CULTURE, PARENTS, AND COURSE SELECTION: A CASE STUDY OF CHINESE ESL STUDENTS IN A BRITISH COLUMBIA SECONDARY SCHOOL

VICTOR MARCELO ESPINOZA

B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1996
B.Ed., The University of British Columbia, 1997

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ABSTRACT

The following is a case study of grade 12 English as a Second Language (ESL) students enrolled in a British Columbia secondary school during the 2001-2002 academic year. The principal objective of this research was to uncover the following: 1) if ESL students made course choices at grade 12 which differed from those of non-ESL student choice patterns at grade 12; 2) the role of familial preferences, cultural influences and prior learning styles which predispose student choice for post secondary concentrations. This research examined the academic transcripts of 238 (94 ESL, 144 non-ESL) students, analyzed the responses of 145 (65 ESL, 80 non-ESL) student questionnaires, and considered interviews with 26 ESL students and 12 school staff (4 counselors, 8 teachers). The findings suggest that a significant difference exists in the academic courses in which ESL grade 12 students enroll compared to non-ESL students. Cultural and familial influences were found to affect both the types of senior courses ESL students chose and their aims about future educational and career aspirations. The findings suggest that secondary schools examine critically their policies regarding broadening the exposure of ESL students to more expressive courses in Arts to extend equality of opportunity in determining their career choice directions.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

A paradox of sorts is at work within the school system when the case of Chinese (students from Hong Kong, mainland China and Taiwan) ESL students is considered. Although on average ESL students spend at least the first three years of high school within the English as a Second Language (ESL) program, (assuming they enter the school system in grade 8), many still tend to graduate with high marks and go onto university. In this study I seek to uncover the curricular choice patterns of ESL and non-ESL students at grade 12. Familial and cultural explanations will also be considered in revealing, in more depth, the logic behind these curricular choice patterns.

What follows below is the background and theoretical framework for this thesis. It is presented in the form of a case study, designed to examine how ESL placement affects student curricular choice at grade 12 within the context of a Secondary School in a Lower Mainland School District bordering the city of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. For the purposes of this study, this high school will be given the pseudonym “West Coast High” (WCH). All names presented in this research are also pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants. WCH is set in a city of 165,000 people. The surrounding city is a growing dynamic urban centre with a unique mix of residential, and commercial property, agricultural lands, industrial parks, and natural waterways. The school district itself is the single largest employer in the city, with a teaching staff approximating 1500 teachers and numerous other support staff. This district and city have
undergone enormous change over the last decade, with significant growth in the early 1990s leading to what is today a dynamic, multi-ethnic community. Much of the recent population growth has been from Asian immigrants, who now represent approximately one third of residents. WCH’s setting is ideal for studying the patterns of ESL and non-ESL student curricular choices because of the high percentage of ESL students at this school; approximately a third of twelve-hundred students are deemed ESL. The school was newly renovated into a unique state-of-the-art facility in 1999 and rests on the West side of the city. As a result of its geographic location, the school feeds from three elementary schools which are all located in the fairly affluent surrounding neighbourhood. Beginning September 2002, as a result of provincial changes, any student living in any part of the city may apply to enter WCH depending upon availability of space. Some students who do not live in the catchment area for the school do apply to get in. This is not surprising given that for the last two years WCH has boasted the highest provincial exam results among all the schools in the district.

As a researcher and teacher (having taught at WCH for four years), I have an interest in studying how cultural and parental factors influence ESL student course selection at WCH. I immigrated to Canada as a young child from Chile and found myself in a new land and new school without the ability to speak a single word of English. In essence, I can relate to and am sympathetic to the experiences many of my ESL students encounter. Similarly, I know that parents of ESL children, as mine were, tend to be over protective and very influential in the lives of their students – both socially and academically. It is perhaps in part to understand my experiences as an ESL student and
as a present educator of ESL children that I seek to uncover and explain curricular choice patterns and parental/cultural influences on this group of students.

The majority of the residents in the proximity of the school live in single detached homes. There is a new community which lies south of the school consisting of new town-homes. The surrounding neighbourhood is pleasant, very family oriented, and an ideal setting for families to raise children. WCH is also steps away from a community centre which hosts open air basketball courts, a lacrosse arena, and tennis courts. Students and people from the community can be seen taking advantage of these facilities before and after school. Unlike many inner-city schools, WCH does not have any of the problems associated with schools in lower-income neighbourhoods. Poverty is not visible here – although pockets do exist in the surrounding city. What may strike some visitors is the amount of wealth displayed by students and their parents. It is not uncommon, for example, to find the school parking lot full of new high-end vehicles driven by students. The school’s teaching staff consists of approximately 50 teachers. Although the majority of the teachers are Caucasian, there is a wide mix of ethnicities represented – Japanese, Chinese, East-Indian, Spanish, among others – this in sharp contrast to the student body with is basically divided between Chinese and Caucasian students.

I will next lay out the background and theoretical context for this study and examine how a guiding question was determined. However, before proceeding further an important note needs to be stated. I have made the arbitrary decision to use the term “Chinese” to refer to students from Hong Kong, mainland China, and Taiwan. I realize that there is much cultural diversity between the peoples of these three groups. However,
all of the students I interviewed as a part of this project stated that culturally they were “Chinese”. Hence it is in efforts to use the terms of the students themselves that I will refer to ESL Chinese students as such. Also, it is important to note that collectively these “Chinese ESL” students make up 98% of West Coast High’s ESL population.

Background and Guiding Question

The ESL program at WCH by and large teaches language skills. However, because of the way in which ESL students are promoted and granted access to subsequent courses in different disciplines such as Arts and Science the ESL program at this secondary school releases students into “regular” (non-ESL) Science and Mathematics academic tracks before it allows ESL students to access language intensive course tracks in Humanities and Arts. Given this, I first set out to uncover if grade 12 ESL students made course selections which were more heavily weighted in the Sciences and not Arts and Literature, when compared to non-ESL students. Next, I attempted to find parental and cultural influences for the course choice patterns of ESL students.

The guiding question of this research is: What are the parental and cultural influences on ESL students’ curricular choices in grade 12? Here “ESL” is defined as a student having been enrolled in any level of ESL between elementary and high school. “Curricular choice” is defined as course selections from grade 12 courses in one of seven categories offered at WCH for the 2001-2002 school year: Arts, Science, Native Languages, Economics, Industrial Education, Fine Arts and Career Preparation/Work Experience.

It is recognized that students are not powerless in this situation; they also act as important agents within the school system; students are free to make their own curricular
choices as they progress through the ESL system. But to what degree are ESL students influenced by parental and cultural factors which play an important role in shaping what choices students make at grade 12? This thesis will attempt to gauge this matter via student and staff interviews along with the analysis of a student questionnaire which was distributed to both ESL and non-ESL grade 12s. It is intended that all the data considered together provide a more rounded and complete picture of first, the patterns of ESL and non-ESL grade 12 student curricular choices, and second, the familial and cultural influences that become key factors in affecting these choices.

What follows below is a detailed description of the way the ESL program was structured at the time of this study at WCH. The ESL program consists of five levels, four that are made known to students and one that is not – Level 5, which students must successfully complete in order to take “regular” or non-ESL English courses (Figure 1.0). A careful consideration of what happens to students at each level, in terms of course requirements, reveals a release mechanism which may predispose students to select subsequent Science and Math courses rather than Arts and Humanities courses. At Level 1 students must take four five-month English based courses which are non-graded along with grade specific Math. For instance, a grade 8 student arriving to Canada may be found to have very little proficiency in English and hence is assigned to this level. Because they have been placed in ESL Level 1, they can enroll in Math 8, Physical Education 8 (P.E), and Home Economics 8 (H.E.), and other non-academic elective courses, but are not allowed to take any non-ESL Science or English based courses other than ESL. Furthermore, school counsellors typically ensure that Level 1 students do not enroll in language intensive courses. Upon completion of Level 1, usually after one year,
students are promoted to Level 2. This ESL level consists of two courses which must both be successfully completed to gain promotion into ESL Level 3. The two courses which make up Level 2 are ESL-English and ESL-Science. This Level 2 student is also allowed to enroll in grade specific Math. Keeping with the example of our hypothetical student, now in grade 9, assuming the completion of Level 1 in one year, would take ESL 2 English, ESL 2 Science, Math 9, P.E 9, and other recommended electives for the first

Figure 1.0
ESL Placement Model at West Coast High School

Level 1.
Non Graded English (one full year)

Level 2.

a. ESL-Science if (a) passed, then released to grade specific Science
   b. ESL-English

Level 3.

a. ESL-Social Studies if (a) passed, then released to grade specific Social Studies
   b. ESL-English

Level 4.

a. ESL-Literature if both passed, then released to grade specific regular English (usually English 11)
   b. ESL-Composition

Level 5. Distinction given to ESL graduates who have “exited”.
Note: ESL students are allowed to take grade specific Math at Level 1

half of the year or semester. If all goes well and all courses are passed, for the second semester of grade 9, they would be released from ESL-Science, and be allowed to take Regular Science 9 (Non-ESL), then would have to complete a number of grade electives such as Band 9, Keyboarding 9, Art 9, etc. Again these electives would be selected with the aid of a school counsellor who would ensure that ESL students keep to electives which do not require a high fluency of English for success. By grade 10, our student is in Level 3 ESL, which again consists of two courses, an ESL-Social Studies and an ESL-English. The core course load for this student would include Math 10, Science 10 (non-ESL), ESL Socials and ESL English. If the student is successful in completing all these requirements they would then proceed to Level 4 ESL, where they would be released from ESL-Social Studies, but still not allowed access to regular non-ESL English 10. If the student does poorly in both or any one of the ESL Level 3 courses, then they would have to repeat the course(s) the following term along with their grade 10 elective requirements. Assuming this student passes the ESL Level 3 requirements the second time, they would begin grade 11, in Level 4. At this point, having passed Level 3, the student would be released into regular Social Studies 11 and could theoretically take Chemistry 11, Physics 11, Math 11, but still not be allowed access to regular (non-ESL English 11) until they complete the Level 4 course requirements of ESL-Literature and ESL-Composition. English 11 would have to be picked up in Grade 12, assuming they passes Level 4 the first time.
By the time a student has graduated out of ESL, they have been taking Science and Math courses for at least 3 years, and have only been allowed to take non-ESL English during their last year in high school. This is the experience of most ESL students entering into WCH at grade 8. There are some exceptional students who are “fast-tracked” out of ESL; for instance, they are permitted to jump from ESL Level 2 to 4. However, this is rare and for those students who enter into the system after grade 8, they usually have a much more difficult time developing their English skills, and navigating through the ESL system, in order to take the courses they need for university entrance. Also, approximately one-half of all the ESL students at WCH arrive after grade 8 and 9. This means that many arrive at age 15 or higher. This tends to be very problematic for these students as they have fewer years to catch-up to their ESL counterparts who arrived at a younger age.

Ultimately the ESL program is structured in such a way that it releases students into the Math and Science track much earlier than it does into the Language and Literature (Arts), language intensive, tracks. There is little room for failure in ESL courses, since doing so could potentially set back a student’s release into the Arts track quite late into their senior grades in school. In theory, students are told that this is not the case; an ESL student may repeat as many ESL courses as many times as is necessary and not be penalized, since ESL courses and any resulting grades in these courses are not considered for university or college entrance grade point averages. Out of consideration for this seemingly problematic structuring of ESL arises the need to study what the current enrollment situation is for ESL students. Do the enrollment figures indicate that a
higher percentage of ESL students enroll in Sciences than Arts and Humanities courses, and what are the parental and cultural forces influencing their decision?

The main objectives of this study are 1) to determine the course choice patterns of ESL students and 2) to discern whether the familial or social-cultural environment is associated with individuals' curricular choices. As is noted in the preceding section, the delivery model for ESL at this school is geared toward early release of students into mainstream Science and Math courses while delaying students from accessing mainstream liberal Arts courses such as Social Studies and English. Because of this mechanism it is most probable to find more ESL students avoiding senior Arts courses and gravitating towards senior Science courses as a result of long exposure to non-ESL Science courses versus their relatively short exposure to regular Socials and Humanities curriculum. Given this, three specific questions are at the core of my research: 1) What is the pattern of grade 12 curricular choices for ESL students compared to their non-ESL counterparts? 2) Do Chinese ESL students perceive themselves as having less freedom to choose academic courses than non-Chinese students because of parental restrictions and expectations? 3) Are Chinese ESL students more likely to be influenced by their families than their non-ESL peers?

In this thesis, I will first lay out the background and theoretical context for this study and examine how a guiding question was determined; a review of the literature will be conducted; next, the research design of this case study will be explained; the findings are examined and discussed, and lastly possible areas for future research are considered along with recommendations for policy change. This study makes a significant contribution to the body of literature on Chinese ESL students in Canada for
several reasons. First, this study begins to address the gap in the research on Chinese ESL high school students in Canada. Much of the existing literature considering ESL students originates from the United States. Second, although several studies focus on academic performance and occupational preferences of Chinese American students, this study attempts to gain an understanding of why ESL students select certain high school courses in grade 12 and further seeks to ascertain if cultural and parental pressures influence these decisions. Third, several studies have compared “Chinese” and “White” student performance at school, especially in the Math or Sciences, but this study is unique in that it not only considers course selection patterns between ESL and non-ESL students, but also surveys their attitudes and perceived beliefs about parental/cultural attitudes towards education. Ultimately, the significance of this study results from the merger of quantitative data, the analysis of ESL and non-ESL grade 12 course selection patterns, and qualitative data in the form of in-depth interviews with ESL students, teachers and counsellors. This research will prove valuable for any future researcher attempting to gain insight into Chinese ESL students’ culture, thoughts on courses, and motivations within a Canadian high school setting. As with any study care must be taken not to generalize from these findings, but they do represent an actual account of what course patterns all grade 12 students took at West Coast High and provide the reasoning behind their decisions.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

In this literature review I will make note of fundamental differences in the educational philosophies of the West (Canada and the United States) versus that of the East (Chinese and Hong Kong). This serves two purposes relevant to this research. The first purpose is to highlight the educational tradition from which Chinese ESL students come and the new situation in which they are transplanted; the second purpose is to gain a relevant understanding of the belief and value systems that Chinese ESL students and their parents hold in regards to education in general. Also, cultural tendencies and beliefs about the education of Chinese students and parents within North America are considered. The educational goals and career preferences of immigrant Chinese parents are also informative. These points are relevant to my study as they will serve as a comparison and knowledge base to my findings of Chinese students' educational goals, their perceptions to what their parents want and expect for them, what kinds of pressure they are under, and how these factors combine to influence curricular choices.

The ESL grade 12 students in this study are currently in the process of adjusting to the educational changes that distinguish the schooling received in their Asian homelands from the new Western perspective taught here in Canada. These students are attempting to wrestle with conflicting experiences, between their “pasts”, pre-Canadian experiences, and their “present” and “future” experiences - those pertaining to their ongoing day to day Canadian experience in and out of school. The subject of “curricular choice,” how it is perceived by students and why certain groups of Asiatic students make particular choices, are difficult questions. These questions become even more
complicated as I, both as a teacher and as a researcher, attempt to gain insight to students' historical understandings about education and academic choices. This is where the “old” and “new” understandings are in tension with each other as students attempt to make sense of the differences in teaching styles and in learning, assessment methods and most importantly in what the ultimate objective of education should be. Some background research on some aspects of Chinese culture, societal beliefs about education and its manifestation as a system can reveal where and why these students’ understandings may differ from those who are non-ESL. This issue gets to the actual heart of what I will be attempting to uncover in this research.

Two main features of traditional Chinese education dating back from the sixth century into the present are 1) the longstanding existence of a written tradition in China and 2) the profound, widespread and systematic use of written examinations to decide on the academic futures of all Chinese students. H. C. Lee (2000) comments on the long-lasting effects of the examination tradition and resulting “examination culture” in Chinese culture and education:

Chinese civilization . . . for over three thousand years, it has continued to create and to preserve a heritage that even today still determines the way Chinese people make judgements on how to live, think and behave.

This monument of human accomplishment is sustained by a tradition of education that is not only unique, but also comprehensively influential. (p. 1)
Nakayama (1984) suggests that Eastern and Western traditions in education have long been separated by fundamental differences. Lee (2000) comments on Nakayama’s comparison: “the Chinese tradition of ‘documentary scholarship’ is in significant contrast with the Western tradition of ‘rhetorical learning’ that began with Greek natural philosophy” (Lee, 2000, p. 661).

The widespread usage of examinations in order to gain entry to government civil service jobs, coupled with the use of printing predating mass printing in Europe by about one-thousand years, has impacted the way Chinese students are taught, what the “Chinese” concept of knowledge is, and what the purposes of education should be. Lee (2000) points to how wide use of print and civil service examinations also impacted traditional thinking about the shape and face education would take in China:

Chinese preference to concentrate in consensus building and seek commonality in opinions, at the expense of developing and debating skills, or formulating dissenting ideas. . . . emphasis on studying the documentary and hence written data has helped to direct the Chinese intellectual activities to a style that was very different from the Western style. . . . The fundamental distinction is the Chinese preference to use accumulated data to create government policy and to construct a peaceful or even uniform society. (pp. 663 – 664)

The work of Morris, in his examination of contemporary Hong Kong, re-enforces the claims made above by Lee. In his The Hong Kong School Curriculum: Development,
Issues and Policies (1996) Morris makes note of some very fundamental differences in the educational philosophies of the "West" (Canadian and American) versus that of the "East" (Chinese and that of Hong Kong in particular). His work and findings are fundamental to the central questions of this research. The very "Hong Kong Curriculum" of which Morris writes is that which has been experienced by the majority of my ESL students who made their homes there as recently as a few months ago.

