THE ADJUSTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL SECONDARY STUDENTS

IN THE VANCOUVER SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

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Natalee Elizabeth Popadiuk, May 1998

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ABSTRACT

This research examines what facilitates and hinders the adjustment of adolescent international students attending public secondary school in Vancouver, British Columbia. The purpose of this study is to determine a set of categories that can be used by school personnel to better assist newly arriving international students in their adjustment process.

The critical incident technique developed by Flanagan (1954) is used for this research to discover what events facilitate and hinder the adjustment of these international students. Twenty-one secondary students, ages fifteen to eighteen, are interviewed from three different public schools in the Vancouver School District. From the interviews, a total of 352 critical incidents are used to develop seventeen categories which answer the question: What facilitates and hinders adolescent international student adjustment? To test for reliability and validity, four tests are carried out in order to establish the soundness and comprehensiveness of the categories including independent rater agreement, comprehensiveness of categories, participation rate, and expert validation.

The results show that adolescent international student adjustment can be facilitated or hindered in the following ways: receiving encouragement or support, receiving advice or information, receiving help, appreciating others, being accepted, making friends, having fun, participating in activities, learning English, communicating effectively, speaking own language, performing well academically, experiencing less demand at school, making decisions, impressed with environment, experiencing dilemmas, and experiencing local annoyances. Portraits of adjustment and maladjustment are given as well as case studies in order to highlight the categorization system in both a general and specific way.
The findings of this study contribute to the body of knowledge regarding international student adjustment because of its use of an adolescent, rather than adult, international student population. This research is also very practical in that it can be useful as a basis for individual and group counselling, various school-based and district programs, and general support and information for school personnel and newly arriving international students. Ideas for further research using this subject population are also suggested.
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FOREWORD

After working in the Richmond School District for four years as a secondary teacher, I became aware of students who were either living alone in Canada for the school year, or with relatives they had never met, while their parents remained in Taiwan or Hong Kong to work. This situation, often referred to as “satellite families,” appeared to be bringing with it a host of problems which were being reflected in the social, emotional and academic domains of the students with whom I was teaching and working. Making new friends, trying to adjust to a new culture, pressure to excel in their schoolwork, depression and loneliness, bullying and victimization, truancy, gang recruitment, drug use and promiscuity kept surfacing in the interactions I had with these students. Knowing only anecdotal reports about their lives and not having the knowledge base of the various issues from which to draw, I felt relatively powerless to initiate effective change in their lives. This was my introduction to the plight of these high school students, mainly Asian, who struggled with the adjustment process of living and studying here in Canada.

During a two year duration at the University of British Columbia, where I was working on my Master’s degree full-time while on a leave from the Richmond School District, I secured a position at International House working as the Coordinator for the Peer Program. My duties included matching newly arriving international students with Canadian students in order to facilitate their adjustment. I read journals on the adjustment process, talked to many of the international students themselves, and learned about counselling and cultural differences in some of the coursework I was completing. I also knew of cases where students had withdrawn prematurely from their studies to return home. Others had become extremely depressed and withdrawn and a few international
students had even committed suicide over the last few years. Sensing the importance of a successful adjustment process and possessing a genuine interest in international education, I worked on a field study for a methodology course with Dr. Larry Cochran which involved interviewing two international students in the Peer Program using the critical incident methodology.

The information I gleaned from this prompted me to further review the literature. I began to search for information on secondary students, knowing that I would be returning to the public school system where I would be faced with either international or immigrant students who found themselves in similar situations. I wanted to learn from the students themselves, just as I had done with the field study on the university students, in order to hear their own stories in their own words which I could then utilize for the purpose of better assisting many of the students from overseas who find themselves studying in Vancouver. Although I interviewed international students (those individuals who are paying full-cost tuition for their educational experience), it was apparent that many immigrant students who do not pay for their education due to their permanent resident status often find themselves in very similar circumstances encountering many of the same difficulties.

As I listened to the stories, it seemed important for the districts and schools who actively recruited students from other countries to maintain the integrity and values traditionally associated with our system by ensuring everything possible was implemented to assist each individual through his or her unique transition process. It was, therefore, my hope that information from this study might be a useful jumping off point for teachers and counsellors to deal with the influx of newly arriving international and immigrant
students in a thoughtful, caring, and knowledgeable attitude that could keep the students safe and appropriately supported.
Statistics

According to the most recent Statistics Canada figures, the total number of foreign students studying in Canada in 1996 was 87,500 with 31% of this number attending school at the elementary/secondary level. Over a ten year period, the student participation jumped from 17,267 in 1983-84, to 27,435 in 1993-94, an increase of 10,168 students (Statistics Canada, 1997). Out of a total of 27,308 international students studying at the elementary/secondary level in Canada during a 1992 study, almost half (a total of 13,082 students), came from Asian countries including Hong Kong (3,733), Japan (2,126), and Taiwan (2,087) (Statistics Canada, 1994). In 1993-94, a year later, most of the students who came to Canada to study were from Asia (52%), Europe (17%) and North America (14%) (Statistics Canada, 1997). The international students attending the elementary/secondary level in British Columbia during the 1993-94 school year was 5,310, an increase of almost ten percent over the previously studied population of 4,866 during the 1989-90 academic year (Statistics Canada, 1997).

These statistics only apply to international students who are not Canadian students, and who do not have “permanent resident” status. They must receive permission from the Canadian government to enter Canada for purposes of study by obtaining a student authorization or special visa. Students who have received permanent resident (landed immigrant) status, (non-Canadians who have sought and received permission to live in Canada permanently), and are able to participate in all levels of education are considered Canadian and are usually included in the number of Canadian
students (Statistics Canada, 1994). The focus of this research is on the international, rather than the permanent resident, student population.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to answer the question: What facilitates or hinders the adjustment of international students who come to Vancouver to attend secondary school in the public school system? Adolescent students who come to Canada must not only become familiar with an educational institution that may be very different from their previous experience in their home country, they must also deal with a new culture and language, the stresses of everyday life, and the loss of close family and friends (Crano and Crano, 1993; Westwood and Barker, 1990; Church, 1982). The pressures on the young people may be multiplied when these factors are considered in conjunction with the fact that they must negotiate the developmental tasks of adolescence and come to terms with their own identity (Wexler, 1991; Santrock, 1990; White, 1989). The factors associated with international student adjustment may be illuminated by interviewing students about their own experiences. Some positive outcomes of this research may include the following:

(a) providing insight and knowledge of the students' experiences in their own words concerning the types of facilitating and hindering events of their adjustment,

(b) knowing what to look for as educators, counsellors, and home-stay families and then supporting the psychosocial and academic needs of the students during the duration of their studies,
enhancing the awareness of teachers, administrators, and counsellors which may help them in their efforts to best deal with the influx of international students into the public school system,

assisting the decision making process of individual schools in terms of services and programs that might best contribute to the students’ successful adaptation,

providing research which school districts could utilize for more effective and efficient planning of their international student programs,

contributing to the body of literature concerning international students and, in particular, the literature concerning adolescent students attending secondary school.

Rationale of the Study

Discovering the essence of what facilitates and hinders adolescent international student adjustment can be of assistance to many of the stakeholders concerned with international education. First, most of the information and theories known regarding international student adjustment has been researched on college and university populations. Considering the growing popularity of full-tuition paying international students at the secondary school level, and the length of time that programs have been implemented in many districts, it is surprising that more research in this specific area has not already been done.

It therefore seems prudent for the sake of the students who are coming to study in Canada, and those responsible for their well-being, to investigate the adjustment process in the adolescent population to determine their specific concerns, rather than relying predominately on data collected from an adult sample. Most research on international
students focus on the adult university student population, and many of these studies research graduate students. Unfortunately, some of the issues are only marginally related to the problems faced by high school students, and other factors that are unique to an adolescent population are not addressed. The literature, due to its focus on an adult population, may neglect to address specific issues related to adolescents, their special needs, and individual concerns.

Second, this research may help newly arriving international students to better understand the process of adjustment that they may experience. The findings could provide valuable information about the factors that may help or hinder them in their goal of adjusting to this new country. They can glean insight from students who have already been through the adjustment process and realize that they are not alone in their struggle to adjust. The students, having knowledge, can monitor themselves or other international students for potential risk factors and safety concerns.

Similarly, this research can assist teachers, counsellors, and administrators by providing a clearer understanding of the students' experiences which may allow school staff to intervene or encourage in a more meaningful and effective manner. By having a foundation from which to work, personnel could feel more confident in dealing with the international students on a day-to-day basis, as well as being aware of possible pitfalls that the student may encounter. If problem areas can be detected at an earlier stage, appropriate interventions can be implemented sooner. Additionally, other professional or support personnel such as school psychologists or youth workers, could become important team players in assisting international students with their specific concerns if these are adequately researched and identified.
This study, then, is important for two main reasons. First, it directly assists the adjustment of adolescent international students' to their new lives in Canada by providing them with relevant information from peers who have previously experienced the struggles of this transition period. Second, it allows school personnel to more fully understand the experience of the international students from the students' perspective, in their own words, and not only from the perspective of the adults who observe and work with them. The overriding goal of this research is to facilitate the successful adjustment of international students coming into lower mainland schools and classrooms.

Approach to the Study

The critical incident methodology was chosen for this research because it allows the international student participants to express their lived experience in their own way. In other words, it gives a voice to a very specialized group of people in the school system who may not otherwise feel heard. The approach is humanistic, and allows for a respectful interaction between the researcher and the participants. This methodology is useful for eliciting a variety of possible facilitating and hindering events from these individuals. The information can then be analyzed and compiled in a way that makes it useful in practice. Using a survey or questionnaire may not have yielded such rich data and, in fact, may have precluded some of the possibilities by omitting some important factors that the researcher had not previously considered due to differences in culture and ways of thinking. Using a qualitative methodology allows the participants to speak about anything that they believe is related to the aim of the study and in the process, provides detailed and comprehensive information that can add to or confirm the existing body of knowledge in relation to international student adjustment.
Summary

The intent of this research is to discover the facilitating and hindering incidents that affect adolescent international student adjustment. Chapter I outlines the purpose, rationale, and approach to the study. The literature review found in Chapter II discusses adolescent development, international student adjustment, and the major concerns of international students. In Chapter III, the critical incident technique is described and specific information regarding the participants, interviews, and procedure are detailed. Chapter IV discusses the results of the study and gives a description of the seventeen categories with facilitating and hindering examples for each. Then the four validation procedures and results are outlined, followed by portraits and case studies of student adjustment and maladjustment, and finally, some important issues that arose from the research. In Chapter V, the limitations to the study, theoretical and practical implications of the study, possible future research are delineated, and a personal reflection is given.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Literature associated with adolescent development, international student adjustment, and major concerns of international students will be reviewed in this chapter. Since much of the international student research has utilized an adult college or university population as their sample, this review will specifically indicate if a high school population has been used.

Adolescent Development

Adolescence, a phase of rapid physical and psychological change associated with the transition from childhood to adulthood, remains an important aspect of many cultures. One aspect that appears to be neglected from the international student literature concerns the importance of adolescent development in conjunction with the issues of adjustment associated with being an international student. The information presented here on this subject stems from a western point of view steeped in an individualistic rather than a collective culture. Therefore, care must be taken due to cultural variations when applying these concepts to adolescents who come from differing backgrounds.

Erik Erikson postulated that adolescence is one of the many psychosocial stages in which an individual must negotiate (Santrock, 1990; Seifert and Hoffnung, 1987). He believed that during this period of time, roughly from thirteen to nineteen years of age, a person tries to work through the identity versus identity confusion developmental task. This means that these young people are trying to find out who they are, what they are all about, and where they are headed. During this process they are confronted with many new roles and adult situations, including vocational and romantic interests. If an
adolescent explores a variety of roles in a healthy and positive manner, then a positive identity will be achieved; however, if the adolescent fails to negotiate this developmental task because he or she has inadequately explored roles, or has not defined an appropriate path, then identity confusion reigns (Santrock, 1990; Seifert and Hoffnung, 1987).

Additionally, the developmental tasks can be further delineated according to early, middle and late adolescence. During early adolescence, the youth is forming a new body image due to the physical changes in their body size and shape. The beginning stages of knowing that one is becoming a sexual being occurs, and with this, a movement toward peers which includes intimacy, risking rejection, and tolerance for diversity (Santrock, 1990; White, 1989). Cultural variations to this may occur according to whether the society leans toward an individualistic or collective perspective. As the individual comes to the stage of middle adolescence, they may rebel or disagree with their parents or authority figures more often in an effort to increase their level of independence. Young people at this age tend to become more abstract in their thinking, and move toward developing sophisticated problem solving and conflict resolution skills. The desire to be independent and an individual in their own right, at least in an individualistic culture, can lead to experimentation in sex and drugs, challenges to parental authority, and value conflicts. Finally, during late adolescence, individuals must come to terms with many of the identity dilemmas with which they have been faced. These dilemmas may include the meaning of one’s life, career decisions, intimate relationships, decision making, taking responsibility for oneself, and working from a value system that makes sense (Santrock, 1990; White, 1989).
Self-concept

During adolescence the cohesion of self can be seen as being at the centre of personality. Individuals who feel confident, centred, recognized and who have the internal sense that the pieces of their experience fit together and are integrated are seen as having a cohesion of self (Wexler, 1991). The core of self is derived from regularities in experience. It is through continuity and support from caregivers that provides adolescents with the confidence to show initiative and to be increasingly the author of their own experiences (Santrock, 1990; White, 1989). This enhances feelings of self-pride and self-esteem. Erikson stated that resolving the crisis of identity versus identity confusion is the key psychosocial task of adolescence which involves selectively choosing and integrating aspects acquired during childhood from parents and society with their own ideas and beliefs about themselves (Seifert & Hoffnung, 1987). It is, indeed, a crisis of finding meaning in one’s own life.

