

UNCERTAINTY AND COLOMBIAN IMMIGRANTS' ENCOUNTERS WITH THE FOREIGN
CREDENTIAL ASSESSMENT SYSTEM IN LONDON, ONTARIO

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Abstract

My research examines the experiences of Colombian immigrants, who have settled in London, Ontario, in negotiating professional qualifications and aspirations in Canada, as well as the subsequent impact to their family unit's spatial integration and their individual identities. The study specifically assesses how educated Colombian immigrants were able to attain the accreditation necessary for employment in their professions and what were their experiences in doing so? Participants' journeys demonstrate a gap in cultural education in workplace practice and reveal a need to attend to the relationship between local contexts, professional identities, and workplace ethics to ameliorate the issues in accreditation that plague the Ontarian socio-economy. Participants and their families demonstrate diverse capacities to cope with the demands and adverse effects of accreditation. Participants confront challenges with steadfast determination and tenaciously seize every opportunity available to them. The testimonies of participants are of undeniable value to shape the approach to immigration policy and program development. To construct a comprehensive story of credentialing and capture the diverse narratives of Colombian immigrants, participants partook in either or both the focus group and semi-structured interviews, which proved fruitful methods for the sharing of stories. In the end, I successfully gathered 15 participants for 2 focus groups. My study sought to share knowledge among and with participants with an overarching goal of returning some of the autonomy that has been eroded by participants' credentialing experiences in Canada. Participants generously shared their experiences.

Dedication

For God, who opened door after door for my family to reside in Canada. He was my strength through the challenges of the past and continues to be my strength for what is to come.

For the participants, whose courage will leave you in awe.

For my parents, whom I saw fragments of in every participant's experience and felt reflected their sacrifice, devotion, and love so that my brother and I lack no opportunity.

For the children who arrived as immigrants and for the children of immigrants who tread society with one foot in one culture and one in the other, carrying the weight of these sacrifices.

For those with stories yet to be heard, and those who experience daily life not fully understood, your courage will create endless opportunities for generations to come.

I hope you see fragments of your journey here too.

“Consistency, courage, discipline, faith... and knowing that you are capable. I haven’t been to church in a while, but I have faith in God here.” (Hector interview, 2023)

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Colombian Immigrants Encounters with the Foreign Credential Assessment System in London, Ontario

“You meet people that have fought in such an incredible way with stories you could write books about. The storytelling has been fabulous. You find people that have been through the same things you’ve been through, or that they go through at their own price. Each journey has its own flavour. That’s one of the most delicious things about this journey... if someone were to ask me if they should come, I would say yes. If you ask my wife, she’d say no” (Hector interview, 2023).

Introduction

My research examines the experiences of Colombian immigrants who have settled in London, Ontario in their professional credentialing journeys. Fleeing insecurity in their country of origin, many Colombians find themselves negotiating their professional qualifications and professional aspirations in Canada. The objectives of my research are: 1) to document the experiences of Colombian immigrants who have navigated or are currently navigating the foreign credential assessment (FCA) process in their respective regulated professions (notably medicine, dentistry, engineering, veterinarian and accounting); 2) to understand the spatial negotiations faced by Colombians as their international training is verified; and 3) to evaluate the impacts of their experiences with the FCA on participants’ identities, taking account of their efforts to work in diverse accredited professions.

As a pluralistic society, Canada relies on the inclusion of diverse national groups, and public approval for Canadian immigration is often based on the successful economic, social, and political integration of immigrants (Bloemraad, 2012). In this context, it is important to gauge the factors driving immigrant inclusion since it is an integral component of Canada's self and world image and contributes to increasing positive perceptions of migrants and Canada's appeal to qualified professionals worldwide. Immigrants are sometimes unable to attain professional recognition in Canada despite the skills, knowledge, and professional credentials acquired in their home countries and the potential for their skills and qualifications to fill labor market gaps. Currently, a misalignment seems to exist between the foreign credential assessment system in Canada and the labour market, with labour shortages in various economic sectors and across numerous professions. The Ontario labour shortage was estimated at 230,000 workers in October 2020. One year later, this number increased to 316,000 (Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, 2021; Alhmidi, 2021) leading Minister Monte McNaughton to comment on the injustice of the fact that only 25% of immigrants in Ontario work in the professional fields for which they were qualified in their home countries. Monty claimed that failure to integrate immigrant professionals was costing the economy "\$20B every year for the next five years", while immigrants are simultaneously "not meeting their full potential" (cited in The Cable Public Affairs Channel, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic heightened the urgency of enabling migrant professionals to become accredited with calls to reform the foreign accreditation processes for several professions. Indeed, adjustments to foreign credential accreditation processes during the pandemic demonstrated how migrant professionals could reduce shortages in the Ontario labour market.

There is evidence of systemic racism (George, Boyd, Hawthorne, and Triadafilopoulos (2013, 2014) in different parts of the accreditation process, such as the language requirements, the points system, and the demands for Canadian experience. Despite Minister McNaughton's (2021) bill prohibiting Canadian experience as a requirement for accreditation in Ontario, the Provincial Nominee Program in Ontario (PNP) – a program targeting specific skills and experience – shows an increase in the share of provincial nominees who had pre-landing Canadian earnings (from 6% in 2002, to 61% in 2019, and 72% in 2021) and study experience (from 7% in 2010, to 38% in 2019) (Picot, Hou, and Crossman, 2023). Many of the criteria required for accreditation of foreign professionals differentiate the worker in the professional space. For this research, the term professional space will be used as it captures more than just the profession as an occupation requiring extensive education and training. It casts a wider net

to include the places where people practice, the practice of the occupation, the training, the processes to integrate into the profession, the professional norms of the field in Canada, and anything related to the space of what it means to be a professional.

Londombia: The Intersection of Location and Demographics

Research into the Colombian community, the second largest Latin American population in Canada (Statistics Canada 2016), provides insights into an important sliver of the broader Latin American community.¹ Most Colombians migrated to Canada between 1995 to 2012 with a peak in 2006 when around 6,500 Colombians entered as permanent residents (Mata, 2021). The biggest push factors for Colombian emigration have been the violence and poverty caused by the armed conflict, drug trafficking, and larger macroeconomic interests linked to the conflict (Alcala, 2008). Since 1999 the number of refugees has grown steadily and between 1997 and 2004, Colombia went from the eleventh to the second largest country of origin of immigrants from the Americas (Alcala, 2008). Despite 48% of the Colombian immigrant intake gaining entry as refugees followed by 36% as economic and 16% as family class immigrants, Colombians comprise the second most highly educated group of Latin American immigrants. Only Venezuelan immigrants have higher levels of educational attainment.

The largest concentration of Colombian immigrants, 42% of those who arrived between 1981 and 2016, lives in Ontario (Mata 2021). Within Ontario, the Toronto Metropolitan Area is home to one in four of those who settled in Canada from 1981 to 2016 (Mata, 2021). Another concentration of Colombians has emerged in London, Ontario, a city of 404,000 people that has been nicknamed Londombia (London Heritage Council, 2023). London's southern location in Canada attracts Colombians since it ameliorates some of the challenges to climate adaptation. Participants in this study praise London's urban size and the planning that has created an urban environment that they deem perfect for families, alleviating the more burdensome features of larger cities like Bogotá and Toronto. These reasons help us understand London's desirable reputation among Colombians across Canada and overseas. London is familiar enough as a

¹ Latin Americans are largely underrepresented in research in comparison to other racialized or migrant groups. Colombians are not discussed much in the Canadian immigration literature, despite the fact that between 1965 and 2015, Colombians represented 16% of all immigrants admitted from Latin America, the largest group from a single national origin (Mata, 2021); these are seemingly the most recent statistics about the demographic in Toronto, which speaks to the visibility of the community in literature.

larger city, but not so large to encounter the concerns with safety, the high cost of living, and congestion that immigrants faced in Bogotá, the largest city and capital of Colombia with 11.5 million citizens (Macrotrends, 2023).

There is, however, a tension in medium-sized cities such as London that need professionals but have labour markets that immigrant professionals find hard to access. According to Veronis (2010), Latin Americans in Toronto have low levels of income, high rates of high school dropouts, and are amongst the most politically underrepresented groups. In 2015, Latin American men averaged wages of \$1,160 a week and women earned \$1,000 on average, placing them in the lowest earnings bracket (Qiu & Schellenberg, 2022). Among employed Colombians, 68% of men have an education beyond high school (23% with post-secondary or trades certification, and 37% with a university degree) and 79% of females have an education beyond high school (34% with post-secondary or trades certification, and 45% with a university degree) (Mata, 2021). The key questions that arise and motivate my research are how educated Colombian immigrants settled in London, Ontario were able to attain the accreditation necessary for employment in their professions and what were their experiences in doing so?

Foreign Credential Accreditation Process

Foreign credential accreditation refers to the entire process that immigrants engage with in pursuit of Canadian recognition of their professional credentials and experience. The case study focuses on skilled immigrants who may be admitted under the economic, family, or refugee classes, and may enter as a principal applicant or the dependent of a principal applicant (e.g., spouse). Moreover, not all skilled workers are in regulated professions that require accreditation. For my research, the term ‘credentialing’ refers to the process of establishing professional qualifications in Ontario as per the powers vested in the regulatory bodies of each profession or labour sector by the Canadian government. My research engages with Colombian individuals who are in the process of obtaining or have obtained their permanent residency and are currently going through the accreditation process in Ontario.

In addition to providing insight into foreign credential accreditation, the COVID-19 pandemic inevitably influences the context for my research as it highlighted tensions among job vacancies in the Ontario labour market, provincial and national accreditation processes, and the broader political paradigm affecting credentialing challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic amplified gaps in the labour market. Ontario’s Labour Minister Monte McNaughton recently confirmed that the

pandemic increased labour shortages. He suggested that doubling the number of professional immigrants admitted through provincial pathways was one solution to labour shortages in various industries, that include 38,000 jobs in health care, 29,000 in food services, 24,000 in manufacturing, and 21,000 in construction (cited in Alhmidi, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic drew attention to labour shortages in health professions, the need to improve accreditation practice, and successful strategies to facilitate accreditation such as temporary licensing pathways that did not compromise professional standards and enabled the rapid integration of qualified foreign professionals into health professions (Rizvic, 2020). In the first year of the pandemic, over 1,200 international medical graduates (IMGs) were competing for 325 residency positions, illustrating the scale of the accreditation challenge (Gutman, 2021).

Current labour shortages, however, predate the pandemic, and they can be understood partly as a result of the accreditation system. A 2020 report from the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities, states that while there is a mismatch between available skills of current graduates and the skills required by employers, there is evidence of significant devaluation of immigrants' experience and credentials through underemployment and reduced wages (The Research Initiative, Education, and Skills, 2020). Hou, Lu, and Schimmele (2019) reported demand for university educated workers is weaker relative to the supply partially as a result of significant structural shifts in the economy away from knowledge-based industries. Yet, amendments to the criteria for the Provincial Nominee Program are seeking higher levels of education (Statistics Canada, 2023). Research shows that there has been active recruitment of high-skilled professionals to fill lower-skilled positions in their fields due to the profound labour needs brought about by the ageing labour force (Reitz, 2013). The mismatch between immigrants' skills and labour shortages in lower-skilled positions serves to screen for the ideal immigrant, whereby professionals' human capital signifies a higher-class other who is deemed more likely to contribute socially and economically to the receiving society (Reitz, 2013). These findings provide some insight into labour market mechanisms and how they are intertwined with the credential accreditation system, impacting immigrants' integration into the labour market, employers and the Ontario economy writ large.

Research Design and Methodology

My positionality as a researcher is foundational to my study. As a Colombian immigrant dependent in a denied asylum claim and a successful claim through Ontario's skilled workers

program, I understand and empathise with my participants as individuals and as part of households whose identities, social and civic participation, and livelihoods have been influenced by foreign credential accreditation processes. I experienced the devaluing of my high school credentials from Colombia to Canada, having to argue for their validity with the support of my family. I can therefore relate with participants about their experiences because of my own experiences, and my own attachment to, involvement in, and sense of belonging to the Colombian communities in London where my family has lived for 15 years. I am also fluent in both Spanish and English.

In addition to sharing knowledge among and with participants, my overarching goal is to return some of the autonomy that has been eroded by participants' experiences as professionals immigrating to Canada. Creese (2011) argues that marginalized social locations provide a form of epistemic privilege that allows us to make sense of the social world. As a child who grew up observing, hearing, and seeing the marginalized social locations of friends and family, I have been studying the world from this position and I understand participants' marginal social location. Based on my personal experience, I am convinced that the family unit, storytelling, and London community location are essential components for mapping participants' accreditation experiences. This research is my tool to make the stories of Colombian immigrants reach beyond the immigrant community.

Research Methodology: Collection, analysis, and interpretation of the narratives of my participants (gathered through focus groups and semi-structured interviews) inform my interpretive theory building through a grounded theory approach (Girard and Bauder, 2007). A thematic analysis was conducted to capture the recurring themes in participants' responses and to recount participants' experiences over time. A narrative analysis was used to assemble the stories in the first section, where the stories were kept temporally intact to draw attention to participants' accreditation plots (Bischoping, 2023). A thematic analysis identified commonalities and differences in participants' experiences (Bischoping, 2023).

To construct a comprehensive story of credentialing, I designed the study to be as inclusive as possible to capture diverse narratives of Colombian immigrants. The focus group and semi-structured interviews proved fruitful methods for the sharing of stories. I initially reached out to personal contacts in the Colombian community in London to connect with individuals meeting my selection criteria, and then, relied on a purposive method through referral for additional participants. Some participants are currently going through the accreditation process, others

successfully completed it, while some dropped accreditation to move into different professions (see Tables 1, 2, and 3 in the appendix for detailed information about the participants).² There is no immediacy in selecting a particular sector as macro-conditions³ such as the pandemic and labour shortages have affected and altered many occupations in Ontario, encouraging shifts in regulations and immigration pathways.

Prospective participants requested more information about my research, and I forwarded the flyer created for distribution to other professionals in their social circles. Through word of mouth, I was told of a Facebook group called, “Latinos en London Ontario” where I posted the flyer and obtained instant interest. The interest was so great that I had a pool of participants scheduled for interviews within two weeks. I had to turn away interested participants, while still accommodating a few extra people in case of last-minute cancellations. In the end, I successfully gathered 15 participants for 2 focus groups. Some participants who balanced two or more jobs were accommodated in phone interviews. I conducted 4 in-depth interviews with participants from the focus groups and 4 in-depth interviews with Colombian immigrants who had not participated in the focus group as their experiences were particularly interesting. Both focus group and interview formats enabled the discussion to flow smoothly from question to question in a conversational style. All participants engaged me in conversation, asking about the research outcomes concerning accreditation and family integration in Ontario after the interviews ended and recording stopped.

Thirteen participants who represented eight different professions are included in this study: Francisco (medical doctor), Eliana (physiotherapist); Ana and Camila (dentists), Miguel and Victoria (teachers) Valentina and David (accountants), Reinaldo (veterinarian), Mariana (registered nurse), and Gabriel, Hector, and Lucia (engineers). Information about one focus

² Participants are listed per focus group and information is provided about gender, age at the time of the study, arrival year and arrival status, English proficiency upon arrival, profession in Colombia, accreditation process status to date; education pathway they pursued in Canada, current job title, and whether or not they are a spouse or a parent at the time of arrival and at the time of this study.

³ The term macro-conditions can be used to describe the broader context and the conditions of that environment where micro-processes, like accreditation, operate. Pandemic urgency is an example as the COVID-19 pandemic was a macro-condition that altered various aspects of the Canadian environment, such as the health sector and the labour market and impacted accreditation processes.

group participant and one in-depth interview participant produced data was not used because they did not have credentials that would have transferred to regulated professions in Ontario.⁴

In the focus groups and in-depth interviews, I asked for permission to audio record. I let participants know that the primary method of interaction was English for the purposes of transcription, but Spanish was also welcome because it was of the utmost importance that participants freely and comfortably express their stories in as much detail as possible. People who solely participated in the in-depth interview ended up switching to Spanish during the interview, while those in the focus group only switched languages to substitute words or complete sentences when they were at a loss for words in English. Participants in the in-depth interviews conveyed their experiences more comfortably and, in more depth, when they shared important details in Spanish. As the researcher, I used Spanish to clarify or repeat the question, minimizing miscommunication. I initially used Otter.ai transcription service to assist with transcribing but the accented English and the switch to Spanish did not produce accurate transcriptions. Therefore, I transcribed and translated the interviews myself. I then used NVivo to code the interviews and conduct a thematic analysis. To supplement NVivo coding, I manually created visual diagrams of the codes.

Focus Group Interviews: I conducted two focus groups, the first with five participants and the second with six. Both were held in a home setting in London (i.e., my father's home as his living space with Colombian decorations presented a comfortable environment). Each focus group lasted an hour and a half, with participants spending another half an hour socializing over '*onces*' (meal or snack that is enjoyed late in the evening in Colombian culture and signifies community, trust, and warmth between the host who offers and serves it and the guest who accepts it). Participants were assigned to focus groups on the basis of length of residence in Canada. The first focus group included people who had arrived arriving more than ten years ago: Francisco, Eliana, Ana, Victoria, and Gerardo. Colombians who had arrived within the last ten years: Camila, Miguel, Valentina, Gabriel, and David participated in the second focus group. All participants filled out a demographic questionnaire providing the information in Tables 1 and 2.

⁴ One completed a BA in Journalism and continued completing a business logistics program after his BA was verified here. The other worked in what would be referred to as social work in Canada, a regulated profession, but had only completed higher education in Colombia equivalent to a BA in Psychology, therefore she was not eligible to continue into social work in Canada.

