

LEARNING FROM EXAMPLE: EXPLORING IMMIGRANT LANGUAGE
MINORITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF WHAT IT TAKES TO "MAKE IT" AS
AN ESL STUDENT

by

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Abstract

Successful students who are immigrant language minority students (ILMS) and who were once identified as ESL learners tend to stand out in the Greater Vancouver area since academic achievement tends to be the exception rather than the rule for these students. Only a small proportion appears to graduate from high school and/or pursue studies at a post-secondary level (Gunderson, 2000).

If one believes that, in general, all children have what it takes to discover and learn about the world that surrounds them, and how to become an active participant in it, then one has to wonder why so many are failing. Moreover, one can ask what the few who are making it are actually doing that allows them to “beat the odds”.

This study attempted to explore this question through a series of qualitative in-depth interviews with fifteen ‘ex-ESL students’ from the Greater Vancouver area. The interviews focused on their perceptions of the factors having influenced their successful academic achievement and integration process as defined by their ability to enter a Canadian university.

The importance of the special challenges that the education of ILMS presents for all involved is stressed, followed by a discussion of how these challenges were perceived, faced and overcome by the ILMS in this study. Special emphasis is put on the importance of sociocultural aspects such as the establishment of a strong sense of self-worth, strong relationships with family and friends, the preservation of home language(s) and culture(s) and prior school experiences as keys to social and academic achievement. This thesis also identifies interesting paradoxes in the way the informants perceived their

educational experiences. Informants commented, for example, on the safe, yet segregating ESL classrooms and the importance of both individual and collective effort.

In summarizing and discussing the comments and advice given by ILMS it is hoped that more people may gain a greater understanding of what ILMS have to face and what it takes to help make success the rule rather than the exception.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

“The ESL classroom is not unlike the dark woods found in so many fairy tales. It has a terrible reputation. Most people try to avoid it, few enter it, and fewer still have returned from it with good experiences. It is mostly unknown, unchartered, and impossibly complex. Worse, one can never be sure who and what one will find there. It is the stuff of rumors and legends. It is the stuff of fear. Much would be gained if we could only befriend one of its inhabitants.” (personal field notes, 2001)

« Thank you for your prompt reply. I do thank YOU, for thinking of such a study, because being an "ex-ESL student" I have always thought about publishing a book about my experiences in Canada and also raising some issues about what an ESL student goes through. So thank you. ^_^ »
(participant, 2001)

1.1 Background of the study

It is said that when a powerful Chinese warlord once asked the wisest man in the land to come up with a curse for his life-long enemy, the wise man answered that the king should simply utter the following wish for his foe: “May you live in interesting times”.

The last 15 years have been “interesting times” for Canada. The considerable increase in Canada’s immigrant population has literally changed the face of its population. In British Columbia (B.C.) the number of foreign immigrants has more than tripled since 1981. Statistics Canada reports that 22.3% of B.C.’s 3.9 million residents alone now report a home language other than English or French (cited in Vancouver Sun, Dec. 3, 1997).

This social change has indeed made things interesting by challenging a society that prides itself on its historic origins in diversity and its self-proclaimed status as a multicultural society. Amongst the greatest challenges: coming up with an education system capable of handling the rising number of students who arrive to school speaking little, if any, English or French.

This challenge has been particularly felt by the city of Vancouver, the area on which this study will focus. The Vancouver school board reported in 1998 that slightly more than 50% of its students spoke a language other than English (McGivern & Eddy, 1999). These new immigrant language minority students have forced schools to move towards new and unfamiliar terrains. Ever increasing demands for English as a second language (ESL) programs have led to the creation of new curriculums and policies to fill the demand.

These relatively new and often still experimental ESL programs have had considerable impact on the public school systems. However as with most major educational reforms, the implementation of these programs has not occurred without debate. Adverse public opinion, a lack of experienced and trained teachers, problems with program accreditation and curriculum development, funding cut backs, and accusations of a lack of government support have all made the subject of ESL programs a controversial topic. Moreover, these debates have been accompanied by an increasing level of frustration on the part of ESL recipients, teachers and families (Beckett, 1999; Gunderson, 2000; in press; Krieger, 1997; Mohan et al., 1996).

More worrisome, perhaps, has been the underlying sense of failure which has been reported. Immigrant language minority immigrant students have gotten "stuck in ESL", have achieved lower scores than the average population, and have also dropped out at rates which are considerably higher than their native English speaking equivalents (Gunderson, 2000; in press; Watt, 2000; Watt, Roessingh, & Bosetti, 1996). According to Tucker (2000), language minority students in general:

...do not develop the academic English language skills that they need to participate effectively in educational instruction; they drop out of school in

disproportionately high numbers than their counterparts; if they do remain in school, they are less likely to proceed to colleges and universities (del Pinal, 1995); if they proceed to college or university, they are less likely to study professional subjects such as engineering, medicine, etc.; if they find employment, they are less likely to be retained and more likely to earn lower wages than their counterparts, etc... (2000, pg. 198-199)

Clearly, the situation there appears to be room for improvement for the present situation of language minority students.

1.2 Brief background of the literature

The lack of success for language minority students has motivated a lot of research in the field of second language acquisition. Researchers have tried to understand the causes and possible solutions of this problem (Anstrom, 1997; Bempechat, 1998; Garcia, Wilkinson, & Ortiz, 1995,). It is generally agreed that it would be naïve, if not simply cold hearted, to attribute the difficulties that language minority students have to a lack of effort or ability. As a result, much effort has been directed to identify instructional practices that prove most effective for language minority students. Content-based second language learning, bilingual education, the use of learning and communicative strategies, and the use of the new technologies in the classrooms are only a few examples of some of the valuable efforts which have been made in this direction.

Despite its progress, mainstream second language acquisition (SLA) research has, however, been criticized for approaching the problem of second language education from a purely psychological or cognitive process. The field is accused of having ignored the social nature of language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Recent trends in SLA research have, therefore, called for studies that approach the problem from a more socially, culturally, and historically contextualized perspective. This includes a more emic or ethnographic,

understanding of the main actors involved in this field, especially the language learners themselves (Lier, 1988; Norton, 1997; Norton & Toohey, 2001).

Very interesting work has been done in answer to this call. Of particular interest has been research based on the theoretical orientation of language socialization: the never-ending process by which newcomers to a certain sociocultural group are communicated that groups language and cultural expectations (Duff, 1995; Morita, 2000; Ochs, 1988; Ochs, 1993; Willett, 1995). Researchers have also started to pay closer attention to the impact that culture plays in minority education (Delpit, 1995; Genesee, 1994; Ogbu, 1995; Van Lier, 1996). It is within these particular frameworks that this study would like to situate itself.

1.3 Purpose of this study

Sadly the majority of language minority students presently in the Vancouver area are experiencing failure (Gunderson, 2000; in press). Nevertheless, some do succeed. Most of us have heard of at least one success story. The successful student arrives in Canada at a young age speaking little or no English and is placed like so many others in one form or another of ESL education. Unlike the majority of his or her peers however, this student does not fail. Somehow, probably through lots of hard work, determination, family support and yes perhaps a bit of luck, he or she gets to exit the ESL programs and ends up excelling scholastically. He or she makes it to the honor roll; he or she is offered scholarships. Some excel beyond the classroom. They become team captains, speech contest winners, exemplary volunteers. Most importantly, they graduate from high school and get accepted to a Canadian university, a seemingly impossible task for so many others.

The fact that successful language minority students are the exception rather than the rule is saddening. However, their existence does give hope. The fact individuals can succeed shows that failure does not have to be the rule. Their presence gives researchers, parents and other language minority students an example that may be followed. What sets these students apart? Is it something they have? Is it something they do? Is it both? Can their strategies for success be imitated? Could the answer to these questions help others to achieve? This study was designed to seek the answer to some of these questions by looking at what successful ex-ESL students had to say about their experiences in Vancouver schools, and the things that impacted on both their academic and social success.

In this sense, this study is strongly influenced by a call in the language minority education literature for research that encourages researchers to be more attentive to success in education than to failure (Bempechat, 1998; Delpit, 1988). The premise is that a great deal can be learned from success. After all, if one wants to learn how to do something well, one should look for people who are successful. Learning from failure can teach us what not to do but learning from success can teach us what works.

1.4 Definitions of the terms

There are a few terms that I would like to define from the onset in this thesis. The first I would like to clarify is the term that I have chosen to use to refer to the informants interviewed in this study.

The SLA literature offers a few possibilities when referring to second language learners. One of these terms: "limited proficiency students" is a popular way to refer to non-English native speakers in the United States. It is a term that I choose not to use in

this thesis. In my opinion, it overly focuses on the limitations and apparent deficiencies of being a non-native English speaker while ignoring the positive aspects that come from being a speaker of another language.

As an alternative, I first started referring to the informants in this study as “ESL students” or “ex-ESL students”. The term “ESL student” is a common in British Columbia. It refers to the various “ESL programs” in which some students are placed at their arrival in schools. “ESL students” are defined in the *ESL Policy Framework 1999* published by the Ministry of Education of British Columbia as:

“students whose primary language(s) or language(s) of the home, is other than English and who may therefore require additional services in order to develop their individual potential within British Columbia's school system. Some students speak variations of English that differ significantly from the English used in broader Canadian society and in school; they may also require ESL support” (paragraph 1) .

The popularity of this term, and its use in the *ESL Policy Framework 1999* has forced me to use it in many aspects of my research. I used it, for example, in the advertisements posted to recruit my informants. I also used the term and the expression: “ex-ESL students” in many of my interview questions.

Readers will notice, however, that when possible I have chosen to avoid this term in the writing of this thesis in favor of “immigrant language minority student”. “Language minority student” is a term which I have borrowed from the field of bilingual education (Baker, 1993) and which I take to mean very much the same thing as the definition offered for an “ESL student”. I have preferred its use for three reasons. First,

it refers, even if only indirectly, to the student's native tongue and hence recognizes its existence and hopefully its value. Second, it incorporates a reflection of these students' minority status in society, a social reality that I consider important to keep in mind when trying to understand these students. Finally, the term also avoids the use of the words "second language", a description that is not always accurate since for many of these students English is not necessarily their second language learned, and since it may not be possible for many, after some time, to distinguish so clearly and neatly between what is their "first" or "second" language.

In my use of the term "language minority student", I have added the qualifier "immigrant". I have done so to distinguish the informants in this study from those students who were born in Canada, but whose home language is nevertheless other than the majority languages of English or French such as is the case for example with First Nations students. I will also use Good's (1973) definition of "perception" defined as, "a continuous process of integration of present and past sensory impressions" to refer to the way in which the informants related and interpreted their recollection of their experiences as ex-"ESL" students.

Another major term to be defined is the concept of "culture". Its importance on the educational experience in general and more specifically on the language classroom in particular has been recognized, as has its complex links to all aspects of our lives. It affects the way we see and deal with the world that surrounds us. Due to this complexity, it remains a hard concept to clearly define. Many definitions have been offered, but for the moment I have chosen to adopt the rather long, but perhaps most complete one offered by John Ogbu (1995) who defines culture as:

A people's way of life. It has five components: (a) customary ways of behaving—of making a living, eating, expressing affection, getting married, raising children, responding to illness and to death, getting ahead in society, and dealing with the supernatural; (b) codes or assumptions, expectations, and emotions underlying those customary behaviors; (c) artifacts—things that members of the population make or have made that have meaning for them; (d) institutions—economic, political, religious, and social—*the imperatives of culture* that form a recognizable pattern requiring know-how, skills, and customary behaviors in a fairly predictable manner; and (e) social structure—the patterned ways that people relate to one another. Culture influences its members, even though the latter create, change, and pass on their culture to their children who, in turn, further change it (Cohen, 1971; Edgerton and Langness, 1968; Jacob, 1993; LeVine, 1973; Spradley, 1979 as cited on p. 192).

I would only make one additional comment to the definition given above to avoid being misunderstood. I feel it is important to stress that I do not see culture as simply a fixed whole but rather as a fluid and ever-changing entity. Yes, a few of the customary ways, codes, assumptions, institutions, and social structures mentioned above can remain very much the same in one's lifetime, but in reality, and especially when dealing with immigration and cross-cultural communication, we must also recognize that most of the elements mentioned above are far from permanent or clearly determinable. Codes are broken, expectations questioned, ways of seeing the world shattered, and boundaries blurred.

Finally, I would like to define two major terms which are used interchangeably throughout this study. These are the concepts of "academic achievement" and that of a "successful student". Ryan, Connell and Grolnick (1992) have referred to as the 'inner perspective' and the 'outer perspective' of achievement. On one end of the spectrum, achievement can be seen as an extremely individual, highly variable term whose value often relies on a set of internal standards and perceptions stemming from one's own personality and culture. On the other end of the spectrum, achievement can also be seen

as the result of the application of external standards and perceptions originating well beyond the confines of one's individual personality or culture (i.e. provincial standards, grades, exam results).

Achievement has often been looked at exclusively from an 'outer perspective', often in the context of evaluation and testing in the literature, when talking about the success or failure of language minority students (Van Lier, 1998). This study attempts to provide a more balanced perspective by keeping in mind both the 'outer' and 'inner' aspects of "academic achievement".

Generally, since this study hopes to learn from the rather small number of immigrant language minority students who finish high school and get to attend a university, "academic achievement" is understood from an 'external perspective' as the successful attainment of the goals, objectives, standards, and social expectations set by an educational institution as the requirements for entry into and/or the successful completion of its programs.

More specifically this study looks at a specific group of "successful" immigrant language minority students. Again, this definition's background is the large number of immigrant language minority students who are failing to achieve the standards set by schools for them. They are getting stuck in ESL programs; they are not attaining the marks required to pass, and many are not finishing high school. In addition, among those who "succeed" in completing a high school education, many are having problems gaining entry into universities. Academic and language requirements such as the TOEFL test or the University of British Columbia's (UBC) Language Proficiency Index are a serious obstacle for many.

As a result, this study defines the small number of students who have met all the criteria necessary to finish high school and gain entry into a Canadian university as “successful” students, or students who have “achieved academically”.

The above narrowed definitions were used to identify informants for this study. We realize that these definitions are externally based perceptions of success/achievement that may not necessarily be shared by all, especially immigrant language minority students themselves. This study has tried to keep in mind the ‘internal perspective’ of “academic achievement” and “success” by making sure to enquire about and take into consideration the interviewed students’ personal definitions of academic achievement.

1.5 Research questions

In order to explore the roles that immigration, language, culture, and ethnicity play on the language socialization and the academic achievement of immigrant language minority students in Vancouver, this study is based on the following research questions.

1. What perceptions do immigrant language minority students who were once in ESL programs and are now attending university have of the factors having influenced their academic achievement?
2. What perceptions do immigrant language minority students who were once in ESL programs and are now attending university have of the factors having influenced their social integration into Canada?
3. What advice do immigrant language minority students who were once in ESL programs and are now attending university have for teachers, parents and other students?

1.6 Significance of the study

The current situation in Vancouver has seen an increasing number of immigrant language minority students in Vancouver. This situation is expected to become even more common in this century to come, not only in Vancouver, British Columbia, but in most parts of Canada and North America in general. Yet, language minority students have been experiencing serious difficulties. This lack of academic success on the part of a growing part of our population can only be the cause of concern. The long-term economic, social and moral costs of this situation cannot be ignored. Students who dropout of school due to language difficulties are far from reaching the goal set by British Columbia's *ESL Policy Framework 1999* which is "to assist students to become proficient in English, to develop intellectually and as citizens, and to access enable them to achieve the expected learning outcomes of the provincial curriculum"(paragraph 2). In a society that puts more and more emphasis in this "information age" on the ability to gather, manipulate and produce information through language, studies, such as this thesis, which explore what can help immigrant language minority students reverse this daunting situation are consequently of great significance.

More specifically, the significance of this particular study is three-fold. First it provides a greater understanding of immigrant language minority students' perceptions of the events that lead to their academic achievement or lack thereof. In its design, it is the only retrospective research of its kind (*I have heard of*) which asks successful immigrant language minority students presently enrolled in a university program to bring their perspectives from the present to bear on their recollections of critical influences in their past. In this sense it provides potentially new and important insight for anyone seeking to improve the way in which the education system deals with language minority students.

In addition, by basing itself on the real stories of real people, this research provides some concrete advice in the form of “real actions” that have been tried and tested and which have helped the students succeed. In so doing, this research provides not only theoretical knowledge, but also practical knowledge regarding best practices for immigrant language minority students. This kind of practical advice is of immediate interest for teachers, schools, parents and other language minority students whose goal it may be to one day be able to attend university in Canada.

Finally, this study had direct implications for the informants since it provided them with a chance to reflect on and explore, and hence come to a better understanding of how their identity and school experiences affected their academic performance and language socialization. It is hoped for example, that as a result of this study, the informants might have become more consciously aware of some of the things that they have been doing right, or wrong with regards to their academic and social achievement. It is also hoped that this increased awareness would translate in continued if not increased achievement for these students.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter presents the background information that forms the theoretical support for this study. This review draws from ideas and knowledge about increases in the number of language minority students (LMS) in North America and their impact on education and schools' response to it, as well as on research on the academic achievement of LMS. This review is based on an extensive search of ERIC bibliographic database, the Academic Search Elite database, the Ingenta bibliographic database, the University of British Columbia catalogue and various World Wide Web sites.

2.1 Why worry about immigrant LMS? Recent demographic changes

For many years now, educators and researchers have searched for the best ways to help students acquire a second language. In the past 25 years, specifically there has been an enormous amount of work done in the field of TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages). This is in no small part due to the prestige that English has gained as the international language of business, politics and science worldwide. It is also due to recent demographic changes in North America. Recent increases in the number of immigrants arriving from non-English speaking countries have made the field of TESOL extremely relevant for English speaking countries such as Canada and the United States.

2.1.1. Yesterday's classroom

Recent demographic changes in North America have completely changed the way classrooms look. Yesterday's classroom was mostly uniform and predictable. Students mostly came from the same local area and expectations, and the languages and cultures found at home mostly matched those found in schools. Classroom homogeneity was reflected in schools curriculums: English was the principal language of instruction (with

the exception of Quebec schools); courses were neatly divided in content classes and language classes and students studied Anglo-cultural classics such as Shakespeare and Mark Twain. The odd presence of immigrant children caused minimal problems. Despite their “foreignness”, chances were they would be white, European, and most importantly more than likely English speaking. In the Canadian city of Toronto for example, until 1961, 9 out of 10 immigrants to Canada came from Britain or Europe and of that number only 3% were non-Caucasians (Sietmiatycki, 1998, as cited in O’Byrne, 2001).

2.1.2 Today’s classrooms

Interestingly enough, in today’s classroom, much of the schools’ curriculums remain unchanged (English remains the principal language of instruction; courses are mostly still neatly divided in content classes and language classes and students continue to study Shakespeare and Mark Twain). Nevertheless, diversity rather than uniformity is now the norm. There are now more immigrants than ever and the majority no longer comes from English speaking countries. Statistics Canada (1998) reports that in 1998, 4.2 million immigrants had come to Canada from over 169 different countries speaking over a hundred languages. In British Columbia, Canada alone, for example, between 3,821 and 4,438 (a total of 21,380) school-age immigrants unable to speak English were expected to arrive each year between 1990 and 1995 resulting in increased enrollment percentages in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs (1998) and in the Greater Vancouver students from over 100 countries speaking over 100 languages (Gunderson, 1995a; 1995b; in press) now represent approximately 50% of the class population (McGivern & Eddy, 1999). The situation is similar in many of the larger cities of North America (though it is worth mentioning that rural areas have also been affected (Samway

& McKeon, 1999). Year by year, today's classrooms have become home to a wider and wider range of new students, languages, and cultures. And with these changes have come the need to find new ways to adjust education systems for this new terrain (O'Byrne, 2001).

2.1.3 Exploring the new terrain: understanding who the new students are and what they need

Understandably, as with all new and uncharted terrains, today's classrooms have fueled their share of interest and excitement, as well as fears and concerns. Though immigrant students from non-English speaking countries are not new to North America, never before have they been so numerous. Consequently, as more and more of those students who were once the minorities slowly become majorities with the numbers to back up political demands and needs, more and more researchers have looked at who these new students are and the unique challenges which they present schools with.

Immigrant students arriving at schools speaking little or no English belong to a group of students the researchers have called language minority students (Baker, 1993; Scarcella, 1990; Thomas & Collier, 1997). This rather large label encompasses immigrants, refugees, as well as Canadian citizens who belong to ethnic minorities. The term may be large but it is an accurate reflection of the social status that unites all of these groups. They all share a home language that has a low status and usually, but not always, a low predominance in society. A young immigrant student who speaks Arabic at home would, for example, fall in this category. This term contrasts with its opposite: majority language students or mainstream students. These terms refer to those students whose language enjoys a high status and which is often, but not always, a high

predominance within a society. In Canada, native English speakers enjoy this advantaged position of power.

What do we know about LMS? On one hand, some of the literature points out LMS' potential to become speakers of more than one language may actually advantage them considerably. This is a fairly new and still controversial idea. Historically, rather than portraying multilingual students as advantaged, research in the 1920's and 1960's suggested that children raised multilingually were more likely to be handicapped, cognitively disadvantaged, confused and unable to function well in school settings. It is interesting to point out that there are still presently people arguing that multilingualism is an educational disadvantage for children (see for example Schlesinger, 1991). However, starting with the apparent counter evidence which emerged from experiments in Canada with French immersion programs in Canada teaching English students in both French and English, many studies now suggest that quite on the contrary multilingualism is not only far from harmful but is also potentially an educational advantage (Baker, 1993; Cummins, 1996; Swain & Lapkin, 1982). Studies have strongly suggested that multilingual children benefit from a greater sensitivity to linguistic symbols and meaning, a greater flexibility of thinking and a greater openness to other cultures (Cummins & Swain, 1986; Hakuta & Diaz, 1985; MacNab, 1979; Reynolds, 1991).

It is worthy to note that certain members of society's elites have perhaps always recognized the intellectual advantages of speaking more than one language. The richest and most powerful groups of societies across the world have historically always made learning a second and even a third language part of the education of their children.

Scholars of the classics, for example, have long recognized the ability to speech and read

more than one language as a symbol of wisdom and knowledge and even Romans brought conquered Greeks to teach their kids in at least 2 languages (McLaughlin, 1985).

Multilingualism has also been linked to economic and political advantages. In Canada for example, the rise of immersion programs was due in part to the demands by English parents to have their children learn French in recognition of the fact that globalization and increasingly multicultural policies in Canada had made bilingualism in French and English a requirement for anyone interested in a federal government job or an international business position.

Sadly, what has been applied to the education of societies' elites does not seem to transfer to the education of some of societies' less influential groups. More often than not, talks of the education of LMS rarely focus on the potential advantages of multilingualism. Rather, LMS' "extra language(s)" have more often than not been seen as a source of problems, a barrier to the English they are required to learn in school. Gone in this discourse are all references to the multilingual potential to be tapped and developed (Nelson, 1998). Native languages are seen as something to be discouraged and even gotten rid of, in favor of English.

And so, ironically, most of the literature concerning LMS talks not of their successes and advantages but rather of the many problems that they face. Carey, (1991) points out for example that, "the average person is all too familiar with the opposite results; namely, that the immigrant populations and other minority ethnic groups are usually academically disadvantaged while they are immersed in mastering their second language rather than advantaged from working in their non-dominant language, as the additive immersion model would propose" (p. 340-341).

One might wonder why students who have the potential to be advantaged bilingual students end up being academically disadvantaged. A review of the literature indicates that it probably comes in large part from the unique challenges that their education entails.

2.2. Challenges presented by Immigrant Language Minority Students (ILMS)

School can be difficult for anyone. School is however, particularly difficult for ILMS who are new to a country and who have to make and adjust to tremendous changes in culture, language and way of life in extremely short times (Anstrom, 1997; Genesse, 1994; Gunderson, 2000; Nieto, 1996; Peyton & Adger, 1998).

The next section will explore these challenges in greater detail. We will see that these challenges have been identified in the literature as physical and psychological, linguistic and sociocultural.

I would like to note here that these challenges are often framed in the discourse of the literature as LMS' challenges. I would not deny that this is true. However, I would argue that these challenges are also the challenges of the schools and wider communities that have welcomed these students. From this perspective: the challenges discussed below, are understood to be shared challenges that must be overcome by students, schools and communities in a common effort.

2. 2. 1. Physical and psychological challenges

One of the things that must be remembered when dealing with immigrants is that few people ever truly want to leave their home country. Leaving one's country of birth, leaving one's home, family, friends, and a way of life is very difficult. The truth is that though there might indeed be a good reason to leave, there is always a price to pay.

There is of course the physical price: the trip, the financial costs, the difficulties obtaining a reasonable and safe place to live, food, and clothes and a job in a country where one does not speak the language and where one's certifications and diplomas are unlikely to be recognized. This is particular true for refugees or immigrants who have come to Canada because they had no choice but leave their country. Yau (1995) and Coelho (1994) point out for example that many refugees come to Canada having lived through war, torture, assault and/or persecution and that they have often suffered from interrupted schooling due to war or forced life on the roads/seas.

There is also the psychological cost to immigration. The mental demands and stress to the immigration itself and the subsequent adjustment that follows takes its toll. For both parents and their children there are the fears and frustrations brought on by the eventual culture shock and the realization that one is not going home. For ILMS, and especially those who arrive in their adolescence, uncertainty, anxiety, and identity crisis are the norm. As Nieto (1996) puts it:

Aside from the normal anxieties associated with adolescence, additional pressure for culturally subordinated students may be the result of several factors, including the physical and psychological climate of the schools they attend, the low status their native languages and cultures are accorded in the societies in which they live, the low expectations that society has of them and, their invisibility in the traditional curricula (p. 191).

Psychological stress and anxiety has also been linked to the many cases of "astronaut parenting" (a common practice in British Columbia, Canada) where parents send their children alone to be educated overseas, while they remain in their home country in order to work (Anstrom, 1997). The luckier ones may get to stay with an uncle or friend of the family yet many are left alone to handle the psychological stress of immigration. Their parents may come to visit them from time to time, but mostly they are

isolated, given at a very early age the responsibility and pressures of fending for themselves. Understanding the physical and psychological pressures under which ILMS find themselves and finding ways to cope with these pressures is one of the first challenges ILMS and their schools must deal with.

2.2.2 The linguistic challenge

The linguistic hardships of ILMS are perhaps the most obvious and popularized difficulty these students face on their arrival in their new country. In addition to working together with ILMS to find ways to handle the physical and psychological stress of immigration, schools are expected to equip ILMS with the language of the majority (English in most provinces of Canada with the exceptions of French in the province of Québec).

Interestingly, though there are disagreements about the best ways to educate ILMS, everyone appears to agree on the importance of learning English to succeed in schools. There is an unquestioned belief in North American society that proficiency in the language of the majority is essential to becoming a contributing, participating member of North American society. English is seen as the key that allows one to participate in schools, socialize, learn, and achieve academic and professional success.

This belief is rarely questioned by the general public in North America, nor is its implied disregard for the native language of the ILMS. Both Crawford (1994) and Fishman (1996) have pointed out the terrible linguistic, cultural, social and economic loss for North America that is represented by the historic phenomenon of language loss by speakers of languages other than English as a result of this lack of interest for languages other than the one spoken by the dominant white Anglo-Saxon establishment.

Despite criticism from proponents of an education system that should develop both English and the students' native language (Krashen, 1991; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1999), most schools continue to strictly define the linguistic challenge of LMS as solely having to develop proficiency in English. In the majority of the cases, this means that LMS are schooled with English as the sole medium of instruction for all tasks, knowledge and exams (Collier, 1989; Wiley & Lukes, 1996). Indeed, with no other educational options, acquiring a sufficient level of English proficiency in order to learn what is being taught becomes crucial. LMS must learn English in a sink or swim situation. They either learn English well and pursue their education, or find other things to do.

