

PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS AND SUPPORT
BY REFUGEE ADOLESCENT STUDENTS AND SCHOOL STAFF

by

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Abstract

This ethnography was conducted in a sheltered literacy class for adolescent refugee students with interrupted schooling at a high school in Vancouver, B.C. A review of the literature identified a shortage of studies in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) dealing specifically with this population of students, particularly within a Canadian context. The review also identified that literature dealing more generally with refugee students and their schooling experiences did so from a deficiency-based perspective. Finally, it was noted that scholarly publications in TESL over the past several decades have operationalized *success* predominantly as academic achievement; arguably, this has potentially led to overlooking other forms of accomplishments. In response to the gaps identified in the literature, the present study sought to focus specifically on the perceived successes and support systems by one class of refugee students with interrupted schooling and school staff in a Canadian context. It also aimed to explore alternative ways of understanding *success* in school which goes beyond academics. Data was collected from twelve students and eight school staff members through semi-structured interviews and observation notes collected by the researcher over a period of ten months. The findings of the study were interpreted through the lens of Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) ecological theory which situates positive human development within context, as well as the construct of *resiliency* and poststructuralist view of *identity*. The first main finding was that most participants did not speak about success as academic achievement, but rather as integration in school life, feeling competent, and forming relationships. A second finding was that while the staff members perceived the students as experiencing success in school, the student participants were hesitant to describe themselves as 'good' students. A third finding was that at this

particular school, there existed a network of multiple and interconnected support systems which bolstered the students' perceived successes and were bi-directional in impact.

Preface

This study was approved by the University of British Columbia, Office of Research Service, Behavioural Research Ethics Board. The certificate number of the ethics certificate was H09-00918.

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Chapter 1: Background of Study

1.1 Introduction

The ever-increasing diversity of the student population attending high schools across the province of British Columbia and all of Canada is a reality. One major source of this growing diversity is the influx of new students via immigration, as highlighted by statistics from the Citizenship and Immigration Canada's (CIC) database. In CIC's summary report "BC Immigration Trends 2009 Highlights" (2010), it is reported that British Columbia was the host province of 41, 438 new immigrants in 2009, placing it as the third largest recipient of immigrants in Canada at 16.4% only after Ontario (42.4%) and Quebec (19.6%) (Chow & Selma, n.d.). Furthermore, BC accepted in 2008 its highest share of new immigrants--at 17.8% of the national total--since 1999. 'Immigrant', however, is a broad term and the Canadian government recognizes several categories within it, including refugees. Returning to CIC's statistics, 1,633 individuals out of the entire pool of immigrants arriving in British Columbia in 2009 held refugee status. From an educational perspective, it is noteworthy that 4.5 % of these 1,633 individuals (ages 25 and over) had reportedly received no formal education. CIC (2010), however, did not report on how many of the 1,633 refugees who entered British Columbia in 2009 were adolescents with interrupted schooling.

Despite this lack of statistical information, it is known that a school board in the city of Vancouver opened a district-wide sheltered literacy class at the secondary level in September 2007 for the intake of just such a unique population of immigrant students. The opening of this sheltered class at Long Rock Secondary School¹ was in response to a noted increase in refugee students (K-12) enrolling in schools in this particular school board in the mid-2000s (S. Helmer,

¹ Pseudonyms have been used in place of real names (of the school and all participants) in order to protect the privacy of those who took part in the study.

personal communication, November 10, 2010). The first cohort of students in the sheltered literacy class predominantly held refugee status and had experienced varying degrees of interrupted schooling either in their home country and/or during their passage to and settlement in Canada. For varying reasons, most of these students had little to no literacy skills in their first language, and many had little to no ability to communicate in English (although many spoke several other languages). Prior to September 2007, such students had been placed in an ESL classroom where they struggled to cope with the linguistic, cultural, emotional, social, and academic demands of their new environs, often in isolation from peers with similar backgrounds. ESL teachers across the school board reported this new group of students were not faring well.

Thus as earlier mentioned, the sheltered literacy class was the school board's response to the lack of support for this particular population of students. Students enrolled in the sheltered class, which was and still is capped at fifteen, spent most of their day with the same group of students and with the same teacher. The idea was to provide a safe and welcoming environment where the students could have room to breathe, begin the phenomenal task of acquiring basic English for the purpose of survival and communication, become familiar with the ways and expectations of Canadian culture--inside and outside of school--and to take steps towards becoming first-time readers and writers in a language which was not their first. During the second year of its existence, the teacher of the sheltered literacy class, Ms. Woodbine, and the head of Long Rock's ESL department, Mrs. Green, shared with me their perception that the students from the first cohort (2007-2008), for the most part, had made a successful transition into regular ESL classes. Still, they desired more information to confirm or challenge their preliminary observations around this issue and others. During the first few months of 2009, I met with Ms. Woodbine and Mrs. Green on several occasions to discuss different possible avenues

for research. The questions that emerged from these discussions became the foundation for the study on which this thesis is based.

1.2 Research Problem

This study aimed to address research problems on three different levels, each of which will be discussed in depth in Chapter Two. During my review of the literature, I found that the TESL literature dealing specifically with the experience of adolescent refugee students with interrupted schooling was scarce, particularly in a Canadian context. While some research reports acknowledged this population of students (e.g. Gunderson, 2007; Watt & Roessingh, 2001), the actual studies were focused on a different or wider pool of students. For this reason, I concluded that there was a lack of information about the perceptions and experiences of adolescent refugee students with little to no formal schooling.

A second research problem was identified when I broadened the scope of my review and considered literature more generally dealing with the experience of refugee students in high school. Here, I noticed that much of the literature came from a deficiency-based perspective, meaning that the authors tended to focus primarily on the challenges and setbacks faced by refugee students in school. As a foil, scholars working in the area of youth and *resiliency* have advocated for a strength-based approach where the capacities, accomplishments, and supportive influences surrounding the youth, or group of youth, are explored (e.g. Schonert-Reichl, 2000).

Drawing the lens back even further, a third research problem was identified during my review of the literature. When looking at the literature dealing with the performance of immigrant youth in secondary schools, I observed that the construct of *success* had been predominantly operationalized as academic achievement in terms of course grades, exam scores, dropout and graduation rates, or university enrolment. For me, this quantifiable operationalization of *success* stood out when compared to the informal reports given by staff

members at Long Rock Secondary School that the refugee students with interrupted schooling were for the most part doing well in school. How could it be that these students, some of whom were unable to read and write or even communicate in English, were perceived as doing well in school? This apparent disconnect in conceptualizing *success* led me to wonder how staff members at Long Rock Secondary School were defining this construct. Such line of inquiry in turn led me to wonder how Ms. Woodbine's students themselves would understand *success* in school. Perhaps most importantly, I began to question whether or not Ms. Woodbine's students would describe themselves as successful high school students.

1.3 Purpose of Study and Research Questions

There were three purposes to this study, each linked to the research problems identified above. The first purpose was to conduct a study that would contribute to the TESL literature through a specific focus on the accounts and experiences of refugee students with interrupted schooling. The second purpose was to conduct a study coming from a strength-based approach, or put another way, a study which explored the talents and accomplishments of a group of refugee students as well as the network of support surrounding them. The final purpose of this study was to explore multiple ways of understanding the construct of *success* within a secondary school context. The three overarching questions guiding the study were:

- 1) How do refugee students in Ms. Woodbine's sheltered literacy class, as well as school staff, describe *success* in secondary school?
- 2) Based on their descriptions of success, do staff perceive Ms. Woodbine's students as successful in school? Do Ms. Woodbine's students perceive themselves as succeeding?
- 3) What support systems are perceived by the participants as helping Ms. Woodbine's students to experience success in their school environment? Are they seen as interconnected?

1.4 Defining Terms

Success, refugees, interrupted schooling, and support systems are terms integral to the study and for this reason require that I clarify how I have chosen to understand them. Defining *success* in any concrete or direct way is difficult since one of the main purposes of the study was to investigate different ways in which *success* is conceptualized by educators and students. The reader should nevertheless keep in mind that, with exception to my discussion in Chapter Two, all references to *success* in school are made in regards to Ms. Woodbine's students.

Refugee is the second term which requires defining. On the Canadian government's official website, the term *refugee* is defined as "people in or outside Canada who fear returning to their home country" ("Citizenship and Immigration Canada: Refugee", n.d.). I struggle with referring so broadly to individuals as *refugees* since it relegates people with extremely different backgrounds and experiences into a single category. Moreover, teachers and administration at Long Rock rarely referred to Ms. Woodbine's students as refugees, nor did the students identify themselves as such. Yet despite my reservations, I also recognize that this term is widely used within the research literature and by the public at large. Taking all this into account, I ultimately decided to use the term *refugee* in this thesis manuscript, including the title. Still, I have made a concerted effort to interchange my references to the students using other identification markers such as 'Ms. Woodbine's students', or simply 'the students'.

Interrupted schooling is another term which has been defined in multiple ways throughout the literature. For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to broadly understand interrupted schooling as a period of several months between the ages of 6 and 19 when a child did not participate in formal instruction in a resourced setting, excluding scheduled breaks in the school term.

Support system is a term which I will use in this report to refer to the factors bolstering the successes reportedly experienced by Ms. Woodbine's students. I understand these support systems to include people, places, and programs both at Long Rock Secondary School and in the wider community.

1.5 Researcher Positionality

During my coursework as a graduate student in the area of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), I began to explore and research my interest in post-migration issues concerning newcomers to Canada. This particular research interest stemmed from my past experience as a volunteer ESL tutor with recent immigrants to Canada, as well as my employment as an instructor in the BC government-sponsored ELSA program (English Language Services for Adults). I also had completed a CELTA course (Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults) in Bangkok, Thailand where my practicum teaching was done with a class of UN refugee students. Knowing of my interest, Dr. Margaret Early in the Language and Literacy Education Department at UBC introduced me to Ms. Woodbine and her students at Long Rock Secondary School. Yet despite my experience with refugee language learners, there were multiple times during the study when I questioned whether I was the best person to work on this project. Having only lived in Vancouver and British Columbia for a short time, I was admittedly unfamiliar with the BC school system. As well, I had never taught, nor was certified to teach, in a Canadian high school context. Finally, I was an English-speaking, well-educated, Caucasian Canadian who had never had the experience of leaving her home by force. When I eventually expressed my concern to Ms. Woodbine, her response was to turn my doubt inside out; she explained that my lack of 'insider' knowledge and experience could be seen as an asset since I brought fresh eyes to the situation. By adopting this perspective, I found a new degree of confidence in my capabilities as researcher.

Over the course of the study, I also became more aware of my own ontological and epistemological positioning as a researcher. In retrospect, I understand now that I began the study with the mindset of a neo-positivist (Roulston, 2010); I assumed that if I asked the right questions, my participants would give responses that could shed light on the truth of their situation and experience. But as the study unfolded, I found myself moving into a new and conscious theorization of conducting research from the position of a constructionist (Roulston, 2010); I began to view the interview data as co-constructions of knowledge between myself and the participants. My shifting understanding was greatly influenced by the assigned readings in a research methodology course I took at UBC entitled *Research interviews in education: Theories and methods*. These articles discussed the multiple ways research interview have been conceptualized (Roulston, 2010), theorizing the research interview as active (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004), and understanding the research interview as social practice (Talmy, 2010). I began to see my role as researcher not as one who uncovers ‘the truth’, but rather as a co-constructer of meaning through interactions with participants, and later through my analysis of the data. For example, in this manuscript, I will not speak of themes as ‘emerging’ from the data or ‘being discovered’, but instead will refer to my own role in ‘identifying’, ‘categorizing’, and ‘representing’ these themes.

1.6 Overview of Thesis

This thesis is made up of five chapters. The present chapter has introduced the study and highlighted the research problem, purpose, and questions. It has also defined several key terms, as well as given consideration to my own positioning as researcher within the research project. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature pertaining to the schooling experience of refugee students with interrupted schooling, and more generally, the schooling experience and performance of refugee and immigrant students. The second half of Chapter Two describes both

the theoretical framework and constructs used to discuss the reported findings of the present study. Chapter Three outlines the methodology used to the conduct the study and includes a description of the research site, participants, instruments, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter Four reports on the findings from the data and discusses their significance in relation to the research literature and theoretical framework and constructs described in Chapter Two. Chapter Five summarizes the major findings and concludes with citing several limitations of the study and offers recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature, Theoretical Framework, and Constructs

2.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter One, the student population in high schools across Canada is constantly increasing in diversity. One of the major contributing factors is the steady flow of new immigrants into the country every year. It is therefore surprising how little is actually known about one particular population of immigrant students, namely adolescent refugees with interrupted schooling. For example, in my reading of the Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) research literature, it was difficult to locate studies that dealt specifically with this group of students, especially within a Canadian context. Branching out more broadly, I also found that the research literature focusing on the post-migration experience of refugee students in general in English-speaking school systems has done so predominantly from a deficiency and needs-based perspective. This approach often forefronts the challenges and obstacles which refugee students must overcome, as opposed to highlighting their successes, strengths, and support systems. Finally, I became aware that the seminal TESL literature pertaining to the performance of immigrant students in high school has defined success in school largely as academic achievement. I consider such a narrow understanding as problematic since it potentially dismisses or discounts other kinds of non-quantifiable accomplishments which immigrant students might also be experiencing.

In the first half of this chapter, I will review the three areas of research literature related to the problems outlined above. First, I will discuss the few research articles in TESL I was able to locate that focus specifically on refugee students with interrupted schooling. Second, I will review the literature which has taken a deficiency-based approach to exploring the experience of refugee students in high school. Finally, I will trace some of the key studies published in TESL over the past three decades in which the construct of *success* in high school has been

operationalized as academic achievement. In each of these three areas, I will briefly describe the purpose, methodology, and findings of individual studies, make connections between studies, and provide focused commentary which will justify my rationale for conducting the present study.

In the latter half of this chapter, I will describe the theory and constructs used to frame the findings of the study. First, the *ecology of human development* theory, developed by Russian American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005), will be discussed in detail. Critiques of the theory will be considered, as well as the influence of the ecological perspective on research conducted in other fields of study such as refugee education and TESL/TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language). Second, the construct of *resiliency* will be defined and its development as a relatively new field of study discussed. Direct links between *resiliency* and Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory will also be made. Third, poststructuralist ideas around *identity* (Norton Peirce, 1995; Weedon, 1987) will be described, followed by the highlighting of an example taken from the seminal research publication by Norton (2000). Linkages between the constructs of *identity* and *resiliency* will also be drawn.

2.2 Refugee Adolescent Students with Interrupted Schooling

The first research problem which I have indentified in my review of the literature is that little is known about the experiences and perspectives of refugee adolescent students with interrupted schooling. Empirical studies related to this population of students in TESL are difficult to locate. Recently, however, there have been a small flow of publications coming out of the Australian context (e.g. Brown, Miller, & Mitchell, 2006; Dooley, 2009; Hewson, 2006). Similar literature situated within the Canadian educational system, such as Collins, Hardy, and Leong (2008) and Kanu (2008), have proven to be extremely sparse.

To begin, why are a number of Australian scholars interested specifically in adolescent refugee students with interrupted schooling? According to Woods (2009), Australia is one of the leading industrialized nation in granting humanitarian visas; yet despite Australia's generosity in their immigration protocol, the country's educational policies around ESL support is reportedly lacking. For example, most states only provide six to twelve months of funded language support before immigrant students are integrated fully into the mainstream schools. In addition, students in Australia can only attend high school up to the cut-off age of eighteen.² Such restrictions have severe consequences for refugee students with interrupted schooling who must try to complete their high school credits in only two or three years, as well as for the teachers who are working with them. These restrictions are further significant in light of research which has argued that it takes ESL students two to three years to develop Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), followed by an additional five to seven years to develop Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins & Swain, 1986). Even more significantly, other studies have suggested that it may take students with interrupted schooling or past traumatic experiences up to ten years to attain the same average cognitive and academic language as their peers (Garcia, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 1997).

Having noted a lack of Australian literature addressing the specific issues faced by refugee students from Sudan with interrupted schooling, Brown, Miller, and Mitchell (2006) conducted a case study focusing on the perspectives of Sudanese refugee students and their schooling experience. Through interviews and focus groups, Brown et al., sought to explore what happened to the Sudanese students when they were placed in mainstream classes after one year or less of special language classes. The study involved eight students drawn from two high

² As a point of reference, ESL students in British Columbia currently receive up to five years of funding for English language support and the cut-off age for attending high school is nineteen.

schools in Victorian, Australia, with four students coming from each school. The two high schools were selected for the study based on their large enrolment number of refugee students. All of the student participants had either experienced interrupted schooling or had never been to school. Prior to integration into their respective schools, seven of the eight participants had been enrolled in intensive English language instruction at on-arrival language centres.

While a great deal of demographical information was provided by the authors about the student participants (e.g. age, number of languages spoken, years of schooling, date of enrolment, number of months in intensive language instruction, family situation), I noted a lack of information about the setting of the high schools themselves. This disconnect between the students and their schooling context can also be found in the authors' decision not to distinguish between participants from the two different schools. Their rationale was that the themes identified in the data were similar across the student participants, regardless of which school they came from.

One of the findings³ in Brown et al. which is relevant to my study was the account by participants that social interaction in school was one of the positive aspects of their schooling experience: "Success with the social aspects of school were seen as key not only to fulfilling friendship needs but also as an important way of developing academic language and understanding" (p. 159). This conceptualization of *success* in school in terms of the social is a significant contrast to the view taken by many researchers in TESL who have posited *success* as academic achievement (see section 2.4 for an extended consideration of this point). The authors' conclusion about the importance of reporting on the perspectives of adolescent refugee students with interrupted schooling also had direct implications for my study. Brown et al. write:

³ The findings came out of a larger study conducted by the same researchers which involved interviews with teachers at the high school as reported in Miller, Mitchell, and Brown (2005).

Making the views of these students explicit, we suggest, provides one starting point for not only understanding in more detail their specific backgrounds and experiences, but also for developing educational strategies, resources and policies that might best meet the needs of these students. It is in this area that there is much urgent work to be done (p.161).

Finally, I appreciated that the authors brought awareness to how individual researchers and practitioners have understood the construct of *interrupted schooling* differently. For example, there has been disagreement over whether or not attending classes in a refugee camp, in the absence of books or supplies, adequately meets the criteria for a legitimate schooling experience. Such obscurity, Brown et al. argued, can impact statistics by downplaying the numbers of refugee students who have actually experienced interrupted schooling. On this point, Brown et al. have brought to my attention the importance of any researcher working with this population of students to recognize and explicitly define their understanding of what constitutes *interrupted schooling*. As stated in Chapter One, I am choosing to define interrupted schooling as a period of several months between the ages of 6 and 19 when a child does not participate in formal instruction in a resourced setting, excluding scheduled breaks in the school term.

Turning now to other studies coming out of the Australian TESL literature regarding refugee students with interrupted schooling, Dooley (2009) identified that high school teachers were challenged in trying to teach this emerging new group of ESL students. Through an interview-based study, the author aimed to describe teachers' pedagogical responses to the needs of refugee students from Africa with interrupted schooling, as well as understand how their shifts in pedagogy went beyond approaches typically taken with other ESL students. Data was collected through interviews in 2006 with the students at their language schools and then two years later after they had transitioned into high school. Parents, teachers and other involved educators were also interviewed. A reflective journal, which Dooley kept during her experience

as a homework tutor and later as an in-home tutor with a Somali family, was also used as data for the study.

Similar to Brown et al. (2006), Dooley (2009) did not provide a description of the school contexts which included one language school and three high schools. Only a brief mention was made that each of the high schools had started a stand-alone (or sheltered) literacy program for their students with interrupted schooling. Such an omission is noteworthy since any accounts on how these individual ESL literacy programs were perceived to support students would arguably be useful information for practitioners, school administrators, and researchers.

One of the major findings in Dooley's study was the acknowledgement by teachers that the challenges experienced by students "arise in part from teachers' assumptions about students' knowledge and ways of thinking" (p. 9). The study reported that participant teachers were moving away from a deficiency view of their students' knowledge base (e.g. assuming that students who had never been to school know nothing of value). Instead, teachers at these high schools were reportedly adjusting their pedagogical approaches in order to better teach the Sudanese students with interrupted schooling, such as actively drawing on their prior cultural knowledge. Dooley noted in her conclusion, however, that despite the changes teachers were making in their pedagogical approach, some of the students still continued to drop out of school. This, she suggested, indicates the limits of language and literacy education and she recommended the need to "understand better the place of school in the post-resettlement pathways of refugee youth with little, no or severely interrupted schooling" (p. 16).