Adolescents, who rely on external sources of validation, can be vulnerable and easily threatened compared to adults who may have more inner resources for changing the environment (Ishiyama, 1989). The self-concept, a consistent and dynamic organization of values that involve a continuous process of assimilation of new beliefs and a change or rejection of the old, of an adolescent international student may be at risk for healthy development during this time (Crano and Crano, 1993). The parents or family decide that the child will attend a secondary school in Canada because it will greatly benefit their future university and career prospects. This means that a child in either elementary or secondary school will be sent away from the family which removes them from the important people in their lives who provide certain types of learning, nurturing, and
guiding experiences that help the emerging individual self develop (Wexler, 1991). These young people not only have to contend with the typical adjustment issues faced by adult international students, but they must also deal with issues associated with being an adolescent -- accepting their parents' decision, dealing with the loneliness and frustration of being removed from the nuclear family and close friends sometimes against their will, and living in a home situation where they have little or no control over the discipline, family dynamics, or contact with home. When the internal experience is primarily about anxiety, tentativeness, or moodiness, the individual becomes fragmented. This means that he or she experiences a sense of emptiness and alienation from others, often leading to rather desperate attempts to escape from these dysphoric feelings (Wexler, 1991).

Coping and Risk Factors

An important aspect to whether an individual will successfully negotiate the developmental tasks of adolescence obviously depends on the level of their coping skills in dealing with problem situations. Adaptive coping, namely understanding the meaning of a troublesome situation, engaging in competent action, and keeping powerful emotions (such as fear or anger) from being too overwhelming, is growth-facilitating and allows adolescents to move forward to complete essential developmental tasks (White, 1989). Maladaptive coping, defined as disordered behaviour, is reflected in the troubled and distressed adolescent behaviour that block psychological growth, prevents the adolescent from actualizing his or her potential, and is indicative of a negative self-concept (Santrock, 1991; White, 1989). It is obvious that maladaptive coping skills make negotiating life's trials difficult for any adolescent. Those individuals who do not have strong support systems built into their lives may be completely overwhelmed.
Depression, characterized by profound sadness, gloom, dejection, despondency, futility, brooding, self-deprecation, low self-worth, pessimism, foreboding, loss of interest in usual activities, and a lack of energy, is a common occurrence amongst all cultures and in all walks of life (White, 1989). With reference to the literature on international students and on adolescent development, it appears that the number of risk factors related to adolescent suicide that may be associated with these students include at least nine of the top nineteen major risk factors as researched by Pagliaro (1995): absence of maternal figure, depression, dissatisfaction with family relationships, external locus of control, hopelessness, lack of reasons for living, lack of social support, loneliness, and low self-esteem. Suicide can also become a crisis-oriented act when a relatively normal adolescent, who is functioning well, enters into a vulnerable period where a sudden drop in well-being and self-esteem is brought about by loss, failure, disappointment, or separation (White, 1989).

Additionally, some students who may be feeling lonely, alienated, and lack a strong self-concept, may become involved with people at school who encourage negative behaviours including sexual promiscuity, drug and alcohol abuse, gang affiliation, eating disorders, truancy, and juvenile delinquency among other things in order to meet their needs (Wexler, 1991; White, 1989; Dreikurs, et. al., 1982). In this way the adolescent youth feels accepted and cared for and learns coping skills to fend off feelings of insecurity, alienation, and homesickness. Not only are the youth at-risk from negative influences at school, there may also be some who are also in danger of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse from one or more members of the household in which they live (Seifert & Hoffnung, 1987). Other students who may desire positive influences
may still feel overwhelmed by all the problems they face due to a lack of coping mechanisms. This leads them to isolate themselves further and generate unproductive stress, frustration, and tension (White, 1989). The associated risks of being an adolescent and an international student may be mitigated by creating awareness and sharing knowledge of these issues with educators, counsellors, guardians, and students.

**International Student Adjustment**

With the active recruitment of international students for both post-secondary and secondary education, it is imperative that educators be knowledgeable on the research associated with the adjustment of these individuals. Unfortunately, the literature is fraught with inconsistencies and contradictions which makes it difficult to develop a workable model or to interrelate the findings in order to develop consistent patterns (Crano and Crano, 1993; Sharma, 1973; Brein and David, 1971). Lysgaard’s (1955) U-curve hypothesis states that international students progress through four stages including a “honeymoon” phase characterized by elation, a hostile stage where there is a movement away from the host culture and toward fellow sojourners, a recovery stage characterized by a superior attitude toward the hosts and an increased ability to communicate and get around in the new culture and finally, an adjusted phase where the anxiety is gone and the new customs are enjoyed. This popular model does not make distinctions between the international students’ ethnicity and culture and that of the host country.

Other research distinguishing between the culture of the international students and the culture of the host country shows that sociocultural adaptation problems were greater in sojourners who made large rather than small cross-cultural transitions (McKinlay, Pattison, and Gross, 1996, Sheehan and Pearson, 1995; Ward and Kennedy, 1993). In
other words, the students’ adjustment was partially related to the degree to which the native culture was similar to the host culture. An example of this would be if an American student came from Oregon State to study in Vancouver at U.B.C. That individual would likely have less adjustment difficulties at a Canadian university than a Chinese student arriving from Hong Kong or Taiwan due to greater cultural, social, and language differences. Additionally, factors associated with academic, personal, and social aspects such as age, gender, marital status, country of origin, religion, motivation, communication skills, command of English, personality variables, community adjustment also affect the degree to which one positively adjusts to the new culture (Barratt and Huba, 1994; Ishyama, 1989; Sharma, 1973). Much of the more recent literature contradicts the traditional view of adjustment in favour of a more comprehensive and multi-faceted view of the factors, both internal and external, affecting international students.

International student adjustment is a complex process where sojourning students (those who stay in a host culture for a specified period of time with the intention of returning to the home country thereafter), often experience high levels of stress, anxiety and disorientation, especially during the first few days in the new culture (McKinlay, Pattison, and Gross, 1996; Ishyama, 1983). Fifteen to twenty-five percent of all international students might be “impaired” (Church, 1982), and this finding is well supported in the literature. This impairment may be found in the individual’s psychological or sociocultural adjustment. According to Ward and Kennedy (1993), the psychological adjustment refers to the psychological well-being or satisfaction of the individual which is related to stress and coping, and the person’s capacity to manage their
stress. Sociocultural adjustment refers to social skills such as the ability to fit in or negotiate aspects of the host culture which is based on cultural learning and the capacity to communicate effectively (Ward and Kennedy, 1993). Further, a relationship has also been found between the degree of discrepancy between expectations and experiences in relation to homesickness. Students who had experiences that did not match up to their expectations were more homesick than others regardless of whether or not they attended an orientation session meant to decrease levels of homesickness (McKinlay, Pattison, and Gross, 1996). These researchers also found that there was not one isolated low phase as suggested by Lysgaard’s U-curve model, but rather that depression comes and goes in waves.

**Major Difficulties of International Students**

In the next section, an overview of the main concerns and difficulties experienced by international students will be discussed. Included here are language, academic, social, and personal concerns, all of which, according the literature review undertaken, are contributing factors to adjustment problems when studying abroad.

**Language Concerns**

International students, especially those from a non-European background, struggle with the adjustment process of their academic, personal and social concerns largely due to their lack of fluency in the English language. The overall experience of foreign students is diminished by the level of difficulty they experience with English and those individuals who are less fluent in English have more difficulty in adjusting to North American culture (Barratt & Huba, 1994; Fletcher & Stren, 1989). In one study, students who believed that their English skills were adequate upon arrival were better adapted to life in the host
country than those who did not believe they were adequate (Surdam & Collins, 1984). In another study by Barratt & Huba (1994), students who were learning a language in order to fulfill an educational requirement achieved a lower level of fluency than those who were also interested in the culture of the foreign language. Supporting this study, students who were learning intensive English in a U.S. university made an easier adjustment and had a better chance of meeting other students while studying (Deressa & Beavers, 1986).

One of the most important elements in successful adaptation is skill with the language, both conversational and formal, of the host society since language problems seriously limit the range of opportunities for demonstrating the international student’s knowledge and competence (Fletcher & Stren, 1989; Ishyama, 1989; Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986). As a student’s use of English improves, social and academic adjustment becomes less of a problem and cultural learning and adjustment becomes easier (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986).

Academic Concerns

An international student is by definition a person who is enrolled in a course of study in Canada from a foreign country and not a citizen or immigrant, although many immigrants may find themselves in similar circumstances. Naturally, academic matters are of great concern to these sojourners who may be preoccupied with their academic tasks and thereby regard outside cultural influences as secondary (McKinlay et. al, 1996).

Unfortunately, research shows that students encounter difficulties in regard to many aspects of their studies which can be either internal or external factors. Some examples of these problems include using the English language, writing essay style exams in English and requiring extra time to write the exam, completing multiple choice and...
true/false questions for the first time, listening to lectures which are too fast for them and struggling to figure out the main ideas, giving oral reports, worrying about grades, lacking the ability to concentrate on studies, and being shy and passive in the classroom rather than participating in class discussions (Crano & Crano, 1993; Deresa & Beavers, 1993; Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Jensen & Jensen, 1983; Sharma, 1973).

In particular, Asian students report that their major academic problem is language difficulties due to insufficient English (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986). Aside from the ramifications of possessing inferior language skills, many international students of Asian background must contend with the cultural differences of what it means to be a student and what it means to be a teacher. These roles are very different in Canada than, for instance, those found in China or Hong Kong (Jensen & Jensen, 1983). An example of cultural role confusion would be in the realm of class participation. In many Asian cultures, it is considered disrespectful to ask the teacher questions because it indicates that the teacher did not make the information clear in the first place. Asian students may also be shy about participating in classroom discussions in Canadian schools and universities since they are accustomed to merely listening to teachers in a lecture style with no student involvement (Jensen & Jensen, 1983).

Additionally, Chinese students from the Chinese mainland, used to more challenging course content, longer hours, stringent exams, and a long history of respect for education, may find our system to be educationally weaker than what they have previously encountered (Dong, et. al., 1996). Asian students, who complete their university entrance requirements in Canadian public secondary schools, still aren’t accustomed to conversing in English with Canadian classmates whose first language is
English, and prefer to continue speaking in their first language with other nationals from their own countries of origin (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986). Overall, international students from a European background were better adapted to life in North America than non-Europeans with the non-European students more likely to experience a traumatic culture shock and encounter more emotional, social, academic, and financial problems (Barratt & Huba, 1994; Sharma, 1973).

**Personal Concerns**

Personal problems, another area of concern to international students, can impede a student’s adjustment process in Canadian culture. Probably the most profound and all-encompassing difficulty to deal with and overcome is homesickness (Crano & Crano, 1993; Ishyama, 1989; Sharma, 1973). Other personal factors found to disrupt the adjustment process include stress, anxiety, disorientation, insecurity, depression, loss and grief, cultural and personal uprootedness, loneliness, anger, frustration, self-doubt, confusion (Westwood & Barker, 1990; Ishyama, 1989). Certain personality traits may be especially susceptible to culture-specific influences and others may prove helpful as a mediator of adjustment (Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Church, 1982). Compounding these internal processes may be external forces such as dietary differences, concern with a deterioration in health, lack of counselling, inadequate housing, and insufficient funds (Crano & Crano, 1993; Sharma, 1973). Significant differences in the adjustment of international students based on gender were absent in the study completed by Crano and Crano (1993), but Dyal & Chan (1985) found that female Hong Kong Chinese were at greater risk for self-reported stress-related symptoms. Having a sense of spirituality where the person feels a connectedness with something greater than the individual or
maintaining religious practices may assist students through a potentially stressful adjustment (Barratt & Huba, 1994; Ishiyama, 1989, Surdam & Collins, 1984).

Social Concerns

Social concerns, another important aspect that is predominant in the literature, includes friendships with both nationals and host nationals, intimate relationships, family connections, and interactions with the host family. A lack of social contact, especially with host nationals, seems to contribute to feelings of isolation and more problems related to cultural, academic and social adjustment, whereas interpersonal relationships with host nationals, in particular, facilitate adjustment (Barratt & Huba, 1994; Fletcher & Stren, 1989; Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986). One study shows that international students who spent more of their leisure time with Americans were significantly better adapted than those who spent it with fellow citizens and yet, in another study, all students report that their closest friends were either co-nationals or students with a shared linguistic background (McKinlay et al., 1996; Surdam & Collins, 1984).

Since family plays such an integral role in defining personal identity among Asians, the lack of support from family members both in the host and home countries makes an important difference in the adjustment of the student (McKinlay et al., 1996). Many students adopt consistent coping strategies by turning to the familiar (food, language, customs, friends) and by maintaining close contact with their home and family. Family expectations around the student's academic success, and the fact that many students are financially supported by their family at home, are important factors in the international student's attempts to do well (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986). Further, many students live with a host family, especially if they are in secondary school, who can be
strangers or relatives that they have never met. The relationship, or lack thereof, with the host family, and in particular, host brothers and sisters, and the subjective feeling of whether or not one is a member of the family, can also be important mediating points in the adjustment process (Crano & Crano, 1993).

Summary

In reviewing the information on adolescent development, there is a decided emphasis on self-development and identity integration. Many important developmental tasks, according to a western, individualistic society, need to occur during this time period, and significant others are crucial in the formation of the adolescent’s sense of self. At the same time as requiring strong emotional support and guidance especially from important adults in their lives, they are also pushing away from parents and authority figures in an attempt to establish their own network of friends and support on the journey to becoming their own person. The theoretical thrust of adolescent development appears to be on identity formation and making important connections with others.

The literature on international student difficulties focuses on language, academic, personal, and social concerns. While surveying this literature, the emphasis seems to be more on academic and language concerns, although the other factors are also important. At the university level, it is obvious that good English skills are required in many fields in order to successfully complete a degree program. Therefore, the emphasis on academic study and language ability appear to go hand in hand. Additionally, since most of the studies reviewed were on adult college or university students, it intuitively makes sense that the students’ primary concerns would be around the success of their academic studies.
especially since they are theoretically into the next developmental stage in their lives in which career, rather than self, is the primary focus.