Information from the focus groups and interviews allowed me to document the experiences of Colombian immigrants navigating the foreign credential accreditation program, assess the impacts of accreditation experiences on spatial integration, and evaluate the relationship between participants' accreditation experiences and identities as they manoeuvred settling in London. I engaged participants with questions that promoted thoughtful reflection and individual and collective engagement regarding participants' experiences of accreditation and integration processes. Participants seemed to smoothly transition through questions with prompts guiding them through specific parts of their stories and experiences. I transitioned between questions by drawing connections between common experiences of interviewees, which increased confidence amongst participants and with the detail shared in their stories.

I readily adapted the questions to prompt discussion of specific topics as stories were shared by participants, however, fellow participants often asked each other the questions. In the first focus group, I often did not need to ask the next question as participants asked each other the subsequent question, and therefore I played a guiding role to focus the conversation on the research questions. In the second focus group, there was a more formal structure as participants answered question by question, and they explored each other's responses by relating to them in their own answers. I often played a facilitating role to prompt clarification when participants asked each other questions.

Focus groups discussed the following questions:

1. Canada is one of the top four destination countries for migrants, and it is unique in the sense that its national identity prides itself on multiculturalism. What were some of the factors that draw professionals like yourselves here?
2. How does your experience with credentialing compare to the expectations you had working in your profession here?
 - What motivated you to continue the accreditation process?
 - What motivated you to abandon the accreditation process?
3. How has the experience navigating the process been?
 - When and how did you first learn about the accreditation process?
 - How does your professional training compare between places?
4. How has the experience of credentialing impacted your integration in Canada?
 - What have been some enablers?
 - What have been some detriments?

Describe the impacts to your family?

Describe the impacts to your livelihood?

5. Where should the government turn their attention to improve the accreditation process?

Semi-Structured/In-depth Interviews: After the focus groups, I conducted semi-structured interviews with four participants from the focus groups over the phone. These participants who had had experiences that required in-depth conversation to best capture their experiences were: Camila and Gabriel who were interviewed together as spouses of a family unit where one was proceeding with their accreditation and the other was not; Francisco who successfully completed his accreditation as a naturopath which was not his first accreditation path; and, Eliana who was the sole participant who successfully completed her accreditation.

I conducted similar semi-structured phone interviews with four other individuals who were not part of the initial focus groups due to scheduling conflicts. While in the first set of interviews, participants were prompted to go into depth on experiences shared in the focus group, this second set of interviews consisted of answering the focus group questions. While the focus group interviewees reference the responses of other participants in their interviews, the second set of interviewees inquired about the experiences of other research participants.

The following questions frames the semi-structured interviews:

1. I want to hear about your education and professional background in Colombia
When did you begin your career and how long did you practice in Colombia?
2. What were some of the factors that drove you out of Colombia? (for 2nd round)
3. How does your training compare in your profession between places?
4. Walk me through a timeline of your accreditation journey?
5. Where have you encountered the most challenges and opportunities?
6. How has the accreditation process impacted yours and your family's daily life?
7. Where should the government turn their attention to improve the accreditation process?
(for 2nd round)

Prior to conducting focus groups and semi-structured interviews, I completed a literature review of academic and governmental sources to gain critical understanding of the Canadian immigration system and the foreign credential accreditation process. I compiled and reviewed reports from relevant parties, governmental reports and webpages, webpages of regulatory

bodies, and press releases from news outlets between 2012 and 2022 to better understand the processes that professional migrants have to navigate.

My research is organized in 4 main sections. The following section reviews the literature on the relationships between the professional immigrant's body, contextual spatialities, and oscillating temporalities to investigate the outcomes associated with the success, failure, or prolonging of the accreditation process. Section 2 entitled Navigating the Foreign Credential Accreditation documents the experience of Colombian immigrants who have navigated or are currently navigating their respective regulated professions (notably medical, dental, engineering, veterinarian and accounting) in the foreign credential assessment process. Section 3 Impacts on Professional Integration examines the spatial negotiations faced by Colombians to practice their internationally verified training. Section 4 Impacts on Lives and Identities analyses the impacts of participants' experiences with the foreign credential accreditation process on their identities, taking account of their efforts to work in diverse accredited professions. The thesis ends with a conclusion that reviews the key barriers and opportunities in Ontario accreditation processes. The profiles of participants to focus groups and interviews are presented in Appendix 1.

1. Literature Review

An analysis of the linkages between the labour shortage in Ontario, pandemic conditions in the province, and accreditation processes is useful for understanding the exceptions to accreditation processes that were allowed during the pandemic on the grounds of labour market need. With this information, I seek to highlight the future possibilities and pathways for foreign credential accreditation. This literature also served as useful reference points after the focus-groups and in-depth interviews as participants asked about recent changes in immigration and accreditation, labor experiences of Latin Americans in Southern Ontario, as well as issues related to spatial integration and identity.

The conceptual frameworks used to investigate participants' experiences draw on several literatures. Critical feminists such as Silvey (2004, 2006), Hyndman (2012), and Mountz and Hyndman (2006) make key contributions to migration theory by exploring the power relations embedded in migration patterns and processes of globalization. Winter (2019) and Bloemraad (2012) explore Canadian national identities and debates around pluralism to expand the

conversation about integration and belonging within political, economic, and social spaces. Identity as defined by APA Dictionary of Psychology (n.d.) is “an individual’s sense as self defined by (a) a set of physical, psychological, and interpersonal characteristics that is not wholly shared with any other person and (b) a range of affiliations (e.g., ethnicity) and social roles.” To understand identity relative to successful or unsuccessful accreditation and the impacts on integration, Bourdieu’s (1977) concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘capital’ frame my research. Bourdieu (1977) defines ‘habitus’ as generative and structuring practices of agency that also shape and reproduced social structure. Blommaert (2005) engages with the notion of habitus to demonstrate locally performed subjectivities are a product of collective and individual practices and histories. Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of ‘capital’ enhances the understanding of integration by examining how cultural, social, and economic capital are related economic capital (Al Ariss and Syed, 2010). Bourdieu’s ‘capital’ enables a critical exploration of how migrants form and renew their identities as they are included or excluded from social spaces.

Creese (2011) engages with ‘social capital’ as social networks, ‘economic capital’ as various forms of wealth, and ‘cultural capital’ as cultural dispositions, preferences, and thinking. This framing aids our understanding of immigrant’s introduction of non-local capital that is often (un)recognized in accreditation processes. Creese (2011) presents the workplace as a space where difference and otherness can either be reproduced, contested, or redefined, therefore participants’ response to confronting barriers are framed as either a successful or unsuccessful contestation through credentialing. Like Blommaert (2005; 2020), Creese (2011) challenges the emphasis on economic capital in many studies that overlook social and cultural capital. Moreover, Creese (2011) points out the flawed presumption that professional immigrants’ human capital will readily translate into the labour market. Immigrants must negotiate unfamiliar labour market practices without the social and cultural capital needed to ensure accurate and fair recognition of their human capital. The failure of foreign credentialing de-skills immigrants, causing downward occupational mobility. Thus, credential recognition as it is currently organized acts as a process that reproduces existing power relations and the inherent privileges of the native-born Canadian, demonstrating a systemic undervaluation of the migrant body and their embodied capital (Creese, 2011).

Bauder (2019) highlights the role of the family in integration and demonstrates a complementary relationship between social and human capital. Valade and Tyyska (2019) argue that human capital includes an immigrant’s embodied capital of acquired knowledge and experience in addition to the institutionalized capital that is educational degrees, work experience, and

language fluency. Valade and Tyyska (2019) capture the relationship between human and social capital demonstrating how the positive effects of one permit growth for the other and produce opportunities for the professional immigrant and their family. Moreover, Bauder, Ali, and Shields's (2019: 9) definition of integration emphasizes the intersections between family and accreditation, whereby it is "a multidirectional, ongoing process with shifting goals and mechanisms... it engages intersecting domains including the economic, social, and political... it is embedded in nested contexts of individuals, families... cities, nation-states." Thus, a newcomer's local and non-local family unit must be accounted for, especially their reproductive and non-monetary contributions that are a pivotal resource for immigrant in Canada (Bauder, Ali, and Shields, 2019). Expanding on reproductive resources, Ahmad Ali and Baitubayeva (2019) highlight the traditional gender roles in the household, which affect women who lack social capital, or a social network that would otherwise support them in the home and professionally. Despite women having comparatively higher levels of education, they often experience more difficulty entering the labour market (Ali and Baitubayeva, 2019: 179). The province of Manitoba has identified this need and is attending to the family unit to reach labour targets by coordinating childcare and immigration policy efforts (Dyson, Roos-Walker, and Hannan 2019). Beyond Canada, countries like Australia, Spain, Denmark, etc. are designing integration programs for the family unit, women, and children in efforts to build social and cultural capital (Ahmad Ali and Baitubayeva, 2019).

In matters of identity, and as argued by Blommaert (2017), linguistic resources and their impacts on mobility within the globalized context raise important issues about meaning making. Multilingualism becomes a resource that is framed by the macro-conditions (e.g., settler-colony) that host micro-processes (e.g., interactions) (Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck, 2005). Specific forms of human capital are favoured, which in turn reinforces existing power structures (Blommaert, 2013). Thus, multilingual spaces challenge "Western assumptions about linguistic uniformity, cultural homogeneity and national membership" (Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck 2005: 201). Language connotes legitimate competence. Linguicism can marginalize undesirable accents and languages, and the bodies wielding them. A growing concern is that accents act as permissible markers for exclusion in comparison to impermissible markers of race and ethnicity (Creese, 2011). Linguicism, the ridiculing of a speaker because of accent (Creese, 2011: 37), establishes language as an ongoing site of struggle where English or French linguistic capital that is recognized by the receiving society can facilitate integration.

As Blommaert (2020) asserts, “there is no accentless language” and if it appears as such then there is a prestige to the produced illusion. Articulation is required in moments of interaction and necessitates the use of intertextual resources (e.g., accent, knowledge), which operate on different scales due to their assigned hierarchies of validity (Blommaert 2017). In the labour market, the written and verbal components of the job application signal identifiers. Thus, intertextual resources act as resources and identifiers. Creese’s (2011) linguistic theory is pivotal for understanding the undervaluing and racialization of professional immigrant bodies, as the discriminatory repercussions of embedded power dynamics work to disadvantage peoples and knowledges at the periphery.

Canada’s Immigration and Professional Accreditation

The settlement experiences of Latin Americans in Ontario provide a foundation for understanding the experiences of Colombians. Girard (2010) examines the correlation between the gap in earnings amongst immigrants and the credential recognition processes in Canada. Girard (2010: 156) found that Latin American and Caribbean immigrants are less likely to work in a regulated occupation but argues for “country-specific initiatives that assist immigrants in finding employment.” Moreover, Girard and Smith (2012) note that the dynamics of foreign credential recognition processes alongside the receiving communities' outlook on their education have detrimental effects for these groups.

Brosseau (2020) provides key information concerning federal awareness and action about foreign credential recognition. Even though primary responsibility for the recognition of foreign credentials lies with the provinces and the regulatory bodies who have been given authority over selected professions, there have been concerns raised federally about the process since the 1990s when interest over the issue peaked publicly. Parliamentary committee investigations made recommendations concerning the Foreign Credential Recognition Program, settlement services, and the recognition of credentials being considered in economic immigration requirements.

Mulholland (2004) identifies the fundamental goals of the ‘two-way street’ approach to the integration of immigrants as a reciprocal obligation to adapt along with the delivery of policies and programs across sectors that facilitate integration. This is supported by the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act of 2001 with its definition of successful integration involving “mutual obligations for new immigrants and Canadian society” (Mulholland, 2004: 5). The concept of

reciprocity is key to understanding the enablers to success for accreditation such as cultural education programs for the receiving society and immigrant alike.

Houle and Yssaad (2010) attend to the distinction between foreign work experience and foreign credentials highlighting that recognition of the former is more prevalent than the latter. Based on a 2000-2005 longitudinal survey of immigrants to Canada, they demonstrated that of the 7,716 immigrant participants, after four years in Canada, 28% have seen their credentials fully accepted compared to 39% whose work experience had been recognized. Partial recognition of work experience was higher for female and racialized immigrants. The credentials of the majority of people from United Kingdom or the United States were fully accepted (Houle and Yssaad 2010). Additionally, refugees were most likely to receive partial recognition for their credentials compared to those who entered as skilled workers. Moreover, refugees have the lowest predicted probability of credential recognition. In comparison, skilled workers of the economic class have the highest predicted probability of recognition, having the most success in their first four years in Canada (Houle and Yssaad 2010).

Credentialing exposes the conditions and micro-processes that appropriately redirect responsibility for accreditation away from the professional migrant body and towards their spaces of integration (Bourgeault and Neiterman, 2013). For example, Boyd (2013) explores in detail the downward mobility of internationally trained engineers and physicians in Canada due to unfamiliarity with labour market structures, job-search networks, language, and social experience. Similarly, in studying the Ontario engineering sector, Girard and Bauder (2007: 1) observe the important role of Canadian engineering societies in establishing qualification standards and the protectionist tendencies they deploy to “protect their professional, social, and economic interests by excluding non-members and foreign engineers.” The discrepancies between accreditation, standards, and integration echo the many credentialing concerns raised by Colombian participants across several professions.

Spatial Integration and Identity

Bourgeault and Neiterman (2013) focus on the brain waste and lack of accountability that result from the institutional complexities of an environment with multiple, interdependent actors. Of particular attention in this study of foreign-trained physicians, Bourgeault and Neiterman (2013) consider the effects of the pandemic that amplified a human resource crisis. They highlight how the active recruitment of immigrant health and medical labour from the top four destination

countries often neglected their long-term integration. Not only do Bourgeault and Neiterman (2013) capture the fissure in accreditation exacerbated by the pandemic, but they link brain waste with lack of support for long-term integration.

Bauder (2003) gives important attention to immigrants' experiences of de-skilling in Canada due to the non-recognition of their foreign credentials. Bauder (2003) centres cultural capital in his analysis of the institutional mechanisms responsible for the exclusion of immigrants from high-skilled work sector, broadening the focus beyond simple transferability. Bauder's (2003) concept of cultural capital broadens accreditation and integration processes. Al Ariss and Syed (2010) also criticize the emphasis on human capital and connect it with the formation of barriers towards migrants from non-European countries that interfere with international career mobility.

Al Ariss and Syed (2010: 302) raise practical and urgent considerations concerning the need for institutional and socio-cultural support for migrants who are "expected to fill job vacancies in developed countries... [whereby] skilled migrants, as a human resource, are and will remain vital in sustaining performance in organizations." Moreover, Root, Shields, and Gates-Gassee, (2019) observe that responsibilities are often shifted onto the household, catering to the 'self-sufficient' narrative imposed on the immigrant that simultaneously demands a strong work ethic and justifies austerity. But Neoliberal political frameworks render invisible the 'caring' responsibilities of professional women and mothers, and public institutions supporting the home are ignored. The curtailment of these services has implications for Canada's international reputation as a state that welcomes immigrants. Hawthorne's (2013: 249) case study comparing Canada and Australia shows that they are highly comparable settlement sites, yet professional migrants in Australia have immediate work associated with long term labour market integration, higher salaries, successful deployment of credentials for job security, and upward occupational mobility.

2. Navigating Foreign Credential Accreditation

This section begins with the successful accreditation stories of two participants, followed by five stories of participants whose accreditation is ongoing, and ending with the stories of six participants who decided to abandon the accreditation process. The stories detail the efforts of each immigrant to respond to their profession's accreditation demands and their financial and temporal investments in accreditation. The tangible barriers to credentialing are emphasized.

Participants' experiences validate findings from Employment and Social Development Canada (2023: 37) indicating that the total costs for accreditation are often unclear and rarely include costs for essential childcare, training and bridging courses, and language courses.

Francisco's Story as a General Physician turned Certified Naturopath

Francisco's story is one of success by several measures but not compared with his own goals. Francisco graduated as the equivalent of a Canadian general physician in Colombia, with a diploma in pain management. In Canada, he downgraded his medical career by becoming an accredited naturopath, rather than a general physician due to several barriers to accreditation as a family doctor. Four years into his practice in naturopathic medicine, he does not consider his accreditation to be a success. He, his wife, and son arrived as refugees in Canada. Due to the urgency of their departure from Colombia, he had not given thought to nor expected to practice as a physician, but the arrival of triplets a few years into his life in Canada propelled him to begin the accreditation journey to obtain a better quality of life for the entire family.

With no knowledge of English upon arrival, he prioritized enrolling in language classes funded by the government before working with two organizations, Will and Access employment, to learn about available pathways for finding professional work. With support from these organizations, he obtained recognition of his medical degree. However, he was not able to practice as a medical professional before attending medical school in Canada for his specialization. To qualify to take the examinations required to enter medical school, Francisco had to compile numerous documents from Colombia. Relying on his mother to do so, she set up communication with his university and then Francisco arranged for the Canadian organizations to contact the Colombian university. He had to call the university quite a few times to clarify the requirements of the Canadian medical school so that his mom could receive the paperwork. This would be impossible for someone with no connections in their home country, especially a refugee. Francisco describes this part of the process as extraordinarily strenuous.

Francisco finally completed the extensive paperwork and took eight examinations to qualify as a candidate for a residency program in family medicine. Completing the exams took three or four years. The tests were incredibly difficult for two reasons. First, the questions not only tested medical knowledge, but were phrased to assess the candidate's familiarity with the profession's technical language. Second, the tests focused on Canadian medical practice, which is immensely difficult to know about without experience or education in Canada.