In Hewson (2006), a ten-week "collaborative journey of inquiry" (p.35) with a group of refugee male students at a high school in South Australia was described. The participants were mainly from Sudan, but a few came from Liberia and Afghanistan as well. The project *Boys'*

Voices was a joint effort between the researcher and students to create a documentary depicting their experiences in their home country, en route to Australia, and life in their new country. It is interesting that Hewson chose not to highlight the fact that the refugee students had experienced interrupted schooling and only explicitly mentions it once. Steering away from categorizing the students as such makes sense, however, given Hewson's stated purpose of exploring how the boys' identities had changed and continued to change since coming to Australia. Drawing on poststructuralist ideas of *identity* (e.g. Norton, 2000), Hewson discussed how the boys were anxious to portray themselves in the documentary not as victims but rather as individuals who felt positive about their opportunities and new life in Australia. Hewson also found that explicit language instruction over the course of the project gave students the agency to further express their ideas and identities. Finally, Hewson suggested that in the making of the documentary, the students took on the role of educating both their teachers and other students in the school. Although Hewson's findings are powerful, one major weakness in the report was that the research instruments and how the data was collected are not described. Such methodological omissions could justifiably lead the reader to question the trustworthiness of the findings.

Moving from an Australian to Canadian context, the literature explicitly dealing with refugee students with interrupted schooling is almost non-existent. In the article by Collins, Hardy, and Leong (2008) in *Contact*, a quarterly magazine published by TESL Ontario, the authors reported on the development of the Bridge Program at Bow Valley College in Calgary, Alberta. The students enrolled in the Bridge Program were between the ages of 16-25 and the authors make it clear that not all had necessarily experienced interrupted schooling; other reasons for the students' lower literacy levels included early pregnancy or the need to work while they had attended high school. The program began as a pilot project in 2002 and was designed for

students who had left high school--whether by choice or because they had reached the cut-off age limit--and still required focused literacy instruction. And so while Collins et al.'s (2008) discussion was not explicitly focused on adolescent students in secondary school with interrupted schooling, I nevertheless appreciated their focus on the Bridge Program and the detailed description of how the program developed over time. In addition, I respected the call by the authors to re-define *literacy* within literacy programs involving students with little to no literacy skills in the traditional sense of reading and writing. In their words:

For many people, there is an assumption that a literacy program is one which teaches basic reading and writing skills. While this is certainly characteristic of many literacy programs, a transition program to help young adults improve their literacy skills and facilitate access to further education must extend to beyond what most people think literacy instruction can be or can achieve. The focus of a transition program should be to offer a structured and supportive learning environment in which to build on and develop the many and varied skills that learners bring with them to the classroom. Ultimately, in a transition program, literacy means capacity building (p.43).

The second Canadian study I located which focused explicitly on refugee adolescent students with interrupted schooling was conducted by Kanu (2008) in two inner-city schools in Manitoba. As in Brown et al. (2006) and Dooley (2009), Kanu did not describe the differences between the two schools and their surrounding communities. The participants included forty African refugee students who had been living in Canada for five years or less, two principals, eight teachers, as well as several guardians and community members. The exploratory study spanned over one year and aimed to investigate the educational needs and barriers of African students who had come from war-affected countries and experienced interrupted schooling. Kanu collected qualitative data through focus groups, interviews with individual participants, and school and classroom observations. The major finding from this study was that there existed various barriers which negatively impacted the students' ability to adjust to and become part of

their new schools in Canada. These barriers were categorized by Kanu as academic (e.g. limited English proficiency), economical (e.g. having to work a part-time job), and psychosocial (e.g. trying to cope with past traumatic events without proper support). Kanu also emphasized several times that programs in Manitoba which aimed to support these students were, in her opinion, inadequate:

These war-affected refugee students lack appropriate and sufficient support programs targeted for them. Sporadically available in some Manitoba communities are generic refugee support programs to facilitate the integration of refugees, but which are uninformed by input from the refugees themselves or research on the effectiveness of these programs for specific groups of refugees (author's observation) (p. 918).

One major critique I have made of the research articles by Brown et al. (2006), Dooley (2009), and Kanu (2008) is that they did not situate the student participants within the contexts of their individual high schools. Drawing on the ecological theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005), which argues that a person's development is inextricably connected to their surrounding environments, omitting significant contextual details is a limitation when exploring students' perceptions about their experience in school. By basing my study in the highly situated context of Ms. Woodbine's classroom at Long Rock Secondary School, I aimed to take into account the impact of the surrounding school environment on the experience of one group of refugee students with interrupted schooling. In doing so, I also addressed Dooley's (2009) call for a better understanding of how schools impact the post-settlement experience of refugee students with interrupted schooling.

In summary, the findings from the literature reviewed in this section collectively suggest that researchers, schools, and teachers need to begin thinking anew about how to work

with adolescent refugee students with interrupted schooling. This includes thinking differently about pedagogical approaches and terms commonly used in relation to these students such as *interrupted schooling* and *literacy*. My difficulty in locating a body of research literature, particularly in the Canadian context, was demonstrative of a need for increased dialogue and studies in relation to this population of students. The present study sought to make a contribution to the Canadian-based TESL literature by focusing on a class of refugee students with interrupted schooling in a Vancouver high school.

2.3 Deficiency-Based Approach to Research Involving Refugee Students

Moving from the literature focused specifically on refugee students with interrupted schooling to the literature dealing with refugee students in general, I found that most of the authors took a deficiency-based approach. By this I mean that a greater emphasis was placed on the needs, challenges, and failures of refugee students. This deficiency based approach can be juxtaposed to a strength-based approach which highlights the students' accomplishments and successes. It is not my intent, however, to argue that all researchers should adopt a strength-based approach; instead, I recognize that identifying the students' challenges and barriers is an important step in understanding and appreciating their successes. Unfortunately, I was only able to locate a few such studies which began by acknowledging the barriers facing refugee adolescent students but then shifted into an exploration of the students' successes. In Oikonomidov's (2007) qualitative case study of seven female Somali refugee students attending an urban high school in the United States, the author reported how despite religious discrimination, the students used their own agency to construct their lives in their new surroundings. Through intensive observations and focus group, Oikonomidov found that the

students' resiliency⁴ enabled them to be successful in learning English and to develop creative ways of dealing with religious discrimination directed against them as Muslims. For example, they turned uncomfortable confrontations into a joke or wore their *hijabs* in unique ways such as tying them at the back of their heads.

Overall, however, it was difficult to locate a large body of studies that took a strength-based approach to refugee students and their schooling experience. The literature which I have chosen to review below (Hamilton & Moore, 2004; McBrien, 2005; Rutter, 2003), each in and of themselves, are largely a review of other empirical studies on refugee students and their schooling. It is therefore telling that the focus of these reviews tended to be deficiency-based. To begin, the rigorous literature review conducted by McBrien (2005) covers publications as far back as the early 1980s. Using an assimilatory-based theoretical framework to organize the literature, McBrien's stated purpose was "to review research findings on refugee children who are resettled in the United States in order to gain an understanding of their unique needs, their obstacles to success, and the interventions that are promising for overcoming the barriers that they face" (p. 332). The use of words such as 'needs', 'obstacles to success', 'barriers that they face' highlights the deficiency-based focus taken by McBrien in exploring the literature. The title of the article, *Educational needs and barriers for refugee students in the United States: A review of the literature*, further highlights the same point.

Based on his review of the literature, McBrien reported that the two major needs of refugee students is psychosocial well-being (e.g. feel safe and having a sense of self) and opportunities to acquire the new language. In the case of language acquisition, McBrien found in conducting his review, just as I did, that most studies have dealt with immigrant students and not

⁴ *Resilience* in this study was defined as "the active participation of refugees in overcoming the difficulties of their past and present lives" (Oikonomidov, p. 18, referring to Anderson (2004)).

refugees specifically. Turning to the obstacles facing refugee students, McBrien compiled a lengthy list from the literature, including: trauma, high drop-out rates, the low level of parental involvement in schooling, and discrimination. As to overcoming these obstacles, McBrien offered recommendations based on the reviewed research: provide social services to support students' adjustment, provide language instruction for both students and parents, and confront issues of discrimination. Based on my reading of McBrien's review, these recommendations seemed to stem from a deficiency-based perspective where external action is required to fix a problem. In fact, of all the literature reviewed, only McBrien's (2005b) own unpublished doctoral dissertation seemed to acknowledge some of the successes of refugee students in school. In his two-year study of eighteen adolescent refugee female students, McBrien found that despite experiencing discrimination from their teachers and peers, the students stayed in school, maintained high grades, and had future goals of becoming doctors, lawyers or teachers. Finally, McBrien's recommendations for future research made further apparent his deficiency-based approach. He called for future studies comparing and contrasting the needs and challenges of immigrant and refugee students. He also identified a need for future studies to explore how the success rate of refugee students in content subjects can be boosted. Future research that investigate the unique needs and barriers of students from specific cultural groups was also called for. In line with the deficiency-based perspective, McBrien made no mention of future studies exploring the successes and accomplishment of refugee students.

As a respected authority in the area of refugee students and education, Jill Rutter (2003) provided a comprehensive overview of the refugee situation and policies in UK schools, as well as detailed information on each of the relevant refugee groups. Like McBrien, Rutter outlined in detail the many needs (e.g. psychological, emotional, language) and challenges (e.g. xenophobia

and discrimination) of refugee students based on a review of the research literature. Hamilton and Moore (2004), writing from a New Zealand perspective, did the same in their book *Educational interventions for refugee children: Theoretical perspectives and implementing best practice*. As they explained, the “many specific risk factors that refugees are likely to encounter are well-known” (p.60) but very little research had been done on the resiliency (or accomplishments) of refugee students.

Unlike McBrien, both Hamilton and Moore and Rutter tried to move away from a deficiency-based orientation and more towards a strength-based focus. There is even a chapter in Hamilton and Moore’s book which addresses the issue of how to foster the resiliency of refugee students. Throughout Rutter’s book, multiple case studies of schools and programs which have enabled refugee students to experience success are briefly summarized. I was a bit confused, however, about why Rutter did not provide the reader with direct references to these reports of success stories; instead, I as the reader had to go to the end of the chapter and try to locate the relevant study within the reference list (and the connection was not always clear). In addition, both Rutter and Hamilton and Moore focused a large portion of their discussion on what they termed as ‘good’ or ‘best practice’ for schools, administrators, and teachers in supporting refugee students. And so while their emphasis is more positive, I would still argue that it lacks a strength-based focus due to the hypothetical nature of their dialogue (the use of modals such as ‘could’, ‘might’ and ‘should’ were plentiful). As clearly stated by Hamilton and Moore, their goal was largely conceptual and involved “developing a model for the education of refugee children [and] to facilitate understanding of the wide range of factors which may have an impact on their adjustment to school and to outline approaches to assessment and intervention for this diverse group” (p. 106).

In summary, much of the literature around refugee students and education has taken a deficiency-based approach, as can be seen across the scope of empirical studies reviewed by Hamilton and Moore (2004), McBrien (2005) and Rutter (2003). The present study sought to address this gap by taking a strength-based approach which explored the perceived successes and accomplishment experienced by a group of refugee students at Long Rock Secondary School.

2.4 Success of Immigrant Students in Secondary School

In this section, I will review the seminal literature published in TESL over the past two decades which have operationalized the construct of *success* of immigrant students in high school predominantly as academic achievement (Derwing, DeCorby, Ichikawa, & Jamieson 1999; Early, 1992; Gunderson, 2007; Toohey & Derwing, 2008; Watt & Roessingh, 2001). It is my argument that this emphasis on success as academic accomplishments is too narrow and fails to acknowledge other forms of success that immigrant students may be experiencing in school, such as emotional and social. Watt and Roessingh (2001) rightly pointed out that “research constructs such as educational success and ESL learners have become multifaceted and complex. Each construct is defined differently depending on who is using it.....The picture is further complicated by the manner in which descriptive statistics are calculated and reported” (p. 205). The final sentence in this citation and its mention of descriptive statistics should be noted since it illustrates how the authors’ consideration of success has been funnelled down to only empirical studies reporting on quantitative-based findings. These quantitative findings in turn naturally lend themselves to conceptualizing success as academic achievement based on numbers and percentages. The narrowing of Watt and Roessingh’s focus is not surprising though, given the dominance of quantitative research that has been done in this area.

Beginning with Early’s (1992) case study exploring characteristics which impact ESL students’ ability to do well in school, *success* is operationalized as a C average in regular non-

ESL courses. Early's use of a quantitative marker of success in school is interesting since her data source was *qualitative*, collected through semi-structured interviews with student participants. The participants in the study were twenty-six ESL students attending high school in Vancouver, BC and who had been in Canada for no less than two years and no more than five years. Fifteen of the participants were categorized as 'successful', meaning they had attained higher than a C average and were primarily enrolled in mainstream classes. The remaining eleven participants were categorized as 'less successful', meaning they had lower than a C average in their regular classes and spent most of their day in ESL classes. Early found that there was no singular circumstance which made some of the participants more successful than others; rather there seemed to be a combination of contributing factors including the amount of time students had spent in school in their home countries and the number of hours they spent on their homework after school. It is relevant to the present study to mention that five out of the eleven students in the 'less successful' group had experienced some form of interrupted schooling, while only one out the fifteen students in the 'successful' group reported interruptions in their schooling. Another contributing factor to success, as operationalized in this study, was the students' ability to seek out help in completing their school work, as well as the level of expertise and availability of the people who provided this help. Learning strategies, the students' purpose for studying, and their sense of power within their personal situation were also identified as factors contributing to the students' ability to succeed in school.

Although Early used a quantitative measure to operationalize success, she put forth in her conclusion an argument similar to my own. She wrote that "most research on second-language learning and school achievement is based on the large-scale statistical analysis of scores from language and subject area tests. While much has been revealed by this work, it does not tell us a

great deal about the factors which influence school achievement” (p.274). In other words, what is being dismissed or overlooked in terms of process or relationships when only numerical successes are considered?

Moving forward chronologically in the literature, a mixed-method study conducted by Derwing, DeCorby, Ichikawa, and Jamieson (1999) also defined the success of ESL secondary school students in terms of academic achievement. Yet unlike Early (1992), Derwing et al. (1999) operationalized success as whether or not students had completed their high school education and graduated. The participants in the study consisted of over five hundred ESL students who had attended high school within a school board in Edmonton, Alberta. The authors generated their quantitative data from student records kept by the school board between 1991 and 1996. This particular school board had requested that the study be conducted in order to compare the completion rates of their own ESL students to those reported in Watt and Roessingh (1994a, 1994b). In this latter study, Watt and Roessingh reported a disturbing 74% non-completion rate for ESL students who had attended a high school in Calgary, Alberta between 1988 and 1993. Somewhat lower but still troubling, the findings of Derwing et al. (1999) were that 10% of the ESL students in the Edmonton school board were pushed out due to the age cap and 36% dropped out for other reasons. Thus, the major finding for this study was that 46% of ESL students in that particular school board were ‘non-completers’. Thinking in terms of success, Derwing et al.’s finding presumably indicated that at least half of the ESL students in their study failed to succeed in school.

In Watt and Roessingh’s (2001) report on their longitudinal quantitative study exploring the drop-out patterns of ESL students at one urban high school in Calgary, success in school was based on completion rates, similar to Derwing et al. (1999). As Watt and Roessingh (2001)

wrote: “We adopted the generally accepted definition of educational success, the completion of high school graduation requirements” (p.208). Data was collected from the records of 505 students spanning across eight years between 1989 and 1997, including the students’ initial intake placement level and yearly progress through beginner, intermediate, and advanced ESL classes, culminating with full integration into mainstream classes. In addition, they built on the data collected during one of their earlier studies which I have already mentioned (Watt & Roessingh 1994a, 1994b) at the same school.⁵ Yet more than just report on the drop-out rate of the ESL students as they did in their original study, Watt and Roessingh (2001) wanted to investigate if and how an extremely large budget cut in education—such as one which occurred in Alberta in 1993--impacted the success of ESL high school students. In terms of ESL support, the 1993 budget cut had eliminated the option for ESL students in Alberta to return for a fourth or fifth year to complete their high school requirements. ESL students were instead required in the post-cut years to complete secondary school in only a three year period. This resulted in a new pressure to transition ESL students into mainstream classes as quickly as possible, whether they were prepared or not.

The findings from this study were that the general drop-out rate between the two cohorts of ESL students (pre-1993 budget cuts and post-1993 budget cuts) was the same at 74%. This remarkably matched the percentage reported by Watt and Roessingh (1994a) seven years prior. Also, Watt and Roessingh (2001) found that the drop-out pattern based on the students’ intake proficiency level remained the same across the pre-cut and post-cut cohorts. However, the authors did find that in the post-cut cohort, ESL students dropped out sooner than those from the pre-cut years. The implications of these findings, according to Watt and Roessingh, was that

⁵ The findings from these 1994 publications were the impetus behind the Derwing et al. (1999) study.

until educational systems understand and appreciate what is necessary to deliver effective ESL instruction at the secondary school level, such as providing ample time for learning, few ESL students “will ever realize their true academic potential” (p.220). While I agree with this statement, I was concerned that there was no acknowledgement that the students may have succeeded in school in areas other than just academic achievement.

Another seminal empirical study regarding the success experienced by immigrant students in secondary school was reported in Gunderson (2007). Gunderson’s large-scale, longitudinal study took into account 24,890 ESL immigrant students, covering 148 language groups, who attended secondary school in a Vancouver school board between 1991 and 2001. Gunderson stated clearly that he was primarily measuring student success in terms of academics: “The studies in this book are designed to explore the language and academic achievement of immigrant students in secondary school” (p. 9). Although Gunderson’s study also collected a substantial volume of qualitative data through open-ended interviews with over 400 randomly selected students, the substantial bulk of the study’s findings were based on quantitative data generated from the students’ placement tests scores (based on oral, reading, and math standardized assessment measures), grades in individual courses, drop-out rates, graduation rates, and enrolment in university.

Gunderson’s study reported on a vast array of findings. One of the major findings was the sheer linguistic, educational, socio-economical, and experiential diversity amongst the 24, 890 secondary school immigrant students. Through analysis of the statistical figures, it was also found that the students’ academic performance in school ranged widely when comparing different language groups associated to general levels of socioeconomic status. For example, students coming from more affluent language groups (e.g. Mandarin-speakers from Taiwan)

tended to have higher scores in their course grades than students from less affluent language groups (e.g. Vietnamese speakers). Through the interviews, the study also found that across the board, most of the immigrant students struggled with their own sense of identity and were confused about how to find a place of belonging in their new school and Canadian society.

Yet another study which operationalized success in school for immigrant students as academic achievement was Toohey and Derwing (2008). Motivated by a report issued by the British Columbia Ministry of Education in 2004 that ESL students in BC had higher graduation rates than English-speaking students (80% compared to 78%), Toohey and Derwing sought to investigate the validity of this unusual statistic. Such high completion rates for ESL students were certainly suspect when considering the findings from other studies (Derwing et al., 1999; Watt & Roessingh, 1994a, 1994b, 2001) which reported on significantly lower completion rates in Alberta. Toohey and Derwing (2008) collected their quantitative data from the records of ESL students enrolled in four secondary schools in the Vancouver School Board between 1997 and 2002. The authors defined ‘ESL students’ as students who, at any time in grade 10, 11, 12, were registered in an ESL designated course. All students not eligible to graduate by 2002 were eliminated from the study, thus bringing the participant sample size to 1,554 students. Two of the schools were located in a higher socioeconomic status (SES) neighbourhood in Vancouver while the other two were located in a lower SES neighbourhood. The wording used in the study’s title, *Hidden Losses: How demographics can encourage incorrect assumptions about ESL high school students’ success*, and research questions below make clear the author’s understanding of success (bold print added for emphasis):

1. What are the **graduation rates** of ESL students registered in the Vancouver School District from 1997-2002?
2. How do the **grades on provincially examinable subjects** compare across ESL **graduates and non-graduates**?

3. Does SES predict graduation rates of ESL students?
4. Does first- language background predict graduation rates of ESL students?
(p. 183).

The focus on graduation rates and class scores in the research questions makes it clear that success in school, once again, was being conceptualized in terms of academic achievement.

Some of the findings from this study were that the graduation rates of ESL students across the four high schools in Vancouver was 60% (933 had graduated, 621 had not). This was 20% lower than the figure reported by the BC Ministry of Education in 2004. Toohey and Derwing suggested that this major discrepancy may have been due to the government reporting on all ESL students from across the province. This is problematic since historically, BC has had a smaller intake of immigrants with lower SES compared to other provinces. As shown in earlier studies (e.g. Gunderson, 2007), immigrant students coming from higher SES tend to have higher graduation rates. Thus, the experiences of immigrant students with lower SES, who are in the minority in BC schools, may have been overshadowed by the experiences of the majority who came from higher SES backgrounds. Accordingly, Toohey and Derwing concluded that many ESL students attending secondary school in BC are faced with the same challenges as reported by other provinces. They recommended that policy be implemented to better meet the needs of ESL students in secondary school and that the BC Ministry of Education mandate that all teachers receive ESL training.