When the information of adolescent development is combined with the literature on international student concerns, there appears to be some discrepancy in regard to the content domain. That is to say that the developmental issues and concerns of an adolescent will probably not be fully addressed in research completed with adults, although many issues in regard to international students in general will overlap. Therefore, this study on the adjustment of international students at the secondary level is practical and should make some theoretical advances. One must ask the question: Does the current literature on international student adjustment adequately address the concerns of adolescent students? My answer is that I do not believe that it is close enough to the experience of the secondary students to be generalized to them with any degree of confidence. Therefore, it is my intent in this study to help in the determination of the breadth of concerns of international secondary students and to take notice of the similarities and differences between them and their university counterparts.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Critical Incident Technique

The research methodology chosen for this study, a qualitative design, is the critical incident methodology. It was selected for two main reasons. First, the critical incident methodology allows the international students to give voice to what has helped or hindered them in their personal adjustment to life in Canada from their own perspective. They are encouraged to share incidents with the researcher that are part of their lived experience, and from which there was a significant outcome in relation to their psycho-social or academic adjustment. Second, the critical incident methodology gives an overall understanding of the factors that either facilitated or hindered the adjustment of the international students. Researchers state that this methodology generates a comprehensive and detailed description of content domain and provides depth and concrete information (McCormick, 1994; Woolsey, 1986; Andersson & Nilsson; 1964; Flanagan, 1954). The researcher is able to see not only the discrete events, but also the overriding categories which may provide useful information for practice and further research. Participants, in a semi-structured interview format, are asked for individual vignettes regarding their own or others' behaviour which either happened to them or were observed by the subject. These events must lead to a significant outcome in the person's thoughts, emotions, or actions. Hence, the researcher seeks critical incidents from the participants that helped or didn't help the adjustment process.
History of Critical Incident Methodology

Developed and utilized by Flanagan (1954), the critical incident methodology was originally used during World War II to identify effective pilot performance. The participants articulated a descriptive account of things that facilitated or hindered a particular aim such as significant incidents in relation to their mission. In particular, two activities that were investigated in-depth included combat leadership and disorientation in pilots. After analyzing the data by extracting the critical incidents and grouping them into categories, Flanagan compiled a list of the factors found to be critical for task performance according to the pilots’ perspectives. When the war ended, Flanagan (1954) refined the critical incident methodology, and utilized it extensively in industry.

According to Flanagan (1954), “the essence of the technique is that only simple types of judgments are required of the observer, reports from only qualified observers are included, and all observations are evaluated by the observer in terms of an agreed upon statement of the purpose of the activity.” Therefore, gathering incidents from observers should result in wide variety of behavioural incidents that they either experienced or witnessed, and which they would consider to be an incident critical to the aim of the study. The critical incidents should be reported as facts regarding behaviour and should be limited to those behaviours that make a significant contribution. The five major steps of the methodology are (1) determining a general aim of an activity which outlines the objectives to which most experts in the field would agree, (2) developing plans and specifications for data collection which would ensure that incidents were factual, (3) collecting the data by means of an interview with the observer, (4) analyzing the data in order to summarize and describe the data efficiently enough to allow it to be effectively
utilized, and (5) interpreting and reporting the findings. Flanagan's extensive research using the critical incident technique has proven to be an invaluable tool for collecting a record of specific behaviour from those who are best suited to report on those behaviours.

Since then, this type of research has fluctuated in its popularity, but it is currently becoming an important tool in the field of psychological research. Woolsey (1986) finds the critical incident methodology to be particularly relevant in the early stages of research because it is useful in generating explanatory information, and assisting in theory or model-building. This methodology can also be useful for test construction, surveys or questionnaires, developing and evaluating programs, and further, more focused quantitative or qualitative research. Additional uses in the field include training of personnel, designing jobs, developing operating procedures, assessing motivation and leadership, and assisting counsellors and therapists (Flanagan, 1954). From the time of its inception during World War II until now, hundreds of successful studies have been carried out using the critical incident methodology, many of which have been documented in a bibliography devoted to the critical incident technique compiled by the American Institute for Research (1973).

Participants

International students attending three different secondary schools in the Vancouver School District were selected to participate in this study because of the relatively long (ten years) and highly successful international student program. Three schools, Gladstone, David Thompson, and Magee, were targeted because they represented a variety of socioeconomic neighbourhoods with ethnically diverse student-body populations. After receiving permission to proceed from the Ethics Committee at the
University of British Columbia and the Vancouver School District Committee for Research, a school contact person, either a school counsellor or teacher in charge of international students, contacted me and made an appointment to discuss the research.

When the contact person from the school met with the international students, they discussed the study with the students, and handed out an information sheet with some basic information about the research and the interview questions. The letter outlining the study and the consent letter were translated into the first or dominant language of the parents, including Chinese, Korean, and Japanese, and was sent to the home country in order to obtain informed parental consent (Appendix A). Most signed consent forms were faxed directly to the individual school offices or to the Counselling Psychology Department at the University of British Columbia; other students brought the signed fax to the teacher or counsellor. The involved school personnel arranged interview times with the students during the school day, located an appropriate room in the school for the interviews, and facilitated the introductions between the students and the researcher. The preparation of the students for the interview, and the introductions by a respected individual in the school, were invaluable for the rapport and trust required to adequately carry-out the interviews.

The criteria for selecting the participants was very broad and flexible in order to allow for a diversity in the participants. An attempt was made to select students for diversity in ethnicity, country of origin, age, grade level, and gender, but no attempt was made to select students of any particular adjustment level. Such variety adds to the quality of this methodology because the researcher can expect to achieve a fuller coverage
of the content domain. However, one factor common to all of the participants was the fact that the students were required to be classified as international students, rather than permanent residents (landed immigrants), who were attending a Vancouver secondary school and paying full tuition to attend (approximately $10,000 per year). These students were also living in a home-stay situation with Canadian host-families who opened their home to international students in exchange for room and board, or with relatives, who in many cases, the students had not met beforehand.

The international students are not immigrants, nor are they refugees, but rather, students who are born and raised in another country who come to Canada with the intention of attending elementary and/or secondary school which often leads to attendance at one of the colleges or universities for an additional four or five years. After receiving their formal education, their intention is usually to return to their home country. Most students in this study reported that they planned on graduating in Vancouver, attending a college or university in Canada, and then returning to their home country to find work.

The demographics of the international student participants were wide ranging enough to ensure variability in the results (see Table 1 below). The international students for this study were required to be at least fifteen years of age and no older than nineteen, although most ranged from sixteen to eighteen years of age. The grade levels were well-represented with the all of the students attending Grade 10, 11, or 12 except one who was in Grade 9. They also had to be in Canada for a minimum of six months for the purpose of having spent enough time here to experience the adjustment process; the majority of the students were here between eight months and two years with a few being here three,
four, or five years. A roughly equal number of male and female participants were desired but in the end there was an uneven split with thirteen females and eight males.

For the critical incident methodology, it was also important that subjects were at least somewhat proficient in English to talk about their experiences with an English speaking researcher, and reflective enough to be able to consider and process the events that both helped and hindered their adjustment. The range of English ability level ranged from fair to excellent. The following table (Table 1) presents the demographics of the participants in no particular order. The “code” is simply the number assigned to an individual student for reasons of identification by the researcher only. The “Yrs. Here” column reflect the approximate number of years that the student has been in Canada studying altogether including attendance at an international school and/or a public school. The remainder of the columns are self-explanatory.

In summary, the following can be said about the demographics of the international student participants:

- gender: 13 females, 8 males
- ages: 1 fifteen, 8 sixteen, 6 seventeen, 6 eighteen
- grades: 1 nine, 7 ten, 9 eleven, 4 twelve
- nationalities: 14 Chinese, 5 Korean, 2 Japanese
- countries: 10 Hong Kong, 5 Korea, 3 Taiwan, 2 Japan, 1 Ecuador,
- languages: 11 Cantonese, 5 Korean, 3 Mandarin, 2 Japanese
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Interview

The critical incident methodology uses a semi-structured interview format which consists of the orientation and elicitation. The link between student and researcher was established through introductions made by a known and trusted teacher or counsellor. The orientation component allowed the researcher to explain and clarify the study to the subjects, communicate the aim of the interview, and to establish rapport with each student. The purpose of the study was to learn what helps and hinders international student adjustment at the secondary school level. By knowing this, school staff may have a more comprehensive picture of these factors, and may be able to better assist newly arriving international students who come to their schools. The signed parental consent form was shown to the student, and they were told that participation in the study was strictly voluntary and that they could end the interview at any time without consequence. Since the interviews were tape recorded for the purpose of extracting the incidents at a later time, the subjects were assured that the tapes would be kept confidential by using a coded number instead of their names and, at the end of the study, all the tapes would be completely erased.

Orientation

Before the elicitation portion of the interview began, the researcher oriented the participant to the aim of the interview:

*Think back to when you arrived in Canada to attend school in Vancouver. What was something that happened that you found to be especially helpful (or unhelpful) to your adjustment. Try and imagine it in your mind. Imagine what happened, when and where it occurred, who was involved, and any words, actions, and feelings that you remember.*
Tell me what happened in as much detail as possible to make this event important in facilitating (or hindering) to your adjustment in Canada.

At this point, the students were encouraged to ask questions and clarify information. Since many of the students struggled with English to some degree, the orientation portion of the interview was very important in ensuring that the student understood the process clearly and that they were given opportunities to ask questions right from the beginning. The researcher attempted to put the students at ease at the beginning of the interview by asking them general biographical questions such as their age, grade, and country of origin, and by acknowledging their feelings of nervousness and by encouraging and reassuring them. Students were also given important definitions for the purpose of this study, and special emphasis and clarification was given to the words facilitating and hindering.

Elicitation of Events

The second portion of the interview, the elicitation, had each student describe the helping and hindering events as clearly and completely as possible. Each interview took between 35 and 50 minutes with the average time being 45 minutes. The interviews were tape recorded with an audio recorder and took place in a quiet room either in the library or in a counsellor’s office within the school. After the orientation, I attempted to elicit the critical incident with the following statements:

- Please describe a particular event that significantly affected your adjustment.
- What happened before the event?
- What was the event?
• What was the outcome of this event?

• Is there anything else that you would like to add to that experience?

The three main parts of this process included (a) what led up to the incident, (b) what was the incident, and (c) what was the outcome. My role as a researcher was to listen carefully and employ active listening skills such as clarifying, summarizing, reflecting, questioning, and empathizing in an effort to ensure a complete and accurate portrayal of the critical incident. If the events were too vague, or there was no event in the description, or they were deviating from the focus of the interview, I would gently probe, question, and redirect the subject to be more specific or to return to the aim of the study. Throughout the interview, the participants asked for clarification when needed, and I asked questions to obtain further information to or to ensure they understood what was being asked. The process of eliciting discrete events from each of the subjects was continued until they could not remember anything else that significantly helped or hindered them. Usually, I began asking for helpful events which were then followed by hindering events, but often, the participants went back and forth between the two according to what became lucid from their memories.

Procedure

A pilot study was initially conducted with two international students at the University of British Columbia using the same methodology and procedures. The results of the pilot study were used to refine the interview procedures at both the orientation and elicitation portions, and to give me experience using the critical incident methodology with international, albeit university level, students.
Participants for the thesis research were recruited through a teacher or counsellor at each of the contact schools. Handouts with basic information and interview questions were given to each of the students, and consent forms were sent to the parents in the home country in their first language. Parents and students were invited to phone or email me for further information or clarification of the study. Consent forms were returned to the school or to the Department of Counselling Psychology through the use of fax machines. When the consent forms were returned, appointments with the students were arranged by the contact person at each of the schools. The interviews for two of the schools were conducted over a three month period from April until June 1997, and the interviews at the third school were completed in December 1997. Each interview, lasting approximately 45 minutes, was tape recorded on an audio cassette. When the interviews were completed, the events were extracted from the tapes, and then categories were developed from the set of incidents.

Analysis

Twenty-one interviews were tape recorded and assigned a code number. Incidents from the first interview were typed out verbatim, and descriptions that resembled a critical incident were extracted and written onto a 3” x 5” card. In particular, the critical incidents were written in a specific manner by outlining (a) the source of the incident, (b) the event, and (c) the outcome of why it was helpful or hindering. This initial set of events was scrutinized by the researcher and the research supervisor in order to ensure a set of incidents that would hold up under the scrutiny of validity and reliability checks. General statements were deleted, the English was sharpened to make the incidents coherent and grammatically correct, and incomplete or unclear incidents were discarded.
The incidents varied in terms of their clarity and description due to English language difficulties, problems remembering significant events, and the general mood or attitude of individual students.

After carefully examining and modifying the cards to clarify the event, I was able to clearly identify the proper format and description. From this point, the remainder of the interviews were scrutinized for events, these critical incidents were recorded onto cards, and then preliminary categories were formed. The cards were sorted according to similar groupings which would become preliminary categories. These would be re-sorted and scrutinized to ensure that each category was appropriate and contained only those incidents that were relevant. Categorization required a consistent focus on the event itself rather than on the source or the outcome.

Extraction of Incidents

Each of the interviews was recorded on an audio tape which was then transcribed and assigned a code number for confidential reasons. I read the words of the participant, carefully extracting whole or concrete events, rejecting abstract ideas or non-events. The three parts of each incident included (1) the source of the event, (2) the event itself, and (3) the outcome of the event. It was important to scrutinize the events carefully in order to clearly understand what led up to the event, what happened, and what was the result. After defining the concrete events of the first participant, Dr. Larry Cochran, the research supervisor, and I further scrutinized the incidents encouraging more precise wording and examples that were less vague. The incidents elicited from the twenty-one international student participants varied in length, clarity, and cohesiveness, often according to how
well they understood and spoke English. Some of the non-events that were thrown out as invalid due to lack of a specific incident were:

Sometimes I miss my parents and sometimes I want to go home. I’m an adolescent now and there are many problems here. We need help from our parents, and I recommend that our parents come here with us.

The vegetables and milk are so much fresher here than in Hong Kong. I’m getting fat here in Canada. When I try something new, I eat so much of it and then I just get fat. I think I’ll probably have to go on a diet again.

These two examples do not have a specific event that occurred, nor do they have a specific source or well-defined outcome, according to the criteria of a critical incident.

After guided supervision on extracting critical incidents from the initial transcript, the process became one of familiarity and confident assurance. From listening to the whole story, or the whole event, I then used a point form summary for the source, event, and outcome, using the participants’ actual words whenever possible. Additionally, the cards were coded with a number which corresponded to each of the participants and whether the incident was facilitating or hindering. These pieces of information for each incident were then written in an accurate and concise form on a 3” x 5” card. Since 356 incidents were extracted in total, there was a total number of 356 index cards.