After passing the exams, Francisco took the International English Language Test, but he did not achieve the required grade. This is where his accreditation as a physician stopped. He expresses immense disappointment and laments the fact that he has since developed the fluency in English required to qualify for a residency. In his pursuit of other options in healthcare, he settled on naturopathy after encouragement from alternative medicine doctors he had studied with in Colombia, and evaluating his professional prospects based on visits to local naturopathic offices in London that had a steady flow of patients.

Francisco has not yet seen a return on the investment of his time and \$100,000 for the naturopathy program. The bridging program reduced the length of his program from four to two years, but it did not reduce tuition. The costs do not incorporate the commutes and stays in Toronto for the in-person components of his education. One of the busy naturopathy clinics that he had scouted at the beginning of the process is now completely barren years later. He estimates that the past year, he billed approximately \$16,000. The cost to sustain his licence per year is \$2,000 to \$3,000. On top of this is the outstanding debt for the cost of his education in Canada. This is the first year he has moved his practice from his home to an office, but he expects to still earn around the same given the trajectory thus far.

Francisco sees three reasons for his current professional difficulties: the lack of acceptance and integration of naturopathy into public medicine, the business skills required of naturopathic doctors operating private practices, and discrimination by prospective clients upon hearing his heavy accent. Francisco's experience has led him to conclude that his family's quality of life, his relationship with his wife, and his own well-being and self-worth would have benefited if he had used his financial and temporal resources to establish himself in a less skilled job. In his opinion, accreditation has not secured his future security and wellbeing.

Eliana's Story as Certified Physiotherapist in Colombia and Canada

Eliana completed a five-year Bachelor degree program in physiotherapy in Colombia. She started her career in the respiratory clinic at a university hospital in Bogotá. After working at a school for kids with cerebral palsy, she worked in a private clinic with 70% of her patients being orthopaedic and 30% pre- and post-op plastic surgery. Her story is one of success by any measure. Eliana arrived in Canada with no knowledge of English, not even knowing how to say

“hello”. She completely relied on her husband in her first year in Canada, and then they separated. Her second year was spent adapting to the changes in her personal circumstances. As a mother, she needed to secure a livelihood for her young daughter. This imperative propelled her to begin her accreditation journey as a physiotherapist.

Her first task was to attain adequate fluency in English. Eliana completed her accreditation in London after living in two other Canadian cities where she gained key work experience. During the process of learning English, she acquired a job as a personal trainer at a female gym, where one of her clients connected her to an opportunity as a physiotherapist assistant. Eliana's credentials were assessed by the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators after she completed the language assessment demonstrating proficiency in English. Her training and education were recognized as sufficient for her to work as a physiotherapist assistant.

Eliana gained experience working as a physiotherapist assistant for five years. She left this position for professional and personal reasons. Professionally, she felt that the experience was monotonous, therefore not challenging her skill set. She also experienced racial prejudice from coworkers and their perceptions of her professional abilities. She attributed the prejudice to her coworkers' ignorance and the lack of social diversity in the workplace. The predominantly white environment is a key factor in Eliana's story of her work experience. The story highlights the tension between the economic need for immigrants to settle in rural areas in Ontario that need professional service providers and the socio-cultural barriers that impede immigrant professionals' success in small communities (Statistics Canada 2023: 12).

Ana's Story as a Dentist Turned Office Manager

Ana came to Canada with the expectation of working as a dentist, however, she made a conscious decision to focus on her family during her first few years in Canada. Ana chose the first pathway offered to foreign dentists to re-certify themselves in the Canadian context: five examinations by the National Dental Examination Board. Each exam costs \$10,000, and every time you fail an exam, the same price is paid to retake it. The first time that Ana attempted an examination, she continued working part-time. She failed the first exam and immediately realized that she needed to stop working entirely if she was to pass the exams. She left work for one year, devoting herself to full-time studies. She describes not having any help, researching the resources needed for her studies and studying completely on her own.

Unlike Francisco and Eliana, she did not have any study groups. Ana's difficulty in preparing for examinations is rooted in the absence of peer support and being solely responsible for deciphering the Canadian scope of the practice on her own. This situation has resulted in a trial-and-error method, where she pays and takes one exam, understands its focus, and is able to better prepare for her second attempt. With time, Eliana's peers were able to guide her through the material and highlight the key information based on their studies at the university. The second point of contrast is the examination costs. Ana has had to pay a higher price per examination and take more examinations than Eliana. During the focus-group, Eliana commented she would not have been able to afford physiotherapy accreditation had it been as costly as Ana's dentistry requirements. Overall, Eliana paid approximately \$10,000 for her entire accreditation, whereas Ana has had to pay that amount for each examination towards her accreditation.

Ana expressed frustration about the clinical exam for the dentistry examination that is technical and emphasizes Canadian practices. Ana indicated that dentists use different techniques depending on their training and treatment preference. She was also frustrated that Commonwealth immigrants, particularly those from India, had a higher pass rate. Despite having less working experience, Commonwealth immigrants seemed to be more familiar with examinations based on the Canadian methods. She often arrived home in tears after spending day after day seeing others with comparable human capital practicing while she cannot, despite having worked in Canadian dental offices for a decade.

Ana gave a lot of credit to her family for their support and sacrifices, stating she would not be able to go through the accreditation process alone. She is sad that her husband is the primary provider because she has reduced her work hours to progress through the examinations. All participants agree with Ana that their greatest motivator is being a good example to inspire their children. The value of Ana's hard work, perseverance to overcome barriers, and support for family members is incalculable.

Camila's Story as a Dentist turned Administrative Coordinator

Camila came to the country a year after her husband, Gabriel, through a separate application as she had had as successful a career as her husband in Colombia. The limited prospects for education, and social and professional development in Colombia encouraged their emigration. When speaking about access to opportunities in her field, Camila approaches it from the

perspective of a medical practitioner and a health administrator since she holds a double specialization in anesthesiology and health auditing.

Camila cites her college tuition as one of the biggest professional accreditation costs at \$17,000. Completion of the college requirements will not contribute to her accreditation itself. Rather, she is completing a supplementary program to gain the Canadian experience that employers seek in international candidates. Unlike Ana, Camila continued down the dentistry accreditation pathway by attending university. She completed the Internationally Trained Dentists Program offered at Western University in London. Despite eight years of professional work experience in Colombia, the three-year program that costs \$365,000 is a prerequisite for those who studied outside Canada to gain accreditation. After obtaining permanent residency and paying the first fee of \$900 to send the papers to the board of dentistry in Canada, Camila began the accreditation process a year later after receiving equivalency approval. The next step is the completion of the English exam at a cost of \$300, followed by an entry examination which has a separate cost of \$5,000.

The entry exam that is a prerequisite for the three-year program requires extensive studying. Camila and her husband Gabriel waited for him to feel secure in his career and his ability to provide for their family so that she could begin her accreditation process. However, the next step of her process requires her enrolment in the bridging program, and at this point, they are waiting for increased financial security of their household. In the meantime, she has had to invest time and money into her dental radiologist certification to be able to achieve upward occupational mobility in her dental office, separate from credentialing. Her decision to proceed with further education was motivated by the need to gain Canadian work experience. Camila is enhancing her options by giving more weight to acquisition of human capital that is valued in the Canadian context than to dental accreditation. She reasons that since every profession evolves, she can at least approach it as an opportunity to update her knowledge and techniques. She is also counting on the community support she will have in a university setting, rather than studying for the exams on her own.

Camila is troubled by the immense financial burden the education required for accreditation will place on her growing family. Despite knowing the demands of the accreditation process, she and her husband were not prepared for how difficult and financially draining it would be. Camila described a slow process of realization about the costs and then an all-encompassing moment of awareness of the financial costs: “you expect to spend a certain amount of money... you

have to spend time and money on it, but when you actually get here, you then understand... This is *a lot* of money... these are *a lot* of things to do... but, well, we are here... so!". With a touch of humour, Camila suggests that she often considers not proceeding with the process. She largely attributes the urge to quit to uncertainties that are beyond her control and the debilitating impact of the financial costs on many facets of her family's life.

Miguel's Story as a Teacher turned Noon Hour Assistant

Due to personal circumstances, Miguel is uncertain about whether he will remain in Canada after his accreditation. Miguel arrived with his family but now lives alone. Miguel and his family had not planned to come to Canada, having fled Colombia with urgency. After five years as a permanent resident, he started the teaching accreditation process. His story describes a common decision-making pattern for professional immigrants, whereby credentialing strategies are a means to economic security, and confirmation of the person's identity.

Miguel arrived with experience teaching at the primary, secondary, and university levels, and with technical language fluency in English. Due to the strict regulations of the Ontario College of Teachers, he is still working on accreditation four years later. Despite having the linguistic capital, Miguel argues that the process is made harder for internationally trained professionals that arrive from non-anglophone countries. Miguel highlights how language barrier did not interrupt his accreditation or his integration in Canada. Instead, he blames the unwelcoming attitudes of the receiving society due to cultural differences and his accented English that have impeded him.

The simultaneous breakdown in his familial identity and experiences of micro-aggressive behaviours in the professional space, are pushing Miguel to return to Colombia. Despite these circumstances, Miguel maintains a positive attitude towards the accreditation process and its integrity. He is the only participant whose negative experiences have not discouraged him from pursuing accreditation, but they have discouraged integration.

Valentina's Story as an Accountant turned Financial Controller

Valentina is working indirectly on accreditation by completing a post-graduate diploma in professional accounting. Her long-term goal is to obtain accreditation as a chartered professional accountant. She is the only participant in the interviews in her 20s. Her decision to

embark on the accreditation process reflects a different set of push and pull factors that provide insight into the decision-making of young, independent, female, Colombian professionals. Professional aspiration is central to her decisions in contrast to the other female participants that make decisions based on family. With her partner David participating in the interview, the discussion shifted from individual decision processes to a collective one.

Valentina describes accounting procedures and entry to the profession as comparable between Colombia and Canada. Therefore, she does not anticipate barriers to establishing the equivalency of her education in Colombia so she can qualify to take the required examinations. She doesn't yet have permanent resident status, another requirement to take the examinations. In the meantime, her post-graduate studies and job enable her to enhance her human capital while sustaining her livelihood. At her job, she is learning about Canadian procedures and laws, and constantly researching supplementary information. Closer to the date of the first examination, she will study chartered professional accounting textbooks to ameliorate the biggest gap in her skills: recommendations about company financial statements. The accounting credentialing process appears to be more straightforward than for other professions. Valentina is learning the Canadian context of the profession through the post-graduate certificate; unlike Camila whose dentistry accreditation program was a barrier to her career.

With her experience in a Canadian workplace and the post-graduate certificate program, Valentina has increased her linguistic capital. Her focus now is acquiring permanent residency and paying the costs of her program while preparing for the accreditation costs. Valentina believes all personal and financial costs are worthwhile to obtain residency in Canada that she considers one of the best countries in the world. She has confidence in the process because "in a country like Canada, if you follow the rules, complete the steps, and work hard, then you can do it, and everyone starts at the same baseline."

Reinaldo's Story as a Veterinarian turned Veterinarian Technician

Reinaldo is the only participant who did not arrive directly from Colombia, but from Michigan where he was able to work in Spanish. He did not need to develop English fluency until he entered the Canadian labour market. Reinaldo attributes his success in overcoming the language barrier to the cooperation and willingness of his colleagues to teach him. He started working as a veterinarian assistant to expand his human and linguistic capital while he overcame various accreditation obstacles. He still has to take three exams, costing \$700 each.

Reinaldo found out that in his field, professionals from Colombia have a harder time being recognized than nationals from other countries who seem to have clearer pathways to their veterinarian accreditation. The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association reports that professional growth is driven by the internationally trained -- Americans lead at 24%, Australians at 10%, then Colombians and Filipinos matched at 2%, with Mexicans and Ukrainians not having sufficient numbers for their own category. Colombia is the only Latin American country on the list (Kynetec Canada, 2020: p. 33). This data aligns with Reinaldo's assertion about Colombians constantly reaching out to him asking about the process, interested in immigrating after reading about the opportunities in Canada. In addition, there are foreign professionals in his field who are also navigating an indirect pathway to accreditation. For these reasons, Reinaldo has pursued accreditation as a veterinarian technician, which requires less schooling, although it is a lower paid profession than veterinarian.

After completing the exams, gathering all necessary documents, and paying for the equivalency assessment, Reinaldo waited three years to hear from the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians. After three years, he was informed that he was not able to apply for accreditation as he was a veterinarian, not a technician. However, the Access centre reassured him that at the time of his application it was an eligible pathway, even if there is now a clear division of the professions and the indirect pathway is no longer be accessible. The Access centre re-worked his application, added supplementary information, and another year later, he received his licence to be a technician. With this licence, he is now able to access veterinarian accreditation, with a warning from his co-workers who have gone through it to stay patient as it is a long process.

Mariana's Story as a Registered Nurse turned Dental Assistant

To become a nurse in Colombia, Mariana completed a five-year program that adhered to the standards set by the World Health Organization. Contrary to the United States, Canada does not recognize these standards and consequently the credentials of Colombian nurses are also not recognized. These accreditation rules have derailed Mariana for more than 12 years. She echoes the confusion and desperation of all participants in the healthcare field trying to gain accreditation. Her story highlights pre- and post-pandemic grievances regarding the accreditation process and reveals some inherent contradictions in the process.

Mariana immigrated with her son with the intention of practicing in Canada and began the accreditation process immediately. The College of Nurses denied her qualifications and recommended that she go back to school. Mariana resisted the pressure to de-skill entirely and moved from factory work to become a personal support worker. She recalls immense frustration as a personal support worker for four years, as it is a strenuous and underpaid work. This frustration and a workplace injury prompted her to switch fields and begin studying as a dental assistant, where the pay is higher, the work is not as physically demanding, and there is more room for professional growth.

Mariana explains that unrecognized foreign nurses, especially Colombian nurses often become personal support workers or dental assistants. Every single one she is acquainted with has abandoned the process to be accredited as a nurse. As Mariana states, “we feel frustrated, because apparently, our education in Colombia is not equal here.” In 2016, about a third of the 245,500 nurse aides, orderlies and patient service associates in Canada were immigrants, many with healthcare backgrounds (Harun and Walton-Roberts, 2022). As all healthcare workers stated in this study, they need to learn about and adapt to the professional differences between Colombia and Canada rather than requiring re-education and re-training.

Gabriel’s Story as an Electronic and Network Engineer turned Network IT Engineer

Gabriel arrived in Canada as an international student to learn English a couple of years prior to his wife Camila. He wanted to see whether Canada would provide his family with the security and quality of life they were seeking. Gabriel’s profession is unique by virtue of its existence on a network platform, which allows for flexible remote work as a software or web developer. The platform allows for human capital transferability in high-skilled work as the skills employed on developer platforms are standard worldwide. His accreditation would give him the authority to work as a network engineer in the information technology industry, using the same skills that he currently uses.

Contrary to Camila’s educational experience in Colombia, Gabriel’s program as an international student in Canada added to his developer skillset. He describes a similar training approach to the subject matter as in Colombia, but at the accelerated pace of a graduate diploma program.

His education background made it possible for him to successfully complete the program while using it to improve his cultural and social capital. The strengthening of his cultural and social capital has proved more beneficial than the educational qualification for his labour market integration.

His experience illuminates some of the challenges beyond accreditation, such as hiring practices, the translation of experience, and the ability to work in an English language environment. Gabriel states that the time and financial costs to obtain accreditation are not worth repeating material he has already learned. Additionally, accreditation will result in only a slight salary increase. The process consists of three tests. If you fail a test you move onto a second assessment demanding 18 tests. Each test costs approximately \$1000. The total time required to prepare for and take the tests is usually between two and three years. Upon completion of the tests, you apply for an interview, pass the interview, and inform the government that you have passed. The interview and documentation take between six and 12 months, which would add another year and half to Gabriel's accreditation. He cites the depletion of his household's resources and sheer difficulty of the process as reasons he dropped credentialing. Nevertheless, Gabriel and Camila still aspire for a life in Canada that will provide physical and social security for their family as they move towards citizenship.

Hector's Story as a Civil Engineer certified as an Electrician

Hector arrived in Canada with his wife and daughter with their eyes set on securing a safer life for their daughter. This is a consistent theme in the strategies of all the families in this study' Professional accreditation is secondary to a better life in Canada. In Colombia, Hector worked as an electrician, then studied to become a civil engineer. With work experience in the oil sector and a post-graduate certification in logistics and international commerce, Hector established his own company and worked across Colombia in all fields related to civil engineering. With his education, skills, and experience, he had two alternative professional career paths in Canada in either logistics or civil engineering and a third path through the skilled trades. Only the trades pathway did not require re-education. He simply had to complete a bridging program.

With two high-skilled professionals facing long accreditation process in the family, Hector felt tremendous pressure on the family's resources. Additionally, Hector was the target of damaging stereotypes about the 'bad immigrant' that discouraged him from pursuing accreditation as a civil engineer or a professional in the field of logistics:

“I’m not looking for a handout, but an opportunity to access support, because my wife and I would have been able to study. It is not easy converting pesos to dollars. There comes a point in the process where your money is just gone... When we arrived, the cost of living was lower than now. Ontario Work subsidizes you with \$850 a month, and the cost of living at the time was \$1,250 for our three persons family. That does not include food, so we went to the food bank, and there I felt useless. I felt like there were people who really needed this. I didn’t belong there. I told my caseworker about my decision to find work, she helped me find a construction job and from there we winded off Ontario Works.”

Lucia’s Story as a Civil Engineer turned Medical Lab Technician

Lucia’s three years of work experience as a civil engineer span the Colombian and Argentinian housing sectors. She currently balances a full-time job as a medical lab technician, two part-time jobs as an independent contractor, and the care of her young son, while her husband works in British Columbia, having found better work opportunities there. Lucia returned to Ontario - after having found more education and work opportunities in Alberta – to be near her family in London, whose support she valued entering motherhood. This interprovincial partnership is a result of her family’s strategy to succeed with professional accreditation and integration. It highlights the centring of the family in decisions for or against accreditation.