In summation, the seminal empirical studies reviewed in this section have all operationalized success in secondary school for immigrant students as academic achievement. For this standpoint, all of the authors have arguably reported that the majority of immigrant students are not succeeding in school. It was particularly striking that in Gunderson (2007), 5,487 of the 24,890 students were initially assessed as having 0-level English ability and hence

unable to complete a standardized test. Since much of Gunderson's data collection was based on the scores generated by the completion of such tests, these 5,487 students were essentially disqualified from participating in any further aspects of the study, including taking part in the interviews at a later stage. Students such as Ms. Woodbine's—refugees with interrupted schooling and little to no literacy ability—would have likely been amongst this group of 5,487 students with 0-level English ability. Ms. Woodbine confirmed that most of her students had initially scored 0 on the basic standardized tests before entering her classroom. Lee Gunderson himself, the Principal Investigator of Gunderson (2007), readily acknowledged that the absence of data for this particular group of students was a limitation in his study and he welcomed other studies that would seek to address this gap (Lee Gunderson, personal communication, April 1, 2010). Accordingly, the present study aimed to explore the possibility of other understandings of success in school from the perspectives of both refugee students with interrupted schooling and school staff. In doing so, it sought to potentially stimulate a dialogue where the various accomplishments of these students could be acknowledged and appreciated.

2.5 Theoretical Framework: Ecology of Human Development

This section outlines the theory and constructs applied in Chapter Four as a lens to discuss the findings of my study. To begin, I have drawn on the theoretical ideas of Urie Bronfenbrenner pertaining to human development within context. Beginning with his PhD work at the University of Michigan in the early 1940s, Bronfenbrenner spent the span of his professional career developing a theory which he referred to as the *ecology of human development* in his seminal 1979 publication. In mainstream psychology, human development had been predominantly thought as cognitive with studies usually conducted in contrived settings such as a laboratory, void of genuine context and relationships. In his landmark treatise, Bronfenbrenner navigated a major divergence in his field. Building on the ideas of his mentor,

Kurt Lewin, Bronfenbrenner argued that human development should be explored not only through objective factors but also through a person's own subjectivities or perceptions of the world around them. Accordingly, Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined human development as "a lasting change in the way in which a person perceives and deals with his or her environment" (p. 3). Also coming out of Lewin's work (see Lewin, 1931, 1935), Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed that the development of an individual be conceptualized as happening within an interconnected network of multiple nested systems or ecologies. In this ecological theory, the immediate setting in which the developing person is situated and interacts is the *microsystem* and the interaction between multiple microsystems creates a *mesosystem*. Take for example an ESL student whose microsystems include her ESL classroom and her home; accordingly, a mesosystem is created when the student's parents and English teacher meet at the school to discuss the student's academic progress. The next system within the ecology of human development framework is the *exosystem* which is the linkage between two or more settings, one of which the individual does not normally operate within. Returning to the example of the ESL student, an exosystem might be created in staff meetings between her school's principal and ESL teachers regarding a new educational policy for ESL students. Finally, Bronfenbrenner defined the *macrosystem* as the overarching ideologies and organization in a culture or sub-culture. The macrosystem is therefore also described as a blueprint for the structuring and organization of the micro-, meso-, and exosystem within a given culture. For example, Canada can be seen as a macrosystem which largely requires that the language of instruction in all public schools be either English or French. At all four levels, Bronfenbrenner emphasized that the relations between the systems and the individual are reciprocal, meaning that both the setting(s) and person can influence one another.

In the years and decades following his 1979 publication, Bronfenbrenner continually revisited his theory, either to re-structure his ideas or to further expand them. For example, in his 1988 article *Interacting systems in human development-research paradigms: Present and future*, Bronfenbrenner's emphasis shifted from the four nested systems to a process-person-context model. In this model, human development is explained as the outcome of a joint function and interaction between the process (what happens) leading up to developmental outcomes, the personal characteristics of the developing individual, and the situation or context in which the development takes place. Over the years, Bronfenbrenner also developed his ideas around the addition of a fifth system, the *chronosystem*, thus taking into account the dimension of time. In his 1992 article *Ecological systems theory*, Bronfenbrenner explained that research in the ecologies of human development must consider time not only in the consistencies and changes within the individual over time, but also in the surrounding environments. During the final years of his work and life, Bronfenbrenner (2001) re-christened his theory as a *bioecological theory of human development* which brought together his ideas on the interconnections between time, context, the processes within a context, and the biological and psychological characteristics of the person. In this new bioecological perspective, Bronfenbrenner replaced the concept of a *microsystem* with *proximal processes*, which he explained are the interactions that the developing individual has with the people, objects, and symbols in his/her immediate settings. Bronfenbrenner further hypothesized that the proximal processes have the greatest impact on development. Finally, Bronfenbrenner (2001) re-defined human development within a bioecological framework—using a process-person-context-time model—as “the phenomenon of continuity and change in the biopsychological characteristics of human beings [intellectually, emotionally, socially and morally] both as individuals and as groups. The phenomenon extends

over the life course across successive generations and through historical time, both past and present” (p. 3). When comparing this definition of human development to his 1979 definition (a change in the way a person perceives his/her surroundings), the shifts and development in Bronfenbrenner’s ideas about time and the developing individual is clear. As mentioned earlier, Bronfenbrenner remained consistent throughout his publications in asserting the reciprocity of influence between the individual and his/her environments.

2.5.1 Critiques of the Ecological Perspective

Although widely influential, Bronfenbrenner’s ideas were not immune to critique. For example, Tudge, Gray, and Hogan (1997) pointed out that the ecology of human development model, as conceptualized in 1979, had little to say about the developing individuals themselves. These authors also highlighted that the theory was not drawn from Bronfenbrenner’s own research data, but instead had extensively been built on the work of others. Referring to the concept of proximal processes, Tudge et al. commented that Bronfenbrenner had not, as of that point in time, provided a clear explanation of what would qualify as a high and low proximal process. Aside from such external commentary, Bronfenbrenner himself proved to be one of his own loudest critics. Writing in 1992, Bronfenbrenner stated: “In a series of articles ostensibly written for other purposes, I have been pursuing a hidden agenda: that of reassessing, revising, extending—as well as regretting and even renouncing—some of the conceptions set forth in my 1979 monograph” (p.106). One of his main concerns was that while many studies in psychology had certainly adopted an ecological approach to investigating human development, these studies had tended to mainly describe the various ecologies with much less attention paid to the actual development of the person and on how this development was occurring over time. As described earlier, Bronfenbrenner would later address this critique through a shift to a bioecological understanding of human development with its process-person-context-time focus.

2.5.2 Influence of Ecological Perspective in Other Fields

Using an ecological perspective as a theoretical framework has been influential not only in psychology, but also in fields such as refugee education and Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL)/Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Pertaining to the refugee education literature, Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen, and Frater-Mathieson (2004) integrated Bronfenbrenner's ecological model together with three distinct phases experienced by refugee students, namely pre-migration, transmigration, and post-migration. The authors viewed an ecological framework as useful when thinking about the needs of refugee students in the post-migration stage since it provided a common lens through which to consider diverse populations of refugee students. Anderson et al. (2004) also pointed out that the use of the ecological framework in the study of refugee education required that the influence of family, community and other support systems on the development of individual refugee students be considered simultaneously. Kanu (2008) also applied Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory of human development to her study of forty African refugee students in two inner-city Manitoba high schools. Using an ecological lens, Kanu discussed how teachers at the high schools, as part of the students' microsystems, had been integral in supporting the integration of the refugee students. From her findings, she also suggested that greater communication and understanding was required in the students' mesosystem involving school and home.

A few researchers working in the field of TESL/TEFL have also used an ecological framework to support their studies. For example, Kang (2006) conducted a thirteen-month case study investigating the factors affecting the learning and use of English by a Korean physician working in an English-speaking country. Drawing on an ecological perspective posited by scholars one of whom she cites as Bronfenbrenner, Kang made the assumption that language learning is influenced by both individual and socio-contextual factors, as well as the

interconnection between the two. The findings from this study were that both individual and socio-contextual factors impacted the participant's ability to acquire and use English in a social setting. Kang reported that the participant's personality, motivation, and occupational beliefs enabled him to overcome challenges to acquiring and using English which arose in his environmental surroundings. While Kang did not make an explicit connection, the findings from her study could have also been discussed using the process-person-context-time model developed by Bronfenbrenner near the end of his career.

2.6 Construct of Resiliency

I will also use the construct of resiliency to discuss the present study's findings.

Resiliency has conceptually been defined in multiple ways by various scholars. One of the more widely encompassing definitions was provided by Masten and Motti-Stefanidi (2009) as:

“Resiliency is a very broad idea referring to patterns of positive adaptation in a system (Masten, 2007). Thus, resilience can be considered at many levels, from the perspective of an individual, a family, a school, a community, or an ecosystem” (p. 721). Another explanation of *resiliency*, provided by Schonert-Reichl and LeRose (2008), is “the ways in which individuals, despite the presence of risk factors, develop in healthy ways” (p. 5). In the remainder of this thesis manuscript, my reference to *resiliency* is based on the combination of these two definitions.

Resiliency, as a relatively new field of study, emerged in the 1960s and 1970s with the aim of understanding and preventing mental illness using a developmental lens. Consequently, scholars working in this area began to take note of individuals--particularly young people-- who were demonstrating positive outcomes or recovery despite the presence of significant challenges and trauma in their lives. Initially, these young people were described as ‘invulnerable’ or ‘invincible’, words which problematically gave the impression that they would remain ‘untouched’ in any situation or time period (Schonert-Reichl & LeRose, 2008). It quickly

became apparent, however, that this was not the case and that the terminology was misleading; *invulnerability* was therefore eventually replaced by *resiliency*. This new research orientation, based on success, emerged as a contrast to the more traditional deficiency-based orientation which sought to identify negative outcomes and their contributing risk factors. As discussed earlier in this chapter, much of the literature concerning research with refugee students has taken a deficiency-based approach. One exception to this was Oikonomidou (2007) who interestingly drew on the concept of *resiliency* to interpret the findings of her study regarding the agency exercised by female Somalian refugee students attending high school in the United States.

According to Masten (2007), scholars in the early stages of the resiliency research wanted to look at neurobiological factors contributing to positive outcomes; however, it was difficult—or even impossible—to measure such factors with the scientific technology available at that time. From this juncture point, resiliency researchers initiated and have since rode the crest of four waves. The first wave came with the aim of describing the phenomenon of resilience, specifically cataloguing its various contributing external factors (e.g. supportive parents, a tight network of friends, access to good schools); arguably, scholars working in this first wave would have found a high degree of affinity with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theoretical ideas about positive human development within ecological systems, particularly with his emphasis on describing the ecological systems themselves. The second wave of resiliency research then moved from being highly descriptive to exploring the processes which occur over time within and around both the individual and the identified supportive factors (e.g. investigating longitudinally the interaction between family members). Thorough studies conducted in the swell of this second wave, however, require at least several years to generate significant findings, which was problematic for a young and emerging field hoping to generate new knowledge. In

response to this predicament, the third wave of resiliency researchers turned their focus to exploring factors which promote wellness, as well as successful intervention practice and programs. Scholars in this second and third wave of resiliency research have made direct and explicit connections between their work and Bronfenbrenner's theoretical ideas. For example, Masten and Motti-Stefanidi (2009) acknowledged that their work is rooted in developmental systems theory, and that "combining multiple strategies in interventions to promote positive adaptation in children is also highly congruent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) concept of the mesosystem" (p.733). Bronfenbrenner's ideas about human development were also acknowledged by Hymel, Schonert-Reichl, and Miller (2007) as being a platform for emerging work in the resiliency field around promoting social competence. The fourth and upcoming wave of resiliency research, according to Masten (2007), will continue to build on the findings of the first three waves by contributing new findings through a return to the original interests of resiliency scholars in neurobiological and genetic contributing factors, now possible to measure due to significant advances in science.

For the purpose of the present study, only the first three waves in resiliency research are relevant. Schonert-Reichl and LeRose (2008) described some of the key findings coming out of these waves over the past decade, namely the vital role of positive and supportive relationships in a young person's life, particularly with at least one adult. Another major finding cited by the authors is the importance of schools as places where youth can have a sense of belonging and are given opportunities to develop their competence not only academically, but also socially, emotionally, and morally. Schonert-Reichl and Hymel (2007), for example, advocated for the importance of developing the Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) of students in school and argued that "a combination of academic learning and social and emotional skills is the true standard for

effective education for the world we now live in” (p. 20). A third key finding coming out of the past decade of resiliency research was the idea that resiliency is ordinary, or as Ann Masten (2001) termed it, resiliency is “ordinary magic”. Masten wrote the following:

Resilience appears to be a common phenomenon arising from ordinary human adaptive processes. The great threats to human development are those that jeopardize the systems underlying these adaptive processes, including brain development and cognition, caregiver-child relationships, regulation of emotion and behaviour, and the motivation for learning and engaging in the environment (p.234).

These three key findings in the field of resiliency research, regarding positive relationships, a sense of belonging and competence, and the ordinariness of resiliency, have particular relevance for the findings of the present study conducted at Long Rock Secondary School in Vancouver, BC, as will be discussed in Chapter Four.

2.7 Construct of Identity

Finally, I will draw on the poststructuralist conceptualization of *identity* to help interpret the findings from my study. Within the field of TESL and more widely in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Bonny Norton (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) has been a forerunner in promoting a new understanding of social identity within a language learning context. At the time of her 1995 publication, Norton Peirce argued that theorists in SLA had yet to generate a framework which adequately addressed the relationship between language learners and their surrounding social world. Norton Peirce highlighted some of the more widely-accepted theories such as Krashen’s (1981, 1982) notion that the learner’s motivation and self-confidence/anxiety level would heighten or lessen the capacity of their *affective filter* to allow the in-flow of *comprehensible input* from the target language. From this understanding, Norton Peirce argued that the focus here was only on the learner and neglected consideration of the social context and its impact. Another widely accepted theory in SLA at that time was Schumann’s (1976)

conceptualization of *social distance* between the language learning group and the target language group and how these distances impacted language acquisition. Norton Peirce (1995) explained that in the case of this theory, the focus was only on the social contexts and ignored individual factors and agency which come into play when one is learning a language. The argument put forth by Norton Peirce was that these “artificial distinctions”, which served to keep the individual and social world separate, were unjustified (p.11). She further wrote:

In the field of SLA, theorists have not adequately addressed why is it that a learner may sometimes be motivated, extroverted, and confident and sometimes unmotivated, introverted, and anxious; why in one place there may be social distance between a specific group of language learners and the target language community, whereas in another place the social distance may be minimal; why a learner can sometimes speak and other times remains silent (p. 11).

Norton Peirce therefore proposed a new theory of social identity which integrated and emphasized the interaction between individuals and their social context, the imbalance of power relations often involved, and the impact which these factors collectively have on language learning.

Drawing on the ideas of Weedon (1987) who defined subjectivity (or social identity) as “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world (p. 32), Norton (1995, 2000) understood social identity as multi-dimensional, changing over time, and often a point of tension involving power relations between the individual and others. Norton thus problematized the assumption made by many SLA theorists that a language learner could be defined in simple, homogenous, and uncritical terms such as extrovert/introvert or motivated/unmotivated. In contrast, Norton used the term *identity* “to reference how a person understands his or her relationship to the

world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (2000, p.5).

In a one year case study involving five immigrant women, Norton (2000) used her developing theory of social identity to report on her participant’s experience of learning English in Canada. Data was collected during the study through diaries, questionnaires, interviews and home visits. One of Norton’s key finding was that the women’s identities—or their sense of self—changed over time depending on the context of their interaction with others, who was involved, and what kinds of interactions occurred (or did not occur) in that particular context. The shifting identity of her participants, in turn, impacted their willingness to communicate in the target language. Take for example one of the participants, Eva, who emigrated from Poland. Her reasons for coming to Canada were to further herself economically and to eventually enrol in a Canadian university and attain a business degree. Upon first arriving in Canada, Eva found employment in an Italian grocery store; in this work context, Eva said that she felt like a valued employee because she was able to speak Italian fluently. Eva’s desire to develop her English language ability, however, led her to seek out employment at an English-speaking fast food restaurant. In this new work context, her positive sense of self shifted because her Anglophone co-workers excluded her from their social interactions and assigned her to undesirable and solitary tasks (e.g. cleaning floors, clearing garbage). Norton suggested that Eva’s co-workers placed greater value on English speakers and thus positioned Eva negatively as both an immigrant woman and an illegitimate speaker of English. After initially submitting to and accepting this negative social identity, Eva eventually activated her own agency and began to assert her desired identity amongst her co-workers as a multicultural citizen who possessed valuable knowledge about life in Europe. Overtime, Eva was accepted by her co-workers as a

legitimate speaker of English and consequently was allowed into their English-speaking interactions and world. As Norton wrote, Eva “was no longer powerless in the workplace” (p.71).

Clear linkages between Norton’s view of identity as multiple, changing over time, and a site of social interaction involving power relations can be made to the *resiliency* research which emphasizes that the fostering of supportive relationships and having a sense of belonging and competence over time can lead to healthy development such as having a positive sense of self. Using this poststructuralist understanding of identity is integral when considering the findings for the present study, particularly in regards to whether or not the student participants viewed themselves in the identity of ‘good students’. This construct of *identity* is also useful when considering how the perceived power relations between the participants and I (as the researcher) impacted what they chose to say during their interviews.

2.8 Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed the literature pertaining to refugee students with interrupted schooling, as well as highlighted studies which have taken a deficiency based approach to understanding more generally the experience of refugee students in school. I have also reviewed several key studies coming out of the TESL literature over the past twenty years and their operationalizations of *success* in school as academic achievement. In each of these areas, I have described the studies, provided commentary, and made linkages which justify the need for the present study. The second half of this chapter has described the theoretical framework and constructs I will use in Chapter Four to discuss the study’s findings, namely Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2005) *ecology of human development* theory, and the constructs of *resiliency* and *identity*. In the next chapter, I will turn to outlining the methodology used during the study.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design (site, participants, procedures, data instruments and collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations) of an ethnography I conducted at Long Rock Secondary School in Vancouver, B.C. between June 2009 and May 2010. As introduced in Chapter One and discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, the first problem prompting this study was a shortage of research in TESL focused on the perspective of adolescent refugee students with interrupted schooling. The second concern that informed this study was the tendency of scholars to take a deficiency-based approach when investigating the schooling experiences of adolescent refugee students. The third research problem instigating this study was my observation that the construct of *success* in school had been predominately operationalized as academic achievement in the TESL research literature.

Over a period of ten months, I conducted interviews with staff and student participants as well as kept an observation journal of Ms. Woodbine's students' daily schooling experience and interactions. Through both of these forms of data collection, I hoped to gain a better understanding of how the participants understood success in school and what support systems they perceived as being in place to foster success. The interviews were transcribed and later coded and categorized into major overarching themes related to the research questions, using the approach suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). While conducting the observations of Ms. Woodbine and her students, I followed the guidelines outlined by Richards (2003) for conducting observations within an educational context. My observation notes were coded using the same themes generated in the analysis of the interview transcripts.

3.2 Research Design as Ethnography

I have identified this study as ethnography for two reasons. First, I conducted observations of Ms. Woodbine and her students over a substantial period of time as a participant observer, a key method often used in ethnographic studies (Palys & Atchison, 2008). As a participant, my role was to assist Ms. Woodbine and the students in their regular classroom tasks. Second, I consider this study an ethnography since Goldbard and Hustler (2005) stated that ethnographies are distinct from other forms of qualitative research in that they place an emphasis on “understanding how people *interpret* their worlds, and the need to understand the particular cultural worlds in which people live and which they both construct and utilize” (p.16). This study, which draws on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2005) ecological theory of human development as its theoretical framework, likewise aimed to situate the participants’ perspectives (or interpretations) within the context of their surrounding environments or ecologies.

On a final note, designing this study as an ethnography has allowed me to remain flexible in my research design and questions. As Goldbard and Hustler (2005) explained:

Any ethnographer needs to be open to research problem reformulation. Just what is practically possible can often shape ethnographic work, as can ‘early days in the field’ as you begin to sample particular settings involving particular participants at particular times....It should be apparent that ethnography is a constant process of decision-making, that openness to smaller or very major changes in research design is crucial, and that data-gathering and data-analysis are interrelated and ongoing throughout most ethnographic research” (p.18).

