the future, fostering a critical belief in the possible and the ability to overcome obstacles (Jacobs, 2005). Rather than an affect, hope is a critical process that results in reflective and collective agency (Jacobs, 2005). Dufault and Martocchio (1985) include an affective dimension in their hope theory and suggest that hope can be expressed affectively, providing the motivation for individuals to move forward in space and time despite challenges. Dufault and Martocchio's (1985) affective dimension includes an attraction to a desirable outcome, a sense of personal significance of the outcome, and feelings of confidence about the outcome. It is intertwined synchronously with other dimensions of hope.

It is helpful to think of hope as having multiple affective expressions (O'Hara, 2013). Hope is influenced by social relationships but not dependent upon them. As human beings, intersubjectivity does not determine us, and although the past can influence our actions, it does not define them or our potential movements toward our future (Jacobs, 2005). I conceive of hope as a cognitive, motivational, goal-oriented pattern of thought that is multidimensional and promotes actions towards a future goal rather than an affect that merely anticipates a future goal without the pathway or motivation to achieve it (Snyder, 2002). Hope is a cognitive construct, and emotion and affect are the artifacts of hope.



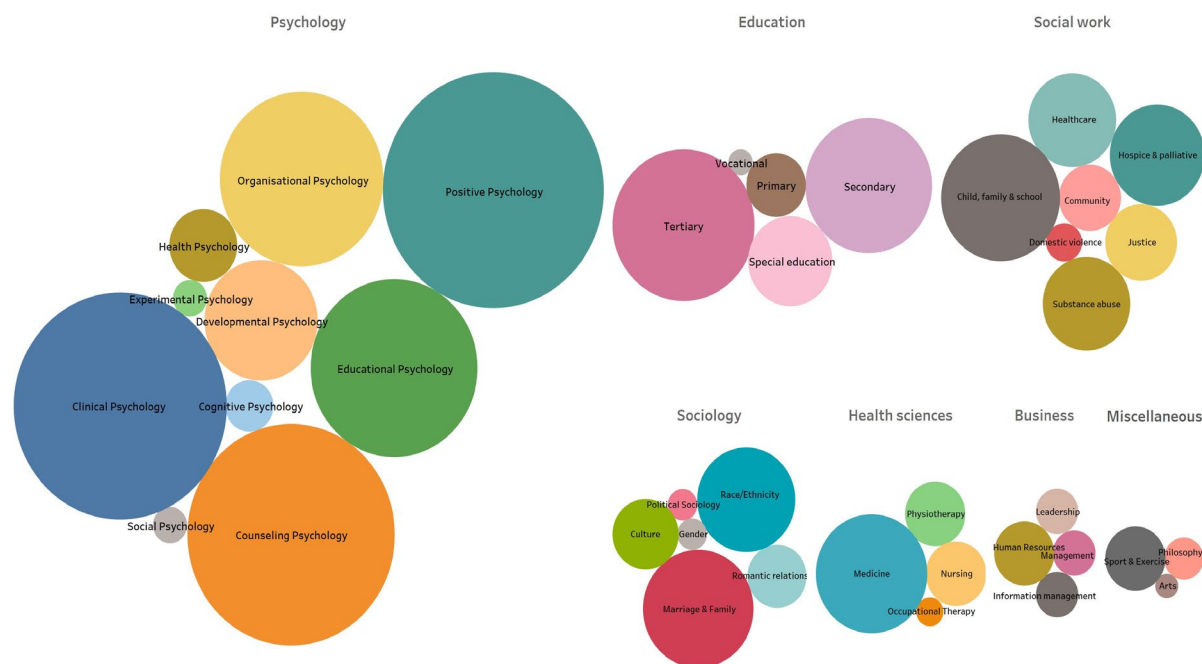
### **Theories and Models of Hope**

Theories and models are defined in numerous ways, and there are many ideas on how they relate. Theories are bodies of knowledge that have a broad scope with the purpose of explaining phenomena. Theories should be coherent and act as useful frameworks that integrate existing knowledge (Fried, 2020). Models are the essence of theories with a narrower scope applied to a singular aspect of a theory providing a more precise understanding of a phenomenon. Models from this perspective, “serve as intermediaries between theories and the real world” (Fried, 2020, p. 336).

There has been significant growth in the study of hope theory over the last 30 years. Researchers began isolating links between hopes association with the theological, social, and philosophical and began to study it from a cognitive-behavioural perspective rather than from an emotional one (Shuster, 2018). Colla et al. (2022) compiled a map (see Figure 1) that shows the extent of the research on hope across disciplines. Fundamental to hope is the premise that human behaviour is goal-directed. “Goals are the mental targets that guide human action sequences” (Rand & Cheavens, 2012, p. 324).

**Figure 1**

*Constellation map showing clusters of application of hope research across disciplines*



*Note:* This significance of hope is revealed in this graphic representation of the wide reaching explorations of hope across disciplines. From “A New Hope” for Positive Psychology: A Dynamic Systems Reconceptualization of Hope Theory,” by R. Colla, P. Williams, L. G. Oades, & J. Camacho-Morles, 2022, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, p. 4.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.809053>

With the advent of positive psychology, the concept of hope has been increasingly acknowledged as a human strength (In, 2016). Snyder et al. (1991b) defined hope as “a cognitive set that is based on a reciprocally derived sense of successful agency (goal-directed determination) and pathways (planning to meet goals)” (p. 571). Goals fundamental to hope theory relate to approaching situations in a goal-oriented way. Agency is the cognitive willpower to get moving toward important, intrinsic life goals, and pathway is the ability to discover different and creative ways to achieve individual goals (Snyder et al., 2002b). Snyder et al.

(2002b) conducted a longitudinal study that showed high hope scores measured with the Adult Hope Scale at the start of college were a significant predictor of academic success over six years, specifically higher grade point averages, an increase in rate of graduation and higher student persistence and retention.

Hope creates positive emotions of joy and euphoria, accompanied by feelings of confidence, inspiration, and purpose. Simply stated, hopeful thought is the confidence that one can locate pathways to desired goals and find the motivation to use those pathways. Snyder et al. (2002a) propose that hope drives the emotions and well-being of individuals. These positive emotions are improved for international students when they feel accepted and legitimized. Being accepted and having a sense of belonging that comes with legitimization influences student performance, persistence, and satisfaction with their collegiate careers (Yao, 2015). Wise (2005) describes a view of hope as representing “an opening to the world, to the other, to the stranger (p. 178).

Hope as a possibility requires a sense of belonging, trust, and safety, which gives one the capacity to “act or position oneself in a social field, across difference” (Wise, 2005, p. 178). Connecting with others is fundamental to hope, as the pursuit of one’s goals occurs within the context of social interactions (Snyder et al., 2002a). Hope provides the energy to reach for personal inner and external resources, igniting the determination to endure formidable circumstances (Snyder, 1995). Hope can help individuals transcend themselves and is defined not merely as an emotion or a feeling but as a cognitive-motivational system (Lopez, 2013; Snyder et al., 2002b).

For hope to be present and influence international students, it is important that they have both agency and pathways (Feldman & Snyder, 2005; Snyder, 2002). Scioli et al. (2011), whose

views on hope stem from clinical psychology, suggest that hope encompasses emotion that supports actions and influences thoughts and behaviours. Scioli et al. (2011) view hope as a network and define hope as:

A future directed, four channel emotion network constructed from biological, psychological, and social resources. The four constituent channels are the mastery, attachment, survival, and spiritual systems (or subnetworks). The hope network is designed to regulate these systems via both feed-forward (expansion) and feedback processes (maintenance) that generate a greater perceived probability of power and presence as well as protection and liberation (Scioli et al., 2011, p, 79).

According to the hope network of Scioli et al. (2011), the ability to achieve strength in the four interlinked channels, which include mastery, attachment, survival, and spiritual systems, depends on achieving the lower levels that are the developmental routes to hope. The foundational levels include 1. hope blueprints, 2. nature and nurture, 3. hopeful core, 4. faith system, and 5. beliefs and behaviours. The ability to achieve and sustain hope is intertwined with goals and objectives accomplished through support and interpersonal relationships. These supportive relationships exist on the second level within social and cultural endowments or supportive guidance. If level two is not achieved, individuals will not move on to level three, the hopeful core, which consists of relational trust and sanctioned commitment, as they do not have the foundations to move forward (Scioli et al., 2011). With the foundational structure intact, international students can achieve mastery in daily hope responses that sustain hope.

Larsen and colleagues at Hope Studies Central (University of Alberta) have studied hope within the context of education and counselling. Larsen and Stege (2012) conducted qualitative inquiry research using a case study methodology. Case study research is commonly associated

with education research and applied practice studies. Findings identified by participants that were integral to experiences of hope were safety, acceptance, understanding, and counsellor commitment (Larsen & Stege, 2012). An important component of this study was a client's sense of personal agency. In addition to developing agency, it was essential to support identity development towards aspects of the self that support hope and seeing oneself as valued and worthy (Larsen & Sege, 2012). This research has the potential to cross interdisciplinary borders as any individual, including international students who feel valued and supported, will have their hope fostered, enhancing their ability to attain their goals.

The three theoretical models outlined below represent hope within the disciplines of palliative care, health and wellness, and positive psychology. The first model is Dufault and Martocchio's (1985) Multidimensional Model, which the authors developed to provide a palliative care perspective for assessing and influencing hope therapeutically during an individual's last phases of their life and in their families. The second model, Nikolaichuk et al.'s (1999) three-dimensional conceptual model of hope portrays the personal meaning of hope within the context of health and healing. Thirdly I discuss Snyder's cognitive model, which has been foundational in positive psychology and expanded as a model for education, sport and exercise, leadership, and sociology inquiries. Snyder's Cognitive Theory (1991) is unidimensional and framed around an individualistic cultural viewpoint, and may not capture diverse multicultural experiences of hope (Bernardo, 2010)

The models of hope described in my literature review inform my research into international students' experience of hope in online and asynchronous learning in higher education. I believe that since humans are unique and diverse, the experience of hope is complex.

One's understanding of hope may be less important than attending to the "stories of hope-related interactions that inform who we are and are becoming" (Li & Larsen, 2012, p. 42).

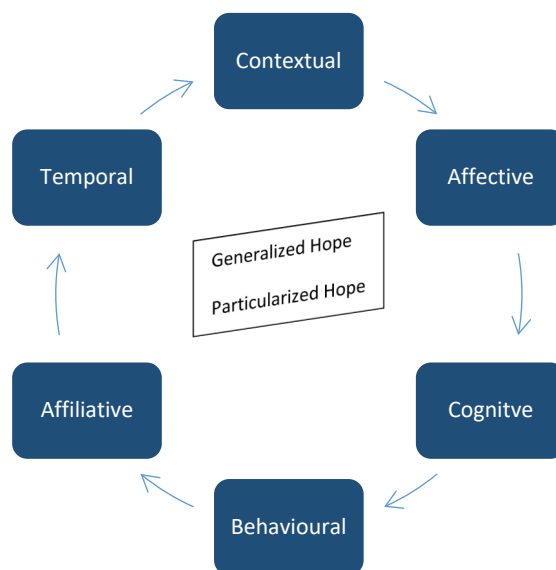
### **Dufault and Martocchio's (1985) Multidimensional Model of Hope**

Dufault and Martocchio (1985) created a meaning framework to promote an understanding of the multifaceted nature of hope. These researchers proposed two spheres of hope; generalized and particularized hope and six dimensions of hope: affective, cognitive, behavioural, affiliative, temporal, and contextual. Their methodology involved a qualitative participant-observer approach. Dufault and Martocchio (1985) confirmed that their data could be generalized to other adults by reanalyzing longitudinal data collected over two years from 47 terminally ill persons with diverse diagnoses. The definition of hope that emerged from the study was, "hope is a multidimensional dynamic life force characterized by a confident yet uncertain expectation of achieving a future good which, to the hoping person, is realistically possible and personally significant" (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985, p. 380).

*Generalized hope* is defined as "a sense of some future beneficial but indeterminate developments" (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985, p. 380). This type of hope is not a tangible entity or a specific quality but a state of mind or way of being. Particularized hope is concentrated on the attainment of a specific goal or outcome, which helps to explain and sustain an individual's life priorities and clarifies what is important (O'Hara, 2013). Generalized and particularized hope work synchronously, and "sometimes the success of particularized hope adds support to a waning generalized hope" (O'Hara, 2013, p. 11).

Dufault and Martocchio (1985) describe the six dimensions of hope as foundational to hope's process. The first is affective, comprised of emotions consisting of an attraction to and personal significance of a goal or outcome. The second dimension is cognition, which is reality-

based and carries the expectation that what is hoped for will materialize. Maintaining hope in this dimension depends upon context, individual resources, and supportive relationships. The third dimension, behaviour, is concentrated on action, which will bring about the desired goal or outcome. It rests on a positive belief that supports positive action and depends upon attitude and perseverance. Behaviours that support hope are psychological action, physical action, social action, and spiritual action. The fourth dimension, affiliative, involves relationships that include family, others, nature, and spirituality. It is about otherness, and an ethical way of being that is empathetic and engaged. The fifth dimension is temporal and is a way of hoping focused not only on the future but also on the present and the past. Past experiences and memories that provide a realization of hope afford a reference for the fulfillment of hope in the future. In addition, past experiences of unfulfilled hope can build knowledge and skills of how to manage difficult experiences. The sixth and final dimension is the contextual element based on life events that can challenge and influence an individual's hope. Hopeful goals evolve as individuals transcend their circumstances and they are hierarchical, moving from basic physiological goals to higher-order goals such as belonging and self-actualization (O'Hara, 2013). It is important to note that Dufault and Martocchio's (1985) theory of hope is specifically focused on the context of health and illness, and therefore may not capture hope as it is understood in other contexts and domains.

**Figure 2***Six Dimensions of Hope*

*Note.* Dufault and Martocchio (1985) created a meaning framework to promote an understanding of the multifaceted nature of hope. They propose two spheres of hope, generalized and particularized hope and six dimensions of hope. From Symposium on Compassionate Care and the dying Experience. Hope: Its' Spheres and Dimensions, by K. Dufault, & B Martocchio, 1985. *Nursing Clinics of North America* 20(2), p. 379-391.

**Nekolaichuk 3-Dimensional Model of Hope**

Nekolaichuk et al. (1999) proposed a conceptual model of hope that captured the meaning of hope within the context of health and illness. The model was guided by Dufault and Martocchio's (1985) model of generalized and particularized hope and Osgood and Suci's (1955) three-factor framework for connotative meaning. Jevne (1991, 1994) stated that it is difficult to capture the elusiveness of hope's qualities grounded in the uniqueness of the experience. Hope has a universal dimension as part of being human, but there is an individual dimension unique to each person (Nekolaichuk et al., 1999).



Nekolaichuk et al. (1999) identified their model as a research tool that was created based on the semantic differential technique. This tool was well-validated and frequently used to quantify personal and connotative meaning. The scale was tested on four participant groups, cancer patients, healthy adults, the elderly, and the bereaved elderly. The authors portray hope in their model as a holistic experience with the hopeful individual moving through a three-dimensional space and time. Their three dimensions consist of personal (meaning), situational (risk), and interpersonal (authentic caring) (Nekolaichuk et al., 1999). Personal spirit is the dominant factor that revolves around a principal theme of meaning. Predictability and boldness are integrated within the dimension of risk while, authentic caring has comfort as the core of the critical component of credibility. The Meaning of Hope Model is distinctive from previous frameworks of hope in three ways. Initially, it captures the qualitative experience of hope “within a holistic, multidimensional quantitative framework” (Nekolaichuk et al., 1999, p. 602). Second, it provides a picture of the experience of hope within a three-dimensional space, and lastly, it captures the elusiveness of hope’s unique qualities across concepts and individuals (Nekolaichuk et al., 1999).

### **Snyder's Cognitive Model of Hope**

The current cognitive theory of hope by Snyder (1994; 2000; 2002) characterizes hope as a personal will and way power towards a personal goal. Snyder et al. (1991a) introduced a model of hope related to agency and pathways called the “wills and ways” of hope. The authors go on to state that “where there is a will, there is a way,” and individuals who have successful goal-directed agency (the will) are able to visualize paths (the ways) to reach their goals (p. 571). Snyder (2002) stated that he was influenced by Menninger who encouraged the prioritization of cognitive processes with emotions as a secondary affective response (Colla, et al., 2020).

Menninger's prioritization of cognitive processes resulted in a theory of hope as a way of thinking, with emotional responses being a consequence of the hope experience rather than a contributor to driving goal-related performance (Snyder et al., 1999b). Snyder's conceptualization of hope is a unidimensional construct with two interrelated dimensions, agency and pathways, which are necessary during goal-directed behaviour and are critical in defining hope. The agency dimension involves goal-directed determination and is the motivation component of hope, while the pathway dimension involves goal-directed planning (Snyder et al., 1991). The pathway dimension reflects the perceived ability to create routes toward goals (Snyder, 2000).

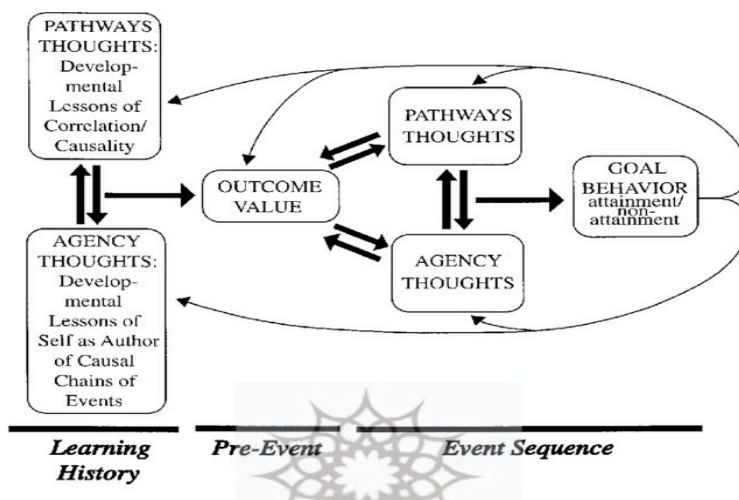
For hope to be present and influential, it is important that an individual have both agency and pathway determination toward their goals and that goals may vary in nature from visual to virtual, short to long-term, and in importance (Feldman & Snyder, 2005; Snyder, 1994; Snyder, 2005; Snyder et al., 2000). Snyder (1995) further suggests that individuals experience hope when they have an expectation that a desired goal can be realized. Hope is a positive motivational state based on successful agency and pathways, and purposeful movement toward a goal requires the perception of both workable routes. "Agency and pathway thoughts are additive and iterative in that increases in one component should lead to increases in the other" (Snyder et al., 2000, p. 749).

Snyder et al. (2000) asserts that pathway thinking starts at birth when the newborn learns cause and effect. Understanding brings awareness about a causal chain of events. Pathway and agency thoughts iterate as the infant grows into an adult and act in synchronicity, driving goal attainment and nonattainment. This results in a feedback flow of hopeful goal-directed thought (Snyder et al., 2000). It is important to note that having the agency but not discovering a pathway

and vice-versa can negatively impact an individual's ability to achieve their goals and thus hinder the development of hope. Other criticisms of Snyder's theory are that it is too individualistic, does not explain why some individuals stay hopeful when they feel that their goals are unachievable, and not allowing for how individuals experience hope in daily life (Tong et al., 2010). Snyder does not integrate the affective within his cognitive focus and does not take into consideration social contexts that can influence perceptions and events (Aspinwall & Leaf, 2002). Snyder and Lopez (2007) argue that even during challenging times, individuals with high hope capital are more likely to perceive pathways to reach their goals.

**Figure 3**

*Iterative Model of Hope*



*Note:* The diagram depicts a schematic of feedforward and feedback processes of the agentic and pathways goal-directed thoughts in hope theory. From C. R. Snyder, S. S. Ilardi, J. Cheavens, S. T. Michael, L. Yamhure, & S. Sympson, 2000. The role of hope in cognitive-behaviour therapies. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 24(6), p. 747-762.

<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1005547730153>

## Hope and Culture

Hope has relevance to everyone and has existed across time and cultures (Lopez et al., 2003). Although hope is a universal concept that can be accessed and developed by all, its conceptualization is diverse and unique (Gallagher & Lopez, 2017). The goals, obstacles, and factors to maintain agency and therefore hope exist within a cultural context. Therefore to best understand hope for international students, it is critical to consider cultural perspectives in goal development and achievement (Gallagher & Lopez, 2017).

Although hope within diverse cultures is an understudied phenomenon, there have been studies that have considered a cultural lens related to hope. Averill and Sundararajan (2004) researched different perceptions of hope from western and eastern perspectives. Averill and Sundararajan (2004) envision hope as an emotion with cognitive rules that govern it. The rules of hope consist of prudential, action, moralistic, and priority rules, which the authors state are broad enough to apply to different cultures.

Ishimwe et al. (2020) transculturally adapted the Herth Hope Index (HHI) to evaluate hope about healthcare workers and healthcare recipients in a rural Rwandan setting. The HHI is a 12-item tool designed to measure hope based on Dufault and Matocchio's (1985) multidimensional theory of hope. Ishimwe et al. (2020) were the first to conduct a cross-cultural validation of the HHI and found the HHII was relevant in diverse cultural contexts. Due to the cross-cultural feasibility of this tool, it would serve as a model for this type of adaptation in low-resource settings (Ishimwe et al., 2020).

Snyder (1994) stated that poverty, racism, lack of access to culturally relevant support services and discrimination are obstacles that are common experiences for visibly diverse individuals. These roadblocks relate to poorer physical mental health outcomes, as well as to

decreased academic success, and financial stability (Government of Canada, n.d.). Chang and Banks's (2007) study of diverse colleges students found that while hope levels were similar across ethnic groups and hope was a positive construct, agency and pathway predictors were varied for specific groups. Snyder (1995) argued that racial/ethnic minorities have lower hope than European Americans. Chang and Banks (2007) did not discover significant differences across the four racial/ethnic groups they studied, nor did these groups experience lower levels of hope than European Americans. Therefore, in contrast to Snyder's (1995) belief, Chang and Banks (2007) propose that "early experience or anticipation of goal-related obstacles for members of these groups may represent opportunities for developing more hope, especially more pathway thinking in later adulthood" (p. 100). Considering important variables such as hope from a multicultural lens is important to the understanding of hope across cultures.

### **Academic Implications of Hope**

Enrolling in post-secondary education is an act of hope. It is manifested through an individual's agency or goal-directed energy and their ability to envision a pathway or multiple pathways to reach a chosen goal (Snyder, 2002). Students usually begin their educational journey full of hope for achieving their academic goals, the relationships they will form, and their future once their academic goals are achieved. Student success is built on individual course attainment and achieved one course at a time (Tinto, 2006). Snyder et al. (2002) propose that hope is central to increasing student learning and success in higher education. Hope gives students the ability to approach challenges with a focus on success, leading to an increased chance that they will reach their goals, resulting in improved life outcomes (Conti, 2000; Feldman & Snyder, 2005). Research suggests that hope may be a critical factor in why some students remain committed to their objectives and persist in higher education despite obstacles and challenges, allowing them

to utilize effective strategies for attaining desired academic goals (Day et al., 2010). Factors influential in academic achievement include clearly defined goals, a belief in the ability to reach goals, and the anticipation of significant meaning when the goal is accomplished (Bird & Morgan, 2003).

Goal theory describes two different types of goals that students characteristically pursue: learning goals and performance goals. These goals then set up either adaptive or maladaptive achievement patterns, which reflect a mastery or helpless orientation (Dweck, 1999). Snyder (2002) suggests that goals themselves do not produce behaviours but comprise an individual's view that they are agents capable of initiating (agency) and implementing (pathways) actions to pursue their goals. Hope allows individuals to perceive stressful situations as challenges rather than threats, giving them the ability to problem-solve to reach a solution. Snyder et al. (1991b) developed the Adult Hope Scale, which measures levels of hope and is composed of Snyder's cognitive model that defines hope as the "perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals and the ability to motivate oneself by agentic thinking to initiate and sustain movement along those pathways" (Snyder et al., 2000, p. 747).

This 12-item scale is divided into two sub-scales, agency, and pathway, using an eight-point Likert-type scale. Of the 12 items, four comprise the agency sub-scale, and four comprise the pathways sub-scale. The remaining four are fillers that distract from critical items that may make the research purpose appear ambiguous, preventing participants from answering the questions based on social desirability (Kestenbaum & Hammersla, 1976). Snyder (2002) found that hope scale scores are associated with higher academic achievement for college students as measured by their Grade Point Averages (GPA). College students with higher hope scores are more motivated, challenged, and energized by their life goals. Adult hope scale scores have

reliably predicted student success in undergraduate education, with students who have high scores more consistently achieving higher grades and graduating (Holder, 2007; Williams & Butler, 2010).

In the academic setting, research indicates that hope positively correlates with higher levels of academic achievement (Barlow, 2002; Feldman et al., 2009; Snyder et al., 2002). Barlow (2002) proposed that strategies to assist students to increase their agency thinking are concerned primarily with the expectancy that one can reach a goal. Providing teaching/learning experiences that augment students' ability to think of multiple paths to reach their goals would increase students' hope and lead to higher academic performance. Along with increased academic performance, high hope levels positively correlate with reduced test-taking anxiety (Onwuegbuzie & Snyder, 2000; Snyder, 1999) and have a positive relationship with scholastic competence, social competence, and creativity (Onwuegbuzie & Jiao, 1998).

Through the growth of individual abilities, "hope functions to energize and sustain the self as it reconstructs itself in the teeth of trying circumstances" (Shade, 2001, p.11). Hope allows students to face challenges and obstacles equipped with the knowledge that they will be successful and achieve their goals. Hope has a spirit of expectation and is evidenced in personal, supportive relationships (Anandarajah & Hight, 2001; Chang, 2003). As more and more international students travel to Canada each year to pursue their education, hope has the potential to ignite their individual abilities, enhance their capabilities, and support them in accomplishing their academic goals.

### **International Students' Experience of Hope**

International students are defined as "a group of individuals who temporarily reside in a country other than their country of citizenship in order to participate in international educational

exchange as students” (Lin & Yi, 1997, p. 74). Snyder’s hope model does not provide for cultural and ethnic differences in its conceptualization of hope but reflects mainly western cultural understandings (Flores-Lucas et al., 2018). As the current cognitive theory of hope characterizes hope as a personal will and way power towards a personal goal (Snyder, 1994, 2000, 2002), it does not consider that goals and motivating thoughts may originate extrinsically. Cultures less individualistic than dominant western culture may experience hope as a dimension. Bernardo (2010) proposed “a locus of hope dimension” that includes both internal and external agency for generating pathways to pursue goals (p. 944). This conjoint model of agency suggests that actions reflect interpersonal goals and intentions and “affirm the interdependence of individuals and their position within social situations” (Bernardo, 2010, p. 945).

International students’ academic and social processes are complex and non-linear, potentially limiting their ability to integrate both academically and socially. On entering higher education, students bring educational experience, competencies, and community backgrounds that influence the student’s integration (Tinto, 1975, 1998). Academic integration is an individual’s ability to persist in their studies, and social integration is the ability to participate in the academic culture within and beyond the learning environment (Tinto, 1975, 1998). Academic integration is a combination of attitude, performance, and commitment to the institution’s academic programs and institutional climate. Social integration refers to how well a student fits into the social community of an institution and how well they deal with interpersonal-societal demands such as group process.

International students experience high levels of stress, often due to homesickness, cultural shock, and perceived discrimination (Russell et al., 2010). As higher education ramps up marketing strategies to situate itself as a global industry, power relationships between student



and host country/institution are reinforced (Stein & de Oliveira Andreotti, 2017). Recruitment policies do not consider the discriminatory practices from faculty and peers that international students may experience when they arrive, which can potentially prevent academic and social integration (Stein & de Oliveira Andreotti, 2017).

Social integration is an important construct as international students are far from support systems that include their family and friends. Academic communities that foster social integration, such as learning communities, student study groups, sports teams, and student fraternities and sororities, can increase academic performance (Russell et al., 2010; Severiens & Wolff, 2008). One of the aims of internationalization is to enhance both academic and social interactions between local and international students. International students desire connection and interaction with their domestic peers. However, evidence suggests that the typical pattern of cross-national interaction on these multicultural campuses is minimal contact between students of diverse cultures and domestic peers (Halualani et al., 2004; Summers & Volet, 2008; Ward & Kennedy, 2001).

Western institutions of higher education philosophize about the inclusion of international students, but this is premised on a position of benevolence bestowed by those doing the including (Ledger & Kawalilak, 2020). International students are expected to conform to existing norms, adopting western knowledge as supreme, making inclusion far from complete (Tavares, 2021). Exclusion can potentially marginalize international students of diverse cultures and influence their ability to hope. Kuokkanen (2008) poses the challenge that the practice of ignoring, marginalizing, and excluding other epistemic and intellectual traditions is a display of epistemic ignorance. When diverse worldviews are not recognized, teaching and learning becomes disrespectful and the alternative episteme becomes invisible and disappears. Conversely, learning

communities that support social integration for international students provide equitable learning opportunities that can enhance experiences of hope. Hope becomes a catalyst to pursue action steps to overcome challenges, enhancing the abilities of international students to meet learning and course outcomes (Uzuner, 2009).

Increased interactions between international students and their domestic peers have benefits related to psychological, social, and academic adjustment (Severiens & Wolff, 2008). The literature argues that achieving hope is intertwined with goals and objectives accomplished through support and interpersonal relationships (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Feudtner, 2005; Snyder, 2000). Feudtner (2005) proposes that hope does not occur in isolation but is dependent on a social network of relationships and that an individual's experience of hope can be understood within an ecology of hope. Hope is often lacking when circumstances are unsatisfactory, damaging, or threatening (Lazarus, 1999). Without the mutual bonds that occur with academic and social integration, hopeful thought may be jeopardized and goal pursuit derailed.

Peers, faculty, academics, and semi-formal extracurricular activities influence social integration (In, 2016). Educators can cultivate hope in international students by improving social bonds, such as developing support groups, mentoring programs, and helping these students establish supportive relationships with advisors, faculty, and peers (In, 2016). Educators who recognize the importance and relevance of hope as a multidimensional life force that provides the cognitive energy to develop successful agency and goal-directed determination can provide hope-building strategies for students, giving them multiple opportunities to reach their academic and career goals. Understanding international students' distinct and individual sources of hope could potentiate the development of educational strategies, resources, and supports that will

facilitate two important academic variables: engagement and achievement. Hope plays a significant role in academic settings and is influential for student success beyond individual intelligence (Day et al., 2010).

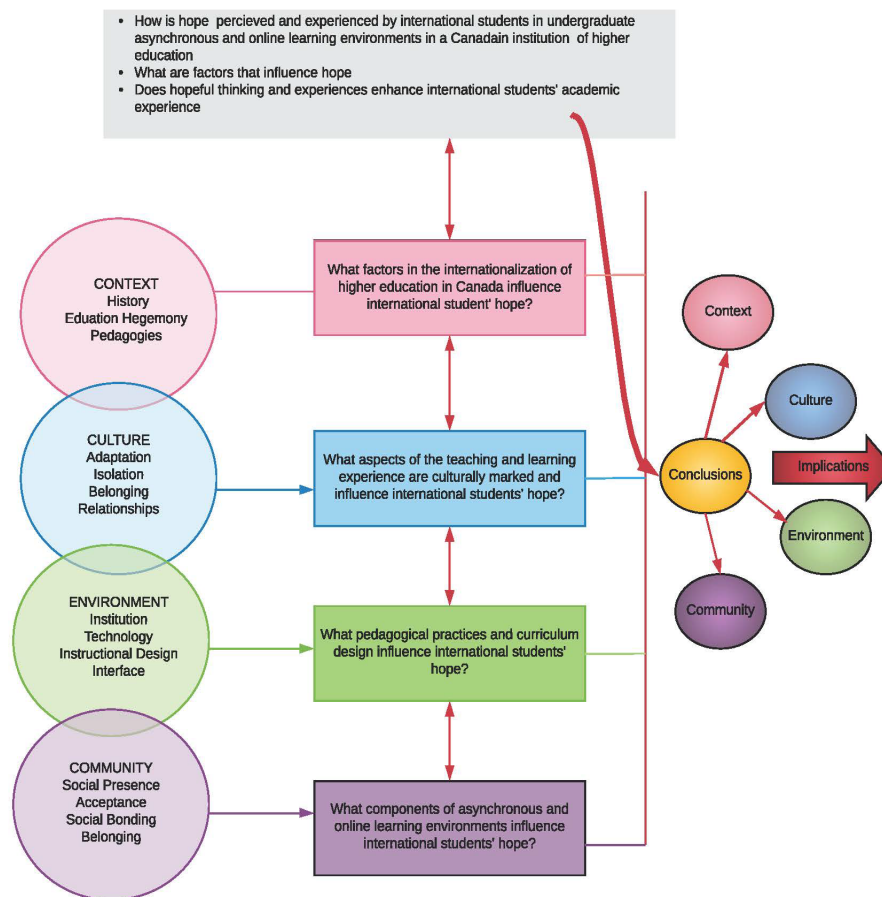
Hope as a cognitive energy is multidimensional in nature and has the potential to assist international students to adapt to new situations that will afford them the ability and determination to reach for their goals and provide the resolve to realize future academic goals in the field of post-secondary education (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Holder, 2007; Snyder et al, 2002). Hope can give international students the psychological strength to navigate academic and social adjustment processes when participating in asynchronous and online education and persist in their goal pursuit despite any challenges they may encounter.

### **Literature Review Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework developed for this research includes concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that informed my study about what is important and relevant to the experience of hope for international students of diverse cultures in asynchronous and online learning communities (Maxwell, 2005). The conceptual framework maps out concepts and interconnected variables that explain the concept of hope for this student population. The four major concepts that emerged from a review of the literature include context, culture, environment, and community. These four concepts are at the heart of my research agenda and are important constructs that help establish, explain, and justify the concept of hope.

**Figure 4**

*Conceptual Framework of Concepts that Emerged from the Literature Review.*



*Note: Conceptual framework of concepts and interconnected variables that emerged from the review of the literature, by R. Fitzgerald 2021.*

The conceptual framework maps out concepts and interconnected variables that explain the concept of hope for this student population. The four major concepts that emerged from a review of the literature include context, culture, environment, and community

### **Concept 1: Context – International Education in Canada**

The first concept centers on the historical context that influences hope in international education and contributes to educational hegemony and pedagogies. Hegemony, invisible to its

adherents, is understood as the process in which a dominant cultural perspective upholds its influence within society (Dorcy, 2010). Anti-hegemonic pedagogies can potentially promote transformative educational experiences that can support international students' hope within asynchronous and online learning environments in higher education.