Lucia first confronted pressures to de-skill when her limited linguistic capital precented her participation in social and professional spaces. The conflict between her social roles had negative impacts to her mental health. Lucia’s story demonstrates the profound impacts of an immigrant's personal and professional identity, particularly for women arriving as dependents. Lucia abandoned the accreditation process and started a new career. After completing a medical technician program in London, she found few opportunities to gain key clinical and laboratory work experience that were available in Calgary. Wanting to relocate to London following her son’s adoption, Lucia’s lab manager in Calgary helped her secure lab employment in London. The manager recommended Lucia to colleagues in London who quickly offered her a lab position so she could move closer to family.

Victoria's Story as a Teacher turned Property Manager

Victoria has experience teaching at the primary, secondary, and university level, and is fluent in both of Canada's official languages with Spanish as her native tongue. Moreover, she completed a Master of Arts in Hispanic Studies in Ontario. Despite attempts pre- and post-pandemic to attain her accreditation in the teaching profession that she is both passionate about and extensively trained for, she was forced to abandon the accreditation process. Due to the saturation of the Ontario teachers' market in 2011, when she had arrived, she entered the field as a supply teacher and teacher assistant with the Catholic District School Board. Once she noticed consistent vacancies for teachers, she began the accreditation process in 2019.

Her pathway to accreditation required only a criminal background check, language assessment, and documents from Colombia proving her education and experience as a teacher. Upon the submission of her documentation, she was told it would take between three to six months to receive a reply. A series of complications and miscommunications, described by Victoria as an absolute nightmare, were a disastrous barrier to her accreditation. Her experience demonstrates the intricacies of the documentation stage of the process. The breakdown in communication resulted in a three year-long delay with the threat of additional requests for information. To ensure her household's livelihood, Victoria abandoned the accreditation process.

Victoria can work as a supply teacher, but cannot work as a full-time, permanent teacher. She is paid less than a third of what a licensed teacher is paid. She explains that beyond the hindrance to her career, reliance on supply teachers impedes students' education. The principal at the school where she works agreed with this argument and assigned Victoria to teach French for a year to fill the absence in their roster.

After completing certification, Victoria pivoted to property management in the first years of settlement to earn a higher income. Her success with property management gave her the confidence to abandon the accreditation process and devote financial and temporal resources to her family. She expresses massive disappointment over the barriers she encountered, especially when she talks to the school principals who inquire about her accreditation in order to hire her. Even worse, Colombian colleagues in Alberta, the United States, Sweden, and Switzerland are all successful teachers. Victoria does not believe she will continue with the

teaching accreditation process in the future; she believes it is in her family's interest to dedicate herself to property management.

David's Story as an Accountant turned Certified Financial Planner

David is the youngest male participant and the only one who immigrated independent of a family. Thus, the decision to drop his pursuit of accreditation is based on his professional assessment rather than family considerations. David's experience may reflect the enablers and barriers more broadly confronted by young, independent, male Colombian professionals immigrating to Ontario. His strengthening relationship with Valentina is encouraging him to consider how his professional career and accreditation relate to his familial goals.

David dropped his plans to pursue the chartered professional accountant accreditation once he settled in London. He switched into the financial field after understanding the financial and temporal cost associated with accreditation as a chartered professional accountant. His post-graduate coop program and a Colombian family friend living in London enabled him to gain experience as a financial planner. His profession's organizational structure is an enabler, allowing him to decide later whether he would like to pivot back towards becoming a chartered professional accountant through a work transfer. Agreements between the professional organizations enable movement between the two professions. For example, the experience required to qualify as a certified financial planner is the same as the experience required of a chartered accountant. Despite this flexibility in accreditation requirements, David has found limited opportunities to gain relevant experience and cites the poor job prospects in London as the primary barrier to his accreditation.

3. Impacts on Professional Integration

This section examines the complexities of participants' spatial navigations of the accreditation processes. The aim is to transcend the dominant immigration framework described by Bauder (2019) as the neoliberal ideological focus that exalts the individual and economic units when measuring success or lack thereof, by expanding our grasp of the forces involved in credentialing. My analysis contributes qualitative findings that are generally missed in quantitative studies of accreditation. In this section, the influence of the Canadian labour market's economic habitus (related to the structure and standards of the accreditation process)

is often perceived as devaluing the human capital of foreign professionals. Moreover, the absence of cultural and social capital reinforces exclusionary mechanisms related to language proficiency and immigration status. Accreditation success necessitates cultivating immigrants' social, cultural, and human capital alike.

Linguistic capital and the de-skilling threat

Participants experience intersecting barriers that work to constrain them. Language is cited by participants as the biggest indirect barrier to accreditation as it is not a formal step of the process but greatly influences accreditation success. Acquisition of linguistic capital takes precedence for participants with no English fluency as it is the first barrier to securing a livelihood through professional work. With the urgency of securing a livelihood, often through low-skilled work, linguistic barriers become so constraining that immigrants abandon accreditation. Participants described their experiences of getting stuck in low-skilled positions that are readily available in London. As for participants who arrive with sufficient linguistic capital, accent discrimination and ability to carry out professional work in the language also threaten to de-skill them.

To combat de-skilling, participants work to develop linguistic capital, aiming to increase their chances of accreditation and labour market success. The development of English fluency requires resources separate from those needed for the accreditation process. Participants perceive English fluency as valuable cultural capital inside and outside Canada, thus it is of higher or equal value as accreditation. Valentina's decision to immigrate to Canada was based on the best-case scenario of gaining accreditation as a teacher in Canada and worst-case scenario being a return to Colombia with English fluency. She stood to gain with either outcome.

Linguistic barriers occur throughout the accreditation process. For Victoria, errors in document translations prolonged the accreditation process for three years while for Francisco, language was the gatekeeper to accreditation since his score on the language test was too low for medical school. Over time, Francisco's English proficiency improved enabling him to qualify as a naturopath. His current linguistic capital would have qualified him for medical school. For Gabriel, upward mobility was blocked by his limited linguistic capital. These individual instances impact each family's financial security, forcing participants to take on lower-skilled work while negotiating their household's capacity to proceed with the accreditation process. Indeed,

participants with dependents describe the challenge of resisting the systemic pressures to de-skill. Some of the most cited entry and supplementary jobs were factory positions, cleaning, construction, car service and delivery. Participants like Gabriel, Francisco, Ana, Lucia, Miguel, and Hector worked as manual labourers, and used these jobs to supplement their incomes throughout credentialing. Those with spouses stated this to be true for them as well. Themselves and their spouses maintain this type of lower-skilled work while launching their careers after abandoning or completing credentialing.

Immigrant professionals describe de-skilling as a survival strategy that results from the extensive resources necessary for accreditation. Several professional immigrants: Lucia, Mariana, Gabriel, and Francisco, pointed out that they observed many Colombian immigrants who had stayed in jobs for which they were overqualified. Participants in the focus groups and interviews emphasized that they were among the few who pursued credentialing instead of permanent de-skilling. Francisco regrets his decision to pursue accreditation. He often wishes that he had developed human and linguistic capital in one of the low-skilled positions he took shortly after arriving in Canada. He thinks that immigrants who stay in lower-skilled jobs are in a better financial position than he is after accruing debt from a failed accreditation process.

Immigrant status and access limitations

Every participant in this study highlighted how the requirement for permanent residency status was a barrier to accreditation. Valentina describes obtaining permanent residency as the first step towards survival in Canada. Hector agrees, noting the costs associated with the precarious status of an asylum seeker:

“The lifestyle [you] have in Colombia is a different freedom; [you] can travel internally and be in a tropical climate. With hard work and effort, you can buy comfort in a consumerist way. Here, you have peace. You can’t buy peace. Even if the lifestyle and the freedom changes, because they take away your papers [here]. Your freedoms become limited. If [you] choose to stay, it will take time. It is a humbling process.”

Hector points out the uncertainty that many immigrants experience during their first years in Canada. A key factor in his decision to drop the accreditation in civil engineering - which would close the door on the opportunity to pursue a Masters in logistics, his specialization in Colombia

- was not knowing if his family's asylum application would be approved. This is largely due to the temporal costs of re-education, both in terms of the length of the program and the daily investment of time to study. Hector's decision had to balance his desire to pursue accreditation to secure his household's security and the risk that their asylum claim would not be approved. Thus, his decision had to attend to the resource investment, which deterred him against accreditation in the regulated profession due to its higher risk as per the higher investment. Camila's case, permanent residency was necessary to commence the accreditation process. She and Gabriel were in limbo without permanent residency and unable to access financial support programs that provide the stability and confidence to commit to the accreditation process. Uncertainty and waiting contribute to poverty among recent immigrants (who arrived five-years ago) and a persistent income gap between foreign and Canadian-born residents (Statistics Canada, 2022). Giving professional immigrants who intend to settle in Canada access to permanent residency and supports for credentialing in the first five years of living in Canada would increase the likelihood of successful accreditation.

Recently, the student visa has become a common pathway towards permanent residency. A report by the Conference Board of Canada (2022: 10) shows that most international students in Canada want to obtain permanent residency. The four participants in this study are examples of this as they entered Canada with student visas with greater interest in it as a pathway towards permanent residency, rather than for furthering their education. Their experiences varied with some programs facilitating the transition to permanent residency while others acted as a barrier. Much depended on whether the education program resulted in the acquisition of useful Canadian experience or just depleted the migrant's resources. This is no small consideration when on average, international students pay tuition between \$7,000 and \$22,000 (EduCanada, 2023). Camila enrolled in a health systems management program as an international student to qualify for permanent residency and to facilitate her accreditation as a dentist in Canada. Contrary to her hopes, Camila describes her program as a barrier with no positive impact on her Canadian work experience. Despite vetting the program on paper, it had little to no relevance to dentistry and she wishes she had received better advice as a prospective dentistry accreditation applicant. Camila claims that her studies detracted from dedicating temporal and financial resources to accreditation. Moreover, for two years, Camila lacked permanent residency so she could not do anything to advance her accreditation. Other participants benefitted from their programs; Valentina's program improved her likelihood to obtain accreditation as a certified public accountant, and David and Gabriel were enabled to succeed in different careers.

The Foreign Credential Accreditation structure

The barriers and opportunities identified by participants pre- and post-arrival greatly impact access to accreditation. Participants report difficulties in communicating with key actors during the accreditation process. Participants describe a confusing web of actors, rules, and regulations rather than a clear linear sequence of stages. Pathways change unpredictably, altering the accreditation space that professional immigrants can enter, and the difficulty of the accreditation process itself. In this complex and shifting context, immigrant professionals often have incomplete information that affects their efforts to become accredited (Hawthorne, 2019). There has been some progress in providing information. The frustration about obtaining accurate, complete, and timely information was more palpable among participants who had arrived more than ten years ago than for participants that arrived in the past decade.

Access to information is a key element in the accreditation process. Participants in the first focus group who arrived over ten years ago described jarring experiences of no clear contact points, reliance on word-of-mouth, and miscommunications that created a snowball of misinformation. In the focus group with more recent arrivals, lack of clarity about communication contact points was also mentioned, but participants described being overwhelmed by the information available on web sites. Both groups of migrants complained that they needed individualised guidance at the start of the accreditation process. Camila, Mariana, Gabriel, Lucia, David, Francisco, and Victoria expressed immense frustration and confusion with obtaining information throughout the accreditation process.

When Lucia arrived in Canada as a refugee with no prior knowledge of credentialing and English, she relied on word-of-mouth information from her social connections. Lucia failed the English examination required to enrol in a graduate diploma program in her field. Emotionally distressed, she consulted a career counsellor to help her identify an alternative career path and abandoned her engineering career.

Unlike Lucia, Camila arrived with knowledge of the accreditation process, even though she also relied on information from her social contacts. She feels that the educational institution she attended in Canada misled her since the program she enrolled in did not qualify her with managerial certification. Her success in her current job is due to her professional experience and education in Colombia and Colombian community connections in London. These social connections were reliable word-of-mouth resources guiding her through the accreditation

process. Regarding access to accreditation programs, Camila is able to access the relevant bridging program at an education institution in London. Others, like Ana, had to travel to Ottawa for examinations.

Francisco also had higher expectations for the payoff from his education in Canada. One of his biggest regrets is disregarding advice from a Colombian doctor who completed her naturopathic bridging program a year earlier. She advised him to abandon accreditation as a naturopath early in the accreditation process. Months after graduating as a naturopath in Canada, she returned to her practice as a general physician in Colombia.

Participants described their difficulties accessing the numerous actors, e.g., federal and provincial government, employers, regulatory bodies, and settlement agencies, involved in the accreditation process. Employers, regulatory agencies, government, and educational institutions are “critical in optimizing immigrant skill transferability” (Reitz, 2012: 158). Settlement agencies try to channel immigrants into work that matches their previous occupation and education (Creese, 2011). Participants confirmed that settlement agencies play a key role in connecting them with the right information for their accreditation, naming organizations in London that had provided key services in their respective processes. Gabriel accessed Will employment solutions through his college in London. The agency helped him understand credentialing, draft a resume, improve his interview skills, and access the labour market. At Will’s group workshops, Gabriel connected with other professional immigrants who provided him meaningful networking advice. Over ten years ago, Francisco also accessed Will seeking to understand how to get a Canadian job, how to support his family in Canada, and how to build a new life in Canada. To describe his experience and goals, Will provided him with an action plan sheet. Hector also visited Will after improving his English. The organisation helped him identify his career options: to accredit as a civil engineer, with the option of obtaining a master’s degree later on or to seek an electrician licence. Lastly, Miguel credits Will as integral in navigating his accreditation process as he had no prior information about it. After an initial assessment, Will also referred Francisco and Hector to Access.

In addition to providing information and help clarifying career goals, Will also referred participants to other agencies such as Access. Reinaldo and Miguel described Access’s mentorship role. For Miguel, Access laid out the accreditation process in detail. For Reinaldo, Access played a pivotal role in his successful accreditation by informing him about available pathways, including veterinarian technician. Access was critical in providing accurate

information to override the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians initial rejection of his application and supported him in the resubmission. Miguel's and Francisco's first step at Access was to validate their education from Colombia using World Education Services. Through Access, Francisco and Hector made social connections that demonstrate how a strong social network and connections to community are key to integration (Martin, 2020). Francisco met a local group of International Medical Graduates, and they acted as a great support in credentialing and exam preparation. Access connected Hector with Skilled Trades Ontario to commence his credentialing via email. Skilled Trades Ontario responded with the required documentation, payment information, and the course requirement(s) for the Electrical Canada Code. He received valuable support from Access in the form of check-ins throughout these communications, which motivated him to continue. To complete the translation of the necessary documents, Hector was referred to Cross Cultural Learning Centre, as well as Ontario Works for financial support. As asylum seekers, Hector and Miguel received financial support until they obtained work permits, and while juggling survival jobs.

Hector's experience is invaluable for comparing the processes of trade certification and accreditation in a regulated profession. Firstly, there were clear and timely communications over email with the trades college, whereas communications with regulatory bodies were drawn out over months or were nonexistent. The trades college requested translated documents confirming Hector's education as an electrician and clarified that trained electrician apprentices must complete 9000 hours of work experience. This requirement is the same for foreign-trained and Canadian-trained apprentices. An employee from the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) referred Hector to a resource available free of charge to assist people in the preparation for their first examination that clarified the nature of the questions. The information helped Hector pass the examination on the first attempt. This is a striking contrast to other participants whose difficulty obtaining any information about the examination questions affected their exam performance more than knowledge of the material itself.

The tasks for translation and the costs of obtaining his license were also clear to Hector. He was referred to a professional translation service that cost \$1,200 and spent another \$300 for the CSA course and evaluation. The submission of his documents cost \$250. Hector waited six to eight weeks to receive approval to move onto the examination where he was offered the option to have an interpreter approved by the trade college or an additional two hours to complete his exam. Lastly, Hector's ability to enter the trades as an apprentice allowed him access to the

field while building industry specific human and linguistic capital in the Canadian context, which participants highlight as an enabler for professional success.

Hector's experience highlights some striking differences between trades and regulated accreditation. Document translation and acquiring information about accreditation processes was more complicated and more costly for regulated professions. Victoria and Francisco describe clarifying professional standards in their fields as a primary barrier to accreditation whereas Hector was given a manual clarifying the apprenticeship requirements. In terms of costs, Camila paid \$900 to submit her documents, almost four times more than Hector paid for document submission. Decisions about the apprenticeship were communicated faster than decisions about regulated professions. Camila waited nearly a year to receive confirmation or rejection of her application, while Victoria and Mariana waited six months for a decision. At the examination stage, a translator or time accommodation would have made a difference for participants like Francisco and Lucia who had insufficient language proficiency to continue the accreditation process. The regulated professions sector would seemingly benefit from clearer communication and the development of an apprenticeship program.

Integrity of the credentialing process, regulatory bodies and professional standards

When speaking of access to their professions, participants spoke of their experiences receiving professional services in Canada. They compared the accreditation standards to the standards of practice to which foreign professionals are held. They brought up the bureaucratic practices and labour market mechanisms that impeded foreign professionals' integration into sectors experiencing national shortage of professionals. Participants also addressed the ethical harms of limited public access to professional services, the squandering of foreign professionals' skills, and the integrity of immigration policies.