Remaining flexible in my research procedure and questions allowed me to keep my ethnographic study responsive to the moods, events, and opportunities which unfolded at Long Rock Secondary School with Ms. Woodbine’s sheltered literacy class.

3.3 Research Site

This study took place at Long Rock Secondary School, a public school located in a highly multicultural area of Vancouver, B.C. Sometimes described as border-line inner city, many of the neighbourhoods surrounding the school were made up of working class families. There were pockets within these communities, however, rapidly undergoing waves of gentrification. Long Rock's student population sat just below 1000, with roughly 150 students receiving ESL funded support at the time of the study. This figure though may be misleading about the actual linguistic diversity within the school; indeed, the school's ESL department head reported in June 2009 that approximately 75% of Long Rock's students did not speak English as their first language and that over seventy languages were spoken by the students collectively. Long Rock Secondary School had earned the reputation of being a model school and was home to a number of district-wide special programs, including Ms. Woodbine's sheltered literacy class. For this reason, many of Long Rock's students commuted from outside the school's catchment area. The school took great pride in its code of conduct which was collaboratively written by staff and students. The code emphasized the responsibility of students and staff to create a school environment which was respectful, safe, inclusive and positive for all. Reference to this code of conduct, whether on a poster, over the announcements, by a classroom teacher or by students themselves, was a notable part of Long Rock's daily culture.

Ms. Woodbine's classroom was located on the main floor of the school at the end of a hallway near the auditorium and music room. Her students had their lockers in this same hallway. Ms. Woodbine's room itself was a larger than average classroom with significant natural lighting coming through the tall windows lining the wall on one side. At the back of the room were three computers where students often worked on their assignments, searched the Internet, watched U-tube videos, and browsed Face Book. Also at the back of the room was a

rectangular table around which Ms. Woodbine and the students would sometimes gather to debrief on the day's activities or to talk about books they were reading. During my time in the classroom, I often worked with students at this table, usually two at a time. Near the table hung a banner which the students had made earlier in the year to welcome visitors; the banner contained words from the students' various languages, with many of the words written in their respected linguistic scripts. Two large chalkboards ran across both the front and back of the room. Students' desks were grouped in pairs and formed three rows. Ms. Woodbine would sometimes have the students move the desks into a circle or other formations if she wanted to engage them in an extended discussion. Before morning class and during the lunch break, it was not uncommon to find Ms. Woodbine's students --both past and present--in the classroom playing cards on the floor, eating lunch at one of the desks, helping each other with their school work, or browsing the Internet, either alone or with friends.

3.4 Sample and Participants

The sampling procedure used in this study was *purposive sampling*, which involved targeting a population that met criteria directly related to the research (Palys & Atchison, 2008). For the school staff, my main criteria was that participants had worked in some capacity with Ms. Woodbine's students. My criteria for potential student participants was that they currently be enrolled in Ms. Woodbine's sheltered literacy class; in this way, I would be able to conduct substantial and concentrated observations of Ms. Woodbine and the student participants. The participants in this study included twelve of Ms. Woodbine's students, the school principal, a community worker, and six ESL teachers including Ms. Woodbine.

Basic demographic details about the eight staff participants are highlighted in the table below. For reasons of confidentiality, pseudonyms have been used in place of the participants' real names.

Table 1: Staff Participants and Demographic Information

Name	Gender	Position at school in relation to student participants (at the time of interview)	Number of years at Long Rock Secondary
Mrs. Hart	F	School principal	4
Ms. Woodbine	F	Classroom teacher of sheltered literacy class, ESL teacher	2
Mrs. Green	F	ESL Department Head, ESL teacher	1 (had taught at Long Rock for 5 years previously)
Mrs. Mer	F	ESL Music teacher	6
Mr. Stuart	M	ESL Music teacher	1
Mr. Campbell	M	ESL Math teacher	1
Mr. Day	M	Pre-employment teacher	n/a
Mr. Phan	M	Vietnamese school community worker	2

The gender of these participants were evenly divided between four males and four females (this was not intentional), each having worked at Long Rock for various periods of time ranging from one to six years. While not noted in the table above, all the staff participants--with the exception of Mr. Phan--were visibly Caucasian. Mr. Day was the teacher in the pre-employment program, a class originally designed to provide students struggling in their regular classes with some job experience and work skills. In 2009-2010, the program was restructured to accommodate the enrolment of students from Ms. Woodbine's class and it also incorporated a new focus of preparing older students to continue on in Adult Education programs.

Basic demographic information about the twelve student participants is highlighted below in Table 2. Again, pseudonyms have been used in place of the students' real names in order to protect their privacy.

Table 2: Student Participants and Demographic Information

Student Name	M/F	Age	Country	Languages (in order as listed by student)	Time in Canada	Time at Long Rock	Grade
Hip	M	16	Vietnam	Bahnar English	1.5 year	1 year	11
Annan	M	17	Thailand	Thai, English	8 months	6 months	11
Treh	F	13	Vietnam	Jarai Vietnamese English	6 months (Cambodia for 2 years)	5 months	8
H'Tam	F	14	Vietnam	Jarai Vietnamese English	3 years	2 years	9
Na	F	13	Vietnam	Mnong Vietnamese English	3 years	6 months	8
Areva	F	14	Thailand	English Thai	8 months	6 months	9
Mya	F	17	Myanmar	Burmese English	Almost 1 year	6 months	11
Jana	M	17	Vietnam	Jirai Bahnar Vietnamese English	2 years	1.5 years	11
Rukia	F	16	Iraq	Kurdish Turkish English	1 year (in Turkey for 3.5 years before)	6 months	9
Kok	M	13	Vietnam	Jarai, Vietnamese, English	3 years	6 months	8
Minh	M	16	Vietnam	Vietnamese English	3 years	2 years	10
Dit	M	13	Vietnam	Vietnamese Jirai English	4 years	6 months	8

Like the staff participants, the gender of the students was evenly split, and again, this was unintentional. At the time of the study, these students were part of the third group of students (2009-2010) enrolled in Ms. Woodbine's sheltered literacy class at Long Rock. They ranged between the ages of 13 and 17, their grade levels varied between 8 and 11, and they had been attending Long Rock for between 6 months to 2 years. The students had been living in Canada between 8 months to 4 years. Most of the students spoke two to three languages, although many were hesitant during the interviews to list English as one of them. Eight out of the twelve students came from Vietnam, with the four remaining students coming from Thailand (2), Iraq (1) and Myanmar (1). All the students who identified their home country as Vietnam, with the exception of Minh, were actually from minority tribes in the central highlands of Vietnam. These groups have often been called *Montagnards* (or mountain people), a blanket term first used by French colonist to refer to the more than forty-five diverse ethnic groups living in Vietnam's central highlands, each with their own unique language, dress, and practice. The students participating in this study came from the Bahnar, Jarai, and Mnong tribes. For political, religious, and territorial reasons, the Vietnamese government has been persecuting their communities since 1975.

3.5 Developing a Better Understanding of the Students

When I asked Mr. Phan why he had agreed to participate in the study, he provided me with the following response:

I feel that the population that I'm dealing with is more, is unknown to the world. And it's my responsibility; it's a sensible thing to do, to be vocal....Because in working with them I've seen the challenges they have to go through. The difficulties they have to face. And yet, the professionals in working with them are not knowing, understanding, where they come from. And so I feel that it needs to [be] documented in such a way that people can be beneficial from that. People can be better prepared when working with this community (Interview, April 7, 2010).

Respecting Mr. Phan's reason for participating in the study, I offer here a modest yet hopefully wider window through which to understand who the student participants were in terms of their individual goals, talents, and past educational and life experiences.

When I asked Ms. Woodbine's students during the interviews what they wanted to do after they left Long Rock, the students listed a wide range of aspirations. Some said that they wanted to work, but were unsure yet of what kind of job. Several students said that wanted to continue studying in areas such as English (Mya), business and Japanese (Minh), and art (Annan). Other students listed becoming a police officer (Kok), an entertainer (Rukia), a nurse (Na), a hair dresser (H'Tam), a teacher (Treh), and working in the family shop (Areva) as their plans for the future.

Like their aspirations after high school, the students were also diverse in their talents. Areva was trained as a classical Thai dancer in Thailand, and Annan and Rukia choreographed and performed their own Hip Hop routines during special events at Long Rock. Kok and Dit were members of the school's wrestling team, and Na and Rukia played for the girls' soccer team. Minh and Annan were skilled in drawing and animation. Hip was a talented beat boxer⁶ and he had also produced and choreographed with friends a series of fight videos which they subsequently posted on You Tube. Na was a singer in the school choir and Jana played regularly in his church band. Almost all the student spoke three or more languages.

There was also a range in the students' educational levels and past experiences. Upon entering Ms. Woodbine's class, most of the students' English language ability were at the low-beginner or even pre-beginner level. By the time some of them began the process of transitioning into other ESL classes near the end of the study period, they had attained a low-beginner to mid-

⁶ Beat boxing involves producing the sounds of drum beats/rhythms and musical sounds using only the mouth, lips, tongue, and voice.

beginner level. The reasons for the students' interrupted schooling and low literacy levels were multiple, including political strife in their home countries, instability of life in refugee camps, the inability of family to pay for education fees, and refusal to attend school because of mistreatment by teachers. The students from the central highlands of Vietnam spoke languages which are verbal but not written, and so literacy--in the mainstream sense of reading and writing--was never part of their lived experience. Also, the students from these minority ethnic groups were often not required to attend formal school in their home countries; instead, they worked the land and learned alongside their elders. In contrast, Ms. Woodbine reported that both Annan and Areva (siblings) were familiar with complex concepts in biology, such as DNA replication, which led her to deduct that they had attended high school regularly in Thailand.

On my last day of participating in the class, Ms. Woodbine asked the students what they would like other people to know about them. The students were hesitant to speak, and so Ms. Woodbine asked permission to speak on their behalf. She said that Hip would like people to know that while still in Vietnam he was made to attend a Vietnamese school where he was mistreated by a teacher. For this reason, he had difficulty trusting teachers. Speaking on behalf of Annan, Ms. Woodbine said that he would like people to know that he served in the Thai army and was expected to conduct himself both as a soldier and an adult. It had been difficult for him to adjust to being part of a family in Canada. Speaking for Treh, Ms. Woodbine said that she would like people to know that she was stubborn and strong-willed in character, and this was an asset when she fled Vietnam and lived in a Cambodian refugee camp for two years prior to coming to Canada. Hip, Annan, and Treh all said that they agreed with what Ms. Woodbine had shared about them.

This snapshot of the student participants which I have constructed from the interview transcripts and from my observation notes underscores that the students who were in Ms. Woodbine's class cannot simply be understood as 'refugees' or 'newcomers' or 'victims' or 'Vietnamese' or 'illiterate' or 'uneducated' or any other categorical term. Instead, Ms. Woodbine's third cohort of students were individuals with a wide range of interests, goals, talents, and educational and life experiences.

3.6 Procedure

The research project in its entirety—from initiation to writing of the thesis—ran from February 2009 to October 2010. The timeline for the study, and what was done, is outlined chronologically in Table 3 below. My original plan was to interview both students and staff members during May and June of 2009, as well as conduct classroom observations.

Unfortunately, time ran short and the ending of regular classes and commencement of exams mid-June made it only possible for me to interview the staff participants. Consequently, I had to recommence my study at Long Rock in the fall of 2009, which meant that a new cohort of students was enrolled in Ms. Woodbine's class. Admittedly, this has consequences for the trustworthiness of my study since the students I interviewed and observed were different from those whom most of the staff participants were referring to in their interviews.

In order to make the procedure I followed while collecting data between June 2009 and May 2010 as clear as possible, I have divided the study into four major phases: 1) interviews with staff participants in June 2009; 2) photography workshop with Ms. Woodbine's class during the first half of February 2010; 3) interviews with student participants in the second half of February 2010, and; 4) my participation in Ms. Woodbine's class as a participant observer between October 2009 and May 2010. Table 3 is followed by a detailed description of what took place during each of these phases.

Table 3: Research Timeline

Date	Activity
February 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff members at Long Rock Secondary School invited researchers in the Language and Literacy Education Department at UBC to initiate a study in Ms. Woodbine's class
March 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Met with Ms. Woodbine and Mrs. Green to discuss possible avenues for research
April –May 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attained approval to conduct research from administration at Long Rock Secondary School ▪ Attained approval to conduct research from the school board ▪ Submitted research ethics application to UBC's Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB)
June 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attained approval from BREB to conduct research ▪ Recruited school staff members to participate in study ▪ Conducted interviews with seven of the school staff (June 15-24)
July-October 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transcribed school staff interviews ▪ Preliminary analysis of the data
Nov.-Dec. 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Began observations of Ms. Woodbine and her students as a participant observer ▪ Amendments to research design submitted to BREB
January 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Observations as a participant observer continued ▪ Attained approval from BREB to proceed with the amended research design
Feb.-March 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explained study and consent forms to parents and students (Feb. 2) ▪ Conducted a four-day photography workshop with students during class time; students took pictures with disposable cameras ▪ Interviewed students (Feb 17-March 3) ▪ Transcribed student interviews ▪ Presented summary of interviews to students, as part of a member check (March 17)
April 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Observations as a participant observer continued ▪ Conducted a final staff interview with Mr. Phan
May-June 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Observations as a participant observer completed ▪ Analysis of data ▪ Submitted written summary of findings to Ms. Woodbine, Mrs. Green, and Mr. Phan, inviting feedback as a form of member checking
July-October 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Writing of thesis

3.6.1 Phase 1: Interviews with Staff Participants

The goals behind the interview questions (see Appendix C) with staff participants were three-fold: first, to gather basic contextual information about Long Rock Secondary School and Ms. Woodbine's students; second, to make inquiry into whether or not staff participants perceived Ms. Woodbine's students as successfully transitioning into regular ESL classes; and third, to explore the staff participants' perception of who or what was supporting the students as they transitioned.

All staff members who had had worked with Ms. Woodbine's students in some capacity during the 2008-2009 academic year were invited to participate in the study via an interview. At the beginning of June 2009, a list of over twenty staff member's names was provided to me by Mrs. Green, the ESL department head. Letters outlining the study and an invitation to participate, along with copies of the consent form, were delivered to each of their mailboxes in the school office. Interested individuals were asked to contact me through phone or e-mail in order to set up a convenient interview time. The purpose for this direct line of communication was to reduce the possibility of any staff member feeling pressured by administration or other colleagues in the ESL department to participate. I also extended an invitation to the school principal and vice-principal to take part in the study. My rationale was since the school's administrative leadership often sets the tone of a school (Hamilton & Moore, 2004), taking into account the views of the administration was important in an ethnographic study seeking to explore participants' perceptions within their surrounding context.

By mid-June, six staff members and the school principal had agreed to participate. The interviews were conducted at Long Rock between June 15 and June 24, 2009 during the final exam period. Interviews were conducted in various locations throughout the school including a

meeting room just off of Long Rock's main office, as well as in classrooms and private offices. Signed consent forms were collected from the participants prior to commencing the interview. Participants were not provided with the interview questions beforehand. One additional staff interview was conducted much later in April 2010 with Mr. Phan, the school's Vietnamese community worker. The reason for this later interview was that many of the staff and student participants had indicated that Mr. Phan was a key support system in the school. In response to this, I felt it was important to include Mr. Phan's account in the research data. Due to technological problems, only the first segment of Mr. Phan's interview was recorded; the remainder of the one-hour interview was documented through hand-written notes and later typed up in a Word Document. Unlike the other interviews with staff participants, I provided Mr. Phan with the interview questions prior to the interview. This change in the procedure was due to my shifting theorization around the research interview (see Chapter One, Section 1.5).

3.6.2 Phase 2: Photography Workshop with Ms. Woodbine's Students

Before interviewing the student participants, I first conducted a photography workshop with them over the course of four classes at the beginning of February 2010. The aim of this workshop was two-fold: 1) to provide the students with new vocabulary and literacy practice around taking photographs; and 2) to generate photographs that could be used as a research tool to linguistically support the students during their interviews with me. This latter aim was inspired by my observations in earlier classes of how illustrated books, such as *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan (2007), prompted the students to engage with me in highly introspective and philosophical discussions.

Over the course of the photography workshop, Ms. Woodbine's students were asked to reflect upon a collection of over fifty photographs which they had previously taken using Ms. Woodbine's digital camera. The students talked with each other, as well as with Ms. Woodbine,

myself, and an invited guest, about which pictures they found the most interesting and why. A photography journal was then created by each student that included a vocabulary list of important words such as zoom in, zoom out, background, foreground, and composition. Students also clipped pictures from magazines which they felt illustrated these words and wrote sentences about the clippings in their journals. Each student created a photography log chart on the computer which they later filled-out while taking pictures. They also sketched and labelled the parts of the disposable camera in their journals, as well as took notes from the board outlining their photography assignment.

After the workshops, the students were given one week to complete their photographic assignment. I asked them to take pictures showing what good students do, places inside and outside of school that made them feel happy, safe, and comfortable, as well as pictures of people from school who made them feel happy, safe, and comfortable. It was my hope that these sets of pictures would provide a platform for discussion and generate interview data connected to my three research questions. Most students shared a disposable camera with a partner and each camera had 27 exposures. A few students finished the assignment quickly, but most required some assistance or coaching, either from other students in the class or from Ms. Woodbine and myself. Upon completing their assignment, students returned the cameras to me and I developed the film in preparation for the interviews with the students.

3.6.3 Phase 3: Interviews with the Student Participants

The aim behind the students' interview questions (see Appendix H) was to explore their perceptions around what good students do in school, whether they viewed themselves as good students, and what people and places they reported as helping them to be good students. The interviews with students were conducted in the second half of February 2010 during class time. Each interview was audio recorded and lasted about 20 minutes on average. This resulted in a

total of almost 4 hours (229 minutes) of recorded interview data. All participants were provided with the interview questions beforehand, and some students requested that a copy of the questions be in front of them during the interview. It was my impression that following along with the questions helped the students feel more comfortable and so I was conscientious of keeping them informed about which question number we were on. Most of the interviews were conducted at the table located at the back of Ms. Woodbine's classroom. Several of the interviews were also done in the school's library. The last half of Treh's interview was conducted in the hallway just outside of Ms. Woodbine's room; I moved the interview here since Ms. Woodbine's classroom was quite noisy that day due to preparation for a school assembly.

3.6.4 Phase 4: Participation as a Participant Observer

Between October 2009 and May 2010, I conducted observations once or twice a week of Ms. Woodbine and her students, usually over a 1.5 to 2 hour time block. This resulted in over 50 hours of observation. My role was not only to observe, but also to participate with the class as a teacher assistant; for example, I helped the students write thank you letters, complete assignments on the computer, and answer reading comprehension questions. I also accompanied them on three field trips to the theatre, planetarium, and on a nature hike. Observations were thus conducted at various locations throughout and outside of Long Rock Secondary School.

3.7 Research Instruments

The interviews with the staff participants during the first phase of the study were semi-structured and consisted of twenty-five questions (see Appendix C). When designing this interview protocol, I operationalized *success* in school as *successfully transitioning into new classes* since, with the exception of Ms. Woodbine, most of the staff participants had interacted with the students only after they had transitioned into their classroom. As earlier mentioned, the goals behind these questions were to gather basic contextual information, to investigate whether

or not staff participants perceived Ms. Woodbine's students as successfully transitioning into regular ESL classes, and to explore the staff participants' perception of who or what was supporting the students as they transitioned. All interviews were audio recorded (except for Mr. Phan's due to technical difficulty) and lasted an average of one hour.

The interviews with student participants were also semi-structured and consisted of twelve questions (see Appendix H). As earlier stated, the focus behind these questions was to explore the perceptions of Ms. Woodbine's students about what good students do in school, whether they saw themselves as good students, and what people and places they perceived as helping them to be good students. Unlike in the first phase of the study, I operationalized *success* as *the actions of a good student* in the third phase. This shift in operationalization was necessary since the students who participated had not yet begun to transition into regular ESL classes and therefore could not speak from first-hand experience about it.

Because all the interviews were conducted in English, I built several linguistic scaffolds into the student interview protocol, including using the students' photographs during the interviews to support their responses. In addition, I tried to use simplistic wording in my questions so as not to go above the students' communicative abilities in English. I also tried to offer linguistic support by providing students with options for responding to certain questions. For example, students were asked to rank who they felt was most important in helping them to be good students using a set of labelled cards which read 'My teachers', 'My family', 'Me', and 'Other students' (see Illustration 1 below). In an ideal world, I would have conducted the interviews in the students' first languages; unfortunately, many of the students spoke languages for which there were no translators in the Vancouver area. Mr. Phan could have arguably provided Vietnamese-English translations, but this would have still been problematic since

Vietnamese was not the first language of students from the central highlands. Moreover, it was the language used by their persecutors-the Vietnamese government-which arguably brings with it significant traumatic associations.