Internationalization is strategic in higher education today. Although there are various definitions of internationalization in the literature, Knight (2004), an expert in the field of internationalization, defines internationalization of higher education as, "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (p.11). Canadian post-secondary institutions have embraced this global trend and made it a high priority, becoming engaged in internationalization and institutional strategic plans that include internationalization in most Canadian institutions. The Government of Canada (2020) identified that between 2014 and 2018, there was an increase in international student numbers by 68%, with 721,205 international students studying at all levels in Canada. They supported approximately 170,000 jobs for the middle class in Canada, a significant economic contribution (Government of Canada, 2020).

International students pay three to four times more tuition than their Canadian counterparts do. In 2018 international students spent an estimated \$21.6 billion on tuition, housing, and other expenses (Government of Canada, 2020). Federal and provincial governments cut post-secondary funding for both international students and Canadian citizens during the 1990s. In some provinces, fees to international students have been completely deregulated, giving universities license to exploit them in order to replace government funding (Canadian Federation of Students, 2015). These high tuition fees impact international students' ability to afford basic living expenses such as adequate housing and food (Calder et al., 2016). In Alberta,

the site of my investigation, Canadian undergraduate students pay approximately \$6,567 for tuition, while international undergraduate students pay about \$28,014 (Statistics Canada, 2022). These costs are partly due to public subsidization of higher education for domestic students, but also due to the marketization and corporatization of higher educational institutions in a quest for alternative revenue sources (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

The Government of Canada has recently made it more difficult for international students to stay in Canada after graduation by unlisting food and retail work as valid Canadian work experience. These jobs, which are typical for students to augment their income, had, in the past, counted towards a permanent residency application (Canadian Federation of Students, 2022). This inability to supplement their income has put higher education out of reach for many international students and particularly those from developing countries. If not awarded full scholarships, international students cannot afford higher education opportunities in Canada (Canadian Federation of Students, 2015).

There is a neoliberal imagining of higher education in Canada. Neoliberalism is a political justification that “ensures that the privileging of free trade and the freedom of knowledge as a form of global capital are commodified and marketed internationally” (Viczo & Tascón, 2016, p.3). Neoliberal managerialism in higher education incorporates cost-cutting and the commercialization of universities (Kandiko, 2010). Commercialization and cost cutting can pose challenges for Canadian post-secondary institutions regarding requirements to balance fiscal pressures with their social and educational duties to students (Anderson, 2015). In neoliberal societies, the dominant way of thinking about hope often mirrors the values and norms of the dominant social structure, which focuses on individual social standing related to income and education rather than on society as a whole (Raco, 2009).

The Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC) supports a pan-Canadian marketing approach incorporating a national brand titled Imagine Education au/in Canada. This marketing assigns a role for universities as major players in building the knowledge economy and supporting the national trade agenda through the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Act (DFATD) (Viczko & Tascón, 2016). The national branding highlights the benefits that international students bring to Canada. These include collegial interactions between international and Canadian students, international student fees to generate revenue for Canada, and the potential for educated international students to fill jobs if they remain as immigrants in Canada (Viczko & Tascón, 2016).

Although Canada's purpose in recruiting international students stems from the need for higher education institutions to remain educationally and financially viable, there are some primary reasons why international students are coming to Canada to study. Canada has an international reputation for being a welcoming society. Canada also offers competitive packages to international students that include the ability to subsidize expenses and gain work experience. International students are eligible for work permits while attending Canadian educational institutions. The 20-hour work week cap has been lifted temporarily until the end of 2023, and there is presently no limit on the number of hours international students can work (Government of Canada, 2022).

Another factor that makes Canada attractive as an educational destination is that, although international tuition appears expensive when compared with what domestic students pay, it is globally competitive. The weak Canadian dollar makes it more affordable than tuition charged in United States dollars, British pounds, or Euros. Immigration pathways are also available to international students to encourage them to stay and improve their living conditions

and professional options by building a new life in Canada (El-Assal, 2018). International students can apply for a post-graduation work permit once they have confirmation from an educational institution that they are eligible to graduate and transition into full-time work (Creaser, 2019). International students also seek higher education in Canada due to the quality of the education offered (El-Assal, 2018).

The Canadian federal government's repositioning of international students to occupy economic roles has transformed the national approach to cross-border higher education to a "skilled labour approach" (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2004, p. 12). This approach by the government is premised on attracting skilled migrants through a promise of citizenship that will allow international students and their families to find a new life in stable democratic, prosperous communities (Shachar, 2006). Many international students are choosing Canada as a place to study, which has led to the exponential growth of diverse international students attending Canadian institutions of higher learning.

The population growth of culturally and linguistically diverse international students has outpaced domestic university students and poses challenges for Canadian higher education to implement manageable supports to meet the needs of these students (Anderson, 2015). International students face complex adjustment difficulties, which can be made worse by artifacts such as a lack of language competency accompanied by unfamiliar pedagogical styles and expectations for learning, where unique cultural experiences and world views go unrecognized (Williams, 2008). The inability of western higher education to adapt to shifting student demographics is concerning, as this has created ethical tensions between the benefits that international students provide and the challenges of adapting to increasingly diverse international student populations (Anderson, 2015). At the same time, international students are valued for



their cultural, political, and academic perspectives, as well as for enhancing the workforce skills that will contribute to the national economy (Tremblay et al., 2012).

Challenges international students face include unfamiliarity with the Canadian curriculum, the use of technology, the university environment, and educator-student relationships. Their diverse needs require a more robust academic support structure to be in place to assist them to adapt (Pilote & Benabdeljalil, 2007). International students receive formal and informal information prior to arriving in Canada, but this can be conflicting. Universities publish handbooks for international students, but the information may vary depending on program and department (Calder et al., 2016). Policies and guidelines for the internationalization of higher education are under Global Affairs Canada and the Council of Ministers of Education Canada, which is federal. However, the implementation of international education is a provincial responsibility, and practices differ among provinces (Calder et al., 2016).

Although the choice to study in Canada has created new opportunities for students and educators, it has also been fraught with difficulties. Macro-level policies concerning the internationalization of higher education potentially overlook the micro-level, which is the international students themselves and their experiences in Canadian higher education. Understanding factors that influence international student adjustment have implications for intercultural education. International students from diverse cultures may view educators and learning differently. These views influence communication patterns, a vital component of asynchronous and online courses. The inability to achieve cultural adaptation may have an impact on grades, course satisfaction, and ability to meet course outcomes (Luyt, 2013). Investigating factors that facilitate the successful cultural adaptation of international students can

bridge the distance between a “Them” and “Us” perspective, leading to collective understandings that better support international student hope.

### **Concept 2: Cultural Adjustment**

The second concept reflects culture. It is important to identify aspects of the learning experience that students perceive as culturally marked, creating barriers to hope. Culture is not monolithic and encompasses more than cultural difference related to language and nationhood. Culture is a set of rudimentary assumptions that include aspects such as acquired knowledge, learned patterns of behaviour, attitudes, values, rituals and rules, a sense of identity, shared history (Webb & Read, 2000). It also includes orientations to life beliefs shared by a group of people that influence group behaviour and the interpretation and meaning of other groups behaviours (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Groups and individuals within a single nation may identify with an ethnic minority or culture within a dominant culture (Chambers, 2003).

International students face many cross-cultural adjustments as part of their transition experience, which is, for them, an academic culture shock. Due to challenges with adaptation to an unfamiliar educational and socio-cultural environment, international students experience a greater degree of stress than domestic students do. Students who encounter foreign cultures for the first time experience a feeling of dislocation or culture shock. This culture shock occurs because they must adjust rapidly to an unfamiliar culture, economy, education, government, and society (Brown, 2008; Ku et al., 2008). The degree of culture shock is related to how they are received by the educational institution and their feeling of belonging and acceptance. Although culture shock provides opportunities for international students to acquire new perspectives, it can often be a harrowing experience (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Arkoudis et al., 2013).

Homesickness, linguistic ability, academic barriers, financial difficulty, racism, and loneliness are problems that arise for international students (Gurin et al., 2002). These students live far from home and lack culturally affirming support from friends and family. There may be barriers to building intercultural relationships, potentially creating academic and non-academic challenges. Dunne (2009) states that several factors influence international students' ability to build relationships with domestic students. The first is proximity; due to separate living arrangements, connecting with each other outside of academia is infrequent. The second is that domestic students often have established friendship networks frequently not open to international students as outsiders. Thirdly, international students often move in different social circles due to cultural constraints, such as abstaining from alcohol and a focus on academics (Dunne, 2009). The fourth is language ability, which can be a barrier to building relationships and prevent acceptance, belonging, and adaptation. Wu et al. (2015) state that language barriers are a major obstacle for international students, both academically and socially.

The rapidly changing online and asynchronous nature of higher education may compound international students' challenges. Online learning takes place in a computer-mediated environment where individuals create, exchange, and understand information. International students whose first language differs from the educational institution they are attending often have linguistic and communication difficulties as a prime academic challenge. Due to the lack of confidence in their language competency, these students may not actively participate in online learning community activities and discussions, detracting from their learning and ability to meet academic outcomes (Chambers, 2003). Like many domestic students, international students, may need to use various online information sources to learn and gain the full potential of these learning resources. This requires well-developed linguistic and information literacy.

International students may have a different view of educators and learning. These views influence communication patterns, a vital component of online courses. Interpersonal uncertainties such as linguistic and social insecurities can discourage international students from approaching their educators and participating fully in online and asynchronous learning (Mehra & Bilal, 2007; Wu et al., 2015). As a result, students may be unaware of available help and not take an active role in their learning. According to Zhang and Kenny (2010), ESOL students require more time to process readings and to post in online discussion forums. An unfamiliarity with western culture and colloquial language can impede their ability to follow course discussions. This unfamiliarity potentiates an avoidance of socializing, which leaves international students on the periphery of online course activities.

It is, therefore, necessary to develop pedagogical approaches and their virtual realizations to promote equity and adaptation in cross-cultural participation in asynchronous and online education. Equity pedagogy involves the educator's ability to develop instructional strategies that appeal to students' preferences and contexts to ensure a culturally responsive content (Banks, 2016). A pedagogy that supports hope is anchored in transformative practices, and the educator role within this pedagogy is to "unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be" (Freire & Freire, 1994, p.9). Hope as a cognitive motivational force, has a positive relationship with self-esteem and the ability to problem-solve, and enhances the capacity to approach an academic experience with a focus on success (Snyder et al., 1991). Educators who facilitate international student hope can provide them with a sense of self that is worthy, worthy of caring and being cared about (Larsen, 2012).

The ability to generate multiple pathways to goals can help international students overcome barriers to their academic goal pursuits (Snyder et al., 2002b). This exploration into

the variables specific to culture has helped to determine how adaptation, isolation, belonging, and relationships contribute to the international students' ability to adapt and helped to identify methods and strategies to promote and enhance inclusive educational environments that support hope.

### **Concept 3: Environment – Institutional Impacts on Hope**

The third concept that emerged from the literature is the environment as it relates to institutional factors that contribute to the experience of hope for international students. Although committed to increasing international enrollment, many institutions of higher education approach student success as a tacked-on strategy rather changing or redeveloping educational character or institutional climate (Tinto, 2006). Technological advances in information and communication have had a major impact on the theory of education, its content and pedagogical practices. Online education is a sophisticated space for interactive learning, and from the perspective of internationalization, educators are developing diverse ways to engage students and transform learning. International students can encounter pedagogical and curricular adjustment difficulties due to teaching methods, styles, and expectations that differ from those they are accustomed to in their native cultures (Williams, 2008).

Contemporary asynchronous and online instructional design does not fully contextualize the educational learning experience and is founded on “epistemologies, learning theories, and goal orientations” that may not be culturally neutral (McLoughlin & Oliver, 2000, p. 58). Asynchronous and online learning environments that incorporate the “cognitive, epistemological, and philosophical aspects of interrelated cultural-educational contexts” (Wild & Henderson, 1997, p. 187) will have a positive impact on students' hope, thereby improving two important

academic variables: academic achievement and engagement (Levi et al., 2014; Snyder et al., 2002b), while also representing a predictor of academic results (Gallagher et al., 2017).

Questions arise on how to design teaching and learning initiatives across geographic, social, linguistic, and cultural distances in culturally equitable ways (Zembylas & Vrasidas, 2005). Learners and educators who design and participate in online education programs construct pedagogical interactions mediated by technology. An important component of technology-mediated interactions is the interface: the communication medium between the learner and the technology. The interface is what comes between the learner and what lies behind the computer screen, the educator, and other students. The interface in asynchronous and online learning has the potential to help educators and learners appreciate and understand international students' hope as it is experienced in the digital divide between international students and their domestic peers. (Zembylas & Vrasidas, 2005).

Education is transformative in nature and necessitates an ontological change in the individuals immersed in its process. It also imposes an epistemological construction of knowledge, which in the case of internationally diverse learners, may or may not be similar to the everyday epistemology of their culture (Mengstie, 2011). As curriculum and educational pedagogies are reflective of the values, attitudes, and beliefs of an educational institution, this investigation of curricular and pedagogical implications for teaching and learning approaches allowed me to discover ways to promote international students' hope through understandings of their epistemological beliefs and lived experiences. Higher educational institutions have the potential to act as agents for constructing hope in their growing international and diverse student populations by extending horizons established by existing ideologies and developing a bridge to the future.

#### **Concept 4: International Students and Asynchronous and Online Learning Communities**

The fourth concept concerns community and the impact social presence has on international students' experience of hope in asynchronous and online learning communities. Asynchronous and online learning communities in higher education have the capacity to promote social connections that include trust, spirit, connectedness, belonging, membership, and support and can facilitate teaching and learning (Rovai, 2000, 2002). The interactions within online and asynchronous learning communities are a significant factor that influences a sense of community, mitigating learner isolation (Rovai, 2000). Hope can be ignited through academic and social integration through participation in learning communities. Learning communities that are shown to be hope-stimulating have a shared sense of efficacy and collective capacity to problem-solve together (Kleinberg, 2007).

Chew (2015) discovered that online learning promoted a sense of community and is a platform that can facilitate the sharing of knowledge. Social bonding that occurs in online learning communities is expressed in terms of liking, trusting, and respect, accompanied by a feeling of mutual commitment and understanding (Lopez et al., 2004). There is the potential to form strong social bonds and support networks through student participation in online learning communities. Hope is interpersonal in nature and is shaped by social, environmental, and contextual factors (Bishop & Willis, 2014). Snyder (2000) suggested that social interactions play a role in developing and maintaining hope in individuals. International students, who lack support from family and friends as they transition to a new country to study, must look to others for social support, such as educators and peers within asynchronous and online learning communities, as sources to encourage hope.

Good communication skills, interpersonal skills, and leadership are essential real-life attributes for international students to have in their academic portfolio when they graduate. These attributes are a significant consideration concerning international students since the Government of Canada wishes to retain these students as permanent residents. These skills will be critical for regions impacted by a declining labour force, where international students can be a new source of highly skilled labour that can contribute to the growth and prosperity of the region (Esses et al., 2018). Important aspects to support these skills and attributes of student learning include a relationship between individual learning, group learning, and having membership in a learning community (Webster & Sudweeks, 2007). As hope contributes to success and academic achievement, it is a vital construct for international students while participating in asynchronous and online learning communities.

Participants in asynchronous and online learning environments are characterized by various factors at any given time, with many combining work and study together. Encouraging hope within these learning communities is essential to support students' ability to set achievable goals and develop effective decision-making skills (Tanglang & Ibrahim, 2015). Setting achievable goals is critical to human success and life achievements. The ability to accomplish a set of goals depends on an individual's hope, which ignites the motivation and mental energy to actualize these goals (Snyder, 2002). As students progress through a program over time, they build community, creating bonds that support hope and, therefore, student learning.

Western institutions of higher education claim autonomy and universality are part of their strategic initiatives. However, there is a need for awareness of knowledge produced about a community or group that tends to reproduce the external knowledge and creates epistemic dominance (Stein, 2008). This can marginalize international students participating in a learning



community by making invisible certain knowledge and ways of knowing (Stein, 2008). International students have very little capital in the field of asynchronous and online learning communities in higher education. This lack of capital, when confronted with embedded beliefs that reflect Eurocentric values and philosophies in constructing social identities, potentially erodes students' hope. A lack of support for hope from all stakeholders, which include institution, faculty, and peers in academic and social spaces, can create educational initiatives that are more transactional than transformative.

Transactional learning initiatives rely on self-directed problem-solving, collaboration, and engagement, while the transformative model is holistic in nature and concerned with how the learner connects with themselves, others, and the world (Hagvall Svensson, et al., 2017). Transformative learning is a changing process for international students where they “make meaning and construct reality through revisiting existing assumptions and move towards life-changing developments in philosophy and outlook” (Tran, 2012. p. 128). Hope, embedded in transformation, allows international sojourners who have the courage and determination to change and shift amid the ambiguity of life situations, to reach for new possibilities through active engagement in asynchronous and online learning communities and, through hope, achieve their academic goals.

The transformational approach in international education can provide opportunities for both international and domestic students to form new ways of thinking and transform their existing perspectives, through reflection, developing intercultural competency within diverse communities (Tran, 2012). Canada envisions international students as potential citizens and skilled workers as critical for areas with declining labour forces. Transformational approaches to learning have the potential to ease this transition and promote enhanced employability of

globally oriented graduates (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2018). Supportive, transformative learning communities can foster a climate of mutual trust. This climate of trust will encourage international students' hope by enhancing their ability to experience a sense of connection and belonging, fostering a shared purpose and commitment to a common purpose (Conrad, 2005).

Research suggests that the concept of a third space in online learning where students from diverse cultures meet could be the bridge between international students' existing culture and their new culture. This bridge can foster a common purpose and provide international students with the ability to negotiate competing and contradictory understanding, creating a more equitable environment (Gutiérrez et al., 1999; Moje et al., 2004). Building bridges is a significant component of creating a third space as it allows learners to see connections and contradictions between their ways of knowing and how others see the world (Moje et al., 2004). Bhabha's (1998) conceptualization of third space described first space is the student's life world, the second place is the classroom, and the third space is the online environment as a hybrid or in-between place where two different cultures connect. The third space where two cultures meet is a place where the marginalized can be heard, allowing for a transformational experience for all. To scaffold a transformative online learning experience, learning communities must be spaces where international students' linguistic and cultural knowledge and understandings, goals, or ways of relating, are celebrated, leading to intercultural learning (Jørgensen et al., 2022). Design processes for third-space pedagogy include peering, experiential orientation, motivation, and pleasure of making together or small group work (Ferrari et al., 2021). Teaching and learning initiatives that support a third space in the digital world of online learning can address equity and

inclusion for international students, enhancing their sense of acceptance in online learning communities, thereby encouraging their hope.

Through a sense of community, learners' agency thinking for goal completion is ignited (Conrad, 2005). Agency thinking: the motivation to move towards a goal, along with pathway thinking: the ways to achieve those goals, is the heart of hope theory. Snyder et al. (1997a) discovered that hope flourishes when strong bonds develop between individuals. "As social creatures, we need to confide in someone about our dreams and goals" (Rodriguez-Hanley & Snyder, 2000, p. 46). Therefore, for hope to thrive, a supportive and equitable environment is needed where individuals can receive assistance and encouragement for their goal pursuits (Snyder, 2000). Equity in learning communities is the fair distribution of learning opportunities and pedagogical conditions. Equity and equality are often used interchangeably but differ in significant ways. The terms carry inferences on how individuals should be treated and how resources should be allocated (Levitan, 2015).

Educational equality implies treating everyone the same, with the understanding that they will all have an equal chance without considering human difference, which includes physical, mental, and emotional characteristics or social and economic status. On the other hand, equity ensures that equal access to and success in higher education, including differences in opportunities and outcomes, should not be attributable to wealth, income, power, or possessions. Equality is premised on sameness and only works if every individual starts from the same place, while equity includes fairness and is sensitive to difference and diversity (Levitan, 2015). A critical examination of online learning environments to determine whose knowledge is created, valued, represented, and consumed provided insight into how learning communities can produce and enhance hope for international students.

## Summary

This chapter presents a review of the literature on hope. It includes the definitions of hope that arise from the varied disciplines where the concept of hope figures. The evolution of hope inquiry through history was discussed, giving a view of ancient philosophers through to the emergence of Christianity and on to the enlightenment philosophers' conceptualization of hope which segued into contemporary understandings.

Similarities, differences and potential interactions with psychological constructs related to hope were expanded to provide an understanding of hope as a unique construct in and of itself. Theories and models of hope were reviewed within a contemporary context as researchers began to study hope from a cognitive-behavioural perspective rather than an emotional one. Although, an understudied phenomenon, hope and cultural understandings of hope were presented as critical to goal development and achievement for international students. Academic implications of hope and international students' experience of hope in asynchronous and online learning communities in English-speaking institutions of higher education, specifically in Canada, discovered in the existing literature were also discussed.

A contextual framework informed the literature review as relevant to international students' experience of hope in higher education within context, cultural adjustment, environment, and asynchronous and online community. These four concepts are the heart of my research and help to establish, explain, and justify the concept of hope for international students of diverse cultures in asynchronous and online education. The first concept in the literature related to context recognizes that Canadian post-secondary institutions have embraced internationalization and made it a high priority. Appropriate attention must be paid to the ethical tensions that exist between the benefits that international students provide and the challenges for

these students that are inherent in largely Eurocentric institutions. The second concept reflects international students' complex adjustment difficulties as they transition into a new culture and includes personal, psychosocial, and academic challenges. This difficult adjustment can lead to feelings of isolation and marginalization, potentially diminishing hope, which can influence grades, course satisfaction, and the ability to meet academic outcomes. Environment related to institutional factors that influence international students' hope is the third concept. Asynchronous and online educational environments are sophisticated spaces for interactive learning. Currently, epistemologies and learning theories within those spaces do not seem to be culturally neutral and equitable for growing international populations. The fourth concept within existing research involves the role that asynchronous and online learning communities have in promoting relational bonds and international students' hope.

Hope is intersubjective in nature and can be supported by social bonding evidenced by trust, respect, and a mutual commitment that occurs in asynchronous and online learning communities. International students participating in asynchronous and online learning communities that support a third space that addresses equity and inclusion have the potential to experience support, membership, and belonging. Hope can flourish in this type of learning space, and international students could potentially participate with a shared sense of efficacy, enriching academic and social integration. These types of interactions in asynchronous and online learning communities are hope-stimulating.

Hope is a cognitive-motivational force that, through its three components: goals, agency, and pathway, afford the energy necessary to reach for inner resources, helping individuals transcend and transform themselves, providing the inner resources necessary to achieve intrinsic life goals (Snyder, 2002b). Higher education is a journey of hope. In academics, hope gives

students the ability to overcome challenges and is a critical component of persistence, diminished test anxiety, scholastic competence, social competence, and academic achievement in higher education. International students are new arrivals to an unfamiliar culture and face complex adjustment difficulties when their unique cultural experiences and worldviews are not recognized. Asynchronous and online learning communities that are transformational in nature support hope, allowing international students to actively engage and achieve their academic goals.

The existing literature is scarce on the topic of international students' hope and its significance in asynchronous and online learning environments. Research into hope and asynchronous and online learning environments discovered that hope is a predictor of persistence, but it does not address international students (Holder, 2007). Much of the research to date has assumed a universality regarding hope and its capacity to support academic goals. More research is necessary to advance current theories to discover programs, strategies and environments that will support international student hope while they participate in asynchronous and online learning environments in higher education. My research study therefore aimed to investigate a demographic of students not previously captured in published research.

### **Chapter 3. Methodology**

Students enter college with hope and aspirations that they will succeed in their educational goals. There is an essential tension between diverse understandings of hope as a phenomenon, which is evident in the present empirical work measuring hope. Can people accurately describe their unique personal levels of hope, and are existing instruments comprehensive enough that explanations are scientifically sound (Krafft et al., 2018)? The methodology utilized for this research study consists of an approach that seeks to qualitatively understand how international students perceive hope during their educational experience while participating in asynchronous and online educational initiatives. The predictive power of hope on academic outcomes and its positive role in protecting student mental health and well-being was the driver in the exploration of this construct.

The purpose of my qualitative research investigation was to examine the lived experience of hope as a positive construct among diverse international students with English as a second or other language (ESOL), as it may contribute to their ability to have well-defined goals, develop strategies to reach their goals, ignite the motivation to successfully navigate their educational trajectories, and achieve their academic goals. The study focused on international students participating in asynchronous and online learning communities in an institution of higher education in western Canada.

A narrative-photovoice methodology within an interpretivist phenomenological paradigm is the research methodology that was implemented to capture the phenomenon of hope as it exists for these international students. The results discovered, when disseminated, will be important in informing curriculum design as well as distance educational policy and practice to

support international students' hope, leading to positive academic outcomes and satisfactory educational experiences.

This chapter provides an overview of the methodological approach and theoretical foundations, the research questions, participant recruitment procedures, research setting, and the data collection procedures for the study. I will conclude with discussions of trustworthiness and credibility of the research study and the ethical implications which are threaded throughout the narrative inquiry process.

### **Interpretivist Paradigm**

An interpretivist worldview frames this investigation of diverse ESOL international students' experience of hope in asynchronous and online learning environments in western higher education. Phenomenology within an interpretivist paradigm supports the study of the phenomenon of lived experience taken at face value (Cohen et al., 2011). Interpretivist phenomenology underpins the understanding of experiential meaning as individuals interact with others and their environment (Lopez & Willis, 2004). The four paradigm-defining questions include the ontological question: what can be known; the epistemological question: what is the relationship between the knower and the knowable; the methodological question: how does one go about acquiring knowledge; and the axiological question: of all knowledge available to me what is the most valuable (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

The interpretivist approach seeks ideographic knowledge, a focus on the individual as unique, and is value-laden, reflecting the epistemic beliefs and bias of the researcher (Cohen et al., 2011; Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The theoretical prowess of this paradigm rests in the view that the study of society exists within a framework of human interaction and the interpretive understanding of these social relationships, explain cause and effect (Crotty, 1998).



Interpretivism seeks to understand the participant experience of a phenomenon, accepting multiple interpretations (Elshafie, 2013). The world of lived experience, the lifeworld, is the basis from which all understanding grows, and what we know is negotiated within culturally informed relationships and experiences of everyday lives (Angen, 2000). Because of this epistemological outlook, interpretivist researchers explore data inductively through themes, patterns, and interpretation to assign meaning to observed phenomena.

An interpretivist approach investigating international students' experience of hope while participating in asynchronous and online learning communities was useful in understanding possible connections that could result in emancipatory strategies, leading to egalitarian educational experiences for this student population. Embedded in emancipatory pedagogy is the principle that education has a role in social justice. It considers account culture and interaction when designing curriculum and honours and legitimizes international students' histories, experience, and knowledge. It provides "the pedagogical conditions for supporting hope," providing a sense of possibility and place for these students. (Giroux, 1997, p. 109).

Narrative-photovoice as a methodology within the interpretivist paradigm can blur the boundaries between photovoice and narrative inquiry (Simmonds et al., 2015). The phenomenological use of photographs was developed by Ziller and associates, incorporating the approach that the perceiver is perceived through photographs and not the perceiver himself (Ziller & Smith, 1977). Ziller and Smith (1977) also state that the photographs are images of the photographers' cognitions and interactions within physical and social contexts. This photographic method was founded in counselling psychology. The premise is that the client using a camera, makes images that manifest their own perception of personal experience, becoming more active in the counselling process (Combs & Ziller, 1977). Combs and Ziller

(1977) found that clients using photographs to guide conversations enriched their self-revelations and helped them to express aspects of their self-concept in a non-verbal way. Photographic research using narrative-photovoice provides a creative tool that will facilitate a deeper understanding of the uniqueness of hope for each international student participant in my study.

Wang and Burris developed photovoice as a research method in the 1990s. Photovoice, typically used with marginalized populations, involves the participants taking photographs as an expression of their experience and answering questions about the photographs during in-depth interviews. Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into human experience as a source of significant knowledge and understanding (Clandinin, 2016). It is relational and participatory in nature, and “a relational ontology is fundamental to narrative inquiry” as this methodology captures the storied lives of the participants (Clandinin et al., 2016, p. 37).

Narrative-photovoice is the juxtaposition of two concepts, photo-narratives and photovoice, that are intertwined to give rise to the term narrative-photovoice (Simmonds et al., 2015). Narrative-photovoice draws on the elements of photovoice and photo-narratives, but its foundations lie in narrative inquiry. The goal of this methodology was to capture international students’ “lived experience of hope in their photographs and the reflections in their accompanying narratives” (Simmonds et al., 2015, p. 38). Narrative inquiry as a methodology provides insight into the experience of hope as the phenomenon under study (Connelly et al., 2006). This methodology provided the potential to understand and interpret international students’ experience of hope as a phenomenon through their eyes and unique stories (Connelly et al., 2006).

## **Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is an appropriate methodological approach for this study as it allows not only an investigation of meaning but of the experience as well: a journey into understanding. Narrative inquiry is communal and claims “humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Philosophically narrative inquiry is based on John Dewey’s (1963) theory of experience, where experience is dynamic and characterized by an ongoing interaction of human thought within personal, social, and physical contexts. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) conceptualize narrative inquiry from a Deweyan perspective as a three-dimensional space. The facets of this three-dimensional space consist of personal and social (interaction); past, present, future (continuity); and place (situation). Interaction involves personal and social aspects of the storyteller’s experiences and their interactions with other individuals. Continuity relates to the analysis of the storyteller in relation to past, present, and future actions. Therefore, it was important for me to consider situation or place while analyzing the narratives and look for specific locations in the storyteller’s landscape that give meaning, including location and its impact on experience (Clandinin & Connelly 2000).

Ontological narratives told by social actors to make sense of their lived experiences are used to describe ‘who’ is the international student, a precondition for the epistemological knowing of the experience of hope. Ontological narratives offer explanations, knowledge generation, a making sense of, and an accounting for, the practices and collective actions of institutions and groups that influence ESOL international students’ experience of hope in asynchronous and online learning communities (Somers, 1994). This knowing has the potential to produce new narratives and new actions leading to a theoretical rethinking of pedagogies and social situations that promote the construction of hope and eliminate the barriers to hope that

impede educational outcomes. The three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry informed my research. It was utilized to understand the lived experience of hope for ESOL international students in asynchronous and online learning communities in western, English-speaking institutions of higher education. Within these dimensions, the investigation looked to four directions of inquiry: inward, outward, backward, and forward (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The inward direction consists of emotions, the outward is the setting, while the backward and forward relate to the temporality of past, present, and future. As international students experience hope, they will do so within these four realms. As I, the researcher, looked forward and backward, and inward and outward, an understanding of the narrative threads of these students' experience of hope emerged. Narrative inquiry "provides the hope and courage to explore and grow," opening opportunities for "dialogue and reflection, each intertwined and cyclical" (Wang & Geale, 2015. p. 198).

### **The Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the overarching research questions that inform the study, which asks how ESOL international students' experience hope in asynchronous and online learning environments in one western English-speaking institution of higher education in Canada and how experiences of hope encourage or discourage these students' ability to meet their educational outcomes. The study was framed around two primary research questions. The first was broken down into sub-questions to provide further support for the inquiry.

1. How do ESOL international students describe their experience of hope in asynchronous and online learning communities in a specific western, English-speaking institution of higher education?

- a. What do diverse ESOL international students see as critical to encouraging their hope and their ability to generate agency and pathway thinking to achieve their goals in asynchronous and online learning environments?
  - b. What do diverse ESOL international students in asynchronous and online learning environments see as barriers to hope and their ability to generate agency and pathway thinking to achieve their goals in asynchronous and online learning environments?
2. What role does hope play in international students' ability to engage, adapt, and succeed in asynchronous and online learning environments?

### **Data Collection**

Narrative-photovoice as a methodology within interpretivist phenomenology satisfied my curiosity as a researcher about how stories told by international students through photographs illustrated their ways of knowing about their experiences of hope in asynchronous and online learning communities and the role this plays in their learning. The international student population that participated in this study included ESOL international students enrolled in a college in western Canada, participating in asynchronous and online learning communities as part of their diploma or undergraduate degree work. As I was not in the role of educator for any of these participants at the time of the study, I was able to mitigate any conceived power imbalance, which allowed the participants to retain their autonomy of consent, given that a chief impediment to informed consent is unequal power imbalances (Clark & McCann, 2005).

Recruitment posters were placed in the international student support center and the Student Association Offices working group, my venues for finding appropriate participants for this research study. Other successful venues for recruitment were social media, the college

newsletter, educators of undergraduate students, and a snowballing technique that helped to solicit referrals from existing participants were other methods that I used to recruit. Interested participants contacted me by email, which they obtained from the venues used for recruitment. I reached out, and an appointment was arranged for the initial interview. Selection criteria was laid out clearly in the advertisements and only international students who had English as a second language or other language reached out to participate.

Initially, 24 international students volunteered, with a final sample size of eight participants. The selection criteria included volunteers who were international students, had English as a second or other language and were engaged in asynchronous and online learning communities in a degree or diploma program within the college where the study occurred. Volunteers who met the inclusion criteria were welcome to participate. Volunteer sampling is potentially a source of selection bias. This sampling technique is when the sample population includes only those willing to participate in the study. Differences can potentially arise between individuals who volunteer and those who do not respond to invitations (Jordan et al., 2013).

The length of this study occurred over one academic semester, which is a four-months. At the time of the initial interview, students were asked how long they would need to take their photographs and form their narratives, and an appointment was set with the participants. The target was to have the final narrative interview prior to the end of the semester. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants. This technique involves selecting individuals with particular characteristics who are available and willing to participate and can communicate about their experiences of the phenomenon of interest (Etikan et al., 2016). The goal of purposive sampling was to concentrate on ESOL international students' characteristics as representatives of this population in higher education in order to answer the research questions.

The participants who volunteered assisted me in acquiring enough data to answer the research questions, with the results contributing to a greater understanding of hope for this population.