The first contrasting point in the philosophies of Western and Eastern education is its diverging notion of what should be taught, or rather, what the focus of education should be. Morris finds the Hong Kong curriculum to be more "product" focused than the "process" focused Western approach of Canada and the U.S.A. The "product approach" treats the content as subject knowledge and as intrinsically valuable, whereas the "process approach" treats the content as process (1996, p. 29).

A second factor contributing to the undeniable differences between Western and Eastern education is the political climates of both countries. There is a wide range of literature pointing to how any government, in its effort to meet its ends, uses schooling as a vehicle to achieve these societal ends (Barman, 1997; Said, 1979; Stanley, 1995; Willinsky, 1999; Woodsworth, 1909). This point is not in dispute here. However, where they differ is in the degree to which different political systems control education and more importantly encourage different types of thinking and learning in general. In the case of China and Hong Kong, political considerations play a very influential role in deciding what gets taught. On this Morris notes

the content of the subjects and the type of subjects offered are eventually
decided by the government which is very sensitive to political considerations.

The content of the subjects such as Social Studies, History and Geography has been carefully selected to avoid encouraging dissent in Hong Kong and upsetting the [former] colonial government and/or the government of the PRC. (1996, p. 31)

The importance placed on written "examinations" as the ultimate form of assessment in Chinese society has been noted above. This type of thinking in regard to measuring knowledge influences all levels of schooling and society. Since the main purpose of assessment in Hong Kong is to sort and grade students for further schooling and education, "the examinations have . . . a powerful influence on the style of teaching and learning used in schools" (Morris, p. 50). Pepper (1990) suggests that it is not only the students who view examinations as paramount to success and hence having little relevance to the study of liberal Arts courses, but that these widely held conceptions are part of the parents' understanding of schooling. Pepper (1990) noted how

in a 1987 report, the Shaanix provincial education bureau highlighted the problem of excess demand over supply in the province's key schools [college prep schools]. Parents were blamed for believing that their children's future depended solely on admission to college. (p.123)

These parents, after immigrating to Canada, will continue to maintain these educational beliefs and values. Ultimately, the residual effect of their line of thinking is to influence
the academic choices they wish for their children, creating a preference for those courses which may be perceived as more valuable against those that will not lead their children into the desired post-secondary institutions and occupations. As Morris notes (1996) what this implies for the teaching and resultant student perspectives is that "consequently subjects such a Social Studies were unpopular because they did not clearly link to a certificate level course" (Morris, 1996, p. 51).

The way students are assessed in Hong Kong is conducted almost exclusively via written examinations, thus setting the framework for how teachers teach students. According to Morris (1996)

there is a preference for some forms of assessments, such as multiple choice questions, which can be more easily demonstrated to provide valid and reliable measures. A consequence of this can often be an emphasis on assessing a pupil's knowledge of trivial facts and information which are easily measured by such forms of assessment. This leads teachers to place the greatest emphasis on memorization by pupils and to ensure that pupils "know" large quantities of information. Little emphasis is given to encouraging pupils to understand key principles or how to apply them. (p, 52)

The result of this conditioning on Chinese students in regard to assessment can be both a positive or negative influence once attending schools in Canada. If teachers here assess via higher order types of questions, where students' opinions matter, and their bringing
together of key concepts is required, these students will have a tendency to perform less well. This is often demanded in courses such as History, Social Studies and Literature. If students are assessed by multiple choice, and are simply asked to restate memorized facts and data (as is often the case in Science based high school courses), then they may appear to be doing well, all the while not truly understanding the key concepts because they are not used to doing so and have only committed responses to memory.

The educational systems in China and Hong Kong have been examined in general terms. The focus will now briefly turn to the ideas of Social Studies and History – two subjects that are greatly undervalued by Asian ESL students at West Coast High. ESL students both in Canada, Hong Kong and the mainland of China tend to steer way from studying Social Studies and History. Their reasons in both countries amounts to basically the same rationalization – that “History” is not practical for the purposes of their future schooling. Support for this is found in Mc-Bride-Chang and Chang’s (1998) study of adolescent-parent relations in Hong Kong. Mc-Bride-Chang and Chang explain how top students in Hong Kong are streamed into the Science academic “bands”.

The strict testing sequence in Hong Kong, compared with the relatively lax sequence in the United States, may cause Chinese parents to be more concerned with their children’s school achievement . . . In Hong Kong, at the equivalent of Grade 7 in the United States, children are assigned to one of five levels of schools, from academically highest achieving (Band 1) to lowest (Band 5). This placement is extremely important to parents and students alike. Further streaming of
students to schooling tracks (Science, which is valued, vs. Arts, which are less valued) occurs around Grade 10 (U.S.). In contrast, there is much less explicit streaming of students in U.S. schools until students begin to consider whether to go on to college. (p. 424)

The attitudes of both parents and students may be developed long before they have enrolled in Canadian ESL classes. Suen, Ng, Jim & Linderberger (1987) have also pointed to the possibility that the values instilled within the Canadian educational system may not be parallel with Chinese cultural and educational values; therefore, immigrant Chinese parents in Canada may transmit to their children messages about expectations and educational success which differ from the messages their children receive in school. Wason-Ellam's (2001) ethnographic study of Chinese immigrant families provides important evidence suggesting that this may be occurring in Canada. Wason-Ellam suggests that the cultural capital of ESL parents’ is not found to be salient in the curriculum their students are learning once in Canada:

in school encounters, the children became aware that school knowledge, unlike family and community knowledge, was a commodity, while the cultural capital of their parents and their multigenerational learning environments contained little that resonated with the curriculum. (p. 71)

Furthermore, Wason-Ellams (2001) concluded that some Chinese parents were not fully aware of the goals for Western pedagogy and thus tended to believe that Canadian
schools were more lax, did not teach children to the same degree that Chinese schools did, and did not assign sufficient homework which she felt was the basis of learning within the rote system in which they had been schooled. A study of a career education/work experience program (Co-op) for ESL students in the Vancouver School District (Wyatt-Beynon, Ilieva, Toohey, & Larocque, 2001) also revealed that Asian immigrant parents are very specific in the aims and purposes their children's education. Wyatt-Beynon et al. note the school district's stated goals for this ESL Co-op was to “create a positive learning environment for immigrant students to attain personal success, to develop English literacy and numeracy skills, a positive self-image, and work habits necessary for employment, further training, and a successful future” (404). These ESL students spent part of the school year in the classroom and the second half of the school year on the job. Interviews revealed that parents “made a consistent distinction between time spent on English instruction and time spent on work experience and job skills and had a variety of perceptions of what was or was not valuable” (p. 409). In this study, the school staff, teachers and counselors, perceived the Co-op program as a valuable - hands on - learning experience for these ESL students. The students' parents, however - after realizing that time would be taken away from courses leading to graduation – did not support the program. Wyatt-Beynon et al. discuss their findings:

In general, then, the parents of currently and formerly enrolled students of the ESL Co-op program focused in their responses on the embodied cultural capital students gained through the ESL Co-op program, with particular emphasis on the development of English proficiency gained
throughout it. While no parent mentioned the development of new social networks (social capital) as a beneficial aspect of the program. ...many parents' views were congruent with those of their children, who say a major drawback of the program being that students did not obtain regular high school graduation through it. Having high aspirations for their children's future education and occupations, many parents were concerned that the ESL Co-op program might limit, rather than extend, their children's opportunities. (pp. 409-410).

Zhang, Ollila, & Harvey (1998) conducted a study of 97 Chinese immigrant parents, all who had children in schools in either the Vancouver school district or in the Victoria school district. The parents selected also had to have immigrated to Canada from Taiwan, Hong Kong, or mainland China within the past six years. Zhang et al. findings were similar to the Wason-Ellams (2001) study in regard to the perceived drawbacks that Chinese parents believed to be present in Canadian schools. While parents in the Zhang, et al. study did acknowledge some positive aspects of Canadian schools, these parents also pointed out the drawbacks. For instance, parents believed, "schools were not strict enough with students, offering too much indulgence and too little discipline" (p. 187). In addition, Zhang et al. noted what Chinese immigrant parents understood Canadian schooling to be:

Flexibility was understood to mean both that teachers design the instruction according to the level or individual students and also that students are allowed to
make their own choices. In contrast, the students were not given as much freedom in their home country. Creativity was understood to mean that teaching is student-centered, emphasizing acquisition of practical skills and the ability to solve problems independently. In Chinese schools, however, teachers dominated the classroom, and students learned by memorization. Autonomy was understood to mean that individual teachers often decide what to teach. Traditionally, in Chinese schools, content and curriculum are often standardized across the nation.

(p. 186)

Yet, despite coming from a locale where different traditions in education are present, Asiatic—Chinese in particular—immigrant children have had much success in their new Western schools. There has been much written on the academic success of students from Asian origins—especially within the United States (Fejgin, 1995; Kao and Tienda, 1995; Sue and Okazaki, 1990). Wong (1980) even attached the "model student" label to Asian American students in his study of teachers' perceptions of the behavioral and emotional characteristics of their Asian students vis-à-vis "white" students. This "model student" label has not gone unchallenged, however; as Lee (1997) points out below, there may be flaws with this generalization of Asian students:

Asian American students have been described as a "model minority" for their academic achievements in general, and mathematics and science performance in particular. The model minority label, however, has serious flaws. This stereotype neglects the diversity among Asian American groups. The success
stories of some students obscure the struggle and ultimate failures of many others. Even those who do well in school often succeed at high costs of emotional and social isolation. (pp. 107-108)

Still, many studies (Leung, Ivey, and Susuki, 1994) have focussed on how in particular Asian students select high prestige careers in the Sciences compared to those in the Social Sciences fields. Several studies have also focussed on the career selection behavior of Asian Americans. Leung et al. (1994), for instance, developed two hypotheses about the career behavior of Asian Americans. The “personality structure hypothesis” suggests that there may be certain personality characteristics of Asian Americans that pushes them toward the Science and technical occupational areas (p. 404). Leong & Serafica (1995) also found that Asian Americans are over-represented in Science and Technology occupations and less represented in Humanities and Social Services orientated occupations. Other studies have pointed to “cultural” factors as possible reasons why Asian students gravitate to differing activities at school and why educational values may be culturally reinforced. For instance, a Canadian study by Wang (2000) compared grade 10 Asian Canadian and “White” high school boys’ notions of masculinity. Wang suggests that, for boys in Asian cultures, masculinity is characterized primarily by a man’s familial responsibility. Moreover, Asian boys identified with a strong work and academic ethic as key to being a “man,” whereas “White” boys identified with physical, “athletic” pursuits. Similarly, Flemming (1991) reported that in Asian cultures masculinity is less attached to Western ideals of sports due to their association with a strong cultural education/work ethic.
Rong and Preissle (1997) introduced the idea that Asian Americans have a "penchant" for occupations such as Computer Science or Biotechnology that are supposedly more appealing because of their income and prestige. The findings of the Leung et al. (1994) study support their "prestige hypothesis" suggesting that Asian immigrants encouraged their children to go into Sciences, Engineering and further found evidence indicating that Asian American students consider occupations with high occupational prestige more often than do Caucasian students (p. 408), allowing the authors to state that

if occupational aspirations are reflections of one's personality structure,
differences in career aspirations between the Asian American and Caucasian students may suggest differences in personality structure between the two racial groups (p. 407).

Leung et al. (1994) also suggest that Asian American students are less attracted to occupations requiring forceful communication and interpersonal influence (p. 407). Leong (1991) also reported on the prestige factor and its importance to Asian Americans, finding Asian American college students placed greater emphasis on "extrinsic" and "security" values – those dealing with income, status and prestige - than did Caucasians and further reported on a dependent decision-making style in Asian American students. In another study examining the differences in attitudes toward Science education among American, Chinese-American, and Chinese parents and students, Chen (2001) found that Chinese parents and students had more positive attitudes towards the school Science
curriculum and set higher standards for their children’s performance in Science than did their American counterparts. Furthermore, Chinese parents “spent more time working with their children, more frequently checked their children’s homework, and bought more books or equipment relating to science for their children than did the American parents” (p. 311).

Several researchers (Leong, 1985; Leong, 1986; Leong & Chou, 1994; Tang, 2002) have suggested the importance of familial and parental input in the career decision making process of Asian American students. Leong and Chou (1994) suggest that for many Asian Americans the choice of occupation is not merely done as an expression of individual choice and interest, but rather is a compromise between parents’ expectations, individual preference, and social mobility aspirations of the family. Mei Tang (2002) in her study of Asian-American, Caucasian American and Chinese college students considered the relationship between student career choice and parental influence. Tang’s findings suggest that Asian American and Chinese college students were more likely than were Caucasian Americans to choose “Investigative” (J. L. Holland, 1985) occupational types and that their choices were more likely to be influenced by their family. When students were asked “Have your parents forced you to follow their choice of careers?” 42% of Asian Americans and 48% of Chinese answered ‘yes’ compared to only 11% of Caucasian American respondents (Tang 2002, p. 129). This may also be the case for Asian-Canadians as revealed in a study by Dhalla, Kwong, Streiner, Baddour, Waddell, and Johnson (2002) of first-year Canadian medical students. Dhalla et al., in aiming to describe the demographic characteristics of these students and compare them with those of the Canadian population found that although there were more people from visible
minorities in medical school than in the Canadian population, certain minority groups, Chinese and South Asian in particular, were overrepresented (p. 1929). Further support for Dhalla et al. can be found in another Canadian study by France et al. (1991). France et al. compared Chinese middle school students who were living in China with their Caucasian counterparts living in Canada and found that Chinese middle school students deemed Science based occupations as most desirable while the Canadian students preferred occupations in the trades and industry.

Leong (1986) made the further connection between individual occupational choice in traditional Asian cultures and individuals' adherences to family expectations and improvement of family status via an individual's occupation choice. Furthermore, these choices were made by students out of consideration for their role in promoting their family by elevating its status via their occupational success. Moy (1992) concluded that Asian Americans value family input, respect senior family members, and are an interdependent part of family life in adherence to traditional values of "filial piety". Gordon (2000) in a study conducted with undergraduate Asian American students in teacher education programs found that parental influence was extremely important for first-generation Asian American students, noting that interviews with students "revealed an almost absolute acceptance of the career expectations, spoken and unspoken, of parents, family, and community. . .more than half of the informants directly mentioned parental pressure to enter jobs that enhanced the image of the family" (p. 184). Furthermore, Gordon points to the fact that a paradox exists between the high success levels that Asian Americans have demonstrated in the educational system, and the fact that they have the lowest participation rates in the teaching force within the public
schools. Gordon's interviews with Asian students stated that major themes could be derived by merging sets of reasons given by respondents to the question, “Why aren’t Asians going into teaching?” The first two most frequently offered responses were lack of monetary renumeration and lack of encouragement – parents were noted as stating that they were “more interested in kids having high paying, high status jobs” (p. 182). A similar Canadian study by Beynon, Toohey, & Kishor (1998) administered to 1595 grade 10 students in Vancouver, B.C. examined the questionnaire responses of students of Chinese and South Asian ancestry, finding that cultural influences include parents’ views about the desirability of teaching as a career. This study revealed that only 2% of the Chinese respondents rated teaching as a high preference. Other studies by Beynon, Toohey and Kishor (1992) and Beynon & Toohey (1995) showed that the two most populous visible minority groups (Asian and Punjabi Sikh) in British Columbia were attending university in rates representative of their numbers in the population, but that their rates in teacher education programs were relatively low. Questionnaire data of these students revealed Canadian university students of Chinese ancestry were more likely to be influenced in their career choices by cultural influences such as family or particular ethnic group’s views of teaching. Finally, the Chinese students indicated that their parents strongly emphasized careers with high prestige such as medicine, law and business.

Studies have also been conducted on the parenting styles of Chinese and Asian American parents and their subsequent effectiveness on student performance in school. Chao (1994), in particular, has described the parenting style of Chinese immigrant families within the United States as “training”. Chao’s notion of “training” is used to
describe a parenting style which is heavily based on parental control and the instilling of work ethics, self-discipline and an eagerness to do well in school on children. In a recent study Chao (2001) concluded that school performance rated very highly for first generation Chinese parents:

school performance is a very important outcome to examine, because it is a highly valued goal for Asian American parents. Efficacy in parenting, especially Chinese, is often judged by how well their children do in school. Thus, school performance is a particularly relevant outcome for this group. (p. 1841)

The research cited above suggests that for many Chinese immigrant parents school success is one of, if not the primary socialization goal along with fostering a strong sense of respect for parents and deference for parents' decisions (Chao, 1995). Furthermore, the work of Schneider & Lee (1990) and Yao (1985) also indicates that Asian American parents offered a home structure which was conducive to high performance in school. This support consisted of a range of parental action such as controlling students' free time outside of school, arranging for extra help, and purchasing extra textbooks for supplemental learning.