Illustration 1: Interviews Cards



Finally, the observations I conducted of Ms. Woodbine and her students were recorded in a research journal. While observing, I avoided focusing my attention on any one person or behaviour or interaction pattern in particular, since as Richard (2003) explained in his book *Qualitative Inquiry in TESOL*, this may lead the observer to miss other significant events. Accordingly, I mentally noted the general interactions between individuals and specific examples of support. Following each observation session, I wrote down from memory my observations in a research journal. I did not use a formal observation grid as a research instrument since I was actively participating with the students and Ms. Woodbine during the observation periods.

3.8 Data Analysis

The first two research questions, pertaining to perceptions of success, were explored primarily through analysis of the interview data. The third research question, dealing with

perceptions of support systems, was explored through analysis of both the interview data and my observation notes. Member checks were also conducted with the student and staff participants. According to Duff (2008), member checking is a form of data analysis which “can enrich an analysis, help ensure the authenticity or credibility of interpretations, or shed new light on analysis” (p. 171). Member checking is typically done by inviting participants to review reports or articles before they are published, and then to include their comments or perspectives in the final edit. Accordingly, I provided Ms. Woodbine, Mrs. Green, and Mr. Phan in May 2010 with a substantial summary of my findings, and invited their feedback and comments. I also provided the students with an opportunity to offer feedback or corrections to my preliminary analysis of their interviews through an interactive PowerPoint presentation which I gave to them at Long Rock in March 2010. I also conducted regular member checks with Ms. Woodbine through our informal discussions after each observation session.

3.8.1 Identification and Coding of Themes

To assist new researchers in conducting thematic analysis of their qualitative data, Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined a series of steps: familiarize yourself with the data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review the themes, define and name the themes, and produce the report. Braun and Clarke also emphasized that these steps are non-linear and often researchers will move back and forth between the stages. They highlighted that data analysis is a process requiring time, which was indeed my experience while working with the data and transcripts. Using Braun and Clark as a guide, all interviews with the staff and student participants were transcribed and the observation notes typed up. Next, I organized the interview data in chart form (created in a Word Document) in correspondence to key interview questions that related to my overarching research questions (see Appendix I for example). Then within each selected interview question, I identified a wide range of themes and patterns from which I generated an

initial set of codes. By reviewing (and re-reviewing) the data over a period of several months, I engaged in the process of refining the themes, both within each interview question and across the questions as a whole, until I had established several overarching themes with multiple sub-themes, as outlined in Table 5 below. Throughout the entire coding process, I tried to remain open to the possibility of identifying new themes and patterns which I may have not noticed before.

Table 4: Overarching Themes and Sub-themes

Staffs' perception of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postive relationships • A sense of belonging • Seeing onself as compenent & participating in class • Academic achievement
Students' perceptions of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having friends • Helping others/asking for help • Doing your work • Academic achievement
Multiple support systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self • Peers • Ms. Woodbine & other staff members • School culture and programs • Family • Community • Interconnectedness of support systems

3.8.2 Transcription

Richards (2003) wrote that “analysis is embedded within analysis” (p. 81), and that the transcription of audio data is yet another form of analysis onto itself. Accordingly, my theoretical positioning as a constructionist (see Chapter One, Section 1.5) informed how I chose to

transcribe the interview data. Desiring to acknowledge the interactional nature of my interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004; Talmy, 2010), I utilized the transcription notes suggested by Richards when transcribing the students' interviews, as outlined in Table 6 below. Note that for the sake of simplicity, I have not used these transcription notes in the quotations cited within this thesis manuscript.

Table 5: Transcription Notes

<p>(-) short pause (+) longer pause -abrupt cut off [[speakers start at same time [] overlapped speech = one turn runs into the next turn with no audible pause (latched utterances) <u>Underline</u> emphasis **quieter voice (xxx) unable to transcribe ? Questioning intonation ! Exclamatory utterance (()) other details</p> <p>Adapted from Richards (2003), p.173-174.</p>

3.9 Ethical Considerations

I took great care to conduct an ethical study. Approval to do the research was received from the principal and vice-principal at Long Rock Secondary School, the wider school board, and finally the Behavioural and Research Ethics Board (BREB) at the University of British Columbia. Since the idea of using students' photographs during the interviews was a later addition to my research design, I submitted an amendment to BREB in December 2009. This amendment addressed how the photographs would be taken, used in the research, and I highlighted that the photographs would be the property of the students and accordingly returned

to them upon completion of the study. Permission to proceed with the amendment was granted by BREB in January 2010.

I also made substantial efforts to clearly explain to potential participants and guardians the purpose and procedure of the study, as well as what it meant to give consent. This included highlighting participants' option to withdraw from the study at any point without repercussions to their position as staff or students (see Appendix A, B, D-G for the letters introducing the study and the consent forms). Of course, this was complicated by the fact that many of the student participants and their guardians were unable to read English beyond the most basic level. I tried to mediate this ethical challenge via a parent-teacher night in February 2010. At this gathering specifically organized for the families of students in Ms. Woodbine's class, I verbally explained the study to the larger group and Vietnamese translations were provided by Mr. Phan. For the families not from Vietnam, I spoke individually with them about the study and the students assisted with the translations. Almost all the guardians and students signed the consent/assent forms; two students, however, did not submit their consent forms. Although their reasons for not participating was never given, I was glad that they felt they could exercise their right to not take part in the study. There was also a thirteenth student who assented to participate in the study, but was not included as one of the study's participants since I was unable to interview him due to scheduling conflicts.

Another ethical consideration was that as refugees, many of the student participants had likely gone through traumatic experiences with authority figures. For example, some of them may have been made to do or say things against their will in order to appease a person in a position of power. One of my concerns at the outset of the study was that the students would view me as an unknown authority figure and would feel uncomfortable and nervous during their

interviews with me. It is my hope that the positive relationships which I developed with the students in the months leading up to the interviews lessened the severity of this ethical issue. One strong indicator that a positive relation was created between myself and the students was the fact that Kok, Minh, and Dit all took a picture of me during their photography assignment. Later, they explained during their interviews that I made them feel good since I helped them with their homework, projects, and writing. Admittedly, the counter argument could be made that I was simply a convenient subject for them to take a picture of.

In terms of confidentiality and protection of privacy, I have used pseudonyms in place of the participants' real names (students and staff), as well as the school's name, in all written reports and public presentations.

3.10 Summary

This chapter has described the methodology used in an ethnographic study which I conducted at Long Rock Secondary School. It has highlighted key aspects of the research design in terms of the site, sampling, participants, procedure, research instruments, and data collection and analysis. In addition, I have discussed the ethical considerations that were involved in conducting the study. In the next chapter, I will report on the major findings in relation to my research questions and make connections to the research literature and theoretical framework and constructs discussed in Chapter Two.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the findings from the study will be presented. In order to report the findings clearly and comprehensively, I have divided the chapter into the three overarching research questions. The themes identified in the interview data and observation notes which relate to the particular research question are described in each section. It should be noted that all findings have been triangulated through member checks with participants. Each section will conclude with a discussion that interprets the findings in reference to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, as well as through an ecological perspective of human development (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 2005) and the constructs of *resiliency* and *identity*.

4.2 First Research Question

The first research question asked: “How do adolescent refugee students in Ms. Woodbine’s sheltered literacy class, as well as school staff, describe the construct of success in secondary school?” As explained in Chapter Three, I operationalized *success* differently during the interviews with student and staff participants. In the student interviews, success was operationalized as the actions of a good student, whereas in the staff interviews, success was operationalized as successful transitions by Ms. Woodbine’s students into regular ESL classrooms. Due to this difference in operationalization, I have chosen to report the findings from the students and staff interviews independently. Nevertheless, I found that success was described across both groups of participants as integration into the classroom, feeling competent, and having meaningful relationships. Put another way, the participants seemed to place their emphasis on the processes within school life as success, as opposed to the production of something tangible.

4.2.1 Students' Perceptions

As part of their photography assignment, I asked Ms. Woodbine's students to take pictures showing what good students do. It was telling that Ms. Woodbine's students did not take pictures of people getting high marks on a test or report card. In only one case did a student make reference to academic achievement; responding to an earlier question about why Social Studies was her favourite class, H'Tam explained that aside from the teacher being nice to her, she enjoyed the class because she had the highest mark. Rather, the most common image taken and talked about by the students depicted their classmates doing homework, finishing projects, studying, helping other students and the teacher, as well as asking the teacher for help. Ms. Woodbine's students also said that good students read and write, respect and help the teacher, pick up garbage, ask the teacher for help, and learn new words. Collectively, all these responses can be connected to the idea of integrating into school life, feeling competent, and developing meaningful relationships. Indeed, students who see themselves as a contributing member of their school would be more inclined to pick up garbage in the hallway. Furthermore, students who believed in their own abilities would be interested in studying or learning new words. Finally, Ms. Woodbine students would need to feel a genuine connection to peers or teachers before they asked for help. When I asked why they liked coming to Long Rock Secondary School, for instance, almost all the students cited having or making new friends, as well as the teachers being nice.

I wish to highlight that after reading the initial report of my findings, Ms. Woodbine took a different interpretation than mine about the students' responses. She pointed out that even though the students did not explicitly define being a good student as academic achievement, they nevertheless described many of the behaviours which would lead to academic success, such as doing their homework, studying, and learning new words. Ms. Woodbine also questioned

whether the students had taken the kind of pictures which they thought I would approve of. Whether or not this occurred is an important question but unfortunately, unanswerably from the data I collected. It is interesting that during a member check presentation which I gave to Ms. Woodbine's students and some staff members in March 2010, Na raised her hand and questioned whether or not a student is always a good or bad. Na's agency to ask this question in front of a large group suggested that at least some of the student participants felt confident enough to represent their own views in the photographs.

4.2.2 Staff's Perceptions

As with the students' responses, I found that most of the staff participants perceived success in school, in regards to Ms. Woodbine's students transitioning successfully into regular ESL classes, as integration, having a sense of competence, and developing meaningful relationships. Many of the participants said that regular attendance by students is a clear marker of their integration, and thus success. As a music teacher, Mr. Stuart said that he doesn't perceive successful students as those who can sing in English perfectly, but rather he explained that, "the most important thing is: are the students doing their best and are they engaged in what the whole process of what music-making is?" (Interview, June 24, 2009). Other staff explained that students have transitioned successfully if they feel comfortable at their new level and therefore participate in class. Mrs. Mer commented that students should, "feel capable enough that they can continue to come and work" (Interview, June 19, 2009). Ms. Woodbine said that she considers highly successful students as those who integrate through interaction with their peers from different language groups. This could also be translated as developing relationships with other students from outside their language groups.

Mrs. Green, as the ESL department head, said that while her initial reaction would be to define success academically or in the traditional sense via test scores and grades, she understands

achievement for Ms. Woodbine's students differently. Like her colleagues, Mrs. Green highlighted success as integration, having a sense of competence, and developing social relationships:

Success is a lot more though [than academic achievement]. A lot of [Ms. Woodbine's] kids, because they've come late, will not graduate. They will not get their dogwood during their time that they're with us. So academic success isn't graduation. Academic success is being successful at the level you are currently at and being motivated to continue to go beyond, even after you leave school, to be a lifelong learner....Success is also finding a social place, finding a place of belonging. And hopefully also finding and valuing things in you that will make you successful in your future life, whether it's music or whether it's cooking etc. (Interview, June 18, 2009).

Like the students, the staff's focus concerning success was very much on the processes experienced by these students rather than their production in school life.

4.2.3 Discussion

Despite different operationalizations of success across the two participant groups, I found that both participant groups described success using non-academic achievement measures, namely integration into the classroom, feeling competent, and having meaningful relationships. The finding that the students and staff did not describe success in school as academic achievement is significant since as described in Chapter Two, success for immigrant students in secondary school has predominantly been understood in the TESL research literature as grades and graduation rates. Through their interview responses, the participants gave accounts of a different way of viewing success, namely as positive social and emotional development. This way of understanding success connects directly to the resiliency literature which argues for the value of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in schools (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007). Moreover, Schonert-Reichl and LeRose (2008) summarized the key findings coming out of resiliency research as the development of supportive relationships, having a sense of competence

and belonging, and the ordinariness of resilience. Applying this summary, I have made a connection which posits the participants' description of success in school *as resiliency* in and of itself. In other words, refugee students with interrupted schooling can be perceived as successful in school when they demonstrate resiliency. Drawing on the idea that resiliency is not an exceptional occurrence but rather quite ordinary (Masten, 2001), demonstrations of resiliency by students is arguably a success which will be experienced by future cohorts of students entering Ms. Woodbine's sheltered literacy class.

Of course, the question will and should be raised of how educators can measure success as resiliency. A straight forward and quantifiable option put forth by many of the staff participants was to look at the student's attendance record. Mrs. Mer, however, said that writing down a number as a form of measurement was "not going to take the whole picture into account" (Interview, June 19, 2009). Indeed, most staff participants acknowledged that measuring success as social and emotional development must also occur through daily observations of how students engage in these domains in the classroom.

Finally, I wish to re-visit Ms. Woodbine's concern that the students may have taken pictures of 'good' students which they thought I would be pleased with. Drawing on poststructuralist ideas of *identity* being wrapped up in power relations between individuals, there is a possibility that the students, as refugees, viewed me as an outsider and authority figure who should be appeased. However, Na's agency to voice her opinion and to question my rationale during the member check presentation echoed Eva's agency in Norton (2000) to make her voice heard amongst her co-workers (see Chapter 2, Section 2.7). Both Na's and Eva's assertion of agency arguably speaks to their movement into an identity as knowledgeable and legitimate English speakers. In the case of my study, I hopefully had created a space where power was

more equally shared between the students and I, therefore making it less intimidating for Na to voice her opinion.

4.3 Second Research Question

The second research question asked: “Based on their understandings of success, do the staff members perceive Ms. Woodbine’s students as successful in school? Do Ms. Woodbine’s students perceive themselves as succeeding?” As both participants described it, success was understood as integration into a new ESL classroom, feeling a sense of competence, and having meaningful relationships. Again, the reader should keep in mind that success was operationalized differently between the staff and student interviews. For this reason, the perceptions for each participant group will once again be reported independently. The finding here, drawn largely from interview data and member checks, was that while the staff participants viewed Ms. Woodbine’s students as successful, the students themselves were hesitant to identify as ‘good’ students.

4.3.1 Staff’s Perception

For the most part, I found that the staff participants perceived Ms. Woodbine’s students as successful in school. When I directly asked if they thought Ms. Woodbine’s students generally experienced successful transitions, almost all participants responded affirmatively. Mrs. Green reported that 45 students (at the time of the interview) had gone into the sheltered literacy class, 39 had transitioned out, and it was her perception that 37 or 38 had made this transition successfully. Mrs. Hart reported that the students were generally excited about transitioning into regular ESL classes, and that to her knowledge, there had been no loss of students in the process. Mrs. Hart, Mr. Phan, and Ms. Woodbine also mentioned several cases of refugee students with interrupted schooling not succeeding at other schools, but after transferring into the sheltered literacy class at Long Rock, the students began to do quite well.

Ms. Woodbine shared with me that when the sheltered literacy class first opened in 2007, there was a general assumption that the students would not integrate with the rest of the school. From her view, however, this assumption has since proven to be untrue. For example, Kok and Dit were members of the school wrestling and tennis team, and Rukia and Na played on the soccer team. Areva had made it as far as trying out. Some of the students also sang in the school choir and one of the girls was a member of a student-organized dance club. Having earlier identified that regular attendance was a clear marker of students' integration and hence success in school, both Ms. Woodbine and Mrs. Green observed that it was unusual for students in the sheltered literacy class to miss school, even when they were sick.

Staff also viewed Ms. Woodbine's students as successful because they had a sense of competence in their school surroundings. Mr. Stuart said that he perceived most of Ms. Woodbine's students in his music class as successful because they not only learned how to play guitar, but also had a good time doing it, as evidenced by their smiles in class. Ms. Woodbine referred to Long Rock's first ESL awards ceremony in May 2009, where 11 out of the 53 students given awards for being studious and respectful had come out of her sheltered literacy class. Mrs. Mer shared that she "sees[s] it as a success" whenever one of Ms. Woodbine's students wins an award (Interview, June 19, 2009). I understood the winning of these awards as symbolically representing a sense of competence that Ms. Woodbine's former students must have felt and exhibited in their new ESL classrooms.

Despite the overall perception that Ms. Woodbine's students were successfully transitioning into other ESL classes, there were several instances when staff participants gave less than positive accounts, specifically in the area of developing relationships. For example, Ms. Woodbine observed that her students were not always confident about interacting with other

students from different language groups outside of the sheltered literacy class. Confirming this observation, Mrs. Mer said that the students from Ms. Woodbine's class tended to sit together in her guitar class and hardly interacted with the other students. She surmised that perhaps they had not yet developed a common basis for sharing with their peers. While Mr. Campbell said that Ms. Woodbine's students eventually integrated to some level with the rest of the students in his math class, he shared that this was not immediately the case. In fact, he said he sensed some tension coming from the other students, as detailed in the following interview excerpt:

Angelika: How did [Ms. Woodbine's students] interact with the rest of the students? Was there mixing able to happen?

Mr. Campbell: Yeah, there was a bit of cohesion. They sat together. You know, I didn't try to separate them. But over time, everybody got to know each other and became, um, much more of a class. A unit as a class. Still there may be a little bit of division. And I think that the students who were here prior to those students showing up, I think, still sort of felt a little like, you know: We were your students from the beginning or something. You know, there was a bit, I thought, I detected a tiny bit of that (Interview, June 24, 2009).

Moreover, Mr. Day said that it was difficult to speak about successful transitions in relation to Ms. Woodbine's students entering his pre-employment program. As he explained:

It's hard to say successfully, because the reason they're coming to me is that they haven't been successful to get into regular ESL. Actually, I'm getting the ones who are quote unquote unsuccessful, or need more time....So I'm not expecting success stories. I'm expecting actually lack of confidence, maybe burn out of learning English and maybe a real frustration that they're not going to finish high school on time with their peers (Interview, June 24, 2009).

This lack of confidence which Mr. Day noted is akin to the students not feeling competent in their new classes.

It is significant that many of the staff participants did not describe their perception of success in binary terms such as 'successful' or 'unsuccessful', even though this is how I posed

the question to them. Rather, they spoke about success in shades of grey which changed across time, place, culture, and individual students. For example, I asked for a description of a student who had not been successful in school (based on an emotional and social understanding), and Ms. Woodbine and Mrs. Green both referred to a Montagnard⁷ female student who had become pregnant and left school. Ms. Woodbine said that the other Montagnard students had kept this information a secret from her, sensing she would disapprove. The students were arguably correct in their assumption since many Canadians would equate the girl's pregnancy with a failure as a student. In contrast, the Montagnard community would view this girl as a success since she had taken up her adult responsibility of raising a family. Both Ms. Woodbine and Mrs. Green recognized this problematic divergence in cultural views of success. Moreover, Mrs. Mer suggested that since the sheltered literacy classroom had only been running for two years (at the time she was interviewed), she was reluctant to make statements about students' success overall. Instead, she suggested that success should be assessed on a case by case basis.

4.3.2 Students' Perceptions

Unlike staff, many of the students were hesitant to say that they perceived themselves as successful in school. Only Annan, Areva, and Dit responded 'yes' to my question of whether or not they were good students. Areva explained that she was a good student because she did her homework, helped her mother, and was a good friend at school. Dit said that he was a good student because he asked nicely. These affirmative responses arguably stemmed from their sense of competence in school and having meaningful relationships. On a different track, Minh problematized and resisted my use of the binary terms 'good' and 'bad' student during the

⁷ *Montagnards* (or mountain people) is a term first used by French colonist to refer to the more than forty-five diverse ethnic groups living in Vietnam's central highlands, each with their own unique language, dress, and practice. For political, religious, and territorial reasons, the Vietnamese government has been persecuting their communities since 1975.

interview. When I asked Minh if he thought of himself as a good student, he responded, “I don’t think so because I am don’t like be good student. I am don’t like be the good student too, because I like I am. I am who I am” (Interview, February 26, 2010). Minh’s response, which challenged my question as the researcher, indicated that he felt confident enough to advocate for himself in the context of a research interview.

I found it surprising though, when considering the staff’s responses, that half of the students were hesitant to say whether or not they were good students in school. Treh responded “Ask Mrs. Woodbine. I don’t know” (Interview, February 12, 2010) and H’Tam replied, “No. But myself I don’t know, but someone know me. But I don’t know myself” (Interview, February 17, 2010). Not attending class or being late for class was the common reason given for being a bad student. Rukia said that she didn’t think she was a good student “because I’m always late...my house is so far, I have to take three bus” (Interview, February 19, 2010). The following excerpt from Mya’s interview also highlights the same point:

Angelika: So now, thinking about yourself, do you think you’re a good student? Do you do these things? ((pointing to her photographs of what good students do))

Mya: Um, um, some I’m good, some I’m not good. ((laughs))

Angelika: Ok, well, how are you a good student? What do you do?