Speed is also an important part of the challenge. Thomas and Collier (1997) point out that the linguistic challenge of LMS is compounded by the fact that not only do LMS have to learn to swim in English to survive in schools, but also the fact that they have to do so as quickly as possible. Since Canadian schools continue to be essentially designed for native English speakers, LMS cannot take advantage of a full educational experience until they catch up to their native English speaking peers.

There have been disagreements on how long this can realistically be expected to take. In British Columbia, Canada, for example, most LMS arrive to school by definition with very, very little (or only basic conversational English). Yet, ESL funding caps in British Columbia imposed in 1999 by the Ministry of Education grants students a period of five years from the time they enter school to gain the required English proficiency that they would need to catch up with their native speaking peers (McCarthy & Foxx, 2001).

Interestingly, the government's 5 year cap is slightly smaller than the average time span of 5 to 7 years found to be necessary by researchers for students with some

kind of academic and cognitive development support in their mother tongue(s), or the time span of to the 7 to 10 years found to be necessary for those who received little or no academic and cognitive development in their first language (Collier, 1989; Cummins, 1996; Thomas & Collier, 1997).

Moreover, the challenge is even greater for ILMS who arrive as teenagers since there are only a couple of years available for them to attain a level of proficiency high enough to allow them to handle the English academic content required to graduate from high school. Sadly if the research is correct it might be an impossible challenge for them to do so in regular school hours.

2.2.3. Sociocultural challenge

Though the general public is usually quite aware of the linguistic difficulties faced by ILMS, they are less aware that the increased number of LMS has been accompanied by a growing sense of malaise felt by both the students and the schools alike with regards to the sociocultural implications of the arrival “new-comers” to a system traditionally designed to educate a more homogeneous groups of students.

According to Spindler & Spindler (2000), it is important to remember that schools are in essence mini societies whose aim is to prepare its members for the larger society that surrounds the school. They teach the values and knowledge that will be required by students in order to participate fully in society when they graduate. Language, and the values and knowledge it encompasses, represents in this sense a huge part of what schools are transmitting to future generations. As Heath (1986) states, “language learning is cultural learning”.

This realization of this important connection has led a number of researchers and

educators in the last thirty years to acknowledge the fact that when students learn a language in a school, they learn much more than grammar, vocabulary and sociolinguistic rules. Rather, language learning is now seen by many as a form of socialization into a series of beliefs, values and power relationships (Delpit, 1995; Gee, 1996; Heath, 1986; Pease-Alvarez & Vasquez, 1994; Pennycook, 1989). The choice of words and the phrases taught in schools form a discourse which is a clear reflection of those words and phrases valued by a society at a certain point in time and consequently of the ideas connected to words and phrases. Delpit (1995) points out that this discourse most often reflects and shapes power relationships in favor of dominant groups in society. In this sense schools become political entities that introduce and recruit students into the discourse of the dominant/majority forces.

From a practical point of view, this can make a lot of sense—after all, shouldn't schools be teaching the values and languages of the dominant forces of society? By doing so, are they not teaching them the “rules” by which the game is played, in essence preparing students to take an active role in society?

The problems and “malaise” arise however, when “newcomers” such as ILMS, bring to the schools values that do not reflect, or even worse perhaps even contradict and/or threaten those of the dominant/majority groups out in the wider society. For these students, it is no longer a question of learning the rules of the game, as much as it is a question of learning to play with someone else's rules. These children have to find ways to relate to a culture-transmitting institution that is attempting to recruit them in a cultural system that is not their own. This is an understandably a conflict for both schools and students involved. The challenge then is, to decide how to resolve this conflict. Should

schools impose their values and ideas? Should ILMS impose theirs? Whose knowledge should be taught and why? In asking these questions, schools become virtual cultural battlegrounds for the production of knowledge, values, and identities (Apple, 1996; Giroux & McLaren, 1989; Spindler & Spindler, 2000).

The answer to these questions will depend on one's view of education in society. For some, education should act as an agent of social reproduction. Schools succeed and benefit society if they produce a new generation that is not too far removed in traditions and values from the one that it is meant to replace. In so doing school's reproduce the society that surrounds them. This guarantees a certain degree of stability by preserving the status quo and ensuring that traditional values remain just that: traditional rather than obsolete.

This rather conservative yet popular view of the role of schools is well exemplified in E.D. Hirsch's 1987 book *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987). In his book, Hirsch argues for the preservation of schools as defenders of a preestablished culture and set of values for the United States. For individuals such as Hirsh, adapting schools so that they reflect the values and ideas of (language) minority students is a dangerous suggestion that is attributed to the disintegration and intellectual (and hence moral) decline of society.

Critics have however pointed out that this vision of education implies that reproducing society is a good thing. Many would disagree with this assumption. Feminists, social activists and minority educators are but a few of the groups who would point out that only a select few have something to gain by preserving the present status quo in North America and that on the contrary there are people who have nothing to gain

and everything to lose should it be maintained, since preserving certain “cultures” and “values” has too often translated in the past to denying and oppressing the cultures and values of others. (Apple, 1996; Giroux, 1988).

On the other end of the spectrum, education can be seen as an agent of social transformation. From this perspective, schools are seen as institutions of empowerment. They promote a personalized education based not on the transmission of a preestablished curriculum of traditional values and ideas but rather on the full development of the potential of all students through a curriculum specifically designed to help them face and handle well the differing sociocultural pressures they meet in their schools, regardless of cultures or languages. The goal is no longer to preserve society or the status quo, or to preserve or transmit particular cultures, by having students choose one culture or one language over an other, but rather to create a group of individuals (from many cultures and languages) capable of choosing on their own all those elements that they need to transform society in response to its ever-changing needs.

This vision of education is perhaps best captured in Brazilian educator Paulo Friere’s (1995) vision of language education as a way to empower the poor and the powerless by teaching them not only how to read and write, but also how to use these powerful tools to talk about, analyze and overcome the oppression they were living under from within the system.

Deciding how to adapt our schools to the sociocultural challenge of the arrival of an ever-increasing number of IMLS is a serious problem. Spindler & Spindler (2000) talk of the dangers faced by a society whose schools “continue to be constructed out of the demographics and cultures of the past” (p. 137) in order to preserve the interests of

the status quo, warning that few societies survive very long when their education systems alienate a large majority of their students.

Are students being alienated? Quite a few researchers have found reports of loneliness, despair and alienation in North American schools. Poplin and Weeres (1993) found, after interviewing students, teachers and support staff alike, “a kind of hopelessness about schools” (par. 12) linked for one thing to discrepancies between the participants hopes and dreams and the reality of school life. Watt, Roessing and Bosetti’s (1996) qualitative study of ESL students’ stories of their adjustment to Canadian schools link feelings of alienation to the high number of ESL dropouts in Canada.

2.3. Answering the call: How schools have been dealing with the challenge of language minority student education

How have schools dealt with the challenges offered by LMS? Do we really need more research? If so, what kind of research is needed? This next section will attempt to answer these questions by exploring what the literature has to say about the way in which schools have handled the challenges presented by increased numbers of LMS.

2.3.1 Historic record of dealing with LMS

Canada’s record of dealing with LMS, like many other countries (see histories of educational practices in the United States, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa for example), is less than brilliant [Cummins, 1996 #197; Edwards, 1998 #231]. A retrospective analysis of the treatment of Canada’s first “ESL” students reveals a system of discrimination which chose to either ignore, or worse eradicate the languages and cultures of students from minority ethnic groups (Ashworth, 1979, as cited in McCarthy & Botham, 2001) . Rather than structures of empowerment, much of the school system

appears to have served the role of disempowering those students who failed to meet the standard of what a “normal” student should be (i.e. white and anglophone language majority students).

Nowhere is this better exemplified than in the stories of First Nations Residential Schools. Survivors of these schools, which took First Nations children away from their families and communities in order to educate them, tell of physical, sexual and psychological abuse that they suffered at the hands of authorities intent on civilizing them. Though most of these students did end up learning English, this was done with complete disregard for their physical and psychological needs.

Children were taken away from their families and communities for periods of up to five years. Schools responded to these children’s unique linguistic needs in a draconian way. Their linguistic backgrounds were completely ignored, even repressed. Placed in English-only environments children were forbidden to use their own languages and were punished severely (often physically) should they do so (Tschanz, 1980). Defined as heathens and savages, the children’s identities and cultures were devalued at a terrible linguistic and psychological price. Of the 300 or so aboriginal languages identified by Bright (1994, as cited in Cook, 1998), Foster (1982, as cited in Cook, 1998) now counts only 53 still spoken today. Their languages and identity loss, to this day, years of abuse at the hands of “well intentioned” educators have been linked to the widespread alcoholism, suicides and social problems experienced in First Nations communities today (Wilson, 1991).

2.3.2 Canada’s present record with LMS

How do present day Canadian schools deal with LMS? A review of the literature

reveals that, though there have been some improvements since the days of residential schools, there are still many problems. There are the disturbing reports of an overrepresentation of LMS in low level content area instruction (Fowler, Hooper, & Naylor, 1998; Gillborn, 1998; Medina, 1988; Yau, 1995). As well, there is the considerable achievement gap that separates LMS from their native English-speaking peers (Gunderson, 2000; in press; Gunderson & Clarke, 1998; Samuel & Verma, 1992). Finally there are also shocking dropout rates reported for LMS with numbers as high as seventy-four percent of ESL students not completing postsecondary studies in certain areas of Canada (Derwing, DeCorby, Ichikawa, & Jamieson, 1999; Gunderson, 2000; in press; Watt & Roessingh, 1994; Watt, 2000).

2.4 Explaining LMS' poor performance

When seeking an explanation to these poor results, the literature points to the fact that schools and most school teachers remain to this day unprepared for (or unwilling to face) the challenges of teaching LMS (Delpit, 1995; Genesee, 1994; Gunderson, 2000; in press; Samway & McKeon, 1999). The following section will explore this in greater detail looking at criticism of Canadian schools' ESL pull-out programs, criticism of Canada's English-only approach to LMS education, reports of schools teachers' lack of preparation for dealing with LMS, criticism of present day assessment practices for LMS and, last but not least, debates over the funding of programs for LMS.

2.4.1 Criticism of Canadian schools' ESL pull-out programs

For the most part, Canadian schools' responses to LMS have been to try and offer them support programs which focus on teaching English skills in order to get students caught up as quickly as possible to their native English speaking peers. These support

programs consist, in the majority of the cases, of what has been labeled as “pull-out ESL classes”, defined by Mckeen (1987) as a type of stand-alone ESL program which groups together LMS to instruct them in a manner similar to foreign language classes, where the focus is primarily on linguistic knowledge. In the case of pull-out classes, students are taken out of their regular classroom environments to be placed in special classes with other LMS where their linguistic needs can be addressed in a special way.

This approach has raised its share of criticism. Handscombe (1989) points out that pull-out classes are good attempts to help LMS, but that they are not without problems in the sense that these classes can be seen as literally pulling students away from content classes and native English speaker interaction, which they so desperately need. Though pull-out classes offer a safer and easier environment to LMS, Handscombe reports that too many operate independently from the content classes, which the students are missing. The result is that the ‘pull-out class’ becomes a waiting place to send students until they reach high enough levels of English proficiency to rejoin content classes. The problem is that, as Thomas and Collier (1997) and Mohan (1986) point out, students do not have the time to wait for high levels of English proficiency to develop before tackling academic content. Their research suggests that contrary to popular belief, separating linguistic development from academic content development may actually be slowing down LMS’ progress. Consequently, they propose that more should be done to integrate language and content at the same time.

Pull-out programs have also been criticized for their negative, actual and perceived, social effects on the school community. Pulling-out LMS from “normal” classes is perceived by some parents, students and educators alike as a form of

segregation, separating the English speakers from the non-English speakers (Salzberg, 1998). This is confirmed by Gunderson (2000) who found that despite recognition by LMS in his study of the importance of interacting with native English speakers as a way of developing language proficiency, that they had considerable difficulties doing so.

2.4.2 Criticism of Canada's English-only approach to LMS education

Canada's educational system is effectively a continuation of the same monolingual English-only approach that has been used historically in most parts of Canada and the United States when dealing with LMS. This approach has raised arguments by proponents of bilingual education who have also seriously questioned whether one can truly achieve one's potential in a school where the development of one's home language and culture are for all intents and purposes absent (Cummins & California Association for Bilingual Education., 1996; Krashen, 1991; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1999; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

Cummins (1996) is among many to see Canada's present approach to LMS' education as one that has failed to address the sociocultural and linguistic challenges of IMLS mentioned previously. He points out that in a country which prides itself for its respect of all languages and cultures as advocated by the Canadian government's multicultural policies, it is ironic that we should place LMS in monolingual schools where their home languages and cultures have little if any status. He also warns that under these conditions it is unlikely that many LMS can succeed academically.

This argument relies on research that strongly suggests that mother tongue development in conjunction with second language development is crucial to the academic achievement of LMS (Cummins, 1981a; Cummins, 1981b; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000;

Thomas & Collier, 1997; Wright, Macarthur, & Taylor, 2000). This research has found that L1 development has a significant influence on the development of L2 proficiency and that the absence of continued L1 cognitive development can actually lower L2 proficiency and academic achievement. This negative effect is what Lambert (1975) refers to as subtractive bilingualism or what Cummins (1981a) describes as limited bilingualism with negative cognitive effects.

Essentially, though researchers such as Cummins agree that developing proficiency in English the majority language for LMS is important, they also stress that this should not be done to the detriment of LMS' native language and culture and rather that school systems should do more to actively promote and develop LMS' cultures and language in schools (Cummins & California Association for Bilingual Education., 1996; Delpit, 1995; Ogbu, 1995; Spindler & Spindler, 2000).

2.4.3. Teachers low levels of preparedness

Language minority student's failure in schools has been attributed to the low expectations educators have of these students due to a lack of understanding of the best practices for these students (Verplaetse, 1998). Samway and McKeon (1999) and McLaughlin (1992) write of the numerous myths and false notions which prevail with a large number of educators and undermine the education of LMS in North America. They point out the urgent need to clarify and debunk such "myths" as the notion by too many teachers (and members of the general population) that a child's English language ability is a reflection of his or her cognitive abilities, or that once a language minority student is able to speak reasonably well, that his or her problems are likely to be over in school to the belief that the use of LMS's native language in class will slow down their rate of

English language acquisition.

The disastrous effects of teachers' lack of familiarity with LMS are well demonstrated in a study done by Moll and Diaz (1987) that reported the dangers of untrained teachers. They found that LMS taught by untrained monolingual teachers were often treated as slow learners, even though they demonstrated that they knew the answers even if they could not express them fluently in English. They report that the LMS in their study consequently learned very little from these teachers.

This lack of understanding on the part of teachers is due in part to a lack of training and experience. McKeon (1994) points out that despite the fact that at least 50% of American teachers teach a language minority student at some point in their careers, many receive little or no preparation in working with these students. One can hope that the situation has improved, over the last few years, but recent research continues to point to a lack of preparation and hence success with LMS on the part of teachers (Dwyer, 1998; Gunderson, 2000; O'Byrne, 2001; Verplaetse, 1998)

In addition to a possible lack of preparation it is worth noting that the literature indicates that many content or academic teachers have also demonstrated a lack of willingness to adapt and prepare for the special challenges presented by LMS. The literature reports a distinct tendency on the part of content or academic teachers to refuse responsibility for the education of LMS: a job which they usually feel falls rather under the category of the duties to be assigned to the ESL specialist than to them (Constantino, 1994; Penfield, 1987).

2.4.4 Criticism of present day assessment practices for LMS

Another problem identified in the literature as leading to LMS' failure has been

schools present assessment practices. Again, the point of the matter is that the schools have not seemed to adapt to the new population of students that they are serving. August et al. (1994) argues that present assessment practices are designed for Native English speakers, and that they are consequently unfair when applied to LMS. Some of the concerns raised include the short time students have to become proficient enough for the tests, cultural biases and lack of familiarity with the testing format (Gunderson & Siegel, 2001; Liu, Thurlow, Erickson, Spicuzza, & Heinze, 1997; Thomas & Collier, 1997). In the interest of fairness and the success of a growing student population, the literature calls for assessment practices that reflect the specific needs and unique realities of LMS.

2.4.5 Debates over the funding of programs for LMS

Last but not least, part of the blame for language minority student's academic failure has also been attributed to a simple but devastating economic problem: lack of funding. Schools, in British Columbia, are amongst many in Canada who have complained that "decisions on how to deliver ESL were based solely on economics, rather than educational wisdom" (Krieger, 1997) and that it was those who controlled the purse strings rather than the students themselves who were failing. Until now, demands for more ESL teachers, as well as the material and resources needed to support them have come up short (Dwyer & Steele, 1997; Krieger, 1997; McCarthy & Foxx, 2001).

To conclude, the overall picture is fairly bleak. One is left with the feeling that much more could be done, or that at least, the right intentions are there, but that obviously, good intentions are not enough. Clear guidance, and better judgment, as well as research to back up some of the important decisions that are being made are clearly required. Moreover, there is a need to understand better what it is that can help these

students achieve. The next section reviews what some of the research that has explored the academic achievement of LMS has to say.

2.5 Looking for the sources of academic achievement in LMS

LMS' poor performance has motivated researchers to explore the factors that might influence their academic achievement. The idea of course is that by exploring why LMS achieve (or do not achieve), one might gain a greater understanding of the causes of academic achievement, and in so doing find ways to promote it in a greater number of students.

Research looking at the academic achievement of LMS has been done in three main ways. First, there have been a number of large scale surveys probing a wide variety of factors related to students characteristics, homes, schools and academic achievement (Bempechat, 1998; Dhesi, 2000; Gunderson, 2000). This approach uses quantitative measures like test scores from various assessment tools such as I.Q. tests, and reading tests, the number of students in classes and socio-economic indexes to uncover empirical evidence of the effect of various factors on the success of LMS. For instance, Bryk, Lee, & Holland (1993) survey study found that poor and minority teenagers were more likely to succeed in Catholic high schools than in public ones. In another instance, Gunderson's (in press) survey of immigrant children in Vancouver found evidence that revealed that immigrant language minority female students were apparently more likely to succeed in schools than boys.

More qualitative research has also been done looking at some of the less quantifiable factors that influence academic achievement in LMS. These studies have principally made use of observations and interviews, usually of an ethnographic nature,

and open-ended questionnaires, enquiring with parents, teachers and students about what they felt about academic achievement. Such studies have provided valuable insights about the perceptions, cultures and contexts which surround academic success. (Clark, 1983; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Duff, 2001; Early, 1992; Gentry, 1988; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Peirce, 1995; Salzberg, 1998; Toohey, 1998). Salzberg's ethnographic study of immigrant parents perceptions of the ESL learning of their adolescent children in the Lower Mainland region of British Columbia, Canada, for example, highlighted the importance of immigrant parents' attitudes towards their children's language programs as a determining factor influencing academic achievement. It provided valuable clues for schools about what immigrant parents felt was important in the education of their children. Toohey and Norton's (2001) work pointed to "the importance of social interactions as well as the practices in the communities in which they were learning" (p. 313) as important forces determining the eventual positioning of students in their learning environment and consequently, their access to learning and achievement opportunities.

Similar research has also used a retrospective approach to study academic achievement. This approach involves asking individuals (deemed to be successful) to bring their perspectives from the present to talk about those influences in their past which had helped them achieve. Harrington & Boardman (1997) study of 100 of "pathmakers": successful individuals in American society is a good example of such a study. Their study highlighted the importance that good relationships with their teachers played in the successful lives of their informants. Both Delpit (1991) and Bempechat (1998) have called for more research of this type, which is rare in the field, pointing out that more could be learned from studying success than by studying failure.

Over the years, researchers have used these techniques separately and collectively to suggest a long list of factors affecting the academic achievement of LMS. These include factors related to second language acquisition and factors related to sociocultural processes.

2.5.1 Academic achievement and factors related to second language acquisition

In the early eighties, researchers explored the link between academic achievement and second language acquisition. This research was based on the notion that it was difficult for LMS to achieve academically if they could not learn the language. The basic premise was that if one could find ways to help LMS learn their second language more efficiently that their linguistic success would translate in improved academic achievement. Research of this type tended to focus on the individual mental processes that determined language learning (Naiman, 1996).

Research produced in this area is perhaps best exemplified by the early works of Cummins (1981) reviewed earlier in this chapter, which looked at the relations between linguistic knowledge acquired in L1 on L2. As well, there have been a number of studies which have sought to identify those individual strategies that helped good language students acquire a second language more effectively (Ellis, 1989; Naiman & Ontario Institute for Studies in Education., 1978; O'Malley, Chamot, Strewner-Manzanares, Russo, & Kupper, 1985; Wong Fillmore, 1979). The result of these studies remain relevant. They stress the importance of such factors as age, prior education, cognitive and literacy development in both L1 and L2, and the use of efficient learning strategies on the academic achievement of LMS. Yet, in general these studies did not focus on the sociocultural processes beyond the individual learner him/herself.

2.5.2 Academic achievement and factors related to sociocultural processes

More recently, trends in the field of second language acquisition have pointed out that equating the academic achievement of LMS with their successful second language achievement offered only a limited perspective on the factors at play. Critics such as Breen (1998) pointed out that being a good language learner did not guarantee academic success and that consequently one had to pay more attention to the social context that surrounded LMS' educational experiences. In a closely related argument, critics such as Pennycook (1989) and Norton (1997) warned against the idealized, neutral image of the learner as an autonomous language learning machine that past studies had relied on, insightfully pointing out that academic achievement could just as well be caused by social or personal factors than by linguistic factors.

Consequently, more complex frameworks have been offered to explain the academic achievement of LMS. Thomas & Collier's (1997) study of the school effectiveness for LMS, for example, proposed that academic achievement is the result of four independent processes that come together to form a complex whole. These include the more traditional linguistic, cognitive and academic processes, but also the less traditional sociocultural processes. Though they stress the importance of all these processes, Thomas & Collier (1997) concur with Cummins (1996), Norton (1997) and many others that in the end it is the sociocultural processes such as the students' socio-economic status, history, family and communities, which are perhaps the most fundamental in determining the academic achievement of their LMS.

Studies have largely shown, for example, that second language learners from higher socio-economic background do consistently achieve higher levels of success than

their less fortunate peers even after making adjustments for other factors (Bursta et al, 1974 as cited in Namian et al, 1998; Harbison & Hanushek, 1992). In a more recent study Dhesi (2000) found, for example, with a sample of 1018 students in secondary/pre-university classes in North India, that socio-economic background was significantly associated with achievement. Gunderson's (in press) research on ILMS in the greater Vancouver school board has also revealed an interesting correlation between Vancouver's richest areas and the proportion of students likely to pursue post-secondary studies at the university level.

Beyond money alone, the influential sociologist, Bourdieu (1977), refers to the crucial role that families play in the academic achievement of their children. He stresses the importance of parents' cultural investments in their children (such as visits to local museums) as important factors can help determine academic achievement. He also points out that the more families invest in cultural capital which is in agreement with the cultural values and ideas found in the schools in which the child is to be educated, the better the chances that student will have to succeed.

Coleman (1988) built on Bourdieu's theories and suggested that academic achievement is the result of both financial and cultural investments by parents, as well as investments in social capital represented by efforts made by parents to build supportive social networks both within and outside the family for their children. Research in bilingual education has largely supported both Bourdieu and Coleman's arguments for the important role that supportive families and strong social networks play on the well-being of LMS (Wong Fillmore, 1991).

Sun's, (1998) study confirmed Coleman's and Bourdieu's notions of investment.

He explored the academic success of language minority Asian students and found that the notion of parental investment was indeed helpful in explaining at least in part the academic achievement of East-Asian-American LMS.

Ogbu (1995; Ogbu & Simons, 1998) offered perhaps the best case to support the importance of sociocultural factors in the academic achievement of LMS. Ogbu investigated "power relations between groups" (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 162) to explain how various levels of status in society affect the way different groups position themselves towards education. He distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary and minority groups. Voluntary minorities principally include those recent immigrants who have come to North America (or any other country) of their free will looking for a better life than the one offered in their country of origin. Involuntary minorities or nonimmigrant groups on the other hand include those who have been made part of a society contrary to their will due to conquest, colonization or enslavement.

Ogbu proposed that voluntary immigrants are much more likely to succeed academically in spite of the traditional challenges they usually face (language difficulties, inappropriate curriculum and racism) because they generally maintain a greater positive attitude towards North American society and its educational system than involuntary minorities. He proposed that voluntary immigrants may see North American schools in a positive aspect of their new society when comparing them to schools back home. Voluntary immigrant parents are consequently more likely to support the school curriculums, while putting more pressure for their children to achieve academically in a system which they view positively. Involuntary immigrants, on the other hand, are more likely to position themselves defensively towards an institution that belongs to a society

that has historically worked to subjugate their needs and rights. Consequently, involuntary immigrant parents are less inclined to push their children to succeed in a system that is viewed as a symbol of oppression.

Consistent with this framework are the results of two case studies of Chinese American and black Americans (Ogbu, 1995), as well as a more recent study by Samuel, Krugly-Smolok & Warren (2001) which surveyed and interviewed 1,954 students from various ethnocultural groups in a Canadian context. In all of the above studies, results suggested that, indeed, the distinction between voluntary minority students and involuntary minority students tended to reflect differences in academic performance.

2.6 Conclusions

In all cases, research in academic achievement has provided considerable ground work for anyone interested in exploring what could help more LMS succeed in school than there are now. It also suggests possible leads for future research and this present study is based on these leads.

First, in further studying the challenges faced by ILMS identified in the literature from, it hoped that a greater understanding of these and the possible ways in which students, teachers, parents and schools alike may be best encouraged to face these challenges. The study also sought to explore the complex question of the academic achievement of ILMS by imitating the qualitative approaches used in the literature and adopting a multiple case study approach seeking to look at a localized cases to attempt to weave some understanding of the complex causal links involved in the issues at play (Yin, 1989). This study builds on the present literature by exploring as suggested success

rather than failure amongst ILMS, and by attempting to identify those sociocultural aspects of a specific location/community (in this case schools in the Greater Vancouver area) which impact on their academic achievement. This study finally attempted to do this by listening to some of the students personal retrospectives of what they had lived and in so doing takes the advice offered by Norton (1997), among others, who suggested that "greater attention to the voices of the learners generates unexpected consequences and new understandings" (p. 415). And so we invite the reader to listen in the pages to follow with sincere hope that out of the stories that follow will emerge a clearer understanding of the varied achievement amongst ILMS in the Vancouver area.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

It may seem counterintuitive to express concern over children who are doing well in school. Why bother? These children have demonstrated that they are flourishing and probably will continue to flourish academically[...]. I believe that this view is shortsighted and misses the point entirely. In fact, our anxieties over school failure should be driving our efforts to understand success. At this time in our social history, there is mounting concern over underachievement in general (especially in mathematics and science), and minority underachievement in particular. With globalization has come a greater dependence on technologically relevant skill, and all of us—parents, researchers, educators, and public policymakers—agree that we can ill afford to see our children's intellectual competence increasingly at risk. It stands to reason then, that we will learn a great deal about promoting school success by studying those students who seem to defy the odds. (Bempechat, 1998, p.5)

This chapter describes the research design of this study and the results of a pilot study. It also addresses issues of validity and provides details about the informants and the procedures and instruments used in the collection of the data and its analysis.

3.1 Research design

This study is unique in three ways. First, it is the result of a collaborative enterprise between two graduate students essentially conducting the same study together. No other studies, to our knowledge, conducted in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia has attempted to do this. Second, this study offers information that has never been collected before to our knowledge using this particular methodology. Although there have been other studies interested in the issue of immigrant language minority students in Canada, none has attempted to investigate qualitatively through an ethnographic approach the perceptions of university students who were once in ESL programs in the greater Vancouver area.

Finally, this study distinguishes itself in its focus on successful students rather than on failing ones. The following sections will elaborate on these three features.

3.1.1 Collaborative study

This study was completed in part to fulfill the requirements for the completion of its author's graduate degree. It's uniqueness stems from the fact that it was conducted in partnership with a second graduate student who also used this study to fulfill the requirements of his graduate degree.