Camila, Francisco, Mariana, Reinaldo and Eliana brought up the bureaucracy as a barrier to entry for internationally trained medical practitioners. They echoed discussions in their social circles about the government motivation for recruiting foreign professionals. Advertisements describing professional work opportunities in Canada appear online in their professional networks in Colombia and are spread through word of mouth. Once in Canada, participants decried the misleading information implying that accreditation was an easy process and emphasized the bureaucratic challenges and expenses involved. That is the case for Reinaldo

and Mariana who endured a harder accreditation process than other foreign professionals even though their professions are deemed in high demand. They concluded that politics override merit as they try to understand why Colombians have such a difficult time obtaining accreditation despite being part of the target demographic for Canadian advertisements seeking internationally trained professionals.

Focus group participants raised questions about the regulatory bodies and the colleges. Regulatory bodies were criticized for their inherently biased position in representing and protecting their members' interests by controlling access to the profession and limiting the supply of professionals. The interests of the colleges were also questioned. International students pay higher fees than domestic students, making their recruitment very profitable.⁵ Participants highlighted how the bridging program entails re-education that necessitates a full tuition payment. A supplementary education strategy that was truly a 'bridging' program could lead to higher accreditation success. Camila chose the education pathway on the assumption that she would benefit from updating her training while achieving accreditation. Francisco studied for two-years but paid the same tuition as a four-year program. Carolina also studied for three years at the full price of four years of study. Evidently, bridging programs are shorter but no less costly than regular programs. Participants were also concerned that the examinations and education were very rigorous, even though they are supposed to verify training rather than develop new skills. Participants also advocated individual assessments of human capital to design individualized education programs to fill gaps and ensure professional immigrants are familiar with Canadian practice.

Discrepancy between professional and industry standards

Participants saw tensions between the labour market needs in their professional fields and the difficulty to be accredited in Ontario. Participants in both focus groups voiced concerns over the wait times and access to professional services in London. Eliana mentioned the year and a half-long wait times at the physiotherapist clinic where she works. Patients beg for earlier appointments, but she and her co-workers are already working through lunch to accommodate patients. Based on their clerical work in dental offices, Ana and Camila confirmed that dentists

⁵ The Office of the Auditor General of Ontario (2022) reports a financial need and profitability satisfied by the international student tuition at the university and college level, with a 342% increase in enrolment in colleges between 2013 and 2021, which resulted into international tuition being 68% of the total college tuition revenue.

are completely booked. Camila's family struggled to find a family and pediatric doctor in London. She had to resort a virtual appointment with a pediatrician in Colombia to diagnose and treat a kidney defect in her newborn. With the Colombian pediatrician's diagnosis, Camila convinced a local clinic of the urgency of her newborn's medical condition and finally received care.

At Francisco's practice, patients complain that their doctors spend little time with them resulting in incomplete assessments of their health concerns and misdiagnoses. In his own experience as a surgical patient in Canada, Francisco describes his experience as average, "not good, not bad." However, as a father who accompanies his children to medical appointments, Francisco has had to intervene and insist that a doctor reconsiders the diagnosis and prescribed treatment. Francisco finds this is a common experience in his social circle who often confide in him about their medical concerns.

These experiences do not align with the accreditation standards expected from immigrants. Francisco asserts that healthcare is a field where practitioners have their own preferences in practice, which are founded on a baseline standard of care. In his view, professional practices are not as prescribed and specific as the accreditation standards. Francisco insists that he is critiquing the accreditation system, not the practice of the Canadian health care system. When Eliana commented that she has not had anything but positive experiences with medical practitioners in Canada as a patient and co-worker, Francisco quickly responded: "exactly, there are good and bad professionals everywhere" to which Eliana replied: "yes, it is like you said, different standards, different expectations. Each professional is different in their practice."

Participants also compared Canadian and Colombian standards of education. As parents, Francisco, Eliana, and Ana could not say that there is a higher standard in Canada. They condemn the belittling scrutinization of Colombian education standards by Canadian teachers and principals. If anything, they argue that private education in Colombia is more demanding. These comments underscore the stigmatization of foreign education at all levels, post-secondary education for immigrants and the primary and secondary education of their children. They also suggest one reason that internationally trained teachers may be stigmatized as the providers of foreign education, that is deemed to be of lesser quality. Participants were concerned by the additional burden of proof required to establish equivalency between their human capital and Canadian teaching qualifications due to the perceived inferiority of Colombian knowledge and pedagogy.

Regardless of whether the accreditation process is fair, participants' perceptions of the process's fairness influence their perseverance with the accreditation process. Victoria could not reasonably participate in a process where the demands appear unfair. Contrary to Victoria, Miguel decided that the standard of expectations was fair and that it was in his professional interest to persevere despite the hardships of the process. Miguel expresses continued motivation based on this evaluation of fairness, which seems to imply that he understood and consented to the accreditation demands. Miguel's language expressed ownership of the process. Miguel applies this framing of ownership over his experience while working for the same Catholic School Board as Victoria. Victoria lost ownership of the accreditation process compiling and translating documents when she perceived some of the difficulties and dysfunction in Colombia and Canada as unfair and unjust. Miguel's perception of ownership of the accreditation process, combined with his single status, enabled him to see opportunities in accessing the teaching space through lower-skilled, supportive roles. He approached accreditation as an observer of the cultural and professional differences between Colombian and Canadian teaching spaces and felt that such experiences contributed to his professional growth. In contrast, Victoria felt that the professional differences that she experienced in the education system in Canada hindered her professional development, stagnating her professionalism from Colombia.

Macro-conditions that reveal the arbitrary accreditation micro-process

Reinaldo's and Mariana's stories illustrate the arbitrary nature of accreditation that can create credentialing gaps. Reinaldo's story focusses on the shifts in the labour market that affect accreditation. When Reinaldo pursued accreditation as a veterinarian technician rather than as a veterinarian, the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians informed him that he was not qualified to be a veterinarian technician. The pathway to accreditation that had been available at the time of his application was no longer available. Labour market conditions had changed. Despite the fact that Canada relies on internationally trained veterinarians to fill labour shortages in the field (College of Veterinarians of Ontario, 2021; Klynnetec, 2020: 4), Colombian trained veterinarians make up 2% of internationally trained veterinarians (Kynetec Canada, 2020: 33). Reinaldo thinks entry barriers impede Colombians efforts to be accredited as veterinarians. If Reinaldo chooses to pursue his veterinarian accreditation, his company will play a pivotal role in supporting his application. Their support is likely to be motivated by market

demand for veterinarians, underscoring how accreditation is part of a capitalist mode of operations in which paths to accreditation appear and disappear in response to changing demand for professionals.

Mariana sought her nursing accreditation before the COVID-19 pandemic, and she re-started the process due to post-pandemic regulatory changes. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Canadian healthcare system was reporting congestion in the system, whereby the system is overwhelmed by patient input without capacity to attend to them (Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, 2021). The additional pressures caused by the pandemic led the government to encourage re-assessment of internationally trained nurses through the National Nursing Assessment Service. For Mariana, it meant a new opportunity after her initial rejection by the National Nursing Assessment Service. She could access a re-vamped fast-track bridging programs (Western News, 2022). Mariana re-opened her accreditation application in 2022, sending the supplementary documentation required by the program. She received an update in February 2023 confirming that her application had been processed but is waiting for a request for further documentation, approval, or rejection. Mariana feels deflated about the prospects to become a nurse after so many years, arguing that her time and finances are better spent on continued education as a dental hygienist. Her thinking mirrors the decisions made by Gabriel and Lucia who abandoned their efforts to become accredited when it proved more difficult than starting an entirely new career.

Mariana explains that she is still concerned about establishing equivalence between Canada's numerical grading system and Colombia's qualitative grading system. For example, her transcripts evaluate in-class components as "met with excellence, met, or not met" but Canada requires a numerical evaluation with a passing grade of 3.5+. Mariana declared with confidence that her education in Colombia merited that grade because it is founded on the same core professional principles of the profession. Mariana's abilities have also been demonstrated by her high score on the jurisprudence exam that evaluates "an applicant's knowledge and understanding of the laws, regulations, by-laws and practice standards and guidelines that govern the nursing profession in Ontario" (College of Nurses of Ontario, 2023).

The pandemic-induced demand for nurses has improved the accreditation process. The National Nursing Assessment System responded to her application with a request for a letter from the university where she completed her Registered Practical Nursing component, and a

letter explaining the challenges of reconciling the quantitative and qualitative evaluations. Although Mariana's education, like those of Fernando, Carolina, Ana, Victoria, and Eliana has been recognized internationally, it seems to be devalued by the regulatory body. Mariana is part of several complaints concerning the National Nursing Assessment Service (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2020). As stated on the College of Nurses of Ontario (2020) website, "nursing education and standards of nursing competence differ from one country to the next... there is no guarantee that it will meet the College's nursing education requirement. Because of this, most RN applicants who completed a nursing program in another country must undergo additional assessment before they can write the registration exam." However, a World Health Organization (2009) report draws attention to the member states who are committed to improving the profession and adhering to the global standards for university education. The Association of Schools of Nursing in Canada and the National University of Colombia are amongst those who participated in drafting standards, making Colombian and Canadian nursing requirements comparable. Still Mariana and her professional network of Colombian nurses struggle to have their credentials recognized.

Professional differences and the devaluation of foreign experience

Participants voiced concern that their human capital was devalued when they sought work in their professional fields. Their professional training is assessed relative to Canadian professional norms. Social pressures in the work environment also adversely affected many focus group and interview participants. Gabriel described immense difficulty getting a job due to unfamiliarity with networking and résumé formatting, and employers' unwillingness or inability to evaluate his experience in Colombia. He highlighted how challenging it was to get his first interview, through a referral from a friend after a year of searching for a job. Despite his work experience in Germany, Finland, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and Colombia, prospective employers seemed to give more weight to his technology certifications than his experience. It became easier to obtain interviews after he acquired a year of experience in Canada. Gabriel's experience illustrates how the economic habitus values different forms of knowledge, for example, institutional education credentials are more valuable than foreign work experience. Based on these experiences, Gabriel thinks that immigrants are unlikely to be hired for managerial positions, limiting their upward mobility:

"It is really tough for the immigrant to get access to positions at the management level, like architect, design, or senior engineer [positions] being only for the

[Canadian] native. It is not about the experience but the networking or the relationships you have with the engineers”.

Gabriel described experiencing and observing the need for social capital for upward mobility from entry level positions such as IT engineer or developer. Even though, Gabriel believes that moving forward with the accreditation process would certainly support his qualifications for such promotions, it will not give him sufficient advantage over an applicant with Canadian experience. He has decided to invest the resources that credentialing requires into a program that would enable the development of complementary skills, such as project management or Canadian language abilities. Additionally, Gabriel reviewed the education pathway for accreditation and discovered it repeats the curriculum in Colombia that he already completed. Such repetition was highlighted by Eliana, Ana, Mariana, Francisco and Victoria as well. The adverse effects of experiences like Gabriel's were evident as early as 2006 when Latin Americans were among the immigrant groups least likely to secure work in regulated occupations, and most likely to have low earnings (Girard and Smith 2012; Boyd 2013).

In contrast to Gabriel, Victoria's experiences with the devaluation of her experience and credentials have been at the administration stage of accreditation. Even though 70% of her program's curriculum in Colombia was taught in English, it was short of the 100% necessary to exempt her from the English Language Testing System assessment. At the time of her application, Victoria was completing a Masters degree in Ontario, had completed two certificates in Ontario colleges, and had years of experience as a supply teacher in the London Catholic School Board. Her story confirms that even after a professional immigrant has gained language skills, education, and work experience in Canada, the burden of proof remains.

Participants felt they entered the labour market at a disadvantage, constantly having to prove themselves despite their qualifications. Micro-aggressions lead them to believe their professional worth is in question. They compare themselves to Canadian-born counterparts in the workplace who are not doubted in the same way. Participants experienced doubt about the worth of their professional abilities, thus impacting their professional identities and their confidence moving through professional and social spaces. The overall repercussion of these feelings of inferiority and doubt is the perpetuation of inequality between foreign and Canadian-born workers. This is statistically supported in that immigrants fare worse in the higher education-occupation mismatch rate and lower earnings gap that is increasing yearly, demonstrating that the higher-education immigrants that are favoured by immigration policy are

not being adequately integrated into occupations that match their high-skillsets (Hou, Lu, and Schimmele, 2019). The experiences of participants in this study indicate that in the long run, immigrants may fare better as they learn to deploy their social, cultural, and human capital to their advantage.

The consequential skill-waste and demeaning of the foreign professional

While Gabriel's professional devaluation occurred in the absence of accreditation, Eliana and Francisco shared experiences of professional devaluation as accredited professionals. They are often in a position of proving their merit as accredited, foreign trained immigrants. They believe these attitudes may reflect negative beliefs about foreign professionals amongst the public. Eliana's professionalism and training as a physiotherapist have been questioned with inquiries about medical equipment available in Colombia. She confessed to having been asked: "Do you have computers in Colombia? Do you know how to use this system? Do you have treadmills in Colombia? How do you do this treatment without this equipment? That is very unsafe." Eliana has deduced that cultural ignorance creates degrading stereotypes and misconceptions about medical practice abroad, as Colombian practitioners do have access to equipment. Eliana, Ana, Francisco, Victoria, and Mariana contend that differences in practice between Colombian and Canadian professionals do not signify more or less professional competence. Participants' experiences indicate that misperceptions occur in the professional space that damage the evaluation of their skills.

Francisco, however, commented that the advantage of medical practice in countries like Canada is in the diagnostic process due to the available technology. He informed the group that all medical practitioners receive elementary clinical skills training, referred to as defensive medicine for detection of illness. Regarding the patient-care model of the health sector, Francisco thinks 'the Canadian way' of the profession is misappropriated by the accreditation process to justify specific standards that do not necessarily translate to quality care. Similarly, Ana asserts that it is a matter of technique preference according to what is discussed between practitioners and the patient, always with the aim of providing quality treatment. This tendency to defer to the practitioner is captured in Bourgeault and Neiterman's (2013) study. Medical practitioners in Canada also point to the difficult integration of international medical graduates and the need to strengthen cultural education about the receiving society and local health care systems (Schmidtke, 2013).

Eliana and Reinaldo illustrate the distinction between professional differences stemming from cultural norms versus professional norms in practice. Eliana's biggest gap in training concerns patient care. She states that Colombian practice allows for more personal involvement in a patient's treatment, e.g., holding a patient's hand to console them. Eliana asserts that this kind of care ought to be integral to the practice as it is what distinguishes medical practitioners from the equipment, yet it is reprimanded due to ethical concerns in Canada. Eliana's professional opinion on the centring of empathy would likely benefit the Canadian aging demographic and long-term care if the system were to integrate this honed skill by Colombian practitioners (Moudatsou et al., 2020). She lamented the contempt that her and her Colombian colleagues receive regarding their patient care that does not align with the norms of Canadian practice.

Reinaldo's experience concerns differences in the regulatory framework of the agricultural and farming sectors. He describes differences in the types of medication available to veterinarians in Canada and Colombia. He had to re-learn medications and their corresponding treatments. He recognizes the importance of navigating such a professional difference in knowledge and materials regarding medication access and dispensing practices. The root of Eliana's concerns with professional difference stem from cultural differences and provide an example of an opportunity for reciprocity in cultural education and workplace ethics, whereas Reinaldo's is a clear example of different regulatory practices and differences in available materials that greatly influence professional practices and procedures.

Skill-waste demands innovative cross-sector collaboration

Gabriel's, Reinaldo's and Eliana's experiences demonstrate the need for innovative strategies to provide the cultural and social capital needed to facilitate the accreditation of immigrant professionals. Francisco's and Mariana's experiences with skill waste demonstrate that the most effective way to reduce skill waste is cross-sector collaboration.

Among the approximate 20 international medical graduates in Francisco's study group at Access, two obtained positions in the National Residency program, with one dropping out six months in and the single successful female candidate completing a residency in family medicine ten years later. Like him, international medical graduates with diverse backgrounds as surgeons, oncologists, neurologists, dermatologists, psychiatrists, internal medicine doctors, and emergency room doctors carved their own path to stay in healthcare, many as naturopaths. The irony is that the naturopathic medical profession is not recognized as part of the publicly

funded healthcare system. Francisco argues naturopathy is a common endpoint for international medical graduates whose skills were recognized by the government when they applied to immigrate but who did not obtain accreditation in their respective specialisations. As a nurse who worked as a personal support worker for years, Mariana also pointed out that this is a common pathway for internationally trained nurses unaccredited in Canada. Yet, many friends and former colleagues who share her education and qualification background were recognized and integrated into the profession in the United States.

Francisco asserts that there is room, and need, for innovative strategies to facilitate the integration of internationally trained medical professionals into the public healthcare system. Such strategies would take advantage of shared skill sets and foreign experience and provide opportunities for internationally trained medical professionals to gain Canadian healthcare experience and familiarity with technical English. Mariana also advocated for innovative strategies concerning personal support workers who have internationally recognized abilities that could alleviate some of the pressures on the healthcare system. Both argue that foreign trained and internationally recognized professionals merit a comprehensive evaluation and opportunity to be certified for positions in healthcare that would improve their careers.

Francisco's innovative strategies are relayed from discussions amongst those in the naturopathy space. Recognition of their skills would merit formal inclusion in the healthcare system. He gives the examples of the roles of a practical nurse or pharmacist, who are able to contribute their skill sets in responsible roles within the healthcare system as primary care providers. Primary care providers he describes are tasked with "the promotion of good health and prevention of disease", which encompasses a range of intermediary work and can contribute to decongesting the system. With the skills and experience that have enabled them to enter naturopathy, international medical graduates could take on a role of this nature, making referrals to doctors as needed.