Mya: Um, I do- I like to read book and writing also I like. But I do-but-I come to sch-so late sometime I misses class. Yeah, so I-

Angelika: Ok.

Mya: It’s bad, I know. Misses class. Bad.

Angelika: Why do you come to school late?

Mya: Um, I wake up late sometimes and I’m waiting for the bus.

Angelika: Yeah, and then you get here late.

Mya: Yep. (Interview, February 19, 2010)

It is my argument that the references made by these students about being absent or late is linked to a perceived failure to integrate into school life.

It is noteworthy that although Mya, Jana, and Rukia each waived on saying whether or not they were good students, all three nevertheless confirmed that they performed most of the behaviours that they had credited good students with. When I asked Ms. Woodbine why she thought they were hesitant to respond either way, Ms. Woodbine reflected that modesty, a noted characteristic amongst members of many ethnic minority groups, may have been a major contributing factor. She also thought that, as refugees, their reluctance might have been due to a fear of disclosing personal information to perceived figures of authority. In the case of Kok, the hypothesis for his hesitation was quite different. During the interview, I got the sense that his negative responses were fuelled by frustrated sarcasm; indeed, he had earlier expressed to Ms. Woodbine and I that he was not in a good mood. He shared with me that he was tired because the day before had been long for him and he was also upset that he had arrived late to school that morning.

4.3.3 Discussion

The construct of *resiliency* can once again be used to interpret the nature of the success that the participants perceived Ms. Woodbine's students as experiencing—or not experiencing—in school. Like Oikonodidov's (2007) study of Somali female refugee students, I have identified resiliency as a basis for appreciating the diverse accomplishments of Ms. Woodbine's students in school, whether it be socially, emotionally, artistically, or in athletics. Taking this

interpretation has allowed me to frame my study within a strength-based approach, as opposed to a deficiency-based focused as many scholars working in the field of refugee studies and education have done (see Chapter Two, Section 2.3). Taking such an orientation, in turn, has enabled me to highlight the students' many accomplishments at Long Rock in class, music, art, and sports.

Significant findings from resiliency research have suggested having a sense of belonging as an important component of resiliency. Both staff and student participants repeatedly spoke about the integration of Ms. Woodbine's students into school life in relation to their attendance. I have interpreted this repeated reference to attendance by connecting it to the students' sense of belonging at Long Rock. If Ms. Woodbine's students felt like they were part of the school community, they would attend. If the students were upset with themselves because they were late or did not attend class (as Kok and Mya were), this would also be indicative of their sense that they belong (or want to belong) and thus wanted to fulfill their obligations to the school community. Another major finding from the resiliency literature was that meaningful relationships supports resiliency. Areva's and Dit's responses--that they were good students because they helped others and asked for what they needed nicely--can be understood as the fostering such supportive and respectful relationships.

It is also noteworthy that with both groups of participants, there was discussion and examples of success (or resiliency) as shifting depending on the context. For example, Ms. Woodbine viewed her students as successful in the sheltered literacy class because they regularly attended and participated; however, she perceived many of them as unsuccessful outside of her class because they did not interact with peers outside of their language groups. Minh's identification of himself as neither a good or bad student speaks to his multi-dimensional view of

success as well. Such fluid perception of success fits with the position of resiliency researchers that youth who are identified as resilient are not ultimately invulnerable. Instead, resiliency researchers have argued that a youth may be resilient in one situation or time but vulnerable in another.

This conceptualization of success as shifting also connects to the poststructuralist view of *identity* which sees a person's sense of self as multiple, constantly changing, and often a site of conflict or tension, depending on the context and the interlocutor (e.g. Norton Peirce, 1995; Weedon, 1987). When I asked the students whether or not they viewed themselves as good students, I was essentially asking them if they held the identity of a good student. Since many of the students were hesitant to respond one way or another, this suggests a point of tension which held them back. Perhaps they were hesitant to associate themselves as being good students because of a distrust they felt towards me as an authority figure. Or perhaps they held back from saying they were good students for reasons of modesty. Or perhaps they honestly did not see themselves in the identity of a good student. Or perhaps, like Kok, their response was dictated by the type of mood they were in on the day of their interview with me. It would be telling if the same question was asked one year later. Would the students' second account reflect a shift in their identity as students? Finally, Minh's problematization of whether or not he was a good or bad student also demonstrated the poststructuralist notion that identity is multiple and difficult to neatly compartmentalize. To repeat Minh's words: "I am who I am" (Interview, February 26, 2010). It should be noted, however, that Minh was an individual unto himself in most situations and therefore his response could be considered as an outlier.

While my focus in this discussion has been on the concept of resiliency (or positive social and emotional development) as success, it is important to recognize that Ms. Woodbine's

students' also displayed others forms of success in school as well. I personally observed the high-level cognitive performance of Ms. Woodbine's students as they worked through and explained metaphorical images and existentialist questions found in graphic novels such as Shaun Tan's (2007) *The Arrival* and Michele Lemieux's (1999) *Stormy Night*. I also regularly observed how the students competently met the intellectual challenges set for them in class by Ms. Woodbine and other teachers. For example, the students (who likely did not have access to computers prior to coming to Canada) created powerful PowerPoint presentations which depicted their lives back in their home countries.

4.4. Third Research Question

The third research question asked: "What support systems are perceived by the participants as helping Ms. Woodbine's students experience success in their school environment? Are they seen as interconnected?" The findings in this section have been generated through triangulation of the interview data, observation notes, and member checks. Since the third research question did not explicitly deal with participants views of success (rather what and who was perceived as scaffolding it), the findings in this section will be reported collectively across both student and staff participants. Based on the triangulation of data sources, the study's third finding is that the systems supporting Ms. Woodbine's students were perceived as multiple, interconnected, and bi-directional in impact. Again, it should be kept in mind that the participants have described success in terms of integration into school life, feeling a sense of competence, and having meaningful relationships.

4.4.1 Support Systems as Multiple

During their interviews, both students and staff spoke about multiple support systems at Long Rock which were perceived as helping Ms. Woodbine's students to succeed in school. For the sake of clarity, I have categorized these support systems into five groupings: Long Rock's

school culture, school staff in general, Ms. Woodbine, peers, and the students themselves.

Having done so, I acknowledge that such clean-cut divisions are artificial and that each of these support systems were in fact perceived by participants as interconnected. The blurring of these categorical walls will be discussed in section 4.4.2.

4.4.2 School Culture as a Support System

There are multiple ways in which *school culture* can be conceptualized, but for the purpose of this study, I am choosing to define school culture as the way that a school operates on a day to day basis. These operations include social interactions between members and where they take place, shared beliefs and values, and implementation of routine practices.

To begin, many of the students took pictures of and talked about places in Long Rock where they felt safe, happy, and comfortable, specifically the main foyer, their lockers, and Ms. Woodbine's classroom. Long Rock's foyer was a place where students regularly congregated and was thus a hub for social interaction in the school culture. At the time of the study, the foyer was a colourful, wide open space at the main entrance of the school with large windows and multiple benches where students could sit. Several hanging banners highlighting the school's Code of Conduct were found here, along with display areas showcasing students' art and team trophies. The foyer also had a bulletin board where posters dealing with issues such as inclusion, sexuality, and homophobia were posted. It was not uncommon to find in this space one of the student-led dance groups practicing their choreography or student counsel holding special events. The student participants said they liked the foyer because there was a lot of space where they could talk with friends, eat lunch, and relax. Rukia explained that the foyer is "the centre of school. Everyone sitting there, like at lunch time. So much fun, they are dancing. Sometime group" (Interview, February 19, 2010). The following interview excerpt highlights Na's appreciation of the foyer:

Angelika: And so where's this picture of? ((pointing to the picture of the foyer))

Na: Hm, I don't know you call but I remember like close to the office.

Angelika: The foyer.

Na: The foyer. Yeah. Close to the office.

Angelika : So why do you like this place?

Na: Ah, because in here, like so big and nice.

Angelika: Ah.

Na: And they make, like a loves week.

Angelika : A love week. The banner there. ((In the picture, I am pointing to a large student-made banner that was strung up across the foyer promoting special events being put on by student council to celebrate Valentine's Day.))

Na: Yeah

Angelika : What do you do in the foyer, that you like doing?

Na: Ah, ((short pause))

Angelika: Do you spend time there?

Na: Sometimes.

Angelika: Ok. And so when you do-when you do spend time there, what do you do?

Na: Ah, I sit right here. ((pointing at a bench near the banner))

Angelika: Ok. Right under the banner on the bench.

Na: Yeah.

Angelika: And what do you do?

Na: ((laughs)) As some like, um, I read my book. But some not.

Angelika: Ok. Good.

Na: Yeah.

Angelika: So but you like it 'cause it's a very big beautiful space.

Na: Yeah. And like having wind. Some people go out go in.

Angelika: Hmmhmm.

Na: Yeah.

Angelika: Yeah. Very fresh, very big, very open. I like this foyer as well.

S: ((laughs)) (Interview, February 17, 2010)

Intriguingly, Ms. Woodbine said that she was surprised by the students' responses since, according to her observations, they rarely spent time in the school's foyer. She suggested that the students might have taken pictures of the foyer because they thought I would *expect* that they spend time there. This is an important commentary, but unfortunately the collected data does not allow me to provide any further insight to the issue. Alternatively, perhaps the foyer was a place where the student would like to spend time in the future. With the appropriate set of data, applying the concept of *imagined communities* (Kanno & Norton, 2003) which refers to "groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination" (p.242), could prove to be useful in understanding this disconnect between the students' responses and Ms. Woodbine's observation.

The students also spoke of their lockers as a place in Long Rock where they liked to gather. The students explained that they enjoyed spending time at their lockers because they

could talk to friends and have fun with them, play games, eat their lunch, and be free. Based on personal observations, I can confirm that many of Ms. Woodbine's students, as well as other students at Long Rock, did spend time with friends at the lockers. A third location where the students gave accounts of feeling safe, happy, and comfortable was Ms. Woodbine's classroom. Students said the room made them feel good because people were always joking, Ms. Woodbine could help them, and they were able to study there. On the days that I came to the school over the lunch hour, it was common to find Ms. Woodbine's past and present students hanging out in her classroom together, eating lunch, or playing games. Several staff participants also perceived that Ms. Woodbine's classroom, as a hang out space, supported her students.

In short, the foyer, lockers, and Ms. Woodbine's classroom were described by the students as regular sites for their social interaction. Accordingly, these locations were aspects of Long Rock's school culture which were perceived as supporting the success of Ms. Woodbine's students in that they were able to develop relationships with peers and deepen their sense of belonging in the school community.

While the students' pictures and talk focused on the places in Long Rock's school culture that made them feel supported, the staff participants spoke about the support systems in Long Rock's school culture from a different angle, specifically referring to the staff's student-centred values and practice of gradually integrating ESL students. Beginning with values, staff participants repeatedly referred to the school's collective commitment to supporting its students. Ms. Woodbine said that Long Rock was "amazingly student-centred" and explained that "it's a part of the culture that issues are discussed rather than hidden and solutions are found to them" (Interview, June 15, 2009). Mrs. Hart said the teaching staff was comprised of people who saw themselves as working together for students. Mr. Phan said Long Rock was a school that never

took no for an answer from students on the verge of leaving school. Mrs. Green viewed Long Rock as a special school because it did not insist on an English-Only language policy and it accepted students and programs which other schools were uncomfortable with taking on. In her words:

We recognize that not all learners fit into nice tidy boxes and sometimes we need to bend, shape, create our own boxes to help work with these kids” (Interview, June 18, 2009).

This shared value around supporting students, including Ms. Woodbine’s, was further demonstrated through the value placed on Long Rock’s Code of Conduct. Developed collaboratively by staff and students, the code was designed to foster a culture within the school which is caring and inclusive. Both teachers and students were familiarized with the code at the beginning of each school year, and regular reference to the code throughout the school day was common place. Within a school which promoted such inclusivity, it is clear why Ms. Woodbine’s students would feel a sense of competence and feel comfortable enough to begin integrating into the school community.

A second aspect of Long Rock’s school culture which staff participants perceived as supporting Ms. Woodbine’s students pertains to the ESL department’s practice of gradually integrating ESL students into new classes. The aim of this gradual integration was to slowly transition students so that they could succeed, as opposed to moving them full stop into new courses with new teachers at some pre-determined time in the calendar year. Mrs. Hart explained that the ESL department’s practice of gradual integration was based on the question of whether or not students could make it at the next level, regardless of whether it was the beginning, middle, or end of term. In Mrs. Green’s words:

As the kids are able to move, we're able to move the kids, which again honours where they're at and we find that helps them progress much more quickly (Interview, June 17, 2009).

Ms. Woodbine explained that her decision to transition a student was not based on how much they had learned, but rather if she could see that their learning was increasing:

But actually, my judgement is often based not so much on what the kids know but how much they've learned. And if someone is on an ascending trajectory, then I'm not so worried about what they know now if I can see that they're learning. That everyday they're learning more than they did. Because those kids have missed a lot, but they are going to function just fine. A lot of it is- kids that have-a love of learning or an ethos around learning (Interview, June 15, 2009).

Mr. Phan highlighted that gradual integration allowed Ms. Woodbine's students to feel safe and to "learn English without feeling stupid or incapable of learning" (Interview, April 7, 2010). Other staff participants said that by gradually integrating Ms. Woodbine's students into classes where they could explore their talents beyond language, such as in art, music, drama, dance, sports, the students were able to enter into situations where they felt competent and therefore were positioned to succeed.

Another important component in Long Rock's school culture in terms of gradual integration, particularly in relation to Ms. Woodbine's students, was the focus on transitioning students into classes with peers from the same cultural group or from the sheltered literacy class in order to create support networks. Mr. Campbell reflected on how moving Ms. Woodbine's students in pairs or small groups supported their integration into his ESL math class:

I think they came almost as a bit of a unit, for instance. They were all, or nearly all, came from the same community I think, so that maybe they felt fairly supported and comfortable. None of them were showing up as the only new kids in the class kind of thing (Interview, June 24, 2009).

Referring specifically to the Montagnard students, Mrs. Green explained that moving these students into a class where they were alone would in no way support their success. Mr. Phan explained that the concept of individualism does not exist in the Montagnard's group-orientated cultures. In his words: "Take one out and they collapse. Keep them together and they grow" (Interview, April 7, 2010). Several teachers referred to the case of a Montagnard student who was gradually integrated into regular ESL classes but was not placed with her peers. Although she was doing fine in her studies, she did not cope well emotionally and eventually dropped out of school. Ms. Woodbine reflected that for this particular student "being isolated from her ethnic group was just too high a price to pay" (Interview, June 15, 2009). The student ultimately agreed to return to Long Rock with the understanding that she would be placed back in classes with her peers.

4.4.3 School Staff as Support Systems

Both groups of participants repeatedly referred to the support provided to Ms. Woodbine's students by school staff. Students took pictures of different teachers in the school and during their interviews talked about why they felt happy and comfortable around them. Rukia said that the drama teacher made her feel good because she was always happy and smiling. Dit took a picture of his wrestling coach and explained that his coach made him feel good because "he teach me how to wrestling" (Interview, March 3, 2010). He also took a picture of his music teacher and said that she made him feel good because she taught him how to sing and play drums. Jana said that he liked Mr. Phan's office because Mr. Phan was from Vietnam and could help him translate: "If I don't understand, then I ask him. He translate for me" (Interview, February 19, 2010). Finally, Kok explained that the staff room made him feel good because it was a place where he could always find help from teachers:

When you get in trouble, something like that, right? So, if you get hurt, something like that. So like, it make you feel happy inside, so you. Nobody ‘no’ there (Interview, February 24, 2010).

Like the students, staff participants also spoke about how their colleagues at Long Rock were a support system for Ms. Woodbine’s students. According to Mrs. Hart, the teachers were the second most important support system in helping Ms. Woodbine’s students succeed in school:

It’s about how well our teachers within the school understand the students and their needs and their capacities that have a bigger effect, I would say, than anything on the outside, beside parental support (Interview, June 15, 2009).

The support that the staff offered Ms. Woodbine’s students was underscored by their reasons for participating in the study. Mrs. Green said that since these students were particularly fragile and sensitive, anything that she could learn to inform her practice would be valuable. Likewise, Mrs. Mer said that she agreed to participate because she felt this study would help the students.

Staff participants also spoke positively about how teachers in the ESL department collaborated and communicated with one another in order to better support their students, including Ms. Woodbine’s. Mr. Phan, for example, commented on how other ESL teachers ensured that Ms. Woodbine’s students were involved in all of the department’s activities including field trips. He also described the personalities of the ESL faculty as sensitive and caring, and said that whatever teachers did not know about a student, they were willing to learn in order to support them.

Several of the staff participants viewed Long Rock’s administration as a key support system for students in the sheltered literacy classroom. Mrs. Green explained that Mrs. Hart “really, really advocates for the kinds of things we’re doing, sort of slow integration with

multiple levels, with meeting kids needs as humans. Not just numbers” (Interview, June 18, 2009). In regards to the administrative staff in the main office, Mr. Phan remarked that they were a ‘fantastic staff’ because they always looked approachable and made themselves accessible to Ms. Woodbine’s students. Likewise, Ms. Woodbine considered the two head secretaries as *the most* important system in the school supporting her students’ success. She shared with me how they regularly donated clothes and food to her students, as well as patiently dealt with their needs around bus tickets, lunch tickets, and other issues. Ms. Woodbine said that the students were unaware of the support provided by the office administrative staff; I, however, did hear the students comment on several occasions about how the secretaries were always feeding them!

Perhaps the most significant factor behind the support given to Ms. Woodbine’s students by Long Rock staff can be summed up in one word: *personality*. Ms. Woodbine clearly articulated this link between personality and supporting (or not supporting) student success in the following interview excerpt.

Angelika: Um, so when you’re talking about the support systems that are in the school, during your two years here, have you seen these support systems change?

Ms. Woodbine: It’s totally based on the personalities of people, both the students, and the staff and faculty. ((At this point, Ms. Woodbine offered two examples of behaviour by school staff members which negatively impacted her students’ engagement in school life)). So there’s something about a lot of the kids. They’re very very sensitive to any kind of criticism, or danger, or whatever it is. It’s very interesting.

Angelika: So it’s, it’s not so much that the set up of these courses have changed, it’s.....

Ms. Woodbine: Personality.

Angelika: Personality.

Ms. Woodbine: Totally around personality. Totally.

Angelika: Ok. (Interview, June 15, 2009)

Mr. Day also raised the same point about the importance of personalities. He commented that some teachers at Long Rock were resistant to the integration of ESL students into their regular mainstream classes because they were more sensitive to outside political pressures to keep grades high in academic classes.

4.4.4 Ms. Woodbine as a Support System

Ms. Woodbine was clearly perceived by both students and staff as the key support system in Long Rock Secondary School. Almost all the students mentioned Ms. Woodbine during their interviews and many explained that Ms. Woodbine made them feel happy, safe, and comfortable because she helped them. H'Tam spoke about the patience that Ms. Woodbine had when working with her:

She like take me when I first came, I don't know anything. Like, even my birthday. Yeah, and then he [sic.] teach me like-even I don't know, then she teach me again, again (Interview, February 17, 2010).

Rukia said she viewed her relationship with Ms. Woodbine to be much deeper than just a student-teacher relationship:

Because she's like-like-you know-not our teacher. Like our Mom. She so care about our class-like every student (Interview, February 19, 2010).

Mr. Phan said that whenever he spoke with the students from the sheltered literacy class, Ms. Woodbine always came up in the conversation. He reflected that her name was often the only teacher's name that the students could remember.

Staff participants also repeatedly mentioned their perception of Ms. Woodbine as the crucial support system for helping her students succeed in school. Many staff members also

referred to Ms. Woodbine as their key source of information about the students. During her interview, Mrs. Green spoke highly of Ms. Woodbine's personality and ability to support the students:

We're blessed to have Ms. Woodbine teaching that program because she is superbly sensitive and very good at quietly giving kids respect for themselves and tools to function within the larger community (Interview, June 18, 2009).

The source of Ms. Woodbine's empathy for her students' situation in part came from her past experience of living and working in other countries: "I know how disconcerting it is to have everything that I've known and been successful at count for nothing." (Interview, June 15, 2009). She described how her time working in countries in midst of civil war gave her an understanding of how disruptive such a situation can be. She also said she was unsure if she could have taught this class when she was younger since it requires that she engage in teaching approaches viewed as unconventional. Accordingly, a significant amount of self-confidence was required to be in her role.