Together, both researchers helped plan and execute this research. As a result of their collaboration, two theses were produced on the same general topic: the education of immigrant language minority students in Canada. Both of these theses are based on the shared experiences and data collected throughout this research. Nevertheless, each thesis remains both unique and original since both researchers originally approached this topic and collected data with different backgrounds, interests and perspectives. The individuality and originality of each thesis was further enhanced by having the researchers analyse the data and write up their results separately, and independently.

This approach is not unlike having two painters paint the same bowl of flowers in front of them. The original source of inspiration may be the same, but the paintings are surely to be different. Consequently, this unique research design offers interested readers and researchers the advantage of being able to assess the same problem from two different perspectives. It is hoped that in the process of exploring these two perspectives, that readers will discover things that may have gone unnoticed without the point of comparison. Interested readers will find further details regarding the nature of this

collaborative approach in chapter 7 of this thesis which will contain reflections of both researchers on the advantages and disadvantages of this particular type of research.

3.1.2 Interactive qualitative design

This study was designed to produce a description of the perceptions that successful immigrant language minority students have of their experiences as “ESL students” in the Greater Vancouver area. In so doing, this study responded to a call in the literature for more qualitative based detailed ethnographic research designs that recognize the context that surrounds the educational experience (Breen, 1998; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Van Lier, 1996).

To achieve this goal, this study used what McMillan and Schumacher (2001) refer to as an interactive qualitative research methodology. Interactive qualitative research is defined as the type of “inquiry in which researchers collect data in face-to-face situations by interacting with selected persons in their settings (field research)” (p.395). It’s goals are mainly to explore people’s “...individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions” (p. 395).

3.1.2.1 Inspired by the ethnographic interview

Spradley (1979) defined ethnography as “the work of describing culture” (p. 3). Its essential goal is to understand the ways that the world is seen, heard, spoken, thought and acted on by people other than oneself. This approach reflects a belief in a “reality” that is not transcendental. Rather it views reality as a construct of people’s perceptions and belief systems. It seeks to understand these meaning-making systems, while recognizing that they are constantly in a state of change and transformation (Spradley, 1980). A traditional approach is the use of in-depth interviews with key informants from

the culture being studied. These interviews generally consist of open-ended questions that allow informants to explain, in their own words, their way of seeing the world that surrounds them.

Ethnographies have contributed greatly to the field of education. Specifically, their concern for the study and greater understanding of diversity and culture has made them particularly relevant for educators and researchers in the field of second language acquisition. Educational ethnographies have helped to explore in greater detail the influence of culture in schools. They have shed light on what goes on “culturally” when you have a classroom of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Recently, educational ethnographies have helped to challenge preconceptions about ‘other people’s children’ (Delpit, 1995). They have also revealed schools as the politically motivated cultural transmission institutions that they are (Giroux & McLaren, 1989). In so doing, educational ethnographies have contributed greatly to attaining the goal of improving the education of minority students (Spindler, 2000).

This study shared this very goal and hopes in its choice of an in-depth interview approach to contribute even if only in a small way to the successful education of immigrant language minority students in Vancouver and to the larger community.

Inspired by ethnographic interviews, this study uses a qualitative approach making use of in-depth interviews with fifteen cases to get at the perceptions and meaning-making structures of informants defined as successful immigrant language minority students.

3.1.3. Studying success

This research studied success by listening to what successful immigrant language minority students had to say. This approach is based on the strong belief that if one wants to learn to do something well, one should look for people who do that thing well and talk to them. This is a slightly different approach than most research studies in second language acquisition that focus on the failures and difficulties of immigrant language minority students. By looking at success from the students' perspective rather than from the educators' or researchers' perspective, this study gives voice to the individuals who are the most directly involved and touched by ESL programs, and hence have the greatest experience with them: the students themselves. In essence, this study recognizes the value of experience. It views the stories told by successful students as valuable records of what has already been felt, tried, and what has failed or succeeded. These stories of paths taken can help create valuable maps that can help those to come achieve, by learning from those who have gone before.

3.2 Validity

Researchers generally feel that it is be harder to show strong validity in the case of qualitative research than with quantitative research. There are, however, strategies that can help enhance a qualitative study's validity. These include: prolonged field work, multimethod strategies, the use of informants' verbatim language, low-inference descriptors, multiple researchers, mechanically recorded data, participant researcher, member checking, participant review, and negative cases (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

Some of these strategies were used to help enhance this study's validity. First, although data were collected through the use of one central method: in-depth interviews, care was taken to try and also collect data from other sources. In addition to the data collected from the interviews, data were collected from field notes, audio-recorded discussions, e-mails and written questionnaires. Such multimethod data collection strategies permitted the triangulation of the information gathered by allowing for similar information to be presented in various forms (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

Triangulation was also possible in a broader sense thanks to the collaborative approach taken with this study. Multiple researchers interpreting the same data, using multiple perspectives, can help broaden one's understanding of the method and the phenomenon of interest (Janesick, 1998, cited in Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2001). This was particularly true in the present study. The partnership which united the researchers, allowed for a constant questioning and sounding out of ideas that would have been difficult to consider alone. Perspectives and choices had to be explained, discussed and checked 'out loud' at every point of the study. This helped considerably in keeping the researchers consciously aware of the own subjectivities throughout the research process.

Second, particular care was taken to make sure that the informant's own words were used in this study. This meant mechanically recording interviews with informants and transcribing them 'verbatim' without giving in to the temptation to simplify the process by simply reducing or summarizing the informants' responses to the interview questions. This considerable investment of time and work enhanced the completeness and accuracy of the data collected, and thereby increased its richness and value. Moreover this improved the chances that the informants' own words would be used in the

final analysis of the data. According to Spradley (1979) using the informants' own words is absolutely crucial to understanding their unique way of labelling, and hence, understanding the world.

Finally, informants were asked to offer their feedback on the researchers preliminary findings based on the data collected. Informants were encouraged to comment on, discuss, add to and question the researchers' findings at this time. This was an important way to help validate whether this study had, indeed, captured accurately their perceptions and ideas about the issues discussed during the interviews.

We hope to have established with the above strategies the basis of what makes for a "trustworthy" study. We do not, however, forget that there are no guarantees that our results are either true or foolproof. We recognize openly the limits of this study and the fact that "validity in either quantitative or qualitative research is not an absolute notion nor can validity be 'proven'. Rather, a high level of validity is a goal to strive for" (Johnson & Saville-Troike, 1992, p. 603). The findings of this study are meant to be taken for what they are: interpretations of the data collected, subject to the biases and baggage that the researchers brought to it. The authors make no claim to the generalization of their results as true statements to be applied to all immigrant language minority students. Rather, these findings are intended to provide food for thought and reflection; a possible interpretation of a specific situation which will stimulate readers to think about similar situations, and perhaps even act on what they have read by applying these findings in further research or practical situations.

3.3 Pilot Study

In preparation for this research, a pilot study was conducted to verify that the proposed interview format and the interview items were appropriate and comprehensible to an “ex-ESL student”. This pilot study also helped us test the logistics of doing the interview. The recording equipment to be used was tested, as well as the room where the interviews would be held.

A fellow graduate student in the Department of Language and Literacy Education was recruited to serve as an informant for the pilot study. For practical reasons, this graduate student was not chosen randomly. He was a friend and was known to share similar interests in the issues of language minority student education. More importantly he fit the description of a “successful ex-ESL student”, having come to North America in his teens, and having subsequently graduated from high school and eventually come to attend a university as a graduate student.

The pilot study was conducted in October of the year 2000. The interview consisted of an audio-taped in-depth face-to-face interview which used ten standardized open-ended prompts. The interview was followed by a follow-up session that invited the informant to provide valuable feedback on the interview’s items and conduct. This follow-up session was also recorded.

The result of the interview was a rich text, which confirmed in this author’s eyes that this methodological design would lead to some very interesting and exciting data. Furthermore, as a result of the pilot study, interview items were changed with some of their wording being rephrased to enhance comprehensibility. More importantly, 6 items were added to the original ten in order to better cover various aspects of the informants’

social lives. Finally it was suggested that an informant would have a better chance to give better answers if he or she had a chance to prepare for the interview with the help of a questionnaire handed out prior to the interview date.

The most interesting consequence of this pilot study was that it led to the partnership which forms the collaborative nature of this present study. Subsequent to the interview, the graduate student interviewed shared his interests in conducting a similar study on the socialization process of immigrant language minority students. It was soon decided (thanks to the wise advice of Dr. Lee Gunderson) that the proposed study could become a collaborative effort. As a result, the pilot study's informant became a co-researcher for this study. His experience as an informant in the pilot study provided valuable insights about what the informants might feel and think, and contributed in no small part to subsequent success with which the interviews were conducted.

3.4 Informants

In accordance to our pre-established definition of a successful student, informants were recruited for this study by advertising for students who: had immigrated to Canada at a young age, had at one point in their schooling experiences been in an ESL program in the Greater Vancouver area, and were presently enrolled in a program of study at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

Most informants volunteered for the study as a result of having seen a recruitment poster advertising the study which was posted throughout the UBC campus (see appendix A). A few informants volunteered, however, after having heard of the study from sources other than the poster. One of the informants was a friend of one of the co-researchers. Another informant was told about the study by a friend of the researchers. As well, some

informants volunteered after having been told about the study by another informant (i.e. one informant who volunteered after seeing the recruitment poster, later convinced her brother to participate in the study). All students who contacted the researchers to participate in this study were accepted with the exception of two students who contacted the researchers after the data collection phase of the study had ended. Each volunteer was offered a total sum of fifty dollars in return for their participation in the study (they were paid ten dollars at the start of the study, and forty dollars at the end).

Once contacted by an interested informant, researchers set-up an initial meeting where the purpose and implications of the studies were discussed. At this time, researchers presented potential informants with an informed consent form and answered any questions or concerns the potential informants had. Researchers also addressed issues of confidentiality and financial rewards, and finally offered the choice to participate or not to participate in the study. No informant chose not to participate in the study following their initial meetings with the researchers.

Fifteen informants volunteered in all (imaginary names have been used to for confidentiality purposes). All were, with the exception of one, non-native English students who had immigrated to Canada with their parents at a young age and who had experienced ESL programs in the greater Vancouver area. One exception to this rule was made with the participation in the study of an informant who had immigrated to Canada at a later age and had experienced ESL programs at the university level in Canada. Since this informant had obtained a masters degree in Canada, it was decided that he met the criteria of a successful immigrant language minority student. More importantly, however, this student was registered in the Bachelors of Education teacher training program.

Accordingly, it was deemed that his unique input as an “Ex-ESL student” who was being trained to become an “ESL teacher” in the Greater Vancouver area would contribute greatly to the study. For these reasons this informant was accepted in the study, in spite of the fact that his case differed slightly from all the other informants.

The recruitment poster was designed with the hopes of attracting as great a diversity of informants as possible (see appendix A). This call for diversity was answered partly in the wide range of ages of arrivals to Canada that were reported by the informants (see table 3.1). These ranged from 5 years old to 22 years old. In total there were five male informants versus a total of ten female informants. Though most were in their early twenties, two were in their mid twenties and one was in his mid thirties. All but one originated from an East-Asian country. There was, however, some diversity in the countries represented. One originally came from Mainland China. Three came from what used to be the independent Hong Kong. One came from Japan. One had been born and raised in Thailand (though her parents were Japanese). Two came from Korea, and six came from Taiwan. The one informant who did not come from an East-Asian country had immigrated from Columbia, South America. Most, with the exception of two of the informants had arrived in Canada with very little or almost no English abilities.

TABLE 3.1**Background of the informants in the study**

Name	Country of origin	Age of arrival	Sex	Program	Degree
1	Hong Kong	11	Female	Arts	Undergraduate
2	Japan	5	Female	Arts	Undergraduate
3	Korea	12	Female	Arts	Undergraduate
4	Korea	14	Male	Arts	Undergraduate
5	Taiwan	11	Female	Arts	Undergraduate
6	Thailand	9	Female	Arts	Undergraduate
7	Hong Kong	8	Female	Commerce	Undergraduate
8	Hong Kong	12	Male	Commerce	Graduate
9	Colombia	20's	Male	Education	Undergraduate
10	China	8.5	Female	Science	Undergraduate
11	Taiwan	11.5	Female	Science	Undergraduate
12	Taiwan	14	Female	Science	Undergraduate
13	Taiwan	15	Female	Science	Undergraduate
14	Taiwan	13	Male	Science	Computer Science
15	Taiwan	14	Male	Science	Undergraduate

3.5 Data collection

The following section will elaborate on the way in which data for this study were collected. Data collection occurred in a number of ways. First, during their initial meeting with the researchers, all informants were asked to fill-out a short questionnaire in

order to collect some background personal information about them and to confirm their eligibility for the study (see Appendix B). The questionnaire asked informants about their country of origin, age of arrival, present program of study, schools attended, length of time spent in ESL programs, languages spoken, and language of greatest proficiency in speaking, reading and writing.

Second, at the end of the initial meeting, informants were given a second longer questionnaire to take home with them and fill-out. Informants were instructed that this questionnaire aimed to help them prepare their thoughts and ideas about their "ESL experiences" for the interview (see Appendix C). This questionnaire contained the same 16 open-ended prompts that made up the interview items. The purpose of this questionnaire was explained to the informants and they were told that they could answer these questions in whatever format they wanted, ranging from point form answers written in the space provided on the form, to more detailed essay type answers written on a separate piece of paper. They were instructed to contact the researchers to make an appointment for the interview once they felt ready for it.

Third, once an informant declared him or herself ready, a date was arranged for an interview. Each informant met separately with the two researchers for a one and half to two hour and half interview (duration of the interviews varied according to how much an informant wanted to say). The interviews took place on campus in an empty classroom that had been reserved for this purpose. The interviews consisted of sixteen standardized open-ended questions and one Likert-like scale question (see Appendix D). Informants were told that they could, should they choose to, keep the answers they had prepared in written form with them during the interview to refer to. Both researchers were present at

the conduct of all the interviews with the exception of one interview where the author of this thesis had to leave before the end of an interview. For each interview, one of the researchers took the role of asking the questions while the other researcher listened and took notes, interjecting only to ask follow-up questions or clarifications about something that had been said. Researchers alternated these roles from interview to interview. The choice of who interviewed whom was therefore, randomly, decided by the order in which the interviews were done.

All of the interviews were recorded with the use of a MiniDisc recorder to be transcribed verbatim at later dates. Transcriptions were done by the researchers, each transcribing half of the interviews. Each transcription was then reviewed and proofread for errors by the researcher who had not transcribed it.

Data was also collected in written form. The researcher observing the interviews took written field notes. As well, researchers' comments and initial reactions at the end of most of the interview sessions were recorded (scheduling constraints made it impossible to do this for a few of them). In addition, individual notes were kept by both researchers throughout the study. Researchers also collected any answers informants had written in preparation for the interview and kept copies of all e-mail communication with the informants.

Lastly, once the preliminary analysis of the data collected had been done, copies of our findings were sent to each of the informants asking for any feedback, concerns or questions they may have about the findings. Only one informant replied to this call for feedback.

3.6 Data analysis

It is important to note that as is often the case with research of a qualitative nature, the analysis of the data collected did not necessarily occur in a fixed and linear way.

Data analysis began at the very start of this project and continued throughout both concurrent and subsequent to the data collection. Informal discussions with co-investigators as well as notes taken throughout the research reflect this process.

Nevertheless, the main data analysis was conducted with the use of QSR N5, a qualitative data analysis computer software program specifically designed for qualitative data analysis. QSR N5 is designed to help researchers explore large amounts of complex data without having to reduce the data to numbers. QSR N5 is essentially a toolkit based on coding text documents, and storing, and searching this coding efficiently. QSR N5 was used to record and link ideas found in the data and to search for and explore recurring themes and patterns.

In addition to qualitative data analysis done with the help of QSR N5, some of the data collected from the short questionnaires and the interviews was also analyzed quantitatively in order to provide additional information using tables created in Microsoft Excel.

In both the qualitative and the quantitative analysis, particular attention was put on trying to make sure that the themes and the patterns that emerged from the data stayed true to the participants' perspectives by making use of the informants own words as much as possible.

This chapter has briefly described the methodology of this study. The following chapter will describe its results.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the key themes and issues which arose from the stories and opinions expressed by 15 ILMS (ILMS), all of which, with the exception of one, had once experienced ESL programs in the Greater Vancouver area as a result of having immigrated to Canada at a young age with their families.

Findings are based on an analysis of data collected through interviews, questionnaires and field notes that focused on answering the three central questions posed by this study:

1. What perceptions do ILMS who were once in ESL programs and are now attending university have of the factors having influenced their academic achievement?
2. What perceptions do ILMS who were once in ESL programs and are now attending university have of the factors having influenced their social integration into Canada?
3. What advice do ILMS who were once in ESL programs and are now attending university have for teachers, parents and other language minority students?

4.1 The informants: Background information

The findings discussed in this study are the result of privileged information. Each informant told his or her story in their fashion and shared their opinions and reflections about what they had lived. In so doing, they were generous enough to let the researchers in to their personal circle of thoughts. As a result, both for ethical reasons and out of respect, the privacy of the informants is of first concern in the discussion that follows. Consequently, the pseudonyms were chosen in the majority of the cases by the students themselves or otherwise at random. In addition, care has been taken to try not to reveal any information of an overly personal or privileged nature.

A total of fifteen ILMS participated in the study representing a wide range of backgrounds, age of arrivals and schooling experiences (see table 4.1)

TABLE 4.1
Background of the Informants

Pseudonym	Country of origin	Age of arrival	Year of arrival	Faculty/ Department	Program	Years at UBC	Languages spoken
Ulrika	Taiwan	15	1995	Science	Geology	3	Mandarin, English
Ani	Taiwan	11.5	1993	Science	Science	1	English, Mandrin, Cantonese, Taiwanese
Naomi	Thailand	9	1989	Arts/Science	Sociology/Geology	3	English, Japanese
Mari	Hong Kong	11	1990	Arts	Political Science/Asian Studies	4	English, Mandrin, Cantonese, Japanese
Hugo	Taiwan	14	1990	Science	Computer science	6	Taiwanese, Mandarin, English, Cantonese
Nansen	Colombia	20's	1990	Education	B.Ed	1	Spanish, English, French
Maia	China	8.5	1990	Biochemistry	B.Sc. In Biochemistry	2	Mandarin, English
Mark	Taiwan	13	1993	Science	Computer science	3	Mandarin, English, Taiwanese
Heather	South Korea	12	1995	Arts	Foundations	1	Korean, English, Spanish, German

Pseudonym	Country of origin	Age of arrival	Year of arrival	Faculty/ Department	Program	Years at UBC	Languages spoken
Lora	Taiwan	14	1995	Science	Math	2	Mandarin, Taiwanese, English
Robert	Republic of Korea	14	1995	Arts	Art history	3	English, Korean
Julie	Taiwan	11	1993	Arts	Economics	2	Mandarin, Taiwanese, English
Beth	Japan	5	1985	Arts	B.A.	3	Japanese, English
Celeste	Hong Kong	9	1987	Commerce	Marketing	4	English, Cantonese, Mandarin
Gabriel	Hong Kong	12	1987	Commerce & Business Administration	MSc. In Management Information System	8	English, Cantonese

They also had experienced an interesting range of different schools and length of stay in ESL programs (see table 4.2).

TABLE 4.2
Schools Attended and Length of Time in ESL Programs

Name	Schools attended ES (Elementary school) IS (Jr. High School) SS (Secondary School)	Date of entrance in an ESL program	Grade of entry	Date of exit from an ESL program	Grade of exit
Ulrika	-SS Vancouver -SS Surrey	February, 1995	Grade 9	June 1998	Grade 12
Ani	-ES Richmond -SS Richmond	September, 1993	Grade 1	September 1997	Grade 10
Naomi	-ES Coquitlam -IS Coquitlam -SS Coquitlam	September, 1989	Grade 4	1991	Grade 6
Mari	-ES Richmond -SS Richmond	March, 1990	Grade 5	June 1991	Grade 6
Hugo	-IS Richmond -SS Richmond	September, 1990	Grade 9	Jun-93	11
Nansen	-Brandon University -McGill University -University of Ottawa -University of British Columbia	Not applicable		Not applicable	
Maia	-ES Vancouver -ES Burnaby -ES Coquitlam -IS Coquitlam -SS Coquitlam	September 1990	Grade 4	1992	Grade 7
Mark	-EE Richmond -SS Richmond	1993	Grade 7	1995	Grade 10
Heather	-ES Coquitlam -IS Coquitlam -SS Burnaby	April, 1995	Grade 7	June, 1996	Grade 8
Lora	-SS Burnaby	1995	Grade 9	1997	Grade 10

Name	Schools attended ES (Elementary school) IS (Jr. High School) SS (Secondary School)	Date of entrance in an ESL program	Grade of entry	Date of exit from an ESL program	Grade of exit
Robert	-SS West Vancouver	July, 1995	Grade 10	June, 1996	Grade 10
Julie	-ES Richmond -SS Richmond	May, 1993	Grade 6	June, 1995	Grade 9
Beth	-ES Vancouver -SS Vancouver	September, 1985	Grade 1	December, 1985	Grade 1
Celeste	-ES Surrey -ES Vancouver -SS Vancouver	September, 1987	Grade 3	June, 1987	Grade 3
Gabriel	-ES Vancouver -SS Vancouver	1987	Grade 6	1990	Grade 9

4.2 Style of discussion

One of the primary goals of this research was to let students themselves do the talking about the issues that concerned them. Accordingly, I have tried to put as many direct quotes from the interviews and questionnaires as possible and attempted to limit my voice to that of a simple guide for this chapter, introducing the various themes as they come up.

Sadly, the limits of this thesis make it impossible to tell each one of the fifteen informants individual stories, which came out of the interviews and questionnaires, in detail. Consequently, the discussion that follows will try to weave together some of the most interesting strands from each individual stories into a larger symbolic story of the lives and experiences of ILMS. The organisation of this chapter reflects this story-telling approach. This chapter is divided into three sections that roughly follow the chronological order the informants' used to tell their stories and comment on them.

The first section "*What was faced...*" explores what happened to the informants on their arrival to Canada and the important events that marked their lives as ESL students in Canadian schools. The second section: *Exploring success* explores the ways in which the students faced their challenges and the reasons behind their actions as ESL students in Canadian schools. Finally, the last section: *What was learned* reports on the informants personal reflections as a result of these experiences and lists the advice that informants had for other ILMS, their parents and teachers.

4.3 *What was faced*

4.3.1 Leaving home

All immigrants' stories can perhaps start with their departure from their home country. It is in many ways the event that defines them. Leaving home represents for the immigrant one possible boundary between the old and the new, who and what one was and who and what one has become. If we are to understand the perceptions of ILMS, then we must understand where they started from, why they left and what they left behind.

The ILMS who participated in this study formed a unique group of immigrants. With the exception of Nansen, the student who immigrated as a university student to Canada in his twenties, none of the informants in this study could truly say that they had chosen to embark on their journeys as immigrants. As is probably true for most children, or young teen-agers, it was the parents who decided their fates by making the choice for them.

For the four students who immigrated at the younger age (ten years old and below), coming to Canada simply meant following their parents, a natural consequence of

the family's power hierarchy. It appears that the students' young age was accompanied by a sincere trust in their parents' ability to take care of them and consequently the departure itself and the move to Canada were never questioned. It was only later that the full realization of the implications of the journey they had embarked on would set in.

Interviewer: Excellent. Um...Did, were you aware that your family was moving to Canada for good?

Beth: No...LAUGHS...No I, I had no idea it was for good. I had no idea it was forever. Um, yeah. I...I don't know what I was really thinking at the time. I just thought it was an adventure and...yeah, I thought, if, even really the remember what my parents told me. But yeah. It just, it just seemed like, ok we're here, you know this is the way things are going to be. And I was just, you know, going with the flow, you know, being 5 as I was...and so. Yeah.

Beth: It was actually, it was like a bit mystery, it wasn't...I, I really had no idea what I was getting myself into...But, um, my sister and I were very, you know, nonchalant about everything, like we trusted our parents. And everything would be ok, right? So we had fun, you know. Um, yeah.

Interviewer: good, and did, were you aware at the time, like, "oh man I'm leaving forever" or did you uh...

Celeste: no I don't think, I think I was too young to grasp the concepts, and and when you're six, or uh, when you're eight uh, you don't really care as long as you're with your parents, it didn't really matter, yes.

Maia: I was...ummm Didn't give it much much thought...I was just like...I was just going to see my parents, like it didn't really hit me...that oh I was going to live in a whole different country. Like...Where everything is different and I'll have to start making new friends...but it didn't hit me...I was only 8 and a half ...I was just a kid (Laugh). So...I didn't really know...

Students who arrived at a later age had a better idea of what was happening to them. Eleven of the fifteen students interviewed received advanced warning of their

departure. And, in some cases, the parents had discussed moving to Canada or the US for a number of years.

Ulrika:....we didn't move right away, we waited about a year, then moved, so eh, I guess that helped a little bit, I was, they didn't say "hey, that's get moving next week!" no, we have this whole year to get used to it so I guess that's why I didn't have much a dramatic reaction to it, I still went to school, during this one year so and nothing big.

Interviewer: I see. So, uh, in relation to that question, what, what was it like when you uh, when your parents told you "Okay, well let's go to Canada"? Did you know or?

Hugo: Uh, yeah. Well, they told me like one year ahead of time. Yeah and we had, we had to go to the you know, the uh, health check up and for, for yeah, immigration. Yeah so I knew that, like, at least a year before.

Only two of the eleven students who arrived at ages later than ten years old reported that the news had been given suddenly with little time for preparation.

Interviewer: So, I hope you don't mind us asking, why did your parents decide to come to Canada?

Lora: Uh...you know, even I, I don't, I don't quite understand (laugh), like uh, cus' I didn't know that, I thought, at first I thought we were just like uh, going on vacation, but the after I got here I just realized we immigrated here (laugh)

Julie: Ok...um, I was still in elementary school. Um, I liked my school a lot I think, cause I didn't want to come here LAUGHTER. And then I was still in grade 5 and it was pretty close to like uh, festival that would, our school was having, and then, I was going to participate in it, but my mom's just, like she didn't tell me, right aw-like, um, a long time ago, that were coming to Canada, she told me probably about a few month before hand...

For most of the students leaving their home was associated with mixed feelings of loss, anxiety, and happiness. On one hand, leaving especially at a later age meant facing the sadness of saying goodbye to the people and things outside of the family.

Interviewer:what did it feel like, were you happy, excited, nervous...

Celeste: funny you should ask because, uh, remembering, I was thought I was very naive because I thought of all of the cartoons that were missed

Everyone: laughter

Celeste: I seriously did! I knew that there was a cartoon show that was, uh, gonna to be shown, uh, I know that like later week but I know I was moving, and I said "ah, darn I'm gonna miss that cartoon"

Mari: Yeah but eh, actually was kind of sad cus' I had a, I had a maid since I was like 1 or 2, and she's been with me like all those, you know, up to 10 years, and since my fam-, like my parents weren't really around all the time, she was the only person that was always there and you know, she took care of me and stuff like that and she had to, of course when we came, she had to you know, go back to where she was, some where in main land, so that was kind of sad, that was really, really, sad...

Students also talked about the difficulties of having to leave a member of their immediate family behind, usually the father. Lora, for example, expressed the sadness she felt when she discovered that her dad would be staying behind.

Lora: Yeah, yeah. Well, I think, I was kinda-uh.....well, I think for me I think like I was not like, "I don't like it or I like it", but I just like go with my parents, cus', cus' at first I do have something in mind like, at I first I thought that our whole family is coming, yeah, but then I realized only my mom, my dad is staying, staying in Taiwan (laugh). I was not like, a little bit unhappy about that....

The truth, however, was that no matter how negative the students felt about leaving, in the end, there was never really a sense that they could realistically choose to stay home while their parents went away.