Forming Categories

Once all the cards were completed, the researcher then had the task of categorizing the incidents by sorting them into piles. A consistent focus on the event was very important for creating categories, or paradigm cases, that would be both reliable and valid. The task entailed reading the events carefully and making a decision in regard to appropriate categorization. Paradigm cases of each category were specifically studied since these events represented cases that best exemplified the category. These model
cases had the greatest number of defining characteristics for each of the categories in question. Ambiguous or borderline events were held aside until the categories were further refined. At that time, most of the borderline cases easily fell into place, but four were discarded.

I continued sorting and progressively refining the categories, until finally, stabilization occurred. Dr. Cochran, involved in this process at various points, provided opportunities for a dialectic to occur with me which further assisted in refining the categories. This interaction allowed for a thorough and comprehensive categorization process. During the refinement process, some categories were renamed to allow for a crisper definition of the category. Ten percent of the total number of incidents, or 36 out of 356 cards, were held back during this process as a category reliability check and were not looked at again until the categories were stable.

During the sorting process, four of the 356 events were rejected for a number of reasons. Two events, after rechecking the original transcript and carefully reconsidering the content, were considered to be summary events rather than single events, the focus of a critical events study. Even though some events included in the study bordered on a summary event, the two that were eventually discarded could be classified as paradigm summary events:

Examples

I had a very difficult relationship with my mother. I moved to Canada to get away from my parents. The stress from dealing with my mom was gone and I gained a lot of freedom from being here. I felt relieved and very independent.
I met some smokers and started hanging around with them. I started smoking, doing bad things, and skipping out of school because of these people. I didn’t care about school at all. I started to feel worried about my life and depressed because they made me do things I didn’t really want to do.

In these examples, there are no clear cut single events, but rather a summary of the entire story they are relating.

Two other events were discarded during the process of categorizing the events because they were both vague and it was doubtful that either event impacted their adjustment to life in Canada. After carefully considering the merit of the two events in how they were presented to the researcher, we decided that they did not fit the criteria for the events included in the study.

Examples

I was sitting in Social Studies class when my teacher started talking about World War I and World War II. I didn’t understand anything about those wars and I really didn’t care to know either. I felt bored and thought that the topic was irrelevant to me.

I was still in Korea and I wasn’t even thinking about studying abroad at all. Then my parents told me that I was going to study in Vancouver. They kept it from me until only a few months ahead of time. I knew that this would mean a lot of changes in my life.
In all, four events were rejected from the original 356 events leaving 352 events to categorize.

Validation Procedures

Altogether four tests of reliability and validity were used on the data including independent rater agreement, comprehensiveness of categories, participation rate, and expert validation (McCormick, 1994; Flanagan, 1954). The purpose of the independent rater agreement is to ensure that different people can use the category system in a consistent way. For this study, one independent judge was asked to place a sample of cards into the seventeen categories to see with what degree of accuracy he could place them. For the system to be considered reliable, the independent judge must rate a minimum of 75% accuracy in placing the cards.

To determine the comprehensiveness of the categories, a portion of the events were removed before the categorization process began. Once the categories appeared to be stable and comprehensive, those incidents were placed into the existing categories. The categories are considered comprehensive if no new categories need to be formed.

The participation rate is calculated by determining how many individual participants reported events in a category. The more people tallied for any given category, the more confidence there is in ascertaining that a category is sound. Therefore, if only one person reports any events in a category, it is less likely to be valid than if fifteen out of the twenty-one participants report in one category.

The fourth validation procedure to ensure the validity of the categorization system is one which uses an expert in the field. If someone who is considered an expert in the field can substantiate the soundness of the categories, then the system is considered valid.
Their expert opinion is given for each of the categories with an explanation as to its usefulness and relevancy according to their professional experience.

These four tests of reliability and validity are discussed in greater detail after the categories are described in Chapter IV.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter outlines the seventeen categories developed from the 352 events which were elicited from the twenty-one participants. Each category is defined, the range of events within the category established, and numerous examples from each category are given to illuminate the stories. After the categories are explored, the reliability and validity procedures are discussed. Then, portraits of adjustment and maladjustment are examined along with two case studies. Finally, issues that came to light through the research, but were not necessarily revealed through discrete events, are explored.

Description of the Categories

The following seventeen categories were developed from examining the 352 events which attempted to answer the question, “What facilitates and hinders the adjustment of international secondary students?” Each category is described and includes both a range of events and examples of events. Fifteen of the seventeen categories are framed in the positive in order to more easily answer the research question at a glance. For instance, the question, “What facilitates international student adjustment?” can be answered by looking at any of these sample categories – Receiving Encouragement or Support, Making Friends, and Communicating Effectively. However, despite the positively framed title, each of these categories presents both the positive or facilitating events and the negative or hindering events. Both sides of this continuum of these fifteen categories are explored in this section. Two of the categories, Experiencing Local Annoyances and Experiencing Dilemmas which contained mostly hindering events,
answer the question, "What hinders the adjustment of international students?" The following categories are placed in no particular order.

Receiving Encouragement and Support (47 events)

This category highlights the events in which the international student received encouragement and emotional support from another person. Often, this support helps the student through the rough spots and makes them feel better about themselves and their situation. The type of encouragement and support is verbal and interpersonal and does not include tangible help or material support. The outcome of facilitating events overwhelmingly shows that the student felt supported, encouraged, cared for, connected, cheered up, safe, and comfortable. Examples range from students receiving special attention or a hug to words and actions indicating a belief in the individual to showing kindness and sensitivity to the student. The hindering events are those in which the student is on the receiving end of negative verbal and interpersonal behaviour. They include someone else putting them down, accusing them in some manner, giving disapproval, ignoring, talking behind their back, disbelieving, lecturing, and badgering. It is in this category where you find many examples of potential verbal and emotional abuse situations or neglect. The outcome of the hindering events indicate the emotional pain that the individual is experiencing – anger, hatred, resentment, embarrassment, depression, fear, homesickness, loneliness, and entrapment.

Facilitating Examples

On my first day of classes, I was very scared. I finally went up and asked my teacher some questions. She was very kind to me, answered all my
questions, and was very encouraging. I felt comfortable and safe after that and I thought that Canadian teachers were very nice.

One day I was feeling lonely at my home-stay. My relatives noticed my mood and comforted me. They talked to me about their own experiences in adjusting to Canadian life and they let me know that it takes time to adapt to life here. I felt so comforted and calm.

Hindering Examples

I came to class late one time but the teacher forgot to mark me as late instead of absent. The next time I had that teacher she started accusing me of skipping out of class last time. When I told her that I had only been late and that I was there for most of the class, she didn’t believe me. She continued to accuse me of skipping out. I was so angry with her because she didn’t trust me.

I had done something that my aunt didn’t like. My aunt refused to speak to me for four months because she was mad at me. She would get me to do things by saying it to another family member and if I asked her something, she completely ignored me. I felt so sad and lonely. I just wanted to go home to my parents.

Receiving Advice or Information (28 events)

In this category another person informs or advises the student on a variety of issues. Sometimes the information is solicited and sometimes it is not, but the student
often learns a new piece of information regardless of whether it is accepted or rejected.

This category does not include encouragement, verbal support or tangible help. The focus of the facilitating events lies in a significant other telling the student how to overcome a problem, how to improve their English, exactly what should be or should not be done, and what may happen in the future. Outcomes such as feeling confident, proud, relieved, motivated, and guided are common, and that the student liked the individual sharing the information even more after the incident. On the other hand, hindering events include being told they were not allowed to be in certain classes, could not change home-stay situations, hearing stories about other people’s misfortunes, and learning that they were going to fail if more work was not done. Anger, frustration, disappointment, as well as a dislike for the purveyor of information, are likely outcomes of this section.

Facilitating Examples

My English teacher told me to practice English by watching television, listening to the radio, and reading the newspaper. He really helped me understand how doing these things would benefit me and add to what I was already learning in class. I felt encouraged by this teacher’s advice and I started doing what he had told me to do. My English improved a lot.

I was wondering what school was like here in Vancouver so I asked my cousins. They told me that I didn’t have to stand up and answer questions in class like back home. They explained how students and teachers interacted and what it was like to be in class here. I felt relieved and less stressed knowing the expectations ahead of time.
Hindering Examples

I wanted to attend university in Canada. I asked my teacher if I could work part-time while I was going to university in order to finance it. He told me that I wasn’t allowed to work because I am an international student and not a permanent resident or Canadian citizen. I was very shocked and thought it was unfair. I felt uncertain about the future.

I had been lazy and not doing my homework. My teacher told me that the course was for credit and I’d have to do more work in order to pass. I was surprised and shocked and stressed. I suddenly felt that I had a lot of work to do.

Receiving Help (21 events)

This category examines incidents where the student was given tangible help that assisted the student in some way. Most of the incidents, facilitating in nature, from this category include the following range: a teacher explaining and helping the student learn something that he or she didn’t understand, a friend giving money to go shopping, university students tutoring international students after school, another student helping with vocabulary and lab work, being allowed to rewrite a test and ask questions during the test. Feelings of relief, happiness, acceptance, and confidence are common, and the international student often finds that they like the person who helped them. The few hindering incidents occur when the student would like to receive help, but there is no one to help them such as when an explanation in the student’s first language is required or when no one is there to help the student get through the practical aspects of nursing the
flu. This category does not include incidents focusing on the student receiving encouragement, emotional support, advice, or information although these are often secondary issues embedded in the context of the interaction.

Facilitating Examples

Before I met with my tutor, I expected that he would rush through the work the same way they do back home. When we got together, my tutor helped me to figure out my English homework and he explained it to me very carefully until I understood it. He helped me a lot and I became more successful in school. I was surprised at all the attention and how much he was able to help. I also felt very pleased with myself.

I was struggling with my work in Chemistry. A Caucasian Canadian girl came over and helped me do the lab by teaching me the vocabulary and working with me until I knew how to do it myself. I felt happy that she was so nice and helpful, and I learned how to do my Chemistry.

I had just arrived in Canada and didn’t really know my relatives very well. Then one day I had a very bad pain in my body. The family took me to the doctor right away and then they took me home again. They were asking me all kinds of questions and wanted to help me. I felt happy that they were taking care of me and lucky that I belonged to this family.
Hindering Example

I was struggling with learning English and I wanted a translation. I asked my teacher if another teacher or adult in the school could speak Mandarin. I wanted my test explained in my own language so I could understand exactly what I had done wrong. There was no one in the school who could help me with this. I felt very frustrated and thought that each school should have a translator to help the foreign students.

Appreciating Others (30 events)

In this category, the international student comes into contact with another individual whom the student appreciates or respects. Often, the student deals directly with the person, but sometimes the student observes someone else interacting in such a way with others that they appreciate their manner of dealing with other people. For instance, students appreciate others who paid special attention to them and their culture, teachers who were laid back and used humour in class, people going out of their way to help them out of a very difficult situation (the focus of the incident is not on the helping, but rather on the appreciation felt by the student), and teachers using different methods to ensure fairness and equality in class. Outcomes include expressions of appreciation, respect, and being impressed by the attitude and actions of the one appreciated either through direct contact with them or observation. A sense of belonging, acceptance, support, encouragement, and validation are results of the interaction.

Hindering events in this category cover those incidents in which the student is taken advantage of or harassed by another person to situations where the student is denied special treatment and attention, is unfairly punished by a teacher, or observes others who
are completely different and are experienced by the student in a negative way. Shock, anger, disbelief, fear, discomfort, and surprise (negatively experienced) are some of the feelings brought forward in these situations. Generally, the student does not appreciate or respect somebody else that he or she has had to deal with or observe.

Facilitating Examples

I was a community service student for a teacher at my school. He started asking me things about Japan and Japanese culture. He told me that he was very interested in my country and that he studied many things about it. I knew that the teacher was interested in knowing about me by the way he talked with me. I appreciated his interested and I felt good about my culture.

I was very homesick during the first year. My home-stay mother was very worried about me. She told me that I should think about staying home next year. She was very nice about it. I knew that she cared about me. I appreciated my home-stay mother’s concern. She made me want to adjust to living here.

Some students in my math class were asking the teacher really easy questions. The math teacher went over to each one of them and taught the students very patiently and showed them exactly how to do it until they understood. I was very impressed with the teacher’s patient and positive
attitude and I was surprised at his level of helpfulness. It made me feel free to ask this teacher any question that I wanted to ask.

Hindering Examples

I was at home with my home-stay dad and his friend. The two of them started asking me if I had a boyfriend. The friend asked me if I wanted to start a relationship with the home-stay dad. They were both laughing at me and harassing me. The way they were talking made me think that they might attack me. I felt afraid and trapped and I didn’t say anything to anybody. I hated them both and I wanted to move out.

I didn’t have a closet in my home-stay bedroom. My home-stay mother went out and bought an old wardrobe. Then she wanted me to pay for it since it was for my clothes. I paid them because I really didn’t know what else to do. I felt shocked that I had to pay for the furniture and I was angry because I didn’t ask her to buy it. I felt ripped off.

My friends and I went out with some western (Canadian) Chinese students one night. We were all talking together, but I discovered that the two groups were very different. We knew different idioms and childhood stories, and generally, just had different backgrounds. I felt uncomfortable with the Canadian Chinese kids and I didn’t want to get together with them again. I knew this was limiting my social connections, but I just didn’t like them or their backgrounds.
**Being Accepted** (28 events)

In this category, social interactions that are not primarily looking at friendships are examined. Instead, the focus is on either being accepted or rejected in a more general arena such as simply meeting people at church, receiving positive feedback from classmates, being teased or called names by people, or being ignored by other students. Some of the outcomes of the facilitating events include feeling accepted, comfortable, proud, safe, a sense of belonging, and confident. Behavioural outcomes such as starting to speak out more and becoming more socially outgoing also led to improved English skills, feelings of competency, and the ability to make more friends. On the other hand, hindering outcomes that led the students to withdraw socially and emotionally included feelings of rejection, anger, fear, depression, sadness, loneliness, and embarrassment.

**Facilitating Examples**

We had to get into groups for one of my classes. While we were talking about our project in the group, I volunteered an idea. One of the group members looked at me and told me that I had come up with a real good idea and everyone agreed. I felt so proud and accepted at that moment. It made me keep giving my ideas.