Mrs. Hart described how Ms. Woodbine's main aim was to build the capacities of her students and facilitate as many meaningful relationships as possible. As an observer, I repeatedly noted how Ms. Woodbine delegated to different students the responsibility of introducing the class to a visitor; this included describing where each student was from and how many languages they spoke. Ms. Woodbine perceived her role as a facilitator for her students and explained that her philosophy was to facilitate as many connections as possible between the students and others (as opposed to doing it for them). For example, Ms. Woodbine used *cooperative learning* (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1988), a pedagogical approach which emphasizes positive interdependence amongst students, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing. In my observation journal, I

repeatedly noted how Ms. Woodbine teamed students together during class activities to support their individual learning whether it was to work on a handout, read books, or complete an assignment on the computer.

4.4.5 Peers as Support Systems

Both student and staff participants perceived peers as a system that supported the success of Ms. Woodbine's students in school. Almost all of the students took at least one picture showing another student from Ms. Woodbine's class during their photography assignment. When I asked them to describe how the other students made them feel good, the most common response was that their peers were funny and made them laugh. Some students said that they spent time together with their peers, either studying or playing cards or playing computer games. Jana explained that Kok made him feel good, "Because sometimes I don't know how to do homework. So [Kok] helps me. Sometime I help him" (Interview, February 19, 2010). As well, almost all of the students stated that they liked coming to Long Rock because of the many friends they had there.

Some of the staff participants also spoke of the students in Ms. Woodbine's class supporting one another. Mr. Phan described how students had volunteered on their own to help orientate new students in Ms. Woodbine's class. I observed how Hip and Treh helped a newly arrived young Montagnard student by translating Ms. Woodbine's questions and comments and including him in on group activities. Ms. Woodbine said that Hip and Treh took the boy home on the bus every day and Hip even walked with the new student to his house. It only took a few months for this student, who was extremely withdrawn and silent in the beginning, to begin speaking and regularly smiling in class. Ms. Woodbine shared that even the alumni from her class has helped new students arriving in her class. However, she noted that this assistance was usually done along ethnic lines and she sometimes perceived this tendency as an impediment to

success as it prevented students from engaging with other students outside of their cultural group.

4.4.6 Students as Own Support Systems

Staff and students were mixed in their perception of the degree to which Ms. Woodbine's students were their own support systems. When I asked the student to rank who helped them most in being a good student (teachers, families, other students, and themselves), teachers and families were most commonly ranked first. Almost all of the students placed their own importance in third or fourth position; this is not to suggest, however, that the students perceived themselves as unimportant. Their positive explanations of how they helped themselves to be good students by reading books, doing their homework, learning English, saying nice things to friends, and so on, indicated otherwise. Ms. Woodbine and Mr. Phan suggested that the students' lower ranking of themselves may have been related to cultural values of placing the group over the individual. There was one exception to the students' pattern in the order of ranking. Mya ranked her own importance above her teachers, family, and other students. Her explanation was that others would be unable to help her in school if she could not help herself first. In her words:

Because it's my mind. If my mind feels good, I want to do-but if feel no good, I don't want to. Somebody, my family, my teacher, they can't talk to me (Interview, February 19, 2010).

In a similar ranking exercise, most of the staff participants responded that they would place the teacher first; nevertheless, they did so with qualifications. Mrs. Hart explained that since the wording of my question ("Who is most responsible for ensuring students' success?") had an active quality which implied agency, she would place both the teachers and the students with their own capacities on the same level of importance. Mrs. Mer responded that her initial reaction was to situate Ms. Woodbine as the most important, but on second thought, she wanted

to give students ownership over their own learning because, as she went on to explain, “if [the students] got something, a barrier, then it’s not going to happen, no matter how hard Mr. Woodbine or I work” (Interview, June 19, 2009). Mr. Stuart also perceived the students as having ultimate responsibility for their success, but acknowledged that teachers have a huge role to play in setting up the student for either success or failure. Only Ms. Woodbine and Mr. Campbell stated without any qualifications that they viewed teachers as the most responsible for ensuring success. Mr. Campbell explained that most of Ms. Woodbine’s students could not advocate for themselves in meaningful ways, and many of their parents were even less able because they could not speak English. Ms. Woodbine explained the rationale behind her position:

Because [teachers are] the only ones that can do the micromanagement of it. And it’s a very delicate thing. You know, you have to let the kids sort of try. The families haven’t-don’t have the experience or language to understand the school system. Administration is too far removed. I think the administration can really help in supporting integration. And, the administration here is very appreciative of the kids. The kids feel very comfortable and safe with them. So I think that’s their role. But the actual, you know, how’s integration is going, who should integrate, I think it’s the teacher’s responsibility.

This is not to say that Ms. Woodbine and Mr. Campbell did not recognize the ability of the students to act as their own support systems. Ms. Woodbine spoke of how students who have a genuine love for learning, or are more individual, or have more confidence, may be highly motivated to work hard and do well in school. She offered an example of one of her former students from Africa who, due to strife in her home country and life in refugee camps, was unable to attend school for a long period of time. This interruption in school was a great sadness for this student and her personal motivation to have a formal education, along with family

expectations, led her to excel academically in her studies as well as a school leader at Long Rock.

4.4.7 Support Systems as Interconnected and Reciprocal in Impact

I begin this section by acknowledging the importance of the student's support systems outside of Long Rock, including their families and cultural group, religious institutions, and community initiatives such as the after-school homework club or one-to-one musical training program that many of Ms. Woodbine's students were involved in. Unfortunately an in depth exploration of these support systems and their connection to the systems within Long Rock was beyond the scope of this study. Still, the interconnectivity between the support systems inside and outside of school was often alluded to by the staff participants during their interviews.

Curiously, students did not speak about the interrelation between the support systems; this may simply have been because I did not explicitly ask them to make these connections. However, their pictures which show 'good' students helping each other in Ms. Woodbine's class suggests a perceived interconnection between their peers, the sheltered literacy classroom, and Ms. Woodbine. The staff participants, on the other hand, spoke without prompting during their interviews about the interconnections between the support systems. Repeated reference was made to the collaboration between teachers in the ESL department in supporting the students. Ms. Woodbine also spoke about how the school administration had supported her in integrating the students into the school community. Mrs. Mer spoke of how she worked with Mr. Phan and other community workers to support the students, and Mr. Day reported that the relationship between himself, the community workers, and the students' parents was necessary and vital. Mr. Phan's description of his role as a bridge between the student, teacher, school, family, and community illustrates in metaphor the perceived interconnectivity between all the support systems, both inside and outside of the school. It should be noted that the interconnection

between the support systems was not always expressed in positive terms though. Mrs. Green voiced her concern that fluctuations in enrolment numbers of ESL students, class sizes, and funding from the Ministry could potentially curb the ESL department's ability to gradually integrate Ms. Woodbine's students

Staff participants also did not perceive the interconnection between support systems and the students as a one way street, meaning all the support was seen as flowing from the external systems to Ms. Woodbine's students. The staff members clearly perceived the students as a system which gave support to others. When I asked the staff participants near the end of their interviews what they had personally and/or professionally learned from Ms. Woodbine's students, the responses I received were powerful. Mrs. Green said that working with Ms. Woodbine's students had re-affirmed her love for teaching; Mrs. Mer said that their presence in her classroom had motivated her to raise the bar in her teaching practice:

The regular kids get by regardless, you know. There's a lot of kids that will do their work, it doesn't matter how it's presented. But these ones really need fantastic teachers. So I can't let it slide" (Interview, June 19, 2009).

Both Mr. Stuart and Mr. Campbell spoke of how rewarding it was to observe the progress of Ms. Woodbine's students in their classes. In Mr. Cambell's words: "[There's] this huge personal impact because you get to go in everyday and deal with them, and share time with them, and learn from them" (Interview, June 24, 2009). Unfortunately, I did not ask the students whether or not they perceived themselves as having an impact on their teachers. However, many of the students referred to how they had assisted other students or their teachers in the past.

4.4.8 Discussion

By drawing on Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development theory (1979, 2005), I have interpreted the finding that support systems at Long Rock are perceived as multiple,

interconnected, and reciprocal (or bi-directional) in impact. To begin, Ms. Woodbine's sheltered literacy class, Long Rock Secondary School, the school board, and the BC Ministry of Education can collectively be understood as the students' school ecology. Within this ecology, there were multiple systems nested within each other, each of which had a role to play in promoting the positive social and emotional development of Ms. Woodbine's students (as discussed throughout this chapter, this form of success can be understood as *resiliency*). Ms. Woodbine's sheltered literacy class, for example, can be seen as having been part of the *microsystem* which provided students with a vital starting point for integrating into the school community. Indeed, Bronfenbrenner hypothesized that interactions within the microsystem—which he later referred to as *proximal processes*—had the largest impact on the students' development (Bronfenbrenner, 2001). This hypothesis fits with the participants' perceptions of Ms. Woodbine as being the most important support system for the students. Furthermore, the principal's office can be seen as part of the students' *exosystem* which supported their success; indeed, Mrs. Hart was not directly involved in the everyday activities of the students, but her openness to less traditional pedagogical initiatives on the part of Ms. Woodbine and the ESL department, was germane to supporting their success.

The evolution of Bronfenbrenner's theory over time shifted the emphasis from simply describing systems within an ecology to exploring how the interaction between the context and numerous other variables impacted human development. Conducting such investigations was proposed through the use of a *process-person-context-time* model (Bronfenbrenner, 2001). Out of respect for the *process* (or the interactions which occur within and between the contexts), I have spent considerable space in this chapter describing how each system was perceived to support Ms. Woodbine's students. For example, I described how Ms. Woodbine use of the

pedagogical approach of *cooperative learning* (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1988) enabled her students to develop their relationship with one another as well as bolster their self-confidence as independent learners. I also described in detail how the practice of gradual integration of ESL students at Long Rock was perceived by staff as enabling Ms. Woodbine's students to feel competent in new classroom situations.

Within the *process-person-context-time* model, Bronfenbrenner's emphasis on the *person* as a contributing factor to positive development can likewise be applied to my findings. To varying degrees, both participant groups described Ms. Woodbine's students as their own support systems. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the students may have been more hesitant to highlight their own agency as they did not wish to stand out from the rest of their peers due to cultural modesty or distrust of authority figures. Applying Bronfenbrenner's emphasis on changes over *time* (the *chronosystem*) unfortunately was not possible in this ethnographic study because of its shorter timeline. Near the completion of this manuscript in October 2010, Ms. Woodbine indicated to me in an e-mail that she was particularly interested in the present phase for the students who participated in the study as they were now in more classes which expected academic rigour. Her observation, that most of the students were rising to the challenge, deserves and requires attention via a longitudinal study spanning several years which future studies could address.

Despite the many evolutions in his theory, Bronfenbrenner consistently emphasized the interconnectedness and reciprocity between systems and the individual. Applying this concept to the findings in the study situated at Long Rock, it was clearly a shared perception amongst staff participants that no system at Long Rock was an island. Ms. Woodbine's ability to support the students at the level of the *microsystem*, for instance, was closely connected to the degree of

support she received from the principal and administrative staff operating within the students' *exosystem*. Mr. Phan's reference to himself as a bridge between the support systems inside and outside of Long Rock beautifully illustrates Bronfenbrenner's ideas. Taking an ecological perspective has also led me to the important consideration of the reciprocity of impact between Ms. Woodbine's students and their support systems. His emphasis that the individual has equal impact on the development of the systems around them (and on the other individuals within those systems) relates directly to the staff's accounts of how Ms. Woodbine's students influenced their own teaching practices.

On a final note, using the lens of Bronfenbrenner's *ecology of human development* theory has been useful in studying a diverse group of adolescent refugee students with interrupted schooling such as those enrolled in Ms. Woodbine's class. As Anderson et al. (2004) have noted, Bronfenbrenner's theory serves as a unifying and organizing lens through which the varied experiences of multiple individuals can be explored. Of course, researchers using this lens should do so always with sensitivity to not over-simplifying the commonalities between their participants and thereby disregarding their multiple and shifting identities (Norton Peirce, 1995).

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, the research findings from the study have been presented in response to each research question. The first key finding was that the participants perceived success as integration, feeling competent, and having meaningful relationships. The second finding was that while the staff members for the most part perceived the students as being successful in school, many students were hesitant to identify themselves as good students. The third finding was that the participants perceived Long Rock as providing the students with multiple and interconnected support systems which were reciprocal in their impact. A discussion linking these key findings to the literature, the constructs of *resiliency* and *identity*, and the theoretical

framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) ecology of human development, was also explored. In the next and final chapter, the limitations of the present study will be considered as well as its implication for future research and consequences for practice.

Chapter 5: Limitations, Implications, and Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

The diversity amongst the student population within Canada's high schools is constantly growing. The widening of this diversification has much to do with the regular flow of new immigrants into Canada each year. Immigrant students, and in particular refugee students, come with values, life experiences, and perspectives which may be unfamiliar to their Canadian teachers and peers. Relevant to the present study, the lack of literature in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) pertaining to refugee students with interrupted schooling is indicative that there is a shortage of knowledge about this particular population of students. And while there is substantially more research literature dealing with refugee students in general and their schooling experiences, most researchers have conducted these studies from a deficiency-based perspective with a focus on the students' needs and obstacles as opposed to their successes and support systems. Moreover, seminal studies in TESL concerned with the performance of immigrant ESL high school students have largely operationalized *success* in school as academic accomplishments with little consideration of other forms of achievement such as artistic, athletic, social or emotional development.

Accordingly, the purpose of this ethnography was to address the three gaps identified in the literature by first focusing specifically on the perspectives of a group of adolescent refugee students with interrupted schooling enrolled in a sheltered literacy class at Long Rock Secondary School in Vancouver, B.C. Second, this study aimed to take a strength-based approach which acknowledged and explored the reported accomplishments and talents of these students at Long Rock. The third purpose of the study was to investigate whether the students and school staff perceived *success* in school in other ways beyond academic achievement.

5.2 Summary of Findings and Discussion

As discussed in Chapter Four, three major findings were derived from the study's research questions. Analysis of the interview and observation data indicated that most of the refugee students with interrupted schooling and the school staff did not define *success* as academic achievement, but rather they perceived success as integration in the school community, having a sense of competence, and developing positive relationships with peers and teachers. In other words, success was seen as the process as opposed to the product. A further interpretation of this finding was that the participants were speaking of success in terms of *resiliency* in that they perceived success as social and emotional development along positive pathways, regardless of the linguistic, cultural, and psychological challenges which the students faced in their new environs. A second major finding was that while most of the staff members perceived Ms. Woodbine's students as experiencing success in school, many of the students were hesitant to identify themselves as 'good' students. My interpretation of this disconnect was a hesitation on the part of students to take on the *identity* of a good student during their interviews with me. This may have been due to their unwillingness to stand out from the group; it may also have been related to their perception of me as an authority figure. The third major finding was that multiple systems within the school were perceived as supporting the students and that these various systems (such as school culture, teachers, and peers) were interconnected and reciprocal in impact. I interpreted this finding through the lens of Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) *ecology of human development* theory which posits that a person's development is impacted over time by interactions between networks of multi-layered systems. Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner's emphasis on the reciprocity of influence between individuals and their environments enabled me to discuss how the various school environments not only impacted Ms. Woodbine's students, but also how the students impacted their own school environments and the people within them.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

Although I attempted to be as thorough and ethical as possible in my study at Long Rock, there were inevitably still limitations to it. The first limitation pertained to my decision to use disposable cameras as the medium for taking pictures during the photography workshop. The rationale behind this choice was cost and resource related since I could afford and had ready access to six or seven disposable cameras, as opposed to digital cameras in the same quantity. While the students had been comfortable taking pictures using Ms. Woodbine's digital camera earlier in the school year, it became quickly apparent during the photography workshop that most of them had never seen a disposable camera before and required coaching in how to use it. Perhaps for this same reason, many of the students were hesitant to take pictures with the disposable cameras. Ms. Woodbine raised the point that since the students felt uncomfortable with the disposable cameras, they may not have taken pictures which best represented their own perceptions. For example, they took pictures of the school's main foyer as a place that made them feel happy, safe, and comfortable; yet according to Ms. Woodbine, her students spent little time there. Accordingly, my decision to use a medium unfamiliar to the students potentially influenced what was discussed (and what was not) during the students' interviews.

A second limitation to this study was time. Ideally, the study would have followed the students over a period of two or three years and repeatedly interviewed them regarding their perceptions of what it means to be a good student, and whether or not they viewed themselves in this light. Since the study was less than a year, I was only able to observe the students for eight months and interview them once. This admittedly did not allow me enough time to explore the ebbs and flows in their perceptions of self and how this impacted their views of success in school. Also, a longer research period would have made the study a better fit with

Bronfenbrenner's *bio-ecological theory of human development* (2001) and its emphasis on understanding positive development as it occurs over time.

A third limitation to this study was language. As discussed in Chapter Three, navigating the language differences between the students and I was an ethical issue I had to grapple with. My inability to communicate with the students in their first languages made it difficult to ensure that the students and their families truly understood what the study involved. Furthermore, my inability to conduct interviews in their first languages raised questions about the trustworthiness of the data. Did the students really understand what I was asking them? Several students in fact expressed frustration during their interviews because they could not adequately explain themselves in English. If time, resources, and translators were plentiful, I would have ensured that the content of both the letters explaining the study and the consent forms were verbally translated to the students and their families. I would also have conducted the interviews with a translator and encouraged the students to give their responses in both their first language and English.

A fourth limitation to this study is that the findings are specific to the group of students enrolled in Ms. Woodbine's class during the 2009-2010 school year. For this reason, the findings cannot be generalized to students who were enrolled in the sheltered literacy class during the 2007-2008 or 2008-2009 school years, nor can they be generalized to students currently enrolled in Ms. Woodbine's classroom. Ms. Woodbine shared with me that the make-up of students in her class shifts from year to year, including where the students come from and the number of years they have been living and studying in Canada. For example, most of the students in the first year (2007-2008) of Ms. Woodbine's class had just arrived in Canada whereas the current

group (2010-2011) includes the younger siblings of those from the first group, many of whom have been studying in Canada for several years.

5.4 Implications for Future Research

Since there is little literature in TESL dealing with the perceptions and schooling experiences of refugee students with interrupted schooling, this study has brought me to an awareness of multiple avenues for future research. I will highlight five here. The first major implication is that future studies dealing with this population of students need to engage in the question of what is *literacy* and, closely related, who is defining *literacy*? The western understanding typically views literacy as a person's ability to read and write in a language. But are there no other forms of literacy? Is the way in which people express themselves through musical instruments, voice, dance, art, photography, and the digital world irrelevant? The concept of multimodality and multiliteracies, which argues for multiple modes of literacies and their equal weighting, needs to be considered (e.g. Early, 2008; The New London Group, 2000). While I did not problematize this term in my study, I nevertheless wish to suggest a move away from simply asking 'Is a student literate or not?', and rather a shift towards asking, 'What are the multiliteracies of this student?' and 'How does the student express him or herself multimodally?' By working from these new set of questions, researchers in the future may more easily bypass viewing the students as deficient and instead move towards appreciating and exploring their other rich forms of literacy which go well beyond reading and writing.

A second implication for future research is in regards to the analysis of data. This study utilized the photographs taken by student participants only as linguistic scaffolds during the interview. Using these photographs as data, however, could generate another avenue for exploring the participants' perceptions of school and their place within it. Such analysis could be done using a theory of multimodality (e.g. Rose, 2001) to investigate what is being

communicated non-verbally through the photographs. For excellent examples of empirical studies which have conducted multimodal analysis, see Kendrick and Jones (2008) and Donoghue (2007). Ideally, such analysis would be conducted in consultation with the participants.

A third implication for future research is connected to time. At one point during the study, Ms. Woodbine shared with me her concern that the absence of academic grades in her sheltered literacy class may be doing her students a disservice in the long run. After all, ours is a society based on progress reports and comparisons with others in both the educational and work world. Conducting future studies over a period of several years would enable researchers to explore if and how the students' understandings of success are challenged once they enter the work force. And as discussed earlier in the limitations of this study, an extended study period would allow researchers to consider any shifts over time in the students' sense of self.

A fourth implication for future research is to explore the multiplicity and interconnectedness of systems outside of the school which support the students' success in school. While in Chapter Four I have acknowledged the importance of these other systems (e.g. students' families, cultural groups, religious institutions, community programming), it was beyond the scope of my study to investigate this area fully. Accordingly, future studies could develop a better understanding of the ways in which family and community life come together with school life to better support adolescent refugee students with interrupted schooling.