Students were provided with a letter of introduction that included information about the study and an invitation to contact me by phone, text, or email if they were interested in more information about the study or in participating (see Appendix A). Those interested in participating were contacted to set up a time when they were able to meet with me. If they could not meet with me face-to-face, an online meeting using the Zoom platform was set up for a time that was convenient for the participant. The initial meeting was an introductory session, where the participants and I shared information about ourselves. It was also used to inform participants of the purpose of the study, show them the ethics board approval, go over the instructions, consent form, expectations, and answer any questions they had (see Appendix F). An introduction to the photovoice method and its potential for helping identify hope, as it exists for these international students, was presented with various examples of how to use photographs and storytelling techniques to convey a complex message. Particular attention was given to photographing ethics and when to obtain consent when photographing people and property (see Appendix B).

During the introductory session, participant consent forms were reviewed, and time was provided to ensure understanding and clarify any questions. Participants who agreed to participate in the study during the initial interview were sent consent forms to read over and sign and a description of the study (see Appendix C). Participants also received a signed confidentiality agreement from me and a clear description of how their data would be kept confidential (see Appendix D). I also assured them that any pictures that were identifying in

nature would be pixelated. Participants were asked to sign their confidentiality agreements (see Appendix E).

Participants were asked to share their stories and photographs about what encouraged or discouraged their hope through one-on-one narrative interviews using email, video conferencing, and face-to-face, depending on student availability and preference. The length of narrative interviews varied based on the topic, context, and diverse ways individual stories were constructed. Interviews were coordinated with participants and lasted anywhere from 60 to 90 minutes. Interview length was determined when the interviewee had told all the stories they wanted to share about their pictures (Kim, 2016). At this point, enough data had been collected to the extent that no new information gathered would add to the understanding of the participants' experience of the phenomenon of hope (Guest et al., 2006). It is not always possible to reach data saturation as qualitative phenomena that involves lived experience are organic and unique; there will always be new stories that unfold (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). The interviews were designed to allow the participants to speak in their own voices and shape their stories in their own way. The initial and final interviews were recorded with the participants' knowledge and consent. Each participant was informed of support resources to access in case of any negative emotions they may experience while telling their stories. All research participants had access to college psychological support services if requested.

### **Photovoice - Visual Methods to Collect Narratives**

There is potential for visual technologies to assist in capturing international students' personal stories and their experiences of hope while engaged in asynchronous and online learning communities. The interview allowed participants to respond to the images they captured with extended narratives, reflections, and interpretations of the pictures, permitting an active



construction of meaning. Photographs can trigger multiple meanings depending on the viewers' experiences, leading to unforeseen revelations and rich descriptive narratives (Schwartz, 1989). Requesting that students interpret images they have taken allowed them to make sense of their lived experience and created a "reflexivity between image and verbalization that produces the data for the investigator" (Harrison, 2002, pp. 92-93). As language barriers can be an obstacle to understanding, images have the potential to overcome linguistic hurdles and difficulties with verbal expression, allowing participants' voices to be heard across cultures (Sethi, 2016).

Participants were encouraged to record and document representations of what creates and perpetuates or diminishes their experience of hope during their educational enterprise in asynchronous and online learning communities. In this way, they were able to exercise control over the research data, allowing an authentic view of personal experience not filtered through the research interview (Squire et al., 2014). Participants submitted photographs they took themselves, while others submitted photographs they discovered online. Wang and Burris (1997) propose that photovoice has three goals:

1. It allows individuals to record and reflect on the strengths and concerns of a community.
2. It promotes knowledge, and critical dialogue about concerns through discussions focused on photographs.
3. It reaches program and policymakers.

Using narrative interviewing techniques with participants about their images in a collaborative exchange, can mitigate power relationships between myself and the participants (Squire et al., 2014). The relationship between researcher and participant is a collaborative venture because the researcher, as both listener and facilitator, negotiates a co-constructed meaning in partnership with the participant (Allen, 2017). Photovoice provided the potential for

international students to record and reflect on their experience of hope in asynchronous and online learning communities. Along with narrative inquiry, expanded the power of their unique stories through critical dialogue about their photographs.

### **Narrative Interviewing**

Narrative interviewing between researcher and participant uses the unstructured interview for data collection (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The narrative technique originates from the Latin term *narrare*, which means to report or tell a story (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Interviewer influence is minimal and everyday communication is used, which includes storytelling and listening (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). The narrative researcher explores and becomes knowledgeable about the field under study by making initial inquiries, reading documents, and investigating rumours and accounts. The narrative interview incorporates two types of questions, exmanent and immanent questions. Exmanent issues reflect researcher interests, designs, and language, which arise from the researcher's approach to the topic of study and must be transformed into immanent questions applying only the participants' language while being correspondingly anchored in the exmanent questions in the narrative. Not all exmanent questions are transferable, as the participants' stories may not have an anchoring point for interpretation. Immanent questions speak to the themes and participant accounts of events discovered during the participant's narration and may or may not coincide with the exmanent questions (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000).

**Figure 5**

Phases of the narrative interview	Roles for the Interview
<b>Preparation</b>	Exploring the field Formulating exmanent questions
<b>Initialization</b>	Formulation of the initial topic for narration Using visual aides
<b>Main narration</b>	No interruptions Only non-verbal encouragement to continue storytelling Wait for coda
<b>Questioning phase</b>	Only question: What happened then? No opinion or attitude questions No arguing on contradictions No why questions Go from exmanent into immanent questions
<b>Small talk</b>	Stop recording Why questions allowed Make a note immediately after the interview

*Note.* Phases of the narrative interview. From S. Jovchelovitch, & M. Bauer, M. (2000).

*Narrative interviewing [online].* LSE Research Online.

<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/2633/1/Narrativeinterviewing.pdf>

Character, setting, and action are inseparable and deeply embedded in narrative inquiry, and the stories captured indelibly create realities of their own (Bruner, 1986). Knowledge is created through stories about lived experiences and the meanings that are created from them. Narrative knowing helps to make sense of the uncertainty and complexity of human lives, allowing researchers to present these complex experiences holistically (Brunner, 1986). The holistic perspective understands human beings not as autonomous parts but within a context where interactive exchanges are primary (Dahlberg et al., 2001).

Participants were asked to form narratives about their photographs through questions using the acronym SHOWED (Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang et al., 1998).

Questions included: what do you See here; what is really Happening here; hOW does hope exist or not exist in this situation; what can wE Do about it? Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2016) list four sections of the narrative interview:

1. The introduction and explanation about the research.
2. The narrative or interviewee's personal story.
3. The questioning phase.
4. The conclusion, where next steps are delineated.

A foundational focus of narrative inquiry is to include a collection of stories or narratives from participants. These stories and moments in time are captured through participants' photographs and narratives portraying individual experiences, providing a window into participant identities (Butina, 2015). The photographs and images that participants selected to submit represented their experiences about hope to them. The photographs act as a visual voice assisting participants to tell their stories, express their needs, and to share experiences that may not have been captured in traditional researcher-driven models (Nyariro et al., 2017). A significant strength of photovoice is that participants are provided the opportunity to document and record their experiences of hope, critically reflect on their experience behind the images, and to narrate their own stories and experiences. As English was not my participants' first language, they had to choose their images carefully to convey some of their deeply-impactful experiences, emotions, and reactions. Their choice of image was often quite reactionary to their experiences. The photographs allowed the participants to "paint their stories," providing greater insight and enlightenment (Wang & Geale, 2015, p. 195). The narrative endeavours to put "its timeless

miracles into the particulars of experience and to locate the experience in time and place” (Bruner, 1986, p. 13).

### **Trustworthiness**

Like other qualitative methods, narrative inquiry relies on criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalizability. To address issues of credibility for the study, the researcher must search for and defend the criteria that best suit the investigation being conducted (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Therefore, it is essential when conducting investigations using this methodology to ask the following question: “how valid and reliable is the collection of these stories, and how can a story be valid as an analysis” (Loh, 2013, p.2)? The validity of narrative inquiry speaks to the “believability of a statement or knowledge claim” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 474). It is vital in narrative research that the knowledge claim is justified for the readers, and traditional understandings of validity may not represent our postmodern research world. There are varying theories about validity that include crystallization (Stewart et al., 2017), trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), verisimilitude (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), and truth-like observations (Barone & Eisener, 2006).

Crystallization proposes an alchemical and transformational approach to seeking trustworthiness, credibility and rigour in qualitative research (Stewart et al., 2017). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggest that crystallization constructs thick and rich descriptions through varied genres and modes that place the researcher in a reflexive process. There is no single correct method of envisioning a crystal; therefore the metaphor reflects the multidimensionality of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Polkinghorne (2007) asks if the researcher’s claim is plausible or trustworthy, and narrative inquiry relates to personal meaning gathered from narrative stories rather than a

measurable truth. The trustworthiness criteria proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1994) to understand individuals in societal and cultural contexts through qualitative research methods can potentially address this conundrum. Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose five criteria to establish reliability in the interpretive paradigm that parallel criteria in quantitative or scientific research. The criteria embedded in a trustworthiness framework include credibility (truth), dependability (consistency), transferability (applicability), and confirmability (neutrality).

The first element, credibility, is about believability: are the findings truthful, and do they capture a holistic representation of the phenomenon under study (Billups, 2014)? Credibility for my research study about international students' experience of hope was determined through prolonged engagement and persistent observation, peer debriefing to secure feedback for comparisons, member checking to ensure participant input was accurately portrayed and triangulation.

Triangulation was achieved by amalgamating participants' interview data, my experience as an educator of international students, and insights from the literature I reviewed. This triangulation approach using multiple data sources produces richer understandings of participant voices and increases my study's credibility, reliability, and trustworthiness (Billups, 2014). As trustworthiness is foundational to high-quality research, member checking, also known as participant validation, was used to explore the credibility of the results. Transcriptions of narrative interviews were returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences, providing an opportunity for participants to engage with and add to the interview data. Member checking ensures that the participants' "own meanings and perspectives are represented and not curtailed by the researchers' own agenda and knowledge" (Birt et al., 2016,

p. 1803). These methods permitted me to treat individual stories within a contemporary discourse approach, constructing social meaning or story as process (Bleakley, 2005).

Dependability addresses the stability and consistency of findings over time and across conditions. Statistically generalizable results, which are similar outcomes when applied to similar populations, are not the goal of the qualitative paradigm: transferability is the objective. Can other researchers reproduce similar findings in similar settings? Transferability was accomplished through ‘thick description,’ which includes the researcher’s field notes that contain recordings, observations, and interpretations during data collection (Billups, 2014). My task as the researcher in thick description was to provide a clear picture of the participants’ stories in the context of their culture and lived experience. Thick description of my findings made visible participant voices, emotions, and the meanings they gave to their photographs and stories allowing me to capture their thoughts and feelings (Ponterotto, 2006).

The accuracy of results is indicative of confirmability and if the results can be substantiated. Confirmability includes reflexivity, which is the integration of the researchers’ “knowledge, bias, methodology, and perspective” (Billups, 2014, p.4). Reflexivity involves affective encounters and poses questions about associations between the “subjective and the cultural, individual and social, self and other,” and as insider and outsider (Koivunen, 2001, p. 8). It involves a co-created space that includes the researcher and the research activity, which are part of knowledge production.

It was important that I, as a reflexive researcher, took emotions seriously, both my own and the participants, as they had the potential to expose ethical dilemmas that are part of the process of knowledge production and ethical research. As research participants who are potentially in an unequal position, international students must negotiate encounters that may be

embedded in classed and racialized barriers (Butcher, 2019). I engaged in reflexivity as a narrative photovoice researcher, which demanded that I show outward interest, understanding, and empathy toward my participant's stories. Through reflexivity, I was able to recognize and take responsibility for my personal situatedness and the potential it could have on the context of my research study and the participants involved, which helped to prevent emotional dissonance (Mazzetti, 2018). As I immersed myself in the data generated by the participants, it was through the lens of my philosophy about the value of hope as a cognitive motivational life force.

In other words, how did I, as the researcher, neutralize bias, motivation, or interest when reporting the discoveries found while writing participants' stories? Reflexivity is integral to confirming quality and transparency of qualitative research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Reflexivity involved examining my conceptual lens, my explicit and implicit assumptions, my values and preconceptions, and how these components affected my research decisions during the entire research process (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). As the professional stranger to the participants involved in this study, it was important to consider how a subjective positioning has the goal of increasing understanding. Ongoing reflection on researcher positioning when collecting and analyzing participant stories is reflexive and emphasizes looking back and inward in self-awareness (Fischer, 2009a). As a qualitative researcher and a stranger to the group populated by other strangers, I came to know the experience of hope for my participants through their photographs and narratives. The stranger's epistemology depends on bracketing a group's experience and therefore developing knowledge and cultural understanding within social fields (Bourdieu, 2003).

As part of the reflexive process, bracketing, relates to the researcher's "identification of vested interests, personal experience, cultural factors, assumptions, and hunches" that may affect



an unbiased understanding of the research data (Fischer, 2009a, p. 583). While engaging in the reflexive act, the researcher brackets these biases as much as possible throughout the investigation, helping identify presumptions to knowingly shift positioning. The bracketing process allows the researcher to reach deeper levels of reflection throughout all the stages of the investigation, therefore mitigating many adverse effects that may occur. This reflexive act is not a one-time occurrence but a process of self-discovery. The self-discovery process can be facilitated by soliciting help from a colleague or co-researcher (Rolls & Relf, 2006). There are several methods of bracketing that include writing memos, interviews with outside sources, and a reflexive journal. Memos consist of theoretical notes explaining thought processes while conducting research and methodological notes explaining the procedural and observational facets in order to explore feelings about the investigation (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Bracketing methods in the reflexive process are not mutually exclusive but can potentially complement each other (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Interviews with colleagues or other researchers conducted during the research process and following data collection can expose themes that may hinder the researchers' capacity to listen to participants or trigger emotional responses that require further exploration. Reflexive journals can support a researcher's ability to sustain a reflexive stance. Essential components to explore would be the researchers' reasons for undertaking the research, assumptions regarding race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, the researchers' position in the power hierarchy of the research, the researchers' values (Hanson, 1994), role conflicts with research participants and feelings of disconnection that may indicate presuppositions (Paterson & Groening, 1996). In my reflexive journals, I kept an account of all interviews and observations and supplemented analytical data with reflexive notes. Included in the reflexive notes are the "researcher's

subjective responses to the setting and the relationship with the interviewees” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 123).

Another component of the reflexive act is bridling, which describes what researchers studying a phenomenon do with their assumptions and preunderstandings as they attempt to interpret and describe the phenomenon under study (Vagle et al., 2009). Bridling is the ability to slow down and reflect on my process of understanding so I do not understand too quickly or carelessly. (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Bridling is self-reflection, an ongoing examination of my point of departure, presumptions, and presuppositions. Through reflection, asking questions about my own understanding, what is it I understand and why I understand in a certain way, I create an opportunity to comprehend differently (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2019)

As researchers, we have to keep in check everything we know beforehand about the phenomenon in order to be open to that which presents itself. If we let theories or personal experiences of the phenomenon take part . . . we might end up having a beautiful description of the phenomenon, not the research informant’s—but our own! (Dahlberg et al., 2001, p. 148)

While engaging in bridling, the researcher remains open to the phenomenon under investigation, in this case, hope, by a conscious willingness to listen, see, and understand international students’ experience of hope (Dahlberg et al., 2001). Meaning is the axis that qualitative research pivots around, and description in qualitative research is the understanding of meaning which continues to evolve as the phenomenon is revealed in the case of this study, the experience of hope (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2019).

Authenticity in qualitative research focuses on the contextual purpose and value of the research. To what degree does the study accurately represent the participant’s perspective,

experiences, and meanings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)? How does it benefit participants and give meaning to the results (Billups, 2014)? As this study was about international students' realities of hope, it had to meet the criterion of verisimilitude: the appearance of being true or real (Oxford Living Dictionary, n.d.). Verisimilitude provides plausibility to consumers of the research, allowing the findings to be accepted into the pantheon of knowledge on hope within the distance education community.

The final element, truth-like observations, like verisimilitude, refers to the extent the research findings accurately represent the reality of the phenomenon being studied. Truth-like observations are grounded in reflexivity, thick description, triangulation, and participant validation (Creswell, 2018). Although not necessarily objective, truthlike observations provide a reliable and valid understanding by implementing rigorous methods of data collection and analysis of the phenomenon of hope as it exists for international students (Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical implications are threaded throughout the narrative inquiry process and encompass “negotiation, respect, mutuality, and openness to multiple voices” (Clandinin, 2006, p. 52). Procedural ethics involved seeking approval from the relevant ethics review committees to undertake research involving humans to ensure that ethical principles and standards respecting the personal welfare and rights of the research subjects were recognized and accommodated. The review boards for this research study include the Athabasca University Ethical Review Board and the Research Ethics Review Board (REB) of the college where the study took place. Assurance of confidentiality and privacy is central to narrative research as it promotes trust and facilitates participants sharing stories of their lived experience of hope (Josselson, 2012).

The principle of justice is embedded in research. Participation in the research project was available to all participants who met the research criteria regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, age, or nationality. Consideration was given regarding token gifts for all participants, and \$10.00 Tim Horton's gift cards were given to participants. One student won a draw for a \$50.00 gift certificate from the college bookstore. I ensured that participants did not feel unduly influenced to participate due to compensation, and participation was voluntary. Information on draw prize (s) was provided through the consent process (University of Toronto, 2011). Interviews were recorded, and participants were informed that I would use pseudonyms for all responses and that their names would be kept confidential. All recordings were stored on a password protected USB drive, and along with the hard copies, are stored in a locked file cabinet in my office. These will be deleted and destroyed in three years as confidential waste as per the colleges REB guidelines.

Consent in narrative inquiry is an ongoing and continuing process, and participants are permitted to withdraw their consent at any time (Josselson, 2012). The ethical challenge in narrative inquiry arises from the fact that the narrative researcher has a dual role: a relationship with the study participant and a professional role in the scholarly community. The researcher's scholarly obligations of accuracy, authenticity, and interpretation can create conflict with the ethical principles of dignity, privacy, and beneficence toward the research participants (Josselson, 2012). The reflexive process consists of taking two steps back for the research. The first step is to objectively observe the phenomenon under study, and the second step is a reflection of the observation itself. This process speaks to ontological positioning: what do I know, and how do I know it?

## Summary

A narrative-photovoice methodology supported by narrative inquiry theory within an interpretivist phenomenological paradigm was selected as the most appropriate approach for collecting and analyzing data to gain a true understanding of international students' lived experience of hope in asynchronous and online learning communities in higher education. Visual storytelling is a powerful method to create an understanding of human experience and is a valuable way to promote social awareness and justice (Kim, 2016).

It was important to develop and adhere to a scheduled research plan to ensure successful research outcomes so that knowledge emerged in a seamlessly. Writing up narratives is a complex process as this data can be messy due to the nonlinear, multivoiced nature of the data. Interviewing and photographs as data collection options promoted understanding of the lived and storied experience of diverse ESOL international students' experience of hope in asynchronous and online learning communities in western, English-speaking institutions of higher education. This knowing will potentially produce new narratives and actions, leading to a theoretical rethinking of pedagogies and social situations that promote the construction of hope.

An interpretive approach using narrative-photovoice can potentiate new understandings of hope through the sharing of stories. This approach satisfied my curiosity about international students' personal stories and illustrated their unique ways of knowing about their experience of hope. Photovoice allowed photographs and images to be shared by students, who are often marginalized in western, English-speaking higher educational institutions so that they could narrate their experiences of hope using their own voices.

Hope resides in a spectrum of human strength, and Snyder (2002) suggests that the rainbow, as a symbol of hope, is a prism that sends out rays of multicoloured light in many

directions. As the internationalization of higher education intensifies, research into hope for students of diverse cultures in asynchronous and online learning communities in western English-speaking institutions of higher education can promote hope, encouraging what Snyder (2002) states as a “personal rainbow of the mind” (p.269).

## Chapter 4. Research Process

The goal of this study was to gain an understanding of international students with English as a second or other language lived experience of hope, a foundational human phenomenon, in asynchronous and online learning communities in higher education. To gain this understanding, a narrative photovoice methodology was used to answer the research questions and sub-questions. Narrative photovoice draws on the elements of photovoice and photo narratives.

1. How do ESOL international students describe their experience of hope in asynchronous and online learning communities in a specific English-speaking, western institution of higher education?
  - a. What do diverse ESOL international students see as critical to encouraging their hope and their ability to generate agency and pathway thinking to achieve their goals in asynchronous and online learning environments?
  - b. What do diverse ESOL international students in asynchronous and online learning environments see as barriers to hope and their ability to generate agency and pathway thinking to achieve their goals in asynchronous and online learning environments?
2. What role does hope play in international students' ability to engage, adapt, and succeed in asynchronous and online learning environments?

This chapter is comprised of a discussion of the data analysis process using a narrative photovoice methodology within an interpretivist phenomenological paradigm. Narrative analysis and interpretation work together in synchronicity to find narrative meaning. I used an iterative and inductive cycle to understand the participants' point of view and garner insight into their personal meaning-making. This cycling through the data involved constant reading over the

interview data sentence by sentence to discover categories, patterns, and themes, challenging and checking the participants' stories to ensure the validity of the themes and that the themes accurately reflected the participants' experience of hope (Kynge et al., 2019). To discover categories, patterns, and themes in the data, coding was done to capture the salient points or essence of the data.

Levels of coding included descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual coding, which I gathered by reading and re-reading the textual data. I have included a presentation of the common themes discovered in the data. These themes deepen the findings of prior research on international students' experiences and highlights their understanding of what encourages their hope and what are the barriers they face while participating in asynchronous and online learning environments in higher education. The themes discovered include Always a New Day and Exercise Books, which are representative of what encourages their hope and Don't Look Down and A Dark Road to represent participants' stories on their barriers to hope. These themes were captured to answer the research questions for this study. The profiles of all participants in the study are provided below, highlighting the individual's background and situating them within the study.

Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to ensure anonymity. It is important to note that each of the participants' lived experience of hope is unique, and this study sought to provide a platform for those voices and stories to be heard.

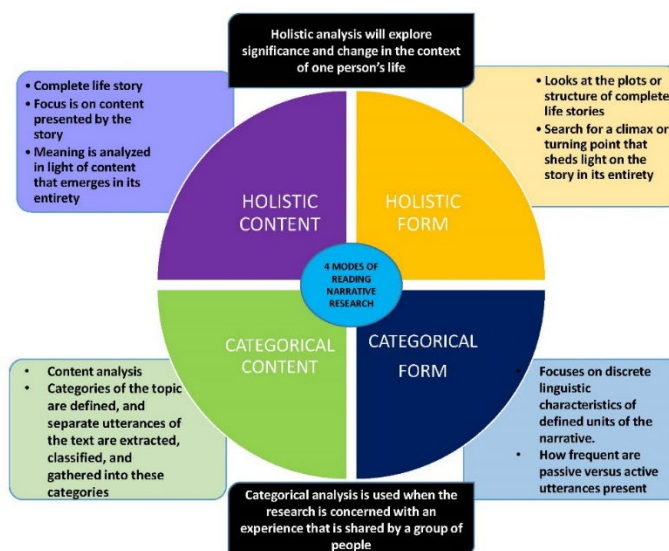
### **Data Analysis Procedure**

The narrative approach to analyzing data is concerned with the storytelling components and the social interactions between the researcher and the participant. It includes the way the stories are told and presented (Earthy & Cronin, 2008). Data for the research included recorded interviews to capture participant stories, my personal field notes in the form of research diaries,



and the photographs taken by the participants. Two independent dimensions emerge when reading, interpreting, and analyzing narrative stories and photographs, “holistic versus categorical approaches and content versus form” (Lieblich et al., 1998, p.11).

The two dimensions intersect, and a matrix of four cells results. These four cells consist of four methods of reading narrative, holistic-content, categorical-content, holistic-form, and categorical-form. The holistic-content perspective includes exploring and discovering links and relationships across the entire story. The holistic-form perspective focusses on the form of the story or the plot. The categorical-content approach is about breaking down the original story and parts or single words that belong to a category are collected from the story or from different texts that belong to various narrators (Lieblich et al., 1998). The categorical-form approach is a vigilant analysis of the plot and focuses on stylistic or linguistic characteristics of the narrative, such as laughter, crying, or a sigh (Lieblich et al., 1998). The model below captures Lieblich et al. (1999) interpretive perspectives for reading, analyzing, and interpreting narrative data.

**Figure 6***Model for classification and Organization of Types of Narrative Research*

*Note.* This figure represents the four cells utilized to read, interpret, and analyze the data within this research study. Adapted from *Narrative research: Reading, analysis, and interpretation*, (p. 11), by A. Lieblich, R. Tuval-Mashiach, & T. Ziber, 2011. SAGE Publications.

Categories and concepts from raw narrative story data are drawn inductively to provide manageable data for further investigation. These categories and concepts become frameworks the researcher applies to new stories that can be explanatory or descriptive (Bleakley, 2005).

The Narrative-photovoice methodology design for this study, was situated within an interpretivist phenomenological paradigm. I used interpretive phenomenological analysis to code the narratives around the photographs to find narrative meaning and delineate codes, categories, and themes from my data. The visual narrative is the foundation for the stories. Photovoice is a very flexible methodology where data analysis can take many forms, be used in a variety of settings, and is appropriate for most age groups (Latz, 2017). Interpretivist phenomenological analysis has a strong intellectual connection with narrative analysis as it is centrally concerned

with meaning-making, and constructing narratives is a way of making meaning (Smith et al., 2009). Approaching narrative data analysis and interpretation, “using our imagination and creativity, we can adapt, modify, and deepen existing analysis methods to address our individual narrative research design and purpose” (Kim, 2016. p.222).

A participant-led analysis embedded in a narrative photovoice methodology facilitates participants to think critically about their experiences of hope. The main goal of photovoice is empowerment rather than social research, and a critical approach can explain the phenomenon under study. However, that explanation is based solely on the participants’ analysis of the photographs and narratives (Tsang, 2020). As a critical approach to narrative photovoice has limitations, researchers have implemented a phenomenological approach where photovoice is a method to produce meanings that participants give to their photographs. By analyzing meanings, I can identify what the participants have in common when they experience hope and explain its patterns, codes, categories, and themes (Tsang, 2020).

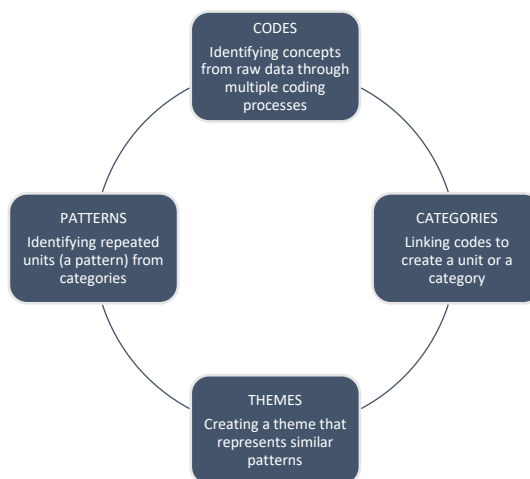
My commitment to this research and the search for meaning in international students’ stories about their experience of hope was facilitated by performing my own transcription of the interview data and tapes, which allowed me to use different senses to build deep connections between seeing and knowing, hearing, and understanding (Rose, 2016). Two reflective diaries were kept synthesizing these deep connections. One allowed me to keep active notes to complement the audio recorded interviews. It is comprised of notes on impressions, behaviours, and nonverbal cues not captured adequately in the audio recording (Sutton & Austin, 2015). This first diary aided me in tracking assumptions, positions, and tensions existing in the interviews (Cavendish, 2011). The other research diary assisted me in noting fundamental changes and decision points made throughout the research journey to track the evolving research design and

facilitate the research process (Newbury, 2001). A self-critical account of the research process supported my ability to record my internal and external dialogue, document the research logistics, and record personal reflections of insights about the self as the human instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Keeping my research diaries close during data analysis allowed for analytical note-taking that assisted me in fleshing out patterns in the data throughout the transcription process.

Researcher analysis involved the elements of codes, categories, patterns, and themes that allowed me to restory participants' narratives. Restorying is the process of interpreting the transcript, evaluating the story to understand the lived experiences, and then retelling the story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My restorying involved replaying the audiotapes, verbatim transcription, and taking notes to fully understand the stories (Foxall et al., 2021). A chart of the basic elements of data analysis is illustrated below in Figure 3.

### Figure 7

#### *Elements of Data Analysis*



*Note.* This figure displays the basic elements of qualitative data analysis. From *Understanding narrative inquiry: The crafting and analysis of stories as research*, (pp. 185-224), by J. H. Kim,

(2016), Sage Publications. [https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/68279\\_Kim\\_Chapter\\_6.pdf](https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/68279_Kim_Chapter_6.pdf)

Interview transcripts were returned to the participants for clarification and approval and to ask if anything was missing. Polkinghorne (1995) indicates that triangulation methods with more than one independent account of an event can help produce confidence that the event occurred. Each interview was transcribed verbatim. I then read the written transcription while listening to the recording to create a clean transcript. A cleaned transcript eliminated pauses, intonations, false starts, and utterances common to everyday speech. The cleaned transcript comprised corrected spelling or other errors and the anonymization of the transcript (Sutton & Austin, 2015) while facilitating a focus on the intent of the participants' stories while making it easier to read (Cavendish, 2011).

When representing participants' lived experiences, it was necessary that I be cautious not to produce anticipated texts, but to assume an open and active listening position in order to hear the unforeseen and uncommon in the participants' stories, thereby attempting to ensure that these voices are heard (Polkinghorne, 1995). Listening is an art and, researchers must listen carefully, attentively, analytically, and with respectful curiosity to the participants' stories as they are told in their own unique way to hear clearly what is being said (Maple & Edwards, 2010).

The narrative researcher must be flexible as the relationship develops with the participant. The participants' personality and responsiveness required continual adjustments in my style and approach. Narrative interviews are social, interpersonal encounters, and not just information exchanges. It is vital to have a place for each participants' voice, as narrative inquiry is based on collaboration, trust, and relationships (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Unstructured interviews with no set agenda, using open-ended questions allowed me to go deeper into the

participant's story and clear up misunderstandings (Kim, 2016). This method encourages cooperation, establishes rapport, and provides the interviewer with a truer assessment of the participant's story (Cohen et al., 2011). Cohen et al. (2011) state a narrative interview has interpersonal, interactional, communicative, and emotional aspects. The interviewer must be conscious of non-verbal communication that may convey something unintentional, such as boredom or anger.

Analysis is an iterative process of shifting description and engagement with the transcript, which involves "flexible thinking, processes of reduction, expansion, revision, creativity and innovation" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 81). The participants in this narrative photovoice research project consisted of eight international students who, through photographs and accompanying narratives, shared their lived experiences of hope in asynchronous and online learning environments in one western English-speaking institution of higher education in Canada and how their experiences of hope encouraged or discouraged their ability to meet their program outcomes as they navigated their educational trajectories towards achieving their academic goals.

A narrative-photovoice methodology within an interpretivist phenomenological paradigm is the research methodology implemented to capture this phenomenon as it exists for these international students. Narrative analysis and interpretation work together in synchronicity to find narrative meaning. Narrative-photovoice is a partnership of words and images that portrays the participants' everyday lives. This storytelling is multimodal and adds another layer of meaning to narrative inquiry, and together they convey meaning that neither could convey alone, keeping the truthfulness of the stories unbroken (Johnson, 2004).

Implementing an interpretive phenomenological analysis approach as detailed by Smith et al. (2009), data analysis was conducted as a heuristic process that involved multiple readings

of the transcripts to identify emergent themes. The heuristic process involves exploring the subjective experience of a particular phenomenon, in this case, hope within a purposive sample of participants, without separating the individual from the experience. Instead, the focus is a reflective engagement in exploring the nature of the interaction or relationship between the participant and the experience (Sultan, 2019). The bonding relationship that arose between myself and the participants provided the best opportunity to understand the innermost deliberation of the lived experiences of the research participants. This relationship allowed interviewees to tell their stories in the way they saw fit without any distortion. My interpretation of the data from the participants' narratives comes from the perspective of faith in the stories that they are true and meaningful to their sense of subjective experience (Kim, 2016).

For this study, as the primary researcher, I analyzed the narrative transcripts collected from the participant narrative interviews. The participants identified the photographs and narratives displayed in this document in Chapter five: Introducing the Participants and Presenting the Findings. The photographs as visual data helped to broaden, deepen, and strengthen my understanding of the students' lived experiences and brought a richer perspective to the narrative interviews (Kim, 2016). Implementing a categorical approach, I broke each story down into separate parts or individual words and phrases from individual participant interview transcripts. This approach related specifically to the phenomenon of hope and how that experience was shared between the participants (Lieblich et al., 1998). I analyzed each transcript individually and employed a reflexive process to bracket initial perceptions from interviews with other participants and bridle assumptions and preunderstandings to interpret and describe the phenomenon under study (Vagle et al., 2009). Writing down powerful remembrances and striking observations of the interview experience in my research journal helped to bracketing my

experiences relating to hope by bringing these issues to mind. In this way, I was able to plan bracketing strategies and document them in a logical way (Wall et al., 2004). An account from my research diary reads:

Does my Caucasian background and my western positionality, my gender, culture, and or my professional background influence my positioning and understanding of the participants' stories and my relationship with the participants. Does my story skew my perceptions...the participants' perceptions? Does the awe, shock, grief, and guilt I feel for their experiences put me in a place apart? Is it condescending? Is it judgmental? Is it empathy?

As part of the reflexive process bracketing relates to the researcher's "identification of vested interests, personal experience, cultural factors, assumptions, and hunches" that may affect an unbiased understanding of the research data (Fischer, 2009a, p. 583). As part of the reflexive act, I bracketed these biases as much as possible throughout the investigation, helping identify presumptions to knowingly shift positioning. Bracketing bias' is accomplished not by eliminating subjectivity but by being aware of it. As a researcher, I cannot reject my beliefs or values. I can refrain from judgment and acknowledge, that my beliefs and values could prompt judgment, using them as a basis for insights. During the interview phase, I bracketed out pre-understandings to keep an open mind and actively listen to the participants. Immediately after the interview, I took notes to ensure I was aware of any bracketing I may have missed during the interview (Dörfler & Stierand, 2020).

This reflexive act was an ongoing process of self-discovery throughout the data analysis. I did reach out to a peer who is a skilled researcher to review the codes, categories, patterns, and themes that I discovered in the participant transcripts. These transcripts were anonymized prior



to my peer reviewing them, and none of the students were in courses that this peer reviewer taught. Involving an outsider to the research who was not a part of the interviews held a mirror to me in support of the reflexive process (Dörfler & Stierand, 2020).