4. Impacts of Lives and Identities

This section examines the impacts of credentialing on participants' lives and identities. Participants' decisions highlight the importance of socio-cultural supports to nurture the social and cultural capital of the professional, and to secure human capital transfer and labour market success. The impacts of the economic habitus are seen in the negotiation of cultural differences

and the consequences in the professional space. Participants' experiences challenge the habitus and demonstrate how accreditation translates into successful integration for the family unit. Family duties and responsibilities are key to the professional decisions of participants. This section contributes insights into the impact of family and community support on labour market integration and demonstrates how integration processes shape the challenges and opportunities faced by families (Ali and Baitubayeva, 2019; Dyson, Roos-Walker, and Hannan, 2019).

Social roles associated with the family unit

Participants' journeys highlight the importance of social roles as they describe a complex system of overlapping and interrelated barriers in accreditation. Accreditation is a means to secure a good quality of life for the family. Quality of life is defined as the increased access to opportunities in Canada compared to Colombia where instability (such as feelings of safety, access to education, temporal ease) posed limitations. Thus, many participants abandoned credentialing when its harms reduced the family's quality of life. In a few words, Hector summarized how social roles can enable or impede the accreditation process: "as long as our children are fine, we [professionals] are fine, if I see my children are fine, I lose interest. A lot of professionals already had the chance to work in their careers and if it were about that, they'd stay in Colombia."

Data measuring accreditation success is incomplete because it centers on the individual without much attention to their families, whereas Colombian participants centered the family throughout their professional journeys. The Evaluation of Foreign Credential Recognition Program (2020) mentions the balancing of family responsibilities solely regarding single women with children. Traditional gender expectations are viewed as a detriment to the integration of professional women. However, based on Colombian participants' experiences, this view paints a reductive picture of the tensions experienced by the family, in the spousal relationship, and by immigrant woman regardless of marital status. Professional immigrants prioritized meeting the family's core needs over accreditation. Participants indicate that the decision to continue or discontinue the accreditation process is not made from the position as a professional, but from a family role as a father, mother, husband, or wife. Women approached professional obligations and aspirations from a stance of care for the home, while men from a desire to protect the home. Immigrants consistently describe a balancing act between themselves and their spouses throughout accreditation, in order to maintain positive family relations and an adequate livelihood for the family.

Accreditation must serve the needs of the family -- and Valentina and David exemplify this balancing act. They arrived as partners but independently proceeded with their immigration pathways and accreditation. As their relationship flourished, David's ambitions for accreditation increased as he anticipated growing responsibilities as a husband and father. In this sense, the accreditation process is directly linked to family resources and needs. As David stated:

"The accreditation process affects your lifestyle... if we want to get those certifications, it's not only the money, but the time that we're going to spend... now we also want to be a family and are wanting to build it in a few years. I think that is the hardest part and the accreditation process is going to change everything in our lives. We are not going to stop working, and thank God, [our accreditation] is not as expensive as a dentist or something like that. We can pay [for it] while we are working. So, it is going to be hard because once we complete our eight- or ten-hour workdays, we're going to have to study for our accreditation, so it's going to change our lifestyle and everything."

David and Valentina share the same reason for immigrating as the rest of participants in this study: to secure a good quality of life. However, as independent, young professionals with no children they focused on their professional ambitions, and they have some flexibility in the job search including the option to relocate. Nonetheless, David and Valentina express apprehension about the financial and temporal strain of the accreditation process on their current resources as they are currently paying international student fees. Valentina elaborates on three reasons for pursuing accreditation despite the difficulties: physical safety, a lifestyle change, and more experience with the English language. Valentina found that the social inequality of women in Colombia limited professional growth. Bogotá's traffic congestion often extended the workday up to 12 hours.⁶ Moreover, the cost of goods in Colombia relative to income is higher than in Canada, making the acquisition of goods easier in Canada and contributing to the prospects for a better quality of life. A Canadian passport and access to lower travel costs are also valuable for establishing oneself professionally. But ultimately for David and Hector, professional and financial stability in Colombia do not increase security; feelings of

⁶ This congestion is such that the *Secretaría de Movilidad* [Secretary of Mobility] (2021) legally manages the "Pico y Placa" congestion with limiting use of vehicles to every other day depending on the licence plate number ending in an even or odd number.

insecurity regarding physical safety are a major push factor for Colombian professionals capable of financing the journey to Canada, regardless of gender and familial status.

Hector, Francisco, Ana and Lucia all mentioned the delicate balance between their roles in the family and as professionals navigating accreditation. From the men's perspectives, the responsibility to financially support the household affected their decisions about accreditation. Francisco considers his accreditation a failure due to its financial and relational strains which he explains as follows:

"I currently have a problem with my car, and now I have to pick between making rent for my office or fixing the car... this is how it affects my life; the low income for my decision even though I did what I was supposed to do... I look on my wall and I see my Canadian title, I see my Colombian title, but I compare it to those closest to me and I am in the lowest income bracket because of these titles... and this my story as someone who tried, behind me there are hundreds of people that aren't able to even try."

Francisco's wife supports the family working two jobs throughout the week, while his income is funnelled into repaying his accreditation debt and into his business. Francisco splits his day between his duties as a father, self-employed doctor, and survival jobs that consist of construction work on weekends and cleaning at night. He expresses immense disappointment and frustration for failing to produce the quality of life envisioned for his family. For Francisco, friends who established themselves in lower-skilled work during the time he spent on accreditation have a better quality of life now. Francisco notices increased relationship strain between immigrant spouses who actively struggle to secure a better quality of life compared to those who have attained it. He attributes the relational and financial fragility of his household to the accreditation process.

By comparison, Lucia's story exemplifies the multi-level constraints experienced by immigrant women. She describes fewer job opportunities for an immigrant woman compared to an immigrant man entering the lower-skill labour market in Ontario as manual labour is harder to access. Ana's decision to step back from the accreditation process was due to the simultaneous need to devote time and resources to her role as mother and wife and to financially provide for the family alongside her husband. Her roles as a mother and wife took precedence over accreditation in a system that inevitably forces the migrant woman to choose. The security and

well-being of her family is always Ana's motivation whether it be in short-term negotiations with the labour-market or long-term negotiations with professional accreditation. Overall, there is parallel emotional distress between the pressure that Francisco and Hector feel to provide financial support to their families, and Lucia's, Ana's, and Camila's sentiments regarding the pressure to work any job that will provide some financial resources.

As a couple, Gabriel and Camila found that accreditation strained their household's limited resources, which already required Camila's mother to relocate from Colombia to enable Camila's accreditation. They presume that Camila's professional career in Canada will have a higher return on investment than Gabriel's, producing the quality of life that they desire. However, as new parents, it is not possible for Camila to proceed with her accreditation in the short-term. The family cannot afford to be a single income household during her credentialing; thus, Camila will continue to work full-time once she enrolls in her full-time program. In the meantime, she has enrolled in an education program to become a radiologist that requires costly examinations in Toronto upon its completion. This certification enables occupational mobility, indirectly supports her long-term accreditation, and will allow her to grow her family and support the household's short-term goal to buy a house. Here, where the possibility of two successful professional careers existed, a choice had to be made due to the high costs involved with credentialing and the absence of social support for recently arrived immigrants. Gabriel describes a 100% commitment to the accreditation process for Camila even though it is an incredible financial commitment. Hector described a similar decision-making strategy in his family, where he pursued accreditation because the process was faster for him than for his wife. His wife's career was halted, which has weighed on their family. Hector recognizes that "she's brave and she has to be, because you don't work when you do what you love, in Colombia she didn't work, but here she works." He affirms that accreditation demands consistent sacrifice. Hector and Camila could not continue with the accreditation process without the emotional and financial support of their spouses. Tests, books, and courses require the applicant's full attention, the investment of time and financial resources by family members, and family adjustments. Failure is not cost effective.

However, the relationship between two professionals is often strained when the time and finances required for credentialing conflict. Gabriel and Camila had difficulties in their first few years of marriage from the pressures on their professional careers, and subsequently their household's livelihood. Additionally, Gabriel and Camila struggle with the financial costs and emotional strain of living with her mother in a two-bedroom house. Relieving Camila of

responsibility for domestic work, Camila's mother helps Camila continue the accreditation process. Camila and Hector also want to grow their family and own a home. Even though, Camila's case is unusual because it is typically the man who moves forward with establishing his career, her accreditation seems to be enabled by her mother. The reliance on Camila's mother that reinforces traditional gender roles in which women assume responsibility for the care of the household is imposed by the demands of the accreditation process. Camila's mother obtained a 'super visa' that permits her as a grandparent of a Canadian citizen to enter for the care of her grandchild while Camila works part-time and studies full-time. Their experience illustrates recent criticisms of policies such as the super visa that shifts responsibility onto newly arriving families and away from state-supported services such as affordable public childcare (Root, Shields, and Gates-Gassee 2019). As a senior Spanish speaker with little financial, social, linguistic, or cultural capital in Canada, Camila's mother is making sacrifices to support her daughter's short-term and long-term goals in Canada.

As a single-parent, Eliana describes a conflict between her cultural capital as a Colombian, Spanish speaking woman and the need to develop cultural capital valued in Canada. Lucia mentioned the same concern. Both women arrived with little knowledge of English, so they depended on their husband's support, creating profound emotional distress and isolation. They found some support and comfort in Spanish speaking, Colombian communities as they adapted to their new environments, but their ability to speak English did not improve. Ultimately, both women removed themselves from their communities to develop their human, cultural, and linguistic capital in order to develop each in the Canadian context and develop the skillsets to challenge the threat of becoming deskilled professionally. There is a tension between the sense of security associated with social connections within the Colombian community and the insecurity experienced outside the community that can only be ameliorated when the immigrant separates from the community. Social contacts and connection to a community counter isolation, benefit mental health, and reduce emotional distress during migration (Martin, 2019), but in Eliana and Lucia had to abandon these resources to improve their English fluency and make social connections outside the Colombian community.

Lucia and Eliana's responsibilities as mothers created tremendous conflicts during the accreditation process. Although Lucia has the emotional and financial support of her husband, due to limited work opportunities in Ontario, he relocated to British Columbia for a better paid job. They operate as a bi-costal family which leaves Lucia as the primary caretaker for their son with high living costs in two locations. Due to these constraints, Lucia took the first few years of

her son's life off work and put aside her plans to go back to school to improve her career in order to work two jobs and be present as a mother.

Eliana is now divorced and lives with her daughter in a different city. She proceeded with accreditation at a cost to her and her daughter. She describes extraordinarily difficult years as she worked full-time during the day and studied full-time in every other moment. Her daughter was constantly by her side, sitting by her during group study sessions with co-workers. After she put her daughter to bed, Eliana would continue studying. Eliana's goal was to succeed in Canada and to succeed she needed to gain linguistic capital. She took government-funded language courses, in classes which were predominantly made up of Spanish speaking ESL students, she had few opportunities to practice English. Even though the classes were a great opportunity for a beginner, she found the classroom English did not transfer easily into day-to-day activities. This complaint is echoed by Camila, Gabriel, Francisco, and Lucia, prompting them to follow Eliana's example to find language training outside the Spanish-speaking, Colombian community. Eliana enrolled in courses at the local college where grade 12 English level classes were available. She sought opportunities to interact with English-speaking Canadians. Once she achieved day-to-day English fluency, she enrolled in a course for Smart Serve certification to start using English in a work environment and simultaneously enrolled in English writing courses. She deduced that enrolling in writing courses would help her to develop the skill to successfully complete patient charts as a physiotherapist, whilst introducing her to an academic setting with non-Spanish speakers for social and linguistic capital development. The decision to take courses at the local college was emotionally difficult since Eliana was going through a divorce, which magnified her feelings of stress and loneliness.

There is pressure on both men and women to actively participate in family duties and the labour market, however, women are further constrained by the additional demands that the accreditation process places on the family. Since immigrant women are more likely than men to arrive as dependents. It is not surprising that women take longer than immigrant men to achieve labour market integration (Ahmad Ali and Baitubayeva, 2019). For Eliana and Lucia, their limited knowledge of English constrained their access to the labour market. For others like Ana, Camila and Victoria, domestic responsibilities delayed their efforts to re-establish their careers and pursue accreditation in Canada. The findings thus indicate the need for family support that will enable increased accreditation success for men and women.

Social and physical adaptation

Most participants arrived as international students or refugee claimants, which created feelings of impermanence for the family unit and uncertainty about accreditation. As noted before, participants were not able to formally begin their accreditation until obtaining permanent residency. They were deterred from long-term planning for the first few years and felt stuck in adapting to life in Canada. The condition of impermanence has a major influence on participants' decision-making, as it causes tension between short-term and long-term choices. Moreover, impermanence prolonged accreditation processes, pushing accreditation farther into the future. In this space of impermanence, immigrant professionals' mental health and age can become barriers to accreditation.

Developing linguistic capital is clearly an initial barrier but with time, the English language fluency of refugee claimants improves. Participants described their knowledge of three different levels of English (see Appendix): in the classroom, day-to-day, and technical use in their fields. Some participants who arrived over ten years ago arrived with no knowledge of the language. With this level of unfamiliarity with the language, spouses became translators for everyday tasks and immigrants had difficulty finding and using online sources and contacting organizations to find employment and/or start their accreditation process. Enrolling in government-funded language courses was the first step to accreditation. Those who arrived with a classroom level of English were unable to converse and express themselves in everyday life, but they were familiar enough with English to participate in government funded classes and work with settlement organizations to start the accreditation process. Participants with a day-to-day level of English described their confidence navigating social and educational spaces. Lastly, technical English, which transcends day-to-day fluency enables confident negotiation of professional environments and the transfer of human capital. Only the two teachers arrived with such advanced fluency in English.

No matter their level of proficiency, participants described challenges with expression and comprehension socially and professionally that stalled their ability to proceed with accreditation. Despite changes in program criteria, participants advanced beyond government-funded English programs and sought increased engagement with English speakers. Many participants describe feeling stalled in the classroom environment and unable to progress to a higher level of English, so they sought opportunities for social engagement to improve their fluency. Participants distinguish in-class English as more formal and less applicable to everyday life, and day-to-day as more colloquial and useful for daily interactions. All participants report success developing their English through low-skilled and entry-level jobs. Lucia and Eliana highlight customer

service positions as the best conditions for improving their English. Francisco and Gabriel emphasize that the client and patient relations in their professions as the most fruitful for technical language development. Immigrants' success obtaining and persevering in customer service positions to gain better English enabled increased feelings of competence, which lead to greater feelings of belonging in Canada. Improved English fluency increased the chances of success in the accreditation process and alternative careers, which in turn increased cultural capital and social adaptation.

Hector, Reinaldo, Eliana, Valentina, Gabriel and Camila commented on government misunderstanding of the gaps in immigrants' English fluency. They assert that most immigrants know English, but that it is an entirely different experience to work in an environment with technical terminology, multiple accents, and colloquialisms. The development of technical English countered the emotional distress of negotiating professional spaces. Technical terminology could inhibit or enable integration into professional work environments. Participants claim that this level of English can only be developed in the work environment. To break this vicious cycle, immigrants argue that there should programs that facilitate acquisition of entry-level positions. Reinaldo explains how veterinarians have acronyms for everything, which requires that he knows the full names and the acronyms. Hector gives an example of the overlap between day-to-day and technical jargon ("a pigtail" is a technique in the electrician trade). Valentina and David mentioned how much of their workday consists of researching laws as they encounter them throughout their tasks. Those in medical professions describe learning the names of treatments, techniques, and equipment while working. Gabriel has identified an innovative tactic to help overcome technical language barriers. His co-workers on the IT engineer team have tools used in user support to help them manoeuvre and resolve problems. Gabriel has discovered these tools also help to improve his knowledge and fluency with industry specific language. He asserts that access to the Canadian labour market space is the best way for immigrants to develop their human capital. He says that it is a practical way to become familiar with the diverse dialects and accents of co-workers and clients, essential knowledge for professional success and job security. At the time of the focus group, Gabriel was considering pursuing accreditation, but by the time of his in-depth interview, he had decided to focus on developing his language abilities in English and French – after realizing the importance of knowledge of both languages for more senior positions in the Ontario company where he worked. He is prioritizing developing his language capital rather than proceeding with his credentialing. Reinforcement of the language and networking skills valued in the Canadian

context will enable his human capital transfer at the managerial level, which is equally if not more valuable than his accreditation.

The demands and barriers encountered by participants in the accreditation process rapidly take a psychological and physiological toll on them. Some of the harmful narratives relate to the public perception that immigrants rely on Canadian social welfare. Participants' stories consistently emphasize immigrants' preoccupation with self-sufficiency by securing work and the desire to wean themselves off settlement supports. Hector describes social welfare as an enabler for immigrants to advance with their career and/or education goals during the early years of settlement. He challenges the misconception of immigrants seeking "handouts". Such misconception not only overgeneralizes the experience of immigrants, it also perpetuates discriminatory and often racist beliefs and attitudes about immigrants who seemingly fail at self-sufficiency.

Lucia and Eliana described the emotional distress created by isolation in the first few years of living in Canada. They described periods of depression as they worked to learn English and navigate their career prospects in Canada. Valentina also mentioned mental health issues that arose due to uncertainty, isolation and separation from her family and culture. These mental health impacts are due to an experienced strain onto their identities, which works to physically constrain them across social and economic spaces. This phenomenon is described by Ahmad Ali and Baitubayeva (2019) as plaguing immigrant women with difficulties in integration that result in their economic dependency and social isolation (Ahmad Ali and Baitubayeva, 2019). Lucia expands on the mental health impacts after failing the English assessment required to enrol in the local college civil engineering technology program. She described herself as "raised to be independent, and not to depend on anyone at any point throughout life, not even my husband." In her first year, she experienced a dual disabling of her professional and social autonomy and de-skilling when she worked in a factory, which led to depression. This "empty and dissatisfied" feeling forced Lucia to re-evaluate her career prospects. Social isolation could be prevented with increased social participation; however, immigrant women are less likely to be members of organizations or associations than their Canadian-born counterparts (Ahmad Ali and Baitubayeva, 2019). Lucia was referred to a career counsellor by a friend who was experiencing similar mental health struggles. Testing that revealed she was likely to find work in healthcare rewarding led her to a job as a medical lab assistant technician. She passed the English assessment, then worked in London for seven years before relocating to Alberta for more promising career prospects.