One final implication for future research is the adoption of a *Participatory Action Research* approach (McIntyre, 2008). Participatory Action Research (PAR) aims to involve the participants as co-researchers throughout the entire study, beginning with identification of the issues, framing of the research questions, planning of the research design, collecting and

analysing data, and finally in the reporting of the findings. Researchers engaged in PAR aim to create a democratic approach to research where the power is distributed evenly between the researcher and participants. While I did not use the PAR approach with the students at Long Rock, I feel strongly that using PAR in conjunction with first-language translators is the most ethical approach to take when conducting research with adolescent refugees with limited English abilities. It would diminish the possibility of the students feeling pressured to participate or powerless to advocate for themselves. Equally important, it would ensure that the research conducted will be of interest and value to them.

5.5 Conclusions

By bridging the findings to practice, three major conclusions can be made from this study. The first conclusion is the power and value, from an educator's perspective, of providing a sheltered literacy class for the initial intake of refugee students with interrupted schooling. Without question, additional time is needed for educators to better understand the perceptions, values, and beliefs of these students. Admittedly, teachers have full teaching days and finding extra time to personally get to know each of the students is not possible, particularly when there are considerable differences in language, culture, and life experience. Teachers' assumptions based on surface observation or conversation regarding how refugee students with interrupted schooling are fairing in school may be misleading. As Mrs. Mer pointed out in her interview, a student from Ms. Woodbine's class who is smiling and polite in her class is not necessarily doing well. Their outwardly show may in fact be masking a lack of interest or uncertainty about *how* to begin learning the new subject. For this reason, it is important that schools allow one or two teachers the space and time to develop meaningful relationships with the students which will allow for a better understanding of where the students are currently at; in turn, these teachers can act as a resource for other staff members in the school about the students.

The second conclusion is that there are multiple ways of understanding student success in secondary school beyond academic accomplishment. Accordingly, students, teachers, administrators, and school boards need to more openly appreciate and acknowledge that success in secondary school is also artistic, athletic, moral, social and emotional development. While a growing number of Canadian school boards are beginning to recognize these other forms of success in their literature, many educators and researchers with whom I have discussed this issue report that this new acknowledgment does not translate into reality. Academic achievement, it seems, is still most highly valued at the secondary school level. Until these other forms of success are seen on equal footing with academic achievement, it is a real concern that the talents and contributions of many students will ultimately be overlooked and dismissed as unimportant. I am not alone in making this conclusion, either. After Ms. Woodbine finished reading the first draft of the study's findings, she sent me a quote that had recently been cited by a teacher at Long Rock. Ms. Woodbine felt it was closely connected to what I was writing. The quote is taken from a David W. Orr's (2004) book regarding the failure of formal education to equip youth with the tools for dealing with the ecological challenges of the modern world. In the quote as follows, Orr is citing Thomas Merton, a twentieth century American Catholic who wrote extensively on spirituality, social justice and pacifism.

....there is a myth that the purpose of education is to give students the means for upward mobility and success. Thomas Merton (1985) once identified this as the "mass production of people literally unfit for anything except to take part in an elaborate and completely artificial charade" (p.11). When asked to write about his own success, Merton responded saying that "if it so happened that I had once written a best seller, this was a pure accident, but to inattention and naiveté, and I would take very good care never to do the same again" (p.11). His advice to students was to "be anything you like, be madmen, drunks, bastards of every shape and form, but at all costs avoid one thing: success." The plain fact is that the planet does not need more successful people. But it does desperately need more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers, and

lovers of every kind. It needs people who live well in their places. It needs people with the moral courage willing to join the fight to make the world habitable and humane. And these qualities have little to do with success as our culture has defined it (p.11-12).

Again linking the study's findings to practice, the third conclusion of this study is that networks of systems are required, at all levels of school life, to support the positive experiences of adolescent refugee students with interrupted schooling. Because of their interconnectedness, when one level of support is missing or lessened, the other levels may be prevented from functioning at optimum capacity. Removing the support provided by cultural peers, for example, may cause refugee students with interrupted schooling to feel alone and alienated in their new environs. The absence of supportive teachers such as Ms. Woodbine, within the context of a sheltered literacy class, may leave the students floundering in regular ESL classes with a sense of being incompetent or unable to succeed in school, despite genuine efforts by their subject teachers to support them. Without principals, vice-principals, and administrative staff who make it a priority to foster an inclusive and respectful school culture that embraces all populations of students, the monumental work by teachers such as Ms. Woodbine and Mrs. Green may be unable to take full root. Budget cuts at the school board and Ministry of Education level can also minimize and even jeopardize the essential support that staff members such as Mr. Phan offer to Ms. Woodbine's students or the ability of ESL departments to gradually integrate them into regular ESL classes. Accordingly, decisions and changes at all levels need to be made with an awareness of how it will impact, whether directly or indirectly, more vulnerable groups such as refugee students with interrupted schooling.

I bring this thesis manuscript to a close with a personal reflection. Near the end of the study at Long Rock, I shared with Ms. Woodbine the realization that my personal learning in this project had gone far beyond how to write a research proposal, conduct ethical research, or

analyse qualitative data. It also surpassed identifying findings that answered my research questions, findings which hopefully would be of value to practitioners and researchers working with adolescent refugee students with interrupted schooling. Above developing these important skills and sets of knowledge, I realized then and still feel now that for me, the most important outcome of this study was having the opportunity to engage with Ms. Woodbine and her students in what was a truly wonderful human experience.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter to School Staff Explaining Study

June 8, 2009

Dear prospective participant,

We are writing to ask you to participate in an interview and classroom observations as part of a study being conducted by Dr. Monique Bournot-Trites, University of British Columbia, Department of Language and Literacy Education, and co-investigator, Angelika Sellick, University of British Columbia, Department of Language and Literacy Education. This research is part of Angelika's graduate degree and may be included in her MA thesis. The findings from the research may be published in a scholarly journal.

The proposed research, entitled *Perspectives on Classroom Practices and Supportive Systems in the Transitioning of ESL Secondary School Students*, is described below.

Purpose:

The main purpose of this research is to understand the perspectives of teachers, administrators, and ESL students regarding the practices and supportive systems within the school which are viewed as helpful in transitioning ESL students from literacy classes into regular ESL classes.

Study overview:

It has been noted by several ESL secondary school teachers in Vancouver that students' ability to transition successfully from an ESL literacy class into regular ESL classes varies widely: some students thrive, some cope, while others emotionally breakdown and perhaps even drop-out. In the literature, there is discussion that a student's success cannot be solely determined by her personal character or her past experience; indeed, the ways in which issues are identified, understood, and addressed by educators and administrators must also be considered.

Accordingly, our main goal in this study is to gather and describe the perspectives of teachers, administrators, and ESL students so as to provide a comprehensive picture of what they identify as beneficial in helping students to transition from a literacy program into regular ESL classes. Through interview questions and classroom observations, our aim is to learn more about your own practices and perspectives regarding this issue.

Study Procedures:

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign the consent form and contact Angelika Sellick. A convenient time for the interview in June (and at a later time, the classroom observations) will be agreed upon.

Teachers: The interview will take approximately one hour and will be audio recorded and later transcribed. During the interview, some of your basic demographic information will be collected (e.g. gender, age range, ethnicity). The classroom observations, which will potentially take place during the teacher's regularly scheduled classes in the fall of 2009, will not be recorded and only hand-written notes will be taken by the observing researcher. Since the focus of the classroom observations is on the practices of the teacher only, it is not necessary to collect consent forms from parents/guardians and assent forms from all the students. There may, however, be individual students in your class who have also consented to participating in the study, and therefore your interaction with these particular students may also be observed.

Administrators: The interview will take approximately one hour and will be audio recorded and later transcribed. During the interview, some of your basic demographic information will be collected (e.g. gender, age range, ethnicity).

Potential Risks:

There is no significant risk to participating in this study. To ensure that misrepresentation has not occurred, the researchers will verify their analysis and findings with all participants prior to any publications or public reports about the completed study.

Potential Benefits:

This study can benefit teachers and administrators currently working in schools with ESL literacy programs. It will provide them with potentially valuable feedback and insight about their collective perspectives on classroom practices and supportive systems in place to help students transition into regular ESL classes. The findings from this study may also offer useful information to other schools who are considering implementing a similar program.

Confidentiality:

As mentioned in the procedures, the interviews will be audio-recorded and confidentiality will be ensured by keeping hard copies of interview recordings, transcripts, and the classroom observation notes in a locked filing cabinet at UBC. Both the recordings and documents will be kept for at least five years. Computer files containing the interview transcripts will be kept confidential through a security code known only to the researchers and the files will be kept for at least five years. To preserve confidentiality, pseudonyms and general geographic descriptors (e.g. in a secondary school in Vancouver) will be used in any publications/reports instead of your real names and the specific school name. Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time or choose to not answer some of the interview questions without jeopardy to their work position.

Contact for information about the study:

If you have any questions or wish to further discuss the research project, please feel free to call or send an e-mail message to one of the investigators.

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:

You can also contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8595/ RSIL@ors.ubc.ca if you have any concerns about your rights or treatment as a research participant.

For your records, keep a copy of this letter and consent form. If you wish to participate, please sign a copy of the attached consent form and contact Angelika Sellick by June 19, 2009. Please note that a fixed number of participants are required for this study and so it is possible that all volunteers will not be needed.

We thank you for your support in this study.

Sincerely yours,

Monique Bournot-Trites, Ph.D, Assistant Professor
Angelika Sellick, MA TESL candidate

Appendix B: Staff Consent Form

Statement of Informed Consent

Title of the project: *“Perspectives on Classroom Practices and Supportive Systems in the Transitioning of ESL Secondary School Students”*

Researchers: Dr. Monique Bournot-Trites, and Angelika Sellick, University of British Columbia

If you wish to participate in the study, please fill out the information below. Be sure to keep the initial letter of contact for your own records. Please sign this copy of the Statement of Informed Consent and contact Angelika Sellick by June 19, 2009.

I have read and understand the attached letter regarding the project entitled *“Perspectives on Classroom Practices and Supportive Systems in the Transitioning of ESL Secondary School Students”*.

I have kept copies of both the letter describing the project and a consent form.

I consent to participate in this study.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to your work position. Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature also indicates that you consent to participate in this study. Please note that a fixed number of participants are required for this study and so it is possible that all volunteers will not be needed.

Signature Date

Printed Name of the person signing above

Appendix C: Staff Interview Protocol

Protocol for semi-structured, open-ended interview with teachers and administrators

Purpose:

- a. To gather contextual information pertaining to the school and the sheltered program
- b. To gather teachers and administrators' perspective about the practices and supportive systems in place within schools which they view as beneficial in helping ESL students to transition from literacy classes into regular ESL classes.

Demographic Information (IN NOTEBOOK):

Position: ESL teacher/ School Administrator

Classes taught:

Number of years at Tupper:

Gender of participant: Male / Female

Age range of participant:

Cultural Background:

Why were you interested or willing to participate in this study?

Can you tell me some general information about your school? (e.g. background, location, special programs its offers)

Can you describe for me, as you understand it, what the literacy program is?

Can you describe the type of students who are enrolled/have been enrolled in this class?

Who is involved in making the decision of when a student should be moved out of the literacy class? What is the decision based on?

Can you describe the procedure which is followed when a student is moved from the literacy class?

In your opinion, is this process effective?

How would you define a “successful” transition from the literacy class into regular ESL classes?

How would you define an “unsuccessful” transition?

Based on your definition of a successful transition, do you think that the students in this school generally experience successful transitions? Why or why not?

Why do you think some students make the transition better than others?

Can you (without using names) describe a few specific cases which characterize how students have reacted differently to the transition?

Do you have any ideas of how teachers and schools can assess or measure the successfulness of a students' transition?

To your knowledge, what supportive systems are in place outside of the school to help students in this transition? How do they work?

Can you identify and describe some of the supportive systems which are in place within the school to help students during the transition?

Have these support systems changed over time? How? Why?

What do you do in your own class to prepare students for a transition? (if applicable)

What do you do to support a student who has transitioned into your class? (if applicable)

Has your approach changed over time? How? Why?

Who do you think is the most responsible for ensuring a successful transition: the student, their family, the teacher, the school administrators, multicultural workers, or the wider community?

How involved in school are the parents of these students? How much interaction do you personally have with them?

If money or resources or time was not an issue, do you have any suggestions of how teachers and the school and the local community could better support students in their transition?

As a teacher/administrator working with ESL students, what are your challenges and stressors?

How have your ESL students, specifically those from the literacy class, impacted you professionally? Personally?

Is there anything else you would like to add that was not covered in this interview?

Appendix D: Letter to Guardian Explaining Study

January 18, 2010

Dear parent or guardian,

We are inviting your child to take pictures of places and people important to them, and to talk about themselves and their pictures as part of a study. We are also inviting your child to take part in classroom observations. The study is being done by Angelika Sellick and Monique Bournot-Trites from the University of British Columbia.

This study is part of Angelika's graduate work and may be used in her Masters paper. What we learn may also be printed as a report in a magazine or shared at a meeting.

The reason for doing this study:

We want to better understand,

- places inside and outside of school where students feel happy/comfortable/safe
- people in school who make students feel happy/comfortable/safe
- what students think it means to be a good student

How the study will be done:

Both you and your child must sign a consent form.

As homework, two students will be given cameras to take pictures of different places and people important to them. This should take about 1 hour.

During class time, students will talk to Angelika about themselves and the pictures they took (see following for the questions). This will take about 30 minutes. Their voices will be taped and later Angelika will type their answers onto the computer.

Classroom observations will happen during the students' classes. Angelika will take notes in her notebook.

Before Angelika finishes a report or talks at a meeting, she will check with you to make sure that you are comfortable with what she is writing/saying.

How this study can help:

This study lets students share their opinion about their school and what it means to be a good student.

This information can let teachers understand how to help students, who have moved to Canada from another country, be successful in school.

Privacy will be respected:

Students' real name will not be used in any reports or meetings.

The pictures belong to the students, but if it is OK with you, Angelika will keep a copy of their photographs. She may describe the pictures (but not show them) in a report or meeting.

The pictures, observation notes, and tape recordings of the students' voices will be kept in a locked drawer at UBC. Only Angelika and Monique will see or listen to them.

If you decide later that you want your child to stop being part of the study, that is OK. Their grades and participation in sports, music or other groups will not change because of it.

Who to talk to about the study:

If you have questions or want to talk more about the study, please call or e-mail. Angelika or Monique.

You can also call the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8595/ RSIL@ors.ubc.ca if you have concerns about your rights or treatment as a research participant.

If you would like your child to be part of the study, please sign the consent form and give it to Angelika. Please also keep a copy of this letter and the consent form.

We thank you for your interest in this study.

Sincerely yours,

Monique Bournot-Trites, Ph.D, Assistant Professor

Angelika Sellick, MA TESL candidate

Appendix E: Guardian Consent Form

Consent Form

*Researchers: Angelika Sellick and Monique Bournot-Trites, University of British Columbia

*If you wish for your child to participate in the study, please sign your name below and give it to Angelika Sellick.

*You can talk to someone at UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8595 or RSIL@ors.ubc.ca if you have any questions about being part of the study.

By signing my name below, I am saying that:

I consent (say yes) to my child taking part in this study.

I understand what the study is about.

The pictures taken belong to the students, but I will let the researchers keep a copy of them. I understand that the researchers may describe the pictures (but not show them) in a report or meeting.

I have kept a copy of the letter about the study, as well as the consent form.

I understand that my child can stop taking part in the study at any time. Their grades or participation in sports, music, and other groups will not change because of it.

Signature

Date

Printed Name of the person signing above

Student's name (printed)

Appendix F: Letter to Student Explaining Study

January 18, 2010

Dear student,

You are invited to take pictures of places and people important to you, and to talk about yourself and your pictures as part of a study. We are also inviting you to take part in classroom observations. The study is being done by Angelika Sellick and Monique Bournot-Trites from the University of British Columbia.

This study is part of Angelika's graduate work and may be used in her Masters paper. What we learn may also be printed as a report in a magazine or shared at a meeting.

The reason for doing this study:

We want to better understand,

- places inside and outside of school where you feel happy/comfortable/safe
- people in school who make you feel happy/comfortable/safe
- what you think makes a good student

How the study will be done:

Both you and your guardian must sign a consent form.

As homework, you and a partner will be given cameras to take pictures of different places and people important to you. This should take about 1 hour.

During class time, you and your partner will talk to Angelika about yourself and the pictures you took (see following page for the questions). This will take about 30 minutes. Your voices will be taped and later Angelika will type your answers onto the computer.

Classroom observations will happen during your class. Angelika will take notes in her notebook.

Before Angelika finishes a report or talks at a meeting, she will check with you to make sure that you are comfortable with what she is writing/saying.

How this study can help:

This study lets you share your opinion about your school and what it means to be a good student.

This information can let teachers understand how to help students, who have moved to Canada from another country, be successful in school.

Your privacy will be respected:

Your real name will not be used in any reports or at any conferences.

The pictures are yours to keep, but if it is OK with you, Angelika will keep a copy of your photographs. She may describe your pictures (but not show them) in a report or meeting.

The pictures, observation notes, and tape recordings of your voice will be kept in a locked drawer at UBC. Only Angelika and Monique will see or listen to them.

If you decide later that you want to stop being part of this study, that is OK. Your grades and participation in sports, music or other groups will not change because of it.

Who to talk to about the study:

If you have questions or want to talk more about the study, please call or e-mail Angelika or Monique.:

You can also call the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8595/ RSIL@ors.ubc.ca if you have concerns about your rights or treatment as a research participant.

If you would like to be part of the study, please sign the consent form and give it to Angelika. Please also keep a copy of this letter and the consent form.

We thank you for your interest in this study.

Sincerely yours,

Monique Bournot-Trites, Ph.D, Assistant Professor
Angelika Sellick, MA TESL candidate

Appendix G: Student Assent Form

Consent Form

*Researchers: Angelika Sellick and Monique Bournot-Trites, University of British Columbia

*If you wish to participate in the study, please sign your name below and give it to Angelika Sellick.

*You can talk to someone at UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8595 or RSIL@ors.ubc.ca if you have any questions about being part of the study.

By signing my name below, I am saying that:

I consent (say yes) to taking part in this study.

I understand what the study is about.

The pictures I take are mine, but I will let the researchers keep a copy of them. I understand that the researchers may describe the pictures (but not show them) in a report or meeting.

I have kept a copy of the letter about the study, as well as the consent form.

I understand that can stop taking part in the study at any time. My grades or participation in sports, music, and other groups will not change because of it.

Signature

Date

Printed Name of the person signing above

Appendix H: Student Interview Protocol

How old are you?

What country do you come from?

How long have you been in Canada?

How long have you been at this school for? What grade are you in?

What classes are you taking right now?

What do you like about coming to school?

What don't you like about coming to school?

Are you part of any clubs, sports, or music groups ? What do you like about being a part of them?

Please tell me about your pictures. Why did you take them?

Who do you think are the most important people in helping you to do well in school?

a) your family b) your teachers c) other students d) you / Why?

After you graduate from high school, what would you like to do?

Is there anything else you would like to say?

Appendix I: Organization of Data in Chart Form (example)

Student #	What Good Students Do	Do they do it?	Do they say they are good students?
1	-do their work -pick up garbage	-not good at doing work (it's difficult) -sometimes	n/a
2	-do homework -help other students do homework	-yes -yes	Yes
3	-do their work	-sometimes	No/ "...like when someone ask, 'Are you good student?'. I don't know. Ask my teacher".
4	-study -thinking/doing work -helping other students with words -ask teachers for help	-yes -yes -yes -yes	"Ask Ms. R....I don't know."
5	-do homework -respect teacher -respect other students -be helpful to other students	-yes -"sometimes (silly) sometimes not" -sometimes -sometimes	"No. But myself I don't know, (but someone know me). But I don't know myself"
6	-do homework -reading -writing	-yes	Yes (says she is because she does homework and helps her mother and cleans house [identity of good daughter]....at school. Good friend"
7	-reading book ("It's free time and they (suppose) to read a book") -writing /listening -do homework/study -help teacher	-yes -yes	"Some I'm good, some I'm not good....I like to read book and writing also I like. But I do-but-I come to school so late sometime I misses class...It's bad, I know. Misses class. Bad...I wake up late sometimes and I'm waiting for bus"

8	-helping each other (students) -do homework	-yes -yes	“I don’t –I don’t know-ask my teacher”
9	-do homework -read books -clean up after yourself (there had been a big campaign recently to keep school clean)	-yes -yes (qualifies that she has read 2 English big books in the past 6 months)	-“I don’t think so” ((laughs))...”Because I”m always late...my house is like so far, I have to take 3 bus”