Heather: ...uh, my parents sort of made it sound like at first that we had a choice, that "we were sort of thinking about going to Canada, what do you think?" And then we said, well, I said no, my sister was jumping for joy. Uh, and later on, when I said no and just, I was really firm about it, they just said that "oh too bad we're going it's all done". They had the interview with immigration. It was all ready to go. They, they did everything basically without telling us, me and my sister and uh, hum (laugh). Not a very good uh way to talking about "Surprise! Guess what you're going to Canada". Yeah.

Robert: Well, I really didn't think about it, because, it wasn't as though I could say I don't want to go and then we would not go. That wasn't the case here, so.

Going to Canada was not completely all bad however. At times Canada represented an escape from a tough and extremely demanding school system.

Mark: Uh, I was feeling kind of excited because the, um, I...I haven't actually gone to any foreign country before right. And, and since, like school was getting harder and harder, and, I feel it might be a good escape from it right. LAUGHS. Yeah, so, I was kind of happy moving here, yeah.

Robert: [I was]...sorta glad on one part because, uh, I almost saw it as uh, opportunity to escape the, rigid academic environment. And that was quite a relief too. Cause I had seen my brother go through the same thing, and, and when he was in grade 12 he would suffer from this, chest pain, which was, was, he was told it was not, purely psychological. So, I had seen my brother suffer through it, and, and I knew that I wouldn't have to go through that again, I mean, like my brother. So, that was relief...

And in some cases, immigrating also meant escaping a school environment that was associated with negative feelings such as isolation, violence and/or stress.

Naomi: Yeah...I think I was actually happy because I was like, "Yeah...I get to go...get away from these nasty boys that I go to school with....LAUGHS...

Interviewer: What did they do?

Naomi: They were terrible....They hid my...we have inside shoes and outside shoes as well...so...they hid my shoes and they'll hide my books....and uh...they'll beat me up after school, and before we go on the bus...and

during breaks and stuff like that...and...uh...they hid my lunch...thank god...LAUGHS...

Heather: Uh, uh, as far as my life goes, I wasn't having all that much of a good time. Uh, because I was being bullied a lot and I went through a lot of uh, difficult times uh, and I was, at one point, like, probably the last year I was Korea, I was probably fighting a lot as well. So uh, uh, so that was probably really difficult for me and uh, I uh, coming to Canada was probably a really big change, a really good change in life, my life, so.

Finally, and most importantly the sense of moving towards something better was accentuated by the fact that parents told their children that the move was at least in part, if not only, to offer them a better education.

Ulrika: I think one of the main reasons because one, we have relatives were already and, and they've been, uh, living quite happily here and they say of good things about Canada, and then it's, it's this school systems, you know, it's uh...a lot freer then, then the school system that you have in Taiwan, it's not as rigid/, and eh, plus they want me to learn English and, and want me to have, uh, fluent English skills so that would help me in the future, I don't know how but (laugh), but that's what they thought, so we decided to move...

Interviewer: Do you know [why your family decided to move to Canada]?

Hugo: Uh, well, yeah basically because of education. Yeah, uh, yeah because you know the, under, under the Asian societies, education is always like, more like you know, exams biased, yeah.

4.3.2 Reasons for coming to Canada

Though informants commented on the limits of ever truly knowing in some cases why their parents had chosen to come to Canada two major reasons were identified. First, as previously mentioned families had immigrated for the sake of the children's education. Their was a strong sense that the education system in Canada would offer

their children a greater chance of success in the future than the one being offered at home.

Interviewer: And, and for your mother, what would have been, the, the motivation?

Was she thinking of your education?

Robert: Yeah, she believed it to be a great opportunity. It would be a place where we could get better education.

Another powerful motivation for moving to Canada, closely related to the first one touched on the general welfare of the students and their families as connected to the political situation in the home countries. Moving to Canada was seen as a wise move away from a questionable and uncertain political future.

Interviewer: if you don't mind me asking, why did your parents come to Canada?

Celeste: Oh oh, because they were afraid of political reasons, uh, you know, 1997, everyone was sort of shaken up and not knowing what's going on back then, so a lot of Chinese sort of moved here and I think we were one of the earlier ones because I came here when I was, 1987, right after expo,

Gabriel: Oh...yeah...of course, yes I remember. Um, it was mainly because, um, the pressure, um of HK going back to China, um, because it was a British Colony for a long time, and, and 1997 you know, that was the year that, that China would take over, uh, and there was fear that, uh, an uncertainty of what would happen, once China takes over, because of the communist, you know, government, so uh...there was a lot of fear and a lot of people in HK, and my parents, you know, didn't want to take the chance of staying, so they wanted to, you know, for our sake, basically for the kids, um, that we came to Canada.

Mark: Politics! It was because of some issue between Taiwan and China. And my, I think my grandpa's worried that China is going to take over Taiwan or something. So he wanted my dad to move like somewhere.

In addition to the two main reasons mentioned above, in a few cases parents' long-term interest in North America also played a role.

Beth: Um, well, my parents their way of thinking was very different from most people in Japan. And my dad had trouble b-b-before he had gotten married. My parents had had their honeymoon in San Francisco. And yeah, so, you know, um, yeah, before, like he even, he had gotten, he had settled down, he knew he wanted to be, um, you know, outside of Japan, somewhere foreign. Uh, actually, he considered America first, and then he he came, went to America and Canada, and decided Canada was a better place to have a family raise kids, what, whatever, what not. So, they decided on Canada, instead.

Finally, prior contact with the country and/or family in the country seemed to have played an important role in the selection of the country. The majority of the student's families had had some kind of contact with Canada prior to immigrating existed in the form of family or close friends of the family presently living in Canada. The support that these families offered as well as the notion that they would not be completely alone in the new country appears to have made a difference.

Ulrika: well, uh, they've been wanting to move out of Taiwan for a long time, so uh, we considered some other countries (laugh), but then, they, eventually decided to move to Canada...I think one of the main reasons because one, we have relatives here already and, and they've been, uh, living quite happily here and they say of good things about Canada...

Naomi: Yeah...um....I guess...I guess um...our uncle had found a place for us...to live..and yeah we already had a family in Canada...so..it was little bit easier...

Mari: plus I think, I think Vancouver was, cus' eh, my mom's family, lots' of her family members are already in Vancouver, so, it was really like a reunification for my, for my mom basically, yeah, so that's why.

4.3.3 Finding a school

The informants who chose to participate in this study had gone to an interesting variety of schools in the Greater Vancouver area. Aware of the important role that the school would play in their subsequent academic achievement and socialization into

Canadian society, we were very interested in finding out how the schools had been chosen.

In many ways the schools the informants in this study attended were selected in much the same way that schools are selected for Canadian born students: the students simply attended the school that was closest to their home. When asked if the selection of their school had played a role in selecting their home addresses informants reported that that was generally not the case. Rather, the choice of their home had more to do with a much wider range of factors such financial resources, convenience offered by the location of the house (close to the school, close to the airport, close to family members already established in the Vancouver area, and finally closer to an already established immigrant community).

In only one of the cases was the actual address of their home explicitly chosen for the reputation of the school.

Interviewer: Good, and do you know how your parents chose this school or was it just, you're living in this area, that's the school you're going....

Robert: Because the, the, distant relations, the family friends we have in, lived in West Vancouver, and they suggested to us that it was a good area to live in and that the schools in West Vancouver were good. So we followed their advice. And, and they also told us, like, the area's uh, wealthy, so, it was a pretty safe bet.

In some cases, informants talked about schools being selected because of the type of ESL program it offered or interestingly enough did not offer. In some cases parents chose schools that had an established ESL program.

Interviewer: was that a school that was close to your house. How did your parents go about choosing that school?

Naomi: I can't remember...I don't think...I..I...nee...I ..I..heard about how

they chose it LAUGHS...but I think.. I think that was the closest school that had an ESL program. We lived in Port Moody that year, for one year and then the next year we moved closer...to school

The reverse, however, was also true. Informants told of cases they knew where schools with no ESL programs had deliberately been chosen parents. These schools were perceived as offering an environment more suitable for English-only interaction with native-English speakers and hence for improved development of English proficiency.

Julie: The few people that my parents know moved to Burnaby and then, there was like, bec-they moved there cause there's no ESL class. They don't want their, like son or daughter to go to ESL cause they know that they'll probably be a lot of Chinese speaking people and then, they will make friends that way rather than in using their English skills.

This occurred in a slightly different way with one of the informants in the study. After placing her in a school which had a good ESL program, Maia's parents deliberately moved her back to her original school (with the less formal ESL program) once she had acquired a minimum level of ability in English, because she had started to speak only Chinese to her friends.

Maia: So they sent me to another school where they had a full time ESL

Interviewer: Ok

Maia: and there were Mandarin speaking people in that class....SO I made friends. And like...I think...I ...I ...I learned English faster...at first

Interviewer: Uh uh...

Maia: But ... Three months later, they found that I...I... you know...barely ...I basically...mustered just enough English and the common phrases...to ...to...to talk...with my teacher and like...just...commands...like basically to get things done, right. But I wasn't really...uhmmm...becoming Canadian...

Interviewer: ok...

Maia: So, it was because, I like you know...I had friends my age, who spoke my language, so I didn't really need to...there was no...there was no incentive to learn English....SO...then...they... pulled me out of that school again put me back into the first school..

4.4 Exploring success: What they faced in school

At the heart of the study were the descriptions of the events that occurred in the school itself. The next section will explore some of the most important themes that revealed about their school experience and what they faced while going to school. These themes include: the initial difficulties of the first days, the need to learn English, learning English as an ESL student and student's perceptions of ESL programs, and finally some of the other challenges faced by the students outside of the ESL programs.

4.4.1 Difficult first days

Almost all the students, regardless of their age arrival had vivid stories to tell about their first days in school. These stories were testimonies of the difficulties faced by language minority students placed in a school where the language of education is one that

is different from his or her native language. In retrospect, stories of the first few days were occasionally told with a bit of laughter, the kind that can only come when a lot of time has passed, but in other cases, even after many years had passed, it was evident that these memories were still bitterly strong.

Surrounded by a new and unfamiliar environment, unable to understand or be understood, frustrated by the inability to communicate even the most basic needs, stories of psychological and physical stress abounded.

In one case, Gabriel mentioned the emotional stress that accompanied his first days in a world that didn't understand him, surrounded by people who were obviously able to do something he couldn't.

Gabriel: Um...I'm trying to remember what was so difficult. Probably the, um, the intimidation of, of the other students. That was probably the most difficult thing to deal with. Uh, Because we were different, you know, uh, I felt inferior, um to the other students, you know, quote unquote regular students. So THAT was the most difficult thing to overcome, you know, being intimidated by you know people who spoke English fluently and who grew up here and who you know, with this culture, so yeah...that was the most difficult.

Beth told with the laughter of the difficulties she faced due to her lack of communication skills.

Beth: It was...What I remember is, um, it was really traumatic cause, I still have pictures, because um, my first class picture, I had no ideas we were having class pictures, cause I didn't understand the language. I'm sure the teacher told us 5 or 6 times, "Oh, class pictures everyone, dress up", right. So one day I come to school, everyone's dressed up. All the girls in their pretty princess dresses, and you know, you know, and, here I was, just in my regular, you know, whatever, sweats or whatever you wore to school, and, LAUGHS...I was like, "this is REALLY weird"...I had no idea what was going on. LAUGHS.

Interviewer: LAUGHS

Beth: And then LAUGHS, we, we're, we're all filed to go into the gym to take

our pictures, and I was like, "Ok, well I'll just go along with this", and it turned out, everyone was like all posing, all pretty, and there I was, in my clothes, whatever, "Ok, take picture", and LAUGHS. And, yeah, I still have the picture of me in my regular school clothes, LAUGHS, from my first day. Um, another story I often tell, is um, I think, this must I still have the picture of me in my regular school clothes, LAUGHS, from my first day. Um, another story I often tell, is um, I think, this must have been the first week of school when I, really needed to go to the bathroom. And I didn't know how to ask, "Where's the bathroom", so I had to hold it, for like the whole day, LAUGHS. It was SOOOOOOOO horrible...I didn't know uh, like how to say, like "I need to GO". SO yeah

For two little girls who were completely alone in a class of native speakers, the pressure was such that both parents and teachers were left wondering whether they should place them in a "special class".

Heather: ahh, impression I got was just, "wow, what a place". Cus' you know, it was just beautiful, when I arrived in Canada, and it sort of gave me a bit of, a bit of hope that uh, maybe it's not gonna be as bad as I think, you know. And uh, but it was as bad as I thought (laugh), when we started going to school, for about a week, uh, we were just sort of sight-seeing stuff, I can't remember where we went but, it was nice. Uh, the week after I started going to school, and the first day was just a nightmare. Uh, there was no Korean in the school uh, the school that I mentioned. Uh, there was I think, a couple of Chinese people and everyone else was just Canadians I guess. Uh, and I didn't, the first day, I didn't speak to anybody and all I could understand, people saying was, "hello my name is blah, blah, what's your name?" and I said "Heather". Ok uh, that's about it. I can't tell you anymore cus' I don't know how". Uh, the last period I was just holding I was, I don't, I can't remember what I was doing, probably nothing because I was just sitting there, I, I just remember sitting at my desk and thinking that, I don't know how I was going to survive this place and uh, I, I think was by an accident that someone threw something at me. Uh, I think they were trying to pass something to each other and it just hit my head and uh, and that was just uh, it. I just started crying, I just fell, and I just took, started crying and I think at one point I fainted because I cried too much. And uh, my ESL teacher came and got me and we went to a different room and I was trying to call my cousin but I didn't know how to say "could I use a phone?" So it was using body language, "phone, phone", "what do you call this phone?" And uh, my cousin came and got me and for the first couple days I was, uh, I was crying a lot and I couldn't do anything and uh, the, the people, the principle, the school called our parents and my cousin and uh, maybe I should move to different school because they thought I was

uh, either mentally challenged or uh, emotionally not stable I guess. And then I lied to them, "well, I was having a stomach ache and I couldn't tell any one uh, so I uh, and I was in pain so I was crying. It wasn't because I was emotionally uh, unstable or anything," so they let me stay (laugh). Kind of funny now that I think about it. It was really sad back then.

Maia: ok...Cause, like....well....You know how I was going through this thing, where like, I was really irritable....My personality was like turned 180...because my parents were like..."That's not the the gentle...like...daughter that we used to know...Right..... And I just started...freaking out....I had temper tantrums....Just cause like the first six months I was here, I couldn't understand anything...I felt likeHelen Keller...you know...like...just so isolated...and couldn't communicate with anyone...and couldn't really make any friends, because like...they couldn't understand and I couldn't understand them...I just felt so...defensive towards everybody..right and then I started...just...like..going to these temper tantrums and then...like..freak out over...like....small things...

4.4.2 Recognizing the need to learn English

The first few days in an English-only school were quickly followed by the realization by all of the students that learning English and mastering it would be necessary.

Lora: Uh, I wanted to, go to regular English (laugh), as soon as possible. Yeah, cus' then uh, I don't know, cus' eh...I don't know why but (laugh), I just know when I get into that level first, and then I feel like, uh, cus' here, everything like, if you're say anything, even if you want to find a job or anything, you have to know English first right? yeah, so then yeah (laugh). English was the first thing, yeah.

Interviewer: Did you, did you realize that very early on?

Lora: Yeah, even the first time I came here, I realized that cus' I had an interview remember with the ESL teacher? Right after that interview, I started feel like, I have to learn English now (laugh), cus' like, cus' I know, cus' I, I know like, I have to learn English cus' I told myself like, if you don't learn English then, there's nothing you can do here right?

As well, the importance of English was something that had actually already been already promoted in their home country.

Hugo: In Taiwan uh, well, we were pushed to learn English.... Well, I knew English was important.

Interviewer: And when you say you knew English was important, why was it important, or why was it perceived to be important? How did you know it? Was it something your parents told you, the school said?

Hugo: Yeah, partly was told by my parents, and, and the society was like, cus' you know, I don't know if you know that but economy of Taiwan is mostly exports right, so we, people have to deal with people from other countries and since English is like the, well, we can say it's the international standard language right, so. So like we, basically all, most of us know, know that English is important.

Consequently eleven out of the fifteen informants explicitly expressed that one of the few explicit goals they had had from the very beginning, even at a young age, had been to improve their English as soon as possible.

Lora: Well, um, I just made a, for me at least, I I made it my goal, to, to learn English and speak fluently, and to, really um, learn it as well as I could, um, so I, I really tried hard to, um, to learn everything about the language and to learn everything about the culture in Canada. Um, so once I was comfortable with the language and the culture, you know, I I, you know I wasn't as intimidated, so that was easier, made it easier to interact with people, yeah.

Mark: My initial goal was to fit in, to bring up my English skills to a point that I would be able to associate with other non-ESL students without feeling like an outsider. Later, the goal changed to surpassing them academically in order to prove that I was intellectually no worse than native English speakers. Such goals were simultaneously motivations to excel.

4.4.3 Learning English as an ESL student: Types of programs

Fourteen of the fifteen students interviewed for this study had experienced being placed in an ESL program in the Greater Vancouver area. Time spent in ESL programs was not limited only to school time programs, but also included summer school ESL

programs. Six of the informants attended summer ESL schools, especially in their first years after their immigration to Canada.

The ESL programs the students attended varied considerably in some circumstances. Schools differed in whether or not they offered an ESL program, the number of ESL students in their schools, as well as the type of ESL program offered if there was one.

Of the ten students who started their schooling at the elementary level, four of the students entered schools that had little if any language minority students and consequently no formal ESL program. In these cases, the students were placed in mainstream classes and were pulled-out to receive one-on-one instruction with a teacher (it is interesting to note that these teachers were not necessarily ESL trained). This kind of one-on-one attention was deemed to be an excellent way to learn English.

Interviewer: I see. So were you put in a, like in those days I think you're still in the beginning of, I, I mean nowadays they're more ready for it because they have more students, who don't speak English in their first language, but, so what was the arrangement with the school? Were you a nor, quote, unquote, normal class and then they would pull you out for ESL or?

Heather: Yeah, that was, that was it. Uh, I participated in uh, I think a little bit of math, and P.E uh, some arts and music, although you know, I wasn't really, really into it. I was sort of put aside and I was just watching them. And I think more than, at least 75 percents of the time I was in ESL. And uh, because I was such, in a, like a beginner level of ESL, I was always uh, being tutored one on one, which was just great. And uh, and the ESL teacher was uh, she was amazing and, I can't remember how she communicated with me but I could remember everything she said and, uh, I learned as far as past tense with her and uh, and it was, it was great and she was really understanding uh, and yeah.

Of the ten students who first started their schooling at the elementary level, five experienced some kind of full-time ESL class. They were placed in an ESL class in which they stayed in most of the day, with the exception of Arts and physical education.

Interestingly, in three cases these classes regrouped all of the ESL students from a school together, so that the ESL class had students from many grades in them.

Interviewer: And you mentioned everyone was in the same ESL class...

Naomi: yeah

Interviewer : what did you mean by that....like all of the grades....?

Naomi: Oh...like...yeah...all the ...all of the students that needed to be in ESL ...would be in the one big classroom...and...and...um...depending on what um...what level of...um...how much English you knew..they..they did different things...

Interviewer: But you were all thrown into the...one big room?

Naomi: Yeah...there was ..oh..actually..there was different hours where you did different things...like...um...I think there was one one hour where everybody was together and did the same things...and um...another hour where other kids..that ...that needed this much English would do something together...and um...another hour where another group of kids that needed about the same amount of English, would do stuff together.

In one interesting case, reflecting the ways schooled evolved and changed during the time the informants arrived, Beth actually spent her first year in kindergarten without taking any special classes before being put in a grade one ESL program, one year later for a short time.

At the high school level the system seemed to have been more uniform. Almost all of the students experienced some kind of ESL block system. Students were placed in an ESL level and the level determined the number of blocks a day that they would spend in ESL classes VS the number of classes that they would spend in "regular" classes.

Hugo: I don't know much about this school, it was like uh, it was more like general like, yeah. But in the other school, they had like this, there's different levels. Say if you have uh, cus' we, we were in a semester system right, so every semester we took uh, 4, yeah 4 courses, yeah so like, say like if you were, if you, if you were in level 1 of ESL, you have to take basically 4, all 4 courses in all the semester. Must be in,

in ESL and if you're in level 2 then 3, 3 courses.

Interviewer: I see, level 3, 2 and level 4, 1 course, okay.

In only two cases, schools offered not only a regular English language oriented ESL class but also special content classes for ESL students, such as ESL science or ESL social studies.

Ulrika: Yea, eh, in this school they had eh, uh...more sophisticated way of eh, ESL program, they have like, matches ESL, they have ESL science, ESL social studies/, so they put me into all those programs, and I think eh, at first that helps you to adjust to the, to their school system, but it became a drag to many people because they have to get a good grade in ESL science in order to get into regular science classes...

4.4.4 The advantages of ESL programs

On the whole many good things were said about ESL programs. ESL classes were much more than a place to simply learn English. Most importantly, ESL classes (or the times when they were taken to work with a special teacher) were perceived to be a fun and welcomed escape from the confusion and pressures of the regular classes. Most students generally enjoyed the atmosphere in ESL classes. ESL classes were a place where they could relax and participate more fully than in the regular classes. ESL classes provided a sort an important social circle. ESL classes were also the place where they could meet other ILMS and especially, someone that spoke the same language as themselves.

Mari: I totally remember it was a really relaxing environment. It was, it was a fun class actually. Cus' we had, we had uh, maximum 7 or 8 students in that class. And it was a combination of my grade and the grade 7 people, and cus' they were all Chinese, all like, all came from Hong Kong, so we had a like, we were even friends you know, outside of the ESL class right, and, so it was, it was basically just, a sort of like a seminar discussion thing

Mark: LAUGHS...yeah, you can me-you can more easily find like, students who

...speak the same language as you right. And...and I think, um, tttt...Um.....Yeah, I, I think um, the ESL depends, like depend, depends on your level right. It's kind of different, because uh, because in, aa, in, E, like if you're in ESL one you're re-you're more relied it on, ESL right because you don't know anything else, like in the other four classes right. So you'll fff-like while in ESL you'll feel like relax and stuff, and if you go to the other classes you will feel like scared and, panicky, right. LAUGHS.

4.4.5 The golden prison

There is an expression that says: "golden bars, still a prison make". Sadly, despite the reported advantages of ESL programs, it appears that this expression applied well to the paradoxical way in which informants perceived the ESL classes.

Despite it's comforts and advantages, especially in the initial first months when meeting someone else who spoke your language and being able to escape from the stress of the real class were so crucial, the ESL classroom soon came to represent for the informants of this study and for their fellow "ESL inmates" a place to escape from.

This image of the ESL class as a prison was overwhelming, and it emerged in almost all of the interviews, if not in reference to the informants' personal goals, then in reference to the general feelings of other ILMS they had met in their schools.

Mark: So uh, yeah it's kinda like a good escape from the normal, uh, like the normal class. But the thing about ESL is that, uh, everyone wants to get, get out from ESL.

Ulrika: Eh, my goals, were to learn English I guess and then try to be eh, in regular classes and get out of ESL as fast as I could, but that's, that was my goal, yea, and eh, yea, and not try, try not to fail along the way (laugh) that was my main goal.

What explained the need to so desperately exit a program, which at first glance was designed to help rather than harm the students? A number of interesting reasons came up. First and foremost was the way in which not graduating from ESL was

perceived. While graduation from the ESL program was an event of joy and celebration, the opposite was also true. For many students, parents and family friends staying too long in ESL was equivalent to failure. This seems to have led to a dangerous simplification of what it meant to be an "ESL student". Either you were in ESL and failing, or you were out and succeeding. There appeared to be no middle ground.

Robert: And, and the, and your level is kinda like your symbol of status. So if you, if you're in like level 1 for like 2 years then people think you're stupid LAUGHS right. Yeah, so like, we like, we always compete to, to move up a level and stuff, right.

Mari: Uh, it's, they tried to push you too fast. See, I think on all of the subjects, you can push a student, you can actually try push a students to go one step of at least half a step ahead of what he or she is able to do. But in ESL you can never do that. Because any sort of, any sense of failure in ESL, or any sort of obstacles in ESL class will totally block the student off. I had, I had a friend that was, yeah I remember, in high school, he came and he went into my ESL class and he was not getting, he had really, really little, like English knowledge, and he was, he would stay in ESL for like 2 or 3 years and still keeping like 3 or 4 classes of ESL, and that was really discouraging for him, and, and it ended up that he dropped out of the school totally. I didn't know it was totally because of ESL or, or whatever. But I've talked to him before and he was saying "oh you guys don't have to go to ESL, I mean I have to go there all the time and, and that just sucks you know", like he'll complain a lot about it, and, and I think it's not that he's not trying to learn at all, but I think it's, it's the pace's not suiting him, and when you have a class of 30, then you can't obviously can't suit everybody right. So if you just can't keep up then you know, the, the teachers wouldn't do anything to you, they just "ok you can't keep up then repeat, you know, repeat another year, repeat this, repeat that", that's you know, that's for, I think that's really, really bad like, cus' any yeah, you just can't push them like to that point. Uh, you have to let them, cus I mean language is, anybody can memorize the spelling or memorize this, and that but you know the, you have to, in order to use the language or be able to use it actually, you first have to have some, you have to love the language first I think, you know. And or at least like the language and, for ESL students, they uh, the ones that I've encountered in high school, most of them hate English, was I think, I think is because cus' of you know, too many failures in trying to learn it. So, you know, even if they learned it in high school, even if you

graduate in high school, they're not gonna use English anymore, they're just not using it you know, at all, and, and that's, well I think that defeats the whole purpose of ESL, right? So,

Interviewer: Do you know a lot of cases of people like that?

Mari: Yeah quite a few, that've been struggling in the ESL, cus' well, but, I, to be honest I don't really know the high school ESL program and what it was totally like right? So I can't comment too much on that, but, but yeah lots of them have been through quite a number of years of high school ESL and then they just couldn't take it and, you know they just quit you know. I see them now in, in eh, in the mall or something like that and then, you know talk to them and then you know, they'll be doing something totally, irrelevant to any sort of English, learning at all.

We were not surprised to find that parents of some of the informants also shared a negative perception of ESL classes and a desire for their children to exit them as quickly as possible.

Ani: yeah, and my dad used to say, "you have to be like, out of ESL". Because I was here for a year I guess, and then there was, another Taiwanese came to our, to our school and, she was pretty good in English. I guess when she came, she was like level 1, and then like a few months later, they moved her to level 3, and then my dad was really mad at me because I didn't do that, because I was moving like gradually, like step by step, so I guess my dad was really, yeah, he was, he was telling me everyday like "you have to be out of ESL"...

Interviewer: Hmm...If I, you mentioned already that that was your main focus was getting out. And, uh, what would have been the reason going through your mind at that time. Was it just because ESL represented something or...

Julie: Um...it was partly from my parents that they want me to, um, get out of ESL so I can take on more regular classes and be more used to the school system.

A second, but just as important factor motivating students' desire to exit the "ESL prison" programs, was that the ESL classroom was perceived by students as having a strong segregating effect, literally and symbolically separating them from the rest of the school population.

Celeste: ...I didn't have a lot of ESL friends, when I was in high school, and I remember distinctively them telling me, because they are put into an ESL class, they're sort of in a ghetto of non English speaking students. And what does that give to them, it just tells them, you know, they're not around English environment, they're around the Chinese environment, or which ethnicity that they are uh, which doesn't serve the purpose of learning English

Mari: Well I think the disadvantage is obviously that, you are an ESL student you know, no matter what, you get spotted out, and although you're enjoying your ESL classes and stuff, people will look at you quite differently. Yeah, cus' I mean for my Caucasians friends, they didn't know what was like right, so it was basically you know, they...it has, yeah, they, they just, they just guess the worst right, so you know, they're, that was not, that was not good. Uh, and...for me I find that you don't get the, as much, as much trust as, as you would've been if you were just a regular student, and participating in like school activities sort of like, uh, yeah I remember, I remember...they were, they were friendly but, to a certain extent. They were friendly to the point...uh, you can't never really get, you would never be like this close, sort of, so they would have their own little secrets, yeah you can sense that...