This body of research provides evidence for three main claims: 1) Many Chinese parents and students experience a fundamentally different educational system before coming to North America; 2) the goals of Western education may not be the same as those held by Chinese immigrant parents; and 3) The relationship between Chinese students and their parents is one where often parents dictate the educational goals and
academic objectives for their children. The research design of this study, discussed in the following chapter, was developed in order to provide evidence to either reinforce or refute these three claims. Through interview and questionnaire development and data analysis ESL students' beliefs about the purpose of education and their ultimate goals after graduating high school can be examined against the current literature. This will allow for discussion on the relationship between what ESL students perceive their parents believe education to be and how this influences them. Similarly, interview and questionnaire data will allow for a discussion on whether or not the relationship between Chinese ESL students and their parents, in regards to educational goals and academic objectives, is in fact dominated by parents as suggested by the literature.
CHAPTER 3
Quantitative Research Design

The data collection and analysis portion of this thesis is composed of two sections. The first is the quantitative examination of student transcripts and questionnaires; the second is the qualitative analysis of student and staff interviews.

The quantitative examination of student transcripts is a two part work. Part A of the quantitative analysis is entitled, “Analysis of Student Transcript Data”. This first analysis is best described as the numeric analysis of all grade 12 students’ transcripts for the 2001-2002 school year. The sample measured was grade 12 students enrolled in grade 12 courses. I do not include grade 11 courses, because the number of grade 11 courses which students may take varies from student to student. Some students may choose to take Physics 11, but having found it too difficult or simply of no interest, do not proceed to take Physics 12. Furthermore, all students must take four provincially examinable grade 12 courses in order to meet matriculation requirements. By deciding to examine the choices of grade 12 students taking grade 12 courses continuity can be achieved in the sense that students must take at least 4 courses from either Arts or Sciences or any combination of the two to graduate.

The aim of such an analysis is to discover patterns in the course choice decisions of ESL and non-ESL students. Specifically, patterns in course selection within three distinct categories are sought after: a) Math and Science: numeric skills required; b) Arts and Language: strongly associated with language skills; and c) Career Oriented Courses: courses providing technical skills in professions that can be useful in the labor market. Based on A and B above, the extent to which ESL and non-ESL groups differ in terms of
their choices in the 12th grade can be examined. The purpose of performing the Analysis of Student Transcript Data is to gain insight into which electives and career preparation programs the groups participated in at higher levels.

The first step in the quantitative examination of student transcript data was to develop a database with all current grade 12 students' information indicating course choices for the 2001/2002 school year. This was acquired by having a school counsellors develop a database from school records of all 238 grade 12 students. The transcripts for examination were received from the counselling department in May 2002 of the 2001-2002 school year. This date ensures that the data on the transcripts would not have been subject to change, since by this point in the academic year it would be half way into the second semester and those students who did request course changes would have had these indicated on their current transcripts.

As far as the decision to make a clear divide between the seven course categories of "Science", "English and Culture", "Native Languages", "Economics", "Industrial Education", "Fine Arts" and "Career Preparation", the arbitrary nature of this choice and some of the problems it may cause are recognized. For instance, there is a problem with positioning a course like Biology 12, which is by nature very language intensive, under Sciences. Some readers might be critical of this point; however, this is how the school itself has divided these courses and hence the decision to stay true to how WCH has treated these courses. Furthermore, many students, not only ESL students but also non-ESL students, choose to work not just towards their matriculation requirements, but also to meet University or College entrance requirements. The question of dividing grade 12 courses into seven categories, and especially distinguishing between either Arts
or Sciences is very pertinent, because this is the typical division under which programs in post-secondary institutions fall. Undergraduate students typically begin their university careers in either the Arts or Sciences, and following their first or second year, become even more specialized consequently applying to faculties such as Commerce, Education, and Forestry. Given the division along Arts or Science grade 12 courses is relevant.

The variables constituting the backbone of the student transcript analysis, will be two. The first is a product of the school system and simply measures ESL placement - students are either placed or they are not. This is a yes/no variable. The second variable to be measured is curricular choice, that is, student course choices from grade 12 courses. These two variables allow for the calculation of the percentage of student's within any of the given course categories. Once this figure is generated, means can be calculated and compared for both ESL and non-ESL students within any of the above course categories.

Students were also delegated into categories by "sex", "birthplace" (born in Canada versus outside Canada ), and "status" (either currently ESL or exited ESL versus never having been in ESL). This information was also reported on the transcripts acquired through the aid of the school's counselling department. The option to either group ESL students broadly along ethnicity or country of origin was considered. Also, certain assumptions concerning non-ESL students had to be dealt with. The following questions were considered: 1) are all ESL students born outside of Canada, or are there some who were born in Canada?; 2) would some English speaking, but non-Canadians, surface in the sample? In light of these considerations the decision to group students by country of origin was to prove more useful than by ethnicity. That
is, to demark every grade 12 student with a simple “yes-no” variable, either as a “0” for those born outside of Canada and “1” for those born in Canada. This was decided after initial inspection of the transcript data revealed that for some students birthplace was indicated as China and for others as Hong Kong. The difficulty with using ethnicity is that the school records do not state official "ethnicity". This being the case it was possible to proceed by comparing student birthplace with whether they are ESL, and/or cross reference this with any of the course category data sets. This was possible with the data available given that the records and data could show whether the student is ESL and if they were born here or outside Canada.

On the matter of whether one should assume that some ESL students are Canadian born but non-English speaking, or non-Canadian but English speaking, my reply would be the following: let the data speak for itself. It is possible for some ESL students to have been born in Canada. Regardless of whether the student was born in Canada, if the child is raised in a non-English household, or if the child is initially assessed as requiring ESL support - then they are deemed ESL by the school board. Having considered all the assumptions and possible complications that the data could present, the first task was to enter all the variables for each student onto the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 10. Once all the variables were entered for all the grade 12s, it was possible to aggregate the course choices into seven discrete sub-categories and then compare the results for ESL and non-ESL students.

Part B consists of the analysis of a student questionnaire that was given out to all grade 12 students. A sample of the student questionnaire can be found in Appendix C. The questionnaire design was carefully considered. First, during the wording of the
questions, I was aware that for the sake of past ESL students, that the questions should clearly be stated and avoid complexity. I made sure not to use the word “and” since this would result in multidimensional questions leading only to confusion on the part of participants. Also, negative phrasing which could also lead to confusion was avoided. Questionnaire items were chosen which repeated the topic; that is, more than one item with different intensities in the wordings were used. This would increase the reliability of the questionnaire. Finally, the questionnaire was pre-tested on a group of 20 Level 4 ESL students. These students completed the questionnaire without any reported or observed difficulties. This “test” group consisted of my own students, and based on previous experience as their teacher, this group would have asked for clarification on any matter related to the questionnaire which they would have found difficult.

The sample population for questionnaire distribution was to be all grade 12 students present during a 10 minute Career and Personal Planning Day homeroom class in May 2002. I chose this time because all students are required to participate for their assigned activities on this special day in order to fulfil their graduation requirements. All grade 12 homeroom teachers agreed to distribute the questionnaire to all their students. No grade 12 students were absent on this day (possibly as a result of graduation being so close). Students were instructed to complete the questionnaire on their own and return it to a box in the school main office within three weeks. A response rate of 61% was achieved; of the 238 questionnaires distributed, 145 were returned. The questionnaire was handed in on an anonymous basis in compliance with the University of British Columbia Ethics Review Board and School District policies on student research. Once all 145 questionnaires were collected, the information was entered into an SPSS version
10 database. Questionnaire items 5 through 12 were crosstabulated with “status” (ESL or non-ESL). This generated a percentage of selections to the Likert like scale for a given range of selected responses for all ESL or non-ESL students. These percentages were then compared for the two groups.

Qualitative Research Design

The qualitative portion of this study consists of student and staff interviews. The interviews were aimed at having the students’ voices come through and provide a more human context from which to consider the findings in the quantitative portion of this thesis. Interviews ranging in duration from approximately 20 to 30 minutes were conducted. All interviews were taped and conducted in a one-to-one setting. Twenty-six (13 males, 13 females) ESL grade 12 students were interviewed and asked a series of open-ended questions (see Appendix A) designed to reveal more deeply the trends in data from Part A and B. The interview subjects were randomly chosen from the group of 40 ESL students whose parents consented to their being interviewed. All of the students interviewed were former ESL students of mine and were randomly selected by drawing names. Some readers may question my decision to use past students. I believe that rather than hamper the findings, the comfort level and previous relationship between myself and the students would allow them to offer up more detailed and candid responses. This section also deals with the responses of 4 counsellors and 8 teachers (see Appendix B for interview questions). All school counsellors agreed to be interviewed, there were only 8 teachers on staff who returned the interview consent form and they were all interviewed.
My decision to make the interviews semi-structured and open-ended (Appendix A and B) and not highly-structured with a set of closed questions was greatly influenced by the suggestion that

we distinguish between informants [open-ended questions] and respondents [fixed-response questions]. In the case of highly structured interviews, the respondents only get to talk about the things that the researcher thinks are important and there is no scope for them to talk about other things that may be far more significant for them. This an inescapable feature of highly structured inquires: they reflect the researcher's theory of what matters. (Knight, 2002, p. 51)

Attempts to ensure validity of the interviews were carried out in the following ways. Since all interview participants were my former students, rapport, trust and openness had already been developed with the result being that participants could express things the way they saw fit. Second, the questions were constructed so that they fully covered the necessary topics raise by the goals of this research. Similarly, no irrelevant questions were asked. Thirdly, as much as possible, students were prompted to illustrate, expand and clarify their initial responses. Fourth, the interviews were all conducted after school, always within the hour immediately after classes were out. All interviews were carried out in the same fashion. Students were greeted. I thanked them for participating and spent less than one minute discussing how I would be conducting the interview. All students sat across from me at my desk which was cleared except for a taping device. I
always held the question sheet in front of me and systematically followed the same sequence. I also made conscious efforts not to signal my approval or disapproval of participant answers. Questions were repeated but no clarifications were made outside of simply reading the question again. I never expanded or suggested a starting point for their discussion to the question outside of the stated question. Finally, students who did not know the answer to a question were never solicited for one. I simply accepted “I don’t know” or “I am not sure” as a response and moved to the next question.

The interviews can best be considered by condensing what they revealed by theme. Three main themes emerged from student/staff responses which will be termed “Parental Input”, “Career Orientation”, and “Social Behaviour”. Each theme will comprise an individual section within the larger “Interview” chapter of this study. The Parental Input section examines issues relating to how ESL students described their parents’ academic demands, restrictions on their freedom outside of school, and general expectations. The Career Orientation section looks at ESL students’ explanations for why they chose certain courses and avoided enrolment in others. This section also reveals why certain careers are preferred by ESL students and their parents over others. Finally, the Social Behaviour section closely evaluates particular behaviors displayed by ESL students with regard to friendship and homework.

The same precautions to ensure validity and reliability, with the exception of location and time, that were carried out with students were also performed with the staff members. I went to teacher’s classrooms and counsellor’s offices at pre-arranged times to conduct the interviews. It was not possible to conduct all the staff interviews in the same place and at the same time due to the busy and often conflicting nature of their
schedules. The school's 55 staff members (excluding administrators) were approached for their participation at the monthly staff meeting held on the first Monday of every month, in this case April 2002. I asked to be scheduled in at the end of the meeting to make my request. I stood up and kindly asked for any staff members wishing to be part of my study on grade 12 ESL and non-ESL students who would like to be interviewed to leave a note in my mailbox as soon as possible. I also noted that I would be placing notices in their mailboxes reminding them of my appeal and providing more information. Eight teachers responded out of 51 and none of the school counsellors responded. The low response rate, I believe could have been a result of the negative sentiment that was strongly present at my school at this time due to the government imposed contract. Furthermore, the school staff were disheartened by the fact that many of their colleagues would be laid-off as a result of provincial government cutbacks. Three months prior to my appeal for participants the staff, as a measure to place pressure on the collective bargaining process, voted to withdraw their services from any after school, non-curricular related activities. By the time I was seeking participants our contract issue had been unsatisfactorily settled. Many staff had vowed not to return to performing any extra-curricular activities. This was the sentiment at my school during this part of my study, and hence the possible low response rate from the teachers. Because I viewed the counselors as important reservoirs of information related to my study, I approached each one personally and asked if they would agree to participate in the proposed interview. Without much persuasion other than a face-to-face visit, all agreed.

All four school counsellors, three females and one male, were interviewed. Eight teachers, all of whom have either had direct experience teaching ESL students or have
had ex-ESL students in their classes, were asked the same questions. Of these eight, five were males and three females. Of the male staff participants, two were of Chinese descent, both having themselves immigrated to Canada while still school aged. The thoughts and observations of the counsellors will be considered as they have direct contact with ESL and non-ESL grade 12 students during their course selection. Similarly, the thoughts and observations of the school teachers will be included and commented upon. As a means to maintain continuity many of the questions asked of the students were mirrored in the questions posed to staff.
Analysis of Student Transcript Data

This section is concerned with the quantitative examination of academic transcripts for all grade 12 students. This first analysis is best described as the numeric analysis of all grade 12 transcripts for the 2001-2002 school year. The sample measured is to be grade 12 students enrolled in grade 12 courses. The aim of such an analysis is to determine patterns in the course choice decisions of ESL and non-ESL students. Specifically, patterns in course selection within three distinct categories are examined: 1) Math and Science; 2) Arts and Language; and 3) Career Oriented Courses. Based on the findings of this analysis, whether or not ESL and non-ESL groups differ in terms of their choices in the 12th grade can be shown.

The characteristics of the sample population for the student transcript analysis are given below. Table 1 indicates that respectively for males in the 2001-2002 grade 12 class 49 males were born outside of Canada versus 55 males born in Canada. In the same

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Canada</td>
<td>63 (47)</td>
<td>55 (53)</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Canada</td>
<td>71 (53)</td>
<td>49 (47)</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>134 (100)</td>
<td>104 (100)</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages have been rounded.
cohort, 71 females were born outside of Canada versus 63 who were born in Canada. The grade 12 class is nearly equally divided between those students “born in Canada” versus “born outside Canada”, with 120 of grade 12s (male and female) being born outside of Canada against 118 of grade 12s (male and female) being born in Canada. Of all grade 12 students born outside of Canada 47% were males while for the females the figure is 53% - for those born inside Canada the number is 43% (males) and 47% (females). Some definite things can be said about the grade 12 population. First, the largest group of the four is females not born in Canada numbering 71. Second, there are more females in the school 56% against only 44% males. Third, the smallest group of the four is males born outside of Canada numbering only 49.

Table 2 indicates that for those who are non-ESL, 26 students (18%) were born outside of Canada, and 118 (82%) where Canadian born, in total 144. Of the total grade 12 population 61% is comprised of non-ESL students. ESL students born outside of

Table 2
Distribution of Research Population by ESL Status and Country of Birth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth Place</th>
<th>ESL</th>
<th>Non ESL</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n (%)*</td>
<td>n (%)*</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Canada</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>118 (82)</td>
<td>118 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Canada</td>
<td>94 (100)</td>
<td>26 (18)</td>
<td>120 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>94 (100)</td>
<td>144 (100)</td>
<td>238 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages have been rounded.
Canada number 94, or 39% of the total grade 12 population. There are no ESL students born in Canada since in the table there is no information for this cross-tabulation calculation. Of significance here is the fact that 61% of the population is non-ESL against 39% which is. There is an association between country of birth and status, in the sense that all ESL students were born outside Canada, while most non-ESL students were born in Canada.

The analysis of student transcript data revealed that within the Science category the ESL cohort enrolled to a greater degree in Science courses than did the non-ESL cohort. Table 3 examines this point further by indicating the enrollment percentages for each group within each of the specific courses within the overall “Science” category. A comparison of the percentage of the ESL and Non-ESL population who enrolled in a specific Science course reveals that a larger percentage of ESL students enrolled in Calculus 12, Chemistry 12, Physics 12, Math 12, Geography 12 and Geology 12. ESL students do not outnumber their non-ESL counterparts in Biology 12. The Biology 12 figures could be explained by the fact that out of all the Sciences at WCH Biology 12 is the least numeric in content and most language dependent. Thus, ESL students may be less inclined to enroll in this course. The Calculus and Math 12 figures suggest 99% of ESL students enroll in a grade 12 Math course compared to only 60% of non-ESL students. Either of these two Math courses is sufficient to meet matriculation and university entrance requirements. Much like Biology 12, Geography 12 and Geology 12 are more language intensive courses than Calculus 12, Chemistry 12 and Physics 12. This might be one explanation as to why there is a lower percentage of ESL students in
these courses than there are in the “hard” Sciences such as Chemistry 12, Physics 12, and Calculus 12.

