


# The Work of “Fitting I

Liza McCoy  
Leah Soveran  
University of Calgary  
October 22, 2010

- 
- ◉ “Integration” as a field of policy, funding, services, programs, individual effort
  - ◉ “Institutional ethnographic” (Smith 2005) exploration of this field
  - ◉ through a focus on people’s work, knowledge, experience in actual settings

## ○ Interviews with:

- highly-educated, recent immigrants (women)
- service providers
- government funders


## ○ Observations:

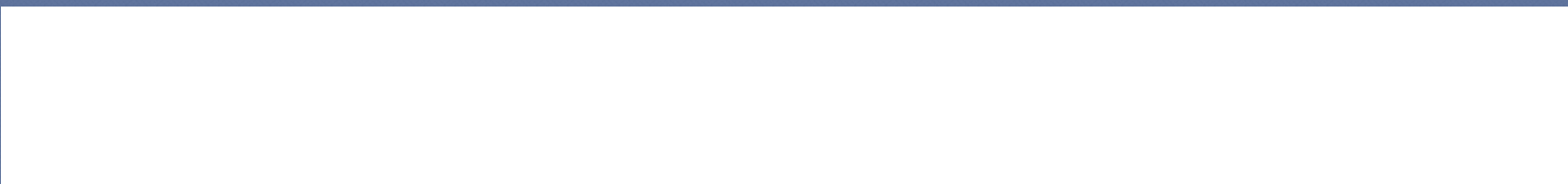
- employment workshops, employment counselling, bridging program classes



- Carried out by a broad range of authorities, agencies

- “work through the choices, desires, aspirations, needs, wants and lifestyles of individuals and groups.” (Dean 2010, p. 20)


- 
- Emphasis on producing self-governing individuals who make choices within zones of freedom
  - Important role for techniques of self-formation or 'practices of the self'
  - Expansion of capacity for agency

- 
- multiple techniques of self-esteem, empowerment, consultation, negotiation
  - “often come into play when certain individuals, groups and communities become ... targeted populations, i.e., populations that manifest high risk, or are composed of individuals deemed at risk.” (Dean 2010, p.196)

## Employment services for immigrants

- Ethnographic exploration of “conduct-shaping,” “self-formation,” “agency-enhancing” processes as engaged in by service-providing staff and immigrant participants
- What do they look like in this specific context?
- What is the experience for those who participate?


- 
- 
- “A Positive Attitude”
  - “Fitting In”




“We’re looking for a positive attitude. The whole interview is really looking for attitude, are they going to be a good fit in the class.”  
(Program coordinator 2)