Member checking was utilized to receive feedback from the participants for them to validate the accuracy of the data and establish credibility. I, therefore returned the interview transcripts to the participants for clarification and approval. Polkinghorne (1995) indicates that triangulation methods where there is more than one independent account of an event can help produce confidence that the event occurred. By having a peer review my data, I was engaging in a reflexive process, bracketing potential biases that could affect the research data. My engagement in the bracketing process assisted me in reaching deeper levels of reflection throughout all the stages of the investigation, therefore mitigating personal preconceptions, such as gender, economic status and how I sat in the power hierarchy of the research (Hanson, 1994). In this way, I was able to consider individual participant's circumstance during the first steps of the analysis and not ascribe ideas or emergent themes to new cases inappropriately.

### **Interview Phase**

The interview method I used implements a questioning phase that was centred around the participants' photographs and accompanying narratives using the acronym SHOWED. (Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang et al., 1998). Eight participants were involved in semi-structured interviews, which I scheduled to accommodate personal schedules. Semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity to establish rapport, the ordering of the question is not paramount. As the researcher, I was free to investigate areas that arose, and the interview engaged the participants' interests and concerns (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed using a transcription software Otter.ai. All data was stored on a password-protected computer, and pseudonyms were assigned to protect participant identities. Research journals and transcribed interviews were kept in a locked file cabinet in my locked office. I worked through the phases of the Narrative interview described by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000). This interview process included preparation, initialization, main narration, questioning phase, and small talk. The questioning phase using the SHOWED acronym centred around the participants' photographs and accompanying narratives.

As discussed in chapter three, photographs as a medium to alternative narratives a useful tool for participants to create more profound meanings of their lived experiences of hope. Photographs inspire individuals to reflexively think, remember, and reflect, representing feelings and thoughts in a specific moment (Glaw et al., 2017). As the photographs were a part of the interviews, it was important to gather the participants' views and explanations of the significance and content of their photographs during the interviews. It allowed me to ascertain if the photographs were informative or symbolic and to explore the stories behind them as part of the research rigour, ensuring the validity of the data in order to make ethical judgements on the interpretation of the photographs (Clark, 2013). Engaging in narrative thinking during the interviews allowed me to ensure that the participants' stories portrayed how they give meaning to their experiences. As the narrative inquirer, my job was to listen attentively during the interviews and prompt with open-ended questions that would allow the participants to follow their own journey as they told their story (Kim, 2016).

## Levels of Coding

### Reading and Re-reading

The analysis process demands the researcher's active immersion in the data and involves reading and rereading the data as I searched for meaning, patterns, codes, and themes (Majumdar, 2022). I, therefore, read and re-read each transcript and then re-read while I listened to the audio recording. There were language nuances and words not picked up initially in the transcript due to the participants' accents; therefore, listening to the recording while reading the transcript line for line was essential to understand the students' perspectives and experiences clearly and ensure that no errors had been made when creating the transcripts. Transcripts were then sent to each participants to ensure that my corrections and understanding of their interviews clearly represented what they were trying to say. Clarifications is an essential step, as interpretations can be skewed, and it is crucial to ensure that specific meanings of the things that matter to the participants are captured. A clear phenomenological focus may be lost as the researcher strays from the participants' explicit meaning (Smith et al., 2009).

A second reading occurred once the participants returned the transcripts with corrections or further insights and to note any alterations in narrative or corrections in the researchers' conceptualizations of the initial transcript. The third reading took place while viewing the participants' photographs and specific narratives of their experiences on what the photographs meant to them, their experience of hope, and their ability to generate agency and pathway thinking to achieve their goals in asynchronous and online learning environments in higher education. This visual storytelling, along with the narrative interviews, was a powerful means to help me understand the meanings participants gave to themselves, their environment, their lives, and their lived experiences through visual storytelling (Kim, 2016). Visual images combined

with textual data can help the “unnoticed aspect of human activity and social organization become noticed and taken into account” to understand international students’ experience of hope in higher education (Bell, 2015, p.144).

The photograph is the birth of the participants’ story about their experiences of hope in asynchronous and online learning in higher education. The narratives capture the unique universality of their understanding of this experience. My research journal captured comments and first impressions during this third reading. This preliminary level of analysis allowed for my growing familiarity with the transcripts and gave insights into ways that a participant speaks about, understands, and considers an issue (Smith et al., 2009).

### **Descriptive Coding**

The next step was to perform a line-by-line analysis of the text, looking for keywords, phrases, or explanations that stood out in the text. These words and passages were highlighted. The first cycle of coding was the descriptive codes which are the labels for similar groups of data. I assigned descriptive codes to sections of the data depending on what the segments were about. Descriptive coding facilitated an emergence of particular words or phrases that stood out in the text due to frequency, association, or seeming significance to the participant or researcher. This process of creating and assigning descriptive codes to categorize data extracts assisted me later on to derive themes and patterns. Categorical content analysis approach where separate utterances of the text are extracted and gathered into categories is a component of linguistic coding (Kim, 2016). Highlighting codes in the transcript expanded on the level of inquiry gathered in the initial reading of the text. It identified other areas of interest to be explored in additional studies of not just the text, but the photographs as well.

## **Linguistic Coding**

Linguistic coding is another element of exploratory coding (Smith et al., 2009). This type of coding pertains to language use. I found this particularly relevant as many participants used metaphor to describe their experience. The metaphor was a powerful component of the data analysis process as it linked the descriptive coding of the narrative and the photographs, and several participants relied on metaphor as a visual strategy. A photograph of a dark road represented hardship and challenges; experiences that made them feel hopeless. In contrast, a photograph of sunlight and nature was described by six of the participants as representative of experiences that made them feel hopeful. Linguistic coding also considers levels of meaning in words and phrases, paying attention to word choices and frequency. Categorical form analysis takes place during linguistic coding, where discrete linguistic characteristics of the narrative was extracted from the data (Kim, 2016). Examples would be the types of metaphors are used by the narrator. This coding level helped to determine the concealed/covert significance of participants' photographs and the accompanying narratives.

## **Conceptual Coding**

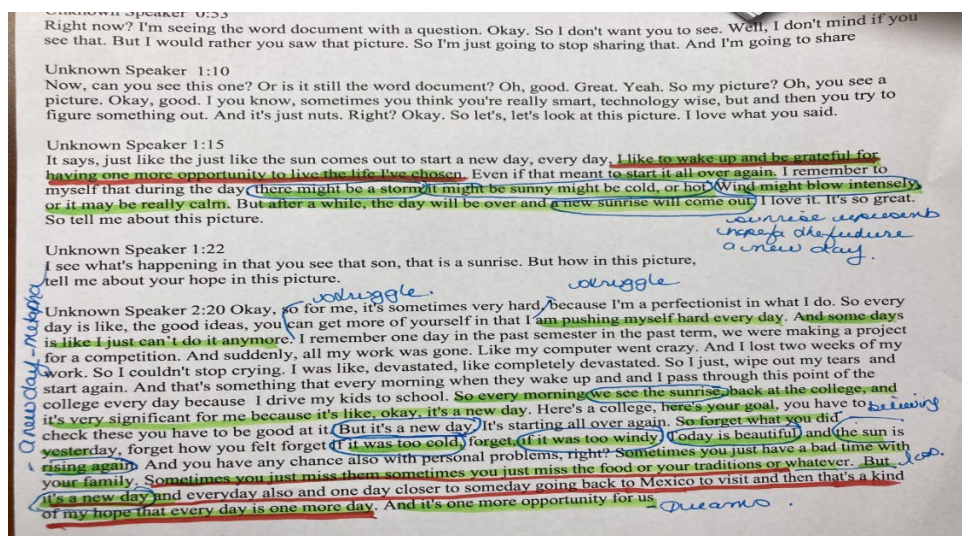
The linguistic coding helped to broaden the analysis to a more interpretative level, dealing with the transcript data conceptually rather than with “the explicit claims of the participant” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 88). This conceptualization or asking questions of the data required a critical lens that opened up interim meanings and interpretations inspired by the participants' words as the sole storytellers. Comments such as “it gives me hope to keep working along the dark road” allowed the identification of emergent themes and helped to capture and reflect an understanding of individual participants' lived experiences of hope. Conceptual coding

focused on the holistic analysis of the participants life story and the focus was on the content that emerges (Kim, 2016).

Figure 4 provides an example of the coding types performed on each manuscript. Descriptive coding is indicated with a green highlighter. The descriptive codes would be struggle and dreams. Linguistic coding is circled and includes metaphors such as “a new sunrise will come out.” Conceptual coding addresses the conceptual content of the participants’ understandings and is underlined in red. Statements such as “sometimes you miss the food or traditions” link the data and open up the concept of loss and became a subtheme for “A Dark Road.”

## Figure 8

### Coding Example



Note. Levels of coding illustrated using the transcript from the interview with Mary

### Identifying Themes

At this stage of the analysis, excerpts from the transcripts were placed under thematic codes that captured not only the narratives from the participants but the photographs themselves and how they were representative of the narratives. A chart was created with participant quotes

from the narrative transcripts and participant narratives about their photographs to begin to make connections for each participant and identify concepts using multiple coding processes (Kim, 2016). The next step was to link the codes into categories that identified barriers to hope and encouragers of hope by searching for relationships between similar codes to combine them to make a category (Kim, 2016). Linking helped me find emerging patterns in each category which contributed to the identification of the themes. The broader themes were narrowed further and categorized under photograph descriptors representative of repetitive codes and categories analyzed in the participant transcripts. This categorization allowed for common themes to emerge from the data with accurate quotes that confirmed the emerging themes for me.

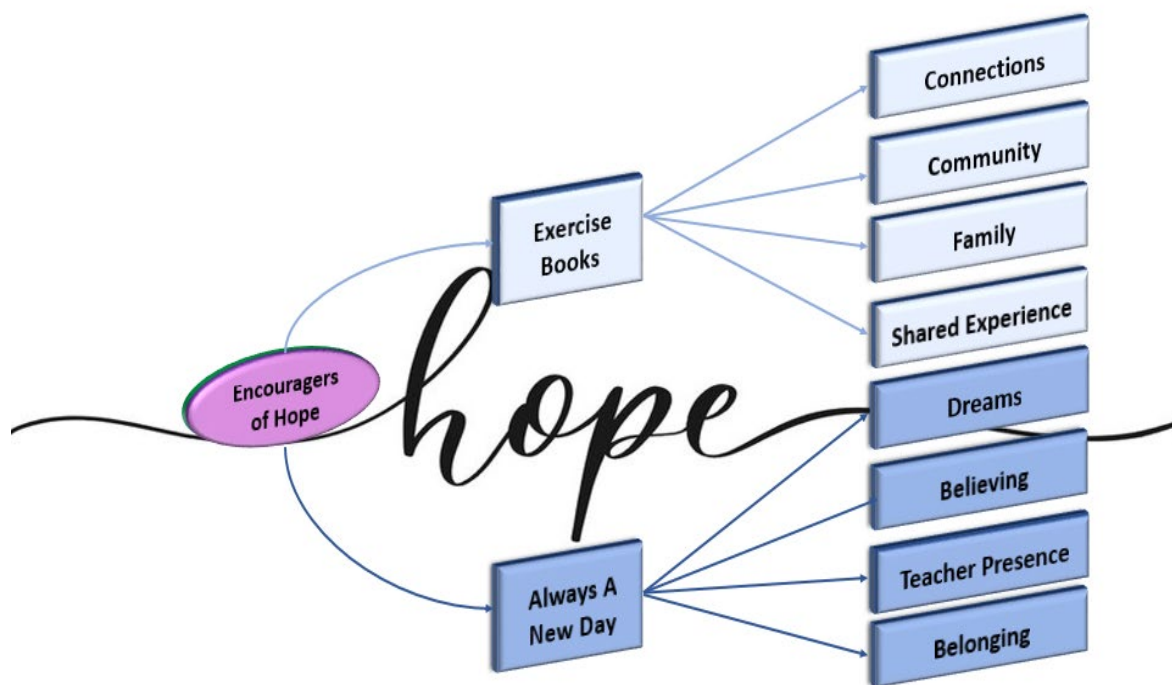
I included an impartial qualified peer to review and assess my transcripts, methodology, and findings to help establish credibility and identify potential bias in my analysis. Researchers are often located in social positions of power, isolating them from the realities they are researching. By seeking a peer review of my findings, I was able to engage in bridling, a reflexive act, by being open to an external assessment of my assumptions and understandings of the phenomenon under investigation. Bracketing, another component of the reflexive act, allows a process of self-discovery and can be facilitated by soliciting help from a colleague (Rolls & Relf, 2006).

This interpretive analysis provided insights into participants' lived experience of hope in asynchronous and online learning environments in a western institution of higher so that meaning could be discovered and clarified. The final analysis of the patterns and meanings was confirmed by moving back and forth many times through photographs and interview transcripts, and interview recordings (Glaw et al., 2017). I gathered all categories under four metaphorical

themes that emerged from the data analysis and captured the essence of these international students' narratives and photographs and how they interpret their world.

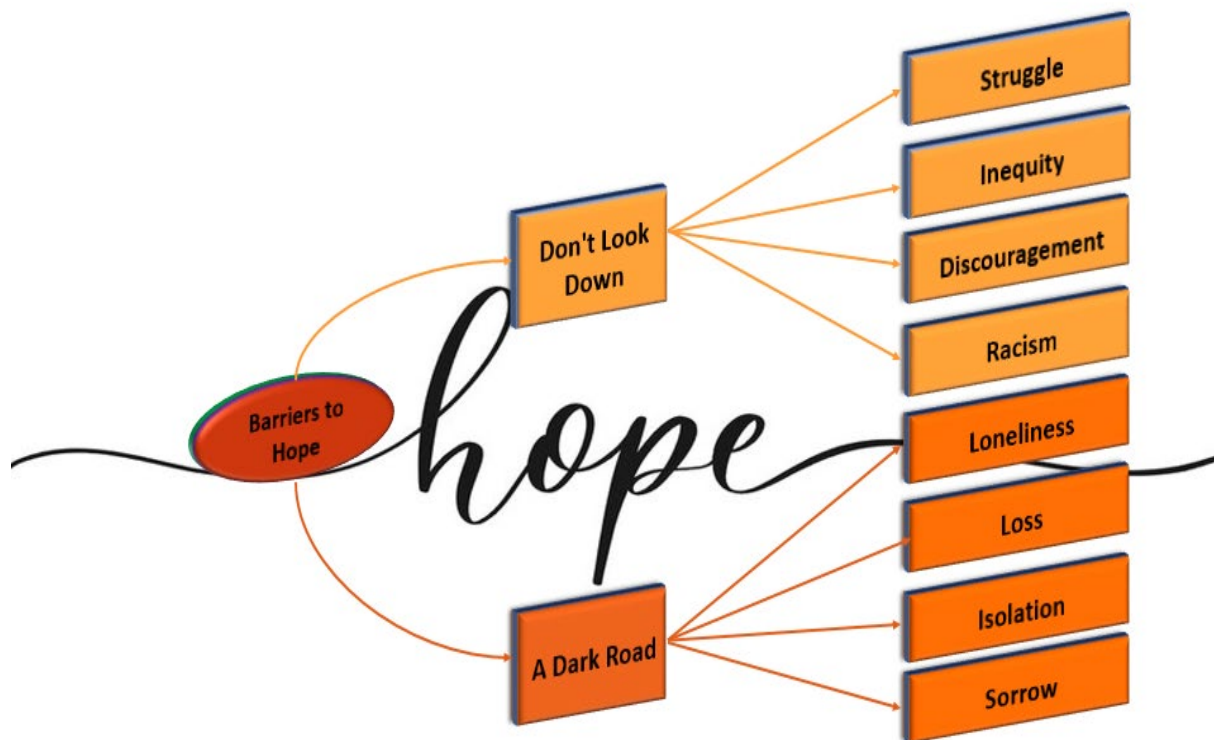
**Figure 9**

*Thematic Analysis – Encouragers of Hope*



*Note.* Themes for encouragers of hope included Exercise Books and Always a New Day.



**Figure 10***Thematic Analysis – Barriers to Hope*

*Note.* Barriers to hope included Don't Look Downs and A Dark Road.

### Summary

This chapter is comprised of a discussion of the data analysis process. Data for my research included recorded interviews to capture participant stories, field notes in the form of research diaries, and photographs taken by the participants. Content analysis was conducted using a categorical approach; each story was broken down into separate parts or individual words and phrases from different texts that belonged to each participant. The holistic approach allowed me to embrace the participant story as a whole and discover the meaning of the text in its

entirety. My thematic analysis aimed to identify the significant themes and patterns in the data and use these themes to address my research questions. Reading and rereading the transcripts helped me to become familiar with the data and generate codes that facilitated my search for themes. The themes that I felt represented the data due to their repetition and similarities were a New Day and Exercise Books, which were identified as encouragers of international student hope, and Don't Look Down and A Dark Road, which are representative of their barriers to their hope. The following chapter will introduce the participants and present the findings.

## **Chapter 5. Introducing the Participants and Presenting the Findings**

This research study explored international students' experience of hope in asynchronous and online learning communities in higher education utilizing a narrative photovoice methodology. The participants shared their photographs and personal narratives about what factors encouraged their experience of hope and what were barriers to their experience of hope. At the time of the research, all participants were enrolled in programs at a college in western Canada and conducting their studies in online environments. Data were collected through photographs, personal narratives, and interviews to answer the study's research questions. The eight participants are introduced, and I assigned pseudonyms to each participant to ensure anonymity. Following the introduction of the participants are the responses to the research questions organized by emerging themes. The graphics displayed in Chapter four display the themes and subthemes gathered from the data. Themes include Exercise Books and a New Day, themes for encouragers of hope, Don't Look Down and A Dark Road, themes which represent barriers to hope.

### **The Participants**

The eight participants are all international students with English as a second language. They come from all walks of life, from affluent to abject poverty. Some have come with their families, some are alone, and some have families here in Canada to support them during their studies.

#### **Advir**

Advir had spent one year in Canada when he participated in my study and stated his age as 20. Advir was born in Batala, Punjab, India. He lives with his uncle, who works for the Canadian government. Advir is studying Engineering Design and Drafting. Advir is from a

wealthy family in India, and his family owns a farm there. His family is very influential in his community. Advir works part-time at a gas station and plans to stay and work in Canada when he has finished his studies. Advir submitted photographic images he took himself and pictures he obtained from the internet.

### **Zena**

Zena had been in Canada for two and a half years at the time of her participation in this research project. She was born in Brazil and is here with her husband. She has no other family here in Canada. Her husband works on a farm, and Zena is taking Agricultural Sciences. Zena is a mature student and stated her age was 35. She chose western Canada because of the farmland here. Zena had no English when she came to Canada and had to take English courses to learn to communicate here. Her first language is Spanish. Zena and her husband want to apply for permanent residency in Canada. Zena submitted photographic images that she captured herself.

### **Cora**

Cora was born in El Salvador in Central America. She is here with her husband and two children, aged seven and nine. Cora was taking Multimedia Production and was in her first year of studies at the time of her interview. Cora is living in the family residence at the college. She has memories of her mother taking the bus long distances to the university to study while Cora and her siblings stayed with her grandmother. Her mother's pursuit of education was inspirational for Cora. Cora's husband has a full-time job, and she has taken a part-time job at Walmart. Cora reported that she struggles to juggle family, work, and studies. Cora and her husband plan to stay in Canada. Cora submitted photographic images that she took herself.

**Mary**

Mary was born in Leon, Mexico. She was studying Architectural Animation Technology and was in her first year at the time of her interview. She is in Canada with her husband and two children, ages seven and three and lived in the college's family residence. Mary was an architect in Mexico, as was her husband. Mary and her husband left a "good" life in Mexico to come to Canada to find a safer life for their children. Their Mexican neighbourhood was seeing more and more gang violence, so just going to the local store was becoming too dangerous. They left their dream home that they designed and built themselves, and if Mary had stayed in Mexico, she had the potential to inherit the family's architectural business. Mary and her family plan to apply for permanent residency. Mary submitted photographic images she took herself.

**Tai**

Tai is an international student born in Kenya, Africa and was 18 when she came to Canada. Tai was in her second year of a nursing program in Kenya when she received her Visa to come to Canada. On arrival in Canada, Tai found that she needed to upgrade her nursing courses to apply for the Bachelor of Nursing Program. The competition was fierce, and Tai was not accepted into the nursing program. As her Visa was due to expire, Tai could not wait for an offer to enter a nursing program and was forced to change her career choice to Therapeutic Recreation Gerontology. At the time of the interview with Tai, she was completing the first year of her program. Tai's brother is in Canada on a study permit, and her sister, who finished her degree in Kenya, is also in Canada on a work visa. Tai is very proud that she could bring her siblings to Canada. Tai plans to stay in Canada when she has finished her studies. Tai's photographic images submitted were ones she took herself and discovered online.

**Ami**

Ami has spent two years in Canada and was born in Burkina Faso, West Africa. She is here in Canada, living with her uncle. Ami did not speak English when she arrived in Canada, which was challenging. Ami spent two semesters taking English courses at the English Language Center. Ami's first language is French. Ami was enrolled in the first year of her Practical Nursing program at the time of her participation in my research study. Ami has not decided if she will return to Africa after her studies. Ami's photographic images were all taken by herself.

**Rauni**

Rauni is an international student from Nairobi, which is in Kenya. She is a Child and Youth Studies student and was completing her first year when she participated in my research study. Rauni decided she did not want to study in Kenya but rather travel and pursue her passions in life. She enrolled in airline school in Nairobi while awaiting her applications for a study visa in Canada to come through. She has no family here in Canada and stated her age as 19. Although she is here to study, she would like to return to her life in Kenya. Rauni submitted photographic images both taken by herself and gathered from the internet.

**Jon**

Jon is an international student from Nigeria. He grew up in a small village where his country is exposed to persistent armed conflict by and with Boko Haram. This conflict has resulted in widespread displacements and food insecurity, and there have been numerous victims of violence. He often worries about his family he left behind. He states that he did not know how it happened, but he found his way to Canada. Jon is working to pay for his education as his family does not have the financial resources to support him. He is here alone without family and was in his second year of Agricultural Science, with a business major at the time of his

interview. Jon plans to stay in Canada. Jon's photographic images were ones he found on the internet.

### **Themes**

The images displayed in this dissertation are not just pictures but rather moments in time that describe these international students' world and their experience of hope. The narratives accompanying the photographs have the ability to move the audience to "thought, reflection, action, and belief (Stroud, 2008, p. 19). The phenomenon the participants reveal through the mutual joining of text and photographic images has been reduced to the following themes. Exercise Books, A New Day, Don't Look Down, and A Dark Road. Themes one and two represent encouragers of international students' hope, while themes three and four represent barriers to international students' hope. Theme one, Exercise Books, represents home and family and can be identified as students' perception of how accepted they feel in their learning communities, their ability to establish significant connections here in Canada, and their involvement in meaningful shared experiences. Theme two, A New Day, encompasses dreams, teacher presence, a sense of belonging and believing in their journey and their ability to achieve their goals and make a new and better life for themselves. Theme three, Don't Look Down, is about the participants' feelings of inequity, their struggle here in Canada, the racism they face and their discouragement with their learning and social communities. Theme four, A Dark Road, is comprised of loneliness, loss, isolation, and sorrow, all experiences shared by the participants and voiced as barriers to international student hope.

## Encouragers of Hope

### Theme One: Exercise Books

I chose exercise books to represent home and family, shared experiences, the participants' learning community, and their ability to establish meaningful connections. International students indicated that these are all important in encouraging and sustaining their hope. Research has discovered that supportive adult relationships with parents chosen as significant supportive others are predictors of hope for these students (O'Hara, 2013; Fruht, 2015; Begeny et al., 2018). The participants in this study spoke about the importance of their families as anchors to their culture and home and in sustaining and encouraging their hope. Family is threaded throughout many of the themes and subthemes.

#### *Subtheme 1: Connections*

Rauni shared a photo depicting her exercise books she brought to Canada from home. They represent her important connections to her community back in Nairobi. The exercise books are memory objects that signify important moments that Rauni wants to remember. "Memory objects are conceptualized as special personal belongings that elicit deliberate or involuntary memories of homeland, home culture, social relations and episodes in one's past" (Marschall, 2019, p. 253). The exercise books for Rauni evoke feelings of hope and well-being, enforcing her sense of identity and belonging when she states, "it just keeps me up and keeps me held up."



**Figure 11***Exercise Books***Rauni:**

Before I left home, I carried some exercise books to school. And I have never used it. But I have kept the book because it keeps me holding on to what I live by and what I have. What I have grown up with. So even missing this small thing and how I get used to seeing my exercise books looking like all the culture and heritage that is put into it and embracing all the belonging and traditions and all the small stuff that is being slowly eroded by our generation. It just keeps me up and keeps me held up. It's from home, right?

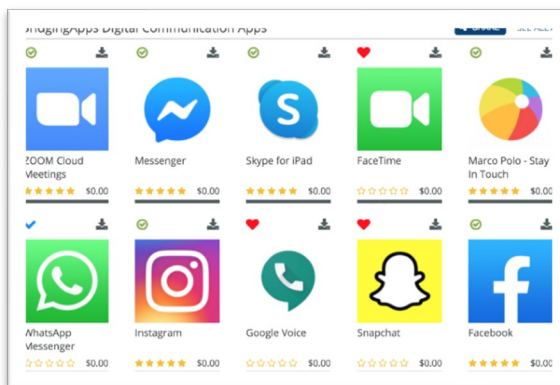
The exercise books are not to be used but are cherished memories of life in her homeland and are a catalyst for shared experience, community, and acceptance that helps her to feel close to her traditions and culture that Rauni is fearful will disappear while she is in Canada studying. Rauni maintains a connection to her home and culture through her exercise books, giving her hope and strength.

Despite the challenges often encountered with the internet, it has provided innovative ways of communicating and has improved the intercultural adjustment of international students

by promoting communication between loved ones to diminish loss and loneliness as they transition to a new culture (Patron, 2014).

## Figure 12

### *Communication*



*Note.* From *Bridging Gaps* (n.d.) *Digital Communication Apps*. <https://bridgingapps.org/digital-communication-apps/>

### **Rauni:**

This picture just simply signifies the world we live in and how best we can get in touch. As I think back and imagine if I was born in a different era, I don't know how I would survive, keeping up with, seeing what's going on in the world back there, talking to friends and family, seeing them on video, chat, FaceTime. Being here and knowing how to hold on to what brought me here. Getting to talk to family every so often. It just gives you purpose and reminds you there's people who are waiting for you back there, there's people who have hope in you, and why they sent you there.

Connections to friends promote social support and influence international student adjustment (Jackson et al., 2013). Hope is interactive, and developing relationships in the host country can assist international students to learn about the host culture and expectations,

experience less acculturative stress, and potentiate successful adjustment (Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015). A few of the international students were able to make connections here in Canada. Rauni states when talking about the pandemic, “I had some experience of normal before all this happened, so I did make a few friends.” Ami stated, “I got to meet a friend through a friend, and it helps a lot. Like we studied together for an exam, and it was awesome. Then I also met other people through her.” Rauni stated that “Keeping in touch with my friends in Canada. Even the small things like sending a chat like one morning or a snap. It really helps. It keeps us all up. I’m hopeful someday I’m gonna get to see them.”

Tai made friends from her own country initially and only made a Canadian friend once she had studied in Canada for a year. She met some of these Canadian friends at work and school.

**Tai:**

I learned a lot from them. A lot like how the education system in Canada works how they were raised; and we did share a lot, and they were interested to know about my country as well. Just a lot of things I learned. We got to spend some time together when we were not at school or work. It is easier to make friends at work, especially if you are working an 8-hour shift – 5 days a week and you get used to being together.

Friendships between international students and domestic peers allow the transfer of knowledge across cultures (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2015). Greater interactions between international students and their domestic peers have benefits related to psychological, social, and academic adjustment (Severiens & Wolff, 2008). Parker et al. (2015), discovered a relationship between friendship, subjective well-being and hope in their study on adolescent youth in a Catholic school in Australia. Earlier, Snyder (2000) further suggested that

social support plays an important role in hope development. Maintaining hope in Dufault and Martocchio's (1985) dimension depends on supportive relationships.

### **Subtheme 2: Community**

#### **Figure 13**

##### *Love Sign*



Ami presented her picture of love. This statuette sits on her bedside table and is the first thing she sees every morning when she wakes up. She talks about this picture, saying, “it is the first thing I see on my table when I wake up. It reminds me of my people and the love that we share. Love is a beautiful thing, and it makes everything bearable.”

#### **Ami:**

I know I have a support system, and I felt like I belong. I have people that love me and also to give the love back. That really helps me because I feel like I am not alone and the people around me can help me.

Material symbolism is about objects and things beyond words and often takes on extreme importance (McCarthy, 2007). Ami's statuette has come to embody her ties to her community, providing a connection even when far away. It encourages hope which ignites her ability to meet her goals. Loneliness and isolation are issues that many international students' experience at

some point during their sojourn away from home to attend school (Sawir et al., 2008).

International students grieve for the friends, family, and home culture that they left behind. Due to the social isolation that they experience, they often require something tangible that represents these losses and supports their feeling of belonging (Sawir et al., 2008).

The social support and community that international students leave behind affect their well-being and negatively influence their academic achievements, particularly with the addition of online learning and the difficulty with proximity that interferes with the ability to make new and meaningful social connections in Canada (Demir & Tarhan, 2001). There are varied factors that can lessen loneliness, such as social activities, social connections, and friendships, which many of these international students lack, particularly those who are in Canada alone (Sawir et al., 2008). Ami looks at her statuette of love, and it brings her comfort and hope and eases the loneliness she experiences being away from home. Ami describes her picture by saying, “It is the first thing I see in the morning when I wake up. Reminds me of my people and the love we share. Love is a beautiful thing, and it makes everything bearable.”

Cora was originally a student studying face-to-face on campus and was moved online during the COVID pandemic. Cora stated, “prior to going online, I made a good community even here in residence. Six of the families just stay together, kids play around, and that was our community.” Cora stated, “we have help with one of the neighbours here and that maybe if I need to leave or go to work and my husband is not here yet, she will stay with the kids for a few minutes.” This ability to build community facilitated by Cora living in residence has encouraged her hope and her ability to engage in her studies here in Canada.

Rauni did manage to establish a community in her online learning community stating:

Online virtual learning is also a sense of hope that we can all work together in this; we're learning the same thing. We're in the same class; we're seeing each other, might not be seeing each other, but you know, there's somebody behind that screen, and we're together in this.

Learning communities that support social integration for international students provide equitable opportunities that can enhance experiences of hope (Uzuner, 2009). In this sense, hope is psychological strength that enhances relationships between classroom climate, emotional well-being, and life satisfaction (Lagace-Seguin & d'Entremont, 2010).

### **Subtheme 3: Family**

Support from personal entities such as family is crucial for international students' adjustment and academic achievement (Aldawsari et al., 2018). Tai has successfully applied to bring her siblings to Canada to join her, and together they are studying and sharing experiences here in Canada. Connections to home and family contributed to my participants' experience of hope. These connections were instrumental in alleviating the stress they experienced from being separated from close family and familiar cultural experiences. Some participants had family in Canada to support them and sustain their hope. Advir stated, "I am really lucky because I have family here, and they are here to guide me, and I didn't feel alone even from the first day. It's important that you have somebody."

Family support facilitates an individuals' hope and, therefore, their well-being, by providing emotional and instrumental resources, such as food, clothing and shelter (Idan & Margalit, 2013). Mary's family was significant for encouraging her hope. Mary states, "my family make the whole difference. My family – that is why I don't close myself to negativity and weakness – so they give me strength." Rauni, too gathered strength from her family, although

they were not here in Canada with her. She was able to communicate with them frequently.

Rauni stated, “family would encourage my hope, something tangible, those I can hold on to, I can hug, I can talk to. It just keeps me up with the new stuff going on that I have to deal with.”

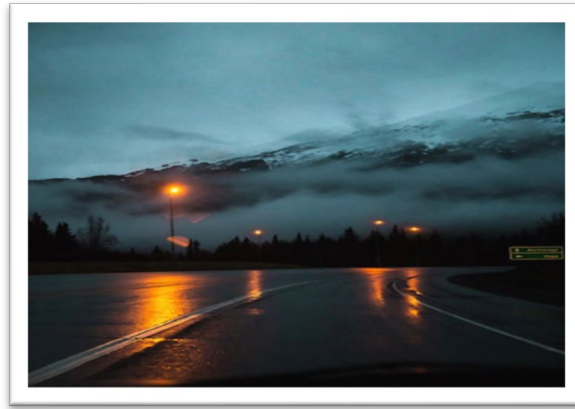
Advir’s uncle was a great support for him here in Canada, and he felt fortunate to live with him.

Advir stated, “a lot of people here are always worried about, I need to pay rent, I need to pay for this and that. I am lucky I live with my uncle,” Ami also gains support from her family here in Canada, as she lives with her uncle.

**Ami:**

“I know I have a support system, and I felt like I belong. I have people that love me and also to give the love back. That really helps me because I feel like I am not alone, and the people around me can help me.”

International participants in this research project utilized visual metaphors to represent encouragers or discouragers of hope. Tai represented her longing for connections with her family and home by submitting this picture of a dark, rain-washed road heading towards the mountains, which she entitled “Adaptation.” This visual metaphor is a powerful and pervasive method of expressing complex concepts and situations (Billot & King, 2015).

**Figure 14***Adaptation***Tai:**

Being in another country and living far away from my family for the first time was not easy for me. Experiencing different culture, climate and getting to meet different people I was not used to. I was worried because I was not going to see my family for the next five years because of the time period of my study visa. It was very hard to adapt living on my own and not seeing them. But I decided to be positive and hope that I was going to see them before the five years elapse. After my first year here, I decided to do the application for my siblings to come over, and after one year, they got the study visa. I am so happy and proud of myself to have them here with me. Currently, I am working on my parents' application. I am also hoping I will see them soon.

Mary, whose family was here in Canada, sharing her international experience with her, stated, “My family make the whole difference. My family – that is why I don’t close myself to negativity and weakness – so they give me strength.”



**Ami:**

Living with my uncle, I know I have a support system, and I felt like I belong. I have people that love me and also to give the love back. That really helps me because I feel like I am not alone and the people around me can help me.