Table 3 indicates the percentage of students within each group, ESL and non-ESL, who have enrolled in each course within the Science category. This table reveals a notable difference in enrolment figures between ESL and non-ESL grade 12s regarding their course selections within the “Science” category. The greatest difference in

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gr. 12 Course</th>
<th>Student Group</th>
<th>Total Group Population Enrollment %*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calculus</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geology</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages have been rounded.
enrollment as a value of total group population can be found for Calculus 12 where 59% of all ESL students enrolled compared to only 31% of the non-ESL grade 12 population. Also producing a large difference was the percentage of all ESL students enrolled in Calculus 12, 45% compared to only 20% of the non-ESL population. Similar differences can be found for Physics 12, where 33% of the ESL population enrolled compared to only 20% of the non-ESL population.

An interesting gender story emerges from the data in Table 4. In regards to the ESL population, the female students in all except for Physics 12 and Chemistry 12 out

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gr. 12 Course</th>
<th>Student Group</th>
<th>Female n (%)</th>
<th>Male n (%)</th>
<th>Total n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calculus</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>30 (52)</td>
<td>12 (33)</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>14 (18)</td>
<td>15 (22)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>33 (57)</td>
<td>18 (50)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>29 (38)</td>
<td>28 (41)</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>33 (57)</td>
<td>22 (61)</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>22 (29)</td>
<td>23 (34)</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>29 (50)</td>
<td>10 (28)</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>35 (46)</td>
<td>26 (38)</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>13 (22)</td>
<td>18 (50)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>11 (14)</td>
<td>18 (26)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>16 (28)</td>
<td>7 (19)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>20 (26)</td>
<td>9 (13)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geology</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>11 (19)</td>
<td>3 (8)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>7 (9)</td>
<td>8 (12)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages have been rounded.
number their male counterparts. For instance, within Calculus 12 ESL female enrollment is 52% compared to only 33% for ESL males. For Physics 12 ESL male enrollment accounts for 50% compared to 22% for ESL females. Also, for Chemistry 12 ESL male enrollment is 61% compared to 57% for females. The non-ESL enrollment figures for the Science category tell a different story. The female and male enrollment percentages suggest that non-ESL males and non-ESL females have more equal levels of participation in these courses; for Calculus 12, Math 12 and Chemistry 12 the difference varies only slightly by a few percent. For Geography 12 and Geology 12 the level of enrollment for non-ESL females is greater than for non-ESL males. Finally, within Physics 12 more non-ESL males (26%) enrolled than non-ESL females (14%). This is interesting in the sense that male enrollment levels for both ESL and non-ESL students were higher for this particular course than they were for the females in both groups.

The second analysis of student transcript data revealed that within the Culture and English category the ESL cohort enrolled in fewer courses than did the non-ESL cohort (Table 5). What becomes clear is that ESL students tend not to enroll to the degree that non-ESL students do within courses heavily rooted in English. A comparison by courses of the percentage of ESL and non-ESL population reveals low levels of enrollment for Literature 12 and History 12. In the case of Literature 12, no ESL students enrolled. For History 12, only 16% of the total ESL population chose to take this provincially examinable subject, compared to 29% of the non-ESL population. The exception to the courses in this category was English 12. Enrollment in English 12 showed similar levels between ESL and non-ESL students; 90% percent of the ESL students enrolled compared to 95% of the non-ESL students. Perhaps what is surprising
about the figures pertaining to English 12 is not that the enrollment by non-ESL students is greater than that of ESL students, but rather that a very high percentage of the ESL group has enrolled in this course. It can be suggested here that although ESL students do not enroll in Literature 12 and History 12 to nearly the same degree that non-ESL students do, almost all ESL students enrolled in English 12 because it is required for university entrance.

Table 5
ESL and Non-ESL Population by Courses in the Culture and English Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>ESL</th>
<th>Female n (%)*</th>
<th>Male n (%)*</th>
<th>Total n</th>
<th>(%)* of Group Population Enrolled in Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gr. 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>49 (84)</td>
<td>36 (100)</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>(90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>69 (91)</td>
<td>67 (98)</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>(95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>9 (12)</td>
<td>6 (8)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>6 (10)</td>
<td>9 (25)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>19 (25)</td>
<td>23 (34)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>(29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>2 (5)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>2 (3)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages have been rounded.

Table 6 considers the enrollment figures for the "Languages" Category. The difference indicated by these figures suggests that 23% of ESL students take Mandarin, their own native language, as an elective. In other words of the total enrollment for Mandarin 12, 92% of the students are in the ESL cohort. ESL students are more concentrated within this elective followed by high enrollment numbers in Japanese 57%
versus 43% for non-ESL students. However, Non-ESL students are more widely distributed among language electives than are ESL students.

Table 6

**ESL and Non-ESL Population by Courses in the Languages Category**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Gr. 12</th>
<th>Student Group</th>
<th>Female n (%)*</th>
<th>Males n (%)*</th>
<th>Total n</th>
<th>(%) of Group Population Enrolled in Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>2 (3)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>16 (21)</td>
<td>5 (7)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>4 (7)</td>
<td>1 (3)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>10 (13)</td>
<td>5 (7)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>13 (22)</td>
<td>9 (25)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>(23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>2 (3)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>7 (12)</td>
<td>5 (14)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>3 (4)</td>
<td>6 (9)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages have been rounded.

To conclude in terms of Science, Culture & English, and Native Languages categories differences exist between the two groups. ESL and Non-ESL students do differ in their course choices within these course categories. ESL students do enroll in higher percentages within all Science 12 courses with the exception of Biology 12. Equally important are the findings from the Culture and English category. These figures suggest that ESL students take fewer courses from this category than do their non-ESL counterparts. When the data from all 238 (94 ESL and 144 non-ESL) students are considered, the following pattern can be said to emerge. ESL students do on average take more grade 12 provincially examinable Science electives than Arts and Humanities
related courses. In addition, for courses heavily based in English skills, such as Literature 12 and History 12, the data indicates that ESL students do not enroll in these courses to nearly the same degree – except for English 12 – as do non-ESL students.

Student Questionnaire Analysis

The second portion of the quantitative analysis involved examination of students’ responses to a questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to all 238 grade 12 students; 145 of the questionnaires were returned. This reflected a return rate of 61% consisting of 80 non-ESL students, 34 males and 46 females, along with 65 ESL students, 27 males and 38 females. The students were asked to record their responses to 12 items (see appendix C for questionnaire) on a Likert type scale. Students indicated their preference to a possible range: 0 = does not apply to me; 1 = strongly disagree (SD); 2 = disagree (DA); 3 = neutral (N); 4 = agree (AG); and 5 = strongly agree (SA). Cross-tabulation calculations were performed to examine the frequency distribution of each item. Questionnaire items 5 through 12 were designed to gain a more complete understanding of ESL and non-ESL students’ feelings and perceptions to a range of issues related to their education such as parental involvement, academic aspirations and freedom to make decisions.

The first four questionnaire items were designed to gauge student’s perceptions of how much control they felt they possessed to make decisions related to their futures and education. I first asked students to indicate their feelings about the statement “I have
Table 7

Students' Feelings About their Perceived Level of Control of Their Futures After High School Graduation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item: I have control over what I will do after graduation.</th>
<th>Does Not Apply</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>4 (6)</td>
<td>12 (18)</td>
<td>30 (46)</td>
<td>18 (28)</td>
<td>65 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
<td>8 (10)</td>
<td>24 (30)</td>
<td>46 (58)</td>
<td>46 (58)</td>
<td>80 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Percentages have been rounded)

control over what I will do after graduation” (Table 7). Of those students who responded “strongly agree” 28% were ESL compared to 58% non-ESL. When the “agree” and “strongly agree” categories are considered together 74% of ESL students answered positively compared to 88% of non-ESL grade 12 students. Of the negative responses, “disagree” or “strongly disagree”, 6% of ESL and only 2% of non-ESL students responded negatively. For this item a larger number of non-ESL students responded positively suggesting that a greater number of non-ESL students felt they had control over what they would do upon graduation than did ESL students. The next questionnaire item stated “My parents have much input into what decisions I will make after I graduate from high school” (Table 8). Of the students who responded “strongly agree” 21% were ESL students compared to 11% non-ESL students. A consideration of both the “agree” and “strongly agree” categories produced a 46% positive response for ESL students versus a 40% response for non-ESL students. The negative responses, “disagree” and “strongly disagree”, for this item were also similar for the two groups with
21% of ESL students responding negatively compared to 20% for non-ESL students. For this item the two groups responded similarly suggesting high levels of parental involvement for both groups of students.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students' Feelings About Perceived Levels of Parental Input on Post Graduation Decisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item: My parents have much input into what decisions I will make after I graduate from high school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Percentages have been rounded)

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students' Perceived Levels of Educational/Career Freedom Granted by Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item: My parents give me the freedom to choose other educational/career choices differing from theirs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Percentages have been rounded)
The next item asked students to rate their responses to the statement, “My parents give me the freedom to choose other educational/career choices differing from theirs” (Table 9). For this item, the percentage of ESL students that strongly agreed was 35% compared to 60% of non-ESL students. When both sets of positive responses were considered, “agree” and “strongly agree”, 69% of ESL students versus 93% of non-ESL students responded positively. For the two groups 12% of ESL and 2% of non-ESL students responded negatively, either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. The last item in this grouping was stated “Your parents/family give you freedom to choose your own life plans” (Table 10). For this item, 28% of ESL students strongly agreed compared to 55% of non-ESL students. Of those students responding positively, either “agree” or “strongly agree”, 68% were ESL compared to 89% ESL. Few students in each group responded negatively to this item, 7% ESL versus 2% non-ESL. These first four items suggest that ESL students may perceive themselves as having less autonomy and control over future and academic decisions than non-ESL students as indicated by the comparison of reported responses between the two groups. Responses to these items may also suggest that ESL students feel that their parents have more direct input into their decisions related to their futures than do non-ESL students.

The next two items were included in order to gauge the possible influence of parental desires on whether students would perceive continuing post-secondary education immediately after high school graduation. Students were asked to respond to the statement “My parents want me to go to university or college” (Table 11). The responses to this statement suggest that for both groups of students’ parents a post secondary education is important. To this statement 80% of ESL students responded
Table 10
Students' Perceived Levels of Freedom to Make Life Plans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item: Your parents/family give you freedom to choose your own life plans.</th>
<th>Does Not Apply</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Group</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>2 (3)</td>
<td>3 (4)</td>
<td>16 (25)</td>
<td>26 (40)</td>
<td>18 (28)</td>
<td>65 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>6 (8)</td>
<td>27 (34)</td>
<td>44 (55)</td>
<td>80 (100)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Percentages have been rounded).

Table 11
Students' Perceptions of Parental Post-secondary Educational Desires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item: My parents want me to go to university or college.</th>
<th>Does Not Apply</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Group</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>4 (6)</td>
<td>8 (12)</td>
<td>52 (80)</td>
<td>65 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>2 (3)</td>
<td>4 (5)</td>
<td>24 (30)</td>
<td>49 (61)</td>
<td>80 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Percentages have been rounded)

"strongly agree" compared to 61% of non-ESL students. Considering all positive responses, "agree" and "strongly agree", 92% of ESL versus 91% of non-ESL students responded positively. Very few students in either group responded negatively. Only 2% of ESL and 3% of non-ESL students responded either "disagree" or "strongly disagree".
Student responses to the item stating “It is important to continue with your education immediately after graduation” (Table 12) suggests a difference in feelings between the two groups of students. To this item 63% of ESL students strongly agreed compared to 31% of non-ESL students. Furthermore, only 1% of ESL students strongly disagreed compared to 8% of non-ESL students. A consideration of both positive categories, “agree” and “strongly agree”, produces response rates of 85% ESL compared to 55% non-ESL. The two preceding items suggest that high levels of parents for both groups want their children to pursue a post-secondary education.

Table 12
Students’ Feelings About Immediately Commencing Post-secondary Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Group</th>
<th>Does Not Apply</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>4 (6)</td>
<td>5 (8)</td>
<td>14 (22)</td>
<td>41 (63)</td>
<td>65 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>6 (8)</td>
<td>8 (10)</td>
<td>21 (26)</td>
<td>19 (24)</td>
<td>25 (31)</td>
<td>80 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Percentages have been rounded)

The next two items were designed to gauge the degree to which students’ would perceive the similarity between their values and those of their parents. This item stated “My family’s opinions about my future career plans are important to me” (Table 13) produced higher positive response percentages for ESL students. Forty-three percent of ESL students responded “agree” and 28% “strongly agree” compared to non-ESL students who responded 35% “agree” and 23% “strongly agree”. In other words, 71% of
ESL students responded positively compared to 58% of non-ESL students. Of those who responded negatively, either “disagree” or “strongly disagree”, 8% were ESL compared to 16% non-ESL. The last item students responded to was “I do value the same things as my family/parent(s)” (Table 14). This item produced similar results for both groups of students. Seventeen percent of ESL students “strongly agree” compared to 16% of non-ESL students, and 32% of ESL students “agree” compared to 33% of non-ESL students. Similar numbers of students in both groups also either “disagreed” or “disagreed strongly”, 20% ESL compared to 22% non-ESL. These last two items suggest similarities between how students perceived the importance of familial opinions in their decisions about their futures.

Table 13
Students’ Perceptions on the Importance of Familial Opinion

| Item: My family’s opinions about my future career plans are important to me. |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Student Group   | Does Not Apply  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree        | Neutral         | Agree           | Strongly Agree  | Total n %       |
| ESL             | 1 (1)           | 1 (2)            | 4 (6)           | 13 (20)         | 28 (43)         | 18 (28)         | 65 (100)        |
| Non-ESL         | 1 (1)           | 5 (6)            | 8 (10)          | 20 (25)         | 28 (35)         | 18 (23)         | 80 (100)        |

(Percentages have been rounded)
Table 14

Students' Perceptions of Personal and Parental Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item: I do value the same things as my family/parent(s).</th>
<th>Student Group</th>
<th>Does Not Apply</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>4 (6)</td>
<td>9 (14)</td>
<td>19 (29)</td>
<td>21 (32)</td>
<td>11 (17)</td>
<td>65 (100)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>4 (5)</td>
<td>14 (17)</td>
<td>23 (29)</td>
<td>26 (33)</td>
<td>13 (16)</td>
<td>80 (100)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Percentages have been rounded)

The quantitative findings from the student questionnaires revealed three characteristics about the ESL population: 1) ESL students perceive themselves as having less input into their future career and academic decisions, while both ESL and non-ESL students indicated that they valued parental input; 2) ESL students perceive themselves as having less freedom in their academic and career aspirations; and 3) the parents of ESL students have a large degree of control and input over the futures of their children as indicated by student responses.
CHAPTER 5

Student and Staff Interviews

The interviews can best be considered by condensing what they revealed by theme. Three main themes emerged from student/staff responses which will be termed “Parental Input”, “Career Orientation”, and “Social Behaviour”. Each theme, which will comprise an individual section within the larger “Interview” chapter of this study, will summarize the main findings and trends in student/staff responses. The Parental Input section below examines issues relating to how ESL students described their parents’ academic demands, restrictions on their freedom outside of school, and general expectations. The Career Orientation section of this chapter looks at ESL student explanations for why they chose certain courses and avoided enrolment in others, Science over liberal Arts courses. This section also reveals why certain careers are preferred by these ESL students and their parents over others. Finally, the Social Behaviour section of this chapter closely evaluates particular behaviors displayed by ESL students with regard to friendship and homework.

All 26 (13 males, 13 females) student participants were grade 12 students who have graduated out of the ESL program at West Coast High. These students were randomly drawn from a total of forty. This initial group was composed of all ESL students whose parent’s consented to their being interviewed and who they themselves agreed to the interview. Most of the students stated they were from Hong Kong (21); the remaining students stated they were from Mainland China (4) or Taiwan (1). Their ages range from 17 to 18 years. The interviews ranged in duration from approximately 20 to
30 minutes. All names used in this chapter are pseudonyms to protect the identities of participants.

All four school counsellors were interviewed, three females and one male. Eight teachers, all of whom have either had direct experience teaching ESL students or have had ex-ESL students in their classes, were asked the same questions. Of these eight, five were males and three females. Of the male staff participants, two were of Chinese decent, both having themselves immigrated to Canada while still school aged. The thoughts and observations of the counsellors were considered as they have direct contact with ESL and non-ESL grade 12 students during their course selection. Similarly, the thoughts and observations of the school teachers were included and commented on wherever their input either significantly agreed or contradicted the thoughts of the counsellors. Many of the questions first asked of the students were mirrored in the questions asked of the staff. Hence, the format to follow will first present the student perspective to questions followed by what staff members stated.

**Parental Input**

The ESL students were first asked, “What are your plans after you finish high school?”, in order to gain information about the goals and pressure on them to enter into university upon completing high school. To this question twenty students out of twenty-six interviewed stated “university” in some form within their responses. The other students responded by indicating a career choice. Of those that did not give “university” as a response, professions such as “doctor”, “rehabilitation”, “business”, “engineer” and “drama” were offered. All except one of the grade 12 ESL students questioned felt that
they were university bound. This student stated "college" as an alternative to university and this was only as a backup, "I hope to go to university, but if I can't, I will go to college and see what happens there" (Charles). Furthermore, only one student mentioned a Fine Arts career in Drama (later, this student revealed that this was her plan and was against her parents' wishes). Evidence from some of the students suggests that parents have made their academic wishes clear.