This feeling was symbolic, but also in some cases quite literal. The actual physical act of being pulled-out of a class and separated from others, and also being kept out of certain classes contributed to this sense of segregation.

Interviewer: Or the, was it a pull-out program, or were you in a special ESL class?

Gabriel: I was in a special ESL class, so I was in, our class was exclusively ESL students. Uh...Actually we were in a portable so we were completely separated from the school LAUGHS!

Interviewer: WOW

Gabriel: So we knew we WERE different LAUGHS

Interviewer: Wow...that's, that's terrible

Gabriel: Um, so LAUGHS that was the type of system that, um, you know, I don't think they would put you in regular classes until you were totally ready.

Informants felt very strongly that ESL classes contributed to making the students feel separated from the general population of the school. This limited their ability to interact and create links with non-ESL students, made it harder to fit-in, understand and be understood.

4.4.6 Other challenges

Though escaping the ESL classes was a major concern for most of the informants, it was not the only one. Escaping from ESL was for students a success but it brought with it new challenges as they faced the difficulties of surviving outside of the golden prison.

One of the big challenges faced by the informants was making the jump to the “normal classes”. Students complained about the jump in difficulty from ESL to “normal classes”.

Robert: Actually thought I was much better than people in my ESL classes, but once I switched over, that it was completely different world, that that, that point I, I, I suggested to my teachers so many times that ESL and the regular, especially English classes, they're SO completely apart in terms of difficulties that we need, uh, some kind of transition between the two, cause, because I, I went through that, and a lot of people did, uh, when they, uh, when their grades, what I mean, when they moved up from one grade to another and then they experienced it too, and everybody said, uh, ESL was so easy compared to what we're doing right now. And that's exactly how I felt because the only reason they moved me to regular was that I was getting an A in ESL language, but once I went there, I alm-I was going to fail.

Robert: ...the combinations of all things. The, hard to participate, and and, you don't want to uh, you don't want to be made fun of because, you speak um, in a weird way. To other people, they it may seem, uh, your accent, your pronunciation or your intonation everything, and then. Uh, the other thing was I actually didn't know a lot of what they were doing. Uh, they, they were reading short stories or, or, even novels, and I would take, mmm, much longer than other people, to comprehend, for example like, Fahrenheit Four Fifty One by Ray Bradbury and I'm going like, "Ok, funny about burning books, but" LAUGHS

Though catching up in math and science classes did not provide too much difficulty due to their prior schooling in their home countries, students also expressed difficulties adjusting to the cultural content of classes such as social studies.

Mari: Now, I think the hardest subject for me, aside from English, is mostly uh, I think was Social Studies. Cus' yeah, I remember even back in Social Studies was, was more like a history thing for, it was more of a history class and I was so unfamiliar with it you know. I remember the first, the first thing they taught us was something about the Ukrainian immigrants and, we had to make like Ukrainian eggs or something like that. Yeah that was fun (sarcasm?) But, I didn't even know where Ukraine was right, so that was, that was hard, that was, that was um, and plus like Canadian history, I was, I was not into Canadian history at all, I was not, it was, I learned history but not, like, Canadians or anything like that. And then, it's usually in, in Social Studies or Science that they ask you to do research projects, / and, and that was the first for me too like, like I could never, I didn't really know how to write even like a, a research paper or something like that, of course like 2, 3 pages right. But, yeah, so, so that was bad.

Students also expressed how hard it had been for them to get used to the teaching style of "Canadian" classes. The Canadian cultural assumption that students should "speak out" in class for example was particularly difficult for many of the informants.

Robert: LAUGHS. And then, but, I I, and the other hard thing was, uh, having to speak. Participation was important here, as opposed to in Korea where, uh, you don't, you don't participate, period. Because if you do, uh, you're going to be, uh, ostracized by your classmates, who, who feel that you're being smart ass. LAUGHS

Interviewer: LAUGHS

Robert: So you don't want to volunteer ever. Uh huh.

Interviewer: LAUGHS

Robert: That's bad for your, um, own health. And then, so you come here, and, and they encourage you to speak and, and if you don't then, they, they think you're, you know, like below normal intelligence. Like ok. LAUGHS

Finally, even though they were no longer ESL students, as was also implied in the above quote, informants reported that they continued to face mixed reactions to their status as ILMS. For example, though for the most part, we are glad to report that informants found their classmates and teachers welcoming and friendly, there were a few explicit reports of discrimination.

Lora: Uh, yeah (laugh) it's uh, it's uh, it's like uh, we had I think was grade 9, grade 10, I don't remember. Even grade 11, I think grade 11, cus' uh, when I, I went to washroom, it was uh, I think it was Remembrance day or something, we had a ceremony, yeah, I got caught in the, washroom by 3 girls. 3 Caucasian girls.

Interviewer: You got caught?

Lora: Not, not caught, like, like, they, they like, uh, pretending that, they wanna uh, threaten me or, anything like, they like, stand at the door like say uh, they, they, they say something like, like, they thought that I didn't understand English, but actually by that time I can understand English (laugh). You know there's Chi, I don't remember what exactly they said, but it's like, like this, one girl she said something about uh, the door's locked, the washroom door like, you cannot get out or something, and then the other girl said that uh, have you even tried uh, being, how do you say that word...uh, have you ever tried being something like, how do you say the word ahh! I can't remember. Have you ever try being.....uh, like something that, that person, turned off the light, I can't remember uh.....Can I just tell you in Chinese? (laugh)

Interviewer: Sure, as long as I can translate (laugh).

Lora: Da (in Chinese)

Interviewer: "Da", Hit?

Lora: Yeah, like, like,

Interviewer: Beaten up? To beat up or,

Lora: Yeah, yeah. Beaten up, yeah. Have you ever try beating up in washroom by 3 girls?

Interviewer: Ohh,

Lora: I heard it! Cause, I was in like, in, I was almost, I was going out right? Yep, but then the three of them they just standing on the wall, on the, on the door. Yeah they, they won't let me out. I was like oh well, I, the first thing I thought was like, they thought I didn't understand English. So I myself pretend I didn't understand English (laugh). So then I just like, I just go like, without talking to them, anything. Yeah, but I did cry after that. I feel so uncomfortable. I did went to for councillor, yeah and the councillor told me to point out who the girls was, but I, I didn't really under, I can, I cannot really remember like, remember what they looked like, yeah, cus' it's, it's, it's so hard to look at pictures, yeah, she just had me the, like the annual picture and thing yeah. But you know, the thing is like, I know the girls that, they were about grade 8 or 9, yeah,

Lora: So they were younger than you.

Interviewer: yeah, yeah.

Lora: So then I feel, well, I don't feel very well right? Yeah feel very uncomfortable, but, well but then after, they followed me to the ceremony too. I don't know why they pick on me (laugh). Cus' they pick on my friends too. Like, they pick on the ESL students too. You know lots of what, lots of kids they do it too. Especially the lower grades like 8, 9, 10. Yeah, I think when you get to 11 and 12, you don't do that anymore, it's like kids stuff, like playing, yeah. But I know the girls is about grade 8 or 9. They just, they wanna, they like to pick on ESL students because they, I know my friend, she's like uh, that time, she's, she just, she just immigrated here like for 1 month and thing. And yeah, she's in her arts class yeah, the classmates in, in her class is like, they're like, I think she wants to use the scissors and anything and then, but she didn't know how to, how to say it right. So she just like, she's like, she just started to say some thing, but then the girls know that she wants to use the scissors they just took it away. So you know, it's very, I don't know how to say it but, you know you, yeah I don't like it that way. So then yeah, but, but the councilor did know that, that thing but they talk to the girl afterwards but I don't know what happened afterwards, yeah. You know, yeah, some of the kids, pretty bad (laugh).

Interviewer: Did this happen a lot?

Lora: Uh, I would say quite common.

Interviewer: Quite common?

Lora: Yep, when you, especially to the grade 8, 9 kids. Yeah, grade 8, 9

is really common, but like, I don't know why, cus' then, yeah.

Students revealed that occasionally teachers in content classes were guilty of what was perceived as differential treatment for ex-ESL students and “normal” student. These teachers were perceived as having unfairly judged the students or of having preferential treatment of certain students over others, or of simply lacking cultural sensitivity and basic respect for ILMS.

Hugo: Yeah cus', well I have this experience like with a ESL teacher. She was saying that, one day she was saying that uh, she was saying that "oh Chinese students spit, so that's why Canadians, Canadian peo-, uh, students now spit too". Yeah that was kind of. When I heard that I was kind of "Oh, oh come on!"

Ani: yeah, something, I was like, you know the teacher's pretty strict and then she said "oh, ESL students are not suppose have As". Like I had 2 blocks, I don't know, I had 2 blocks of ESL, if I had As, I would've gotten straight As and then she wouldn't give me an A so then I don't why. I had like 86 percent, 86 point something, that was an A right? And then she scaled it down she said, "ESL student shouldn't have this high marks". I don't know, it's pretty weird, and so like, I had a tu-, I still had tutor at that time so my tutor teacher tell me, "she's weird", she said "it's ok, don't worry about it, you have an A in English already".

4.5 How they faced it: Explaining success

In spite of the many challenges that they faced, the 15 students interviewed succeeded in overcoming their difficulties and accomplishing the long journey from new immigrant to university student in an all English university.

Interestingly, few were inclined to see themselves as successful. When asked if they agreed with the researchers' assumption that the fact that as ex-ESL students, who had made it to the university level that they should be considered successful, only four of the students agreed. Five students disagreed and seven appeared to be unable to say if they considered themselves a success or not.

Though they did expressed a sentiment of success when they were able to leave their ESL class, and a sense of happiness and accomplishment in their stories about being able to come to university, most felt that the word successful was either too strong or too premature. Many pointed out that they would not consider themselves successful until they had graduated school. Others pointed out that for them, success, had much more to do with what one would accomplish with one's life than simply being accepted by a Canadian university, and that this included things outside the range of academic achievement such as one's ability to give back to the community or to become a better spiritual person.

Interviewer: Some would say that uh, as an ESL student, uh, and now you're in university, you're a very successful student, what do you think about that?

Hugo: Uh, I don't think I would use the word successful (laugh).

Interviewer: Why not? You don't consider yourself successful?

Hugo: Uh, not at this stage (laugh), yeah.

Interviewer: So, how would you define success, for yourself? What would make you a successful student?

Hugo: Oh you mean as a student or, or like in my career.

Interviewer: Let's say uh, successful student, for now.

Hugo: A successful student.

Interviewer: Yeah, how do you feel about that?

Hugo: Uh.....I still wouldn't use successful (laugh).

Interviewer: Really? What would you use? What would you, describe your situation?

Hugo: Uh, let's say, I would say I work hard and I have, I have achieved uh, most of my goals as, of, being a student okay, yeah. But I'm still like,

I have some more still to come, so yeah. And I'm not confident I can, I can do the graduate level studies so, or at least not now so, so that's why I wouldn't use successful.

Interestingly, perhaps a sense of modesty may have also impacted on the students' answers to this question, as they seemed far less hesitant to identify success in their older siblings.

Interviewer: If I may ask, was your sister just as successful as you were in like is she attending university or?

Heather: Uh, she has been very successful. She, uh, has been studying music ever since she was 5, piano and uh, the part of the reason that we were, uh, we came to Canada was to uh, you know, to get a better education of course. But as uh, with my sister, was even more so because in Korea it's hard to major in music. Uh, she's now in the US, one of the most uh, most, the world's most famous...she always says that her English is not good, and she's always saying I'm better than her as far as English goes and, you know, I don't think so because she's doing really well. She's getting straight A's in school and uh, it's because of her determination, because of her hard working, like working habit, that she was able to get there with uh, and she is one of the most successful students that I know of and, really proud of her.

Nevertheless, these students *were* able to exit the ESL programs they were originally placed in, function in an all English school environment, obtain good marks, and even in some cases, get on the honour roll, enter a university, gain scholarships, and even become, English tutors themselves. These were all accomplishments which made them in my mind good examples to learn from and which prompted us to ask: how they had done it.

4.5.1 Effort

Though some did refer to the fact that some students did better than others simply because they were better at language or perhaps luckier than others (because they had had better teachers, schools and parents), first and foremost informants pointed out that

facing their challenges had required a great deal of discipline and personal effort, and that though obvious perhaps, that these elements had made a difference. They felt that ILMS had to be responsible for their own success, and that hard work and determination were important. In this sense the informants displayed strong internal locus of control.

Mark: students have to motivate themselves, not tutors motivation them. You just cant push people like that. You have to realize that you have to, you want to or you need to. Once you realize than it will work out.

Ani: don't, don't say like "oh, your, your, your still young and you don't have to do anything". Like, now my sister, she's like 11, and she knows she has to study, just like I was before. Like she knows when she goes home, she has to play the piano, practice the piano, she has to finish all her school work, and when she has a test, she has to study. It's like, it's like in the way that I'm brought up, like my dad makes us like, realize there's this responsibility that we have to do

Celeste: ...opportunities you take them you don't, they're not totally given, you have to go grab opportunities. If they haven't taken the opportunities to meet English speaking friends, or to use it, to use their English, then, that's their loss. You know, so, in comparison, uh, I think it's with the individual uh, they're willing to put that effort, and to, willing to eh, to learn the language.

Naomi: what you're learning, or, or like...I think to...uh, I think it's important to, um, to want to do well, and make that effort, to, to um, try to get it, like try to understand it, and try to be able to comprehend it, and and, DO the homeworks, LAUGHS...because it does really help, even though it might be difficult or boring, or whatever...You might be able to play outside instead LAUGHS, I guess. I think it's important to actually do the work and make an effort to do it. And to, and I think, um, I think it is not going to come like really easy, unless you're one of those brilliant people, LAUGHS....

Attending summer English school, studying vocabulary, reading in English, working with tutors on writing, doing grammar books at home, and taking time to do one's homework all counted as the kind of effort that was necessary. Most importantly, hard work and effort also included mustering up of the courage to leave one's comfort

zone and do things that one might not be naturally inclined or comfortable doing such as: going out and talking to native English speakers, finding a job in an English only environment, or simply speaking out in class.

Julie: Uh...I would say that, um...probably, always put yourself in a situation where you have to use English. Cause if you're getting used to like your group of friends that speak your language only, you're not going to be able to practice it, cause, practice doesn't make it perfect but at least it makes it fluent so, um, I think that's pretty important to forcing yourself to actually be in a situation where you have to do it.

Students also explained their success by pointing out that they had realized early that combined with effort practice was the key. This applied particularly to their academic success with regards to their ability to learn to use English effectively in a fairly short time compared to some of their fellow classmates. This was a simple fact, but one which governed much of their actions. All of the informants in this study demonstrated that they took time to practice the necessary English skills they needed to acquire. They spoke, listened, read and wrote extensively in English. Reading was particularly perceived as important.

Mark: And, so I actually started hanging out with, a lot of, of pe-people who are not Koreans, and, I often think that was very important in helping me learn Chinese, I mean English, much faster. Because I was forced to speak English with them; I didn't know Chinese then so, so I spoke English with them, and, and, more practice you get faster you, faster you cc- you learn. Honestly I, I, could tell that, uh, pretty quickly, from just observing how the other people were doing. And then, they were, in the same level in like, fff for 2, 3 years, and, and you could just tell that, it was so much better, to, practice.

Heather: ...I do remember doing is uh, watching a lot of T.V. because as far as conversations and uh, things like that go, I was uh, I knew that watching T.V. was probably the best thing I could do. And uh, my favorite T.V. show, the Power Rangers, uh, (laugh), uh, I learned a lot of stuff from that as well. And a lot of uh, uh, I knew like how to say bad things, because you know all the evil people are saying bad things, all

the good people saying good things...

Maia: it wasn't till grade six that I realized...I was at another school this time...that I realized that oh...my...my...friends are all reading like ...the babysisters' club and...and...like young ..young adults novels and I was stuck in like reading like...storybooks with pictures (sarcastic) and stuff like that... so...that...yeah...it was then I realized "oh my god I have to start reading these other books"...SO the summer after grade 6...I like...I like read like crazy. I read the Hobbit and all these other books...and umm...and...LAUGHS...the Hobbit was a big accomplishment for me at the time...

Heather: Uh, probably grade 9, when I was, I was done with ESL. Uh, grade 8 and even in grade 7 I was trying to write my diary in English and I still have them, when I look at them I have no idea what I said. Uh, bad grammar you know, bad grammar all over the place. Uh, and I tried to write as much as I can uh, in English. Even the stuff that I had to write in Korean, I tried to translate it to English and uh, probably a bad ideas because now I look at it I don't know what I said (laugh). Uh, some of the more uh, sometimes, just barely sometimes I'd write in Korean, when I had this really important thing to say, that I wanted to remember and I want, had to have it you know, uh, say four, five years from there and I wrote it in Korean, uh, which I still have. I understand those (laugh). Uh, my first poem and story was grade 9. Uh, you, know still, grammar mistakes all over the place, but, uh, I was proud because I actually wrote a story in English and you know, I could understand it relatively you know, so.

As Julie said so well, the resounding theme that emerged was that though practice might not actually guarantee that you would be perfect, it did often mean that you would improve.

4.5.2 The help of others

What also came out resoundingly, perhaps even more so than the traditional: "I did well because I worked hard", was the realization or the recognition that a great part of their success was due not only to their individual effort but also to the effort of the people who surrounded them. Success was in no small part attributed to the opportunities and

access to information and resources that they had been offered by their parents, schools and friends.

4.5.2.1 Family

Families were one of the key factors that influenced the importance the informants' success. Families were seen as the original source of the example to follow with regards to strong work ethics and being impressed at an early age with the importance of working hard. Family also played a big role both as providers of a safe and comfortable environment to study and develop academic achievement, but also as a source of possible extra help and resources essential beyond the classroom itself to achieve in an all-English school. This meant, for example, access to tutors, even when money was tight and when it meant commuting for great distances.

Beth: Yeah, um, yeah, I think like the thing that really helped with my, my, um, my parents are both very supportive of, my education and, you know, and so, my dad always told me like, if I'm ever stuck in, a situation where I feel that, I, you know my level of, of competency in some area is not up to par and I need some extra help, like in terms of tutoring or whatever it was, that he's always said to be able to like, you know, get me the tutor or whoever I need to improve myself. And so, I think that really helped, like, knowing that I could go, and asked for the extra help when I needed it. Yeah.

4.5.2.2 Teachers

Teachers were mentioned as also having played in most of the cases a vital role in the success of the informants. The majority of the informants reported that they had benefited from good teachers, especially in their ESL classes. Good ESL teachers were teachers who were able to get the students talking, took time to get to know their students on a personal level, offered one-on-one individualized emotional and educational support, all while being strict enough to force them to speak English.

Heather: ...the ESL teacher was uh, she was amazing and, I can't remember how she communicated with me but I could remember everything she said and, uh, I learned as far as past tense with her and uh, and it was, it was great and she was really understanding uh, and yeah.

Celeste: ...uh, my grade three teacher...was very supportive, I remember us always writing. We always wrote stories uh, and she would tell us just write down the ideas, it doesn't matter if the spelling is not correct because you can always go back and check the dictionary uh, eh, just think of your plot and write it out, eh, because it's your rough draft, you can always write it out, go back edit it, so...maybe that encouraged me because even though my English, maybe the grammar is really poor, whatever, it, it encouraged me to get those things out

4.5.2.3 Friends

The kind of friends one had was also seen as having made a crucial difference in the lives of the informants. On one hand, being surrounded by people who could speak one's language, especially in the early days of one's arrival in an all English school was perceived as an advantageous thing which helped make the transition to the new school easier and much less psychologically disturbing. Native language speaking friends provided an environment, much like the family environment that offered understanding and support in a way that was not limited by language or cultural difficulties. Native language speaking friends also shared the immigration experience and, therefore, understood it's difficulties which made them easier to talk to and easier to connect with. They could understand them quite literally (they would have had no problems understanding their language) but also symbolically (they would have thanks to their shared background a greater ability to understand what the students were going through).

Native language friends also served as useful support groups for the ILMS. In the cases where these friends were slightly more experienced because they had been in the country longer, they helped considerably, by serving as a bridge between the new school

culture and language and the old one. For instance, ILMS friends helped by translating in those first few days what was being said in class. They also helped explain rules and class activities; which had they simply been explained in English, would have been much more difficult to understand.

Heather: Uh...I don't, I don't think I ever felt comfortable in that school. Uh, of course you know I made some friends, uh, the Chinese people they were really nice to me because they knew what I was going through. And uh, they were always you know, comforting me and meet with me. Of course I don't remember what they said, I, I probably don't know what they said uh, but I was really, I felt so blessed that they uh, they were there with me. And uh, no one was treating me badly or anything so uh, it was ok. Uh, I think it was about a month into, I think it was about May that another Korean girl came to school. Uh, she was worse than I was and she'd been there for 5 months or something and we became best friends of course. And uh, and her being there with me was just hu (expression of relief) you know. Cus' before I couldn't, I was really shy. People thought I was shy but, now I could reveal my true identity to them you know, "look I can laugh and stuff you know" (laugh). So uh, that was also really lucky that uh, she came along, yeah

Ulrika: Yeah I think so, yeah if, if there were no uh...Mandarin speaking immigrants back in high school then I think I would be a very different person now because, you have to, it's very hard to make that transition from, from this world to that world and eh, if you can find something sort of connects you between the two worlds, you know, you will, you will feel more comfortable adopting to that new society, so if there were, if I was the only Chinese speaking person, immigrant in my high school, then I'll probably have a very difficult time adjusting to the whole new cultural stuff, so I think it's good that, that eh, there are people of my own native language around, but too many is not good, is not going to be good but eh, the right amount, at least to me, I feel comfortable seeing there's so many people there.

Interestingly, informants also pointed out that in some cases immigrant language minority student friends who did not speak their native language made the best partners for practicing English.

Heather: Hum, uh, speaking, in groups because uh, when you're in ESL, you know, you don't feel that pressured. You know that the people around you are

going through the same thing and if you make a mistake in grammar or pronunciation, they're not gonna laugh at you, uh, because they probably don't know that I've made a mistake uh (laugh). Uh, so you know speaking and just having conversations probably the best in groups. Uh, grammar and stuff, was probably uh, by myself. Or, or in pairs because you know, if you're in a pair you can ask questions because sometimes in English you don't really know what's right and what's wrong, uh, so you could ask, yeah.

Robert: ...my, the other thing was that, native speakers would, uh, have a tendency to avoid you because, of the communication problem. Not because they're bad people, but simply because it's not easy, you know. That you have to actually make an effort to, communicate with somebody who don't speak the same language as you do. So then, then go find other ESL students, and, and I'm sure they'd be willing to speak English. You may feel like a fool at the time. But, but for, for the bigger picture, it's something you have to consider.

Informants also stressed the importance that making native English friends had played in their lives. As mentioned previously, the goal to escape ESL was motivated in no small part by the students' realization that they needed contact with Native English speakers if they were to truly learn the English language in a fluent way. Native English speakers were seen first as a source of real English and real culture to be learned from (as opposed to the textbook or classroom English and Canadian culture of the ESL classrooms-which was judged useful, but nevertheless limited). Native-English language friends helped the informants obtain key elements which helped form their Canadian, or new identity: such as learning the language, the idioms, the games, the sports, etc.

Mari: of me, they were just laughing because I did something funny, then, then, when they explain it to me I would laugh myself right, so yeah, that was fun, that was the first time I learned how to play "truth or dare", "spin the bottle" kind of thing (laugh). So that was, that was really fun, and then, just because there were, there were more girls like, cus' the Caucasians are like girls, sort of thing, so I, I started hanging around them more then I would hang around the guy friends, just because they're guys you know, so yeah, so that was, so my whole like, my whole grade 6 and grade 7 years it was basically like, balance of the two, yeah.

Nothing illustrated better the powerful impact of friends than the simple fact that some informants reported that English and Canadian culture were not the language and culture acquired during their school days. Three of the informants reported that as a result of having attended schools with a high population of Cantonese students that they had learned Cantonese as well as English upon coming to Canada, despite the total absence of an educational effort to teach Cantonese. Informants reported that they had simply picked up the language from hanging around and socializing with Cantonese speakers. In one interesting case, Ani, a Mandarin speaker from Taiwan, stated that she now spoke Cantonese more comfortably than Mandarin.

Ani: Yes, yeah. I guess, yeah. For example now, I have a class, I have math class. I know a group of Cantonese friends and I know a group of Taiwanese friends. But then usually I would sit with the Cantonese people.

Interviewer: May we ask why? Is it just because of the language or, any particular reason?

Ani: I, I, I don't know what to say to those Taiwanese people. I don't know why. I would talk to them but then, I would just, I don't know what to say to them. It's like there's no, nothing common between us.

Interviewer: Do you think it's because just from the beginning in your class, there were lots of Cantonese people, then you didn't have contact with Taiwanese people?

Ani: I think so. It's like, I know all those like, media stuff. Like those actors and actress in Hong Kong but then I don't know anything about Taiwan. So I guess, yeah I'm more like a Cantonese.

Ani: Yeah. Like, I don't even speak Mandarin at all. The only thing I speak is Cantonese and Taiwanese at home. And then when I speak like, remember there was a girl here, she was Taiwanese. And after we went out, I was telling, I was talking to her in Mandarin, and then she said "are you sure you're Taiwanese? You sound like a Cantonese. Your Mandarin's pretty weird". And then I was like, "I'm a Taiwanese!" Gosh, so I don't know, I, well, my identity changed

4.5.3 Prior schooling

Prior schooling and its impact on their Canadian schooling was also deemed important factor having helped the students succeed. Having had some prior experience with English was definitely seen as an asset, as was the simple fact that English had a certain positive status in their home countries.

Prior schooling was seen as the source of the strong work ethic and many of the good study strategies that helped the students cope with the heavy workload of attending an English-only school.

Maia: In China..like just...I went to school right. And...of course the education back then was very stringent. You... basically... uh... had to get up at like 6 every morning...go to school till about 2...come home for lunch and a nap till about 3 and go back to school till around 6. And THEN... homework was another, whole other thing. Like You.. you see.. I worked as hard, as FAST as I could and I...I used to get done at around 10 at night. SO that was like the normal life for an elementary kid..in ..in China...Yeah...So ..it means..

Interviewer: WOW

Maia: That probably had a lot to do withuh...with with my academic priorities

Finally, prior schooling was deemed to have played an important role in the sense that the majority of the students came from countries where math and science were taught at a higher and more advanced level than in Canada, when compared grade for grade. As a result, the students felt that they enjoyed an advantage when they came to Canada. They were able to focus on their English learning without having to worry too much about missing out, or falling behind in many of their academic content courses, since for the most part they found courses such as science and math easy and a simple review of what they had learned before.

Mari: actually. At least, at least for elementary years I think it was, I've

learned enough math at home to cover the whole, yeah, in elementary school.

Mark: Uh, yeah, like I, I forced myself, to, like, like memorize bunch of vocabularies every day right. And, I, um, I ssss-like the main focus in my studies was English, right. And, I think like the other courses, if, especially math was pretty easy. So, there's not much pressure from the other classes. I think, um, yeah the other pressure I had from the other classes in grade 8, was uh, home economics.

4.5.4 Home language and culture

With regards to the importance of their culture and language itself, it was interesting that the majority of the informants felt that their L1 had helped or at least had not hindered their academic success.