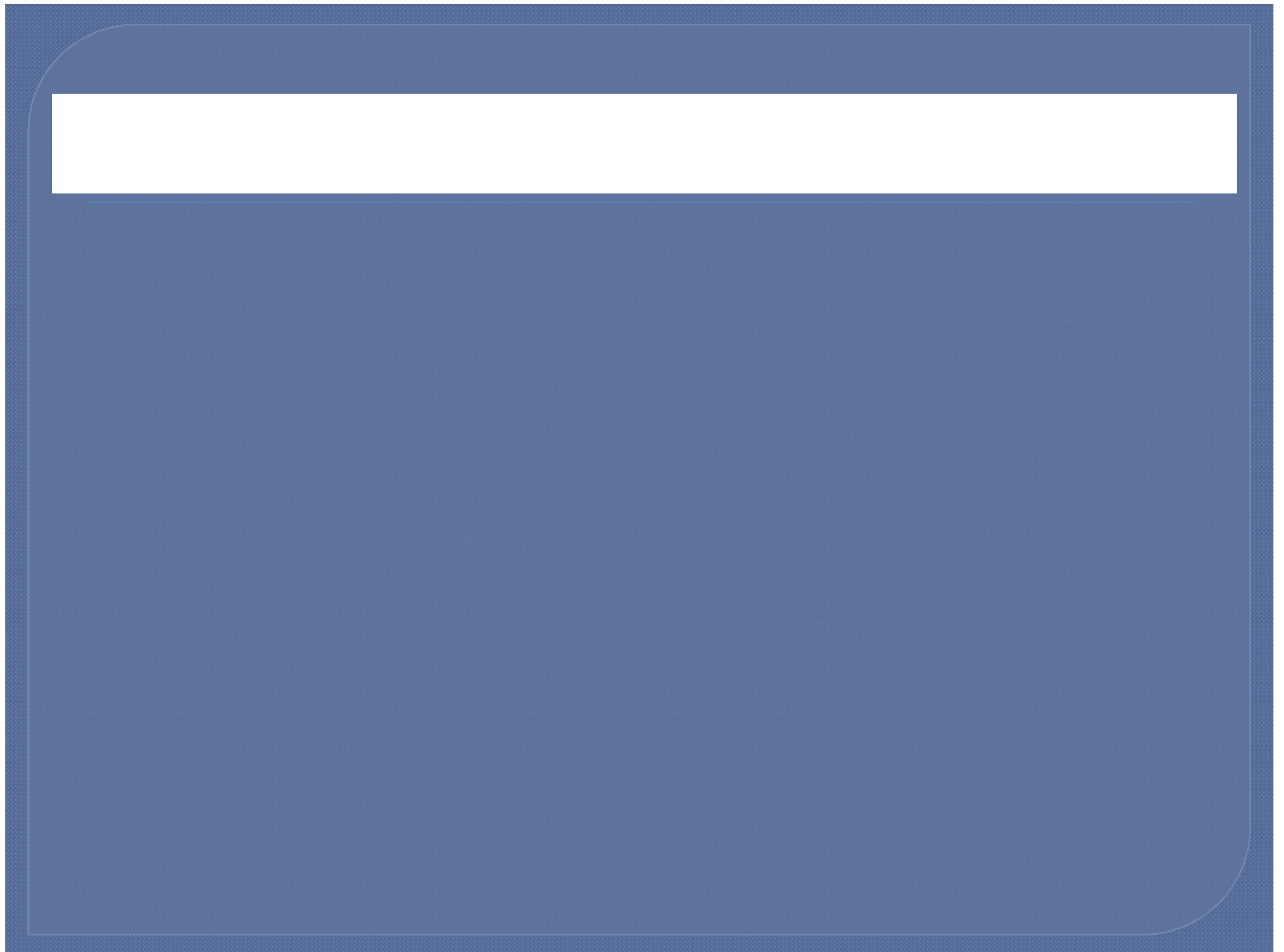
“You have to be open, so open, malleable, willing to learn, um, positive. If you're not positive about your chances of success it slows you down considerably.... So, your attitude is huge.” (Program coordinator 1)

- Class guidelines e.g., (avoid making comparisons between Canada and your country)
- Teaching and reinforcing positive styles of talk and self-talk
- Highlighted in materials distributed by Government of Alberta



“We're trying to help these students fit in, understand what is required, and have a sense of accomplishment... For the staff, we focus on helping them fit in and if they get a job, great. For the students, they don't understand why they're not getting work, but they want a job. And so we're actually teaching them what's in their blind spot.” (Program coordinator 1)

- 
- Self-presentation (dress)
  - Bodily comportment
  - Smile
  - Doing “small talk” at work
  - Asking to join co-workers at lunch
  - “Networking” – talking about accomplishments
  - Taking initiative
  - Speaking up to share ideas at work
  - Women not being subservient at work



“Your politeness, your small talk. But I don't do that very much because I'm, I'm the person like, how do you call that? I just, I just do my job.” (Malaya)

“So now I understand maybe that [small talk] is something that is part of job!” (Hua)


“ Many people have told us, um, South Africans are pushy, they’re outspoken .... You don’t work like that here.... Canadians are more polite, they’re more considerate, more .... Um, and I’ve found that in the work too. ... The other day, I was actually making a joke and I just realized, oops, that’s not going down well.” (Shirley)

“ You know, in my classroom the student is from all over the world, so we can learn from them, and now I can contact – communicate – with the people from all the world, from the different country, and not just Canadian. Yeah, it’s good, pretty good. I think my confidence is very improved.” (Lian)

“I think that I am suited, more suited, or more fit, I don't know, for Canada than for Russia.” (Alina)

“So I, I feel very pressure while working [in China] because while working...I really like making joke (laughs)... [While working in coffee shop] I always uh, saw Canadian people making joke with each other, they laughed and very relaxed and very happy...but while working in my country sometimes the relationships is very serious, I think.” (Wendy)

“I knew many people who took this program already and they told that – so this program changed them very much. So before they were uh one person and then it was different person. ... Yes [it was true for me] of course, of course, very very strong.” (Marianne)

- 
- The work of fitting in – explored as the joint work of staff and program participants
  - Conduct shaping, agency-enhancement, and self-formation in bridge-to-work programs

- 
- ◉ Thank you!
  - ◉ Liza McCoy [mccoy@ucalgary.ca](mailto:mccoy@ucalgary.ca)
  - ◉ Leah Soveran [lrsovera@ucalgary.ca](mailto:lrsovera@ucalgary.ca)