I didn’t know anyone in Vancouver except my relatives. My cousin asked me to attend church with her. I went to her church and met lots of new people. They were very accepting and friendly toward me. I liked the people a lot. I felt comfortable and safe and continued to go back there. I ended up making new friends and speaking more English.
Hindering Examples

Most of the students in my class knew each other and were already in groups when I arrived. I tried to talk to some Canadian students who were in my class, but they just said some bad things to me and others ignored me as if I wasn’t there. I felt sad and depressed and very lonely. I just wanted to go back home or at least to another school.

I was walking in the hallway at school. Some Caucasian Canadians were in the hall. They looked at me as I walked by and said, “another black hair again” in a real mean tone of voice. I just kept on walking even though I wanted to argue with them. I felt very sad for myself and very angry at these girls.

Making Friends (25 events)

This category maintains a strict focus on the making of new friends, initial interactions, getting to know each other better, and becoming good friends over time. One main difference between the Making Friends category and the Being Accepted category lies in the intention and motivation of the story. Even though incidents from both categories may examine first impressions or meeting new people, the emphasis of this category is one of potentiality in the mind of the international student to become friends with someone else or that an interaction with another goes exceedingly well and there is a mutual agreement, whether spoken or unspoken, that they will continue to see each other and become better acquainted. Typical scenarios include meeting people in a variety of venues and getting to know them better with general outcomes of feeling happy
and excited, and sometimes even relieved, to have found a friend who is similar. Many of the facilitating incidents led students to become good friends with the people they met, someone they could do things with, and talk to about anything and everything on their minds.

The down side of making friends is being ignored, rejected, ostracized, or put-down by people with whom the student would like to have as friends. It also includes the realization that some friends are more superficial and that it is not as easy to make friends as one might think. Most hindering incidents highlight the intention of the international student to meet new friends, but in one way or another, they are shunned; however in one event, the student and his group of friends reject a classmate who would like to become friends with them. Generally, feelings of rejection, sadness, loneliness, and disappointment prevail as outcomes in this category.

Facilitating Examples

I wanted to meet new friends from other cultures. One day I talked to a Chinese classmate at school and learned about her culture, language, and food. Since I am from a different culture, I learned many new things about Chinese people. We talked a long time about her and her life. I felt very happy and excited to have found a new friend who was similar to me in many ways.

At the international school, I had only hung around with Asian students. When I came to the public school, I met my first Caucasian Canadian friend. I felt so excited. I enjoyed being with my Canadian friend a lot.
Hindering Examples

I wanted to become friends with the popular group at school. I was invited by one of the girls to go to Starbucks for a coffee and to talk because that is what they usually did together. When I got there, most of the other girls just ignored me. I felt very upset and lonely. I also wondered if I would ever be popular.

I was hanging around with my Chinese friends at school. We were talking about money and what their parents can give them. I kept wondering if they had anything else to talk about. Then they started talking about Hong Kong singers and artists and I didn’t know what they were talking about. I felt unconnected to them and couldn’t relate to their shallowness. It made me miss my real friends at home.

Having Fun (29 Events)

In this category, having fun is the focus of the event, usually with friends or family. The incidents range from attending parties to sitting around talking to playing games and joking around to getting pictures taken at the mall or having a real good laugh. The focus is not on the activities themselves, but rather on the subjective feeling of having a great time, enjoying oneself, and having fun. Opposite to this, the hindering events deal with feeling miserable, homesick, regretful, depressed, stressed. Looking for something fun and not finding it, starting to cry suddenly, experiencing psychosomatic illnesses, missing family and friends, thinking of committing suicide, smiling on the outside and feeling miserable on the inside, staying up all night to try to forget problems
among others reflect the range of the hindering side of this category. It is in this category where homesickness is most severe and prevalent.

Facilitating Examples

I really enjoyed living with my Canadian home-stay family. One evening I was playing a board game with my home-stay brother. He was losing and I started teasing him. Then we both started making funny jokes with each other and we just laughed and had lots of fun. I felt very relaxed and at home.

On the last day of our ESL tutorial, we had a party where we talked and laughed and played cards. The students from our class really felt close to each other. We had lots of fun together. I felt accepted and happy.

Hindering Examples

Things were very difficult with living at my uncle's house. One time I got so depressed and felt so trapped that I thought about killing myself because of all the stress. I felt depressed and hopeless and lost. I was miserable.

I felt really homesick when I was here at the beginning. I kept thinking about my family and friends every day. I cried myself to sleep every night and wished that I was home instead of in Canada. I felt sad and lonely and wanted to go home.
I was very shy. I stayed home every day after school, at night, and on the weekends. I didn’t do anything or go out with anybody. I wasn’t having any fun at all. I felt lonely and bored.

**Participating in Activities (21 events)**

This category deals with the student’s active involvement, or lack thereof, in extracurricular activities at school or in the community. The events differ from those in the Having Fun category by the emphasis on the activity itself which is more often an ongoing, regularly scheduled activity in which they participate. For example, attending church regularly, doing volunteer work at school, playing basketball at the community centre, joining school teams, and joining a Dragon Boat team all fall within the range of this category. Contrary, hindering events occur when the student is forced into doing an activity in which they have no interest or desire, someone or something outside of themselves restricts or forbids them from participating, or they stop themselves from becoming more involved. Asking adults for permission to do something and being denied, having restricted access due to hours or type of entertainment, being told to come straight home and not join extracurricular activities, and not becoming involved in school activities because of too much school work all give the range of hindering events.

**Facilitating Examples**

My teacher introduced me to the basketball team. I joined the school team, went to practices, and played in the games. I really enjoyed playing this sport. I felt involved in school activities and met two new friends.
I wanted to help other people while I was here. I started doing volunteer work at the neighbourhood house on a regular basis. I felt like I was contributing and had a sense of belonging.

I was finally able to join the school band. We got to go on a field trip to Victoria for a few days and I played my trombone with the other students at Market Square. I felt proud of myself as well as excited and happy.

Hindering Examples

I wanted to study all the time so I could get high marks. I didn’t join any teams or clubs at school or take part in any extracurricular activities at all. I regretted not becoming involved in other activities because I was too focussed on school work.

I wanted to go out with my friends on the weekends. I asked my uncle every weekend if I could go out to play some sports with my friends, but he wouldn’t let me. I felt lonely, sad, and trapped.

I thought that I could go shopping anytime I wanted. I went to Metrotown on a Monday night at 8:00 p.m. but all the stores were closed and nothing was going on. I wandered around for a while, but then I just went home. I felt bored and disappointed that everything was closed. I thought that there weren’t enough things to do in Vancouver.
Learning English (20)

The process of acquiring English as an additional language is outlined in this categorical framework. It speaks to the students' initial experiences and realizations in regard to learning a new language. Various strategies utilized in learning English are also explored to some degree. The facilitating outcomes indicate that the English skills did improve or would improve in the future due to practice and further learning while the opposite was stated in the hindering outcomes. This category does not include the difficulties of communication in expressing oneself or understanding another. The range of facilitating events include being forced to speak English, working hard at learning, speaking to others, living with an English speaking home-stay family, attending English as a Second Language classes, watching TV programs, and practicing new words and concepts. Hindering events cover finding the work too easy, not being called on by the teacher in class, living with a non-English speaking home-stay family, not practicing enough, and discovering the difficulty of learning a new language.

Facilitating Examples

My home-stay family was a Canadian family. When I arrived at my home-stay, we spoke English because they were Canadian. They didn’t speak Japanese so I was forced to speak lots of English. I gained lots of practice in English and my English improved.

I started getting lots of homework from school. I stayed up until 4:00 in the morning to finish all my English and English as a Second Language homework because I had to look up so many words in the dictionary.
Even though I was exhausted and the work was difficult, it was a positive experience. My English improved and I felt a sense of accomplishment.

I wanted to learn more English. I was in class and I forced myself to speak English so I could improve my oral abilities. It was really hard at the beginning to make myself say things, but I didn’t want to only know formal English from books. My English started to improve and I felt good about myself.

**Hindering Events**

I wanted to speak English at home. I went to stay with my uncle’s family. When they started speaking to me in Korean, I asked them to speak in English so I could improve my English. They refused. I felt very disappointed and worried about being able to learn English and I thought I was wasting my time and money by staying with them. My English did not improve.

I attended my English as a Second Language Level 1 class. The work that we had to do was too easy for me and there was no homework. All of the kids in the class spoke Chinese together. I didn’t like how the teacher taught us because we had to work with ourselves. I wanted to work with English speaking students. My English did not improve. I felt disappointed and thought that the class was a waste of time.
I was hanging around with a group of people who spoke Mandarin with me all the time. One day I suddenly realized that I only speak 20% English in class because 80% of the time I speak Mandarin with the other people in the class. Then I realized that I spoke Mandarin 100% of the time outside of class. My English was not improving at all for an entire year and my pronunciation was all wrong.

**Communicating Effectively (18 events)**

This category discusses the communication process -- sending and receiving messages so that the student is understood and the student understands others. The focus is not on learning the new language, but rather on the ability or difficulty in communicating and expressing oneself in English. Incidents ranged from being able to understand people who talked slower to not being able to think of the words to use to not understanding idiomatic and slang expressions. Most of the incidents in this category are hindering in nature. The outcomes for the hindering events tend to be frustration, disappointment with self, embarrassment, feeling stupid, and confusion.

**Facilitating Example**

I couldn't understand much English in my regular classes. Then I went to my English as a Second Language class and my teacher used an easier vocabulary. She also talked slowly so I could understand her. I felt good in that class because I knew what was going on. I also knew that I would feel comfortable asking questions in class in the future. I like the teacher.
Hindering Examples

I was late for school one day because the bus didn’t come on time. When I got to school, I told the teacher what happened. The teacher thought I was talking about my birthday. We kept trying to talk to each other, but he couldn’t understand me. Finally I just gave up and sat down. I felt really embarrassed and scared.

My teacher said that I needed a partner in class. I didn’t know what the word “partner” meant so I just sat there. I didn’t know what to do and my classmates were looking at me and wondering why I was sitting there. I felt confused and embarrassed and thought, “I am so stupid.”

Speaking Own Language (13 events)

This category shows incidents where the student speaks his or her own language with other people who are also fluent in the language. In most cases, the first language is spoken because it is easier to express one’s thoughts and understand another. This category is an important one, but the smaller number of events may not indicate it as such. The reason for this lies in the fact that in a significant number of events that were eventually placed in other categories, the student mentioned as an aside, that he or she preferred speaking in their own language. These incidents had as their emphasis, something other than speaking their own language, such as making friends, but the friends happened to be from their same cultural group and they spoke in their first language together.
The facilitating events in this category include receiving a translation of a teacher's lesson, communicating problems and feelings to friends, talking and having fun with friends of the same nationality, and enjoying living in a home-stay where everyone speaks the first language. Facilitating outcomes include feelings of confidence, being understood, a sense of belonging and connectedness, and an ease in expressing oneself. Hindering events range from speaking in their language with almost everyone to people telling the student to stop speaking in their own tongue. Feelings of surprise and disappointment at having many people from the same culture here, and feelings of anger, shame, and embarrassment at being told to speak English are some typical outcomes.

Facilitating Events

I was speaking a lot of English at school and even at home in order to practice. Then one day, I went home and just started speaking Chinese with my relatives. It was so much easier and natural, and I was really scared that if I talked too much English, I would forget my Chinese and I wouldn't be able to talk it anymore when I went home. I continued talking Chinese at home from that day forward. I was able to maintain my first language.

I hung around with a group of Chinese friends. My friends and I were together and we just talked and talked. Since we were talking together in Cantonese, it was lots of fun and we were able to express ourselves properly. I felt a sense of belonging and connectedness because of speaking my own language with my friends.
Hindering Examples

I was talking to my friend in Chinese while we were walking down the hallway at school. A Canadian girl was walking beside us and she told us to “shut up and stop speaking Chinese.” She told us that we should speak English because we’re in Canada. I felt very angry and embarrassed. I didn’t say anything to her. I kept talking Chinese anyway.

I went to the supermarket to buy some food. A Chinese lady came up to me in the store and just started talking to me in Cantonese. She asked me what one of the English signs meant so I took some time and explained it to her. I thought that there are too many Chinese people here in Vancouver which made me angry because I can’t practice my English very much.

Performing Well Academically (15 events)

In this category, the incidents highlight academic performance, and in particular, receiving marks, participating in class, helping others with their work, passing and failing courses, tests, and assignments. The facilitating outcomes emphasize a confidence and pride in one’s own abilities and a desire to continue to do well, while the hindering outcomes lead the student to feel disappointed in themselves, pressured to do better, angry at self which turned into sadness or depression, and they often just wanted to give up.
Facilitating Examples

I studied very hard in my classes. When I got my first report card, I saw that I had got good marks in all my classes! I felt so proud of myself. I was more confident and happy.

I was unsure of my English abilities at school. I wrote an essay for my English class at school. When I got it back, I saw that I did very well. I was pleased with my mark and felt more confident in my ability. I knew that speaking English at home at helped me.

Hindering Examples

My English was very poor. I failed the first term in Social Studies which was about Canadian history. When I saw my mark, I knew that I had tried hard, but it was too hard for me. I felt disappointed in myself and I felt pressured to do better.

I handed in my first essay. When I got the essay back, there was red pen all over my paper. I got a bad mark. I felt upset and disappointed with myself. I also doubted my ability.

Experiencing Less Demand at School (6 events)

Although this category is small, the events are so clearly identified that a separate category was created. There was also various comments made about school being significantly easier here than in the home countries of the students, but they didn’t always frame the stories as events. Five of the six incidents in this particular category are
facilitating in nature and range from the realization that school here is easier with less homework to realizing that teachers don’t pressure you and there is not as much work to finding the homework so easy that they finished up in no time. Almost all students felt relieved and more relaxed. A behavioural outcome for many of the students was the ability to become more involved in other activities due to the extra time. They played sports, went out with friends, had more spare time, participated in other leisure activities, and just did whatever they wanted to do. The only hindering event was when the student found the work extremely easy and was worried that he was becoming too lazy about school which might result in him not learning anything.

Facilitating Example

I was expecting teachers here to pressure you to work hard like back home.

After going to classes for about a month, I suddenly realized that teachers here don’t pressure you at all, and there’s not as much work to do. I discovered that I had lots of free time to do whatever I wanted so I went out with friends more often. I felt more positive about being in Canada and I felt very relieved.