Robert: I don't think it matters, what, what my native language is, but whether, how, it, whether how good you are. Whether you're good at your native language or your not good at your native language. And I think that affects your learning progress, with, or, speed, with the new language that you're approaching. Because this is from my, not from my personal experience, but, from looking at my students. I have three students now. And one's 13, one's 12 and one's 11. They all came here at the same time, and then, so, obviously the older has the, the best command, of his native language. And, he's not as good at English as the youngest, but, but he has, uh, he's able to grasp the concepts much more learning in English. And, and, the youngest who came here, with originally very little knowledge of, of Korean, however is able to, learn English very rapidly. But her Korean is almost, uh, basic. I would say. And the middle child, who, who is somewhat, has, some knowledge of Korean, but, but she just can't do it at all. Uh huh. And so I guess, if you come really young here, then you start thinking in English, and then that would help immensely. If you come too late, uh, that you might have a hard time learning the new language, yet at the same time, your, uh, knowing your native language in a, very uh, knowing your native language very well, its not going exactly hinder you from learning the other language. It will help you because you have, uh, sense of grammar, sense of uh, what is sentence. Uh, the formal properties of language. But when you ha-when you really don't have the advantage of coming here young, and, but you don't have the advantage of knowing a language, what a language is like, then you have a big problem there. So it's not just about, what your native language is. I know people say, I know when your, another language has the identical grammar structure as your own language. Like with me and, Korean and Japanese, and, I think it's

slightly different. But, when there are, even when there are no relationships between the new language and your old language. It's not so much about whether how they, um, how they, different they are, but, or how well you know it.

In some cases L1 had helped by allowing the students to equate new words to the ones that they knew in their own language. In others cases, L1 had helped by allowing students to create associations with sounds to help them memorize new words.

Naomi: Like I think, initially when I translated back to Japanese, I think that made it stick better, and um, also, trying to, trying to remember, like, a similar sounding things, like, like, "oh this sounds like melon, so, so this is LAUGHS this", like ...um...I still, I still use that, sort of word associations, like looks like a melon, so, it's aa melon, as far as that...

Students also pointed out that when writing, knowledge that they had acquired in their L1 carried over to their writing and reading in English.

Lora: I think it was because uh, uh, in some way I think it's because my Chinese is not bad. I can do very well in Chinese writing, yeah, I think that helps with English writing, right. It's kind of the same way, like how you can write uh, things, how to describe things, yeah..

Julie: ...I read the...I, I read a lot of books like um, Count of Monte Cristo in Chinese first and I would actually go to look for the English version. And then it would help me understand things. Like, the main story plot although they wouldn't be exactly the same cause it's translated right? But, and, I remember that um, a lot of materials like, Shakespeare, I think I read back in, cause they translate it and they would put it in modern Chinese so its really easy to understand, and I would have read it, I would have read it when I was back in Taiwan cause I was really, I really like reading then, so a lot of things that the teacher would put on the English course lessons that I may have read already in Chinese and it, it did help.

Even in the rare cases where their L1 was deemed to have no real advantage for their English learning (for example in the case of Mandarin) because it was so different from English, it is interesting that it still remained a positive influence, if only because,

being able to speak the language, was both a way to preserve their link to their family and home land's culture, and an important source of pride.

Ulrika: no (laugh), but I think it's, it, eh, cus' the two languages are very different, so obviously if you know French then English is probably, you know, very close, but eh, Mandarin is not something that can help you in terms of learning English, but eh I do feel, I'm proud that I can speak Mandarin and I'm proud I'm Chinese in heritage so eh, yeah, even though it didn't help me, but I think it's also an essential, skill to have, a second language that you can speak fluently and write and read, yep.

With regards to their specific language abilities, an analysis of the interview questions revealed that the informants rated their language abilities in interesting ways suggesting that despite the value they placed on their home language, maintaining it was a difficulty for a majority of the informants. Despite the fact that English was not their native tongue and, therefore, rarely given the best score of five, eight of fourteen informants who specifically rated their language skills in English and their native tongues rated their English higher than their native tongues. Only four of the fourteen informants rated their mother tongue as stronger than their English. Two of the informants gave both English and their native tongues similar scores, suggesting an equal degree of comfort with both languages. It is interesting to note that language maintenance was a source of pride and a goal for most of the informants who saw it as a vital key to their home cultures, but that this was a difficult goal to achieve.

4.6 Explaining failure

Though the initial focus of the research was to look at what successful students had to say so that one could learn from their example, one of the unexpected findings which came up as a result of the interviews were the students' opinions and stories about what they had learned about academic failure and its causes from their fellow students

who had not done so well. The next section reports on some of the most interesting things the informants had to say about what they felt were particularly counterproductive to the academic achievement of ILMS.

Interestingly, the most important cause of failure mentioned by students appears to have been the age of arrival of the students themselves. Most felt lucky that they had arrived at a young enough age to start off their school experiences in Canada at the elementary level. They talked of the greater likeliness that kids would end up playing together and interacting in elementary school, especially at a young age, regardless of whether or not they spoke the same language

Lora: 2 or 3 ESL students yeah. You know I think, in some way kids will be easier to get along with like even if you don't speak English well, yeah and then besides it's, a lot faster if you, you, you, the way you learn English when you were like young kids, yeah.

The ease with which these friendships were made had something to do in Celeste's opinion with the simple fact that younger children had a greater tendency to be open to new ideas, and hence new people.

Celeste: it's probably easier for, it probably easier younger children to be fully submerged into uh, uh, you know, English classes than older students, if they don't have the basics concepts of it than it's really hard uh...

Interviewer: ...you said younger is probably better because they don't have basic concepts what...

Celeste: preconceived ideas/

Interviewer: ah, ok, interesting, so they're more open?

Celeste: they're more open

Maia: But yeah...I would tell them...like tell them that, you know, just...Play with people you like playing around. Lang--- ...I mean you don't have to speak...what...you...they don't have to understand for you to have fun with them. Right... Its...its just...yeah...just learn from

people....like...um...You can learn from anybody. You can learn from everybody (laughs) So....just like...just, just, I don't know...(gives up) For a little kid, I'd be like...just...um....do things you like to do. Language doesn't, I mean, just because you don't speak what they're speaking, just because they can't understand you doesn't have to limit you to...like...the toys you get to play...the games you get to play right...

They also warned of the dangers of arriving too late in the Canadian system and simply running out of time before graduation in order to learn English.

Interviewer: and do you ever like chat with you know a group of friends you know like drinking coffee or something like that, hey you, I'm, not, I made it you didn't, but like do you ever discuss why like some people,...

Ulrika: discuss why they didn't make it?

Interviewer: yeah

Ulrika: I think that was a very sensitive subject, cus' that sort of personal of their wounds so I didn't really do that so, uh, but I think, I, I, I understand why they didn't make it, and, and, timing is a very good, important factor right? some of them arrived when they are in their grade 11 or 12, so that's obviously, they don't have enough time to succeed and

Gabriel: Um...um...I am not sure about that. I think more importantly; is...um, how old they were when they first came to Canada. I think the age, is, mo-, a more important factor, than having family here, so if you're younger, when you came here, like I'd consider myself fairly young, when I came here, so it would be easier to integrate into Canadian culture, whereas if you're older, if you're 16, 17, going to high school, you know, mid, in the middle of high school, it will be harder for them to get great.. No matter whether they have family here or not.

Second, discussions of the importance of the presence and support of the family in the adjustment and educational career of the informants led to talk about the dangers of the absence of family support and presence. When asked why they thought so many students did not do well, many of the students referred to the absence of parents and

family support as a major cause of failure among those ESL students they knew of who had not succeeded.

Ulrika: usually those kids are, I think, I don't know if they are successful or not I, I don't really have the statistics but, I would think that their kids would have, eh, harder time trying to adjust, to the whole school and transition then eh, those kids who have parents with them, right, and also there's, it's just when you're a teenager, there are a lot of issues that, that are going on, if your parents are not there, like, like a lot of kids they smoke, they do drugs, they get drunk or whatever, and eh your parents are not around then they don't have those people to, to, look after them and they feel free to do everything they want and they may, try, you know, think it's more important for them to hang out with their friends then to stay in school. I, I knew couple of friends of mine who eh, ended up dropping out from school and eh, when their parents, was starting to realize those problems are happening, it's too late right, their kids were already eh, de, detached from them for such a long time and they feel I can do whatever I want and you can't, `` there's just nothing you can do about it and, and eventually the parents try everything they could, it's just too late right, so I think it's eh, the parents should be around and eh, and eh even if the home stay families or relatives and everything, it's still not, it's not still home, so eh, the parents should be around.

Finally, Nansen and others pointed out that failure linked to poor English skills was sometimes the result of spending too much time with peers from one's native language group, combined with limited contact with native English speakers. ESL classes, and extended stays in them, forced for the most part, were seen as contributing to the creation of a special group of students which Nansen called "shadow students".

Nansen: We extrapolate that idea here to high schools, and you see a lot of the peers working around together, and, teen ag-teen agers culture's like that. So one of them is going to have a better understanding of English than the other one, right. So, one of the reaction I will, I would say, right, is that uh, sometimes we ff- we, some students shadow, with other students right, that are more proficient in the language. And they just, depend a lot of the, in them right. ... if...the student is, is, always you know, become, bec, always sort of like, you know, waiting for that other peer to help them. He's going to become a shadow, of the language. ...this something that I'm telling you that I'm been, have been digging a lot and a lot. And this is from personal experience coming coming up, of what I seen in the high schools, uh now. And, uh, so there gonna, to, there are a lot of these

shadow students, that I call them. They just never going to get up to speed. Because they always, have, gon-wanna have one or two friends that are helping with their English. Right. and also um, they just feel comfortable that way.

4.7 What they learned

This last section explores what advice informants had to give based on their experience for parents, teachers and students.

4.7.1 Advice for parents

The informants strongly advised parents to stay informed and to know what was going on both in their children's schools but also in their children's lives.

Ulrika: Uh, they should eh, get to know what's going on in class, right. Read the, in high school they had those newspapers that you can bring home to, and eh, read that and also know what's going on in class, also what classes your student, kids are taking, a lot of parents have no clue what's going on in their children's life, so that's not good.

Nansen, the ESL teacher-to-be, felt particularly strongly about this and pointed out that this advice could apply not only to parents of ILMS, but to all parents.

Nansen: Advice for the parents who are ESL, parents of ESL kids, ESL themselves and advice for the parents that are not ESL, please, all of them, come to the school. We want to see, we want to see, your faces. We want to see what you look like, right. All ESL and non ESL, please come to the school you know, bake cookies whatever, if you want to share it with kids you know, do something about it or show up and say hello to the teachers right. That's it, we don't think that because they're non ESL, they don't have to show up to school, I mean you know, kids still need to learn, I mean you know, so that's what I'm saying, just please come to school and you know, you don't need excuses to come, cus' they, some of the parents just show up, maybe once a year for parents teachers' conference, to say okay, "how's my kids doing, oh good, okay, bye", you know. So you know, community involvement is, and see that's what I'm saying. A lot of the,

Basic communication about some of the more complex issues that the students faced such as their identity crisis or their linguistic challenges were also important for

parents to talk about. For Julie, nobody could truly replace parents when it came to talking about problems, not even a brother or sister:

Julie: If some-, like something happened in school or whatever, you're really pissed about someone, um, they the one that you can turn to. Um, I don't think sibling does as much. Siblings, probably, they're, that you can look up to. Like, "oh, they did that, why can't I?" and stuff like that, but, in terms of, uh, talking or like just like self counselling about, simple things, um, I think parents, is probably the better.

Parents were encouraged to encourage their children to succeed by modeling first of all the hard work and determination that was necessary to succeed, and also by encouraging their children as much as possible. Informants distinguished between good pushing and bad pushing. Good pushing, or positive encouragement, used realistic goals, and was sensitive to the students' actual abilities, and desires, never actually asking them to do things that were impossible, or beyond their abilities at a certain point in time.

Interviewer: Uh, and to get, just, maybe just to get the details, if I'm the parents, for example my parents is not doing so well, when you say push, what does push mean?

Hugo: (laugh). Well, well of course you know that not everyone is like going to do well in school but uh, or everyone has this uh, advantage. At least you have to find out what your, your child is good at and just, at least just tell him like "you should, you should work toward this, this direction". So it's not just push "oh you should study hard, you should study hard", like you have to, as a parent you have to do some homework too.

Providing opportunities to expose their children to English both in a social and academic way was also high on the list of advice for parents. Parents were encouraged to let their kids interact watch tv, read books, play with other children, and provide English support in the form of help with homework, or tutors when or if needed.

Finally, students emphasized once again the importance of maintaining strong ties with one's home language and culture when they questioned the efficacy of switching the home language to English as a strategy for parents to help their children master the majority language more quickly.

Interviewer: Something that was mentioned by your sister. Well actually she didn't mention it, we talked about it. But um, the idea that some parents, um, sometimes decide, "Ok, let's speak English at home", how do you feel about that idea?

Mark: Um, I don't know. I, I...Like in my perspective, I think it's going to be, kinda fakey. Like you want to speak English, you would be going to school and talking to other students right. So, I don't think that would be a good idea

Maia: Ummm...for parents...for parents...Hmmm...I'm...I...I have a family friend...family friend of my parents...Ummm...Their two sons...uh...second son was born here...the first son came at age 2 I think ...and they don't speak any Mandarin at home..yeah right. I think mainly because, because the parents wanted..the kids to..to...be...like...fully immersed in Canadian culture. They never spoke Mandarin at home to them. You know...that's good at first,...and but, once they became fluent...they sort of abandoned...LAUGHS...everything they've known

Maia: Right...right

Maia: And that's kind of...I think...Preserving your own culture is very important. I think peo---Parents should...Although try and encourage them to develop like...a Canadian identity...should also, you know...like...teach them...teach them the homeland...like...the ways...you know...the language....Um...yeah...bilingualism's pretty important.

4.7.2 Advice for students

In a sense the advice given by the informants for their peers seemed to reflect that they did believe that it was not impossible for other ILMS to succeed. There was the general feeling that anyone who wanted to follow in their steps would have to work hard, but that it certainly was not impossible.

First, despite recognizing the difficulties and initial reluctance that accompanied doing so, students stressed the importance of interacting with English as much as possible. The advice was clear, if one wants to master English, using it as much as possible in as wide a variety of contexts as possible is crucial. Students listed a wide variety of activities that could be performed to help one interact in English. Reading extensively in English and writing in English were strongly recommended.

Beth: The best advise was given by me grade 2/3 teacher, "go to the public library and borrow and read many, many books". Secondly, I think it is important to make friends with fluent English-speakers...

Getting involved in the English community through volunteering or part-time jobs or sports and watching television and listening to the radio were also seen as powerful ways to learn English. Finally, talking to your teachers and or trusted friends both to get information and clarification about class content and feedback, but simply to practice English with were some of the ways suggested to open themselves to and surround themselves with the English.

Robert: Force yourselves to be friends with people you have to speak English with. If native speakers avoid you, find ESL students of different nationalities. The more you speak, the faster you learn.

Interviewer: ...Uh, what, what advice would you give, to, to the students, as to, like specific things they can do to, if they, they want to repeat what you did?

Gabriel: Um...Oh...Um...One of them was probably to interact with people, with diverse backgrounds, and so...I think that's key to, to learning, English, because then you're forced to speak it. If, if they don't speak your mother tongue, you know, how are you going to communicate with them, but with the language, that you you know, speak in common, and so, that would be English, in Canada, and so that's one thing. Um, another things was, um, to get involved with different activities, um, like I was saying, for me it was sports that helped me, for other people it could be joining different clubs, or different

extra-curricular activities, although I know it's hard because when you don't speak the language, it's hard to join the clubs, but, you know, get involved, like, you know, I mean outside school, um...do different things, you know. If you have a hobby, you know, go find other people with the same hobby, and um, and you still can do it, you know, so, that would help you, improve your, your, your language skills, because you have to...Yeah.

In addition to surrounding themselves with English, fellow ILMS were encouraged by the informants to be open to their own cultures and to be proud of whom they were. Informants stressed the importance of remembering that the inability to speak perfect English limited in no way their potential to do great things.

Robert: And finally, oh yeah, the other thing that I mentioned previously about how, uh, your, inability to speak perfect English does not mean that you are less than your peers who have, uh, the ability to speak perfect English, that like, don't be discouraged by, uh, you know, being, being the one, who is not like the other people cause, once you realize that you, you're, you're not dumber or, your stupider, then, then you're going to be just fine.

Fellow ILMS were also encouraged to be proud and confident by taking notice of the advantages of being multilingual/multicultural while focusing on what they had to offer to others.

Nansen: So, learn the language first by surrounding yourself with the community that speaks the language or, you know encouraging that, that's one issue. But at the same time, to never, never, ever forget your identity right. And be proud of that and share your identity with the community that you are working and living with. And it's as simple as that and especially high school kids

As with the advice they gave parents, the informants also talked of the importance of setting realistic goals and objectives in order to remain confident and positive.

Robert: ...people here, they come, and they, they look at, what they think are the success cases. And and they, try to be, just like that. And, in, in, in the process they, often times, fall into the trap of setting up an impossible, goal. Something that is, completely unattainable for these people. People come from different circumstances and they have different abilities and, and, sometimes they just, uh try to be so much like those

people, and when they cannot achieve the goal, they just become completely crushed. And, I think it's much better that you set up a realistic goal that would be suitable for you. If, if you think you cannot, go into four year university when you graduate from high school then, start thinking about 2 year colleges, and and community colleges, and you can always transfer, and, think of oth-think of, what other options rather than, and, and, and like thinking about just like, Harvard or ...like John Hopkins...

4.7.3 Advice for teachers

One of the main themes that emerged when we asked students to give advice for present and future teachers of ILMS was the need to try and be as accepting and welcoming as possible. Students felt that teachers needed to pay attention and show sensitivity to the difficulties faced by language minority students, especially in the early days. In other words, teachers had to convey a strong sense of accepting and welcoming to their students.

Robert: Um, I think the key words are uh, patience and compassion. Uh, they, they just have to realize that, uh, I mean that although these people are not, not, not stupid, they are going to take some time to learn the English and be able to communicate, like, the rest of the school population and some teachers just don't realize that, uh, and then, they, they would, write down these, uh, like, uh, very very discouraging comments on the, on the, on the, on the assignments when they hand it back to the students, and about how, mmm like, "this is the wrong", like, like "you have to do the whole thing again". I mean, it help, helps to do the whole thing again. It's good to know, some what your mistakes are, but, but they just word it in such a way, that, that the students are completely crushed.

Being an accepting and welcoming teacher included making efforts to try to understand the students' backgrounds, realizing that not being able to speak a language did not necessarily mean that one was not intelligent. Treating *all* students equally was particularly stressed by informants of this study as an important way to make all students in a class feel accepted.

As well, accepting the students meant accepting and inviting them to share the knowledge they brought to the classroom, including their knowledge of their mother tongue. A good example of how this could be done to positive ends was given by Hugo.

Hugo: Uh, specific things.....uh, one of my uh, ESL science instructor, uh, he was a, oh it was quite, he had the, the list of like, the scientific terms and the Chinese terms (laugh), and it was quite helpful like, that list and yeah. Cus' we uh, we learned quite a bit of science in Taiwan already so yeah. And the list was like taking from a Taiwanese textbook, yeah so. Yeah, was like yeah, I can just compare the English terms with, with the Chinese term. It was, it was quite helpful and benefit me til now. Well at least til, til my first degree (laugh).

Ulrika: ...always smile and, and eh, they don't judge you and eh, they appreciate the culture and the way that you were brought up, so they would not try to change you or anything so, that, that's very good. So eh, even though eh, the way they taught things wasn't really the plan I had in mind, but because they try to do their best and they make you feel comfortable and made you wanna, at least I, I, feel going to school is a very enjoyable thing, not a drag in life or anything so, so that's good, at least they achieve this positive learning space for you, yeah.

Teachers were also advised to foster success and confidence in English by taking a more active role in getting the students to interact both inside and outside of the class with many different kinds of people. One student recommended for example that simply telling students to go out and interact with others was not enough. Teachers were advised to explicitly teach students how to go beyond the simple, "hi", when meeting a new potential friend. Other students recommended field trips in the community as well as inviting guests or volunteers in the classroom.

Lora: Yeah it's, it's just like, I can always remember they tell us to make more friends with Caucasian people with Canadians right, but they just tell us they don't show, they don't show us how right. You know it's really difficult. Even if like you say "hi" to the Canadian people or the other speak, English speaking people right, they might just say "hi" to you and that's it right (laugh). Cus' they, they know you're ESL students, yeah. Lots of them they wouldn't, even you know it's not like they're bad or anything, they're nice too, but they know you don't speak English like, at that time, you're just, you're learning, they don't want to

spend the time like, talking slowly to you, yeah it really depends on person to person right. So I would suggest the teacher like, to find some Canadian, who are willing to do like talk to us, yeah, who are willing to like learn from us too. Maybe they want to learn Chinese too right. Yep, that'll be a good idea. Yeah cus', it's really hard to meet someone or to find someone who's willing to like learn English slowly with you right, they just want to make friends with you but make friends is ok like "hi", "hello" like next time you see them "hi how are you " right, but after that, that's it (laugh). Yeah, you don't get into the next step.

Despite the fact that the students knew that it would be difficult for the teachers to do this, students also stressed the importance for teachers to be able to spend some one-on-one time with their students. Simply being there to listen, and getting to know the student at a more individual level made a huge difference in the students' eyes. One-on-one interaction was perceived as one of the best ways for teachers to get to know the students' needs and cultural backgrounds in greater details. Furthermore, students also pointed out that these types of interactions often helped them understand explanations and complicated class concepts which would have been missed in class. One-on-one feedback on assignments was also seen as many times superior to simple written comments with regards to learning how to write.

Naomi: I think, I think our ESL teacher, like we had just the one ESL teacher for everybody, but, I think she was really good at, sort of, knowing where, um, where our, uh, strengths and weaknesses were and being able to work with that individually so just not looking at, the classroom as just one classroom, of like, an amorphous blob of, non-English speaking people, I think looking at each individual as people, I think that really helped. Yeah...

Mari: Like I think, you know, uh, I don't know maybe, there are way too many immigrating students right now, too many ESL students. And, there's just not enough, maybe just too much to ask for the teachers to, to uh, pay more attention to them personally, like to the mental, I mean you are moving to another you know, to a totally different world. Uh, no matter how, how convenient it is for, for right now to travel back and forth, or whatever, you are moving, and you are moving at a very young age you know. Even in during high school you know, there are lot, lots of adjustment to make, lots of things to do and, if you just keep bombarding them with "ok you're not getting an "A", you're not getting 'A'" then

that's not gonna do any good. Yeah I think they, they should actually yeah, talk to them more like, one on one or at least in a smaller groups

Lora: ...yeah the teacher had a, the, she's nice and she's quite good at like, know what like each students' need, yeah. She would talk to us like privately, yeah. I think that's really nice yeah.

Interviewer: Did she do that after class or during class, or,

Lora: After class, like yeah, she would say like who ever come to class afterwards, come see me (laugh)yeah.

Interviewer: She would say that like come see me after class?

Lora: Yeah, afterwards yeah. Maybe 2 or, 2 or, like 1 or 2 students at the same time, but you know that really helps, even if just like little step yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Good.

This chapter has attempted to do an overview of the challenges faced, the possible solutions and the valuable lessons and advice offered by the fifteen participants of this study. The implications and links to the literature of these findings will be discussed in further details in the next chapter of this thesis: Discussion and Implications.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study was originally designed to explore what helped some immigrant language minority students achieve academically while so many others failed? To answer this question this study asked fifteen immigrant language minority students (ILMS) to talk about what they had gone through as "ESL students" in the Vancouver area in order to gain information about the following three questions:

1. What perceptions do ILMS who were once in ESL programs and are now attending university have of the factors having influenced their academic achievement?
2. What perceptions do ILMS who were once in ESL programs and are now attending university have of the factors having influenced their social integration into Canada?
3. What advice do ILMS who were once in ESL programs and are now attending university have for teachers, parents and other language minority students?

This chapter will try to address the main points which emerged as possible answers to these questions, seeking to discuss the ideas proposed by the fifteen informants in their interviews and questionnaires and to compare these to those found in the literature. This section will also look for the general implications these findings have for all interested in the education of ILMS as well as possible areas for future research.

5.1. "Pay more attention to them personally"

This study's design originated in response to the recent call in the literature for research which took into consideration not only the linguistic and cognitive factors

involved in educating children of other cultures, but also the sociocultural factors which surround their education.

According to the literature, no full understanding of what occurs to second language learners in schools could occur without taking into consideration the sociocultural nature of learning a second language (Anstrom, 1997; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Duff, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Van Lier, 1996). This implies that a more emic or ethnographic, understanding of the main actors involved in this field is needed, especially the language learners themselves and the specific social and cultural contexts in which they exist. In other words, one needs to understanding in greater detail who they are, where they come from and the perceptions they may have of the language they are trying to acquire.

The depth and rich diversity of answers provided by the informants in this study confirmed the importance of paying attention to the sociocultural details that surround ILMS. In addition to their individual personalities, each and every single one of the students in this study, even those who shared the same country of origin, brought with them a different baggage of history, language, social status, life outlook and cultural experience.

What came out of the interviews was that these differences did make a tremendous difference. Even apparently trivial things such as the location of a classroom, the number of ILMS in a school, the existence of other students from the same country in one's class, the distance of one's house to one's school, the age of the students in the class, whether or not the student had brothers or sisters to compete with, or even

the schedule of a school's intramural events had possible effects on the academic achievement and social integration of ILMS.

The importance of these tiny sociocultural details implies two things. First, it confirms that paying attention to them is necessary. These tiny details are vital clues that can help parents, teachers and fellow students gain a greater understanding of what it takes to be a successful student. Second, the very complexity and variety that exists from one ILMS makes each case unique, making generalizations about good ILMS or "ESL students" difficult.

This could be extremely disappointing, and in no small measure frustrating for all involved in the education of ILMS. The complexity of the issues to consider which the literature and this study proposes, more or less eliminates the possibility of simple solutions that could be applied to fix the high number of failures and dropouts experienced by ILMS in Canada and the rest of North America (This is something that this author would wish Ministries of Education across Canada to remember).

Though a general model of what is involved in the education of language minority students may be useful, solutions will have to be based on specific localized information taking into consideration the perspective of the particular individuals involved and their sociocultural background. This will require trying to refrain from talking about ILMS as if they formed one homogeneous group for purpose of simplification. As the variety of answers provided by the informants of this study has shown simply grouping students as "ESL students", "Asian students" or even "Hong Kong students" is simply not enough. Ethnicity, or their linguistic difficulties with English are but two of the many factors which can make each case unique, and though these type of generalizations may be

useful at a certain general level of planning, at the beginning of the school day, when interacting with the students, it is not only information about the “average Chinese student” which will eventually help find the best way to teach a student. Rather it is specific information about the personal backgrounds of individuals like Maia, Hugo, Nansen, Ulrika and others like them that will make the difference.

For parents and concerned individuals interested in helping ILMS achieve, this means taking the advice offered by the informants in this study: that is, taking the time to sit down, patiently talk with them, and getting to know them. For teachers, this may be asking them to invest time and resources which are lacking, but schools may seriously want to consider the benefits of giving teachers the time to get to know their students.

Naomi: ...we had just the one ESL teacher for everybody, but, I think she was really good at, sort of, knowing where, um, where our, uh, strengths and weaknesses were and being able to work with that individually so just not looking at, the classroom as just one classroom, of like, an amorphous blob of, non-English speaking people, I think looking at each individual as people, I think that really helped.

5.2 What should we seek to know? Understanding ILMS' special conflicts

Lora: You know the teachers, I know uh, my counselor she was really good, yeah 'cause she understood, she understood like, like we, like how the difficulties for, for the ESL students, yeah.

Trueba (1989; 1991) argues that part of the problem contributing to the many difficulties faced by linguistic minorities is that many seem unaware of the special conflicts these students have to deal with. Spindler & Spindler (2000) suggest that these conflicts are mostly related to the difficult task of reconciling one's home cultures and languages to that of the new school and society's. This is partly due in his opinion first, to the fact that most educators working with ILMS today have most probably never themselves experienced what they are asking their students to do. It is also due, in his

opinion, to the absence of the voices of the students themselves in discussions surrounding the education of ILMS. It is hoped that this study will have contributed in some part in helping the voices of a few ILMS be heard.

The voices heard in this study did, indeed, give clear examples of the type of conflicts suggested by Trueba (1989; 1991) and Spindler & Spindler (2000). Leaving one's home and friends permanently, learning to survive in a new world with new rules and languages, learning to live as "the different one", powerless and misunderstood, dealing with the anxiety, stress, shame, pressure, frustration, self doubt and isolation, all while keeping up with one's academic achievement and having to learn English as quickly as possible, were all mentioned as difficulties faced by the informants in this study.