After high school I will go to university and then when I finish at university my parents want me to go back to Taiwan to find some job.

After a while I have to help my Dad because he has his own company and so maybe I will help him go to other country and make our company bigger. (Kevin)

Another student stated that his mother had already laid out academic expectations for after high school.

I'll go to university cause my Mom is always expecting me to go there....

I know that if you don't go to university you won't get a good job. (Meng)

As a follow-up question students were asked, regarding what they were planning to do after graduating: "Did your parents give you a choice about this decision?" Approximately half of the students stated outright that they had no choice in what they would do after graduating school. For the other half who did believe they had a choice, it became clear from their statements that they were only given partial decision making
power. For these students, the issue was not a matter of whether they wished to go to university or not, but rather what choice they would make in regards to location, or school. This is in contradiction with the quantitative finding in Table 10 where 68% of ESL students indicated that they agreed with the statement “Your parents/family give you freedom to choose your own life plans”. For the students below the ultimate decision concerning attendance had already been made by parents.

They say I have to go to university to get high marks and graduate
and then choose a good job. (Bryan)

She said I could go to any university. I know that if you go to college
it is harder to find a job than if you have a university degree. (Meng)

Another student felt that he had been given a choice, but only regarding the details surrounding his university attendance.

Ya. She let me like pick whatever university you can go into. (Ronald)

For other students, although they stated during the interview that parents had not overtly made the decision about university, it is evident that these students implicitly knew what their parents expected of them – university.

Actually I don’t think so, because they said you can decide whatever you want, but I know what they are thinking about, because of course they
want you to go into university and get a good job. (Alred)

One student even stated peer pressure as a motivating force behind her university aspirations:

They didn’t say anything about it, but everyone is doing it. (Sara)

Staff responses right from the opening of the interview process suggest a high level of parent pressure to perform well in school on ESL students. The first question to be considered by counsellors and staff was “Do you think most students from Asian countries like China differ from Canadian students? If so, in what ways?” As mentioned earlier in this thesis most of our ESL population, approximately ninety-eight percent, come from China—and for the purpose of student interviews twenty-five of the twenty-six students reported being “Chinese.” Hence the word “China” was included in this question. All four school counsellors mentioned parental “pressure” as an item of significance that, in their opinion, differentiated ESL students from those that were not. In addition, all four counsellors mentioned the academic rigor and streaming which overwhelmingly was part of Chinese ESL students’ programs.

They have pressure to go into university; there are many kids who say their parents do not want them to go into college. They want them to go straight into university... He [the student] said there is no way that his parents would accept him going into college first - even if college offers university courses. (Maria - counsellor)
One counsellor stated that parental pressure could even lead to “undue” emotional stress.

I think a lot of them can’t handle it. It puts undo stress and pressure on them, and a lot of them are depressed. We have kids coming in crying – they can’t take it anymore. We had a couple of kids that have had suicidal tendencies because of the pressure. I think it is carried over from the parents. (Nora - counsellor)

Another counsellor stated that Asian students usually do not go against their parents’ wishes.

In most cases children don’t go against what parents want, they have had so much pressure about going to university, going to UBC, that most kids don’t push against that. (Carrie - counsellor)

According to counsellors, parental pressure is a component in the lives of many Chinese ESL students. As all the school counselors echoed when questioned, this “pressure” element was among the first issues raised when asked to compare ESL and non-ESL students.

The teachers gave a much broader range of remarks to this question. Both Chinese-Canadian teachers and staff gave distinctively similar comments stressing again the prominence of parental pressure in the lives of Chinese ESL students.
There is definitely more family pressure. The parents will look at the report card and say, ‘so and so has a B, let’s hire a tutor for the kid’. That happens a lot, . . . and having a tutor is very common place. For Western students you don’t hire a tutor unless the kid is about to fail, or a teacher recommends it, and the Canadian parent might grudgingly higher a tutor. For the Chinese parent, having a long term tutor is like having medical insurance, it is almost like a given. (Mark - teacher)

Another Chinese-Canadian staff member indirectly suggested the high expectations that “Chinese” parents placed on their children.

We have parents that come here and their kid has got ninety-five percent and they say ‘how can they do better?’ I go like come on ‘get a life’. That is my attitude. (Tim - teacher)

A grade 12 English teacher also alluded to what he felt was a more disciplined approach to school and school work by the Chinese students and furthermore attributed this to possible home life.

I find Asian kids better behaved in the classroom and hand in better work. They spend more time on assignments and as a rule, they work more conscientiously in groups and hand in better work . . . if you asked me . . .
would say they have better work habits, perhaps because of the structure at home, and they are more serious about their work. (Mitch - teacher)

This teacher, when pressed to make a group distinction, did believe his Chinese students to be more diligent in their schoolwork. He placed this difference on possible home life, implicating that parents are catalysts for student behavior.

Considering the comments made by the four counsellors and similar remarks echoed by teaching staff, the staff indicated that Chinese ESL students face more pressure related to achieving success in school than non-Asian students. This is not to propose that non-Asian Canadian students do not have “pressure” placed on them at home, to exceed scholastically; however, the teachers possibly through conversations with parents, and the counsellors most definitely via conversations with students and parents, had a sense that greater pressure was being placed on Chinese students. When questioned, the interviewed staff saw this as being the single most distinctive feature between the two groups of students.

On the same theme, students were asked, “How do you think Chinese or Asian parents might be different from Canadian parents?” All twenty-six students gave similar responses, overwhelmingly pointing out how Chinese parents were “strict” or applied more “pressure”, while the Canadian parents tended to be more “open” and provided their children with more “freedom.” It is interesting that some Chinese students equated more freedom on the part of Canadian parents with “caring less” about their children. Similarly, some students also pointed out that Chinese parents “cared more” because they looked after their children’s economic needs even after they reached the age of majority,
nineteen. One discussion with an ESL grade 12 student included many of these elements in her response.

I think for the Chinese people the mark is everything. If you have good marks then it means everything: you are intelligent, you can make good money, everything. . . . They [Canadian students] can choose what they want. They are free. (Joyce)

Another student equated parental care with economic support into adulthood.

Maybe Chinese have to care about the kids a lot. They have to teach kids things and give them food and clothes even after they are nineteen. The Canadian parents do not care about the kids much and after the kids are nineteen - they probably let the kids go out and earn money by themselves. (Bill)

One female student also explained how “Chinese” parents planned for the educational needs of their children after graduation.

Usually people tell me that Canadian parents doesn’t give the money to their children for university, but Chinese parents they have a plan. They plan which money will go. They will save a bunch of money and budget for the school like for their children to go to university school. Like Canadian they won’t. (Phoenix)
One student explained the relationship between parents, their financial support, and issues revolving around parental control as an exchange.

Chinese parents like to support their kids, but in exchange for that they get more control of their kids. Like ‘I provide your food and provide your shelter so you have to listen to me’. Whereas Canadian kids work, there is exceptions, but most of them work and basically they can somehow support themselves. For example on car issues, the parents give lots of limitations like you can’t drive at night, you have to ask for permission. You know White kids, they buy their own cars and they can drive whenever they want. Canadian parents have less control. (Simon)

For other students, the degree of “openness” between children and their parents was the largest difference between Chinese and Canadian parents.

They [Chinese parents] are more strict, and Canadian parents are more open. It is hard for me to talk to my parents; they always yell at me for little things. They won’t understand, they won’t sit there and talk to you... They [Canadian parents] are kind of like friends. They kidding around with them [children]. (Julia)

Canadian parents would be too open and Chinese parents would be half
and half, half strict and half open. . . too open the kids have too many
choices and they just do whatever they want – so you don’t get the result
of being better. (Jinson)

For other students “freedom” in terms of to what degree parents controlled academic and
life decisions was the most distinguishing feature between the two groups of parents.

They [Canadian parents] let their children do a lot more stuff that they like
to do. Chinese parents want you to do homework and like study. . .study
like for a certain amount of hours or do homework. If you are Canadian
you don’t even have to go home – you can go out and play. (Charles)

I think the Canadian family just want their child to be happy and then
lets them decide their things, but for Chinese parents of course we still
want you to be happy, but most of the time Chinese parents make
decisions for you. They won’t even ask you before they make the
decision for you. For example marriage, they won’t even ask you if
you like that guy or not. If he is rich and he is with you just go. They
don’t care. (Rose)

For other ESL students, parental pressure is derived from the fact that they expect and
want high scholastic results from their students.

Taiwan parents is more strict, and told their kids to do that and that.
Canadian parents, you can do whatever you want. They [Tai Parents] want their kids to be the best, and [for] Canadians [it] is just like not really that important. (Sara) I think Chinese parents care about more, care more about their child, but I don’t know about Canadian parents. . . because when we’re in elementary school, if you don’t want to do homework they will make you do it. (Meng)

Chinese people treat their children so seriously, Canadians’ is not. They let the children do any-thing they want. (Penny)

They don’t let, like they control their kids to do certain things . . . by using force. Like if they don’t do certain things they won’t let their kids come home, or throw them outside. Something like that. (John)

There is a sense among Chinese ESL students that their parents care more for them than Canadian parents do for their children. These students see pressure and expectations to do well academically, along with tight controls over their behaviour outside of school as expressions of how their parents care for them. Expectations, in regards to academics, as the student responses suggest, are made clear by parents.

Seeking further evidence on the nature of the two groups I asked the staff, “How would you say that the parents from these two groups differ?” Considering the four counsellors’ responses to this question, two main themes emerged. The first was that education – university education – from “UBC” in particular was very highly valued and
desired; the second was that parents were not willing to accept alternatives to university education such as college.

College is perfectly acceptable. They don’t want that; they want university. University or nothing. (Arthur - counsellor)

Because the majority of ESL students are Asian, I find that their values are different from the culturalized Canadian kids who are a great variety of nationalities in our school. . .they value university very highly. In fact, in our school it’s UBC. This comes from the fact that when they are over in Hong Kong or China or whatever the only university they hear about is UBC. So that when they come here that is where they want their kids to go. (Carrie - counsellor)

The teachers gave similar responses suggesting that the Chinese ESL parents were much more involved in directing the lives of their children.

Asian parents are far more interested in the academic well-being versus the emotional and overall well-being of the child. The pressure that is put on the child, I think, is far more extreme than a Western parent. (Francis - teacher)

The parents want to be much more involved in their children’s lives. They want to plan every aspect, or as much as they can. Most of their extra-curricular activities, they have a time-table. They have a plan to get their kid into university from an early age. (Mark – teacher)
Statements from both the school counsellors and teachers suggest that Chinese parents are university focussed. These parents want their children to go to university, and will not accept other substitutes like college as alternative routes for entry into university. For most non-Asian Canadian parents, college is an acceptable alternative or indirect path to university. For some reason, not obvious in the responses above – possibly due to a lack of knowledge concerning the Canadian education system – Chinese parents see college as inferior to university. Chinese parents, as the evidence suggests, place high value on education and hence the resulting “pressure” to succeed academically on their children. Perhaps the clearest distinction among “Chinese” parents and “Canadian” parents, as offered from the staff respondents, would be the narrow focus that Chinese parents have versus Canadian parents. Asian parents seek academic success for their children, while Canadian parents may also seek academic success among other socializing skills that are necessary for the schooling of a “well-rounded” student. As will be demonstrated below, this discussion of “narrow” focus versus a more “well-rounded” approach to education continues in the academic freedom and social habits sections below.

When the students approached the question: “Do you think most parents from China or Asian cultures allow their children to make free decisions about their future careers?”, the majority of students stated that they did not. Some students thought that their parents did give them freedom to choose, but they still knew of fellow students who were not given this choice. The main feature that this question highlights is that again parents do have a strong influence – if not direct control – over what their children study.
Students stated that in some cases it depended on the amount of education that parents had, those with higher levels of education wanted to have more direct input into the selection of courses or at least the direction their children were taking. Other students mentioned that much of their lives, at least academically speaking, was to some degree "planned out". For the following students, there was no question that parents “ask” and children simply “do” as they are told.

Most parents force their children to go to university. Like one of my friends does. My Mom’s friend forces her daughter to go to university – like no matter what. Her daughter studies from day to night and doesn’t sleep for that day. That’s what most parents do. (Edwin)

No. They just want you to do something and you have to do something. (Carol)

No. Taiwan education is very hard, very complicated. The school time in the day is nine hours – so tired. They [parents] tell you to ‘study go study. . .don’t leave your desk’. (Wen)

Other students were not as definite in their responses. Still, they did suggest that many parents, choose for them.

They let me as long as it is a good job – you know. If I say I want to be a dishwasher they won’t let me. . .Go to university, find a job that you get paid a lot that you won’t get tired and stuff. (Jen)
Maybe they want their kids to be like following when they are having some kind of business. Maybe they want them to keep on going in their business and earn more money. (Ronald)

I think it depends on the family and what their grandparents think. Because if the grandparents told them something about their opinion than the parents might take that opinion because they grow up in that family. For them those stuff are deep inside their brain, it's like rules. (Rose)

In a subsequent question, I asked students the degree to which ESL parents are involved in their children's education. The question asked, "How are your parents involved in your education?" For many students, the acquisition of a tutor to support their children's school work was the main response.

They help me to find a good tutor or to help me finish-up Math. I think that is the best they can do for me. (Alred)

They will see your report card or interview with teacher... I think most Asian children have tutor at home. (Kevin)

Other students reported a high level of parental involvement and concern over their school work and grades.
They just ask me to do homework and study everyday... Report cards they just sign it and if I get ‘A’ they will be happy and if I get ‘B’ they will not be satisfied. (Bill)

They always want me to study. Study. Study. Study... I have to study at least five hours a day... I woke up really tired sitting in front of your desk five hours at least at day, and then finally you can go out, you just want to go out and you can’t... I don’t want just sitting in front of my desk. Even if I like go down to drink water my mom will like ‘Are you finished studying upstairs? Are you finished studying?’ They will be like, ‘why are you downstairs?’ – ‘I just came down to get water’. (Rose)

The third interview question posed to counsellors and teaching staff who participated in the interview was, “Which group of students, do you think are allowed more freedom to make academic and career choice decisions?” All four counsellors responded that they felt non-Asian Canadian students were granted more “freedom” to make academic decisions when compared to their Chinese ESL counterparts. On this all four counselors were very definite in their responses and three offered various details indicating that Chinese parents were also less likely to accept advice from the counsellors which conflicted or went against their “plans” or “expectations” for their children. Any hint from the counsellors that a direct university transition from grade 12 might be difficult, or possibly beyond the capability of their student, was met with resistance from Chinese parents, as the counselors explain.
Definitely Canadian. The kids come in and they make their choices – what they want to take. Asian kids their biggest thing is to upgrade, everything is geared to get marks to get into university. Whereas kids [Canadian], they get the big picture that they know my marks aren’t going to get me into university so they look at optional . . . what are other programs available.

(Artur - counsellor)

Another counselor suggested that the educational goals of Chinese ESL and non-ESL parents were different and thus result in less “freedom” being granted to ESL students.

I would say the majority of them, either because of parental expectation or those expectations which they have taken on from their parents, I don’t feel they have a lot of freedom to chose, and the focus on academics is huge. Where I think the culturalized Canadian population values the academics and I think in all cases where their child could have the opportunity of moving on . . . they want them to experience more. They want them to have the opportunity in the woodworking shop, in the photography room, etc. (Carrie – counsellor)

When questioned on the topic above, seven of the eight teachers interviewed also stated that they believed non-ESL, Western students, have more freedom in their academic choices that do Chinese ESL students. It is interesting to note that the two Chinese-Canadian teachers on staff also agreed with the counsellors. In their views, the majority
of Chinese parents had a clear “plan” for their children, and all else – including school activities such as sports teams – was second to academics.

Canadian kids... on the basis that Chinese parents or Asian parents want their kids to be more pragmatic. For example, if the kid wants to do liberal arts or something like that, the first question is ‘how will it get you into university, into a successful career?’ (Mark – teacher)

Definitely the Western kids – definitely. The oriental parents, the Chinese parents have really high expectations for their kids. Tutoring, and extra help and extra this. Again, I think that oriental parents push their kids into certain prestige careers. . . doctors, lawyer, accountant whether the kids like it or not, and they push to the point where sometimes they . . . lots of the kids aren’t capable of doing it but the parents push anyway. If you look at the way things are, a lot of Orientals will not put their kids into being mechanics or plumbers or carpenters because there is no prestige in it. (Tomas - teacher).

Counsellors and teachers do perceive that Chinese ESL students are given much less academic freedom to pursue a wider range of electives than Western students. Counsellors have stated, as a unified department, that both Asian parents and their children come into their offices requesting specific information for university entrance, and request placement into academic courses. On the whole, what appears to be the largest difference – as indicated by the evidence above - between the Chinese ESL
students and the non-ESL acculturated Canadian students is breadth of their course selections. Chinese parents would prefer a streamlined education for their children concentrating in the academic subjects – specifically Science - one that does not deviate from the ultimate parental objective of “university”.