I had to work very hard at school in Hong Kong. I realized that I didn’t have to do much work here at school in order to get good marks. It was easier work and not as much homework. I felt relieved and found that I had lots more spare time. I started to become very lazy.
Hindering Example

I found school here to be so easy. I was working on my homework on night. It was so easy and I finished it really quickly. Then I just talked to my friends on the phone. I became very lazy about doing my school work. I thought that I wouldn’t learn anything in Canada. I was very worried about my future.

Experiencing Dilemmas (18 events)

This category deals with dilemmas where the student is either involved with or observes an interaction where the student feels torn and is torn in some way by what he or she is experiencing or witnessing. The students, in these situations, may or may not be trying to decide on a course of action, and in fact, many of the situations are internally focussed where they may be experiencing some confusion or cognitive dissonance about the dilemma. The two facilitating events have to do with the student being faced with a dilemma, but taking the initiative to make the best of it. For example, a student asks an English speaking classmate for an easier explanation instead of asking the teacher, and another student learns how to cook and take care of himself when his aunt goes out of town for a week. In both cases, the student was experiencing a potentially uncomfortable situation where any number of things could occur, but they took the initiative and acted on the dilemma rather than keeping it locked up inside of them.

There are mostly hindering incidents in this category, and they include the following range: wanting to leave the home-stay, but being afraid to upset parents; watching a counsellor joke around with and call in Caucasian students first, but knowing that the Chinese guys were there first; seeing an aunt make a mistake while driving, and
witnessing other drivers swearing at her and making rude gestures; working with a group of friends in class who then reject another student who is friendly and tries to work with them. In all of the hindering cases, there is often an opportunity for the student to take the initiative and address the issue in some manner, but they do not. In many cases, the dilemmas are caused by moral or value conflicts and the student is uncertain as to what is happening or how it could be approached.

Facilitating Example

My parents had done all the chores and practical stuff for me when I was living at home with them. Then my aunt went away for a week and I didn’t know what to do. I had to cook my own dinner so I got everything I needed and made myself something. It wasn’t very fancy and not as good as my mom cooks, but I felt proud. I felt independent and responsible for myself.

Hindering Examples

My aunt and I were driving down the street. My aunt made a mistake while she was driving. I looked around at the other drivers. I saw some of them swearing at my aunt and making rude gestures at her. I felt angry and shocked and scared. I thought that they were very unforgiving toward my aunt.

Our PE teacher took us bowling. A Chinese friend asked me if I wanted a pop. I said that I did so she bought one for me and one for her. An East Indian kid asked her for a pop too so I was going to give him mine. My
Chinese friend told me not to give it to the other kid because he was Indian and black. I felt surprised at my friend’s reaction and I felt sorry for the East Indian kid. I saw my friend differently after that and started to move away from her as a friend.

I didn’t like my home-stay family. I came home on the bus from school and saw the light on in the house. I just stood outside on the sidewalk for a long time. I didn’t want to go in. I felt very scared and wanted to live somewhere else.

Making Decisions (9 events)

Being satisfied with decisions one has made, making a decision, or having others make decisions for the student are all part of this category. Decisions range from deciding which type of school to attend to ignoring a parent’s advice and making one’s own decision. Generally, when the student had some control over the decision making process and gave the decision considerable thought, the outcome was facilitating in nature, whereas when other people were making the decisions or the student made a decision based on peer pressure, the outcomes were more negative. Positive outcomes such as feeling proud, responsible, happy, stronger, independent, and focussed emphasize the importance of students making good decisions.

Facilitating Examples

I really wanted to study English in Canada. I was the one who made the decision to come to Canada to study. I made this decision by myself without my parents’ influence. I had a plan for my future. Now that I am
here I know that I made the right decision. I feel independent and focussed because of my decision and I want to do my best.

I was taking too many ESL classes at my school. I looked into the different types of schools and then I decided to go to a semester system instead of a year-long system. This allowed me to take regular classes where I could relate to native English speakers instead of taking ESL transition courses. This decision allowed me to start earning credits toward graduation right away. I felt very happy with my decision.

**Hindering Example**

I met some friends who were a bad influence on me. On day I decided to skip out with my new friends and we just hung around at someone’s house. We didn’t even get into trouble when we went back to school. I thought that there weren’t enough rules in Canada. Then I kept skipping out more and more.

**Impressed With Environment (9 events)**

This category looks at how the environment, including the city, weather, buildings, or nature, affects the international student’s adjustment. Eight of the nine events are facilitating with items ranging from the beauty of Stanley Park, the mountains, and trees to the fresh, clean air and bright sunshine to the grandeur of the downtown public library building. The only negative events addresses the cold and rainy weather. The outcomes for the facilitating events include feeling proud and lucky to live in
Vancouver, seeming happier and healthier, being uplifted and wanting to stay here, and being impressed.

Facilitating Examples

I was staying with my relatives in Vancouver. When I first arrived on my first day here, they took me out for the day to see special locations like Stanley Park and Queen Elizabeth Park. I saw the ocean and forest and even the totem poles in the middle of the park. I thought that Vancouver was absolutely beautiful and I felt lucky to be living here.

I went for a walk in my neighbourhood. I noticed that the air was so fresh here and I kept taking deep breaths. The air felt so good on my face, so clean. Back home, the air is so dirty that it actually makes your face sticky and black. I felt great enjoyment from living here. I knew that I enjoyed a healthier and cleaner lifestyle than at home.

Hindering Example

I expected that the weather would be warm in Vancouver, but it was always so cold and rainy during the winter. One morning I looked out my window and saw how rainy and dark it was outside. I stayed in bed and didn’t want to go to school at all. I felt very sad and just wanted to go home.

Experiencing Local Annoyances (15 events)

This category which only contains hindering events focusses on the difficulties encountered due to local customs or cultural differences. Most of the items are tangible
in nature such as having bags stolen from a public place, experiencing poor service with the transit system, disliking Canadian food or gaining weight because of it, paying 14% taxes at the stores, and experiencing different hygiene practices. Typical outcomes include feeling homesick, disappointed, shocked, angry, bored, and unmotivated, and these events made many of the students want to go home or yearn for things from home.

**Hindering Examples**

I had to take public transit to get around the city. I took the bus from Vancouver to Richmond to visit some friends. It took me one and a half hours each way. I kept wondering why it was taking so long and why Vancouver’s public transit system was so bad. I felt angry about the wasted time and I never took the bus to Richmond again. I wanted a transit system like we had back home.

In Japan, we soap up and shower first, and then take a long, hot bath. The first time I took a shower here, I didn’t feel very clean because it was so different than home. I still wanted to soak in water after the shower. I felt homesick and disappointed.

I thought that I’d like to eat Canadian food. My home-stay mother cooked a typical Canadian meal. I started eating the pork chops with gravy, but everything was so oily and it tasted awful. There weren’t any vegetables or salad so I asked them to make me a salad. I missed Korean food so much and I thought that Canadian food was oily and awful.
Validation Procedures

Four validation procedures were used to determine the reliability and validity of the seventeen categories in order to determine whether or not they were sound and comprehensive. These tests include independent rater agreement, comprehensiveness of categories, participation rate, and expert validation.

Independent Rater Agreement

The purpose of this exercise is to check for the reliability of the categories. If an external judge can place a sample of events in the appropriate categories with a minimum 75% agreement level (Flanagan, 1954), then the category system can be said to be reliable. In this study, 352 events were placed in 17 distinct categories. In order to select a roughly proportionate sample of approximately 50 cards or 15% of the cases, calculations were made by taking 15% of the number of events in each category. For instance, in the Being Accepted category there are 28 incidents altogether. By calculating 15% of 28, four cards were chosen from this category to become part of the reliability sample. Each category had cards pulled according to the required percentage to ensure an approximately proportionate sample. In the end, 53 cards were selected.

To choose the events, I randomly chose the appropriate number of cards from each category, half from facilitating events and half from hindering events, and placed them in no particular order. Once the cards were thoroughly mixed in order to ensure events from the same category did not appear in a group, an independent rater was asked to place the cards in the appropriate categories according to their individual descriptions and defining features. The judge was a vice-principal from a Richmond secondary school with a Master’s degree in administration. After I briefed the judge on the categories and
he felt confident that he understood what was required, he placed the random sample of 53 cards into the 17 categories. This procedure took about 50 minutes to complete.

The results of this reliability test show that there was a 90.5% agreement between the performance of the researcher and the judge. In all, 48 cards out of 53 had been placed in the same categories by the judge with five cards being misplaced. If he had placed 53 out of 53 cards correctly, then there would have been 100% agreement. We examined the cards that had been placed in other categories and it appeared that the rater had been unclear as to the exact meaning of one of the categories (two were misplaced). He thought that the other three incidents were less clearly stated than other events in that he believed they should have gone into one of the other already formed categories. In none of the cases did the independent judge feel another category should have been created. After reviewing the results of this test of reliability, I felt that the categories were stable and complete.

Comprehensiveness of Categories

According to Andersson and Nilsson (1964), it is important to check for the completeness of the category scheme by withholding approximately 10% of the event cards until the categories have been determined and stabilized. The idea of this test is to check on whether or not these cards can be placed in the existing categories with ease. Earlier in the research when all the events had been typed up onto cards, I randomly selected approximately 10% of 356 cards for a total of 36 cards to be removed from the categorization process. These were not looked at again until it was time to check if they would fit into the existing categories without being forced.
After stabilization of the categories occurred, I took the reliability cards and placed them into the existing categories easily. Most categories had one or more cards and a few had no new cards, but a new category was not needed. Since the cards fit easily within the existing category scheme, the system can be considered comprehensive and complete. If they had not fit, new categories would have had to be formed and the categorization process repeated.

**Participation Rate**

This test of validity checks for interpersonal agreement among participants. If one participant reports a specific category as being significant to his or her adjustment, then it is easier to dismiss or doubt the importance or validity of such a category. However, if seven or ten or thirteen participants all report that a category affected them in a similar manner, then the category whether facilitating or hindering to adjustment takes on significant importance which may have implications for students and others working with the students.

The following Table 2 outlines the participation rate in each category, that is, the number of times or frequency that a student reported a certain type of event in a given category as well as the percentage or participation rate. For example, the number of participants that reported an event that fell into the Being Accepted category was 17. Turning 17 into a percentage based on the number of participants which is 21 results in a participation rate of 81%. In other words, 81% of the 21 participants had at least one event fall into the Being Accepted category.

Participation rates were highest in Receiving Encouragement or Support (86%), Being Accepted (81%), and Making Friends (81%) and lowest in
Experiencing Less Demand at School (29%), Making Decisions (29%), and Impressed with the Environment (38%). The validity as shown in the participation rates further confirm the soundness of the category scheme.

Table 2: Participation Rate for Each Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Participation Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Receiving Encouragement or Support</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving Advice or Information</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving Help</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciating Others</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Accepted</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Friends</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having Fun</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in Activities</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning English</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating Effectively</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking Own Language</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing Well Academically</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing Less Demand at School</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing Dilemmas</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Decisions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impressed with Environment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing Local Annoyances</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n= 21 participants
Expert Validation

This procedure allows for an expert in the field to carefully examine the categories to see how useful and relevant the categories appear to be in light of their experience and expertise (Flanagan, 1954). For this study, I had an English as a Second Language specialist with over ten years experience working with permanent resident and international student adolescents in a Vancouver District secondary school. Her Master’s degree in the English as a Second Language field looked at female E.S.L. high school students’ participation in physical education (Schwab, 1996). I felt that her work experience and academic expertise gave her the necessary qualifications to check my categories for their soundness. I instructed her to determine the usefulness of each of the categories and comment on her findings.

She examined each of the seventeen categories carefully to assess and evaluate how closely they matched with her professional and academic experience. The expert found a high correlation between this research and her practice and made comments that the categories were obvious ones that one could not argue. In further discussion about the nature of the categories and looking at specific examples in each, the expert in the field continued to validate the process when she read the incidents. Many issues were valid and topical and she had further knowledge and insight in regard to the wider scope of these issues. Among many things, she talked about her concerns of possible abuse in the home-stay situations and the fact that some international students are not in home-stay situations at all, but are living alone where they are receiving no emotional
support or guidance by any adults or family. Apparently, after their initial placement in a home-stay situation, some students move out with the permission of their parents into a home by themselves, but the school is told that they are living with another relative. Listening to her commentary on both the categories and specific events within each category and seeing the bigger picture about international student adjustment allowed me to determine the validity and soundness of the categorization scheme.

Portraits of Adjustment and Maladjustment

Ideally, an international student who experiences more facilitating events than hindering, would most likely have a greater opportunity for successfully adjusting to life in Canada. Looking at an example of a best and worst case scenario based on the research of this study, helps to create a portrait of adjustment and, likewise, maladjustment.

A Portrait of Adjustment

For a person to adjust successfully, he or she would require many positive experiences to happen, especially during the first year. One of the most important aspects of life needs to include nurturing in the form of encouragement, emotional support, and having people in their lives that they respect and appreciate. Despite the fact that these students are here to study, they are first and foremost teenagers who require at least the same level of support as parents would want to provide, if not more. Adolescents are in a stage of learning about life and about themselves and many of the struggles that they face will be for the first time. Because of this, giving a student tangible help as well as providing advice and information as necessary, can assist him or her in dealing with life’s
difficulties. Students who are accepted by others including peers, home-stay family members, school personnel, and others in the community have an increased chance of feeling better about themselves and their situation in life. Making friends and having fun with them and joining extracurricular activities is a natural part of growing up that allows one to connect and feel a sense of belonging. A high school student’s ability to successfully negotiate the variety of relationships in his or her life will greatly determine the outcome of their experience in Canada.

In addition to relationships, students who come to this country with a solid base of English and then take every opportunity to practice and learn more English while also allowing themselves some opportunity to speak their own language in order to facilitate a sense of being able to fully and competently express one’s thoughts and feelings. Of course, the higher the level of English, the better the marks will likely be at school which is another factor facilitating the adjustment process. Students who take control of their lives by making their own decisions based on information and consideration seem to fair better than those who are less certain. Finally, negotiating the local customs and culture, enjoying the city and the beauty of our natural surroundings in addition to the other positive factors already discussed, affords the best opportunity for students to successfully adjust to life in Canada.