Students' support from their families are essential in encouraging and sustaining their hope. This is embedded in the fourth dimension of Dufault and Martocchio's (1985) model of hope, the affiliative dimension, which involves relationships that include family and others. Family support facilitates an individuals' hope, by providing emotional and instrumental resources, such as food, clothing and shelter (Idan & Margalit, 2013).

**Subtheme 4: Shared Experience**

International students in my study spoke about the importance of involvement, connection, community-building, and sharing experiences here in Canada. International students who establish a connection with the community have fewer challenges adjusting to the new culture and experience less stress and depression (Jackson et al., 2013). The assimilation of international students into the societal and institutional culture of the host country is an assumption of higher education institutions. This assimilation is important for academic achievement and social integration (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). This presumption leaves a gap for international students as it does not guarantee relationships with their peers, educators or individuals in the community.

**Figure 15***Challenges in Online Learning***Cora:**

This is all at the computer. The idea is just to describe how it did work for a student for a mom that is a student and also been doing this with kids. Everybody was at the computer. In order to help them as they don't have English as a first language. With online, I can record my classes and watch them later and just be with them first.

Cora could share her children's learning experiences while also engaging in her own academic coursework. This ability for Cora to work with her children where the family is sharing the transition to a new culture and a new learning environment can broaden horizons and expand their sense of what is possible, providing a sense of connection that supports hope (Snyder, 2002). Cora's educator facilitated the ability for a shared experience with her family by recording course work so Cora could adjust her learning needs around her children's learning needs. By sharing personal experiences of setting and accomplishing goals together, families can inspire and motivate each other in the pursuit of their own goals (Snyder et al., 1997a).

Social support and connections from the same or different cultural groups contribute to international students' ability to adjust to their new environments. Social, supportive relationships promote a shared experience facilitating a sense of belonging. It gives international students a feeling of control in the world they are experiencing and promotes the ability to cope effectively with external challenges.

**Tai:**

One thing that gave me hopes are my friends because they have gone through the same, and they are now in a better place. The other things with friends, it's not like we were friends before in Kenya; I just know that they're coming from different places in our country. So it's like meeting new people, but at least they're speaking the same language; they understand you more because they went through the same thing you're going through. It is easier for me to make friends with them than making friends with Canadians.

Shared experience can arise for international students when they build relationships with others who share similar experiences, such as other international students. The experiences of other international students who have successfully navigated the challenges of a new culture and learning environment can inspire and instill a sense of hope (Snyder et al., 2005). Sharing experiences leads to a feeling of acceptance and legitimization and generates a feeling of belonging. When international students can connect and share experiences with others that identify with them and offer support, it creates a sense of agency and promotes the ability to create pathways to achieve their goals (Lopez et al., 2004). Being accepted and having a sense of belonging that comes with legitimization influences student performance, persistence, and

satisfaction with their collegiate careers (Yao, 2015). A feeling of belonging can create meaning and purpose in one's life, which contributes to a hopeful outlook.

### ***Theme Two: Always a New Day***

Theme two concerns international students' dreams, connections and support from their educators, their sense of belonging here in Canada and in the institution of higher education, and their belief that they will reach their goals. These were important constructs in encouraging participants' hope and were represented in their photographs and voices. Students talked about lights in a dark forest, a new day, the sun always giving light, and spring is just around the corner. Light and darkness were continuous themes that the participants used to metaphorically pictorialize their hope. Light, symbolized by the sun, represents good, happiness, joy, knowledge, or hope, while darkness symbolizes bad, sorrow, loss, ignorance, despair, danger, or hopelessness (Forceville & Renckens, 2013). The metaphor expresses thoughts that are difficult to express in literal language. Much information can be expressed in a single metaphorical image, as seen in the participant's photographs portrayed in this dissertation. "The communicative function of metaphor is to capture and transmit the subjective intensity of experience in a way that literal language often does not" (Grady, 1997, p. 11).

#### **Subtheme 1: Dreams**

Advir provided a picture of a sunrise to portray his hope for a better day. A day when he will fulfill his dreams, graduate, and live in Canada.

**Figure 16**

*Always a New Day*

**Advir:**

So, no matter what happens, there is always a new day that begins; no matter how bad things are, no matter anything, there's always a new day that has to come. And you know it will bring something good. But then I am hopeful for a better day. If I'm sad and I try to think that I will have a better day. And I'll be like, I am doing this; it's gonna help me in the future.

This perspective speaks to Advir's positive thoughts about his future. His hope for a better day is related to his expectation and capacity to attain his significant life goals, which is hope as defined by Snyder (2002). The envisioning of positive outcomes is a requirement of hope theory.

Rauni speaks to her hopes for a better day in her picture of the Acacia tree. Although the Savannah is dry at the bottom of the tree, it is strong and will endure. Rauni's experience in Canada is dry, with no leaves or grass, but she will endure. Both Rauni and the Acacia tree are lonely but beautiful in their environment.

**Figure 17***Weather and Climate***Rauni:**

I took this picture of an Acacia tree which is well known as a heritage African tree in the scope of east Africa as we have a well-balanced climate. It gives me hope that at the top, its leaves are green, but on the bottom; it is still dry savanna. It is as sturdy as it looks, it stands, and it is strong, and it houses so many nests. Being in Canada at a certain time, the leaves are all going to fall off, and it's gonna dry up, no leaves, no grass, no nothing as compared to seeing this tree. It is rooted there for years and years, and it will stand all through the seasons looking just the same, covering the same nest, keeping the birds up, feeding all of them when it can. It's lonely, but it's still beautiful in its environment too.

Rauni's sandals are her connection to the culture she deeply misses and are a talisman representing the hope that she will achieve her goals, "spring and summer is gonna come," and her future, "it's gonna bloom someday." The sandals are resting on a small tree just coming into bud. *Talismans* are special objects that can represent affiliation or membership in a group. They are items connected to positive emotions and bring comfort, calm, energy and emotional health (Walsh, 2014). The sandals remind her of her dream to come to Canada and the opportunity this journey has presented for Rauni. Rauni is afraid to wear these sandals as she is not sure she will

be able to get another pair. They are her symbol of home and her link with her family and her past, and they provide a sense of identity and continuity (Marschall, 2019). She wants to preserve them with the same intensity as her need to preserve her connection to home.

**Figure 18**

*Spring is Just Around the Corner*



**Rauni:**

The Maasai sandals represent culture and being at home, and the diversity of such things like clothing. They help me calm and resonate with the heat that I love. By looking at them, I know spring and summer are gonna come along with the tiny trees blooming. They are dear to me and make me think about the hustle and how much was done before in my quest to reach for this dream to travel and new opportunities that I might choose to explore. So, it brings a whole brightness in my brain, in my heart, that spring is gonna come, and these sandals remind me of that. It keeps me going because however cold and harsh it might get, how hard studies might get, there's a hope that spring is just gonna come; if you wait, it's gonna bloom someday.

Zena also captured a photograph of her nature diagrams that she is completing for an assignment. Nature gives her joy and a sense that all will be well. Appreciating nature and

feeling connected with the natural world is an important source of hope. Trees and flowers are often shared as celebrations and symbols of hope. Experiences in nature can boost our emotions and cause an increase in our hope. Well-being and purpose in life are attributes that Snyder (2002) identified as being vital to the hope process. Nature is one of the hope objects in Dufault and Martocchio's (1985) affiliative dimension and is characterized by relationships and a concern for other living things. Dufault and Martocchio state, "to be able to continue to be renewed by beauties of creation" is a source of hope (p. 386). As Zena describes her picture entitled Nature: "All the beautiful shapes and joy of nature makes me feel certain that everything will be fine."

### **Figure 19**

*Nature*



Mary's picture of the sunrise characterizes an opportunity to live the life she chose when she came to Canada. Mary maintains her positive outlook, which kindles her hope, providing the energy to tap into her personal inner and external resources, igniting the determination to endure the challenges she faces as she waits for that better day.



**Mary:**

So, every morning at the college, we see the sunrise, and it is very significant for me. It's like, okay, it's a new day. Forget what you did yesterday, forget it was too cold, forget if it was too windy; today is beautiful, and the sun is rising again. It's a new day, and every day is one day closer to someday going back to Mexico to visit, and every day is one more opportunity for us. So we wait for the next year; we wait for the next day.

**Figure 20**

*Starting Over Again*

**Mary:**

Just like the sun comes out to start a new day, every day, I like to wake up and be grateful for having one more opportunity to live the life I've chosen, even if that meant to start it all over again. I remember to myself that during the day, there might be a storm, it might be sunny, it might be cold or hot, wind might blow intensively, or it might be really calm, but after a while, the day will be over, and a new sunrise will come out with new possibilities.

Jon's image of the sun is his metaphor for positivity. He says the "sun brings light to everyone," and when he stands in this light, it will guide him on his journey and gives him hope that he will reach his dreams and arrive at his destination.

**Figure 21**

*Light*



*Note.* From Cutewallpaper.org. Tree of Life. <https://cutewallpaper.org/24/tree-of-life-pictures-free/2273810993.html>

**Jon:**

This picture reminds me no matter how dark it will be; the sun always gives light to everyone. Every day when I wake up and look at the sun, it gives me a big hope of living in this country. I feel like I am standing in the light, looking at the light to help me. It makes me feel I can get some of the things that other people are getting. I want to reach a certain place. I want to get my permanent residency because this is my dream. So, this picture reminds me that no matter how you are doing, how you are struggling, when school is rough, or struggling with financial problems, the sun will always shine. It brings me a light, and that's a sign of hope that my journey is going to be shined by light which can lead me to my destination.

Jon says about his picture entitled Dreams, “this picture gives me hope that I could fulfill my dream in Canada.”

## Figure 22

### *Dreams*



*Note:* From *Gelly Images* (n.d.) [Photograph], A young African American Woman raises her arms facing the sunset down over the valley and the ocean. <https://unsplash.com/s/photos/sun-raise>

Jon submitted this picture he entitled dreams.

### **Jon**

I go to the window, and I look, and I say, Jon, someday you're going to become a Canadian citizen; you will be free. I see it as freedom. Facing of depression and being lonely, but at the end, there's always joy, there is always a dream that you will always achieve. I never believe I can go to school and finish school. College is gonna be a big relief for me, that you know my dream come true. This picture reminds me that no matter where you are from, no matter where you come from, this country is always going to help you achieve your dream, that we can always do that we come here to do. Anyone can be less privileged, becoming what they want.

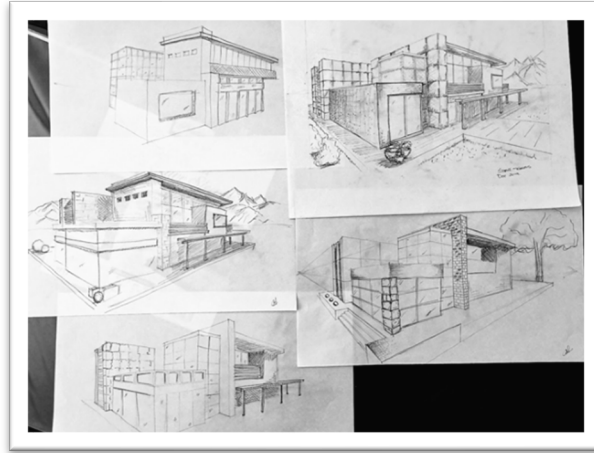
Hope theory, with its agency and pathway thinking, can help individuals overcome challenges, stay motivated, and persevere in the pursuit of their dreams (Snyder et al., 2002a). As participants have articulated and illustrated above, hope theory can facilitate the achievement of personal goals and the realization of one's dreams (Cheavens et al., 2008).

### **Subtheme 2: Believing**

Mary sees her journey here as transformative or, as she states, “a design process.” Snyder (2002) states that hope as a cognitive-motivational force provides the necessary motivation to reach for inner resources that help individuals transcend and transform themselves, giving them the ability to achieve their life goals. Transformation and growth are common human experiences, and not all successfully attain high levels of internal development (Wright et al., 2021). Mary has been able to transcend her challenges through hope with the necessary components of agency thought, the ability to persevere in the pursuit of her goals, and pathway thought, the ability to flex and adapt, creating different pathways to reach her goals when obstacles occur (Snyder et al., 2002b). Mary's hope is future-oriented, created from internal and external resources.

## Figure 23

### *Design Process*



### **Mary:**

In order to achieve a great design, we have to follow a process. We might think the first idea is the best, but then we add details, change materials, erase elements, etc. Right now, we are our best design, but we are constantly changing to improve. I like to go back and take a look to who I was and who I am now and what details I want to keep, and which ones I need to erase. Seeing this process reflected in myself and my family gives me hope to continue in our journey in search of our goals.

Tai also speaks about endurance in her ability to generate agency thoughts and pathway thoughts, to keep believing through challenges and struggles that there would be a “light in the midst of the dark.” Tai alludes to transformation in her picture of a tree growing out of a rock. The tree, against all odds, grows through stone, which is a significant metaphor. It represents how Tai’s hope, as a dynamic motivational system with its components of goals, agency, and pathway, can bring about transformation and allow Tai to attain what she perceives as unreachable levels of human potential (Wright et al., 2021). Hope is an important construct in

helping Tai remain committed to her goals and sustain the motivation to take action toward achieving “a better place.” Hope provides a reason to believe that current circumstances will change despite the unpredictability of the future (Houston, 2020).

**Figure 24**

*Sacrifice: Picture of a tree growing in a rock*



Tai states, “life at times might be very difficult, but we have to sacrifice and be patient to be successful.” We should keep working hard and trusting the process even if the journey seems impossible. At least after sacrificing for some years, I have hopes I will complete school and graduate soon.

**Figure 25***Lights in a Dark Forest*

*Note.* From *Pexels*. [Photograph], Forest with sunlight <https://www.pexels.com/photo/forest-with-sunlight-158251/>

**Tai:**

This photo represents endurance and hard work even when things seem tough. When I first came to Canada, my expectations were very high based on discussions from colleagues who had come earlier than me, and so I expected to meet equally like them. Little did I know that nothing comes on a silver plate. It took me three months to meet a few friends. It was hard to find jobs because I was in school at the same time. But I kept pushing harder, trusting and believing that one day everything will be okay. One thing that gave me hope are my friends because they had gone through the same, and they were now in a better place. I knew a day will come and I will also see light in the midst of a dark forest.

Ami's stethoscope, an icon for health professionals, represents her future as a nurse. When she looks at this stethoscope, it affirms her belief in her ability to become a nurse. Not

only will Ami transform herself, but she hopes to transform the future and fight the virus that has prevented her from making friends and having the social and learning interactions she needs to keep her hopeful. Hope as a human strength assists individuals in garnering resources in their environment to support pathways toward achievement (Colla et al., 2022).

**Figure 26**

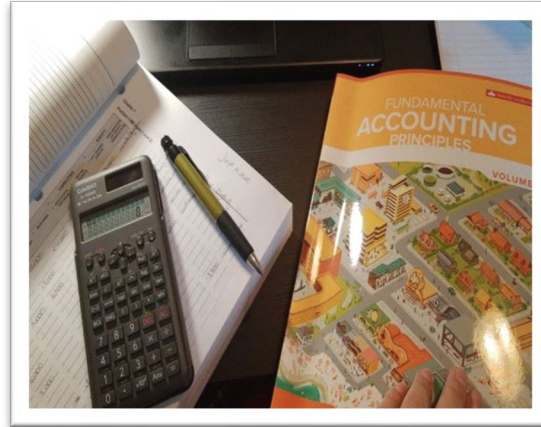
*Stethoscope*



**Ami:**

That this picture shows hope to me as it is one of the goals I work towards. When I sit in my room and I feel sad, or we locked down so we can't do anything. I just look at my stethoscope; this is the final goal. At the end of my studies, I get to practice nursing every day. When I look at my stethoscope, I see life; I see hope. Knowing that all the efforts and struggles of learning during a pandemic will pay off in the future. I will become a nurse; I will help fight this virus, and everything will go back to normal.



**Figure 27***Possibility*

Zena called this picture of her textbook and school supplies *Possibility*. She spoke about her ability to imagine and believe in positive possibilities. When she looks at her textbooks and the tools she uses to learn, it helps her to look to the future. “I like accounting, so even when I feel stuck, I know I can do it. Believing this is possible makes you feel better, the hope that you can do something that will be better.” Zena believes in possibility, and this agency thinking, positively linked to hope, is about believing that goals can be reached with an individual’s resources (Snyder, 2002). When she talks about possibility, Zena stated, “If you feel stuck, believe it’s possible to feel differently. Believe in possibility itself.”

Mary uses this picture of a waterfall to represent the turbulence she experiences as an international student. Despite the turbulence, Mary is hopeful, believing that a rainbow will appear and she can achieve her academic outcomes and a life here in Canada.

**Figure 28***Waterfall***Mary:**

Sometimes I like to think about myself as a flowing river with quiet stretches and noisy waterfalls. Waterfalls might look amazing to everyone, they are powerful and carry so much energy, but for me, as a river, it is messy, uncertain, dangerous. No one wants to be IN the waterfall; they just want to contemplate from the distance. My hope is that at the end of the waterfall, there's always a rainbow, and then the new river slowly continues its trail in peace.

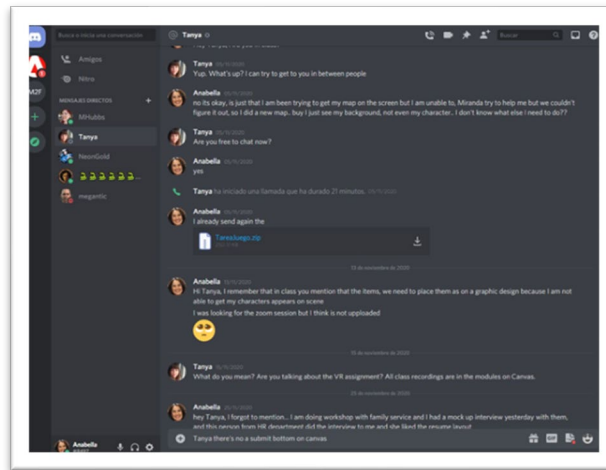
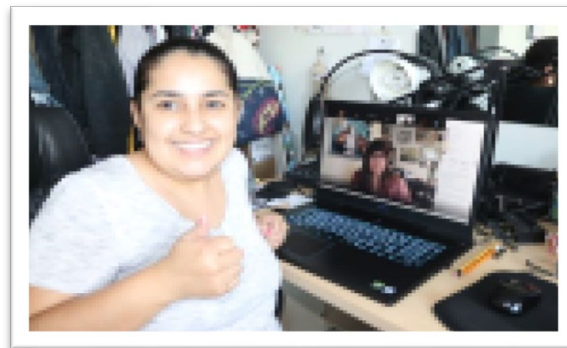
Despite the need for endurance and sacrifice, participants believed they could reach their goals and achieve their objectives. Cheavens et al. (2006) argue that supporting and encouraging an individual's strengths will assist them in developing hope and facilitate the development of endurance. Snyder (2002) proposes that hope empowers individuals to set goals, find the pathways to achieve them and persist when confronted by challenges, which enhances their capacity for endurance. Snyder et al. (1991) developed a validated measure of hope that included a subscale on willpower. In this validated measure of hope, hope and willpower were found to be

closely related, and as my participants indicated, high-hope individuals will persist when faced with obstacles and make sacrifices in the pursuit of their goals.

### **Subtheme 3: Teacher Presence**

Cora's picture is about learning and educator interactions and how these have positively impacted her experience here in Canada. This support has encouraged her hope. Although Cora is here with her family, she still looks to support from her learning community as a source to encourage her hope and help her navigate her challenges, such as online communication and online learning platforms. For hope to flourish, a supportive, encouraging, and equitable environment is necessary (Snyder, 2000). Educators, through ongoing support, can encourage international students' hope and increase their ability to meet academic outcomes. Educators who create a third space of engagement in their online learning communities prevent inequalities and create spaces that do not segregate or exclude international students from their domestic peers (Mayes Pane, 2009).

D'Amico et al. (2020), in their quantitative study about on-campus support and hope, found that supportive relationships from educators were key in forecasting high hope levels and were significant in student's self-assurance in graduating, achieving educational goals, satisfaction with their academic career, and could potentially lead to greater outcomes. Cora spoke about her teacher encouraging her hope and indicates this in her picture entitled *Teacher Communication*: "I am able to get support from my teacher through online platforms like this one. This helps me with my learning and understanding. You can also use video."

**Figure 29***Teacher Communication***Figure 30***Thumbs Up*

Cora also provided a picture of her giving her educator a thumbs up due to the support this educator provided for her. “I took this picture with my instructor because I like her classes. She is very supportive, and she has been helping me to transition to online, a process, and she's been very helpful.” Mary stated that she had classes at 830 in the morning and had difficulty with childcare at that time. The instructor recorded the class for her as they were aware of her situation. She stated, “they helped me to find a way that I could take the class farther in the day when I have time. This was really helpful to me.”

**Subtheme 4: Belonging**

Some participants had the support of their learning community to encourage their hope. Establishing supportive relationships can alleviate learner isolation (Rovai, 2000). An online learning environment that allows individuals to build social bonds establishes a third space of connection leading to a transformational experience. The social bonds these participants are able to establish are essential to support their ability to achieve hope (Feudtner, 2005). Barriers to friendships with their Canadian peers were typically cultural and linguistic differences. International students who were able to find Canadian peers who had an interest in their background were able to make meaningful friendships. In these cases, cultural and linguistic diversity became conduits to friendships instead of barriers. Friendships between international students and domestic peers allowed a knowledge transfer about new cultures and fostered a stronger appreciation for diversity and global citizenship (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2015).

**Cora:**

In my case, I had the opportunity to have amazing people around me. I mean, it doesn't matter. They are Canadians or international ones, but we mix together. We don't say oh, you're from Canada, and I'm from outside Canada. I mean, we are classmates.

Rauni also felt appreciated by her Canadian peers.

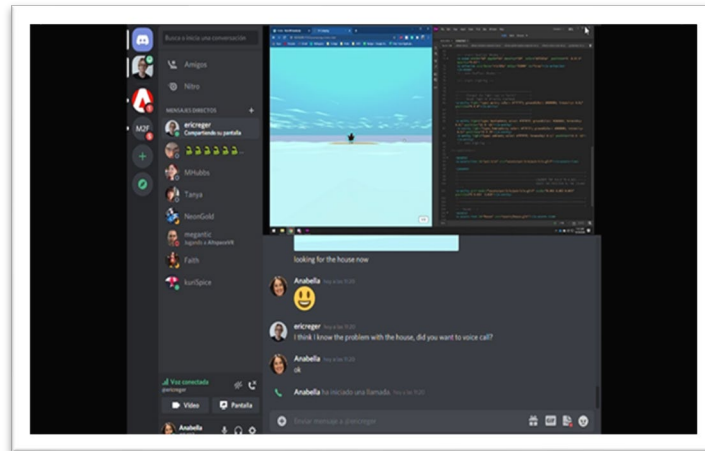
**Rauni:**

I haven't met people who don't appreciate where I am from yet. They ask questions try to embrace my culture, like, my hair. So, can you do that to my hair. Even small things like where I used to work, last time you brought this in and I tasted it, can you make it next

time and then bring me some for myself where I don't have to taste yours and make you feel like I deprived you of your break food.

### Figure 31

#### *Classmate Test Help*



#### **Cora:**

This is the conversation I had with one of my classmates. I was kind of crazy with this assignment, and he just helped me when we could just go ahead and share a screen, we can do chat, and we can just go in and send files. He really helped me a lot. He helped me and encouraged me just to keep going.

#### **Rauni:**

There's people who are willing to give you a push and to give you a reason to continue going. I didn't want to wake up this morning. But you have to read this email; you have to respond to it. You have to reach out and get some help for yourself because it is there for you.

Jon found his support outside of his learning community.

**Jon:**

Different people can also be the light in our life. My boss who supported me and welcomed me through my challenges, and made me part of his family, gave me hope. He has been a light in my life. He asked me where I was staying, and I tell him I have no place to stay, so he gave me the job.

**Barriers to Hope****Theme Three: Don't Look Down**

Theme three comprises the subthemes of struggle, inequity, discouragement, and racism. Participants talked about struggle and not looking down, the disparity in costs for their education versus Canadian students, cold and snow, becoming discouraged and facing depression, and experiences of racism and discrimination that made them feel like they were in a cage. International students face many microaggressions against their race, ethnicity, phenotype, language proficiency, and foreign accent, which increases their stress (Ee, 2013). Increased stress for international students may profoundly affect their psychological adjustment (Marks et al., 2018). Strategies to eliminate barriers to hope must be human-centred and honour these students' multidimensional identities and experiences.

**Subtheme 1: Struggle****Figure 32**

*Don't Look Down*

**Mary:**

Every time I look at this picture, I remember saying to myself while I was taking it, “don’t look down!” The feeling is overwhelming like you are being swallowed or pulled towards. Sometimes, when I accidentally look down to when I started my process for immigration, I just can’t stand it. It is such a long way with too many stairs, and every time it seems you have reached the next level, it looks just exactly the same than the last one. There are still so many levels to reach, but I try not to look down and just keep going.

Cora lived in residence, and the space was very minimal for herself, her husband and two children. Cora’s office was in the clothes closet as the only space she could get away to complete her academic work. It was very challenging for her as she had many worries, such as getting sick and being unable to work, which could have interfered with her ability to complete her studies in Canada.



**Figure 33***Taking a Break***Cora:**

This is the space that I have, and sometimes I have to move away to regain my energy. The only moment I get away from this unit is when I go to work. You don't want to go out. I don't want to get sick. I don't want to be in trouble, so I just stay here. If you get sick, you can't work, and your whole family can't work, and then we are all gonna be in trouble.

**Subtheme 2: Inequity**

There are many challenges that international students face in their journey to come to Canada and while they are studying in Canada that can impact their experience of hope in asynchronous and online learning communities in higher education. These challenges can potentially decrease a students' pathway thinking and ability to produce routes to achieve significant life goals. Financial burden is the greatest due to the high tuition fees along with the cost of housing. Kahlon (2021) states that in a recent survey, it was found that nine out of ten students worry about their expenses. Many manage this financial burden by working illegally,

making them victims of labour exploitation. The exploitation of international students has become widespread in communities across Canada (Kahlon, 2021).

**Advir:**

I see people not eating for days because they don't have money. They just go hungry for days, and then they go to any shop, and they literally start begging the owner to give them a job. Some businessmen are taking advantage of this. They will give \$10.00 an hour, and that person will be happy to take it, and he won't say minimum pay is \$15.00 an hour.

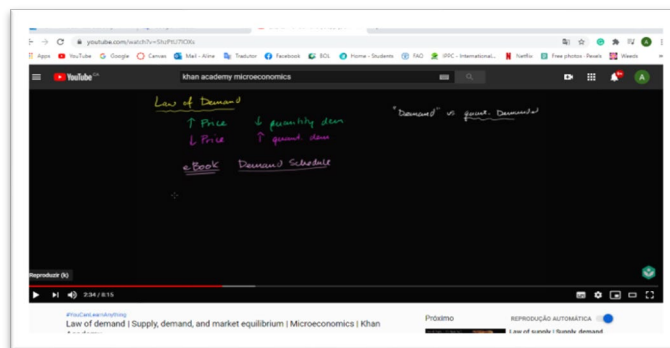
Advir goes on to say, "that person is just happy that he's given him a job. A lot of people here are always worried about; I need to pay rent; I need to pay for this and that."

**Advir:**

The government has its own reasons, but everything for international students is very restricted. The same course I am taking the local people; they take one semester for them it is \$2,500. to \$3,000. The same semester for me is \$9,000. to \$10,000. That's a pretty big gap.

**Figure 34**

*YouTube Video*



Zena entitled her picture *YouTube Video*, which is about educational inequity, stating “As an international student, I am frustrated I paid \$6,000 for this semester which class I have been learning from YouTube videos.” Jon stated, “I begged for employment and offered to work for free to prove myself. I got hired. I was a boy from the streets who is in the office right now.”

Many international students come to Canada to escape poverty and pursuing international education will allow them to achieve social mobility, giving them the ability to support and further opportunities for their families. It can also help these students and their families to settle in Canada, and many treat their international education as a stage to permanent residency (Kahlon, 2021). Systemic inequity embedded in institutional policies and structures perpetuates unequal outcomes and opportunities for international students. Discrimination, oppression, and marginalization create structural barriers and power imbalances, leading to disparities in educational attainment (Denaro, 2022). Systemic inequity can be an obstacle to the development of hope (Snyder et al., 1991).

**Jon:**

I arrived in Canada at the airport, and I had nowhere to go and no one to call. I called a taxi to go to the university and slept there all night. If you don't go to school, there is no way you can survive in Nigeria.

**Tai:**

We put our future at risk; we put in everything here, leaving everything to come here and study and be in society. Most of the people have spent their family fortune just to come to this country because they feel like they will have a better future here and they don't have anything left anymore.

Mary stated, “My children. They won’t suffer what I am suffering at college. So, it is a war between keeping a balance.”

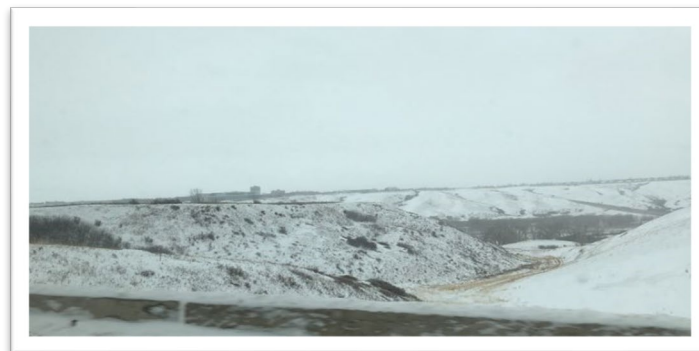
### **Subtheme 3: Discouragement**

International students’ experience stress and pressure due to their desire to live up to family expectations, meet financial obligations and excel in their studies to gain the social mobility they seek. This pressure can impact these students’ mental health causing depression. International student suicides have become an alarming trend in Canada which mirrors the Australian international suicide rate over the last decade (Kahlon, 2021). Hope is associated with reduced depression and can potentially alleviate the effects of negative life events (Visser et al., 2013). Participants in this study admitted to experiencing depression.

Jon stated that “leaving our home country coming to here, we need help because I wasn’t fine because you came here and started feeling depression, and you know, loneliness.” Rauni also experienced mental health issues saying, “My mental health was up in the blues. Yeah, and then I got depression. There was too much going on.”

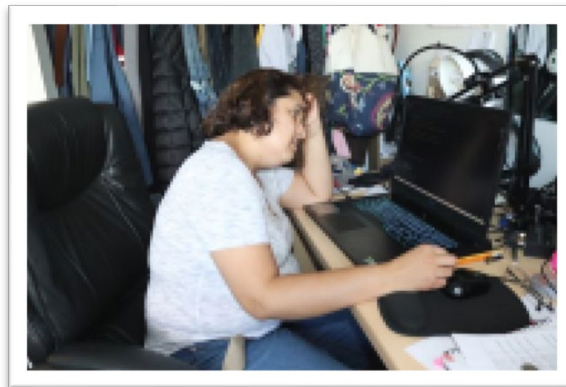
### **Figure 35**

*Cold and Snow*



**Advir:**

I grew up in a place where we never had so much snow, and we come here, and it snows, and you see it's all white, and you cannot really see a lot of life in there. Plants are dried out. You cannot see people walking out; you cannot see anyone having fun, no forms of life, no colours, just white. In my first half of my second semester, we used to go to the college in person, and you see everyone face to face, you see their expressions, and you can understand them properly. Online, everyone keeps their cameras; off there is no life, and it affected me, and I felt like I don't want to go to class anymore.

**Figure 36***Moments of Frustration*

Cora commented on her image entitled Moments of Frustration, stating “When I get tired, I take a free breath to get energy and continue. The difficult moments, I just get my head in my hands and having that kind of moment where I think everything is so difficult.”

**Subtheme 4: Racism**

International students participating in this study indicated they experienced covert and overt racism. In Canada, racism is often covert due to its official multicultural policy adopted in 1971 (Kymlicka, 2010), which emphasizes the value of cultural diversity and equality of all

citizens. This perspective has led to a pseudo tolerance for diversity, and Canadians often deny their own racism (Arat-Koc, 2005). Discrimination is difficult to bear as these students are newcomers to Canadian society and have likely not experienced discrimination in the past. The language barrier that exists for international students who have English as a second language makes it difficult for them to decode slang and certain demeanours unfamiliar to their culture (Ee, 2013). The inexperience with not understanding local colloquialisms makes it particularly challenging in the online learning environment and impacts these students' ability to understand what is being said and to be understood themselves. Research confirms that ESOL international students may be unsure of their communication abilities and isolated due to a lack of verbal cues and social presence in asynchronous and online learning environments (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005).

Students who came to Canada to attend face-to-face classes found themselves taking asynchronous and online courses due to the COVID pandemic. According to Karkar-Esperat (2018), language proficiency is a significant challenge for international students taking online classes. They are unable to see body language and reactions which are a significant factor in understanding communication. These classes are heavily dependent on reading and writing, which international students with English as a second language find difficult. The inability to understand and participate in online learning is a factor in diminishing these students' social capital. Social capital through meaningful and effective relationships with others may enhance hope as a personal strength (George-Levi et al., 2019).

The inability to build relationships strongly influences their well-being and is a barrier to their hope and ability to belong here in Canada. Measures affecting hope will also influence well-being (Pleeging et al., 2021). The perception that the burden is on the international student

to adapt to their new society is very prevalent. They are expected to learn the language and cultural norms to succeed in their studies (Ee, 2013). If they do not comply with these norms, they are often left on the margins of their learning communities. Advir stated, “I’ve felt people are getting discouraged that one person will just say something, and the person will be like, oh my goodness, you know he doesn’t even like me for no reason.”

**Advir:**

Lots of people are nice here, but some people they look at you and make such a bad face. I see people even start crying because they’ll make a bad face and doesn’t even reply to them. At work, a guy gave me a bill, and it didn’t even reach the counter. It just fell in front, and he’s looking at me, expecting me to come out and pick it up. Like everyone is a human being, you cannot treat him like he is nothing; there’s some etiquette, some respect.

Tai speaks about her experience with domestic students saying, “you try to make them understand you by using other words that mean the same. You get very frustrated and disappointed.”