Conflicts also included having to deal with the complexities of making friends from a variety of groups, without compromising one's allegiance to any single group. Being an ILMS meant having to deal with parents who might not understand what you are going through or the language(s) or culture(s) that you are slowly acquiring outside the family home. It meant having to deal with the frustrating reality that one could lose one's native tongue much more quickly than one can learn a second language. It meant having to go to extra schools, and working harder and longer than other students. It also involved dealing with the frustrating paradox of knowing that one should interact with native English speakers to improve one's language and social abilities in the new culture, despite the fact that one's very lack of social and language abilities and lack of cultural experiences in English, made it difficult to attract native English speakers to interact with.

These are all issues the informants of this study had to deal with as they learned English and were slowly socialized in the process into Canadian society. Clearly due to these conflicts going to school was, for them, far more complex than simply getting an education. Consequently, this study supports Trueba's claim that educators interested in helping ILMS achieve need to first acknowledge the unique conflicts ILMS face and second, look for ways to help students deal with them.

The next section will try to put Trueba's ideas into practice by exploring the ways that the informants in this study turned the conflicts that they faced into experiences of success.

5.3 From conflict to success: Learning from the example of successful students

One of the interesting aspects of this study was the chance to explore how, despite the difficulties they faced, successful ILMS' perceptions might provide clues as to what might help other ILMS move from conflict to success. This next section summarizes what appears to be some of the major factors that allowed ILMS interviewed in this study to succeed. The next section will discuss the role of the family, prior schooling, the impact of parents' and students' attitudes towards their new schools, the crucial role interactions had on the academic achievement of the informants interviewed and finally the importance of definitions of success.

5.3.1 Success and family

The decisive role of family, and particularly parents, has long been considered vital to the academic achievement of any student in the educational research literature (Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1988). The explanations provided by informants in this study

regarding the important role their families played in their success (or lack of success of their friends) strongly reinforce this idea.

Informants' explanations that a lack of family support was in their opinion one of the main reasons why so many of their fellow ILMS classmates failed or dropped out suggests that family does play an important role, as do their revelations that, in their own personal cases, parental support and encouragement had been keys to handling and coping with the conflicts they faced on a regular basis.

Parents, in many cases, were judged to be the best placed to understand and help ILMS. Moreover, they played an important motivational role if they held high (but reasonable) expectations while at the same time providing the resources such as (books, extra attention and tutors) needed to achieve these expectations. Finally, parents served as important role models and inspirations for much of the hard work and determination put in by the students in this study.

Finally, a correlation between parents' social status and educational level certainly has been suggested in the literature (Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1988; Dhesi, 2000). Interestingly, though this question was never asked directly of informants, it is noteworthy to mention that the interviews did hint that the students came from families where parents were highly educated with most of the informants' fathers (and occasionally mothers) holding high level jobs as engineers, businessmen, managers, academics and educators. Nansen reports for example that:

My family, my dad, is a lawyer. My mom also went to university. Surrounded by, you know, uncles and aunts that are professional that way. So, education was regarded as something that is good to do, something that is a way to good. Right, something that was encouraged.

One might therefore add that in addition to the informants' parents' support, one should probably not dismiss their parents' fairly high socio-economic status when trying to explain their academic and social achievement. The resources that were made available to them, the positive attitude towards education and the access to various knowledge (art, travel, languages, music, tutors) are certainly linked to their parents ability to provide these resources and do explain at least in part these students' success.

5.3.2 Success and prior schooling

The findings of this study also showed that prior schooling was important to the academic achievement of ILMS. First, prior schooling experiences did determine students' level of familiarity and proficiency with the English language. Informants confirmed the common sense notion that having received some prior training in English, even if it were limited to grammatical instruction, explained explain why some ILMS did better than others on their arrival in a new school. Furthermore, the value placed on English, and its culture in one's home country, was often internalized by the students. Consequently, prior educational experiences with English also impacted, at least in part, students' attitudes towards English and possibly Canada.

Second, and, perhaps, more interesting was the mention by informants, who arrived at a later age, of the benefits gained from having acquired a high level of academic content in the areas of math and science prior to their arrival to Canada.

According to the informants in this study, coming from a country that taught math and science skills that were two to three years ahead of those taught in similar grades in Canada seemed to help in two ways. First, prior education in certain academic content areas seemed to allow some students to avoid the trap mentioned in the literature of

falling behind in their academic development due to their heavy focus on language learning in their initial years after their arrival (Mohan, 1986; Thomas & Collier, 1997). Despite being pulled out of content classes, such as mathematics and science, in order to attend ESL classes, the informants of this study felt that thanks to their prior education, they did not have to worry as much as others (for whom the academic content was new). Once they “escaped” the ESL class and returned to the content class, catching up on what they had missed while improving their English skills was made easier by the fact that they had studied the academic content previously in their home country.

This effect allowed students to remain on par, if not superior to, fellow classmates in certain content areas. Moreover, the informants in this study revealed that at a time when their confidence and experiences of “success” were diminished, especially when facing the challenges of full blown regular classes, they benefited from the positive confidence building experience of actually being able to excel and show off expertise in an area other than English. This was for them a valuable and rare opportunity to feel “good at something” at a time when most things reminded them how bad they were at English.

It would be interesting to see how important this kind of protective factor might be. What would children from countries with educational systems that taught academic content at equal, or perhaps even inferior levels to that taught in Canadian schools have to say about ESL programs, which pulled them out of math and science classes, which covered content which they had not previously learned? Would they be able to handle as well as the students in this study being pulled-out of for considerable lengths of times from regular content classes? How would they do if they had to face once they were

finally reintegrated into a “normal” program catching up, rather than simply reviewing, all of the missed material? Coelho (1994) suggests that it is exactly the absence of academic cognitive development in their home language due to interruptions in prior schooling experiences that intensify the difficulties faced by refugees arriving in Canadian school systems. In this sense, one might predict an important link between ILMS’s prior academic development in their home country’s school experiences and their consequent academic success in their new country. One might also be able to explain, at least partly, why ILMS from particular countries do seem to tend to do better than others.

These findings suggest that perceptions of self-worth, as created through experiences of success, play an important role in the education of ILMS.

5.3.3 Prior schooling: Using background resources to promote success

In addition to providing the experience of success that was so important in helping them build self-esteem and confidence, being very good at math or science also permitted students to present themselves to others in a different light. Being good at something not only boosted their self image, it also meant that people looked at them differently. These were rare occasions where “regular students” and teachers saw ILMS as students who had something to offer. In so doing, students changed the way people interacted with them by changing the way people perceived what they had to contribute.

Using knowledge acquired in their prior schooling to interest others in interacting with them is a good example of how many of the students used various resources at their disposal from their backgrounds to help them renegotiate their identities in schools. This confirms Norton & Toohey’s (2001) suggestion that the ability to create more powerful identities by putting themselves in situations where the resources they have to offer can

be valued seemed to be important for successful language learners. Another example of this type of identity reinforcement based on resources the students have available to them thanks to their backgrounds was found in the informants use of L1 maintenance as a way to attract and maintain valuable ties with communities from their home countries, as well as way to increase their worth to the Canadian community as speakers of more than one language.

5.3.4 Success and the students' and parents' attitude towards the new school

Almost all of the students in this study, with the exception of two, confirmed that they saw North American schools as an escape from a home country school system that was more demanding both scholastically and psychologically. Maia expressed this sentiment well as she talked of the competition students faced in countries where high populations and limited resources meant that students started competing very early for access to the best schools and universities.

Maia: Yeah, Yeah, I don't know if I'd, uh, where I'd be in China right now... cause it's so competitive. Only about um, like 5 % of all students get to go to university. I think...Don't quote me on that, but think, you know, cause, it's such a huge population, they just can't, they just can't have so many schools for everybody right. So most people, most people would, ummm, I'm not including colleges, but there are colleges, second, second rate schools that you could go to, but yeah, its, its very hard to make it, to a, a, like, prestigious or renown school in China. I don't know where I'd be but that's why I think I'm really lucky cause I'm at, I'm at a western university and, and a lot of people try to get here from like the best school in China right.

This study also revealed that the informants' parents may have also contributed to putting Canadian schools in a positive light since one of the main reasons given by parents to their children for immigrating to Canada was the improved educational opportunity such a move offered.

The fact that the “successful” students interviewed appeared to have been positively predisposed to their Canadian schools may confirm Ogbu’s (1986; 1995; 1998) theory that immigrants that view their *new* schools more positively than the ones they have left behind have a greater chance of achieving academic success. Indeed, despite the difficulties they faced in their new schools, the informants revealed that they and their parents saw the Canadian school system as a desirable/positive alternative, and hence a system which was worth trying to participate in and work with. Moreover, the prestige that a North American education back in their home countries appears to have also helped students and parents approach their new schools positively. This must certainly have helped the informants succeed both academically and socially as they were more likely to see themselves as luckier or better off than their peers back home despite the challenges they faced in their new environment.

I would like to note here the exception of Mari, who never did view Canada or Canadian schools in a positive light. The fact that she did succeed in spite of her opposition to the school suggests that ILMS’ attitude to their new schools may be important, but that is not the only nor perhaps the most important factor in determining academic achievement.

5.3.5 Success as the result of interaction with others

Informants stressed the importance of being able to interact with a variety of people as a key to their academic success. They emphasized, for example, the importance of good relationships with their families and teachers. They also talked about the usefulness of making contact with and becoming active members of their own linguistic community as well as the English community. This was reflected in students’

advice to parents and teachers to get to know each other well, as well as recommendations for other students to get out and get involved through activities such as clubs, volunteering, part-time jobs and contests in their communities.

The implication of these findings is that a great part of the success that these ILMS experienced may have resulted from their ability to create and maintain strong relationships with a wide range of people who could help them face the difficulties of being ILMS. This further confirms the importance of considering the sociocultural nature of language learning and its assumption that to learn a language requires participation in a variety of contexts and activities with a variety of people going far beyond the constraints of the language classroom itself (Duff, 1995; Duff, 2001; Heath, 1983; Ochs, 1988). Consequently, the implication is that patterns of language use and/or patterns of social interaction must be of concern for all interested in the academic achievement of ILMS.

Schools and parents need to actively seek ways to help ILMS build healthy strong relationships. This is, of course, no easy task. There are many factors that make each relationship unique, not the least of which are the individuals and contexts involved. Having said this, once again, I stress the need to look for localized solutions that would take into account the specific sociocultural characteristics of each case. With this in the mind, however, I would like to offer the following suggestions as possible starting points of discussion rather than definitive answers.

First, the findings suggest that allowing and/or encouraging the use of ILMS' native tongues and cultures to interact and build relationships with others, appears to have been very beneficial. The ability to use their native languages to talk and express

themselves helped ILMS build confidence and make their first friends. Moreover, it helped them maintain their native languages and cultures, consequently, easing communication with and strengthening their ties with their families and first language communities. Perhaps most importantly, in the first days of their adjustment, it helped them break through the wall of silence and misunderstanding that could make them feel like, as Maia put it, "Helen Keller".

Maia: And I just started... freaking out....I had temper tantrums...Just cause like the first six months I was here, I couldn't understand anything...I felt likeHelen Keller...you know...like...just so isolated...and couldn't communicate with anyone...and couldn't really make any friends, because like...they couldn't understand and I couldn't understand them...I just felt so...defensive towards everybody..right

The implication is that ILMS native languages and cultures must be seen as resources rather than sources of problems when dealing with ILMS' education, and that room for these must be made in the class. For parents, this stresses the importance of adding to ILMS' native languages and cultures rather than simply replacing them with English by maintaining home language use and possibly, home language schooling.

Second, and perhaps more difficult, is trying to ensure that ILMS have opportunities to interact meaningfully with native English speakers. This implies much more, as recommended by Lora, then simply reminding ILMS of the importance of talking with English native speakers. Schools and parents have to address the fact that due to feelings of inferiority, as well as the existence of language and cultural barriers, that it is simply not easy to make friends with "regular students".

Lora: Yeah it's, it's just like, I can always remember they tell us to make more friends with Caucasian people with Canadians right, but they just tell us they don't show, they don't show us how right. You know it's really difficult. Even if like you say "hi" to the Canadian people or the other speak, English speaking people right, they might just say "hi" to you and that's it right (laugh). 'cause

they, they know you're ESL students, yeah. Lots of them they wouldn't, even you know it's not like they're bad or anything, they're nice too, but they know you don't speak English like, at that time, you're just, you're learning, they don't want to spend the time like, talking slowly to you, yeah it really depends on person to person right. So I would suggest the teacher like, to find some Canadian, who are willing to do like talk to us, yeah, who are willing to like learn from us to. Maybe they want to learn Chinese too right. Yep, that'll be a good idea. Yeah cus', it's really hard to meet someone or to find someone who's willing to like learn English slowly with you right, they just want to make friends with you but make friends is ok like "hi", "hello" like next time you see them "hi how are you " right, but after that, that's it (laugh).

Schools need to take a more active approach than simply waiting for people with different languages and cultures to interact naturally. Rather, interaction is much more likely to require careful planning and effort on the part of all involved. For schools this may involve evaluating whether students are indeed interacting or whether they tend to be segregated, and taking steps to organize activities that might bring both ILMS and various Native English speakers together. School trips in the community, guest speakers, common sports, clubs, and shared social outside the school, language exchanges (as suggested by Lora) and peer-tutoring (ex. An ILMS helps a student with their math while the native English student helps the ILMS with his or her English) are some of the things which helped ILMS in this study make the connection with English native speakers which could serve as examples to follow.

Based on the data collected in this study, schools would do well to pay greater attention to the impact on social interaction of even the smallest details such as the physical distance of ILMS' classes from the rest of the school. This issue was well illustrated by Robert's references to his high school's parking lot and the way that it served to reflect and possibly reinforce the division between ILMS and native English students as represented by the types of cars they drove and where they parked them

(ILMS from Hong Kong in his school tended to drive more expensive cars than those driven by native students).

Robert: And so, even if you looked at our parking lot, you can tell it, because we had our own grad parking lot for grade twelve students, and the, we had the path right in the middle. The north would be all, uh, beat-up, beat-up 70's Chevy, and, and so on, and on the south we would have all the luxury cars.

Interviewer: Wow.

Robert: So, so that, there, there you can tell immediately.

Interviewer: So even the students did park, they would purposely park in different...

Robert: Yeah, I mean I don't know when it started but, by the time I got to grade 12, that, that was what was happening. And so, language wasn't the only segregating factor, but, in my case, people, people were all nice. I, I, I detected no hint of, of racism or discrimination, because of your nationality, your race or, your linguistic problems. But just that, when you have different languages here, different cultural backgrounds, you just tend to, like go, separate ways.

It would also be interesting to explore in further detail the different types of social interactions which are offered by the elementary school settings VS the secondary school settings to confirm the informants intuition that elementary schools provide greater ease and opportunity for students to interact in a variety of ways than the secondary schools setting do.

Finally, I would remind teachers and administrators that it is not only ILMS students who need to be taught explicitly how to interact with Native English speakers as mentioned by Lora, but also that, as suggested by Spindler & Spindler (2000) among others, some kind of cultural sensitivity training aimed at improving relations between students of diverse cultures would be good for all members of the school community, including the Native English students and the teachers themselves.

5.4 Why worry about interactions? The dangers of isolation and alienation

Why should schools worry about language use/and or patterns of social interactions in their schools? One could answer this question by heeding the warnings given by the informants of this study when they speculated about the various reasons which led so many of their fellow ILMS to fail and dropout.

They seemed painfully aware of the challenges that could limit their interactions (shyness, group pressure, astronaut families, feelings of inferiority), but all felt that the failure to overcome these challenges had a far greater price to pay than facing these difficulties. Informants warned that students who failed to interact and create relationships with others (especially with native English speakers), despite their best efforts, would have a much harder job of achieving academically and integrating in their new society due to a growing sense of isolation and alienation. They warned that it was easy for ILMS to start to feel very alone in their communities and/or their schools. For some students these feelings resulted from being left to survive on their own, with no parents to look after them. Informants also pointed to the feelings of alienation and segregation that resulted from the perception of ESL classes as “jails” which keep them separated from the rest of the school community, or the simple inability to make friends due to linguistic and cultural barriers.

This loneliness could eventually have terrible consequences if it led to a distancing oneself as much as possible from the culture and the language to which the painful feelings of rejection were associated. As a result some ILMS, according to the informants, became less and less interested in English language and culture since it belonged to the community that had rejected them. This, of course, created a vicious

circle as the more distance a student took from the English language and culture, the more likely he/she would be to become more isolated from the school community, and its larger community. This would further perpetuate a progressive cycle of isolation, resulting in a total lack of interest in the school, academic failure, dropping out, which would lead to more isolation and at its worse, extreme distress and despair. One might note here that the literature is full of examples of the extreme consequences that this cycle can have, including drug abuse and even thoughts and/or attempts of suicide (Cummins, 1996; Gunderson, 2001a; 2001b).

5.5 Reflections on the importance of effort as a key component of success

It was interesting, that of all the things mentioned by the students, they would list individual effort as the main component of success for ILMS. This could be interpreted literally as meaning that, indeed, the individual effort of ILMS plays the greatest role in their academic achievement and social integration. However, this would seem contrary to the heavy emphasis this author has put, until now, on the sociocultural factors surrounding the academic achievement of ILMS. Consequently, I felt it was important to interpret this result more carefully.

Though I do not deny that individual effort and determination may have an important role to play, I propose that the informants' emphasis on the value of effort in their explanations of success may have also been a reflection of the myths and values surrounding explanations of success that existed in their cultures and communities. The view of success as the fruit of personal effort has been discussed in the literature before by researchers such as Stevenson & Stigler (1992), who suggest that different cultures have different myths or stories to help their members explain success. They consequently

suggest that the academic achievement of any student cannot truly be understood without first understanding the success myth on which it is based on. In the case of Asian cultures for example, Stevenson & Stigler propose that success tends to be explained as the fruit of personal effort.

Researchers such as Trueba (1989) and Ogbu (1995) have also pointed out that North American schools tend to emphasize the responsibility of the individual for his or her performance while downplaying (deliberately?) the roles that the school and society itself have to play on the academic achievement of their students. Seen in this perspective, it is not surprising to find that the students in this study might see their individual effort as the key to their success.

I would myself question the informants' proposition that effort was the main factor influencing ILMS' academic success. Though this may have been what was said explicitly, I propose that this type of discourse relieves schools, parents and communities too conveniently of the responsibility they have in the successful academic and social integration of these students. It also fails to satisfactorily explain the low number of ILMS who are achieving in schools these days. Researchers such as Bempechat (1998) have generally found that if there was one thing that most ILMS and their parents had in common, it was a sincere desire to do well and try their best. Surely, if effort were the key, more ILMS would be succeeding. Moreover, it is interesting to note that it would probably have been very hard for many of the informants in this study to sustain their effort without the support of some of the more implicit sociocultural elements mentioned above (parental support, financial resources, a positive attitude to the school, and strong relationships with a variety of friends, teachers, and community members). If one agrees

that the successful education of ILMS is not simply an individual affair on their part, then it appears it would be wise for schools, parents and communities to remind ILMS that they do not have to carry the full responsibility of their academic and social achievement on their shoulders.

For ILMS this may have the beneficial consequence of lightening the already heavy burden of challenges they already have to face. For parents, teachers and schools this would mean realizing that they must take an active role in these children's lives if they truly want them to succeed. Success is a collective effort they must engage in with ILMS. As mentioned in the interviews, parents and teachers alike must remember that they represent important role models, resources and source of personal worth for ILMS in the times of difficulty they are almost certain to meet. Parents, schools and teachers must be present, interested, encouraging and most importantly aware and understanding of the difficulties faced by these students due to the complex situation in which they find themselves.

5.6 Paying attention to students' definitions of success

Understanding how students explain success or failure and the origins of these explanations can be extremely revealing. Examples of some of the definitions of success/failure expressed by the ILMS in this study include the following:

- Individual effort is key to success
- Success is defined as the ability to make oneself a better person
- Success is defined as achieving financial wealth
- Success depends on our friends
- Success depends on our families

- Graduating from the ESL classroom is a sign of success
- Not graduating from the ESL classroom quickly is a sign of failure

This chapter has already explored some of these in the above discussion, but I believe that the last two are good examples of why schools must pay attention to these definitions of success.

This study revealed that many ILMS students defined success and failure at one point in their school experience in a rather limited way as “escaping from ESL”. Apparently, little of what happened in the ESL class itself, the friends made, the language learned or even the increasing ease with the new culture appeared to count very much. Rather, the *true* success was measured by the act of exiting the program only.

It is interesting to note the arbitrary nature of this definition. Though one might understand why graduating from an ESL program could be seen as a positive thing, one might question, for example, what kind of real evidence supports the idea that remaining longer in an ESL class should represent failure. There are, after all, many good reasons why some students would have to spend more than a year in an ESL program (the literature does suggest that the average language learner will take from 7 to 10 years to master a language (Collier, 1989)). It could even be argued that the ESL class should be perceived as a positive place of success, since it allows students to perfect the very skills they need to develop greater ease and confidence when interacting with the rest of the school. The reality, however, is simply that this is not the definition that has been adopted by students or parents. Based on the legitimate assumption that the ultimate goal of language education should be the ability to participate fully in it's community, students have opted to focus on the restrictive aspects of the ESL class as a sign of failure.

As mentioned by the informants, one *cannot* understate the importance that “feeling like a failure” can have on the academic development and social integration of students. This study revealed how this particular definition of success impacted in a negative way on students’ and parents’ perceptions of themselves, their progress, and their school program. Consequently, schools and anyone else interested in helping ILMS must pay careful attention to the way success is portrayed in schools. The consequences of these definitions are important and must be considered seriously. They must identify consciously the definitions of success/failure used by students and ask themselves if these definitions are realistic and/or desirable for ILMS. If, as mentioned by the students in this study, extended stays in ESL programs lead to students hating English and themselves because they come to see themselves as failures, schools, teachers and parents must take action to try and recreate new definitions of success, which will include the many students who through no fault of their own have to spend longer amounts of time in ESL programs.

5.7 Conclusion

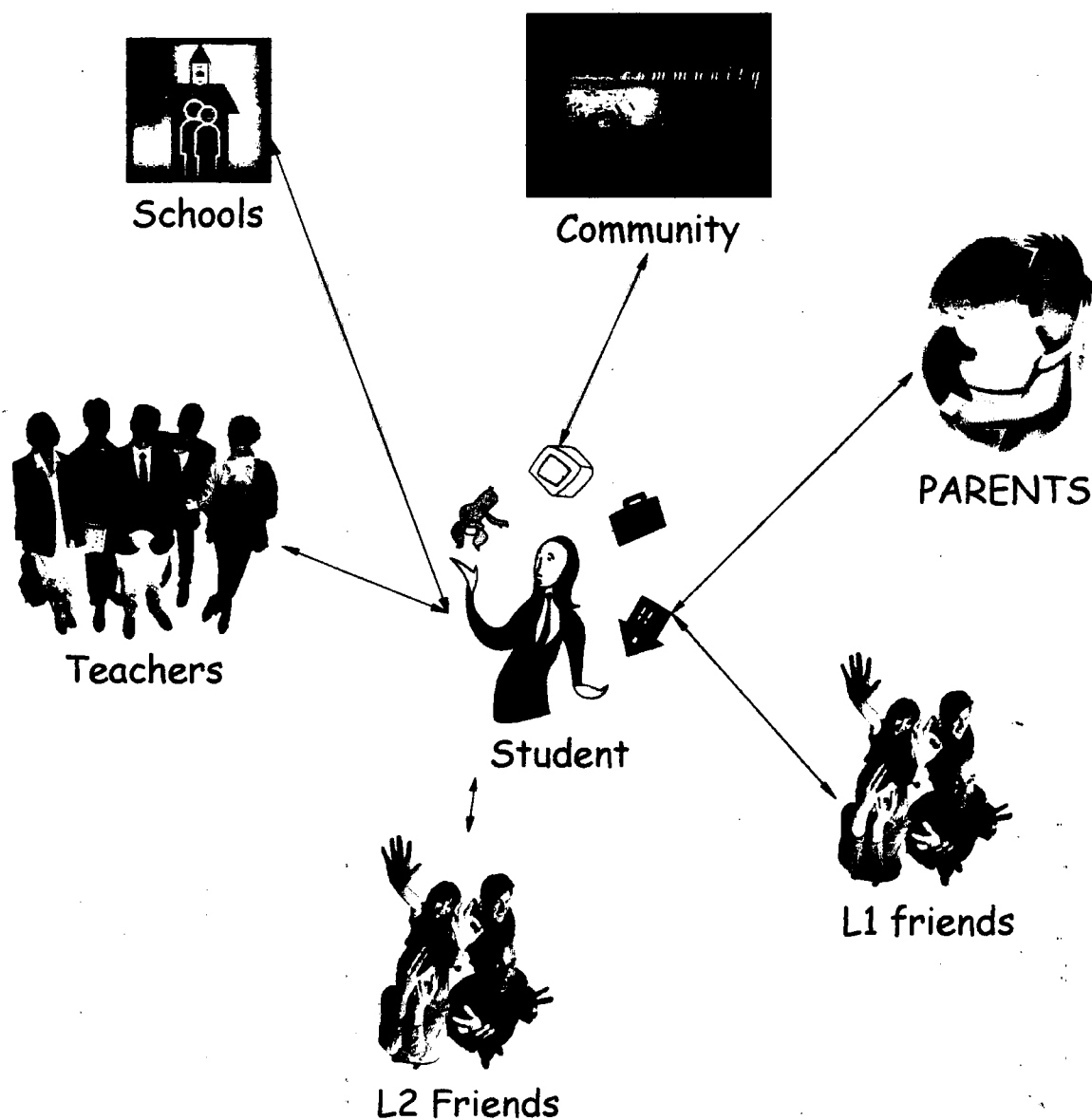
As we begin this new century it has become evident that it will be marked with a cultural and linguistic diversity that will become more prevalent in North American schools. Consequently, one of the big challenges of this new century will be to strive to improve on our record with regards to the education of ILMS.

Fifteen ILMS participated in this study and have provided some hints that may help us prepare for this challenge. This chapter has argued that ILMS face unique conflicts as they enter a new school and that the resolution of these conflicts is not only dependent on their linguistic ability, but also on their social and cultural backgrounds and

how they build and interpret relationships while interacting with the various people and resources that surround them. In essence this research presents a picture of the successful ILMS as a central member of an extremely complicated juggling act which requires effort and determination but that also relies on many others for its success (see fig. 5.1).

Like a multi-person juggling act, the education of ILMS combines a series of complex motions that require constant adjustment and maintenance, and that is essentially difficult to predict or control with any degree of certainty. In order to preserve and develop (“keep in the air”) in a balanced way the multiple languages, resources, cultures that form their identities, and which lead to academic achievement the ILMS must count on various people to help them. Parents, schools, teachers, friends and the wider community must all play a role. Above all like juggling, the education of ILMS requires a willingness to participate and a good relationships with all those involve if success is to be achieved.

Fig. 5.1: ILMS as a juggler



This research has convinced me that understanding ILMS' academic achievement will require a greater understanding of the specific backgrounds and sociocultural elements that surround them and the way in which they interact with them. The goal should be to identify those background resources and interactions that are the most beneficial for the students and to look for ways to further promote them in the future.

There is a need for more detailed longitudinal ethnographic case studies of ILMS academic journeys through a school would allow one to confirm this study's analysis of ILMS' experiences by observing directly how various sociocultural elements come together, how students react to them and their potential long term impact on their lives. To do this, one could follow, for example, immigrant language minority students in their school environments over a period of time to observe and study the types of relationships they establish, and the impact of these relationships on their social and academic achievement. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, such studies could investigate the importance of prior academic development through prior schooling, those background resources which can help students strengthen their identities, the origins of perceptions success and failure in ILMS, as well as the kind of activities that may help parents and teachers bring together more effectively ILMS and home language *and* native English speakers in a meaningful and positive way. Moreover, it would be interesting for future studies to not only consider "successful" learners, but also some of the less "successful" language minority student in an attempt to understand the forces affecting their social and academic achievement (Gunderson, in press).