Despite not entering their previous regulated professions, Lucia, David, Victoria, and Mariana's successful career adaptation demonstrates the benefits for foreign professionals of entering a new field rather than pursuing accreditation. As older immigrants, age played a significant role in Lucia's, Mariana's, Francisco's, and Hector's decisions to abandon accreditation. They acknowledged that the accumulation of barriers over the years, which are extensively described in this paper, combined with the increasing physical and temporal limitations with age significantly dimmed their prospects of accreditation. Francisco, Ana, Luis, Camila, Hector and Gabriel separately emphasized that it becomes harder to justify re-education at an older age, especially when accounting for the retirement impacts and resource strain. For Camila who is starting her family, age is a key variable in her and Gabriel's decisions – notably the decision to pause their accreditation to grow their family and acquire a house. Age is a resource, enabling or constraining, and subject to constant re-evaluation. Camila describes this re-evaluation at each stage of the process:

“Okay, how old am I? Am I able to do all of those things? Because I have to start thinking about the pension plan... many other things that are involved in [my] life and [my] journey... it's a tough decision, of course, you have to balance all of those 100 variables to make a decision”.

Accreditation is a balancing act between an array of variables and resources and, as Camilla states, “the costs to pursue what you want to achieve, settle down and have an economy in the house for all that we need in daily life.” As argued by Ahmad Ali and Baitubayeva (2019: 181) “unemployment, separation from family, discrimination and prejudice, language barriers, and lack of social support” are the greatest post-migration stressors. Research shows that the chronic stress of limited financial resources and social capital are among the factors causing psychological problems in adults, and subsequently obstructs the next generation of immigrant youths' ability to equally access social and education capital (Ahmad Ali and Baitubayeva 2019; Valade and Tyyska 2019). Participants commented that the longevity of these barriers means that the stress experienced by immigrant professionals and their families is constant. Participants shared that they are in survival mode for the first few years of life in Canada. They struggle to integrate due to the lack of social support for the family while negotiating accreditation demands. Their experiences point to the fact that both professional immigrants' abilities and the spaces that they enter must be considered to improve accreditation (Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck, 2005).

Participants reflected on the experiences of cultural differences in their social and workspaces. Some shared experiences that they had not considered before hearing others mention them. They shared moments where misinformation about Colombian and/or Latino culture led to presumptions and stereotyping, which resulted in the othering and racialization of participants. Imbalances of power were unearthed, seemingly grounded in attitudes and beliefs about cultural superiority. Through their daily lives and the accreditation process, participants were marginalized from the normative practices and common knowledge processes associated with the receiving society/culture. Contrasting with some exclusionary experiences, participants also mentioned inclusionary experiences grounded in reciprocity, encouragement, and support. Professional environments that operated with these values enabled the professional immigrants' success and played a key role in their successful accreditation. This demonstrates the utmost importance of socio-cultural education in the workplace for immigrants to thrive. Participants saw the equal importance of foreign professionals' willingness to integrate to the receiving society's culture and the receiving society's willingness to integrate foreign professionals. These findings support Mulholland and Bile's (2004) case study on the Canadian approach to integration, which demonstrates a reciprocal obligation in conjunction with policies and programs across sectors that facilitate integration. Participants value their co-workers as a resource that enables their accreditation.

Yet, the opposite is also true. Discriminatory behaviours in the workplace are detrimental to the accreditation journey. Negative interactions associated with hostility, isolation, indifference, inadequacy, and inferiority cause participants' negative feelings. Often, such interactions are caused by cultural ignorance, micro-aggressions, racial prejudice, linguicism, as well as discriminatory hiring and disciplinary practices. Even though Miguel and Hector describe feelings of discomfort and unease in particular moments, they remained unsure of whether their experiences were due to racism or misunderstandings of cultural differences. Yet a majority of participants understood the root cause of these moments as racism and discrimination. The literature on unconscious bias would qualify such moments as forms of micro-aggressions, which are experiences of racism that are in fact difficult to identify (Wingsue et al., 2007).

Eliana confided about various instances in her professional and personal life where she experienced hostility, cultural ignorance, micro-aggressions, and racial prejudice, whilst observing discriminatory disciplinary practices of a fellow Colombian female co-worker. She hopes that by sharing her stories, people better understand what it means to enter social and workspaces as a woman, as an immigrant, as a Colombian, and as member of a collectivist

culture. Her desire is to foster mutual respect and recognition of diverse ways of existence professionally and socially and to confront the expectation of the immigrant to assimilate rather than integrate. More so, Eliana wants to bring to light these experiences after observing a pattern of systemic silencing of marginalized foreign professionals. Her first set of experiences occurred at the hospital where she worked in a small city in Ontario. She describes her co-workers as Canadians of white-European descent and herself as the only Colombian worker. Co-workers questioned how physiotherapy is practiced in Colombia, making stereotypical and culturally ignorant remarks concerning the technology and quality of care. The implication was that professionals in Colombia did not have professional abilities. This is an instance of micro-aggression in the workplace based on differences in professional practices, which are rooted in cultural differences. The overall impact was the cultivation of a negative work environment for Eliana both personally and professionally, resulting in her relocation to London where she obtained a position in a hospital.

Similar to Eliana's experience of being negatively stereotyped, Francisco experienced professional devaluation due to linguicism from patients. Dealing with telephone inquiries, he thinks that his accented English resulted in prospective clients' immediate dismissal of his professional services. Many inquiries come from individuals with accented English as well, and he has not acquired any clients through these interactions. His pool of clients is predominantly Spanish speaking acquired through word of mouth. These experiences exemplify the socioeconomic and sociolinguistic power dynamics operating in a diverse population. Their experiences demonstrate a gap in cultural education in workplace practice. The details of their stories reveal a particular need to attend to the relationship between local contexts, professional identities, and workplace ethics. Moreover, they demonstrate how the local context becomes transformed and as it is infused with non-local knowledge and practices, and there is innovative potential in this transformation for the space and the individual alike.

In addition to Eliana's own experiences of discrimination, she has observed discriminatory instances and other workers have shared them with her. Her Colombian co-worker was terminated after a single complaint, despite having no prior disciplinary actions -- in contrast to the Canadian co-worker that brought the complaint, who has received several disciplinary notices, but has not been terminated. From Eliana's perspective, different cultural norms had created a grave misunderstanding in the professional space. For Eliana, the situation ought to have served as a cultural education opportunity. Her co-worker filed a complaint about the

termination on grounds of discrimination and gathered evidence but was told that she had provided insufficient evidence of discrimination. Victoria and Eliana pointed out that a large number of foreign professionals were listed by their respective colleges as suspended professionals. They suspected that racialization in professional space subjects foreign professionals to higher levels of punishment compared to their Canadian counterparts. Schmidtke's (2013) research found that racial discrimination is a critical determinant of immigrant's labour market integration, but this form of exclusion is difficult to establish due to the burden of proof.

Ana, Victoria, Francisco, and Gerardo all carefully listened to Eliana's stories, nodding and mumbling words of support and understanding. The conversation transitioned to focus on the lack of understanding by the dominant culture of their cultural differences, which they agree is the root cause of racialization. The following is an example from Eliana that demonstrates how cultural differences translate into professional differences and micro-aggressions when unchecked by the dominant culture:

“Every time in the evening before clocking out [I] would ask, “is there something I can do for you before I leave?”. At the beginning, they said the same thing, “that’s so weird, why do you do that? Everybody has their own job.” I refuted that, because if I can help someone then we can all go home earlier and our job is not done, because it is for the patient, not for us, right? To [be able] to work as a team that way.”

Ironically, a former co-worker mentioned to Eliana that after her departure from the hospital, they ended up adopting this habit. With students from all over the world, Eliana considers the professional space she enters in London as being much more inclusive than that in the small city. Her previous experience led her to enter this new work environment with a demeanour that would immediately address and ameliorate any behaviour that may lead to questions about her professionalism. Despite still receiving professionally discouraging comments about “remembering that she was here as an assistant”, she stated that this line of commentary in her present workplace was an exception to an otherwise positive workplace culture, whereas that was not true in the position she had to leave. In fact, Eliana's coworkers supported her accreditation. Her co-workers took it upon themselves to provide the materials she needed to study; they lent her textbooks, they studied with her, they practiced for their own examinations, and included her as a patient. She asserts that without their support, it would have probably been impossible to pass. Thus, Eliana highlights that a key variable to having received that

support is based on reciprocity, whereby she contrasts her experience of receiving support to that of another foreign trained physiotherapist who did not. She states that this individual also did not show the same interest in reaching out, learning from, or extending support to co-workers in the same way Eliana did. Eliana successfully transformed her cultural capital to cultivate a supportive environment where she would be seen as a team player and prove her ability to be a good professional.

Miguel and Hector also spoke of the cultural differences in their workplaces and the importance of collective teamwork, and how those of a collectivist culture should not feel they have to suppress this reflex. Hector detailed an experience similar to Eliana's where he was initially very uncomfortable in a Canadian family-owned. He looked for an apprenticeship at a different company with a multiculturally diverse workforce where he felt more supported, gained the confidence to ask and answer questions, and spearheaded the creation of synergy in the workplace to show his capabilities and produce a healthier team dynamic. These are practical examples of professional improvements, whereby reciprocity between co-workers created opportunities for knowledge sharing and on-site efficiencies. In Hector's case, these changes reduced labour and material costs.

Participants in the first focus group moved from reflections in the work space to those in social spaces after reasoning with the remark of everyone having their "own job to do" in the workplace. They felt like the language in this quote by their Canadian-born co-workers perfectly captured the tension at root of their cultural and professional differences that are based on the different modes of individualist versus collectivist norms of operation. Participants shared experiences where 'hellos' in common spaces like the elevator or the hallway were received more warmly than in-between apartment balconies, where the greetings were rejected due to a perceived intrusion upon personal space. The navigation of these boundaries by immigrants is a daily learning experience that is not understood by many from the dominant culture. The dominant culture holds the foreigner as an outsider coming into the Canadian space on Canadian land, thus the onus is on them to integrate.

The power of solidarity

Participants' experiences of support have enabled their accreditation attempts and/or successes. Without support, the professional motivations and personal joys of immigrants were diminished. Miguel and Hector described moments of isolation, being overlooked, and being

ignored in the workplace. They both observed negative reactions to their Colombian identifiers, i.e., their accented English and expressive mannerisms. Miguel, Eliana, and Hector described different experiences that shattered solidarity and left them feeling insecure. All three participants detailed a psychological transfer of responsibility when they observed indifference in their professional spaces. They felt the need to overcompensate and cultivate what they describe to be a friendlier and warmer atmosphere to confront the pressures to assimilate. They talked about the specific example of receiving a greeting in the workplace. It is an example of the social indicators that immigrants experience navigating spaces in the dominant culture. The cues indicate acceptance or rejection by occupants of those spaces which implicate feelings of belonging and can have adverse impacts on immigrants. The following quote from Eliana is an example of the fine line between cultural difference and the microaggressions that occur in the absence of respect:

“Simple things like saying ‘good morning’. When I was working at the hospital every morning I said, “good morning, everyone, how are you?”. At first, they’d say things like, “you’re so weird, or that’s so weird. Don’t you see people are working? Don’t you see people are just starting off their day as if it were something rude. Then, the funny thing is, after seven years they said to me, ‘since you left, now we always say good morning in the department.’”

Miguel is the only participant in this study who did not interpret experiences of indifference and isolation in the workplace as racism. Not sure that people act with intention, he perceives “the mistreatment he has experienced by teachers, students, and the whole organization” as rude and attributes it to a cultural gap. More so, he perceives that this behaviour must be an example of the common workplace practice in Canada’s individualist culture, thus, leading him to believe his personality is incompatible with the Canadian space and reducing his expectation that he would flourish if he were to stay. Miguel has consistent feelings of insecurity, not knowing whether the disdain is due to negative perceptions of his professional abilities. Miguel is prepared to return to Colombia following the completion of his accreditation although he is constantly completing more paperwork for the accreditation, seemingly halted at the documentation stage that derailed Victoria. The experience has made him realize that the social solidarity experienced in collectivist societies like Colombia is valuable to him and not worth sacrificing. He adds that this experience, combined with the rising costs of living in Canada, have not improved his quality of life, and concludes “If I’m going to be in a rat race in Canada, I prefer to race it in my country”.

In his interaction with Latin Americans, Hector has observed feelings of shame over ethnic identifiers. When Hector inquired about a co-worker's Latino heritage, the man asserted he was a Canadian. Later on, Hector observed a Canadian ask the man the same question to which he confirmed being Venezuelan. When Hector confronted him about it, he responded with "well, I've been here for three years and forgotten my Spanish". On a separate occasion, Hector asked the man for directions in Spanish, not having the confidence with the language to ask another co-worker in English and the man started to explain in Spanish and then switched to English. Hector explained that his co-worker became especially indifferent after finding out that he was licensed, whereas the co-worker was still an apprentice. Hector attributed his co-worker's hostility towards him to their common linguistic and pan-ethnic identity from which the co-worker wanted to distance himself. His co-worker's behaviour exemplifies behaviours of internalized racism. Unfortunately, these experiences led Hector to quit his job two weeks later and left him with a negative perception of the solidarity amongst Latin Americans in Canadian spaces.

Eliana's story of her Colombian co-worker's unjust termination reflects the discrimination that immigrants face in Canada. Furthermore, Eliana observed that other migrant groups in Canada seem to have a stronger community fabric and they organize amongst themselves to support each other and increase their security. She notes the voice of the Latin American is absent:

"As Latin Americans, we do not have that. We go with the flow and if someone treats us wrong, or if someone does something wrong to us, we don't speak up for each other. We just let things go... I don't know if it is something intrinsic to the Latin American community... I don't know, but if it is, we need to be a part of a community that speaks up for each other and support each other so we do not have to face the discrimination we do now."

Community plays a role in successful accreditation. Lack of community support or the absence of a community can easily dissuade immigrants from pursuing accreditation. On the other hand, Eliana, Reinaldo, and Lucia's stories exemplified supports from colleagues in the professional space that encouraged their professional development and credentialing. Encouragement from community connections transcended the individual's professional aims and contributed to a better quality of life. Even though immigrants describe quality of life in terms of access to greater opportunities and physical security, neither is sufficient in the absence of a social community.

When participants were asked about their decisions to settle in London, many mentioned a mother, brother, cousin, uncle, or family friend that lived there prior to their arrival. This was the case for Lucia, Reinaldo, David, Valentina, Hector, Camila and Gabriel. When asked about why they decided to stay in London or return after moving away for a period of time, they cited struggles to integrate elsewhere and familial and community connections in London. Their experiences are evidence of Dyson, Roos-Walker and Hannan's (2018: 92) assertion that family and the household are a cornerstone to an immigrant's relationship to the labour market. Research reinforces the pivotal role that families play in integration and survival as the emotional and social support increases resilience and improves mental health by reducing the emotional distress during migration (Martin, 2019).

Participants also indicated that if professional credentialing threatened their social or cultural capital, it was not pursued. Accreditation is at odds with securing a good quality of life for the family. Camila spoke of the difficulties of settlement and her accreditation process in the absence of community support. She compares her recent arrival in Canada to going through university in Colombia with the support of her social and familial network. This comparison resonated with the rest of the participants who spoke of their families as both the local, immediate family and the non-local, extended family.

Lucia's decision to return to London from Calgary was driven by her new role as a mother. Despite more work opportunities in Calgary, she and her husband prioritized their son's upbringing in an environment where they had support from their family in London. For Lucia, proximity to community overrides the difficulties accessing higher-skill job opportunities, as well as access to accreditation and education programs in London. However, job opportunities in London are an immense barrier that Gabriel, Francisco, and David describe in their sectors. Gabriel commutes to Hamilton and Kitchener-Waterloo a couple of times a week, as London-based work is scarce. He estimates that for every 100 positions he would see available in Toronto in any given month, there would be only 15 to 20 in London. The competition for these positions does not favour immigrants given the data on workplace discrimination (Turchick, Hakak and Holzinger 2009; Creese 2011). Gabriel and David assert that there is almost no salary difference between positions in Toronto and London to accommodate for the high cost of living, thus making it a nonviable option. David has also noticed that London is a student city with many local colleges and a major university producing a supply of entry level professionals competing with professional immigrants. By comparison, Hector describes the growth in the trades sector as providing a "metropolis of opportunities", the exact opposite of what was

described by participants in regulated professions. Hector and Francisco have observed that the immigrants settling in London in recent years are working car service, construction, and cleaning positions because of limited job opportunities.

Camila and Valentina shared that they work at the same dental office and that the owner is Colombian. For Camila, a casual introduction with a fellow Colombian, led to a sharing of mutual dentistry backgrounds. The dentist had gone through accreditation in Canada, and now owned a practice. Camila highlights the value of having her boss as a mentor who shares the same linguistic and cultural background. Camila asked for the opportunity to volunteer in the office in the meantime and she was offered a position when it became available. Camila makes a connection between her first and current jobs on the basis of a shared identity. Her first employer was also a Colombian who acted as a mentor having gone through the accreditation process and training in orthodontics. With shared identities, employers appreciate the challenges of accreditation, cultural differences become similarities, and social connections become professional networks that enable skill transfers.