**Tai:**

I was in the same group as some Canadian students. And most of them just didn’t take our ideas. Some Canadians, you can sit with them, but they don’t want to talk to you. No one wanted to take my ideas.

Jon also had problems relating to domestic students saying, “you come to class, and people don’t want to work with you; people don’t want to communicate with you because you are from a different country. It makes me feel like I am in a cage.”

### ***Theme Four: A Dark Road***

The participants in this study told stories about sorrow, loneliness, loss, and isolation. International students suffer significantly from the harmful effects of loss and loneliness. Homesickness as part of the cultural shock experienced by these students mimics a grief experience, a loss of, and mourning for significant persons in their lives. There is also the loss of cultural cues, roots, and close ties with family and friends (Patron, 2014). Negative emotions and feelings such as loneliness, loss, sorrow, and isolation are factors in low self-esteem, potentially contributing to adverse outcomes and reduced hope (Feldman et al., 2016). A recurring theme with the participants is that no matter how dark the road or how turbulent the waterfall, they can find hope and continue their journey to reach their life goals. Jon talks about his journey being a dark road, but he can find his agency and pathway towards his goals by what he terms the snow along the road that represents help from others that give him direction.

#### **Subtheme 1: Loneliness**

##### **Figure 37**

##### *A Dark Road*





**Jon:**

This road reminds me the journey of being an international student in Canada. I feel like this is a long way for me, for all international students, coming from a very long place, a far country, to a different country to study just for hope. I feel like I am standing here. And when I look at the far end, the road never ends, you know. I feel like this picture is a journey for me to keep going, to keep pushing on. It reminds me that we should be strong because you are going to meet obstacles. It is very depressing, it is very lonely, and I feel the journey never ends; international students will still walk this road, and we don't know where the road is leading, but it carries us on our journey. I wanted to use a picture with snow, as it represents that no matter what, there is hope from different people along the way. The white snow falls down along the road, trying to show you direction, and it gives me hope to keep working along the dark road.

Mary talks about her friends at home and how they say they admire her and that she is so brave but will not join her here in Canada. Mary states, "They are just very comfortable where they are, but it makes me feel very lonely because it makes me realize no one is going to do what you do." Jon spoke about his appreciation for what the college was doing for him, stating, "I appreciate what the college is doing for us, but still, the world is so lonely." Advir talks about his loneliness when he says, "it is hard to make Canadian friends. In Canada, everyone's mentality is more for every person on his own."

Loneliness is significant for the international students in my study, particularly the ones who are here without family. Loneliness can weaken hope and motivation. Disconnection from others can lead to the inability to set goals and pursue pathways toward those goals. This

inability to initiate agency and pathway thinking can negatively impact students' mental health, increasing depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation and social disconnection (Chang et al., 2019).

### **Subtheme 2: Loss**

Dufault and Martocchio (1985) state that in the contextual dimension, hope comes to the forefront of experience within the context of life situations surrounding a person's hope. Stress and crisis are related to loss, and hope can be encouraged and exchanged with others through sharing thoughts, feelings, and goals. As international students' friends, families, and cultures are far away, it is vital they connect with others here in Canada to sustain their hope. Rauni shared a picture of the food she loves that she can only get at home in Kenya.

### **Figure 38**

FOOD – 'UGALI & NYAMA'



### **Rauni:**

This picture gives me hope that I will get back to tasting all the different flavours from different cultures within one country. It reminds me of how much I didn't appreciate that while I was there. All the flavors, all the richness, all the aroma I took for granted. I try to

quench my thirst for such foods and such smells and tastes, but it doesn't taste the same. It never feels the same.

**Tai:**

Living far away from my family for the first time was not easy for me. I was not going to see my family for the next five years because of my study visa. It was very hard to adapt living on my own and not seeing them. It was really hard for me because I was missing my family.

**Tai:**

In my country, I had joined the university, and I was in my second year doing nursing - The issue is I wanted to do nursing and not any other program. I was not going to wait to be given the offer in nursing because my Visa was going to expire. I took the Therapeutic Recreation Gerontology program offer, and I joined because it was not going to take long before completing the program.

Rauni experiences cultural loneliness and loss when she talks about what she remembers from home and fears that these things may no longer exist when she returns. She also speaks about how her experience of the cultural food she can obtain here "in Canada, is never the same."

International students experience loneliness due to cultural factors in distinct ways. They miss their cultural and linguistic setting and have lost contact with others who share their worldviews (Sawir et al., 2008). Rauni reiterated this when she said, "The time I ever get to travel and get to see stuff back home again, it may be gone."

Advir misses his life back home and talks about his loss.

**Advir:**

I would say it is hard to make Canadian friends. It's really different here. In India, my social life was different, and it was really difficult to leave all that social life behind.

Mary, who left her family's architectural business to start a new life in Canada, stated, "Every time I remember saying no to my family, saying no to my dream house, saying no to my friends. So it was very hard for me,"

**Subtheme 3: Isolation**

Canada is an individualist society and challenging for those from a collectivist society. Most participants in my study came from a collectivist society. Social networks are less critical in an individualist society than in a collectivist society, particularly in learning communities where individualist attitudes promote a lack of classroom interaction leaving international students isolated. Individualist societies often emphasize independence, and international students struggle when interdependence is seen as inappropriate. International students from collectivist cultures often see attachment to the collective as a significant need (Newsome & Cooper, 2016). International students have many challenges adapting to a western educational system where individualism is prized.

**Figure 39***Mask*

Ami speaks about isolation, “Everywhere I go, I have to wear a mask; it is the norm now. My glasses get fogged up, and I cannot see my people, nor can they hear me when I talk. It feels like a barrier.” While Ami commented on her inability to practice her labs, stating “They had to cancel our lab – this lab is a full practice. Online reduced my opportunities to practice.” Rauni speaks about her sorrow about what she had lost going online, “I didn’t get the opportunity to become the social me.”

**Advir:**

At home, you never see anyone alone. It was hard to adjust to that kind of culture here; you miss your family; you miss the food or your traditions. I think it is a Canadian cultural thing where people tend to stay more isolated. At home, you never see anyone alone. This COVID thing made everything worse, made social life even worse, you not seeing anyone face to face. How do you expect to talk to them, so it is kind of depressing.

**Advir:**

On Zoom, if people are visible, they know that they can be seen, and they are liable to contribute. They feel that urge to contribute. If they are not visible, you know, they don't care. They're not even listening. They're sitting somewhere else.

**Subtheme 4: Sorrow****Figure 40**

*Leaving my Home*



Jon talks about his picture he entitled, Leaving Home, saying, “leaving my home country to another country is a big challenging, lonely world.” Jon states, “We put our future at risk; we put in everything here, leaving everything to come here and study and be in society.”

Advir talks about being unable to attend face-to-face classes and the impact online learning had on him.

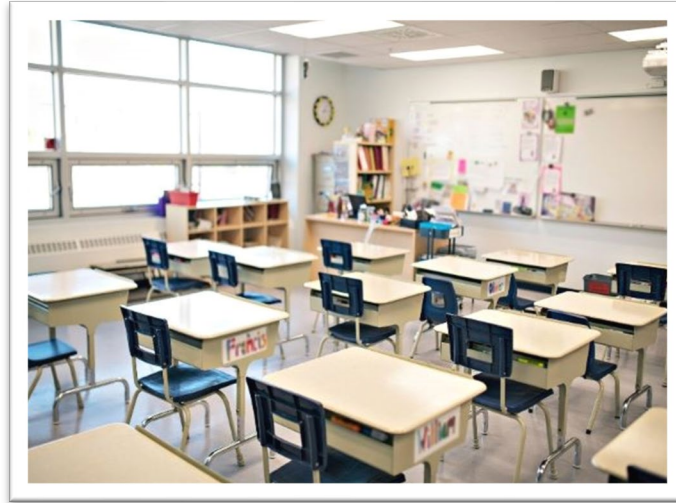
**Advir:**

But the thing is, at least I would have seen people in college and interacted with them in college. But now, I don't even have any chance of that. So, it was a total cut-off for me from the whole society. And I was just in my house doing college work and going to my job. And that was about it. And sometimes, I would, you know, when I would come back from my job, and I feel so like, what the heck is this, you know, what life am I living?

Mary also talks about loneliness and loss, stating “So here in Canada, I tried to find a middle spot to where to belong. And I just couldn’t. Sad to be online no time with other people.”

The COVID pandemic brought its own dynamic to the international students’ experience of hope. They were isolated not only from their educators and learning communities but also from their social connections impeding their ability to build relationships and make connections here in Canada. Ang et al. (2022) conducted a study on first-year college students’ adjustment during the COVID-19 pandemic and the protective role of hope. They found that hope can mitigate “loneliness and provide higher life satisfaction over time” (p. 8).

The international students in this study voiced that their goal was to make connections with their educators and peers in their learning communities. Loneliness and isolation are negative emotions stemming from the inability to overcome thwarting situations and can result in inadequate agentic and pathway thinking or low hope (Snyder, 2002). Research indicates that feelings of isolation diminish hopeful thinking and can negatively influence learner outcomes (Bressler, 2006; Bressler et al., 2010; Snyder et al., 2002b). Ami said, “I feel sad when we are locked down and can’t do anything.”

**Figure 41***An Empty Classroom*

*Note.* From *Shutterstock*. [Photograph], Empty Classroom.

<https://nypost.com/2020/07/08/empty-classrooms-could-put-kids-at-emotional-risk-therapist/>

Ami stated: “I took this picture from the internet because I was not able to get one from my school. It is empty and it makes me feel lonely and sad.”

The participants felt they did not have a connection with their educators making them feel that their educators did not have any investment in them and they did not care. A lack of caring from educators speaks to Kasworm (2008) and the four acts of hope that support students’ positional and relational agency with their peers, educators, and the institution leading to the achievement of academic success. These four acts are: seeking entry; ongoing engagement; engagement in new and different knowledge; and challenges international students face in achieving a place, a voice, and a sense of value in the cultural worlds of higher education. They are integral to encouraging hope for international students in higher education.

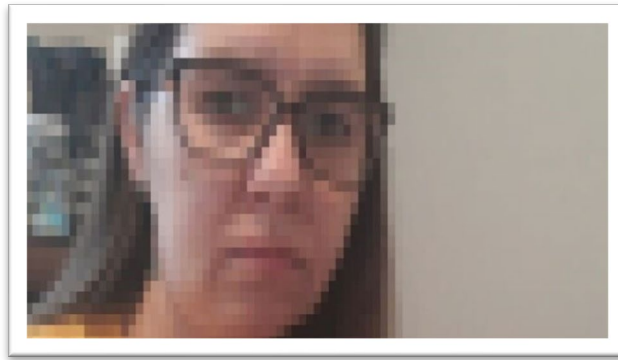
Educators have a role in building hope in students, and strategies include caring about students, demonstrating enthusiasm about course material and praising student effort (Snyder,



2005). Guthrie and Fruiht (2020) discovered in their study about the role of hope and on-campus social support that support from educators, advisors, and other staff members predicts higher hope and students perceive a greater ability to persist in college. Without the support of their educators, international students experience barriers to their hope.

### **Figure 42**

#### *Frustration*



Zena talks about her image she entitled *Frustration* stating, “my eyes show the frustration I am feeling about this class. I believe this instructor doesn't see that their material gives no willingness to learn or even watch his videos. I feel like he doesn't care about his students.”

Rauni commented on her lack of support from her instructor.

#### **Rauni:**

I can't afford to get textbooks, you know. And I imagine online learning should provide more because I physically can't reach the library as I was relying on that. I physically can't borrow from someone as I was relying on that. We're all not balanced. You shouldn't expect all of us in class to have textbooks. And this instructor just said something that has always hurt me today, and I'm so grateful he's retiring. He said, what do you mean you can't get a textbook? What did you come to school to do?

As part of the acronym SHOWED questioning implemented during the interviews to encourage participants to form narratives about their photographs, there was the final question, “what can we do about it” (Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang et al., 1998). The international in my study offered some insightful suggestions and strategies to encourage their hope and mitigate any barriers to hope they may face during their asynchronous and online educational experience here in western Canada. These insights from the participants are important to assist stakeholders in higher education to develop strategies that will strengthen international students’ hope to foster positive motivations and outcomes for these students. I provide these insights and suggestions in Chapter Six: Discussion and Future Directions.

### **Summary**

The ability to hope and endure, according to Snyder’s Hope Theory which is about maintaining a positive motivational state focused on goals, the pathways to meet goals, and sustaining the motivational energy to reach these goals are essential to engender hope. (Snyder, 1994). Dufault and Martocchio (1985) propose six dimensions of hope; emotions, cognitive processes, motivational components, relational components, a sense of meaning and purpose in life and the ability to adapt to specific challenges and circumstances.

Within the theme Exercise Books, international students fostered their hope through connections with family, home, community, and shared experiences. They did this through memory objects, material symbolism, and metaphorical images. Theme two, A New Day, captures participants’ dreams, teacher presence, sense of belonging, and their belief in a future and a better life. A New Day was metaphorically captured in their photographs and narratives as students talked about lights in a dark forest, a better day, the sun always giving light and white

snow along a dark road to express what provides the agency that will move them along the pathway towards their goals.

Theme three, Don't Look Down, is about the participants' feelings of inequity, their struggle here in Canada, the racism they face and their discouragement with their learning and social communities. Students talked about discrimination, language barriers, exclusion from their learning communities and a lack of educator presence which they equated to not being cared about. These barriers to hope left many students facing depression as they were isolated on all fronts, from family, home, friends, and their peers, with no resources to support them. Theme four, A Dark Road, is comprised of sorrow, loneliness, loss, and isolation, all experiences shared by the participants and voiced as barriers to international student hope. Even in the face of adversity, these students have hope which, according to Dufault and Martocchio (1995), has the potential to assist them in adapting to the unfamiliar and provide them with the internal resources to continue reaching for their future goals.

## Chapter 6. Discussion and the Final Question

My research study investigated ESOL international students' experience of hope in asynchronous and online learning communities at a post-secondary institution in western Canada. The purpose of the investigation was to use a narrative photovoice methodology to listen to international students' voices to discover what encouraged their hope and their barriers to hope during their asynchronous and online studies in learning communities in an institution in western Canada. I used the acronym SHOWED when conducting the narrative interviews about the images the students submitted (Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang et al., 1998). The questions consisted of what do you See here; what is really Happening here; hOW does hope exist or not exist in this situation; with the final question being, what can wE Do about it? Listening and valuing student voices provided insight into the strategies and mediators stakeholders in higher education could implement to encourage international students' hope allowing higher education to work in partnership with students as equals to influence change. Encouraging international student hope will provide the support they require to take active roles in strategies to encourage their hope, allowing them to develop the necessary agency and pathways to achieve their goals.

This qualitative exploration conducted within an interpretive phenomenological paradigm, used photographs to encourage the participants to reflect on and interpret their experience of hope as the phenomenon under study. The study afforded rich content with powerful images that students used to capture their experience of hope. In keeping with this, stories were taken at face value and I embraced the participants' views (photographs) and voices (interviews) as unique to them and their situations. I did this while honouring their histories,

experience, and knowledge about what enhanced their hope, what were barriers to their hope, and what their experience of hope meant to them (Tsang, 2020).

In this chapter, I connect the findings from my study with the conceptual framework as it relates to international students' experience of hope in online and asynchronous learning communities in one western institution of higher education. Figure 4 shows the conceptual framework diagram. The participants' answers to the final question, what can we Do about it, will be outlined in this discussion. It is critical that stakeholders in higher education move away from colonial considerations of what international students need to what they want as stories told from their own voices.

### **Discussion**

Bodies of research that framed my study as relevant to international students' experience in higher education are captured in my conceptual framework, and consist of context, culture, environment, and asynchronous and online community (see Figure 4). The impact of these constructs on international student hope discovered in my research study is described in the following discussion. My research study was conducted to address the gaps in the substantive knowledge base about higher education's role in encouraging or discouraging ESOL international students' experience of hope in asynchronous and online learning communities in a western institution of higher education in Canada.

#### **Concept 1: Context**

Contextually the increasing commercialization of higher education has the perspective that international students are a tradable commodity in the global education market and a practical solution in helping institutions of higher education in Canada to remain economically viable. Canadian post-secondary institutions can restructure their priorities encompassing more

than a quest to balance fiscal pressures. They can bridge the distance between a “Them” and “Us” perspective, leading to collective understandings that support international students’ hope. Dufault and Martocchio’s (1985) contextual dimension of hope is rooted in the life circumstances that surround, influence, and challenge a persons’ hope.

International students enrolled in higher education are addressing a need to transform themselves, improve societal circumstances, belong, and succeed in their educational endeavours. Higher education must include an institutional context when supporting international students’ success and the broader context into which learning is integrated. This broader context includes students’ backgrounds and social, cultural, familial, physical, and virtual contexts. In this way, higher education can stimulate and sustain international students’ trajectory toward their goals and be a driver for the hoping process (O’Hara, 2013). Although educational factors such as intelligence and prior grades are used by higher education to predict academic achievement, the broader context, which includes internal psychological factors such as hope, are stronger indicators of academic achievement (Day et al., 2010; Snyder et al., 2002b).

Creating an institutional environment and culture of mutual engagement will promote an integrative experience and encourage psychological factors such as a sense of belonging which participants felt was significant to encouraging their hope. Hope is often a highly personal experience embedded in convictions about the world and attaining what we want (McGeer, 2004; Snyder, 2000). International students’ experience academic and social misunderstandings during their participation in higher education within the classroom, the campus, and the local community (Canadian Bureau for International Education, CBIE, 2018). Participants did not comprehend course instructions, had problems achieving praxis in their learning through online labs, and were concerned about repercussions if they emailed the educator to request more

information, which was discouraging for the students and impacted their ability to hope.

According to Snyder (1994), hope develops throughout an individual's life and is enhanced through experiences and interactions with others. Educators as role models and caring mentors can influence students' hope through their educational offerings (Snyder, 2002; 2005).

The participants in this study identified many aspects about their context during their educational experience in higher education that threatened their hope. Educators who were not invested in their learning, and hurtful dialogue that lacked compassion and understanding of specific student situations, were perceived as uncaring. False assumptions about students' financial constraints and language barriers discouraged students' hope and impacted their ability to circumvent the challenges they faced. Implementing faculty training programs would allow educators to deliver a more inclusive and internationalized curriculum. Incorporating anti-hegemonic pedagogies can promote transformative educational experiences that support students' hope within asynchronous and online learning environments in higher education.

Other contexts can play a role in the hoping process and be a source of hope. As an example, educators can help international students find pathways to achieve their goals by encouraging a sense of meaning, trust and self-confidence (Benzein & Saveman, 1998; Du & King, 2013). If educators are to be part of international students' hoping process, faculty training programs will aid in raising awareness of international students' unique challenges. Increasing faculty awareness of the challenges international students face would be an important step in gaining support from faculty and staff members who may have connections to provincial and federal structures that international students do not, giving them the ability to influence policies and practices (Calder et al., 2016).

The degree that international students were fluent in English was a factor in participants' capability to be understood online. There are language proficiency tests international students must complete to demonstrate competence. These competencies include reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Even though they meet the threshold required on the tests, they still encounter language barriers during their academic programs. Proficiency tests are costly for international students, and at the college where this study took place can range from 200 to 300 dollars. Recognizing that deficiencies in language proficiency are a barrier to understanding course content in asynchronous and online studies and a barrier to inclusion by domestic peers in their learning communities. It is urgent to provide language programs for students that require supplementary support in order to bridge international students' ability to learn and participate. Brown (2019) suggests that pathway programs are potential bridges to increase international student integration and provide learning opportunities on educational culture, idioms, slang, colloquialisms, and writing styles to further their educational goals in Canada.

Internationalization has brought changes to the cultural composition of students, where supports need to be tailored to the individual rather than a "one size fits all" perspective. Establishing programs and services for diverse populations and marginalized groups is important to ensure transformative education practices that reflect diverse ways of knowing. Transformative education practices embrace global learning and have the potential to expand both international and domestic learners beyond national and regional scopes toward broader global perspectives (Barker, 2020).

According to the province of Alberta, where my study took place, global talent attraction is a top priority (Government of Alberta, 2020). The goal is to attract talented international students to post-secondary institutions and communities. The marketing material from the



Government of Alberta specifies that international students who arrive in Alberta to study are choosing a world-class educational destination that is safe and welcoming and focused on quality assurance and student success (2020). The designation world class is “a semantic sleight of hand that suggests that the culture of great value is inclusive across nations, rather than reflecting an exclusive club where a particular culture is a passport for entry, as is arguably the case” (Lumby & Foskett, 2016, p. 8). Participants in my study did not always experience the welcome that was promised. Without the promised welcome, trust is diminished, and relationships fail to thrive. Dufault and Martocchio (1985) have an affiliative dimension to hope, concerned with an individual’s relationships and connections. Bishop & Willis (2014) state that hope is relational and is influenced by social, environmental and contextual factors. The hopeful core of the Scioli et al. (2011) network consists of relational trust and sanctioned commitment. Foundational strengths are essential to achieve mastery in sustaining hope (Scioli, 2011) and as some of my participants intimated, they did not find the foundational strengths supported by trust and relationships.

Participants stated they did not always feel safe and voiced experiences of racism, financial insecurity, and labour exploitation. One international student, arrived at the airport with nowhere to go and no one to call, ending up sleeping all night at the local university. In their International Education Policy, the Government of Alberta (2020) states that six Edmonton post-secondary institutions have come together to welcome international students when they first arrive at the airport. This Edmonton post-secondary welcome booth is staffed with airport campus greeters and provides information on everything an international student requires for their first 24 hours. They are provided with food, a place to stay, and a ride into the city. They state this is part of the “Alberta Advantage” (Government of Alberta, 2020, p. 11). International

students arrive at airports all over the province and may not realize that this will not happen outside of Edmonton and that they will be left alone to fend for themselves. This international student support initiative is an incentive that needs to be a priority wherever international students arrive to study in Canada and can mitigate feelings of abandonment and isolation that international students feel.

Feelings of abandonment can lead to feelings of loneliness and depression. Chang et al. (2019) found in their quantitative study about the relationship of hope to loneliness and unhappy conditions in Hungarian young adults that feelings of disconnection and isolation can lead to anxiety, distress, and suicidal ideation. Five out of eight participants in my study voiced experiencing loneliness, isolation, and depression. All participants experienced feelings of loss due to isolation from their family, home, culture, and friends. When hope is encouraged and supported, an individual's pathway and agency thinking abilities to reach their goals are enhanced, and there is less likelihood that they will harbour thoughts about self-harm (Chang et al., 2019). Building relationships that begin as international students enter national gateways in Canada to pursue their education can encourage hope. As other researchers have found, relationships and connections with others through support networks are a powerful source of hope (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Herth, 1990; Snyder, 1997a; 2000)

## **Concept 2: Culture**

Many aspects of the learning experience for international students is culturally marked and creates barriers to hope due to an unfamiliar culture, economy, education, government, and society. Hope, explored with a critical social lens, dictates the exploration of the construct in the context of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Bringing a culturally responsive curriculum into the classrooms can support culturally relevant and equitable teaching practices. Ensuring caring

learning communities where culturally diverse individuals are valued and developing curriculum, teaching strategies, classroom climates, and relationships based on the cultural knowledge of diverse cultures, families, and their communities will support student hope. Institutions and their stakeholders as change agents for academic equity, intermediaries for power imbalances, and accepting cultural responsiveness as pervasive strategies to the effectiveness of all aspects of learning for students of every ethnic group will encourage and support international student hope (Gay, 2018).

Due to limited cultural responsiveness from domestic students, participants faced social isolation and found it difficult to connect with Canadians. Thus, international students relied on other international students to help circumvent the challenges they were facing during their education. Participants stated that even when in the same groups as other Canadians, their ideas were not considered and people did not want to work or communicate with them because they were from a different country. They also experienced Canadians making faces at them, ignoring them, and being treated like they were nothing with no respect. One participant stated that this treatment made him feel like he was in a cage. Participants also reported that it was hard to make Canadian friends, particularly in the asynchronous and online environment.

According to Snyder et al. (1997a) social support and positive interactions are linked to hope, while negative interactions are barriers to hope. As Freire (1994) stated, there are two positions, the hopeful and the hopeless. Those who constantly face exclusion and isolation from their social peers will begin to have negative feelings towards their goal pursuits and may be unable to visualize pathways due to past failed attempts, diminishing hope. International students desire to make Canadian friends and to be accepted, included, and valued. Institutions and educators can influence hope by supporting meaningful interactions between international

students and their Canadian peers within online learning communities, and constructing a social circle is important to determining individuals' hope by creating a constructive and safe environment for hope to flourish (Benzein & Saveman, 1998; McGreer, 2004). Interactions between international students and their peers can create a shared hope. Shared hope can function as a socially shared capital that can arouse others, creating a culture of hope (Wang et al., 2013).

Internationalization in post-secondary education is dynamic, and it is essential to be innovative in ensuring intercultural and international understanding positions the need for the internationalization of domestic students. Participants able to make friends in Canada experienced acceptance and interacted with domestic students that were curious about their cultures and where they came from. These feelings of being accepted by their classmates and supported in their learning by their peers encouraged their hope. By understanding diversity and difference, domestic students will improve their understanding of culture and difference. It is urgent that stakeholders in higher education ensure that internationalization strategies are not to minimally accommodate international students through token gestures while at the same time “resisting incursion across the boundaries of the host culture” (Lumby & Foskett, 2016, p. 6).

### **Concept 3: Environment**

The educational environment in higher education is comprised of the quality of instruction and faculty interactions, institutional policies, culture, and how these impact student experience and success. Higher educational institutions have the potential to act as agents for constructing hope in their growing international and diverse student populations by extending horizons established by existing ideologies and developing a bridge to the future. International students face many barriers as they attempt to integrate into Canadian academic environments

including isolation, marginalization, racism, and alienation (Guo & Chase, 2011).

Internationalization brings students and educators from varied systems, and a heterogeneous and diverse learning environment is created. International students are often expected to adapt to an unfamiliar environment markedly different from their own, including language, culture, and pedagogical traditions and are often unaware of their academic responsibilities.

Internationalization has become a major focus for Canadian higher education as a means to shore up diminishing finances. However, international students' success and persistence must be addressed by developing programs, practices, and policies aimed at influencing student persistence. Persistence is the likelihood that a student will continue toward the completion of their diploma or degree (Tinto, 2010). Strategies that support student hope will promote their ability to take action toward their goals through psychological, physical and social action (O'Hara, 2013).

The internationalization of Canadian campuses is continuing to grow, and institutional environments are becoming more diverse. These diverse environments will have increasing demands for curriculum and support services that enhance international student integration, ensuring ongoing student engagement and inclusion. The bottom line is that joint integration between domestic and international students enhances international students' intercultural and linguistic skills (Brown, 2019).

Institutions of higher education must reflect this in their strategic plans as they define their strategies and directions, ensuring the resources are available to meet and sustain internationalization and provide quality learning experiences tailored to fit international students' unique needs and therefore encourage their hope. Research has found that institutions that ensure international students have access to supportive relationships from academic advisors and

student organizations will support student hope (Anandarajah & Hight, 2001; Chang, 2003; D'Amico et al., 2020; O'Hara, 2013). Learning experiences that are unique to the individual affect the dimensions that promote hope and enhance their ability to incorporate a future-oriented and goal-directed outlook.

The most significant social support is relationships with faculty members. Students who feel connected to faculty members are less likely to leave (Fischer, 2009b), have increased self-assurance in graduating, achieve their educational goals, have satisfaction with their academic career, and can lead to greater outcomes beyond their education (D'Amico et al., 2020). Participants stated that educators who cared about them, answered their questions, helped them transition to a new educational environment, and were empathetic about their situations encouraged their hope. Communication was important to participants' hope, such as being able to send educators messages and have them reply in a timely manner.

Robertson et al. (2000) conducted a study regarding contextually relevant issues facing international students in one Australian university. They identified that international students found inadequate course selection guidance, and limited access to computer labs and other facilities. These challenges were confirmed by the participants in my study as one student went to the college to print a document for her assignment, and when she got there, no one was around; she did not have enough money in her account and was unaware of how to put money on her account to allow her to print. She stated that this lack of support discouraged her hope. She felt the college needed to be more supportive and was concerned about how she would learn. Another issue Robertson et al. (2000) discovered was that students in their study experienced unfriendly staff and inexperienced lecturers. The international students in my study also suffered from these experiences where an educator was not present, did not offer relevant learning

material, and was not understanding or interested in a student's situation that was preventing her from gaining the appropriate supplies to support her learning.

Rather than defining educators' roles as strictly professional, a critical pedagogy needs to determine the role of educators as cultural workers who produce ideologies and social practices (Giroux, 1997). As transformative intellectuals, educators have the potential to provide their students with a voice and a sense of belonging. Educational stakeholders must step back from power relationships that "subjugate, oppress, and diminish other human beings." (Giroux, 1997, p. 224). In this way, educators, curriculum designers, policymakers, and institutions of higher education can "redefine themselves as part of a language of transformation and hope" (Giroux, 1997, p. 227).

There were 6231,565 international students studying in Canada at all levels by the end of 2021 (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2022). Higher education has made internationalization an institutional priority, so attention must be paid to the international student experience as a marker of internationalization rather than the numbers. Braggadocio about how an institution is internationalizing its campus by citing the number of international students attending does not guarantee that these students are having a positive learning experience. Higher education has a responsibility to create learning environments that foster cross-cultural acceptance. Stakeholders that include the institution, faculty, and peers in academic and social spaces within higher education must be provided with the necessary knowledge to support a safe and welcoming environment for international students. Curriculum and faculty professional development has taken a back seat to recruitment, and institutional partnerships and academic-related internationalization initiatives must become a priority (Smith, 2020).

#### **Concept 4: Asynchronous and Online Community**

The international students in my study were engaged in asynchronous and online educational initiatives. Many of these students had enrolled as face-to-face students but, due to the pandemic, were forced to move their studies online. The teaching and learning during the pandemic were untested and further exacerbated the challenges international students faced creating barriers to hope that international students experienced in their learning communities. These barriers included their ability to make important social connections and to engage with an effective teacher presence. Careful instructional design goes into quality online learning, and the design process utilizes a systematic model for curriculum development that incorporates online learning pedagogy. A careful design process is absent when ERT is implemented due to a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Hodges et al., 2020). The absence of a quality design process potentially led to an inability to meet the needs of our diverse student populations by not attending to the social aspect of learning. Important infrastructure such as the library, career and wellness services, as well as the opportunities for co-curricular engagement and social support, were not accessible as these take time to identify and construct (Hodges et al., 2020).

Learning Management System (LMS) is another aspect of the institutional infrastructure that can be challenging for international students. During asynchronous and online learning, international students are expected to use learning management systems. It is important that diverse learners have the knowledge and skills, and digital literacy to use these systems. International students have a different culture of learning from that of western academic institutions and often lack the skills and abilities to use LMS, resulting in the inability to meet their outcomes (Hassan et al., 2021). Students must not be assumed to have the knowledge to use technology, as they come from diverse cultural backgrounds where they may not have had



exposure to or the financial capacity to purchase digital devices. There is a need for orientation programs for new international students to overcome these challenges, which would include the use of academic technology important for necessary to achieve academic outcomes such as LMS, library search, and email access. One participant stated that they knew of other international students who didn't know how to use a computer when they came to Canada. Therefore it was very challenging for them to understand course expectations and outcomes.

Retaining hope against the barriers of diversity and lack of knowledge capital, which is a fact for many international students, requires a cognitive resolve and a belief that goals related to educational objectives are obtainable (Pettit, 2004). Hope is socially mediated and is influenced by differing degrees of affective, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions. To sustain international students' hope, it is essential that online educational offerings are individualized to international students' unique realities rather than impose Eurocentric curriculums and assumptions that are not hope sustaining and further marginalize international students. These external circumstances can lead international students to reexamine the legitimacy of their goals with the potential of hope being abandoned (O'Hara, 2013). Hope interventions in online learning communities can make ripples that expand as more hopeful energy is ignited, which generates more hopeful behaviour and actions, increasing hope for all stakeholders (Lopez, 2010).

In a study conducted by Muganga et al. (2021) on the impact of learning on international students' studies, it was found that limited class participation was a significant theme. This inability to engage in online communities applied to the participants in my study. They stated that they did not get opportunities for social connections, and the invisibility of peers in online learning environments made it difficult to interact in online discussions. One participant stated, that although she was adjusting to the online environment, nothing could replace the relationship

she could have with another person in education with someone sitting next to her. Many domestic students experienced the same feelings of isolation as they moved from face-to-face learning to ERT in response to COVID-19. Social encounters they would normally establish during their face-to-face classes were restricted. Students had to focus on established spatially close relationships outside the student community, such as in the household, families, and existing friendship circles (Elmer et al., 2020).

International student participants in my study had left their friends and families in their home country. They were unable to build personal connections with peers or their community here in Canada. Elmer et al. (2020) found in their investigation of students' social networks and mental health before and during COVID-19 that those students who lived by themselves and had less direct contact with their families and friends are at a higher risk of mental health problems and social isolation. The conceptualization of depression highlights the role of negative future-oriented cognitions. Hopelessness is a significant factor for depression and is correlated with higher probability estimates of positive future events (Thimm et al., 2013). Hope is about relationships, and strategies that promote social engagement for international students in online learning communities will help maintain hope. As described by Dufault and Martocchio (1985), the affiliative dimension is about an individual's sense of relatedness and includes social interaction, mutuality, and attachment. Others in the relationship serve as a source of hope and through dialogue and exchange in the online environment as sharing takes place that encourages hope and a sense of belonging.

Students who were forced online due to the COVID-19 pandemic had already been attending their classes on campus. The initial face-to-face interactions gave them the opportunity to make friends and gain their support. One participant had a group of peers that made sure she

attended her classes by calling to wake her up, initiated her into some of the Canadian traditions such as going for a Tim Horton's coffee prior to class, cheering each other on when the semester got hard, and offering to help if content was missed. She stated that this encouraged her hope and made her feel like she could accomplish the goals she had set for herself.

All participants in my study missed the engagement that they would have experienced if they had been able to attend classes on campus. One participant stated that when he was unexpectedly forced to take his classes online, he found it challenging and had difficulty summoning the energy to even attend the synchronous sessions due to the lack of interaction. He often watched the recordings later, which limited the value of the learning experience for him. It was also very difficult for students to communicate and ask questions online as they feared they would not be understood. Language barriers and shyness made reaching out to instructors after online sessions challenging. International students, I interviewed also stated that their online learning made learning the practical aspects of their courses difficult.