A Portrait of Maladjustment

On the other hand, a portrait of maladjustment illuminates a host of hindering events that could affect the student’s sense of well-being. An isolated individual who experiences difficulty making friends and is generally not accepted by others is susceptible to feeling alienated and alone. If, in addition to being rejected, the adolescent
is criticized, yelled at, neglected, taken advantage of, or ignored, the overwhelming sense of dejection and sadness is multiplied and a state of depression, psychosomatic illness, or chronic homesickness is likely to be the outcome. The student, already feeling isolated, either chooses not to participate in activities in order to avoid further rejection and humiliation or is denied permission to participate which only serves to further alienate the child.

School may be already difficult, even in their own country, and then if English is also limited, failure is a virtual guarantee in many or most classes. Without extra support, help, and guidance from home and school, the academics are likely to go by the wayside, perhaps to be replaced by deviant behaviour such as gang affiliation, drug and alcohol abuse, or truancy. Struggling with dilemmas and not making their own decisions based on solid reasoning or intuition only leads to a further sense that one is a failure. Finally, when the student cannot become accustomed to the local customs including food, transportation, the rainy weather, and other cultural differences, he or she may feel overwhelmed and frustrated with himself or herself and life in general. These negative experiences highlight a portrait of maladjustment in an adolescent who is studying and living in Canada.

Case Studies of Adjustment

The following scenarios are a compilation of real life experiences and events from the international student participants in this study. The identifying features of the stories are changed to protect the student's privacy, but the events themselves come from their own personal stories. The purpose of outlining these two cases studies, one outlining adjustment and the other maladjustment, is to provide details of what some students
actually experience rather than just giving generalities. It also pays tribute to the individuals who shared their stories in order that others may learn from their experiences. Finally, the case studies concretize the findings of this research, giving it both a form and function that is quickly and easily identifiable.

Case Study of Adjustment

Suzy, a fifteen year old international student from Japan, decided to come to Canada to study English and learn about Canadian culture one year before she actually arrived. Her parents supported her decision to study here and when she arrived, they phoned her every week and encouraged her to be strong and happy whenever she started to feel homesick. Suzy was placed in an English speaking Canadian home-stay family situation where there was another female adolescent her age who showed her around the neighbourhood and school as well as introduced her to some people at school. The home-stay parents were very kind and gentle people who were interested in Japan and Japanese culture. They spent many evenings at the dinner table learning about Suzy and her family and she found out more about them and life in Canada. The family tried to go out together once a week for such things as a hike in the mountains, cycling around the seawall, or a movie at the IMAX theatre, and they encouraged her to join extracurricular activities at school. She discovered how much she loved the outdoors and took kayaking lesson in the early fall and skiing lessons in the winter. Suzy realized that her English ability and knowledge of Canadian life was increasing day by day.

At school, Suzy liked all her classes and most of her teachers. Within a few weeks, she was hanging around with a nice group of girls from her English as a Second Language class, and she was accepted by most of the students in her regular classes.
Already, she had shared her experiences about Japan with her Social Studies class and showed them pictures of her life back home. The workload and expectations were much easier here than in Japan which pleasantly surprised her, but this allowed her to learn and catch-up quite quickly. By the end of the first semester, she was achieving good marks in all her subjects and receiving lots of encouragement from her teachers and classmates. At the urging of her English teacher, a woman who Suzy respected and appreciated the most, she became involved in the band and was allowed to go on a field trip to Victoria for the weekend.

Sometimes when she was feeling homesick, she would call her Japanese friend, another international student who she met in class. They would get together and talk and talk in Japanese until she felt better or they worked through the problem together. She felt so relieved to be able to express herself so fully and to have the cultural nuances understood by her Japanese friend. When Suzy began to feel uncertain about a decision that she needed to make, she went to see her English teacher after school or her home-stay mom, and they would help her to make her own decision. Often they gave her information that she needed to make a better decision.

Overall, she was adjusting to all the differences here, like the food, but every once in a while her home-stay mom bought all the ingredients to make a real Japanese meal. The only thing she never completely got used to was the shower. It just wasn’t the same as back home! Although Suzy encountered difficulties and struggled with a variety of issues, she always felt well supported by many people who cared about her well-being and who could help her through anything. Her own personal qualities, like her flexibility,
an easy going temperament, a warm personality, and a sense of confidence assisted her to negotiate the adjustment process more successfully.

Case Study of Maladjustment

John, a seventeen year old from Hong Kong, came to Canada as a result of his dad sending him here to learn English so he could find a better job upon his graduation. Unfortunately, John did not want to leave his friends and he was close to finishing school at home. Besides, he only knew a few words of English. When he arrived in Canada, he was placed in a relative’s home, but John did not know these people and he did not like them when he met them. His uncle made him baby-sit his own children after school and forbade him to take part in any activities at school. John made a couple of friends who were also from Hong Kong, but these guys were always getting into trouble at school. He could only go out with them one night on the weekend. Otherwise, the remainder of his time was spent studying which he hated to do because it was so difficult.

The school placed him in ESL level 1 classes, the most basic English classes available, and although John was seventeen years old, he was put into Grade 10 courses. The counsellor told him that he would have to pass Grade 10 English or finish four levels of ESL in order to be promoted into regular classes, and with his low English abilities, he wasn’t likely to graduate from the public school system. He was very angry with this information which made him dislike school even more. In the few regular classes he was taking, he was glad that he was auditing them which meant he didn’t receive a mark because he would have been failing all of them too. He got back an essay that he had to write and it was full of red ink showing him all of his mistakes, and then the next day, he saw that he had failed his science test. He felt very depressed and stupid. Even after a
year of living and studying here, John’s English remained constant since he spoke Cantonese 90% of the time and only practiced English in his ESL classes because he was forced to do so by the teacher. Otherwise, he just copied his friend’s homework or didn’t do it at all.

Throughout his first year, he missed his parents and friends back home very much. Feeling sad and anxious much of the time, he wanted to return home, but couldn’t decide whether to ask his parents or not. One day, his aunt became very angry at him because he went to a basketball game after school and didn’t get home until 6:00. For the next three months, she completely ignored him and acted as if he were dead. The rest of the family taunted him about his poor grades and his uncle grounded him so he couldn’t see his friends outside of school at all. When John asked his teacher if he could change his home-stay because things were not good, he wasn’t learning any English, and he had to take the bus for an hour each way, he was told that he wasn’t allowed to move once he had been assigned to a family. At this point, he felt so trapped and depressed that he seriously considered suicide. Into his second year, John started skipping out to be with his friends and they started to get into all kinds of trouble. Finally, the school asked him to leave, and his father shamefully brought him home.

### Issues

The next section deals with various issues that seemed to be important in that they were mentioned by many of the participants in a variety of ways but they were not necessarily identified as distinct events. These issues are brought forward here because of their importance in relation to the international student’s personal and emotional safety.
Depression

All students talked about homesickness to varying degrees. Many shared that they had felt very sad and homesick ranging from a minimum of three months up to eighteen months. Even when things were going well, the participants would suddenly feel a pang of homesickness that might last until the next day or for the next month. Many, including male participants, stated that they often cried themselves to sleep during their adjustment period. Overall, most seemed to struggle through with varying degrees of success. None of the students mentioned either in the form of a critical incident or as an aside that they had received information on how to deal with or identify stress and depression, nor did they admit to seeking counselling for their personal issues.

The aspect most disconcerting to me as a counsellor was the intensity of sadness and depression occurring among some of the students. Through the relating of their stories, it was evident that these students were probably moderately to severely depressed during their transition period. Many students wanted to give up and go home when they were feeling down, and a couple talked about seriously considering suicide as an option to ending their emotional pain. The stress and pressure that these students experienced were often overwhelming, and they did not feel equipped to handle the difficulties. They spoke of feeling trapped and they had felt that their situation was hopeless. In light of the fact that these students came from a collective society, it is probably not that surprising that many seemed to flounder when they did not have the built-in support system and guidelines associated with living in their home countries. Suddenly, they found themselves struggling with the values and goals of an individualistic culture where group support and interconnectedness is secondary to individual growth and power. In light of
the possible negative consequences, the issue of depression and suicidal ideation needs to be given extra attention and consideration by those people dealing with high school international students.

Abuse

The potential for abuse in the home-stay situations, whether relatives or not, is enormous. Some students described situations in which the child had been verbally or emotionally abused or neglected on a regular basis by their home-stay families. Examples include being regularly yelled at or humiliated, completely ignored for months on end as a form of punishment, told how stupid and lazy they were and then loaded up with more chores. Most of the individuals who shared stories of this nature had finally been allowed to change their home-stay after a couple of years. Although physical abuse was not discussed, the likelihood of this occurring in some home-stay family situations is probable in light of the fact that many families still believe that beating a child is an effective and appropriate method of disciplining.

Another serious breach of trust is in sexual abuse or harassment. One student spoke extensively of a previous home-stay father's sexual harassment. Examples included inappropriate hugging, kissing, and touching, and discussions where he attempted to coerce her into having sexual relations with him. Fortunately, nothing serious occurred and this particular student was very vocal about getting out of that situation, but she said that she did not disclose the true nature of the problem to the school officials when asking for the change. The potential for a student being trapped in this type of situation is frightening especially if they have been told that they cannot move and if they are afraid of getting into trouble with officials and being sent back home.
Finally, financial abuse is another area of concern with these students. A number of students talked about situations where home-stay families, usually unrelated, expected payment for things that should have been provided by the family without charge. For example, one student paid her home-stay mother $200.00 for a wardrobe for her clothes because there was no closet in the room. The woman bought the wardrobe and then asked for payment. Another student paid her home-stay father money after he coerced her to do so for setting up her computer. A third student complained of having to pay close to $200.00 for the installation of a phone in her room which included the home-stay family’s phone bill.

The picture that began to emerge as I heard stories directly or indirectly relating to the various forms of abuse was one of deep concern for the health and safety of these children. These issues must be addressed with the high school students who come to Canada to study because they are a vulnerable group for psychological difficulties and abusive relationships.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Summary of Results

This research examined the adjustment process of international students attending high school in the Vancouver School District. Twenty-one students were interviewed using the critical incident methodology to determine what facilitated and hindered their adjustment to living and studying in Canada. From the twenty-one participants, 352 identified events were elicited and then sorted into seventeen distinct categories which include Receiving Encouragement and Support, Receiving Advice or Information, Receiving Help, Appreciating Others, Being Accepted, Making Friends, Having Fun, Participating in Activities, Learning English, Communicating Effectively, Speaking Own Language, Performing Well Academically, Experiencing Less Demand at School, Experiencing Dilemmas, Making Decisions, Impressed with Environment, and Experiencing Local Annoyances. Through a number of different reliability and validity checks, the categories appear to be relatively sound and comprehensive. The results of this research indicate very specifically what types of events facilitate or hinder an international student's adjustment.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limits of this research is that it cannot be generalized to all high school international students at this time. More research would be needed to make comparisons and to be able to state with confidence that the research extended to a wider population of students. However, the research could be extended to other international students attending secondary school within the Vancouver School District with a degree of
confidence. The research could also not be generalized to the permanent resident student population despite the fact that many of these students find themselves in very similar situations.

Another aspect that limits this study is my role as a English speaking Caucasian teacher/counsellor within a school system. The fact that I could not converse with the international students in their own language or understand subtle nuances of culture may have affected the quality of responses given. Unfortunately, not all of the students were as articulate and reflective as I had expected and some struggled with relaying their experience in English. Additionally, not being able to talk with the students in their first language especially during their first year in Canada is limiting because those who are really struggling with the adjustment process have probably not learned enough English to be included in this study. Therefore, students who have successfully made it through the adjustment process are more likely to be included in this study. Others who were not as successful may have gone home after the first year.

Another limitation is that the study does not differentiate between the length of time in Canada or the ages of the participants. Generally, it can be said that the longer the student has been in Canada, the better he or she has adjusted and that the younger the student, the easier and quicker the adjustment process. Finally, socioeconomic status was not taken into account which may affect the research because, most likely, the students come from wealthy families who can afford $10,000 a year tuition plus home-stay and other expenses.

Students may have also been wary of me as a stranger since the interview was the first and only time that I met them. Since I am an adult which they may see as someone
in a potentially authoritarian role, there is a power imbalance which could bias the way they answer the questions or the stories they choose to share. My gender and ethnicity may have also made me more suspect in the eyes of some of the students. However, warm introductions by the host school representative, a warm-up period of getting to know each student, and my own friendly and accepting attitude toward each individual helped to mitigate some of the initial fear or mistrust.

Finally, this particular methodology utilizes self-reporting rather than direct observation. Therefore, the events that are elicited are limited to what the individuals remember during the interview. These memories were sometimes sketchy and lacked the detail and substance that would have added richer meaning to the events. Additionally, the incidents were portrayed by each student in the way that they perceived their experiences which may have been quite different than how others observing the event would have described it. However, the nature and draw of the critical incident methodology is the fact that it attempts to get at the experiences of individuals that helped or did not help them from their own perspective.

Although there are limitations to this study, one of the main purposes in using a methodology such as this one is to generate an initial set of categories as an exploratory study. This research was able to get at the general picture of the major factors that facilitated and hindered high school international students.

Implications for Theory and Research

This study has added researched information focusing on adolescent, rather than university, international students, and is a cross-cultural developmental critique. There is a marked difference in the emphasis in many of the facilitating and hindering aspects for
students in high school when compared to the adult university population which makes intuitive sense. The major focus for high school students is on relationship, connectedness, belonging, friendship, and on receiving lots of support, help, advice, and encouragement. In reviewing adolescent development and having direct experience teaching and counselling adolescents, these issues are typical for the developmental phase despite the cultural background. The literature concerning the adult population highlights and emphasizes more concerns in relation to academic work and learning English which also makes intuitive sense considering that these adult students are attending colleges and universities for the betterment of their career opportunities. An example of overlap between the literature on adult international students and the findings of this study is in the debilitating effects of homesickness on all areas of adjustment for both the adolescent and adult student.