As suggested by the voices of these ESL students, parental input is a large factor in their decision making process. Almost all students stated that they were university bound. Likewise, many indicated that this was not only their wish but what their parents wanted and expected of them. Staff responses and especially the responses from counsellors mirrored student statements.

Career Orientation

I asked the ESL students during their interviews, “Are there jobs or professions that Chinese or Asian parents would not want their children to do or study for?” Six of twenty-six students stated “no” in their responses. However, the remaining majority of students all had very clear ideas about the types of careers or jobs they felt their parents would not want them to do. For several students, low prestige, manual or labour jobs were definitely frowned upon by their parents.

Yes. Like driving the bus. Like something. . .most Chinese parents want their children to find job which is very popular job like being a lawyer. Being a chef anything lower than that they don’t recommend. (Bowen)
Of course... like picking up garbage, police, join the military. (Simon)

Ya for some. Like to go digging at a site, like for History. (Stephen)

For many other students, any job that did not earn a substantial amount of money would definitely not be approved by their parents.

Those jobs which will not make their living... those that don’t earn more money. (Canny)

It is ok as long as you make enough money. [For] Chinese people, especially my parents, money is quite important. (Edwin)

My parents tell me that you can do any job at first, but they won’t like me to be a worker over thirty years old. I should have a big business when I am over thirty. (Kevin)

I think it is Art. Because Chinese like their children to earn so many money and support themselves. (Penny)

Staff were asked: “Are there jobs or professions that ESL parents would not want their children to do or study for?”, and “What are the types of jobs that most Asiatic ESL parents would be very proud to have their child doing?” The responses to these questions from all counsellors and from the majority of teachers suggest that any courses
or fields in the Liberal Arts, Fine Arts or Shop orientated areas are discouraged by parents. Furthermore, responses from all four counsellors and staff suggest that there is a strong push for Science related fields such as Medicine or Dentistry, and Business on the part of Chinese parents.

The comments from all four counselors reveals a strong pull factor into the "Sciences" and as a second choice "Business".

Anything that's not a doctor they don't want them anywhere near it. That is why we have a real difficult time in our Fine Arts . . . all the shops . . . there are very few [ESL students] that are in the shops. (Arthur - counsellor)

I think a lot of the trades. The kind of trade or apprenticeship kinds of courses. The expectations of the ESL parents is Sciences. They steer their kids more to Sciences and Engineering more than the general Arts. (Nora - counsellor)

Likewise, teachers also had a sense that anything in "Arts" was not encouraged.

Perhaps in the areas of Geography or Geology I think it is a little harder to accept . . . Environmental Studies. I think it is valid and honorable – there’s a lot of opportunity – a former student of mine is in SFU right now and she is doing a Geography major and combining that with a Business, Commerce major too. She wants to work for . . . do some consulting for corporations in the environmental studies and stuff. But I think those kinds
of things are not...you know the traditional doctor, lawyer type professions [Chinese parents] probably want. (Lex - teacher)

Anything related to Arts. They would be very hesitant about their kids going into anything related to the Fine Arts as well. Overall, in general, I’d say they are very focused...maybe cultural expectations...they want their kids to find the jobs that are going to pay well so they can look after the parents and also their own families...and for social status and prestige. The parents want to be able to tell others that their kids are doctors, lawyers and engineers – not necessarily teachers, archeologists and librarians that kind of thing. (Olson - teacher)

In these responses there was a definite sense that Chinese ESL students were, as one teacher phrased it, discouraged from “probably things to do with the liberal Arts, they don’t want their kids to be starving artists” (Mark - teacher). Some comments from staff and student interviews suggest that a university education and the subsequent profession chosen by the student carries much importance for not only the individual student but also their immediate family. Prestigious careers bring a sense of pride to the family - especially the parents and grandparents. This point is suggested in the responses from two counsellors.

Well I think they want high professional jobs. I think it also...to them, and I talked to a couple of parents that it is...it is looked upon by other members of the family if their kids aren’t going to university it is almost
not a disgrace but it is not accepted. So they in turn pressure their kids because it is also their face. They have to be accountable that their kids aren’t making it to the next level. (Arthur - counsellor)

A lot of them really want their kids to go into business, taking business through university . . . Science degrees. I should qualify that a lot of the kids because of their ESL background, the Arts is a lot more difficult for them because they have to express in written form their opinions and research and things. So the kids do tend to swing more towards the Sciences, but I do know that the parents it’s a really big thing for them to have a Doctor a Lawyer or Dentist in the family. (Carrie - counsellor)

As many of the staff believe, prestigious careers in Science or Business are what is the ultimate objective of many Chinese ESL students and their parents. The evidence from the staff suggests that this could be due to cultural expectations and also because of difficulty with language based courses rooted outside of Science and Business.

ESL students were asked a similar question mirroring the one above, “If you were to ask Chinese or Asian parents what their educational goals for their children were what would they say?” The responses from all students again suggests continuity with what the staff responded above. A few students stated high prestige professions.

Mostly like be a doctor or a lawyer. (Alred)

Go to university, study financial business and hopefully they can open
up their own Business. (Simon)

Doctor, lawyer. (Carol)

University like graduation stuff. Really high level school. Rich. To be a business person. (Phoenix)

Other students gave responses indicating specific parental academic and behaviourial expectations while in school.

Most would say...get good marks, and try their best, and study. You can’t fool around. (Bryan)

Maybe they want their children to have the highest education. Going to university and earn a Master’s degree. Maybe they think that their kid is like the best and stuff. (Ronald)

To get straight A’s and...a top quality personality and then they have to get both personality and grades - or even higher than that. (Rose)

For others, university was associated with success and increased monetary rewards.

Finish university and get a good job and money. (Wen)
To get a better job, better life afterwards – after finishing university. (Jinson)

Probably university level. Professional. They want me to just study in university that’s all. (John)

Though I had intended question six to be about educational goals in the broader sense, it was more narrowly defined by all interviewees. This question asked staff about the educational expectations of their Chinese ESL students and was stated, “If you were to ask most ESL parents from Asia what their educational goals for their children were what would they say?” The responses from the staff again indicate that parents hold high professional expectations for their children. All responses from counsellors indicated university; some of the responses further elaborated on students being expected to concentrate their scholarly energies into either the Sciences or Business. The responses from school staff indicate that they believe that, for ESL parents, there is a tendency to equate university education with success.

Probably to get into the Sciences at UBC. I think because, I don’t know about China but I know in Japan there are certain universities that are number one, and it is the goal of every parent to go to the best university because if you go there your life is already planned out. You’ve got an easy ticket to get out of university. (Nora – counsellor)

I think there is a real push to maintain the highest grades possible. My sense
is that most ESL parents think that the student should focus on solely academics not so much on extra-curricular, social aspects. I guess it is a means to an end in terms of achieving their goals of becoming a doctor or lawyer or a business person and go back to Hong Kong or whatever.

(Lex - teacher)

They [ESL parents] are pretty strict. They expect their students...their kids to be high achievers no matter what. The parents expect that their children will go on to post-secondary education...they are all expected to go to university or college. And maybe too the parents also start to sort of funnel kids into certain subject areas as well – for example Sciences and Math. They feel their kids should do well in those areas because those areas are important in their eyes...in their minds. (Olson - teacher)

Staff’s perceptions were all unanimous in suggesting that ESL parents believe that a post-secondary education is in the futures of all their students. At least, this is where they expect their students will end up. The counsellors have stated that not all those students from this group, or from the school’s Western Canadian-born population, enter university straight out of high school. What is striking, however, is that staff repeatedly state “UBC” in their answers, in addition to university. This lends evidence to the premise that indeed “prestige” is a definite factor in deciding where students will attend if possible. There is a perception, as indicated by staff statements, that any other post-secondary institution – locally speaking – other than UBC is considered second, and that college is seen as a last (disgraceful) resort.
Students were asked, “Are there some subjects in school in which more Chinese or Asian students take than “Canadian” students? Why?” The two most prominent responses where “Science” and “Mandarin”. Math and Science were the two key areas pointed out as having more Chinese students than Canadian students primarily because these subjects were easier for them given their schooling before coming to Canada.

Math...you know China’s study is total different from here, and the Chinese, most of them, are good at Math and the Science like the Physics. (Penny)

Science, Computer, Engineer. Look at UBC most of them are Chinese because they are really good at Math. Like in UBC the Math they are learning is in like in Hong Kong is only like a high school level. It’s like grade twelve level. It’s like really easy for them to go into engineer. (Phoenix)

One student points out that low enrollment in Technical Education, “Shop” courses is due to “cultural” preferences.

Like the hands on stuff, like Electronics, Woodwork, Metalwork and Technology. There is not many people taking that. Because Chinese people don’t like hands on stuff. They rather be guided than do free-spirit stuff. All the Science and Math, all the academic stuff like Physics and Math and Biology, Chemistry. Where you can end up getting really high pay and into university. (Simon)
For many other students Mandarin was the subject pointed to as having more "Chinese" students than "Canadian". Again, students indicate that the reason for this is because they can perform better in this course than in the other language electives offered at the school.

Like Mandarin and Japanese. Most of the kids already know Mandarin already or Japanese to get good marks. If they study something like French and they don’t get it they won’t pass and stuff. (Jen)

Ya. Like Mandarin because they already know Mandarin, so when they take it they think they will get A. (Meng)

Staff interview questions seven and eight were open-ended and resembled each other in nature. Question seven read, "Are there some subjects in school which more ex-ESL students would take than Canadian students? Why?", and question eight read, "What subject areas or senior courses would you find a high number of ex-ESL students in?" The staff’s response to these questions was overwhelmingly "Science", with some staff members stating that in addition to the Sciences some students might enroll in "Business". What is also revealed in the responses by counsellors and teachers is that Chinese ESL students may be selecting the Science route to university because it is less dependent on English language skills, and because many ESL students from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan have had Science training previous to coming to Canada. This is later
supported by what many students stated in their interviews, that Science training in Asia—Mathematics in particular—is superior to that which is taught to them in the Canadian system. One counsellor states, Science is the easiest route to university for ESL students.

Sciences...They can’t excel in Arts because they can’t take Geography or History because their English isn’t good enough. The only thing they can do, they can do extremely well—especially kids that have exited [ESL] and are good kids in general—they will excel in Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry. They will maybe take their language a Mandarin and then bingo they’ve got entrance to university. So they have to stick to subjects that are non-language based. (Arthur – counsellor)

The Science teacher below also echoes the remarks made above:

In the Math and Sciences especially. Physics, Chemistry, Math are the three courses...because those courses are not language intensive. You don’t need as much language for it, it is more Math and that’s more universal. They studied it all in China and they studied it here. It is easier to pick-up. Whereas Biology is one of the Sciences they don’t take as much - there is more language involved. Physics they do more. (Tomas - teacher)

What the above suggests is that for the ESL student, who is pressured and expected to “make-it” into university, the surest curricular route they can take to achieve this aim is by selecting Science and Math based courses. There are also cultural/parental
underpinnings in their decisions to take Science courses, as student interviews have suggested thus far. For many Chinese ESL students education becomes much more about attaining a high school and university credential, than it does about experiencing Canadian culture and trying new experiences - in essence – becoming a well rounded individual.

Student responses to “Why do you think on average that more ‘Chinese’ students study Science than do ‘Canadian’ students?”, provide evidence to the fact that their former schooling in this area gives them the incentive and a possible advantage in the Science and Math courses.

So many Chinese learned it in China or Hong Kong or Taiwan so they think it will be easy for them. (Bill)

Like in Hong Kong that subject [math] is the main subject. If they are going into that class they will show out that they are the best student in that class than any other. (Ronald)

Like comparing now, Canada to Taiwan, those subject I learn right now, some subjects it’s like for grade eight in Taiwan. That means we’re slower, actually Canada is slower than China or Taiwan. Like if now I in am in Taiwan and I am still in grade ten those Socials, Science, Math, Mandarin I learned in Taiwan and its like grade twelve in here, or sometimes even university. So when I came to here Canada, those Math will be like grade seven or six for me. So like I think that
we are better. (Rose)

Other students indicate a strong parental influence as an explanation for why so many ESL students concentrate their academic energies in the Math and Sciences.

I think because Chinese people think Science is useful in the future. For Chinese most of their parents want them to take Science. (Stephen)

Chinese students because of their parents their backgrounds. Because they...Chinese parents want them to be the greatest...study Science is a better career. (Bryan)

Cause their parents don’t want them to study Art, cause in our culture Art is less important than Science course. Math is important too. It is considered as a Science course. They can earn more money in the future. (Canny)

Other students, point directly to the fact that for “Chinese” Science is more important. Below the students stress a strong cultural gravitation towards this subject.

Because Chinese people have a good understanding and their background. They usually pressure them a lot when they are young. Science won’t involve as much English as the other subjects. (Julia)

Cause I think that they think it is more important...but then Chinese
people, in order for them to get higher marks they have to study either one, take one Science in order to go to university and everything, but White people they don’t care. (Pennina)

Because they think they’ll have a good future if they study Science. They can be a doctor or do scientific stuff. (Charles)

Some students also point out the fact that Science courses are easier and will proved them with the credits necessary to gain university entrance.

Maybe they don’t want to take Socials Studies. Science is more easy than Socials Studies (Carol)

Good question. . .cause it’s like a main course to go into university.

Most universities require you to study like at least two courses of Science. (John)

Cause they want to go to university, and Science includes everything like Biology, Physics and you need that when you get a job. (Meng)

The student responses above do reinforce the statements made by staff to the same question. There does appear to be a general focus in the Sciences on behalf of Chinese ESL students partly due to cultural, linguistic, and parental factors.
When staff were asked question twelve, “Why do you think on average that more ‘Chinese’ students study Science than do ‘Canadian’ students?”, they indicated that they believed in a strong cultural underpinning for this decision.

On the average I think it is because it is a cultural value that they have. There is more value into that because of the security that we talked about. They feel that they are going to get better jobs and prestige. The other thing is that, because kids have told me, that my mom wants to tell her friends ‘I am in the Sciences or in Business and that I am at university not in college’. So again it has to do with prestige as well as security.

(Maria - counsellor)

One counsellor suggested that this preference for “Science” resulted from the influence of previous schooling.

Because they think traditionally the students that grow-up in China – it’s a lot of rote [learning]. It’s a lot of memorizing. It is not a lot of creative kind of thinking. It is more analytical, it is not creative. It is not abstract. So when they come here students seem to excel in the Math and the Sciences because it is a lot of ‘here is the question – there is only one answer to it’, it is not creative thinking. (Nora - counsellor)

Teachers also reflect the comments made by counsellors.
It probably reflects on the school system itself, those must be courses that are stressed far more in Asia and therefore that extends here... and also, it leads to the ultimate goals that they are looking for. I think also History, Social Studies and English are viewed, you study concepts of the past, which are not so relevant, but rather [they] want to deal with changing the future. (Francis – teacher)

I would say that because they probably emphasize Math and Science to a greater degree than we do in Asia. It is not just a matter of emphasizing, but I think they make them work harder. They do more homework, so that when they come to North America they are more advanced in Science and Math. Also, coupled with the fact that English is very difficult for them, it would be natural for them to place more emphasis on something where they don’t have a block towards it. (Mitch - teacher)

I posed the same question to the students. Their responses suggest that for some, the high level of English proficiency required in these courses is a deterrent towards enrollment.

They probably like screw-up... they usually take for provincial, they usually take Mandarin, Physics, Chemistry so they get really high mark. Usually English will pull down their mark. (Phoenix)
The English is too hard and you get low marks. (Julia)

Maybe they hate it. It is hard to memorize those stuff and it is so boring. (Bill)

Other responses to this question reveal that for some students there is little Chinese cultural emphasis in these courses and therefore are of little interest to ESL students.

I do not think Chinese people like History or Literature because they all want to take summer school for Socials. They all want to get this over and quickly so that they can chose whatever they want. They are not interested in it. So they just want to keep their culture rather than join the Canadian culture and learn about it. (Bowen)

I think that after Socials 11 they will quit all this History, because it is boring and also they think that they are Chinese doesn’t care that much about Canadian History. (Aired)

No. I think they don’t care about Western Culture. (John)

Finally, a few students suggested that because these Arts courses were not related or relevant to their specific future career or academic aspirations, students felt these courses were “useless”.

History is not related to your profession. If you are going to be a doctor,
you don’t need History. For language, for us, I think we rather take something that is close to us like Mandarin to boost up your mark without even studying. (Simon)

Most people think like History is pretty useless in the future. (Stephen)

Staff interview question nine deals with the subject of why Chinese ESL students may shy away from any courses that are not in the Science domain. Specifically, question nine raises the issue, “What about courses like History, Literature or Languages?” Both teachers and counsellors stated that these courses – those relying heavily on a well-grounded understanding of English – would be avoided by most ESL students. In response to question nine staff stated:

I think partly it may be the language, because it takes you years – even if you are out of ESL – to feel comfortable (Maria - counsellor).

No. I think one reason could be a language barrier. Also, I don’t think they are viewed as important a Science or Mathematics. (Francis - teacher)

Nope. I think because they don’t have a strong enough language base, even after being here for five or six years, they are still not comfortable. (Sandra - teacher)
One teacher states that “English” is only taken because it is a requirement for those students wanting to graduate and go to university.