Due to the pandemic that generated regulated and restrictive lockdowns, higher educational institutions were forced to provide educational experiences online. Asynchronous and online learning courses were instituted rapidly during the pandemic, and unlike well-planned online curricular design, capturing the unique multiple cultural perspectives important for an inclusive curriculum design may have been missed. An online offering of educational resources that do not appreciate diverse pedagogical objectives and philosophies will not reflect the multicultural ways of knowing, preferences, and styles of learning that meet international student needs (McLoughlin & Oliver, 2000). A cultural third space in online learning initiatives has the potential to facilitate a move away from the homogenization of international students towards a recognition of the uniqueness of each student's difference and promote individual agency that

can encourage hope (Mayes Pane, 2009). Culturally relevant curricula in asynchronous and online learning communities provide international students with the support, membership and belonging they need to make hope flourish, resulting in two academic variables: academic achievement and engagement.

### **The Final Question**

Wang and Burris developed photovoice methodology in the 1990's building on a rich tradition of photography-based research. Marginalized groups are typically featured in this type of research. It encourages participants to take ownership of their experiences and helps them to understand their power to make changes to their communities. Participants in my study were asked the final question what can we Do about it in Wang and Burris's "SHOWeD" (Wang 1999; Wang & Burris 1997; Wang et al., 1998). I asked this question to gain an insider perspective, so I could cross-examine contextually based meanings from an insider standpoint. This insider perspective would help me to gain new insights into my participants' constructed realities about their experience of hope, and the role asynchronous and online learning communities have in encouraging or discouraging hope (Sutton-Brown, 2014).

Student participants appreciated many of the supports that already exist at the college. However, they did have several recommendations that they felt would better support their hope while participating in asynchronous and online learning communities in higher education in western Canada. Participant recommendations that were voiced when asked the final question are compiled under the following areas: educator support, peer support, and institutional support.

### **Educator Support**

According to the literature supportive relationships from educators are, the greatest predictor of higher levels of hope for students (D'Amico et al., 2020). Participants stated that it is

important to international students that educators check in frequently. Participants reported difficulty in group work situations as they felt excluded, and their views were not considered valid. Educators should be mindful of how group dynamics can influence students' hope and belonging. International students are often outliers in educational groups, and "if their sense of belongingness or hope doesn't align with the group's sense of belongingness or hope," they will not benefit (Wurster et al., 2021, p. 74). By checking in to ensure that international students are feel included in the group, educators could confirm that students are having a positive learning experience and meeting their outcomes. International students voiced that this type of educator commitment to them was a sign of caring and, if present, enhanced their hope.

**Rauni:**

For the first semester, I had this one instructor who's quite friendly and very motherly. The instructor checked in every class to see if I was getting this. Because you never know if someone has a problem with English itself. She would check in, did you get what you need, do you need me to see you outside of class, just to confirm if you understand? This is what CANVAS is; it is not a work you are going to put paint on; it is where you are going to submit your papers. When I got stuck, I just hop in an email and the courtesy of telling me, okay, we're going to look into that when you come to campus tomorrow.

These small things helped me to transition.

**Ami:**

The teacher could encourage more breakout rooms. You don't feel as much pressure as if there were so many people. When there is a lot of people, I get a little bit scared. Having less people in zoom helps with participation for sure.

Small group work is a component of third-space pedagogy which help international and domestic students form new ways of thinking, transforming their existing perspectives, developing intercultural competency (Tran, 2012).

Participants stated that using their names was important, going through the course content with them, staying five minutes after class and letting them know how the course will unfold, being clear on expectations for assignments, and simply telling them where to get their textbooks, where the bookstore is, or the financial office encouraged their hope.

**Tai:**

The first time I did my assignments I had to ask my friends because, in class instructors, they don't know this is your first semester, so it is not like their problem; some assume you know how to log into CANVAS and it is really hard to submit assignments. Maybe you are in class where you don't have a friend from Kenya to explain it to you, and it is hard to approach other students when it is your first time in school, your first time in your first semester.

Many of the participants have to adapt to multiple situations, that include language, a foreign culture, pedagogical conditions, economy, and communities that are foreign to them. This complex adaptation leaves little room for coping with the minutiae of everyday academic life. Snyder (2005) identified strategies for educators to build students' hope. Strategies included:

- caring about students
- spending dedicated time to work with students
- identifying goals both for the students and for the class
- praising student effort
- setting a definitive plan for students to achieve course goals

Rauni stated, “I don’t know what to expect; I’m scared, just telling you, I’m scared and having someone by me would be way easier.”

Professional development programs for educators of international students must include an intercultural curriculum that will equip them with the tools and abilities concerning hope theory and hope praxis. Faculty must ensure they have the professional knowledge to address international students’ linguistic and cultural differences and effectively assess their learning. The ability and knowledge that educators gain through professional development initiatives will allow them to support international students’ agency and pathway thinking, encouraging hope and scaffolding their ability to reach their graduation goals.

### **Peer Support**

Participants in my study desire contact and interaction with their domestic peers. They want to make Canadian friends and feel a sense of belonging while studying in Canada. Hope does not occur in isolation but is dependent on a social network of relationships (Feudtner, 2005). When they were in online learning, participants missed the social connections they were able to make through informal gatherings and social events. This inability to interact and meet their Canadian counterparts isolated them and discouraged their hope. Interpersonal bonds that occur with academic and social integration encourage hopeful thinking, and peers are an influential resource for assisting international students in making social connections (In, 2016). Social support plays a significant role in promoting hope development (Snyder, 2000). Rauni stated, “They used to celebrate black history month, but it’s indefinite now, but having a virtual get-together to embrace individuality, the different cultures we have.” Participants missed connections with peers.

**Ami:**

At the college, they could still try to have activities and things like that. And then they have prizes that they will ship to your house. Activity where a member and I got put into a cohort online. We were debating answers. It was just fun.

**Mary:**

I am thinking that international affairs could have more social meetings because I know there are more Mexican people in the college, but I only know one or two guys because you never get so friendly with a Canadian.

**Jon:**

I remember the Student Association organizing some programs, some good pizza, we always eating and good interactions. We never have them during the online classes. So, having things like that can boost us; the students learn more, like having a platform for them to come talk about, relate to, how we feel like, what are things that keep us going. That platform is going to help international students.

The participants voiced that mentorship from Canadian peers as important to encouraging their hope. Contact between international and domestic students promotes cross-cultural efficacy and positive socio-cultural and psychological adaptation (Thomson & Esses, 2016). Mentorship programs help international students make social contacts that build social networks. Social contacts become conduits through which students can gain academic and cultural inclusion. Initiatives that pair international students with host students have the potential to promote cultural inclusion and awareness. Thomson and Esses (2016), during their research study about pairing newcomer international students with Canadian student mentors, determined that this mentorship facilitated positive changes that included a greater ability for international students to



adapt both socio-cultural and psychologically with decreased acculturative stress. Domestic students can assist international students to successfully adapt to the academic community as they are cultural and linguistic insiders. Mentorship programs provide the potential for both international and domestic students to engage with each other and experience cultural differences, which can lead to the development of intercultural competence. Increased engagement provided the opportunity for social integration and cross-cultural friendships to develop (Alsafar, 2015).

**Mary:**

I was thinking that they could get some Canadian volunteers to talk about, say, Thanksgiving. In Mexico, we don't have Thanksgiving and didn't know why you all went so crazy. So, the food I researched, and I was like, oh, wow, it's really important. I went to an international meeting, and I had Pumpkin pie, and it was so good. So, knowing what they do for this holidays and how their family has the traditions. We need Canadian volunteers to talk to and ask questions to exchange information and experiences. I know they can help international students become more immersed and help them transition through. It is good to have tutors and teachers, but it is peers and classmates that really close the circle.

Rauni thought a mentor would be a good idea stating, "That's where I think a mentor would be really handy to have. You know next week is going to be minus 20. Have you got the gear you need to stay warm"?

**Rauni:**

So, things like having someone who's grown up here, and all they've eaten and learned and lived on, is what being Canadian is. So, giving back to someone who doesn't know what being Canadian is, would be such a blessing to someone.

**Advir:**

I think a mentorship program would really help. I have been living here for almost one and a half years, and I have not really understood the community here. It is very difficult, especially when you do not have a good social life. You cannot understand the community well until you meet a lot of people and you understand their behaviour. You understand what people like here and what they don't like. To want to know Canadians when you are here, or what is the whole point here?

Considering that peer support and social relations are important supporters of hope, it is necessary to incorporate initiatives into the student experience that allow international students to gain a sense of belonging and help with their acculturation and ability to get to know the people with whom they are sojourning. Many group activities offered on campus for the participants do not include Canadian peers. Although students can connect with other international students, this presents a barrier for international students to connect and develop relationships with host students. It is also a constraint that encourages intercultural segregation. Positive social interaction and friendship formation with domestic students are important to mediate loneliness, help students develop networks that can lead to career opportunities, and facilitate cultural understanding between international students and their hosts. Attachments that occur through support groups, and peer mentoring programs, promote the establishment of supportive relationships with and between peers, particularly when students are engaged in asynchronous

and online learning, will encourage hopeful thinking leading to positive academic experiences and the attainment of significant educational goals.

### **Institutional Support**

Participants offered recommendations about how higher education in Canada can support their hope and, therefore, their ability to succeed in their academic trajectories while participating in online and asynchronous learning communities. Institutions of higher education in Canada are willing partners in internationalization and globalized knowledge creation and transfer. International students have enriched these institutions intellectually, culturally, and educationally. Institutional support services require a commitment from the organization, and international students' personal and academic needs must be considered to make these services meaningful. Educators who are aware of up-to-date technology for teaching and learning can assist international students to work across cultures and gain international competency, encouraging their ability to develop agency and pathways to reach their goals. It is important that the institutions provide ongoing inclusive support to international students to ensure that they actualize their social and academic goals.

### **Zena:**

The college isn't caring what the instructor is giving us, and the college needs to make sure they are giving us good material. Make sure the instructor is engaged with the students and make sure the students are learning online. Is this enough? Is it not enough? Is this good? Tools improve, and the college needs to say to the instructor you need to make a better video; use this tool and make a better video.

With the sudden transition from face-to-face education to ERT, educators were unprepared and found it problematic to suddenly become experts in online teaching and learning.

The implementation of ERT led to pedagogical challenges, such as poorly planned and suboptimal implementation of course offerings, which risked the achievement of instructional goals (Hodges et al., 2020). Faculty had difficulty accessing support systems such as professional development, learning management system training, online course design, and faculty experts' assistance in migrating their face-to-face courses to online teaching and learning.

These difficulties significantly impacted international students' ability to sustain their hope and meet their academic outcomes. Institutions of higher education should consider rethinking their ability to support faculty during a crisis and over the long term, as there is the potential for future disasters that include both public health and natural threats to safety. Online education will remain as society continues to be impacted by the virus, and online education could potentially replace face-to-face education for an extended time. Standardizing processes to support and facilitate teaching competence in online teaching and learning is essential. Ongoing institutional evaluations of academic efforts provided throughout the COVID-19 crisis are required to ensure institutions will be ready to offer quality online offerings in the event that it is necessary to implement ERT in the future (Hodges et al., 2020).

Institutional orientation programs for newly arriving international students are central to their successful integration into the institution and the community. The content of international orientation programs at the college participants were attending consists of information about the college and the institution but very little about the community that international students will be attempting to navigate during their studies. Participants expressed a desire to know more about their community outside of the college.

**Mary:**

Actually, I just knew about the bridge. I couldn't find much information about the city. I am catholic so; I didn't know where to go. I still don't. I'm not sure how to get into the process of first communion for my children. I went to the office, and they just kept telling me to look on the website and all the information will be there. I didn't understand the website.

For example, the bank. In Mexico, when you open an account, it is free. So, I don't need a job to prove that you need a bank account, not only because you are a student but because it was free. So, my husband was unable to get a bank account that wasn't attached to me because he didn't have a job. He needs to be working a month to open an account separate from mine. I didn't know that.

We couldn't have a phone. We're using our phone from Mexico, and we want a number from Canada. We needed a driver's license and a bill. I had an international license, and they were like no, we need a Canadian document, so I had to buy a prepaid plan and my husband as well. It was a process we didn't know it will be so difficult to get a phone.

Finding a family doctor. In Mexico, we just go anywhere to a doctor that is of interest the most. If you don't like him, or he is too busy, you can go to someone else. Here you need to have a doctor and he's not all the time available. I didn't understand why I need to have one doctor, and to wait so much trying to get an appointment.

**Rauni:**

How Walmart is what Walmart is, I would 1,000% want to go to this Walmart. Tell me about what you need, what most students my age buy because that's one thing I had a

problem with when I came here as I settled with people who are way older. Stuff like even foods, and I am Okay, what do we eat here? Tell me that you can always drop by McDonald's and get this. This is where we have a McDonalds in the city.

Yeah, it's small things would really be appreciated for someone who's in a whole new world. When you read negative degrees, they mean negative; you are freezing. You don't have winter boots, don't go out in the blowing snow, or you will freeze, and nobody tell you that. That is just small things that the mind doesn't put into reality.

Culturally relevant academic advising is not proportionally or specifically assigned to a rapidly expanding international student population. An important consideration is having knowledgeable academic advisors in Canadian higher education to support an increasingly diverse international student body. Academic advising entails providing holistic support services to college students on matters that affect students' academic and emotional well-being. These services include academic and career advising, academic and remedial help, and life and learning options (Lee & Metcalfe, 2017). As their role is to support students' educational goal achievement, academic advisors and student support staff have a key role in supporting international students' hope. An individual's ability to sustain agency and pathway toward their goals despite the challenges they face exists within a cultural context, making it a critical consideration in understanding hope (Edwards & McIntock, 2018).

**Mary:**

Giving real examples about industry, like where we'll be able to work when we are done. I am not really sure where to look for a job, what industry I should be focusing on. What salary should I be waiting for? So, talking about what you should expect out there, what should be your rights as an employee.

**Rauni:**

So personally, one thing I really would like for the college to work on is even career advisors; I believe we only have one International Student Advisor. Even if we had three students, I feel like with all three students, they may not feel the same way about the same advice. So even adding one more could be quite helpful because the things we might say, or the places we might come from, might not resonate. An advisor to just talk to an individual personally and see how they're doing, how they're going, and probably what they need, what they want to ask, like, where am I supposed to find this? If I need to reach out to someone? How do I get to that?

**Summary**

In this chapter, I connected the findings from my study with the conceptual framework discussed in my literature review as it relates to international students' experience of hope in online and asynchronous learning communities in one western institution of higher education. Context, culture, environment, and asynchronous and online community are important constructs in creating barriers or encouragers of hope (see Figure 4). As internationalization continues to grow, Canadian higher education institutions must move away from the "one size fits all" perspective prevalent in teaching and learning initiatives today towards a transformative education practice. This transformative practice can be achieved by establishing programs and services that meet the needs of diverse populations and marginalized student groups, as recommended by participants in this study.

Culturally marked learning experiences create barriers to international student hope. Institutions that act as change agents for academic equity and mitigate power imbalances embedded in higher education policy and practice will allow all stakeholders in higher education

to act as agents for constructing hope. Implementing curriculum and supports that are culturally responsive will build a bridge that can facilitate a supportive environment for international student integration to ensure ongoing student engagement and inclusion. Culturally relevant curriculum and teaching practices are necessary in asynchronous and online learning communities that reflect multicultural ways of knowing, being, and learning. These teaching practices will provide international students with the support, membership, and belonging that will make hope flourish, helping students develop the motivation to build the pathways to reach their academic and life goals.

The final question to participants in my study was, “What can we do about it.” This final question asked the participants to discuss potential solutions that would support their hope while participating in online and asynchronous learning communities to empower them by giving them a voice in offering solutions from their own perspectives. Recommendations from the participants were embedded in categories that included educator support, peer support, and institutional support. Supportive relationships with educators, a caring perspective and a clear understanding of international students’ situations are critical to sustaining international students’ hope. International students come to Canada with the hope that they will build friendships with domestic students.

Ethnocentric attitudes toward international students by domestic students often prevent cross-cultural interactions, which can diminish hope. Participants put forward peer mentorship as a way to facilitate increased engagement with their domestic peers. Institutions of higher education that engage in internationalization have a role to play in supporting international students’ hope. Higher education policymakers, administrators, and educators must understand diversity to respond both ethically and academically to the diverse cultures, languages, and



ethnicities of international students. A commitment to international students' emotional, cultural, and social needs, along with their academic needs will provide them with the cognitive motivational resources that strengthen agency and pathway thinking, facilitating hope and, therefore, goal achievement for these students.

## Chapter 7. Significance of the Study and Future Directions

This study provided international students a voice to tell their stories about their experience of hope in asynchronous and online learning communities in higher education. Participants answered the research questions about the experiences they faced during their sojourn in Canada to study and described their barriers to hope and what they found were encouragers of their hope. In addition, they were invited to make recommendations regarding what would encourage their hope and thus increase their ability to sustain the motivation necessary to develop pathways toward their ability to achieve their educational goals. Participants spoke of strategies that would help themselves and future international students. Many expressed gratitude that through narrative photovoice research, their voices were heard.

Narrative Photovoice as a methodology provided the communicative potential that allowed me to purposefully consider participants' visual meaning-making processes and give voice to their lived experience of hope. It was significant for providing a richer picture of their experience of hope. As a visual methodology, narrative photovoice was able to transcend much of the cultural barriers to communication that participants with ESOL experienced. Participants' photographs were the visual medium that allowed them to voice their lived experiences through stories, generating new insights and perspectives on the barriers to their hope and what encouraged their hope. Participants were appreciative that they were given a voice. Advir stated, "there are a lot of people who really want to speak. Doing this really made me feel our voice can be heard." Jon stated, "it was just good for me to talk to you." These are examples of *Living Hope*, which is the process of active engagement with the world to determine a better future (Cammarota, 2011). The construction of knowledge through collective participation, where participants equally participate with educational stakeholders democratically, allows them to

become learners and experts simultaneously (Cammarota, 2011). Narrative Photovoice allowed my international participants to experience a sense of personal agency and provided them with the capacity to intervene in their own lives (Rolbiecki et al., 2016).

This chapter will discuss the role institutions of higher education have in ensuring high-quality teaching and learning experiences for our international student populations that support hope. Increasing student hope will encourage more engaged and productive students who can achieve their educational initiatives. Recommendations for institutions include the following: pre-arrival initiatives, orientation initiatives, peer mentorship initiatives, and educator professional development initiatives. I will also discuss recommendations for practice, provide future research directions, and include my reflections on this investigation into international students' experience of hope while participating in online learning communities in higher education.

### **Recommendations for Institutions**

International students face many challenges with acculturation, a significant one being loneliness (Neto, 2021). Chang et al. (2019) found in their examination of hope and loneliness as predictors of unhappy conditions in young adults that loneliness is positively associated with anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. Young adults who are isolated or disconnected from meaningful relationships experience loneliness, and these negative effects can be mitigated by hope. Rauni and Ami had tangible items that connected them to home. Rauni's exercise books represented cherished memories of her traditions, her home in Nairobi, her culture, and her family. They were her source of identity, giving her strength and hope. Ami's statuette "Love" represented her connections to home and her ties to her family. Participants like Advir, Ami, and Mary were grateful to have their family members here to support them during their studies in

Canada. Advir stated, it is important to have somebody, Mary's family made the whole difference for her, and Ami felt supported, making her feel less alone. Even though Ami lived with her uncle, her feelings of loss for what she left behind and her experiences in a different country and culture brought many challenges for her. Her "LOVE" statuette, which she looks at every day, gives her comfort, courage, and hope, lessening the loneliness she experiences here in Canada.

Connections and support from their peers and educators as important encouragers of hope was a powerful theme that emerged during my data analysis. These connections and support provided the motivation that assisted participants in making pathways toward their dreams. Mary expressed the desire to know more about Canadian holidays and customs. Jon and Ami suggested that an online social platform where students could get together, play games, share stories, and talk about what keeps them motivated would help them to make friends and achieve a sense of belonging. Rauni wanted to experience what it is like being Canadian. Advir and Rauni felt that mentorship programs would support their hope.

Initiatives like orientation programs, peer mentorship programs, and social programs that include both international and domestic peers are ways that institutions can support cross-cultural knowledge and assist international students in their acculturation process and sense of belonging. Cora felt that support from her educator through the online platforms helped her learn and understand course content. At the same time. Rauni and Zena had frustrating encounters with their educators impacting their ability to learn and understand. These challenging encounters with educators was discouraging for them, impacting their motivation and ability to sustain their hope leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness.

It is essential that institutions generate initiatives that target international students to enhance their ability to establish meaningful connections within their learning communities with their peers, their instructors, and the community where they are residing. These initiatives can occur prior to international students' arrival and continue throughout their sojourn here in Canada. This ability to establish meaningful connections will assist them in their acculturation process, lessen loneliness and isolation, and are significant for sustaining their hope. Hope and performance are influenced by the academic systems where students operate. (Snyder et al., 2002b)

## **Institutional Initiatives**

### ***Pre-Arrival Support Initiatives***

The transition from living at home to living far from family and friends is significant for international students, and homesickness, if not mediated, can lead to poor academic performance, poor quality of life, and psychological distress that will destroy hope and students' ability to meet their outcomes (Rathakrishnan et al., 2021). Institutions of higher education can intercede and make efforts to promote a healthy socio-cultural adjustment for international students and facilitate social interaction, language ability, and cross-cultural understanding. Some strategies for intersession can occur prior to international students' arrival.

### **Advir:**

It would have helped if I knew all these things before actually coming to Canada; if I knew more about the community, it would really help. I have been living here over a year now, and I have not really understood the community.

The more familiar international students are on what to expect can build confidence generating hope agency and pathway thinking providing positive expectancies of the future

(Cheavens & Ritschel, 2014). Confidence is an artifact of hope along with happiness (Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder, 1999; Snyder et al., 2000). Strategies include providing a contact person from the hosting institution that offers orienting information about the institution, the environment, the community, spiritual information, health and wellness services, weather, banking information, and phone services. Pre-arrival emails will inform about what to expect when they arrive, particularly where to find support such as transport, where they will live, and if someone will be there to meet them. Schneidmiller (2016) found in her investigation into understanding the needs of international students and how orientation programming can best meet those needs stated that information about what to pack and notifications about deadlines were useful to international students. Assisting international students who require information on how to contact family at home, how to access the internet, and get phone service would provide students and their families with valuable knowledge about activities of daily living that would alleviate some of the loss they are experiencing and provide them with the ability to make those positive connections they are missing. Having this essential information before arrival in Canada will facilitate an easier transition for international students mitigating loneliness and isolation and encouraging hope.

### ***Orientation Initiatives***

Participants in my study mentioned that they received, on arrival, information about the college and their programs but lacked information about the community, which made integration into the community outside of the institution difficult. Mary talked about having trouble opening a bank account, getting a phone, and where to find religious instruction for her children. Rauni wanted to know where to shop and what food to buy. Orientation folders should contain information about the college and academics, and information that helps international students

orient themselves to the city and the community. It would be important to provide information on where to find housing, a list of rental properties with prices and locations, and host families who are willing to offer homestays. Information on personal safety would also be a valuable addition to orientation folders.

Student orientation to the college is offered to all attending students, both domestic and international, and is traditionally provided by non-international faculty. A consideration for online orientation aimed at international students to facilitate understanding would be for presenters to slow down their speaking and check for clarification (Schneidmiller, 2016). Breakout rooms following main information sessions with existing students who could answer questions in the international students' language would be helpful as it is difficult for students unsure of their language abilities to ask questions in a larger group. Orientation sessions could be where volunteer peer mentors attend with their assigned international student to assist in understanding, help them make connections with other peers, and encourage their sense of belonging.

### ***Peer Mentorship Initiatives***

International students in my study faced difficulties and obstacles during their experience studying here in Canada. Tai spoke about sacrifice, and Mary said she can't look down as her journey was so steep that she felt overwhelmed. Jon experienced financial burdens and stated that some international students faced labour exploitation. Mentorship programs where international students are connected to a peer mentor prior to arrival have the potential to help them feel socially connected and welcome. This mentorship can continue once the international student arrives in Canada. Peer mentors can help international students navigate the higher education culture and the community in which they live. Furthermore, peer mentors can offer

emotional support and friendship. Supportive relationships in higher education are significant sources of stress reduction (Tinto, 1993). Having someone they know when arriving in Canada can help improve international students coping as it allows them to form meaningful relationships with those outside their own culture (Schneidmiller, 2016).

Advir stated he wanted to meet Canadian students while he was here studying or what was the point of being here. Students who cannot connect and establish friendships with domestic students often establish friendship groups within their own culture, which impedes acculturation and can increase feelings of loneliness and homesickness (Thurber & Walton, 2012). Peer mentors promote important connections with domestic students contributing to social integration. Cora found support from a student peer who helped her to work through an assignment and encouraged her to keep going. Rauni had a group of classmates that encouraged and supported her, teaching her about Canadian culture. She was not fearful about attending social activities as her domestic peers accompanied her. Rauni felt such a great sense of belonging and acceptance that she joined the International Student Association as an ambassador to other international students. Both these students found that these peer connections gave them a sense of belonging and supported their hope.

A formal peer mentoring program has great potential to positively impact peer mentors and international students. A facilitated peer mentorship program for international students would assist those who cannot find a peer mentor independently. It would be important for mentors to have specific training related to international students on how to support them within the college and the community and provide them with the expectations for contact to facilitate the success of these relationships. Mentors who receive recognition for their participation, may be more willing to volunteer, as mentoring benefits both mentors and international students



(Beltman et al., 2019). Benefits for both the domestic student peer mentors and the international students include the development of intercultural competence, the opportunity to reflect on their own culture, an ability to achieve an understanding of other cultural perspectives, gain self-confidence, and broaden their worldviews. These beneficial relationships can alter how domestic students and international students view themselves and their world, promoting their development as effective global citizens (Alsafar, 1015).

### ***Educator Professional Development Initiatives***

Educators of international students are responsible for implementing the strategies (pathways) for reaching course goals (in their curriculum) and having the motivation (agency) to teach their lessons with passion and excitement. Students are responsible for discovering pathways and the motivation to achieve the instructor's educational outcomes. If these hope components are missing, international students' hopes of reaching their goals will be diminished (Snyder et al., 2006). Participants in my study had varied experiences with their educators. Cora and Rauni had supportive educators, which was a positive experience for them, enhancing their hope and, therefore, their ability to meet expected outcomes. Rauni also had a negative experience with her educator, as did Zena. Both felt their educators were uncaring, unsupportive, and did not understand the challenges they were facing with their online learning and their adaptation to Canada.

Participants had come to Canada to study with the expectation that they would attend face-to-face classes. When the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, ERT was initiated, and institutions shifted their courses online as a temporary approach to standard instruction. ERT involves an unplanned practice that utilizes any online resources that were at hand. The result of this unplanned practice, put in place to ensure continuity for students, was a limitation in

resources, particularly faculty support and training (Hodges et al., 2020). Educators play a critical role in the learning experiences of their students. The inability of support services to meet the needs of educators and a lack of professional development opportunities in online teaching resulted in less than optimum educational experiences for students. There was a gap in the consideration of vulnerable populations such as international students (Bond et al., 2021).

An online academic course often takes months to plan, even with the syllabus and course material already available. Converting an in-person class to online requires time and support to develop delivery methods, create alternate student assessments, and learn how to engage in online pedagogy (Walsh et al., 2021). Formal online teaching and learning training can create a more positive learning experience for both students and faculty. This formal training can consist of computer literacy, learning opportunities that result in the creation of high-quality learning experiences, the importance of timely response to students, mentorship from experienced online educators, pedagogical training, culturally relevant course material, and crisis-specific training to help educators become more aware of the needs of the students and how they can support them.

The rapid transition to online learning resulted in disadvantages for educators and students. It is important that institutions create plans that focus on the negative impact of an emergency can have on the cross-cultural adaptability of international students (Novikov, 2020). To ensure a quality online education program, it is important that the means are in place to convert face-to-face learning to user-friendly digital formats, ensuring that resources are available to provide international students with the information they need. Translating this information into the diverse languages that represent the international student population would ensure understanding, scaffold their hope, and provide them with the ability to reach their goals.

Supportive relationships with their educators are a significant predictor of student hope and are critical to international students' successful adjustment (D'Amico et al., 2020). Participants in my study confirmed that this was true. Educators who receive the support they need to provide a quality online learning experience will experience hope themselves. Educators with hope will have the agency and pathway thinking to consciously provide hope-building strategies in their curriculum and therefore inspire hope in their students.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

It is important that the results of this study move beyond the world of research. My study aimed to provide information that can be used to design interventions in asynchronous and online learning that can support and enhance international students' hope with a focus on eliminating barriers to hope that impede academic performance. This narrative photovoice research has the potential to inform higher education in Canada about strategies that have the potential to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students regardless of their socioeconomic status, gender, age, ethnicity, or nationality. Photovoice has three main aims: to give voice to the realities that individuals experience on a daily basis, raise the awareness of critical discourse about individual and community issues, and reach policymakers (Wang, 2006). The new knowledge garnered in this study, generated by the participants', will be shared with distance education policy, program makers, educators, and curriculum designers. In this way, change can be initiated to develop strategies for asynchronous and online educational initiatives and curriculum development that strengthens international students' hope, leading to higher success rates for these students in western academic institutions.

### **Recommendations for Research**

While this study provided a window into the experience international students have of hope in online learning communities in higher education, there are limitations to this study that could be addressed in future research. As hope is unique to each individual, I suggest that similar studies be conducted with other diverse groups of international students and expanded to encompass institutions of higher education in other communities in Canada to gain a broader understanding of international students' hope as it exists in different institutions and different communities. Another perspective to approach with future research would be to study other marginalized groups in Canada including newly arrived immigrants, indigenous populations, and visible minorities, to give voice to their experience of hope in higher education. An untapped population engaging in online learning, often forgotten in higher education, is the prison population, which would give an interesting perspective on their experience of hope in online teaching and learning. While the study captured some recommendations from the participants about strategies to support their hope and ultimately their ability to realize their educational goals, future studies could collect data regarding the experience of hope for international students once suggested system changes have been implemented.

### **Reflections of the Researcher**

This research study was a continuation of my journey into hope as a “multidimensional life force characterized by a confident yet uncertain expectation of achieving a future good which, to the hoping person, is realistically possible and personally significant” (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985, p. 380). This journey to discover the impact of hope on the life worlds of diverse populations in varying situations started during my master's studies. It ignited a passion in me to study a construct that has the potential to provide individuals with the internal resources

they need to reach their aspirations and achieve their dreams. These internal resources can kindle the determination necessary in the face of adversity, helping them to navigate life challenges and provide the motivation and ability to determine pathways to achieve future goals. This process was not only gratifying but emotional as well. The participants' stories were deeply personal, and I felt privileged to be the conduit by which they shared their narratives and photographs that reflected their experiences of hope. I was gratified to be a part of these experiences with my participants as they told their deeply personal stories and shared powerful photographs depicting their hope experience. I was also touched emotionally by how willing participants were to share their experiences of hope with me.

Narrative Photovoice as methodology provided the medium to give voice to the voiceless, and that in itself is an encourager of hope. Enabling students to voice their experiences of hope and provide recommendations for change validated their visions of their future, thereby providing a pathway to realize those visions. As language barriers can be an obstacle to understanding, images have the potential to overcome linguistic hurdles and difficulties with verbal expression, allowing participants' voices to be heard across cultures (Sethi, 2016). This Narrative Photovoice research study honoured international student voices and stories, enabling them to be truly heard. By engaging them in this way, I hope to provide an opportunity to make a significant change to how we support international student hope in higher education. By asking participants to provide recommendations about how higher education could support their hope, participants were better able to imagine strategies to encourage their hope that would provide a better future as they envision it. Asking for their recommendations created a supportive space for participants to see themselves as active agents, exploring possibilities for change rather than accepting existing constraints.

An unanticipated takeaway for the participant interviews was how empowered they felt being offered the opportunity to tell their stories. The empowerment they felt was a “*lived hope*” generated by an experience of progress and positive change. When my participants directly experienced a positive outcome in the ability to make a change in their lives, it provided them with a sense of agency and motivation to progress toward their goals. Lived hope is active and dynamic, encouraging personal growth, a sense of purpose and the ability to shape one’s life course (Lopez et al., 2004; Snyder, 1994). Hope is theorizing there is a pathway, and change is about implementing that pathway (Keen, 2000).

Participants stated that partaking in this research study made them feel they could make a change that would make other international students’ lives easier. They felt that this would facilitate their ability to do something to make a change. They further articulated that it was an honour that a venue was provided for international students to speak and that through this opportunity, “other international students who are suffering” will be able to speak in the future. Jon stated, “doing this is a big chance for international students to be heard, to be loved, and feel welcome at the facility. Expressing myself gives me this big freedom and we should give room for all international students to speak.”

### **Summary**

The intent of this narrative photovoice study was to understand and give a voice to international students’ experience of hope while participating in asynchronous and online learning communities in one western institution of higher education. My research questions guided the study. Each of the questions encouraged international students to share their personal stories and experience of hope. The participants talked about what encouraged their hope and what were their barriers to hope as they sought entry into higher education, during their ongoing

engagement in their learning communities, their engagement in learning new and different knowledge, and their ability to gain a place, a voice, and sense of value in the cultural world of higher education. These acts of hope can either support or prevent international students' negotiation of positional and relational agency regarding their peers, their educators, and the institution (Kasworm, 2008).

Participants were drawn from diverse countries of origin. They reported challenges related to loneliness, belonging, acceptance, inequity, racism, and loss. Encouragers of hope consisted of shared experience, community, family, connections, teacher presence, and belonging. Recommendations put forth by the participants to enhance their ability to sustain hope as a multidimensional, cognitive motivational force encompassed institutional initiatives such as pre-arrival support, orientation, peer mentorship, and educator professional development. These initiatives will sustain hope allowing students to develop goals (pathways) and agency (motivation) and has a positive relationship with self-esteem, an ability to problem-solve, and enhances the capacity to approach an academic experience focusing on success (Snyder et al., 1991).

