

# MASTER OF EDUCATION THESIS DEFENSE

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**Mon. November 21, 2011, 4:00 p.m.**

Location: Memorial Hall, Room 417

## **Feeling Our Way in the Dark: Educational Directions for Students from Refugee Backgrounds**

### **ABSTRACT**

This study explored teaching and learning for youth from refugee backgrounds in Prince Edward Island (PEI) schools. Policies and guidelines pertaining to both immigrant and refugee youth were analyzed to determine what teaching practices and policies exist across Canada. Seven PEI teachers who taught refugee youth were interviewed to learn about their teaching triumphs and challenges. Observations were conducted for six hours in two grade nine classes in order to further explore teaching strategies for students from refugee backgrounds. The study also included student journals by seven youth from refugee backgrounds attending intermediate and high schools in PEI. The data were analyzed, compared and contrasted. The data reveal that both students and teachers agree that a main challenge faced by refugee youth is language proficiency. However, the findings also confirm that the challenges go beyond language acquisition. Since students from refugee backgrounds may have experienced trauma and interruptions in education, it was found there needs to be improvements in services available to these students such as counseling, one-on-one support, teacher training, and school inclusion practices. Marginalization and exclusion exist in the schools these youth attended.

Teachers also expressed the need for better preparation at the university level and more ongoing professional development related to areas such as teaching basic reading and working with students who have experienced trauma. Practical implications are discussed in relation to current research literature. The study leads naturally to specific recommendations in policy and practice for teaching youth from refugee backgrounds.