Chinese see the importance in those subjects but perhaps not for all the right reasons. They will hire English tutors more often than Math tutors, but the English tutor’s job is to get them to have a high grade, but whether the children really learn to express themselves to live a full and enlightened life, well that is of secondary concern. (Mark - teacher)

Language difficulties, in the opinions of the staff members above, appear to be one reason why ESL students may shy away from these language based courses.

In relation to the above, students were asked, “What courses do your parents expect you to take?” Overwhelmingly, the majority of students named courses in Science and Math.

They expect me to take I.T cause everybody does, every single Chinese student I know took I.T. [Information Technology]. (Edwin)

Yes they expect me to take the courses I have to take. . .Math, Science. (Jen)

In Math and Science they expect A’s (Simon).

In response to the question asking, “Were there any courses your parents did not want you to take? Why is this?”, half of the students answered “no”. The remaining students
offered replies which indicated that their parents did not want them enrolling in courses that were not directly related to their academic program. Electives, for some parents, were viewed as distractions.

Like P.E. cause they think it is useless. You don’t learn anything from that you just play. (Charles)

Many of them like Drama, Acting, Art, Music. They don’t want me to be an actor and stuff because my father wants me to like help him control his company and stuff. So he wants me to study business. (Brian)

Yes. Dance. I don’t know, my mom she’s like...she said, because when you take Dance class you have to buy those shoes - those pants it’s easier for you to stretch out. But they say it’s a waste of time. It’s a waste of money. Why don’t you use this course to take other important classes. (Rose)

My mom wanted me to take Electronics...she thinks that electronics is going to help me in Physics somehow. (Simon)

When propositioned with question eleven, “Do ESL students avoid any classes because of possible language difficulties?”, staff stated that there were two types of courses that they believed ESL students avoided. The first were those which depended
heavily on English and the second were those which were seen a distractions or not leading towards university entrance.

I think they would try to avoid the ones that are the creative ones. I think some of them shy away from Art. The ones that are expected to go to university, they don’t take the higher level P.E., lets say the Art, the Foods, the Textiles. Generally they are streamlined to take the academic courses.
(Nora - counsellor)

Well I think they all try to take English 12, but they probably dread it. ..they Need it for graduation. The things that they probably would not take are the History, Geography, Psych. (Tina - teacher)

Ya. . .usually English. . .English Lit. Plus, they also avoid things like Shop, the I.E [Industrial Education] because they are more hands on and the parents would steer them away from it. The parents would rather tell them to take Calculus instead of Woodwork even if the kid loved Woodwork – there’s no future in it, that’s what they see. (Tomas – teacher)

Questions twenty and twenty-one deal with the matter of parental input and expectations concerning student enrolment in certain courses. The statements below reinforce the notion that ESL parents want their children to enroll only in those courses directly related with credentials that will lead to university. Teachers and counsellors alike stated that Chinese ESL students were less likely to enroll in electives that were
seen as a “waste of time”, and that ESL parents were very influential in the decision processes when it came to students selecting their courses. In response to question twenty-one, “When grade 12 ESL students choose their courses for their senior year, do you think their parents have much input? What advice do these parents give?”, staff responded:

No I think the parents have a lot of input – if the parents are around. I think that they do have influence. . . . Probably to keep their courses in line with whatever program they want to take, or want their son or daughter to take and those are usually in the Math or Sciences. (Lex – teacher)

I think if they were giving advice I think they would probably advise them to take things they are good at, but also things that they think are important. I don’t think anyone would take their child aside and say why don’t you just take a couple of classes that you really enjoy for the sake of learning something different. (Tina – teacher)

Most of the staff felt that parents were very influential in directing their children’s academic programs. A similar question was posed to students in efforts to uncover what students thought, “When you chose your courses for this year did your parents have any input? Did you ask for advice? What advice did they give you?”. Approximately half of the students stated “no” in their responses. They felt that their parents had faith that their selections would be the most wise for them. For the other half who did state a strong
parental influence, many of these parents pushed for Science and Math related courses to be integrated into the student’s program.

Yes. They prefer me to learn more important courses. . . they prefer me to learn Science. Like there is three subjects for Science and they prefer me to do them all. Instead of taking writing, like accounting. (John)

They let me choose it, but they say taking more Science class. (Stephen)

At first take Math and Science then I can take whatever I want. (Wen)

The staff responses to question twenty-one suggest that teachers and counselors also believed that parents expected their children not to deviate from a narrow range of academic-stream courses. When asked, “Are there any courses which grade 12 ESL students would be expected to take? Or, are there any courses which grade 12 ESL students would be discouraged from taking?”, staff responded:

I think they are probably expected to take Math 12, AP [Advanced Placement] 12, Science 12. I think they are probably discouraged to take some of the Fine Art electives. (Francis - teacher)

Yes, the Chemistry, the Biology. . . Probably [discourage] the Fine Arts. I don’t spend a lot of time in the Chemistry rooms upstairs or the Art, the Drama room down the hall, but I do know walking by the classrooms
I see more Asian students in the Chemistry lab than in the Drama room. (Lex - teacher)

They usually tell them to go towards the Sciences. Math, Calculus, Physics, Chemistry, Computers – again that is what leads them into university. I think the parents would not see as much value if a student wanted to take Metalwork as opposed to Calculus. (Tomas - teacher)

The topic of “work experience” raised many conflicting issues among the staff that volunteered to be interviewed. When asked “do you think work experience – or work experience courses are equally important to ‘Chinese’ and ‘non-Chinese’ students or parents?” The counselors all seemed to suggest that more “Chinese” students were taking work experience courses than in previous years, and that the areas of work experience in which these students opted to go into reflected their interest in primarily Science and Business fields.

It is getting better, especially with the kids...because we have offered Science Career Prep. When we didn’t offer...it was more of the technical and the Fine Arts and the fine skills they weren’t using it at all. Once we brought in, introduced, Info Tech. and the Sciences then a lot more of the kids have gone out and used that service. (Arthur - counsellor)

Well I think that there are some that take the Career Prep. which is a little bit different than a work experience. That gives them more
opportunity because it is specialized training in a certain area which hopefully, most of them do it in Science, which will then eventually help them when they get into Science or when they hope to get into Science at university. But I think most of them stay away from the work experience because that typically, to a lot of parents, is the kind of thing that you were going to do if you were going to be a trades person.

(Maria - counsellor)

The interviews in this section suggest that some cultural influences are acting on Chinese ESL grade 12 students. There are strong pull factors operating which attract these students to Science oriented courses. These would be as a result of students having had success in these courses, as they suggest either here in Canada as a result of longer exposure to Science versus Arts courses and possibly as a result of previous schooling in China or other Taiwan. As the students stated, many of the concepts (or at least the grounding) necessary for success in Math and Science were learned before coming to Canada. There are also push factors which operate to encourage these students away from Arts and Humanities based courses. These are mainly parental pressures to go into Science. It would appear that there is a cultural belief, on the part of both ESL students and parents, that Science courses have more value or purpose. Also, the fact that students themselves recognize the difficulty in attempting such grade 12 courses as History or Literature is another factor making these courses unattractive to ESL students. This coupled with the fact that ESL students have a strong desire to enter university and parental expectations that reinforce this notion, it is quite possible that the evidence from
these students does suggest a cultural/familial bias away from Arts and Humanities courses and an influence towards Math and Science.

For the teachers and counsellors, three main reasons stand for why Asiatic ESL students enroll in high numbers within Science and Math based courses. First, it appears that teachers believe that many of these students immigrate with the advantage of having been schooled more rigorously and to a higher degree in Math and Science courses. This would provide these students with an incentive for concentrating in these courses. Second, considering the interviews above, there does appear to be parental emphasis on studying Science based courses versus liberal Arts; these courses are viewed as more valuable and as being associated with higher prestige and income. Third, as staff have stated, this is a survival technique on the part of ESL students. Given that Science and Math courses, generally speaking, require less linguistic emphasis than courses such as History 12, Law 12, and Literature 12, these students naturally gravitate to the courses that will prove “easier”. As all students interviewed stated, their ultimate goal is university entrance; concentrating on their native language and Science courses in grade twelve would provide a clear avenue to complete the provincially examinable credits needed for their purposes – and also meet the expectations of their parents.

**Social Behaviour**

Chinese ESL students were asked what they believed to be true about their work habits compared to those of “Canadian” students. Approximately two-thirds of those interviewed, responded “yes” when asked: “In terms of work habits or study habits, do you think ‘Chinese’ students are harder working than ‘Canadian’ students?” For many of these students, the fact that they were forced to study by their parents was the
overwhelming factor in their responding this way. Some students offered parental influence as the main reason why they answered positively to this question.

First of all it is parents again. I think most Canadian parents don’t pressure their kids. They don’t really care how the kids do as long as they are happy, but Chinese parents are different. Most of them are different. They pressure us. They give us a lot a lot of pressure on them and they always care about our school marks and stuff, but Canadian parents, most of them, they don’t really care. Ya, I feel annoyed sometimes. (Jen)

Sure why not. . .sometime like most ‘skippers’ I think are more Canadians. (Sara)

The Chinese they live in China, like the society, so they must work hard in their culture. Their parents always teach them like that, it is kind of culture thing. (Joyce)

Some students stated that they believed this to be so because of the impact that former schooling and their previous teachers had on them.

Because Chinese teacher everyday gives you many many homework, and if you didn’t finish them you have to do extra. So you have to study very hard (Penny).
Canadian students don't take more time to study their work than Chinese I think. They get used to it in Hong Kong. Ya in China. If you don't study the teacher will hit you – punish you. (Phoenix)

For a third of the students, their observations suggest a more complex understanding of the question stating that you simply could not generalize about the two groups of students. These students felt that the “individual” was really the main factor in deciding who had better study and work habits. The students below move away from an ethnocentric viewpoint.

No. Maybe some of the Chinese and some of the Canadian are hard working students. It doesn't depend on the nation. (Bill)

Not really it depends on the student. Asian and Canadian all have good students and also have some bad student that they don’t study. (Kevin)

Staff were asked question fourteen which dealt with the matter of student social habits. Teachers and counselors were both also asked, “In terms of social habits, do you think ‘Chinese’ or ‘Asiatic’ students compare to ‘Canadian’ Students?” Their responses overwhelmingly suggest that little cross-cultural interaction is occurring.

Well they tend to . . . a lot of the kids they tend to stay together. I don’t think they are as social as the other kids. They tend to have, generally speaking, if
you look at most of them because of their language difficulty...they are more prone to stay with kids that speak their own language. Which is huge and it’s a big problem the fact that they only speak their native language when they are outside the classroom. (Arthur - counsellor)

They tend to stick with students that come from the same country. They don’t socialize a whole lot. They don’t get involved in school activities as much, be on school teams, be in school clubs, you know...be on student council. For them that is something that is taking time away from their own studying. So I think they tend to sort of stick with their own kind. (Nora - teacher)

One thing I do notice, they don’t mix very well with the English speaking or the ones that don’t speak the same language as them. I think you go were you’re most comfortable – it’s the language that is the most comfortable. (Tim - teacher)

Interview questions thirteen, fourteen and nineteen were designed to get at staff’s perceptions of the group dynamics of Chinese ESL students. Insights into work habits and social behaviour, as perceived by counselors and teachers, were offered. In response to question thirteen, “In terms of work habits or study habits, do you think ‘Chinese’ students are harder working than ‘Canadian’ students? Why?” the staff was divided in how they responded. The four school counsellors all responded ‘yes’ and provided much
anecdotal detail to support their statements; teachers, conversely, stated that they had experienced a wide range of students from both groups and therefore found it difficult to generalize. The counsellors, perhaps with their ability to visit and talk frequently with students in a private, one-on-one setting, provided statements - not comparing the two groups – but emphasizing common themes like “dedication” and “hard work” in their discussion about “Chinese” students.

I think the word ‘dedicated’ probably in the fact that their whole hours spent is based on school. Where we have some really top notch kids but they do other things. They [non-ESL students] focus on sports and enjoying a little bit. If you look at the average top scholar in the Asian population, they do two things if they do at all. They do a lot of work in the academic and a lot of them do music. So they will play high level music, and that is about it. I have never really seen many really dedicated in the sports aspect or stuff like that. (Arthur – counsellor)

One counsellor emphasized the forced effort put into excelling in school.

They talk to me about the hours that they keep and for a lot of them it is huge - up until twelve, up until one. They talk to me about doing four or five hours of homework a night...a lot of them have huge expectations for themselves. (Carrie - counsellor)

They put more time in their studies and spend less time socializing with
friends. I think it is a cultural influence. What amazes me is that they seem to be so obedient. They don’t question very much; they don’t challenge. (Maria - counsellor)

They have to meet those expectations. The parents are also hounding them if they don’t spend hours doing homework. Their parents are going saying ‘Why?’, or they are putting that pressure on asking their kids why they are not studying. (Nora - counsellor)

Teachers were less likely to state that there were differences between the two groups of students.

I think that is a generalization that can’t be made, because I have seen a lot of the kids that have satellite parents that are some of the laziest kids that I have ever experienced in my life, and then I have seen that extreme where Asian kids conform to that stereotype. However, I have seen the same in Westernized kids. (Francis - teacher)

No. I don’t think there is much difference. The parent’s push them, that’s why they [Chinese ESL students] work harder and they have no life other than that – the pressures on them so much. We’ve had, I had one student whose parent beat her because she didn’t get an ‘A’, and Social Services had to be involved in that one. So there is a lot of pressure for these kids. In terms of work habits, I don’t think they are better behaved, sometimes
they are worse behaved and I find they are not as respectful to the teacher.

(Tim - teacher)

When students were asked, "Do you enjoy having friends from different cultures at school?" all students responded "yes". The Chinese ESL students interviewed were very positive about their relationships with their peers and displayed an eagerness to make friends. One student even replied: "Ya I love it" (Canny). None of the students responded with any negativity or animosity towards their "Canadian" peers. However, some of the students did voice the fact that most of their friends were still from their own ethnocultural group and that some problems did exist in making friends with students from other cultures.

It depends. Like some Canadian kids are very nice they don't have racism against Chinese, so I make friends with them. Some of them hate Chinese or hate people from any culture. (Edwin)

Most of them are my culture [because] between friends we talk about different topics. (Meng)

I have White friends, but still, the majority of my friends are Chinese. (Simon)

When students were asked "Do you think there are any problems, here at school, between students from different cultures?", for approximately one third of the respondents there appeared to be no problems. However, the remaining students all
offered some account of a “problem” they perceived. There was a range of issues which students brought forward. For some students, the “problem” as they saw it, was that outside of class there was very little intermingling between cultural groups at West Coast High.

Yes. They can’t get along – you know what I mean? They can’t get along.

Like the different culture people always stay together. Like Chinese people always stay with Chinese. They won’t play with Canadian they’re different. The culture is different. . .the language. (Joyce)

Ya some, but they are not racism. Usually Canadian born Chinese they usually hang out with Canadian born Chinese. Chinese will hang out with Chinese I don’t know why – it’s so natural. (Pheonix)

They are kind of like separate. The kids are in different groups. Sometimes you have problems talking in English with others. It is hard to communicate.

I think they also have different interests. For Canadian people they are more interested in sports. Chinese they always talk about movies and Chinese stuff. (Julia)

Question nineteen was aimed at gauging teachers’ and counsellors’ perceptions about whether or not they believed that much cross-cultural interaction was occurring at the school. This question asked staff, “Do you think that many close cross-cultural
friendships develop at school?" The statements from both staff and teachers suggests that some, although little, cross-cultural interaction in a meaningful sense is occurring.

Years back the Asian kids were rallying to have their own graduation, they did not want to have it with the rest of the kids. . .this is not that long ago because we have only graduated five classes. They didn’t want to come. So I have seen more of a feeling that ‘this is our school’ happening, and yet I still have to say there is separation – but it has been more separate. (Carrie – counsellor)

Yes, it depends on the culture. A lot of the Asian kids, and when we say ‘Asian’ we are talking specifically about China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, I think within that group itself there is a lot of differentiating groups that tend to stick together. (Francis – teacher)

No, I think people stick to themselves. Especially the ‘Orientals’ they stick to themselves – a few, we had one student here who was from Taiwan who moved from ESL Level 1 to Level 5 in less than three years and he became student council president and he has done a lot of things. Now he is in Ottawa but that is pretty rare to see someone who is willing to put that much effort in to it. (Tim - teacher)

A possible explanation for why few cross-cultural friendships develop may also be found in the staff’s responses to interview question fifteen dealing with extra-
curricular activities. When asked, "What about extra-curricular activities, do these students differ?", the responses suggest that the two groups do differ. There are two fundamental differences, the first is related to participation rates and the second with the types of activities that the two groups select to become involved in.