Similarly, Gabriel identified two immigrants who helped him understand available accreditation pathways. In this conversation, Lucia wondered whether meeting an immigrant engineer negotiating accreditation would have encouraged her to persist with accreditation instead of changing careers. She contrasts her experience with that of a family member, a medical doctor, who recently arrived and has connected with other doctors familiar with the process and advising him. She suggested that the large number of newcomers now in Ontario has created strength in numbers – as obtaining information through peers increases social capital that encourages accreditation. Hector firmly agrees. While he acknowledges the assistance of organizations like Will and Access, he places more importance on mentorship between professionals. He noted that without mentorship, many professionals become demotivated professionally and personally, even to the point of experiencing depression. Hector described meeting other immigrants, especially those in his profession who have succeeded in their accreditation as a powerful enabler to success. His encounter with a Colombian anesthesiologist who succeeded in his accreditation gave him the hope he needed to persevere with accreditation.

There is solidarity among the Colombian community. David's parents connected him with a family friend who offered a position that he has held for almost five years now. However, he adds that around 80% of their client portfolio are Latin Americans, and a lot of them are

Colombians. Thus, speaking Spanish becomes an advantage. Similarly, when Lucia relocated from Alberta to London, the office manager assured her that her Spanish language was a resource for the office. Lucia has become a medical technician and translator, playing a key role in maintaining the insurance logs and medical history profiles of Spanish clients. Solidarity was also created amongst participants. Hearing that Eliana was a registered physiotherapist in Columbia (and being cognizant that such accreditation is difficult to secure), Francisco asked for her contact information for (Spanish speaking) patient referrals. She was the first accredited physiotherapist to whom he could refer Spanish-speaking patients. All participants point out that their bilingual abilities are not only an asset, but a required skill due to the growing Latin American client base. Solidarity among Spanish speakers therefore connects professionals to each other, and to the subset in of the Canadian public who share their ethnic identity. The rising population of Spanish speakers in London increases demand for bilingual services and familiar business practices.

5. Conclusion

Participants hope that sharing their stories produces productive change. The main contribution of my research is the amplification of the voices of my research participants. Participants and their families demonstrate incredible capacities to cope with the demands and adverse effects of accreditation. They confront challenges with steadfast determination and tenaciously seize every opportunity available to them. The testimonies of participants are of undeniable value to shape the approach to immigration policy and program development. Participants were asked to share their ideas for change in the current structure and their recommendations for program development to aid professional immigrants with accreditation processes. Interview participants had more time to reflect but all provided powerful ideas.

Francisco urges the government to do what is necessary to integrate the international medical graduates that are recognized as doctors, but not accredited to work in Canada. If the government is truly invested in the successful integration of these professionals, then they should seek solutions for those that are already in Canada before recruiting more immigrant medical doctors. Francisco captures the gravity of de-skilling in the healthcare field by saying “there are thousands of people here, highly skilled people who are working as drivers, cleaners, construction workers, bank tellers, etc... Each year, so many immigrants I know return to their home countries to go back to work as professionals there, because they could not accredit

themselves here... I remember when I first came to Canada, I started doing cleaning jobs and I was working with a couple of friends, a lawyer, and an economist, and I used to joke about what a professional cleaning service we made up.”

For Eliana, the accreditation process needs to be clear, and applicants and their families want support. She finds the same need to improve credentialing based on the profound need for more professional and support staff in her workplace. Immigrants need to have more information about accreditation so that they understand what they are getting into. Eliana remarked that when immigrants arrive, they are not set up to succeed with accreditation and the odds are stacked against immigrant families. Thus, they end up doing other work to support the family and one cannot even pursue the idea of being a professional, so it becomes an afterthought. Eliana also contends that “you are treated differently as an immigrant. There are good professionals and bad professionals everywhere, and there needs to be a better filter determining what qualifies a good one based on the standard in the field. It should not take five, ten, twenty years to finalize this.”

Like Eliana, Reinaldo advocates for accurate information in the advertising targeting internationally trained professionals. Immigrants need accurate information about the probability of successful accreditation to enable professionals to make a well-informed and accurate self-assessment of their training and skill set prior to emigration.

Beyond transparency, Mariana believes the standards require case by case flexibility. The practice in different countries will always be different, and foreign training should not be discounted because of differences in educational criteria, especially when immigrants have the required professional capacity. This was her case. She proved her capacity by passing the jurisprudence exam, but she is blocked by the differences in grading between Canada and Colombia. As Mariana explains, “my score was high, and it is an exam distributed to all nurses... I hope one day I can tell you, I got approved, I passed all the tests, and I am a nurse here.”

Ana recommends restructuring the costs of accreditation, indeed its entire business model, because the credentialing process places a heavy burden on the resources of the entire family.

Camila emphasizes that training needs to be restructured. She commented that it would be amazing to shadow a dentist in the same way that a dental assistant with a level one certification is able to shadow another dental assistant during their studies. Such a path would

reduce the cost and time involved in accreditation and mentorship would facilitate skills-development. The government could also increase financial support for accreditation, so professionals do not have to rely on expensive lines of credit from banks. Additional clarity regarding the accreditation process is also needed and accessible points of contact about the process. Camila summarizes her experience as follows: “we are waiting, and it is years of baby steps... you need to do those baby steps because sometimes you feel like you are just going to give up... but we cheer ourselves up and we keep going. A lot of people don’t even get to this point, and that’s why they don’t talk about it”.

Miguel believes that immigrants want to be responsible for their own accreditation and professional development. Many of the conditions to succeed exist in Canada, but there is room for improvement. Immigrants require support maneuvering the professional competition in the Canadian market with their human, social, and cultural capital developed for the context. As well as the overall adaptation to the professional and social environments for successful long-term integration.

Valentina contends that the accreditation process and the labour market should place more value on foreign work experience. Ten or twenty years of experience as an accountant in other countries are not valued by employers or regulatory bodies, despite the transferable nature of the human capital. Years of experience ought to contribute towards experience for entry level work at the very least.

David shifts the focus to stimulating the economy in London to increase job opportunities. He thinks the Canadian government needs to facilitate the redistribution of professional services from large Canadian urban centres to small cities and their surroundings. Canada is seeking qualified foreign professionals and people want to come, but they are not going to stay without opportunities for work.

For Gabriel, the government of Canada needs to improve the of clarity of their website. The current website is too complicated to navigate, and essential information gets lost. By comparison, YouTube videos uploaded by immigrants who have undergone accreditation disseminated clearer information. Like Camila, Gabriel asserts that more points of contact are needed to provide information about credentialing. As Gabriel notes: “We have invested in the economy here. We pay taxes... you assume you are going to be part of the labour force, because that is what they sell you on, but you encounter so many obstacles that you get stuck

in de-skilled positions.” Gabriel also emphasized how Colombian immigrants value security in Canada. He includes bodily security alongside competitive salaries, and health and social benefits as the attractions of Canada for professionals that motivate them to persist and succeed. Gabriel had expected he would have to pass a series of tests to prove his abilities as an electronics engineer, but accreditation was not that straightforward. Thus, his settlement journey did not start with accreditation but rather with “a lesson on patience, patience for the homologation, patience for permanent residency, patience with the language, patience for finding work.”

Hector, returning to Gabriel’s recommendation to mobilize professionals for accreditation support, suggests that “a great idea would be the organization of a data bank of people that have gone through the process and were successful so it can become a reference.” On grounds of solidarity, professionals could be willing to participate in a mentorship program and the government must be responsible for the development of a data bank where newcomers can be put in contact with a successfully accredited individual. Hector hopes the competition mentality of professionals will be disrupted by such programs as well, fostering encouragement instead. He concludes his advocacy for solidarity stating that “the process is about surrounding yourself with those who have the same end goals as you or are already there... for mentors to create physical spaces where you can meet and talk about your experiences to encourage another, someone saying ‘you can do it’ because they did do it.”

Lucia reflected on adaptation skills and advocates for an increase in governmental support for the care responsibilities and access to education so that women are not held back from opportunities in the workplace. She reflects on the fast-tracking opportunities in Alberta that more accurately bridge skills rather than retrain. As Lucia stated: “I worked a factory job [in London] for a few years. I left and came back nearly a decade later. People that I met on the job years ago, people in their late 40s and 50s, are still in the same positions. It makes me sad. What a waste of talent... what a waste of wonderful people with a variety of skills that could be used to contribute to the development of different industries.”

Lastly, Victoria suggests amending the accreditation process reasonably and implementing mechanisms of accountability for the actors involved to minimize oversights that cause unjustifiable rejections. Similar to Eliana, she advocates for reasonable timeframes to complete each accreditation stage and improving communication with transparency. As it stands, she

asserts that the accreditation process in Canada lacks integrity and does not respect immigrants nor their resource investments. In her view, the process requires immigrants to overdeliver.

Regardless of success, all participants agree that there is room for improvement in the structures of support for the transfer and return value on foreign professionals' human and cultural capital. Participants affirm that credentialing sets an unjustified and unprecedented standard of expectations to regulated professional practice. They argued that the theoretical components and core principles of their professional accreditation in their home country are comparable to Canada's system. They confidently assert that the focus of accreditation ought to be supplementary education or training for transfer into Canadian practice. Examples of this additional education are training with equipment, legalities, and common practice techniques. The findings demonstrate that participants often fail to achieve accreditations due to variables separate from their knowledge of the practice. It is the intertwined cultural and professional norms of the receiving society that create barriers to accreditation. In addition, the attitudes of the immigrant and receiving society alike work to encourage or discourage immigrants during accreditation. Reciprocal cultural education is deemed equally necessary for the immigrant and the receiving society to challenge the habitus. These efforts would counter various forms of discrimination.

Support for cultural capital transformation and social capital development positively impact both integration into the labour market and society. Efforts to create cultural education programs and social networking opportunities that aim to support the immigrant and their family is ideal for accreditation and integration successes. Participants demonstrate that a successful accreditation process does not necessarily correlate to successful social integration. Nor does accreditation produce successful labour market outcomes. But many participants succeeded in transferring their human, social, and cultural capital outside accreditation as they enter lower position in their occupational sectors. This decision improves their occupational mobility and integration outcomes, whilst conserving the resources of the household that would otherwise go into accreditation. For many participants, the financial demand of the accreditation threatens the household security and therefore the decision to abandon or continue the accreditation process often becomes a decision made by the household unit rather than the individual. In regard to security through permanency, professional immigrants with access to permanent residency and supports for credentialing in the first five years of living in Canada are more likely to achieve accreditation.

Lastly, participants perceive a lack of integrity in the credentialing process and subsequently, the Canadian immigration system. Their experiences pinpoint cross-spatial areas where they lack support in long-term integration despite recognition of their human capital, thus derailing their professional practice. Participants brought up learning of the intergovernmental scales as they undergo their accreditation and immigration processes. Their frustrations concerned how intergovernmental affairs intertwined with accreditation pathways, education programs, and job opportunities. They describe finding out about different accreditation systems through word-of-mouth after commencing their accreditation in Ontario. Participants brought up credentialing pathways and job opportunities in British Columbia, Alberta, and the Northwest territories. From a newcomer perspective, settling in Canada ought to ensure credentialing access nationwide. Improvements to the foreign credential accreditation system could allow migrants to better integrate themselves into Canadian society.

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Appendix 1: Participants Profiles

Note for Foreign Credential Assessment (FCA) Status: The column FCA Process Status outlines the dates the process was achieved, dropped, or since when it has been in-progress as outlined by the participants. However, a definitive start point for the process is difficult to grasp given the fluid nature of the barriers and enablers that transcend different spaces of the professional migrants' everyday life. For example, migrants can start working on improving their English level proficiency or attempt English exams before starting the actual accreditation process as it is a necessary component of the process itself. Another example are international students enrolling in programs that would supplement their skills in the Canadian context to gain familiarity with their fields and increase their likelihood of successfully securing employment in the field.

Table 1: Focus Group 1 Interview Participants - Arrived over ten years ago

Participant (gender)	Age (at the time of study)	Arrival Year	Arrival Status	English Proficiency upon Arrival:	Profession in Colombia	FCA Process Status	Continued Education Pathway in Canada	Current Job Title	Parent ^p	Spouse ^s
1. Ana (F)	48	2005	Refugee Claimant	Classroom	Dentist	In-Progress since 2007	Dental Examinations	Dental Office Manager	(a) of 2 (b) of 2	(a) Yes (b) Yes
2. Francisco (M)	56	2009	Refugee Claimant	None	General Physician	Dropped in 2015 Achieved in 2019	Residency Program of Family Medicine Naturopath School of Toronto	Naturopathic Doctor	(a) of 1 (b) of 3	(a) Yes (b) Yes
3. Eliana (F)	51	2004	Refugee Claimant	None	Physio-therapist	Achieved in 2015	Physiotherapy Examinations	Physiotherapist	(a) of 1 (b) of 1	(a) Yes (b) No
4. Victoria (F)	47	2011	Refugee Claimant	Technical	Teacher	Dropped in 2022	Ontario College of Teachers Accreditation Virtual Learning Environments Diploma MA Hispanic Studies Project Management Certificate Condominium Management	Temporary Classroom Support Personnel Property Manager	(a) of 2 (b) of 2	(a) Yes (b) Yes

^p caretaker of a dependent under the age of 18 (a) at the time of arrival, (b) into the process

^s married or common-law partner (a) at the time of arrival, (b) into the process

Table 2: Focus Group 2 Interview Participants – Arrived in the last ten years

Participant (gender)	Age (at the time of study)	Arrival Year	Arrival Status	English Proficiency upon Arrival:	Profession in Colombia	FCA Process Status	Continued Education Pathway in Canada	Current Job Title	Parent ^p	Spouse ^s
1. Camila (F)	36	2019	Student Visa	Day-to-day	Dentist	In-Progress since 2023	Health Systems Management Certificate Dental Radiology: HARP Approved Certification International Trained Dentist Program ^f	Administrative Coordinator	(a) No (b) of 1	(a) Yes (b) Yes
2. David (M)	26	2017	Student Visa	Day-to-day	Accountant	Dropped in 2018	Professional Financial Services Certificate Chartered Professional Accountant Certification Chartered Financial Planner Certification	Certified Financial Planner	(a) No (b) No	(a) No (b) Yes
3. Reinaldo (M)	45	2016	Tourist Visa, Student Visa	Classroom	Veterinarian	Achieved in 2021 In-Progress since 2016	Veterinarian Technician College of Veterinarians of Ontario Examinations	Veterinarian Technician	(a) of 1 (b) of 1	(a) Yes (b) Yes
4. Gabriel (M)	46	2018	Student Visa	Day-to-day	Electronic Engineer and Network Engineer	Dropped Electronic Engineer in 2022	Software and Information Systems Testing Certificate Product Manager Certification ^f	Network IT Engineer	(a) of 1 (b) of 1	(a) Yes (b) Yes
5. Valentina (F)	27	2018	Student Visa	Day-to-day	Accountant	In-Progress since 2018	Professional Accounting Certificate Chartered Professional Accountant Examinations ^f	Financial Controller	(a) No (b) No	(a) No (b) Yes
6. Miguel (M)	51	2017	Refugee Claimant	Technical	Teacher	In-Progress since 2018	World Education Services Credential Equivalency	Noon Hour Assistant	(a) of 1 (b) No	(a) Yes (b) No

^p caretaker of a dependent under the age of 18 (a) at the time of arrival, (b) into the process

^s married or common-law partner (a) at the time of arrival, (b) into the process

^f long-term continued education pathway goals

Table 3: In-depth Interview Participants

Participant (gender)	Age (at the time of study)	Arrival Year	Arrival Status	English Proficiency upon Arrival:	Profession in Colombia	FCA Process Status	Continued Education Pathway in Canada	Current Job Title	Parent ^p	Spouse ^s
1. Mariana (F)	47	2011	Refugee	Classroom	Nurse	Dropped in 2014 In-Progress since 2023	College of Nurses of Ontario Accreditation Dental Assistant National Nursing Assessment Services Registered Dental Hygienist ^f	Dental Assistant	(a) of 1 (b) of 1	(a) No (b) No
2. Lucia (F)	50	2002	Refugee	None	Civil Engineer	Dropped in 2004	Civil Engineering Technology Medical Lab Technician Medical Radiology Technologist ^f	Medical Lab Technologist	(a) No (b) of 1	(a) Yes (b) Yes
3. Hector (M)	47	2018	Refugee	Classroom	Civil Engineer and Electrician	Dropped in 2019	Civil Engineering Internationally Trained Electrician Assessment Master Licensed Electrician ^f	Electrician Apprentice	(a) of 1 (b) of 1	(a) Yes (b) Yes
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4. Francisco (M)	56	2009	Refugee Claimant	None	General Physician	Dropped in 2015 Achieved in 2019	Residency Program of Family Medicine Naturopath School of Toronto	Naturopathic Doctor	(a) of 1 (b) of 3	(a) Yes (b) Yes
5. Eliana (F)	51	2004	Refugee Claimant	None	Physiotherapist	Achieved in 2015	Physiotherapy Examinations	Physiotherapist	(a) of 1 (b) of 1	(a) Yes (b) No
6. Camila (F)	36	2019	Student Visa	Day-to-day	Dentist	In-Progress since 2023	Health Systems Management Certificate Dental Radiology: HARP Approved Certification International Trained Dentist Program ^f	Administrative Coordinator	(a) No (b) of 1	(a) Yes (b) Yes
7. Gabriel (M)	46	2018	Student Visa	Day-to-day	Electronic Engineer and Network Engineer	Dropped Electronic Engineer in 2022	Software and Information Systems Testing Certificate Product Manager Certification ^f	Network IT Engineer	(a) of 1 (b) of 1	(a) Yes (b) Yes

^p caretaker of a dependent under the age of 18 (a) at the time of arrival, (b) into the process

^s married or common-law partner (a) at the time of arrival, (b) into the process

^f long-term continued education pathway goals