In addition to extending the research, this study also confirms much of the current research. If one also examines the results of this study with the literature, there is a high correlation between the two in the general domains of language, academic, social, and personal issues. Most of the information gleaned in this study can be supported by the literature. One of the major issues concerning the adult international student population that did not appear in this research is financial concerns. Many adult students are self-supporting or rely on scholarships and money becomes an issue for them. However, the secondary school population of international students is fully supported by their parents and money does not appear to be an area of concern. Another area of difference lies in areas of potential abuse. The literature did not reveal abuse or potential abuse as a concern, but this study brought forth the topic of abuse and neglect as a real concern.
Implications for Practice

The lack of knowledge about dealing with international high school students as a teacher or counsellor can lead to problems and further hindering rather than facilitating events for these students. This study can, therefore, assist the school personnel in handling various situations and having research based on an adolescent population to back-up their practice. The results of this research could have a significant impact on how international students are prepared and supported by educators and school boards during the time they are living and studying in Canada. In particular, counsellors with the awareness and knowledge of the results stemming from this study and other related research, can be more effective in assisting and being more proactive.

At least one school counsellor within any school that serves international students could receive in-service training on the types of experiences that either help or hinder these students and the types of programs that they may offer to them. Even though a one day orientation program is provided at the school district level for the students, a comprehensive package of on-going support by the individual schools could be implemented. For example, a type of buddy program where international students are paired up with English speaking Canadian students within the school as a lunch time gathering where games, music, stories, and other fun activities could be shared in a relaxed and supportive environment could be implemented. The buddies would be encouraged to get to know each other and learn from each other. This program could be run as a club by an interested teacher or counsellor on staff. The primary objectives would be to increase the opportunities for students to make contacts and engage with English speaking students, to have fun while participating in a variety of activities, and to
have a safe and friendly place to share experiences, talk, and receive support and encouragement.

Another possibility for in-school support would be a support group for the international students which would be run on an on-going basis where students could come and discuss their shared experiences in adjusting to school, friends, and their home-stay. It would be important for a trained counsellor, who would run this group, to have a solid understanding of where these students were coming from based on the research of students who have already experienced the transition. The group may be conducted as part of the Career and Personal Planning hours required for all secondary students. In this way, they are receiving on-going emotional support, a forum to express themselves with others going through the same process, and the potential for developing a mentor type of relationship with the counsellor. The group could address different topics associated with this research in order to touch on areas that students may be less willing to discuss such as abuse or depression. This group counselling situation would also be the gateway for students to go see the counsellor to address specific individual concerns. The idea of going to see a counsellor may be demystified and the stigma lessened.

Since students did not mention going to see a counsellor for any personal problems, although they talked to them regarding academic issues, the counsellor, if they are not the primary contact person for the international students, may decide to call each of the international students into his or her office, make introductions, and explain the role of the counsellor. Referring to the research based on other international students’ experiences and knowing what kinds of things facilitated and hindered their adjustment can lend validity to the counsellor’s words. Since the students in this research seemed to
have different levels of support systems, it would seem prudent for the counsellor to individually talk to each student on a regular basis to assess for problems, to encourage involvement and participation, and to answer any questions that may be just underneath the surface.

Another idea that comes out of this research is a mentoring program where each international student is linked up with a teacher in the school who becomes their mentor. A twist to this is an older student, perhaps even an international student who has been living here for a number of years, could become a student mentor to the newly arrived international student. The purpose again is to hook up each person with as many resources as possible in order to create a strong and varied support network. Similarly, peer counselling and peer tutoring would be worthwhile endeavors to have set-up for all students, but especially for the international students. As discovered in this research, many students required extra help with their homework or English skills outside the regular classroom situation. Having peer tutors or peer counsellors available on a daily basis for an hour after school and then encouraging students to take advantage of the services provided may help in their adjustment to academic work in a second or third language.

From some of the incidents reported in this study, it may be worthwhile to ensure one adult in the school who can provide translation services when a need arises. This would be useful during initial orientations or when important decisions needed to be made. It might be helpful for the student not only for the ease of expressing oneself in his or her own language, but also for the understanding of subtle cultural norms and ways of thinking that people from the same background and ethnicity may quickly recognize.
The school personnel who set-up the home-stay situations must be sensitive to the fact that potential abuse situations may arise. It appears from talking with the participants of this study that home-stay situations should be monitored more closely or have regularly scheduled visits. Negotiating problems could be done by a school mediator or counsellor trained in mediation if a family and student are really struggling with an issue. The student needs to feel free to explain uncomfortable situations surrounding the home-stay situation to school personnel without feeling that it may somehow jeopardize their standing in school or ability to remain in Vancouver. All students should receive basic information on the potential abuses, what is and is not acceptable, possible resources and contact agencies, and who they should talk to if they are uncertain about a given situation or if something is going on that they feel is wrong. Other concerns of emotional and physical neglect, that is where a student’s basic needs are not being met because there are no adult caretakers, are brought forward concerning students who are living by themselves for many years starting at thirteen or fourteen years of age. Something should be done about this in Canadian law, but there is currently no consequence to the family for this neglect.

Another issue for daily practice concerns the timetabling and courses available for these international students. It seems that many students are told that there is not enough room in the appropriate level of E.S.L. that they require. They are then placed into classes that are much too difficult to facilitate their learning of English or given a mix of classes that regular students would never be given. If these students are to be accepted into a given school, then an appropriate timetable and mix of classes seems like a basic requirement for admission.
The information gleaned from the participants may prove useful for school boards in planning and evaluating their international student programs or for new school boards in the process of implementing such a program. The students' experiences as delineated in the seventeen categories could be a useful tool in ensuring a comprehensive and ongoing package of support. Some of what is already being done may be confirmed through this research and other aspects of these programs may be modified or dropped according to the research. Overall, the results of this study can assist school boards to be more effective and efficient in their delivery of services to international students studying in the secondary school system.

The research in this study gives guidelines as to what is truly important in facilitating the adjustment of international students as well as what kinds of things hinder this same process. There is a basis for implementing different programs and ways of dealing with students that reinforce many of the common sense answers to the question, "What facilitates student adjustment?" A teacher, counsellor, or administrator unfamiliar with issues faced by international students and who have a limited understanding of people from different cultural backgrounds could better assist these students with knowledge that is based in this research and delivered during professional development days. The concrete possibilities shared above are some ways of opening the doors of communication and acceptance in order to help increase awareness of all the people involved concerning the potential problems and abuses that these students may face. Additionally, the study creates a level of understanding that facilitates increased empathy and compassion in those who work with these students every day. Finally, this research gives each school an opportunity to reflect upon their own way of dealing with
international students and how the attitude of school personnel affect the practice of dealing with international students.

Implications for Further Research

This study provides an excellent basis for further research and study on international students who come to the lower mainland in order to study in our public schools. The most obvious suggestion for future research is to replicate the study or conduct studies on a particular age group or according to their length of time in Canada. Attitudinal differences could be identified to determine how this may affect student adjustment. For instance, a student who makes their own decision to come to Canada, enjoys learning English, and has a positive attitude may adjust better than a student who is forced to come here to study. Further, a lengthy questionnaire could be developed and widely distributed to international students studying in the various districts of the lower mainland or in the province of British Columbia. If the results confirmed the results in this research, then the categorization and outcome of the study could be generalized with confidence to all international students in B.C. A study that examined the differences and similarities between Asian and European or American international students would probably yield different results as suggested in the literature review. Furthermore, one cultural background, instead of five, could be studied more extensively to determine the validity of the categorization system for any particular group. Any study conducted during the first year of the student's stay in their first language would be a definite addition to the body of knowledge about international student adjustment.

A longitudinal study where a few students are tracked throughout the duration of their stay at a public school would no doubt yield rich results. The information could
lend further weight to the idea that international students at the secondary level have some very different concerns and emphasize different aspects of life than those attending university. Additionally, research which questioned all the stakeholders such as teachers, counsellors, administrators, home-stay parents and siblings, the international students themselves, and parents in the home country may provide other useful insights. Finally, a test could be created based on this research which would be administered to the students when they first arrived and then again during the school year to see how the student’s attitudes, perceptions, and experiences change. In a similar light, a simple pen and paper test could be developed that school personnel could administer to students at the beginning of their stay and then at various intervals during the first school year to assess potential problems or high risk situations.

Personal Reflection

As with any research methodology, there are always pros and cons that are inherent in its use. The positive aspects of the critical incident methodology outweighed any negative factors. I enjoyed the personal, relatively in-depth, one-to-one contact with each of the participants involved. They seemed to enjoy sharing their experiences, and I certainly appreciated the privilege of hearing their personal stories. I also enjoyed the conversational style in this methodology where I could listen to their words and tone of voice, ask questions to have them clarify or expand their stories, and observe their non-verbal behaviour. All of this created a more holistic picture of the person and their experiences. The downside to this methodology was the enormous amount of time required to sort out the incidents, write up the cards, and create the categorization system. However, the end result was worth all the hard work and effort.
The process of researching the topic of international student adjustment has been one of both professional and personal growth. Professionally, I have learned first hand from students who have experienced the struggle of adjusting to a new life in Canada. The stories that they shared from their lives provided me with valuable information that can be used by school personnel, home-stay families, and newly arriving students to assist these young people who come from abroad to study within the public school system. Knowing both the facilitating and hindering events and the categories into which they fit, allow those who are interested in international education at the high school level to implement programs and policies that are grounded in research.

While writing this thesis, I was also counselling full-time at a secondary school in the Richmond School District. Even though our district does not have international students at this time, there are numerous landed immigrant students who fit many aspects of the profile of an international student. They are dealing with issues of adjustment having just arrived in the country, they struggle with relationships and trying to find their place, and they become frustrated with studying and learning English as an additional language. I had the opportunity this year to counsel a number of these students who were finding life difficult and who were struggling with depression and failure in school. In assessing the problems, I noticed distinct similarities between what they were saying and what the international students in my study had shared. Taking this cue, I based the counselling in the context of my own research, and found that I was making links to these students who were permanent residents, but new to the country, that I had not previously been able to make.
With some, I simply counselled the student using the results of the study in mind as a guideline, and with others, I shared relevant pieces of the research with them in order to increase their awareness and understanding of the problems with which they were dealing in a larger context. In either case, students responded favourably, and where there had previously been some mistrust of what would happen if they came to talk to a counsellor, there appeared to be a deeper connection with the students and relief seemed to flood them when I understood their situation with a level of clarity and understanding that others seemed to have missed. Using the research as my base did not occur to me during the first few months of counselling these students. It was not until I heard one student explaining her situation in detail when suddenly I heard the echoes, and decided to slowly, but deliberately ground my counselling in the information gleaned from the international student participants. From my own professional viewpoint, the research aided me in providing better quality service to the students with whom I worked.

Personally, the insights I have learned from these students has been an invaluable lesson in resiliency and perseverance. These students, in many ways still children, showed me over and over again the strength of the individual mind and spirit in overcoming obstacles and difficulties. I was amazed at their skill in negotiating a culture and language so different than their own. Listening to the stories of their personal journey of adjustment, I wondered how I would have fared had I gone to Japan or Hong Kong as a fourteen year old to learn a new language, live with strangers, adjust to customs and a culture so vastly different than my own. Even thinking about my own struggle as an adult to learn German as a second language and going to Europe numerous times to live for a few months at a time with German speakers made me appreciate the
frustration of these students learning English and living in a different culture. What these
children, these young adults are doing is really quite amazing when you sit down and put
yourself in their shoes. I learned to appreciate the struggles of these students in a way
not previously realized.

Completing a pilot project, working with international students, researching the
adjustment process, interviewing twenty-one students, analyzing the data, working with
Dr. Larry Cochran, and writing this thesis has been an adventure and a journey. The
process has run the gamut from fun to frustrating and wonderful to wretched, and
admittedly, there were times when I didn’t think I would ever finish. However, now that
the end is here, I am able to reflect on the process and know that I have learned and
grown and succeeded in what I set out to do. Like the students in my study, I will be
negotiating the next transition period of my life as I finish this degree and move on to a
new journey of growth and discovery.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

LETTER DESCRIBING THE STUDY AND CONSENT FORM
Dear ____________________________,

Your child is being asked by a school counsellor or teacher to participate in a study as one of the requirements for my masters degree. This research is being conducted to determine what does and does not help International students adjust to life in Canada. The purpose of this study is to assist school counsellors and teacher understand how to help International students to do better in school.

Participation will involve a 30 - 60 minute interview which will occur at your child’s school. In the interview, the student will be asked to recall their experiences when they came to Canada to study. He or she will then be asked to identify the factors that either helped or did not help this adjustment process.

The interviews will be tape recorded, but will be erased upon completion of this study. Any information resulting from this research will be kept strictly confidential. All document, including tape recordings, will be identified only by code number, and kept in a locked filing cabinet. Participants will not be identified by name in any transcripts or reports of the completed study.

Your child’s involvement is entirely voluntary, and he or she may withdraw from the study at any time with no jeopardy of any kind.

If you would like your child to participate in this study, please complete the attached Parental Consent Form, and return it to your child’s teacher or counsellor. I will then contact the student to arrange a suitable interview time.

Yours sincerely,

Natalee Popadiuk
Researcher, M.A. Candidate
Parental Consent Form

Study: The Social, Emotional, and Academic Adjustment of International Students Attending Secondary School in the Vancouver School District

Investigator: Natalee Popadiuk 822-1265
Supervisor of Research: Dr. Larry Cochran 822-5259

Dear Parents:

A study is being carried out through the Counselling Psychology Department at the University of British Columbia and the Vancouver School Board. This research is being conducted as one of the requirements for Natalee Popadiuk for the masters degree in Counselling Psychology. The purpose of this study is to help school counsellors and teachers understand how to help International students to do better in school.

International students aged 15 to 18 years old will be asked to answer questions about their experiences in adjusting to life in Canada. Specifically, each student will be asked about what events helped and did not help them in their overall adjustment. This interview should take from 30 to 60 minutes of the student’s time. The total amount of time that will be required of each participant will not exceed one hour.

Your child’s participation in this study will not affect his or her grades in any way. The interviews will be tape recorded, transcribed and given a number code to ensure confidentiality. The tapes will be erased upon completion of the study.

If you would like your child to participate in this study, please fill in the bottom half of this form, and return it to the child’s teacher or counsellor. Should you have any questions about this research, please call the researcher, Natalee Popadiuk at 822-1265.

Your assistance in this study is much appreciated.
Please fill in this form & return to your child’s teacher or counsellor

I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the consent form.

I ___________________________ have read the above information and I understand the procedures to be used in this study. I also understand that my child’s participation in this study is voluntary, and can be terminated at any time upon my request.

I consent / I do not consent (circle one) to the participation of

_________________________________________ (name of child) in this study.

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