The culturalized Canadian kids, although there is a group that does not participate in much, most of the kids participate in something in the school and some of them participate in huge amounts. The ESL kids...there is a group of them that yes they participate in the badminton, in the tennis - specific things, and some of them do get more involved. It is still more to a much greater degree the culturalized Canadian kids that value that. (Carrie - counsellor)

It doesn't seem so because when we do scholarships they might have high high marks, but a lot of the scholarships require that you have been involved in the community, school and community at large. And although many may have the marks, they don't have the other part. I have heard students say that they spend...that they go to bed at night time because they were studying so hard. That doesn't give them enough time to do other things. (Maria - counsellor)

It depends on what you categorize as extra-curricular because a lot of Asian kids are involved in stuff outside of school...I would say that
the participation rate is higher among Western students than it is for Asian students. I think that there is more emphasis put on education primarily the quantity of studying versus the quality of experiences. (Francis - teacher)

Well, in sports I think probably the Canadian kid is expected to participate because there is a cultural reason to excel in sports. For the Chinese parents sports would be a secondary concern, even though the children would be interested. But they would strongly prioritize saying that academics are more important than sports. (Mark - teacher)

I think there isn't equal participation because a lot of those students who are ESL students either feel that they can't participate because of the language. They are afraid to, for example, student council there is a lot of talking – you have to know what is happening in the meeting. No one wants to look stupid. But there is a small group that goes against that and tries to get into everything...I think what appeals to different groups, as extra curricular, maybe is not addressed in some of the schools. The activities don't interest them. (Tina - teacher)

A small percentage do but a lot of them don't. If the students [Chinese ESL], their parents definitely put a precedent on marks over extra-curricular. If the marks are good, then they will accommodate the
students' interests. The parents would definitely put a priority on the academic over a well-rounded approach. (Olson - teacher)

Student and staff evidence suggests that little meaningful mixing of Chinese ESL students occurs. As the students themselves have stated, it is not that they do not want to have friends from other cultures, but that their English fluency tends to be a barrier inhibiting this process. This is an important point to consider because it could be hypothesized that cross-cultural influences between the ESL and non-ESL population within the school is kept to a minimum. Certainly, the intermingling of different ideas about curricular choice patterns between the two groups is minimal. This also lends to the notion that parental influence, not peer influence, would ultimately be the largest factor contributing to what curricular choices students may make.
CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The main objectives of this study were 1) to determine the course choice patterns of ESL students and 2) to discern whether the familial or social-cultural environment are influencing factors on ESL student’s curricular choices. As stated earlier in this thesis, there were specific questions forming the core of this research: 1) What is the pattern of grade 12 curricular choices for ESL students compared to their non-ESL counterparts? 2) Do Chinese and Asian ESL students perceive themselves as having less freedom to choose academic courses than non-Chinese students because of parental restrictions and expectations? 3) To what degree are Chinese ESL students’ academic choices influenced by their families?

The three questions were to be explored by the data collected from students in the form of quantitative (analysis of student transcript data and questionnaires) and qualitative measures (interviews with students). The first question was concerned with revealing if the pattern of grade 12 curricular choices for Chinese ESL students would be concentrated within the Science based courses, whereas the non-ESL students’ curricular choices would be more widely distributed within all other academic areas. The analysis of student transcript data revealed that indeed there were distinct course choice patterns between ESL and non-ESL grade 12 students. Specifically, the data indicated that ESL grade 12 students were over-represented in the Calculus, Chemistry, and Physics compared to their non-ESL counterparts and that non-ESL students were over-represented in the Arts and Humanities courses. These findings are not unlike those found in similar studies on Asian students elsewhere (Leung, Ivey, and Susuki, 1994;
Both of these previous studies also found that Asian American students were over-represented in the Science and Technology occupations and less represented in Humanities and Social Services oriented occupations. The findings of this study, after considering the data from 238 student transcripts, clearly suggests that a curricular choice pattern – differentiating ESL students against non-ESL students - emerges. ESL students on average take more grade 12 provincially examinable Science electives than do their non-ESL counterparts. In addition, for senior courses heavily based in English skills, such as Literature 12 and History 12, the data suggests that ESL students do not enroll in these courses to nearly the same degree.

The interview data from students, teachers and counsellors suggests that three main reasons exist as to why Chinese ESL students enroll in high numbers within Science and Math based courses. First, it appears that some ESL students immigrate with the advantage of having been schooled more rigorously and to a higher degree in Math and Science courses. This provides these students with an incentive for concentrating their efforts, once in the Canadian school system, within the Science course track. Second, there is parental emphasis on studying Science based courses versus liberal Arts. Evidence from students suggests that they and their parents view Science based courses as more valuable and as being associated with higher prestige and ultimately income. Conversely, Arts or Fine Arts based courses are viewed as generally less useful and as leading students away from higher paying careers in Science. These findings are in line with those of Leong (1991) who also reported on the prestige factor and its importance to Asian Americans, finding Asian American college students placed greater emphasis on “security” values dealing with income, status and prestige. Third, as staff and students
have stated and the quantitative data have indicated, “avoidance” of courses demanding high functioning English skills is, in effect, a survival technique on the part of ESL students. Given that Science and Math courses, generally speaking, require less linguistic emphasis than courses such as History 12, Law 12, and Literature 12, these students naturally gravitate to the courses that will prove “easier”. This appears logical given that, as all students interviewed stated, their ultimate goal was university entrance; hence, concentrating on their native language and Science courses in grade 12 would provide a more viable avenue to completing the provincially examinable credits required for this purpose.

The next question dealt with whether Chinese ESL students would perceive themselves as having less freedom to choose academic courses than non-ESL students because of parental restrictions and expectations. The quantitative data in the form of the student questionnaires and qualitative data gathered from interviews with students also supported this. On a number of related questionnaire items, students’ ranked responses suggest that ESL students did report significant levels of feeling less freedom to explore curricular options than did their non-ESL counterparts. In particular, the quantitative findings from the student questionnaire revealed three characteristics about the grade 12 ESL population. First, ESL students perceive themselves as having less input into their future career and academic decisions. Second, ESL students perceive themselves as having less freedom in their academic and career aspirations. Finally, the parents of ESL students have a large degree of control and input into the futures of their children.

From the student and teacher interview data three main themes emerged with respect to the academic and career aspirations of ESL students. First, the parents of ESL
students have a large influence in the decision making process of their children. All students indicated that they were university bound, and that this was not only their desire but also an expectation of their parents. Second, there are strong pull factors, culturally and from parents, operating which caused students to gravitate to the Science oriented senior courses. Many of the students interviewed provided evidence suggesting that there was a cultural belief among Chinese and Taiwanese ESL students that “Science” based courses have more practical value and purpose than do courses based in the Humanities. Students perceived this route as the most likely to facilitate their entrance into university – by avoiding the courses which require a high level of English mastery; parents perceive a Science emphasis as the most likely to lead to financially stable and rewarding careers. ESL students, as the evidence suggests, were discouraged from deviating from this narrowly focused academic program. Parental influence and its importance in the decisions made by Asian students in North America has also be found in the work of (Leong, 1985; Leong 1986; Leong & Chou, 1994; and Tang, 2002). Leong & Chou (1994), for instance, found that for many Asian Americans the choice of occupation was not an individual choice, but a compromise between parents’ expectations and social mobility aspirations of the family. Tang’s (2002) study suggests that student career choices were also more likely to be influenced by their families. Third, interview data suggest that little meaningful and significant intercultural mingling occurred between ESL and non-ESL senior students. The chance for external – peer – influences to affect the decision making patterns of ESL grade 12 students is minimal as the exposure between these students is largely kept to in-class interaction. Language barriers between these two groups of students appear to be the largest obstacle between cross-cultural
friendships developing. In the same vein, parental restrictions on extra-curricular activities also played a role in keeping meaningful contact between ESL and non-ESL students to a minimum at West Coast High.

Readers must be cautioned against taking the findings herein and applying them to all “Chinese” ESL/non-ESL learners. The findings within this study only begin to examine the complex phenomenon of grade 12 course choice patterns for West Coast High’s ESL population only, and for the time frame of the study only. The school culture and climate invariably changes from year to year. As new immigrants arrive from other nations outside of China, the dynamics of understanding ESL student choice patterns will become even more complex.

Recommendations for Further Research

To further understand the differences in course choice patterns between Chinese ESL students and non-ESL students and the parental/cultural influence behind these choices a study involving 1) interviews with both ESL and non-ESL students; 2) interviews with ESL and non-ESL parents; and 3) an examination of grade 12 ESL student transcript data over a period of several years is needed. There are several areas of research that could and need to be undertaken in order to provide a larger and more in depth view of how Chinese ESL students navigate the school system once here in British Columbia and suburban Vancouver schools. Below are six possible avenues of research which could be pursued.
1) A longitudinal study examining the ultimate professions that students choose to enroll in once completing university. This would reveal if parental expectations and those which the students have for themselves changed between high school senior years and university completion. This study would also reveal if ESL students upon their years leaving high school would break away from the parental locus of authority and influence and in essence start to make decisions based on their own needs and aspirations and not because of filial piety.

2) A similar study could be conducted of 4th or 5th year university ex-ESL and non-ESL students in the faculties of Science and Arts. This would provide support either for or against the findings found in this thesis, plus would also either lend or detract support for some of the studies cited in the literature review portion of this thesis.

3) One of the limitations of this thesis was that although the voices of students do come through, they are limited to those of ESL students only. A similar study concentrating on the collection of qualitative data from both ESL and non-ESL students via interviews could provide a cross-cultural comparison between the two groups of students. Also, this study does present the voices of parents but only as filtered through the remarks of their children. A thorough investigation of Chinese ESL parents and their children is another possible approach that researchers could explore.

4) The role of possible stereotyping at school needs to be examined. Many ESL students in their responses to interview questions suggest that they believed Chinese ESL students did better or excelled in Science courses compared to non-Asian or non-Chinese students. The persistence of this perception by ESL students could make
other ESL peers mistakenly believe that they can only be successful in this area. New ESL students seeing other former ESL students being successful in this area of study may reinforce this belief. The interview data suggests that when Chinese ESL students see many of their peers pursue academic courses in Science and very few pursuing courses in the Humanities or Social Sciences, they come to believe that Chinese ESL students should choose the Sciences. A study is thus needed to explore what stereotypes are prevalent within the Chinese ESL community at school, to explore what the basis for these stereotypes is, and to explore how their existence influences ESL students.

5) There is a wide range in the age at which ESL students begin their studies in Canada. The amount of time an ESL students has been studying in Canada and how their acculturation rate impacts student success and academic choice is another topic which needs to be considered in a future study. Acculturation rates may be an important factor in explaining choice autonomy for different Chinese ESL students. It may be possible that views about careers and academics may be more inline with mainstream society for students from families who immigrated while they were still in elementary school. It is also possible to suggest that for those students arriving well into their high school years acculturation might be low and these individuals and their families would identify more with their culture of origin.

6) There may be a discrepancy between the ideal and the actual career choice for Chinese ESL students. This discrepancy may result from parental financial considerations or job market concerns. Immigrant parents may have as a paramount concern the financial security of their children. Immigrant parents may perceive jobs
in Science and Technology as the most stable and secure for their children. Thus, future research is required to examine the possible relationship between student career aspirations and parental background and expectations.

**Recommendations for Change**

School leaders have a unique responsibility and duty to address increasing diversity in the educational and operational aspects of schooling. Given the findings of this thesis, the School Board, school departments and administration are advised of the following recommendations for policy change. The following recommendations could be implemented in order to ensure that ESL students receive equitable exposure to the same courses that non-ESL students have access to. This in turn will allow ESL students to develop a broader curricular set of options before they make crucial future career path directions.

Often what the aims of schooling should be and what it means to be educated are contested. ESL parents are no exception as they bring with themselves their own set of beliefs and values on the subject. Thus, parents coming from other countries may hold fundamentally different educational philosophies and place different emphasis on what the goals of education should be when compared to the goals of “Western” education. Parents of ESL children in high school will often strongly urge and push for their child to enrol in courses which given their past experiences will lead to the most desirable outcomes – typically a well paying job and a secure future. It is in the shaping and orientation of these parental notions of how schooling and curricular choices lead to
possible economically rewarding and personally fulfilling careers that schools can play a vital role. Ultimately the gap between what ESL parents and their children perceive to be the connection between school and work and what the potential realities are is an area that needs to be addressed.

Schools need to play an active role in welcoming parents into the school and explaining the possibilities of different curricular choices. Counsellors need to explain to parents that breadth of knowledge leading to a well-rounded responsible and productive citizen is what Canadian education seeks to achieve. Parents and students alike need to be told how intense focus into solely one discipline with little or no crossover into other curricular areas can be potentially truncating to a student’s future. Likewise, career fairs and career counsellors should be brought into the school to educate both parents and students on the choices students have. It would seem that for many ESL parents (and students) benefits could be gained by revealing the potential rewards of careers other than those of “doctor”, “dentist”, and “lawyer”. This is vital as many ESL students who do not go on to these “high prestige” careers may have to face resistance from parents and family as indicated in this research.

However, counsellors should be cautious in applying career counseling strategies that generally encourage independence and self-exploration of students. For Chinese parents, parental preference may have important influence on the career choices of their children. Simply empowering ESL students to pursue a career that fits their aspirations and interests may jeopardize a student’s relationship with their family. However, parents need to also be made aware of the need for students to explore different educational avenues and realize the reality of the Canadian labour market. Specifically, that
university is not the only path to a fruitful life. Trades and technical occupations can also provide mental stimulation and financial rewards paralleling or even exceeding certain occupations requiring university training.
Reference List


Appendix A

Student Interview Questions

1. What are your plans for after you finish high school?

2. Did your parents give you a choice about this decision?

3. Do you think most parents from China or Asian cultures allow their children to make free decisions about their future careers?

4. Are there jobs or professions that Chinese or Asian parents would not want their children to do or study for?

5. If you were to ask Chinese or Asian parents what their educational goals for their children were what would they say?

6. Are there some subjects in school which more Chinese or Asian students would take than “Canadian” students? Why?

7. What about courses like History, Literature or Languages?

8. Why do you think on average that more “Chinese” students study Science than do “Canadian” students?

9. In terms of work habits or study habits, do you think “Chinese” students are harder working than “Canadian” students? Why?

10. How do you think Chinese or Asian parents might be different from Canadian parents?

11. Do you think there are any problems, here at school, between students from different cultures?

12. Do you enjoy having friends from different cultures at school?

13. How are your parents involved in your education?

14. When you chose your courses for this year did your parents have any input? Did you ask for advice? What advice did they give you?

15. What courses do your parents expect you to take?

16. Were there any courses your parents did not want you to take? Why is this?
Appendix B

Staff Interview Questions

1. Do you think most students from Asian countries like China differ from Canadian students? If so, in what ways?
2. How would you say that the parents from these two groups differ?
3. Which group of students, do you think are allowed more freedom to make academic and career choice decisions?
4. Are there jobs or professions that ESL parents would not want their children to do or study for?
5. What are the types of jobs that most Asiatic ESL parents would be very proud of their child doing?
6. If you were to ask most ESL parents from Asia what their educational goals for their children were what would they say?
7. Are there some subjects in school which more ex-ESL senior students would take than “Canadian” students? Why?
8. What subject areas or senior courses would you find a high number of ex-ESL students in?
9. What about courses like History, Literature or Languages?
10. Do you think that because a student is/was ESL that this will be a problem to their future career goals?
11. Do ESL students avoid any classes because of possible language difficulties?
12. Why do you think on average that more “Chinese” students study Science than do “Canadian” students?
13. In terms of work habits or study habits, do you think “Chinese” students are harder working than “Canadian” students? Why?
14. In terms of social habits, do you think “Chinese” or “Asiatic” students compare to “Canadian” Students?
15. What about extra curricular activities, do these students differ?
16. Do you think work experience – or work experience courses are equally important to “Chinese” and “non-Chinese” students or parents?
17. Do you think that both ESL and non-ESL students receive an equally balanced educational experience? What could be some areas of difference?
18. Do you think there are any problems, here at school, between students from different cultures?
19. Do you think that many close cross-cultural friendships develop at school?
20. When grade 12 ESL students choose their courses for their senior year, do you think their parents have much input? What advice do these parents give?
21. Are there any courses which grade 12 ESL students would be expected to take? Are there any courses which these student would be discouraged from taking?
Appendix C

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. I am: a. male  b. female

2. I am ___ years old.

3. I was born in: a. Canada  b. other: ________________

4. Circle the correct letter below regarding ESL.
   a. I have never been in ESL.
   b. I am currently in ESL, level ____ (fill in your level).
   c. I graduated out of ESL at grade ____ (fill in grade).

For items 5 to 12 rate your response by filling in the circle for the number which corresponds best with how you feel. Follow the scale when selecting your answer:

1=strongly disagree  2=disagree  3=neutral  4=agree  5=strongly agree  0=does not apply to me

5. I have control over what I will do after graduation.
   o o o o o o

6. My parents have much input into what decisions I will make after I graduate from high school.
   o o o o o o

7. My parents give me the freedom to choose other educational/career choices differing from theirs.
   o o o o o o

8. Your parents/family give you freedom to choose your own life plans.
   o o o o o o

9. My parents want me to go to university of college.
   o o o o o o

10. It is important to continue with your education immediately after graduation.
    o o o o o o

11. My family's opinions about my future career plans are important to me.
    o o o o o o

12. I do value the same things as my family/parent(s).
    o o o o o o