Pre-arrival support that includes connections with domestic peers, communication with a contact person from the host institution, pre-arrival emails about what to bring with them, checking to ensure they have a place to stay, and available transport on arrival will provide international students with a sense of belonging, assist with their socio-cultural adjustment, and encourage their hope. It is important that orientation programs include information about the community. Orientation programs will facilitate international students' acclimatization to the city, where they will live, as well as institutional and academic information.

Peer mentorship programs between domestic students and international students can raise intercultural awareness for domestic students. Broadening the curriculum and social support structures to include mentoring of international students by domestic students would assist with their sense of belonging, lessen their loneliness, and scaffold their cultural adaptation to their new life in Canada. The ability to build relationships with their Canadian counterparts provides a sense of belonging, trust, and safety. It is a critical component in helping international students who are at times alienated and peer attachment which are founded on relational trust and are significant for sustaining hope (Scioli et al., 2011). Humanistic bonds that happen with academic and social integration encourage hopeful thinking, and peers are an influential resource for assisting international students in making social connections (In, 2016). Social support plays a significant role in promoting hope development (Snyder, 2000).

Educator professional development initiatives that support educators' ability to deliver quality online teaching and learning pedagogy will support educator hope and therefore support international students' hope giving them the agency and pathway abilities to reach their goals. Dufault and Martocchio (1985) state that maintaining hope in the cognitive dimension and affective dimension requires supportive relationships. Educators who are hopeful themselves and therefore are supporters of international students' hope can create experiences that provide a realization of hope that affords the achievement of hoped for goals in the future (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985). Educators with appropriate professional development can cultivate international student hope by establishing mentoring interactions, implementing strategies that include caring about their students, delivering course content with enthusiasm and praising student efforts (Snyder, 2004).



The results of my research will be shared with higher education stakeholders engaged in international online education initiatives to engage in hope-building strategies that strengthen international students' hope leading to increased success rates for international students and a better socio-cultural adaptation to Canada. Future research has the potential to target other marginalized groups engaging in higher education in Canada to provide a broader understanding of hope across different institutions, populations, and communities.

My final thought as I complete this study is the degree of inspiration I garnered from the international students who participated. They told stories of perseverance and determination to reach their goals and achieve their dreams no matter what obstacles they faced, and some of these obstacles were significant. They put their futures at risk to come to Canada to study and then had to contend with racism, inequity, outsider status, rejection, learning challenges, financial struggle, separation from their families and their cultures, and mental health issues. Through it all, they sustained their hope by not looking down but rather continuing to climb toward their goals. They managed to wake up and be grateful for the opportunity to live the lives they have chosen, look at a sunrise and see a new day, and believe that the new day will bring something good. They found connections that are a light in their lives, and as they traverse a dark road, they can see the sun that will shine a light on their journey of hope in higher education.

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## Appendix A

### Letter of Introduction

A storied picture of hope: Using Narrative Inquiry and Photovoice to understand International Students' Experience of Hope in Asynchronous Learning Communities in Higher Education.

#### Principal Investigator

**Rebecca Fitzgerald EdD(c) RN**

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**Phone:** 403 634 7291

#### Supervisor

**Dr. Debra Hoven**

**Email:** [debrah@athabascau.ca](mailto:debrah@athabascau.ca)

**Phone:** 1-866-441-5517

Dear Participant

My name is Rebecca and I am a graduate student in the Center for Distance Education at Athabasca University. I am doing a study on the experience of hope for international students with English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) and I am interested in learning about how hope helps you reach your academic goals and overcome any obstacles that you face while participating in learning communities asynchronously or online. This investigation will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. Debra Hoven as the Doctoral Supervisor.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an international student and if you agree to this study, we will work together to create a narrative of your educational experiences. This narrative will include pictures that you take as well as your personal story. It is possible that some of the questions arising from the narratives interview may make you feel uncomfortable, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time. You will be allowed to create an "alias" to help protect your identity from those who will be reading this study. However, since we will be working together, I will know your identity. Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Study records will be kept as confidential as is possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Study information will be coded and kept in locked files at all times. Only myself as the sole researcher will have access to the files.

While there will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of hope and its relationship to positive student outcomes and the potential to develop strategies that will support international student hope at the curriculum and institutional level. There will be no costs to you as a result of taking part in this study, nor will you be reimbursed for your participation in this study. Each participant will have the opportunity to put his or her name forward in a draw. A name will be drawn on the completion of the project. The winner of the prize will receive a \$50.00 gift card from the Lethbridge College Bookstore. All participants will receive a \$10.00 gift certificate from Tim Horton's following the interviews as a thank you for taking part in the study.

**PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY.** You are free to decline to be in this study or to withdraw from the project at any point by contacting the researcher.

All participant data, photographs, audio recordings will be destroyed when the participant withdraws and their input will not be included in the study up to verification of the transcript. Thank you for your attention. If you agree to participate, please complete the attached consent form and information sheet and return it to me in the enclosed pre-addressed, pre-stamped envelope.

Thank you for considering this invitation. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact me (the principal investigatory) by email at [becky.fitzgerald@lethbridgecollege.ca](mailto:becky.fitzgerald@lethbridgecollege.ca) or by phone 403-634-7219 or my supervisor by email at [debrah@athabascau.ca](mailto:debrah@athabascau.ca) or by phone 1-866-441-5517

This study has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board and Lethbridge Colleges Ethics Review Board. Should you have any comments or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, please contact the Athabasca Office of Research Ethics via email at [rebsec@athabascau.ca](mailto:rebsec@athabascau.ca) or the Lethbridge College Ethics Review Board at [appliedresearch@lethbridgecollege.ca](mailto:appliedresearch@lethbridgecollege.ca).

Thank you for your attention. If you are ready to participate in this project, please complete and sign the attached Consent Form and return it to me in the enclosed pre-addressed, pre-stamped envelope.

Kind regards  
Rebecca Fitzgerald EdD (c) RN

**Appendix B**

**Participant Consent Form to Take Photograph**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ give permission for \_\_\_\_\_, acting on behalf of Rebecca Fitzgerald a graduate student at the Center for Distance Education at Athabasca University conducting research into International Students Experience of Hope in Asynchronous and Online Learning Communities to take my photograph. By signing my name below, I understand and agree that unless otherwise stated in writing, Rebecca Fitzgerald assumes that permission is granted to use my photographs for project related reports, exhibits and presentations that are likely to result from this project. Identifying images will be obscured or pixelated to protect my privacy. I understand that researchers, policy makers, students, and possibly people from my community will see my photo.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Participant Consent for Research Participation

#### Principal Investigator

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**Email:** [debrah@athabascau.ca](mailto:debrah@athabascau.ca)

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Mrs. Rebecca Fitzgerald, a graduate student in the Center of Distance Education at Athabasca University is conducting a study, entitled *A storied picture of hope: Using Narrative Inquiry and Photovoice to understand International Students' Experience of Hope in Asynchronous Learning Communities in Higher Education*. This investigation will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. Debra Hoven as the Doctoral Supervisor. The purpose of the project is to learn more about international students with English as a second or other language (ESOL) and their experience of hope while participating in asynchronous or online learning communities as part of their diploma or degree work at Lethbridge College. The participants in this study will work with Mrs. Rebecca Fitzgerald to create narratives of their individual experiences of hope during their participation in asynchronous learning communities and how or if hope helps provide the ability to achieve academic goals and overcome any challenges while participating in asynchronous or online learning communities. The researcher is interested in understanding what factors may affect international students' hope and if this affects their academic success and educational experience.

#### Audio Tapes

The research study involves transcribed interviews and participants will be provided with a transcript of their interview to review. Transcripts will be mailed to participants with a return prepaid envelope. Participants will be asked to return the transcripts with their comments, clarifications or withdrawals within 2 weeks of receipt.

#### Time Commitment

Participants will attend one introductory session at the beginning of the semester to provide information on the project, methodology, and photography ethics as well as a narrative interview at the end of the semester.

Each session will be 60 – 90 minutes in length. The time commitment will be approximately 4 - 4.5 hours over the semester which includes both information sessions and time to take photographs.

#### Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, the following will happen:

Participants will be asked to take photographs of what they believe either enhances or detracts from their experience of hope while participating in an asynchronous or online learning community.

1. If the participant requires a camera, the researcher will loan one to you.
2. Participants will create a narrative about their pictures that reflects their personal story and experience of hope during participation in an asynchronous or online learning community. The narrative can be attached to the photographs.
3. Participants will participate in an interview in which they will discuss their personal story and experience of hope during their participation in an asynchronous or online learning community.

#### Risks and/or Discomforts

1. It is possible that some of the questions during the interview may make you feel uncomfortable, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

2. Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Study records will be kept as confidential as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Study information will be coded and kept in locked files at all times. Only the researcher will have access to the files.

**Costs/Financial Considerations:**

There will be no costs to any participant as a result of taking part in this study.

**Incentives**

Each participant will have the opportunity to put his or her name forward in a draw. A name will be drawn on the completion of the project.

The winner of the prize will receive a \$50.00 gift card from the Lethbridge College Bookstore. All participants will receive a \$10.00 gift certificate from Tim Horton's following the interview as a thank you for taking part in the study.

**Withdrawal of Consent**

**PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY.** Participants can withdraw their participation at any time during the project by contacting the researcher. All their data, photographs, audio recordings will be destroyed when the participant withdraws and their input will not be included in the study. Participants can be asked that their data to be removed from the study up to verification of the transcript.

**Questions**

I have talked to Mrs. Rebecca Fitzgerald about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about the study, I may call her at (403 634 7291) or email [becky.fitzgerald@lethbridgecollege.ca](mailto:becky.fitzgerald@lethbridgecollege.ca).

**Consent**

I am free to decline to participate in this study or to withdraw from it at any point up to the verification of the transcript. My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

I am an international student with English as a second or other language (ESOL) studying at Lethbridge College.

Signature / Date of Participants Signature/ Date of Person Obtaining Consent

This study has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board and Lethbridge Colleges Ethics Review Board. Should you have any comments or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, please contact the Athabasca Office of Research Ethics via email at [rebsec@athabascau.ca](mailto:rebsec@athabascau.ca) or the Lethbridge College Ethics Review Board at [appliedresearch@lethbridgecollege.ca](mailto:appliedresearch@lethbridgecollege.ca).



## Appendix D

### Confidentiality Agreement for Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_ (print first and last name) understand that the information that I will read and/or hear in the audio recordings or transcripts may be of a sensitive nature. I will keep confidential any information concerning the information contained in the interview audio recording or transcript.

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### Confidentiality Agreement: For Research Participants

\_\_\_\_\_ (print first and last name) understand that the information that I will read and/or hear in the audio recordings or transcripts may be of a sensitive nature. I will keep confidential any information concerning the information contained in the interview audio recording or transcript.

Signature of Research Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix F

### CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The REB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

**Ethics File No.:** 24003

**Principal Investigator:**

Mrs. Rebecca Fitzgerald, Graduate Student  
Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences\Doctor of Education (EdD) in Distance Education

**Supervisor:**

Dr. Debra Hoven (Supervisor)

**Project Title:**

A Storied Picture of Hope: Using Narrative Photovoice to understand International Students Experience of Hope in Asynchronous Learning Communities in Higher Education

**Effective Date:** July 06, 2020

**Expiry Date:** July 05, 2021

**Restrictions:**

Any modification or amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval. Ethical approval is valid *for a period of one year*. An annual request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year. A Project Completion (Final) Report must be submitted when the research is complete (*i.e. all participant contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable)*) or the research is terminated.

**Approved by:**

**Date:** July 06, 2020

Cheryl Kier, Chair  
Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, Departmental Ethics Review Committee

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Athabasca University Research Ethics Board University  
Research Services, Research Centre  
1 University Drive, Athabasca AB Canada T9S 3A3 E-mail  
[rebsec@athabascau.ca](mailto:rebsec@athabascau.ca)  
Telephone: 780.675.6718



## Appendix G

### CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL - RENEWAL

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The REB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

**Ethics File No.:** 24003

**Principal Investigator:**

Mrs. Rebecca Fitzgerald, Graduate Student

Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences\Doctor of Education (EdD) in Distance Education

**Supervisor:**

Dr. Debra Hoven (Supervisor)

**Project Title:**

A Storied Picture of Hope: Using Narrative Photovoice to understand International Students Experience of Hope in Asynchronous Learning Communities in Higher Education

**Effective Date:** July 06, 2021

**Expiry Date:** July 05, 2022

**Restrictions:**

Any modification or amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval.

Ethical approval is valid *for a period of one year*. An annual request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year.

A Project Completion (Final) Report must be submitted when the research is complete (*i.e. all participant contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable)*) or the research is terminated.

**Approved by:**

**Date:** June 18, 2021

Carolyn Greene, Chair

Athabasca University Research Ethics Board

Athabasca University Research Ethics Board  
University Research Services, Research Centre

1 University Drive, Athabasca AB Canada T9S 3A3 E-mail  
[rebsec@athabascau.ca](mailto:rebsec@athabascau.ca)

Telephone: 780.213.2033

**Appendix H**  
**Categorization of Themes**

<b>Exercise Books</b>			
<b>Connections</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Family</b>	<b>Shared Experience</b>
Rauni - So still something I crave to do to make genuine friends for myself because I've ended up know people from other people, for me doesn't feel authentic because the only thing leading us to each other is this middle person.	<b>Cora</b> - Prior to going online, I made a good community even here in residence. Six of the families there just stay together, kids playing around and that was our community.	<b>Rauni</b> - Data connections - it just joins us together so seamlessly, to have communication for them to even see that I'm still holding on. I feel however much we are in this different million miles apart we can still sit and talk and have video conferencing even with the extended family and they can just see you.	Tai - One thing that gave me hopes are my friends because they had gone through the same and they were now in a better place.
<b>Rauni</b> - I had some experience of normal before all this happened, so I did make a few friends.	<b>Cora</b> - We have help with one of the neighbors here and that maybe if I need to leave or go work and my husband is not here yet, maybe she will stay with the kids for a few minutes.	<b>Mary</b> - My family make the whole difference. My family – that is why I don't close myself to negativity and weakness – so they give me strength. (crying about loss of project work).	Tai - The other things with friends, it's not like we were friends before in Kenya, I just know they're coming from different places in our country, but I have never met them before. So, it's like meeting new people but at least they're speaking the same language. They understand you more because they went through the same thing you're going through It is easier for me to make friends with them than making friends with Canadians.
<b>Ami</b> - I got to meet a friend through a friend and it helps a lot. Like we studied together for an exam and its awesome. Then I also met other people through her	<b>Jon</b> - He asked me where I am staying and I tell him I have no place to stay, so he gave me the job	<b>Rauni</b> - Family would encourage my hope something tangible, those I can hold on to I can hug, I can talk to. It just keeps me up with the new stuff going on that I have to deal with.	Ami - know I have a support system and I felt like I belong. I have people that love me and also to give the love back. That really helps me because I feel like I am not alone and the people around me can help me.

Exercise Books			
Connections	Community	Family	Shared Experience
<p><b>Rauni</b> - Currently I have a few friends around and I am happy and blessed to have them.</p>	<p><b>Rauni</b> - the student encourage my hope, seeing everyone there every morning and we are cheering each other up, even got a chance that when the semester got hard, we would contact and people would wake you up, you know, what do you want? Are you coming to class? Do you need me to study harder for you today? A like, help with what you missed. So yes, they do give me hope and the fact that we're seeing them still holding on giving me a courage to hold on myself We're gonna make it through.</p>	<p><b>Advir</b> - A lot of people here are always worried about, I need to pay rent, I need to pay for this and that. I am lucky I live with my uncle</p>	<p><b>Tai</b> - After my first year here, I decided to do the application for my siblings to come over after one year my brother got a study visa and my sister here for a work visa. I am so happy and proud of myself to have them here with me</p>
<p><b>Rauni</b> - Talking to friends and family, seeing them on video, chat, face time. This just resonated with my day-to-day life.</p>	<p><b>Jon</b> - something that will be forever with me in my whole life. I'll tell my kids even though I make it her there are good people here I want to keep doing the same thing he has done to me. Because I know.</p>	<p><b>Rauni</b> - Before I left home, I carried some exercise books to school, and I have never used it. I have kept the book because, it keeps me holding on to what I live by and what I have. What I have grown up with.</p>	<p><b>Ami</b> - With face to face I am close to the person teaching me. Me particularly I need the presence of the person just to see the person face to face and like see the person do things in class, it makes me engage more.</p>

Exercise Books			
Connections	Community	Family	Shared Experience
<p><b>Jon</b> - My dad called and thanks him a lot. We grew up with nothing and he never had the money to support me but that light you know you have been the light in my son's life.</p>	<p><b>Rauni</b> - Online virtual learning is also a sense of hope that we can all work together in this, we're learning the same thing. We're in the same class, we're seeing each other, night not be seeing each other but you know, there's somebody behind that screen and we're together in this.</p>		
<p><b>Rauni</b> - Being here and knowing how to hold on to what brought me here. Getting to talk to family, every so often. It just gives you purpose and reminds you, there's people who are waiting for you back there, there's people who have hope in your in doing and what they sent you there.</p>	<p><b>Rauni</b> - However, much it feels so long. We sure will finish school, you might not meet out there, but we will work in the same workspace, work environment, and have the same learning experience, just from different avenues.</p>		
<p><b>Rauni</b> - Keeping in touch with my friends in Canada, Even the small things like sending a chat like one morning or a snap. It really helps. It keeps us all up. I'm hopeful someday I'm gonna get to see them.</p>			

Exercise Books			
Connections	Community	Family	Shared Experience
<p><b>Rauni</b> - Canadians are quite friendly and very open to even however much people might not be genuine, they are friendly and open, and welcoming.</p>			
<p><b>Tai</b> - I just made friends from my own country. The first time I made a Canadian friend was after 1 year. I met some at work and some at school.</p>			
<p><b>Tai</b> - My friends tell me to just work hard so I did work hard hoping that one day I'll be good.</p>			
<p><b>Advir</b> - I am really lucky because I have family here and they are here to guide me and I didn't feel alone even from the first day. It's important that you have somebody.</p>			



Exercise Books			
Connections	Community	Shared	Shared Experience
<p><b>Jon</b> - So I've been a lucky person to meet this man and he has been the light in my life. He helped me sometimes when I don't have money to complete my tuition fees in school and pay for the rest. There are always different people who can be the light in your life.</p>			
<p><b>Ami</b> - With face to face I am close to the person teaching me. Me particularly I need the presence of the person just to see the person face to face and like see the person do things in class, it makes me engage more</p>			
<p><b>Jon</b> - I did learn different things, different skills, and the online classes with the discussion. I believe that discussion really helped changed me, makes me research, the engagement solving a topic.</p>			

## Encouragers of Hope Themes 3 and 4

## A New Day

Dreams	Believing	Teacher Presence	Belonging
<p><b>Mary</b> - I like to wake up and be grateful for having one more opportunity to live the life I have chosen.</p>	<p><b>Tai</b> - I kept pushing harder trusting and believing that one day everything will be okay. I knew a day would come and I will also see light in the midst of the forest.</p>	<p><b>Cora</b> – I like her classes; she is very supportive. She has been helping me transition to online a process and she’s been very helpful.</p>	<p><b>Rauni</b> - I want direct connection with someone. So, I am still trying to find people.</p>
<p><b>Jon</b> - I go to the window and I look, and I say, Jon someday you’re going to become a Canadian citizen, you will be free. I see it as freedom. Facing of depression and being lonely but at the end there’s always joy, there’s s always a dream that you will always achieve. I never believe I can go to school and finish school. College is gonna be a big relief for me that you know my dream come true. This picture reminds me that no matter where you are from, no matter where you come from, this country is always going to help you achieve your dream, that we can always do that we come here to do. Anyone can be less privileged becoming what they want.</p>	<p><b>Advir</b> - One important thing that I felt that made me hopeful is that no matter what happens, humans always find their way around. And everybody in this COVID situation, all the instructors, and the students were trying their best to make these things normalize and keep the flow going. Obviously, there are always ups and downs, but it is interesting to see what humans can do in the face of adversity.</p>	<p><b>Cora</b> - Instructors stay after class to answer questions.</p>	<p><b>Rauni</b> - I haven’t met people who don’t appreciate where I am from yet. They ask questions try to embrace my culture like[ my hair. So, can you do that to my hair. Even small things like where I used to work, last time you brought this in and I tasted it, can you make it next time and then bring me some for myself where I don’t’ have to taste yours and make you feel like I deprived you of your break food.</p>

A New Day			
Dreams	Believing	Teacher Presence	Belonging
<p><b>Jon</b> - The road carries me on the journey, and I feel I might get there soon.</p>	<p><b>Ami</b> - When I look at my stethoscope, I see life, I see hope knowing that all the effort and struggle of learning during a pandemic will pay off in the future. I will become a nurse and will have my desires, and everything will go back to normal. This picture shows hope to me as it is one of the goals I work towards. When I sit in my room and I feel sad, or we locked down so we can't do anything. I just look at my stethoscope just like, this is the final goal. At the end of my studies I get to practice nursing every day.</p>	<p><b>Mary</b> - Last year I had classes at 8 am and my kids went to school at 830 so they let me record the class without me being there. They were aware of the situation and I would have had to drop off the class as it interferes with my personal schedule. They helped me to find a way that I could take the class farther in the day when I have time. This was really helpful to me</p>	<p><b>Cora</b> - In my case I had the opportunity to have amazing people around me. I mean, it doesn't matter. They are Canadians or international ones, but we mix together. We don't say oh you're from Canada and I'm from outside Canada. I mean we are classmates.</p>
<p><b>Jon</b> - This picture reminds me no matter how dark it will be, the sun always gives light to everyone. I wake up and look at the sun it gives me a big hope of living in this country. I feel like I am standing in the light looking at the light to help me. It makes me feel I can get some things that other people are getting. I want to reach a certain place; I want to get my permanent residency because this is my dream.</p>	<p><b>Mary</b> - someday will be a river again and you will flow with your environment.</p>	<p><b>Rauni</b> - At the same time instructors do encourage my hope. Because being virtually some of them just tell us, they can feel how hard it is.</p>	<p><b>Jon</b> - Different people can also be the light in our life. My boss who supported me and welcomed me through my challenges and mad me a part of his family, gave me hope. He has been a light in my life.</p>

A New Day			
Dreams	Believing	Teacher Presence	Belonging
<p><b>Jon</b> - Being able to express myself here gives me freedom.</p>	<p><b>Tai</b> - After working hard, I have hope that I will get it. I have hopes I will complete school and graduate soon.</p>	<p><b>Cora:</b> is the communication I have with one of my teachers, she is really supportive, and we can just go ahead and send them a message.</p>	<p><b>Cora</b> -When my instructor is not available, I have the help of my classmates, this is a conversation that I had with one of my classmates. I was kind of crazy with this assignment, and he just helped me when we could just go ahead and share a screen, we can do chat, just go in and send files. He really helped me a lot. He was a Canadian student. He helped me and encouraged me just to keep going.</p>
<p>Rauni - The Acacia tree is as sturdy as it looks, it stands and is strong, and it gives me hope that at the top its leaves are green but, on the bottom, it is still dry Savanna. Shows me a sense of support I have, that will always be by me with all that I do. All this diverse systems that are working in support of just my education, just give me a hope that there's people who are willing to give you a push and to give you a reason to continue going. I didn't want to wake up this morning. But you have to read this email, you have to respond to it. You have to reach out and get some help for yourself because it's there for you.</p>	<p>Zena - like accounting so even when I feel stuck, I know I can do it. Believing this is possible makes you feel better, the hope that you can do something that will be better that even if you feel stuck after you just take a brief break and you know it can be better.</p>		<p><b>Tai</b> - At least after sacrificing for some years I have hopes I will complete school and graduate soon.</p>

A New Day			
Dreams	Believing	Teacher Presence	Belonging
<p>Rauni - Spring is just around the corner – Sandals are dear to me and they represent culture and being at home. Looking at them I know spring and summer are gonna come along with the tiny trees blooming. They are dear to me and make me think about the hustle and how much was done before in my quest to reach for this dream to travel and new opportunities that I might choose to explore. So, it brings a whole brightness in my brain, in my heart, that spring is gonna come and these sandals remind me of that. It keeps me going because however cold and harsh, it might get, how hard studies might get, there's a hope that spring is just gonna come, if you wait, its gonna bloom someday</p>	<p><b>Tai</b> - I kept pushing harder trusting and believing that one day everything will be OK.</p>		
<p>Mary - I like to wake up and be grateful for having one more opportunity to live the life I have chosen. Even if it means I start all over again. There might be a storm, it might be sunny, might be cold, or hot. Wind may blow intensely, or it may be really calm. But after a while the day will be over, and a new sunrise will come out.</p>	<p>Tai - After working hard, I have hope that I will get it. I have hopes I will complete school and graduate soon.</p>		

<b>A New Day</b>			
<b>Dreams</b>	<b>Believing</b>	<b>Teacher Presence</b>	<b>Belonging</b>
Mary - So, every morning at the college we see the sunrise and it is very significant for me. It's like okay it's a new day.			
Mary - Forget what you did yesterday, forget it was too cold, forget if it was too windy, today is beautiful and the sun is rising again. It's a new day and every day is one day closer to someday going back to Mexico to visit and every day is one more opportunity for us. So just wait for next year, we wait for the next day. A better day/poetic fallacy/personification			
Advir - But then I am hopeful for a better day. If I'm sad and I try to think that I will have a better day. And I'll be like, I am doing this, it's gonna help me in the future.			

A New Day			
Dreams	Teacher Presence	Belonging	Believing
Zena - All the beautiful shapes and joy of nature makes me feel certain that everything will be fine. I think this is like the hope that everything will fine after all of this stuff we are going in right now. So I know everything will be fine it doesn't matter if it is for the college or a personal life or professional life, I think after that, I don't know if it will be a year or two years but I know everything will be fine.			
Advir – So, no matter what happens there is always a new day that begins, no matter how bad things are, no matter anything, there's always a new day that has to come. And you know it will bring something good.			
Jon - It brings me a light and that's a sign of hope that my journey is going to be shined by light which can lead me to my destination.			
Rauni - So, I look at my Maasai sandals and they resonate with my life because it keeps me going. So much hard things might feel a spring to wait, it's just gonna bloom someday.			

### Barriers to Hope Themes 1 and 2

#### Don't Look Down

Struggle	Inequity	Discouragement	Racism
<p><b>Mary</b> - I am pushing myself hard every day and some days I just can't do it anymore</p>	<p><b>Advir</b> - I see people not eating for days because they don't have money. They just go hungry for days and then they go to any shop and they literally start begging the owner to give them a job. Some businessmen are taking advantage of this. They will give me \$10.00 an hour and that person will be happy to take it and he won't say minimum pay is \$15.00 an hour. That person is just happy that he's given him a job</p>	<p><b>Zena</b> - Walking in circles and couldn't see the mistake. So I think that if I had a colleague I could ask</p>	<p><b>Advir</b> - Lots of people are nice here but some people they look at you and make such a bad face</p>
<p><b>Mary</b> - So, I was Ok don't look at the big picture, the big picture of what was in Mexico and all the process that you have to go through to be here because it's devastating, it is really tiring.</p>	<p><b>Advir</b> - The government has its own reasons but everything for international students is very restricted. The same course I am taking the local people, they take one semester for them it is \$2500. to \$ 3000. The same semester for me is \$9000. To 10,000. That's a pretty big gap</p>	<p><b>Zena</b> - asked us for the theory, and we did not study for that. If he wants us to know something, he should teach us that</p>	<p><b>Tai</b> - I was in the same group as some Canadian students. And most of them just didn't take our ideas</p>
<p><b>Mary</b> - Oh my God I have reorganized my whole life again because my schedules are different all the time</p>	<p><b>Mary</b> - So it is a war between keeping a balance</p>	<p><b>Zena</b> - When I was in Brazil, I was the best student in class and here I'm not always enough, I'm like in the middle</p>	<p><b>Mary</b> - When I was at university in Mexico there were students from other cities, and I tried to help them, and I guess I was expecting that here. Yeah but of course that didn't happen.</p>



<b>Don't Look Down</b>			
<b>Struggle</b>	<b>Inequity</b>	<b>Discouragement</b>	<b>Racism</b>
<b>Ami</b> - The effort and struggle of learning	<b>Jon</b> - Begged for employment and offered to work for free to prove himself. Got hired "I was a boy from the streets who is in the office right now.	<b>Cora</b> - I just get my head in my hands. I think everything is difficult	<b>Advir</b> - People from Alberta feel they are the best and no one else can match up.
<b>Rauni</b> - We came here to struggle just make it work.	<b>Jon</b> - Most of the people have spent their family fortune just to come to this country because they feel like they will have a better future here and they don't have anything left any more.	<b>Jon</b> - Leaving our home country coming to here we need help because I wasn't fine because I came here, and I started feeling depression and you know loneliness	<b>Jon</b> - You come to class and people don't want to work with you people don't want to communicate with you because you're from a different country. It makes me feel I'm in this cage
<b>Tai</b> - Before I came, I knew some friends who were already here they can't tell you the struggles and the hard life they have to go through.			<b>Tai</b> - Some Canadians, you can sit with them, but they don't want to talk to you. No one wanted to take my ideas
<b>Rauni</b> - Whatever perception you have in your brain coming to Canada, it might flip, it might change and just expect the other side of the coin. It will not always be a bed of roses and even roses have thorns so just be anticipating that			<b>Advir</b> - I've felt people are getting discouraged that one person will just say something and the person will be like oh my goodness, you know he doesn't even like me for no reason

Don't Look Down			
Struggle	Inequity	Discouragement	Racism
<b>Tai</b> - I had friends from India telling me they didn't know how to use a computer and now you are supposed to use it. It was challenging for them.			<b>Tai</b> - You try to make them understand you by using other words that mean the same. You get frustrated and very disappointed
<b>Advir</b> - We have a lot of software that we use, we have a lot of practical work. It was kind of difficult to do that online.			
<b>Mary</b> - They won't suffer what I am suffering at college.			
<b>Ami</b> - I had to take two semesters of English when I arrived – very challenging - first language is French.			
<b>Advir</b> - The online thing we didn't expect, and it is quite a bit challenging for us.			
<b>Jon</b> - It is really hard because you are watching it online, you are not doing it practically			
<b>Cora</b> - Sometimes I am kind of crazy because I have now a part time job.			

## Barriers to Hope Themes 3 and 4

## A Dark Road

Loneliness	Loss	Isolation	Sorrow
<b>Jon</b> - Me standing in the lights, looking at the lights to help me. Facing of depression and being lonely.	<b>Tai</b> - I was going to see them before the 5 years elapse	<b>Jon</b> - I arrived in Canada at the airport and I had nowhere to go and no one to call – Called a taxi to go to the university and slept there that night - if you don't go to school there is no way you can survive in Nigeria.	<b>Ami</b> - I feel sad, we are locked down and can't do anything
<b>Mary</b> - They are just very comfortable where they are but it makes me feel very lonely because it makes me realize no one is going to do what you do.	<b>Tai</b> - Living far away from my family for the first time was not easy for me.	<b>Rauni</b> -I didn't get the opportunity to become the social me.	<b>Zena</b> - They should see the material that teachers are giving to us because I think he does not care about us.
	<b>Ami</b> - On zoom I can't see my people.	<b>Ami</b> - An empty classroom makes me feel lonely and sad.	<b>Rauni</b> - The teacher said something that always hurts me today What do you mean you can't get a textbook, what did you come to school to do.
<b>Jon</b> - I appreciate what the college is doing for us but still the world is so lonely.	<b>Rauni</b> - The time I ever get to travel and get to see stuff back at home again, it may be gone.	<b>Ami</b> - The mask puts distance between people and people don't interact.	<b>Mary</b> - So here in Canada I tried to find a middle spot to where to belong. And I just couldn't.
<b>Advir</b> – I would say it is hard to make Canadian friends. In Canada everyone's mentality is more for every person on his own.	<b>Rauni</b> - So, seeing that on a regular basis and women with a basket walking down in the village and all these colours going on vibrant colours and embracing traditional such differences that I don't get to visually embrace as I used.	<b>Advir</b> - If they are not visible, they don't care, they're not even listening. They're sitting somewhere else.	<b>Jon</b> - We put our future at risk, we put in everything here; leaving everything to come here and study and be in society.

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<p><b>Jon</b> – I wanted to use the picture with snow as it represents that no matter what there is hope from different people along the way. The white snow falls, down along the road trying to show you direction and it gives me hope to keep working along the dark road. No matter how dark the white snow keeps falling down trying to show you the direction. I can stand on the road; I can seek people for help. It just represents hope that keep working that I'm still with you on this white snow and it gives me hope.</p>	<p><b>Tai</b> - I was not going to see my family for the next five years because of the time period of my study visa.</p>	<p><b>Advir</b> - What life am I living?</p>	<p><b>Zena</b> - Even watching the videos, I am not learning from him. So, I don't feel hope in this class.</p>
<p><b>Jon</b> - The road never ends you know.</p>	<p><b>Tai</b> - In my country I had joined the university and I was in my second year doing nursing - The issue is I wanted to do nursing and not any other program. I took the TRG program offer and I joined because it was not going to take long before completing the program.</p>	<p><b>Ami</b> - They had to cancel our lab - this lab was a full practice. Online reduced my opportunities to practice</p>	<p><b>Zena</b> - I cannot email him because I think if I send an email, he doesn't care about us right now he will make my life harder than it is.</p>

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	<p><b>Advir</b> - It's really different here. In India my social life was different, and it was really difficult to leave all the social life and fun.</p>	<p><b>Advir</b> - I think it is a Canadian cultural think where people tend to stay more isolated. At home you never see anyone alone. This COVID thing made everything worse, made social life even worse, you not seeing anyone face to face. How do you expect to talk to them, so it's kind of depressing?</p>	<p><b>Zena</b> - The teacher who's supposed to make videos for us doesn't. It was not made for the Lethbridge College student – it was made for everybody. I feel very frustrated.</p>
	<p><b>Mary</b> - Every time I remember saying no to my family, saying no to my dream house saying no to my friends So it was very hard for me.</p>	<p><b>Advir</b> - At home you never see anyone alone. It was hard to adjust to that kind of culture here you miss my family you miss the food or your traditions.</p>	<p><b>Mary</b> - Sad to be online no time with other people.</p>
	<p><b>Tai</b> - It was very hard to adapt living on my own and not seeing them. It was really hard for me because I was missing my family.</p>		
	<p><b>Tai</b> - Living far away from my family was not easy for me.</p>		