This author hopes that this study has succeeded in raising important questions and valuable advice with regards to the education of the ILMS. This study has confirmed that the education of ILMS is a complicated matter that touches much more than the students themselves, or even their schools. Parents, schools, fellow students and all members of the community have a role to play. It is hoped that further research will provide ways for all of these elements to come together and provide students with the chances they deserve to *all* become successful students.

CHAPTER VI: REFLECTIONS ON LOUIS' THESIS

Introduction

This research is the result of collaborative effort with Louis Chen, another Master's student in the department of Language and Literacy Education. Over the months Louis and I collected similar data through a shared methodology. These were then analyzed independently from both of our perspectives to produce two unique, yet, similar theses.

For this researcher, this somewhat unconventional approach to research for a Masters thesis had many benefits. Louis and I developed a strong friendship over the months that was a great source of support as we worked through the various stages of the research. Moreover our partnership gave us the chance to share and discuss ideas and tasks on a daily basis in the initial stages of the research, in a way that is rarely done when doing individual research. This constant exchange helped us clarify ideas and kept us challenged to always try to consider as many perspectives as possible. This exchange continues today, as I would like to write about one last benefit presented by this approach: the pleasure enjoyed when having finally finished writing separately the first five chapters of our respective theses, we were able to exchange documents to read, compare and reflect on what each part of the whole we formed had accomplished.

As I read Louis' thesis, and gained in the process a peek into his mind and the way he had interpreted the data, I was allowed to gain a fresh perspective on the topic of this research while at the same time verifying to a certain extent whether or not my intuitions about the main messages I had identified in the students' interviews and surveys truly were the kind of intuitions another researcher would agree with. This

second thesis felt a little for me like a mirror of sorts. By looking into it, I was offered a point of comparison that allowed me to come to a greater understanding of what my own thesis might look like to others.

This chapter is meant to be a synthesized record of some of the major ideas and comments generated as a result of looking into this mirror. The following sections will comment on each chapter in turn and look at what were some of the biggest similarities and differences as well as relevant points were for both theses.

6.1 Chapter I

Louis' introductory chapter in its similarities to mine reveals in many ways the reasons why this research quickly brought us together. Both Louis and I share a strong interest in the journey of immigrant language minority students (ILMS) in North American schools. We were interested in learning more about what it takes to not only learn another language, but also through that language, enter a new world, and in the process be transformed by oneself and others into one of its members. Louis was interested in the experiences of social adaptation integration while my focus included both academic achievement and its links to social adaptation and integration. Deciding to combine our efforts was an easy decision. Our goal, as expressed in our first chapters, was the same: to find ways and/or start a discussion about the ways to help many more ILMS make their journey of transition from one country and school system into another a successful one.

This journey was one that both Louis and I approached with a great sense of the difficulties and hardships it presented to ILMS. This belief was rooted in the literature's sad report of ILMS failure in schools but also in personal experiences. This is a truth that

is better revealed in Louis' chapter than in mine. Louis adds in his chapter a candid retelling of his own experiences as an ILMS. I believe Louis is right to be honest in presenting his story early in the thesis. In a sense it was one aspect of Louis' chapter that I enjoyed the most. I felt that by identifying himself as an ILMS, Louis was legitimizing this research and his ability to tell the story of other ILMS in a way that simply referring to the literature could not.

Louis's candid revelation of his own personal vested interest in the well being of ILMS reminded me that I also had a much less theoretical interest in the matter myself. I regretted that I had not told readers earlier that, though I had not immigrated to Canada at a young age, my parents had been immigrants to this country from France. Speaking only French at home, I consequently, had also been a language minority student in an English school where like the informants of this study, I had also had to learn and adapt to a new wor(l)d. This is something that readers need to know for it did strongly influence my choice of this research topic and the way in which it was researched.

In truth, I realize as I write these very words that, in part, what we were doing in planning and executing this research was in no small part telling our own stories: stories of hardships, challenges and successes, and seeking to learn from them. As language educators, minority students, future parents of minority language students, we were well motivated to look for the answers to the questions we asked. On a more unconscious level, perhaps we recognized, deep inside, that in view of the odds out there, that we had been lucky and that this was perhaps a chance to return the favour by trying to help others like us.

6.2 Chapter II

In many ways, chapter two, for both our theses, offered slightly different routes to argue similar positions about the present state of research in the field of the education of language minority students. I offered what I now feel to be a more general history of what challenges the field has had to face as well as some of the different research approaches that had been suggested in the literature, while Louis, on the other hand, was more specific in his choice of relevant topics related to the socialization of language learners. We both based our research in a literature that suggests that paying attention to the social, cultural and political factors involved in the education of ILMS is crucial for anyone interested in helping them achieve. Like me, Louis refers for example to Ogbu's (1995) focus on the impact that socio-cultural factors such as the country of origin and the reasons motivating immigration to a new country have on the relationship ILMS forge with their new schools. Both of us also looked to authors such as Duff (1997, 2001), Gunderson (2000), Norton (1997) and Ogbu (1995) who argue that the solutions to the challenges seen in the education of ILMS today lie in remembering that ILMS need to do much more than simply acquire competence with the linguistic features of the majority language. Going to school as an ILMS must be understood to be a complex socialization process into a new culture and society, whose dynamics involve contributions, interchanges and reactions to these by both learners and the members of the language community to be entered.

For both Louis and me, the implication is that ignoring the reality about the socio-cultural and political nature of ILMS education may be directly linked to the psychological distress, insecurity, loneliness and frustration reported by ILMS in schools

today (Gunderson, 2000). Our chapters therefore draw on the literature to conceptualize the education of ILMS as a site of cultural conflict where part of becoming successful lies in being able to create a self or identity with the resources available that can reconcile one's home cultures, languages and social values with those of the majority.

Though we were not suggesting anything new, we both felt that this vision of what happens when ILMS entered a majority language school system required a wider and more social/complex range of data than what had been originally collected in the past. It also required listening and learning from the experiences of the students involved. This justified in our opinions our research interests and the research design we adopted: as we aimed to get more information through qualitative interviews about the extra (socio-cultural) stuff which may have played a determining role in the lives of (so-called) successful students from the Greater Vancouver region.

Where Louis and I differed, perhaps, was in his focus on literature dealing with one particular ethnic group: the Asian ILMS and what it had to say about the difficulties they faced in North American institutions. Specifically, Louis points to what he sees as crucial cultural differences between the East and the West (Zia 2000; Tuan, 1998 as cited in Louis, 2002) idealized in his example of the cultural conflicts which pit Asian ILMS in a war against their parents expectations of what true success in the new country should be.

I did not review this literature for two reasons. It first has to do with a difference in our methodological approaches which, I will explain in further detail in my discussion of Louis' chapter three. The second reason, has to do with my difficulties grouping together, as he did, ILMS under the label of "Asian" students. I find it difficult to clearly define what the term Asian means. Does it include North Asians such as Russian and

Indian students as well as North and South-East Asians such as Japanese and Chinese students? What about the fact that some groups like the Taiwanese and Hong Kong students might want to be considered differently from each other for example? I am, perhaps, too cautious here, but I find the term too large and fuzzy and am uneasy about its usefulness as a way to generate common cultural explanations for members of communities I perceive to be unique and distinct cultures, despite their similar origins.

Moreover, I instinctively feel that there is a danger of oversimplification in literature that focuses heavily on the general culture that ILMS come from as a cause of the identity conflicts they face in North American school systems. To do so in my opinion does not allow culture(s) to have the fluid and ever-changing, personal and contextualized nature that I would like it to have (see the definition of culture offered in the introductory chapter of this thesis). This is something I will discuss in further detail when talking about the findings and discussion chapters of our theses.

6.3 Chapter III

The very nature of our collaborative enterprise in doing this type of research together meant that our methodology chapters were almost identical. Louis and I also described a methodology centred on the use of the qualitative interview as a powerful research tool. There are some differences though. I liked the way in which Louis framed his methodology better than mine. Whereas I framed our methodology as inspired by the schools of educational anthropology and ethnographies, in retrospect, I believe Louis was, perhaps, more accurate in describing what actually happened as essentially encouraging our participants to tell us their stories or narratives. Though we did follow the format of an interview, I believe the transcripts reveal that the informants did much more than

simply answer our questions. They shared with us the ways in which they had weaved their experiences and perceptions of their educational experiences as ILMS into their life stories and success myths.

Despite the similarities, however, one crucial difference must be stressed which I believe may have had a considerable impact on our final analysis of the results obtained. It is interesting to note that Louis' study ultimately involved a total of fourteen informants, while my study refers to fifteen. This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that at the very end of our data collection stage, Louis and I were contacted by Nansen, a UBC student presently enrolled in the Faculty of Education in the Teacher Education program. Nansen, like so many of other participants seemed eager to participate in this study and share his experiences and advice for future researchers, teachers, students and parents. After meeting Nansen, however, we realized that he did not exactly fit into the category of informants that we had originally determined for the study. It turned out that Nansen had not actually experienced being an "ESL student" in the Greater Vancouver area. On the other hand, he had experienced coming to Canada as an international student and had attended University in Canada before immigrating to this country from Ecuador. He had in this sense experienced life as an ILMS though, obviously, in a very different way. What made Nansen very interesting, however, was that at the time we met him, he was just about to become a music teacher as well as an "ESL teacher" in the Surrey area of Greater Vancouver. Nansen had also previously experienced working with "ESL kids" as a substitute teacher and during his practicum.

Essentially, Louis and I were faced with an important research decision. On one hand, we could choose to add Nansen to the fourteen other informants we had

interviewed up to that time, this despite the fact that he did not truly match the characteristics of the original informants we had advertised for. Or, on the other hand, we could choose not to use Nansen in this study. Interestingly, since time was running out, we decided to interview Nansen together, following the same procedure as with other students and asking only slightly modified questions to adjust the interview to his different starting point into the Canadian educational system. The idea was that once the interview was done, we could always take our time to decide if we would use his interview or not in our own final analysis. The decision would be an individual one.

In the end, I decided to include Nansen's interview in my data set. Essentially, in spite of his difference from the rest of the informants, I believed he had interesting things to say that needed to be added to this research. Yes, he had not truly experienced like others in the study life as an "ESL student", but he had experienced teaching in it, and he also had spent much of the last six months thinking, writing and discussing about the situation of ILMS as part of his training. Furthermore, I felt Nansen represented a rare kind of ESL teacher. Not only had he been recently trained and would, therefore, be able to offer some insights about the kind of preparation teachers were getting at UBC, but he also was one of those rare ESL teachers who had actually done "successfully" what he was asking his students to do. Nansen had experienced what it was like to be a second language learner. This was something that he stressed in his very first meeting with us. This he felt gave him a special understanding of the situation and the students that others might not have. I agreed with this and this heavily influenced my decision to include him in the study.

There was one more important reason which motivated me to include Nansen. Nansen was the only non-Asian student to respond to our recruiting poster. As mentioned earlier in this study, I had been weary of using the informants' home cultures as the only explanation for what had happened to them. In this sense, Nansen represented, for me, a chance to see if some of the ideas that would be derived from fourteen Asian-background ILMS would also be reflected in the comments of a Hispanic-background ILMS.

Interestingly, Louis, in the end, chose not to include Nansen in his study. He respected the original criteria that we had set ourselves and limited himself solely to the experiences and stories of those students who had experienced ESL programs in the Greater Vancouver area. I respect this decision very much. I would like to note nevertheless that this missing Hispanic student may have (had he been included) changed some of Louis final analysis. This is a point that will be developed in greater detail in the following discussions of chapter four: findings and chapter 5: results and implications.

6.4 Chapter IV

I will be honest and admit that as soon as I obtained a copy of Louis' thesis that I quickly skipped the first three chapters in order to rush to Chapter IV: the findings section of his thesis to answer the question that had been haunting me most of the summer as I analyzed and interpreted the data alone. Would he see the same things that I did in the data? Would he agree with what I had said? Would I agree with him? More importantly, what would the answers to these questions say about us and the research? What I discovered amazed me? Yes we did find similar things but like two painters painting the same flower, we had painted our pictures quite differently. In this next

section I would like to address some of the most striking elements of Louis' findings which either agreed, surprised, highlighted, and/or disagreed with my findings.

6.4.1 Similarities

In general, I was happy to find that Louis and I had reported similar themes as a result of our qualitative analyses. We had both approached this research with similar questions, looking for those characteristics of successful students' lives that had had the greatest impact on their "success".

We agreed, for example, that actually being able to define what made a successful student would be a lot fuzzier than we had anticipated as we both found that students used varying and occasionally contradictory definitions of what they identified as the factors behind the makings of a successful ILMS. Louis found like me that for the most part the definitions offered in this study by the informants appeared to vary from person to person and context to context. This proved, perhaps, the complex and potentially contradictory nature of success and suggested that success, like culture, perhaps, should not be seen as a fixed thing, but rather as a fluid entity determined in large part by the context surrounding it and the person it is being applied to.

Despite this qualitative shadiness, we both found that the interviews we had conducted did suggest some major themes and advice about academic and social achievement for ILMS. Both of us found that the students had indicated that their original experiences in their home countries had had an impact; from their previous experiences with English, to their general educational experience. These had in their opinions helped determine their outlooks on English and their new host countries as well as their study strategies. We also both stressed what we felt was the crucial role of the

immigration experience itself, and the considerable impact that its hardships and stress put on the ILMS in our study, especially in their first years in their new country. It was seen to impact principally on their attitudes to their school, their self-esteem, their ability to socialize and their academic performance. We also both stressed the important role that strong connections to one's family and home country and native cultures and languages played in the students' journeys from one world to another. I point out the fact that these connections were often essential support networks for the students. Louis points out the conflict between the parents' culture and the informants' emerging cultures, and the pressure informants feel when asked to conform to cultural expectations which differed, or contradicted those found in other areas of society they inhabited (i.e. school, etc...). Finally, both of us found that once in Canada, the actual school experience had also been determining. Two important themes are repeated in both theses with regards to the informants' experiences: the paradoxical nature of the way ESL programs are perceived by ILMS and the importance of the social forces at work in the school itself.

Louis and I found that for the ILMS in this study saw ESL classes in contradictory ways. Louis mentions as I do the opposite desires that were reported by our informants. On one hand, the desire to stay in the ESL class which was more comfortable and more conducive to establishing social friendships and support networks, amongst teachers more sensitive to their needs than regular class teachers and fellow classmates with whom common backgrounds were much more likely to exist than in any other classes. On the other hand, there is the burning desire to escape the ESL class whose effectiveness is questioned, as it is perceived to be a force holding back the students through its segregating effect and limited chances of exit.

We both saw that these paradoxical forces went beyond the ESL classroom and also applied in the wider school context, where interaction with native English speakers was perceived by student to be both desired and yet also resisted by most ILMS.

Interaction with non-native speakers from the same background was suggested to be important and useful, yet at the same time liable to impede on a students ability to learn the English language and, therefore, achieve academically. I strongly agree with Louis here who points to that greatest of social pressures: the desire to fit-in and belong to a community as a major force acting these contradictory findings. My findings strongly support Louis' findings that the ILMS in this study had difficulties fitting into a school designed for majority culture and language learners and that they at times created their own communities where they could fit-in.

Finally, both our findings pointed to the similar personal individual characteristics that had been identified by students as important to their success. In reporting students' advice to others we both find characteristics such as: the ability to remain open to the other majority culture and perhaps more importantly the ability to remain determined and hardworking enough to bridge cultural and linguistic in spite of the hardships such as discrimination, isolation and misunderstanding. This is accompanied with the advice for teachers, parents and students alike to strive to build an understanding and supporting network which allows access to resources from the majority language community such as books, television programs and teachers, all while maintaining ties with their home language and culture.

6.4.2 Differences

Despite the similarities there were a few points where I felt that our interpretations of the data differed. I found it interesting to note that Louis had focused more explicitly on the concept of identity than I did. This was not a concept that I referred to as much, though his ideas resemble my focus on the importance of self-worth, as I looked at the important effects that segregation, self-doubt and the choice of social interactions could have on the way the students saw themselves. What I liked, however, about Louis' discussion of this concept was his interesting point that none can really live in the absence of experiences which will help them develop their identities, and that one will naturally seek, and find opportunities to build identities, though these may end up being different from what was originally intended by either parents, or schools (as in the example of some of the students who developed a Cantonese identity in the absence of experiences which would allow them to develop a Canadian identity). This was, I felt a very important point to make.

I felt that if Louis findings differed from mine, it was in their focus. Louis focused perhaps more on the ESL programs, the students themselves and the impact of their families and their obligation to their families as key factors in the education of ILMS. This is not a huge difference, but I feel it would be important to also attempt to include in a wider view of the experiences of the ILMS by also referring to wider social contexts such as the school and the "regular classes" and their friends and native English speaking interactions which also made-up an important part of these students' lives.

6.4.2.1 How truly limited were their interactions?

This different interpretation, may perhaps be explained by a difference in the way we reported the data provided in the interviews. In his chapter, for example, Louis argues that all the ILMS in these interviews were for the most part socializing with peers from their own cultural and linguistic backgrounds. He sees this as an important social activity that occurred best in ESL classes, and in the students families. This explains, I believe, his focus on these contexts. I would argue however that in actuality not all of the ILMS limited their social interactions in such a way. I agree with Louis that the sentiment of wanting to fit-in was a strong factor in the students choice of actions as students. I also agree that common grounds did make it easier for ILMS to socialize and fit in to communities from their own ethnic background, however, I also believe that despite the barriers that limited their access to native-English speakers, the interviews do suggest that interaction with native-English speakers and members from other cultural communities did occur more often than it is implied in Louis' findings. This is a question of detail, but whereas I agree with Louis' suggestion on page 49 that there was a "tendency to interact exclusively with friends that shared the same ESL experiences", I would disagree with the message that most of these participants seemed "to interact mostly with peers from ESL programs" (p. 65) only. In my opinion there is sufficient evidence in the statements of students such as Beth, Celeste and Mark to propose that in actuality one of characteristic that may have helped these students stand-out from other ILMS who may not have been so successful, may have been their ability to resist the "tendency to interact mostly with ESL peers" and actually find ways to interact with a wider variety of people including some native English speakers.

6.4.2.2 How truly important were their families?

In another case of what I feel to be a difference in focus, a large part of Louis' findings centers on the crucial role that informants' parents had in determining their definitions of what it meant to be successful. This is one point where I felt that our findings differed slightly. On one hand both our findings suggest that ILMS' families do have a very important role to play in their social and academic success and my findings do place the presence of a supporting family as one of the strongest recommendations that the ILMS in this study gave for success. I am not sure however, if I would agree that "students' perceptions were *mainly* defined by the academic standards set by family members" (p. 33).

It was my interpretation of the data, that yes, parents did indeed play an important role in determining the students' perceptions of success. Students did mention that they felt that parents and siblings had been a source of motivation or pressure. I also agree with Louis that for the informants in this study knowing that their family's reason for moving to Canada had been to provide them with a better education did affect the way that they approached school. Indeed, the work and sacrifice involved by "the move" and the fact that it was done "for them", placed extra pressure on the students, and perhaps, motivated them more strongly to succeed, in order to pay back, or fulfill a sense of duty the students feel towards their families and more specifically their parents. However, despite these findings, I feel more hesitant than Louis in arguing that parents were indeed the "main source of the students' perceptions". First, I believe the data suggests that friends, previous school experience, contact with Canadian cultures, brothers and sisters, teachers, employers, social pressure and the development of their own identities over

time also had a great deal to do with their definitions of success. Second, there was is evidence that in some cases these other social forces led some informants like Ani to actually question the definitions of success imposed on them by their parents, hence implying that their perceptions of success differed from those of their parents.

Ani: Yeah as I said my dad forces me to study all the time, and mainly because, actually my dad always feeds me with this like, "you're Taiwanese, you should succeed in Canada, so people in Canada would look at Taiwan as like, a better country", or something. But then actually I don't really believe in that...

Moreover, many of the definitions of what they believed to be a successful student given by the informants did not in my opinion always match the traditional "Asian definition" offered by Louis: i.e. to achieve a high level of education and job status to later be able to care for one's parents. Definitions offered by informants also involved what I felt to be very intrinsic standards and/or North American values: i.e. being successful because one is doing what one wants to do, or being successful because one has given back to society, or being successful because one could participate in society, rather than simply externally defined standards originating from their parents. Mari, for example, talks about the success cannot be measured by marks and academic achievement alone and which sounds very "North American" in its strong emphasis on individual self-development.

Mari: Well I think, to me is, uh, I think the mental development is more important than, any just you know, academic uh, knowledge. Cus', cus' I mean in the world today you can basically get information everywhere, everywhere and anywhere. Yeah, so basically I think university education for me, uh, cus' I mean everybody can just, cram and the text book 2 days before final, and then do the final and you know do good at it and then you know forget about it right? Everybody does that kind of thing you know, I obviously do. But the matter is how to, not to totally memorizing all the information that you've learned but, how to analyze it critically and you know and, and, that's the first step and then you know

try to u, development your own argument around it you know that's. That's the skill that university taught me uh, for all these years. So I think uh, a good uni, a successful student is not just based on if how many A's you're getting, or you know or, or, or how many easy credit courses that you're taking...I think success is measured not on, on, not like on a few numbers or anything, but it's on the person and how they have developed themselves to be, yeah to be, what they are.

Finally, even if one recognizes the important role of parents, I wonder if indeed their main attribute was that of a source of pressure and obligation for the students. My findings suggest that parents were often more than simply a source of pressure. They were also a source of support, family love, self-esteem and inspiration. These are findings that Louis does not talk about, but which I believe should also be considered.

6.4.3. An interesting difference in perspective

I will end by commenting on what I felt was one interesting difference I noted in the way Louis and I approached the similar topics of social integration and academic achievement. It was as I first read Louis' chapter four that I realized that Louis and I seemed to have understood the relationship between academic achievement and social integration or achievement (as I would say it in my words) differently. Louis states in his introductory paragraph (p. 33): "In pursuing the answers to this general question, this study sought to understand students' own perceptions of the affects of the following significant factors: participants' academic achievement, participants' background, participants' ESL experiences and immigration process, and participants' views on identity." In other words, I was surprised to notice that Louis seemed to propose that academic achievement was a "significant factor" which impacted on social integration.

I took me a little while to understand what had bothered me about this sentence, but it came to me as I reviewed both our findings. I realized that though I would agree

that academic achievement and social achievement are linked, I would hesitate to state as clearly as Louis did the relationship that exists between these two processes.

I believe I do understand what Louis was referring to in his thesis. It is true that our findings did suggest that our informants ability to socialize with native members of the English community were limited as long as they were in ESL programs. Our findings revealed that exiting ESL programs was determined in great part on one's ability to demonstrate a certain control of English, as determined more often than not by their final marks in these classes. In this sense, yes, the academic achievement of ILMS does impact on their social integration.

However, I wonder for example if the situation may not be a little more complex. Does academic achievement always determine social integration? After all, is it not possible to achieve academically while not achieving socially? (this is what I would refer to as the "geek factor" -- something which I would argue was reflected in some of our participants stories who revealed that marks or academic success were not always guarantees that the student had achieved socially). I would also question whether it is not rather the opposite that is true, with social integration being a factor for academic achievement. This is supported by the fact that we both found strong social factors such as the ability to establish relationships with friends and teachers were connected to our informants advice for future ESL students eager to succeed. In actuality, I am certain that Louis would agree with me in saying that the data does suggest that the two interact with each other in a dynamic and complicated way, each influencing the other, with social integration factors actually being perhaps more important than actual academic achievement, if one had to put a value of the impact of each.

6.5 Chapter V

As the culmination of our work, Louis and I both had the same goals as we wrote this chapter. We both tried to explain our findings and their implications as well as to link our findings to the literature we had introduced in chapter two. More importantly, we both sought to draw lessons from the data gathered, lessons which could inspire discussion and possibly change for the education of ILMS.

6.5.1 Similarities

As with our other chapters, our discussions of the data contained very similar themes. The most common and most important was our belief that our findings confirmed the profound role of socio-cultural factors have both positively and/or negatively impact on the success of ILMS. We also both suggest that the socio-cultural factors that come together in the case of ILMS may not always do so easily, making them hard to handle for ILMS. Where I talk of the difficulties of juggling complicated social, linguistic and cultural resources, Louis talks of the conflicts, struggles and identity crisis faced by the informants in our study. Our main message echoes what the implications of these difficulties are for anyone interested in helping ILMS. First they must be understood and taken into consideration. Second, ILMS must be provided with the extra help needed to deal with these difficulties. The informants of this study expressed clearly that ILMS who were left alone to deal with these conflicts experienced isolation, loss of confidence, frustration and a growing sense of failure which created a vicious circle and lead to academic and social failure, keeping ILMS from ever truly becoming part of their new community.

What kind of help can be provided? I looked at the relationships ILMS established as a source of this help. Establishing these relationships, I argue is difficult. It requires resources which make you appealing and worth investing in, and most importantly parents, friends, community, schools and teachers willing to participate actively in what I refer to as a complicated multiperson juggling act. Louis looks at the concept of identity to argue that ILMS' identities and identity formation are keys to understanding the way they socialize and approach their schools. Help therefore comes in the form of being able to negotiate an identity amongst complex and often contradictory cultures. This echoes my discussion as he refers for example to the important role of friends. Friends are an important source of support, friendship and identity for ILMS. Essentially, our discussions are similar in that they argue that an understanding of how the students use the socio-cultural forces around them to establish relationships which are based on, and at the same time actively construct their identities, can help teachers, parents and fellow students help more ILMS succeed.

6.5.2 Differences: Is the glass half empty or half full?

Where Louis and I differed slightly however had more to do with our focus on the type of socio-cultural forces at work in the above mentioned process. As I read Louis thesis, I felt that he had focused more than I had on the conflicts and the problems that could impede ILMS progress, whereas I had tried to focus more on the forces which, I felt, could help ILMS. I will give a few examples of this in this next section.

In our discussion of the importance of friends, Louis discusses in greater detail the difficulties the students in this study had in making friends "outside of the Asian circle" (p. 85) suggesting that mainstream students did not understand their identities as ESL

students and were unable to sympathize with their experiences as immigrants” (p. 86). Louis identifies accurately, in my opinion, the consequences of this lack of affirmation from mainstream students as feelings of inferiority and exclusion which lead to a failure to fit into the “mainstream”. My discussion of the impact of friends is similar but I think I put the greater emphasis on the fact that despite the difficulties identified by Louis, the ILMS in this study were able to form friendships with non-Asian members, implying that this interaction and the way in which the students were able to engage in them are essential strategies for success for all ILMS.

In another, yet more important example, Louis revisits his literature review and concentrates a great deal of his discussion on the impact of the Asian background that the students in his study brought with them, specifically focusing on Confucianism and the obligations imposed by this traditional aspect of Asian culture on the students relationships with their parents, and in a more minor way with their friends. This link between the students’ Asian background and its conflicting impact on the students’ interaction with their new societies and consequently their identities resounds as one of the major themes of Louis discussion. Once again, it is the conflict or the cause of the problem that is at the heart of the discussion.

My discussion of the impact of parents was a little different. I have already argued in my discussion of chapter four that though I recognize the importance that they played, that I was not sure that they had played the most important role in their children’s academic and social progress. Consequently, I would suggest that I tried to focus more on the positive role that family could play in the lives of ILMS.

Indeed, as suggested by Louis, it is important to note that family, and other socio-cultural forces such as teachers and friends were at times in opposition to the identities of the ILMS in this study, but it is equally important to note, in my opinion, that they were also important resources without which the participants themselves admit they may not be where they are. In the case of families for example, parents may certainly have been a source of pressure for their children, but there is evidence which suggests that they also were a source of inspiration and strength. I believe this is something which is eclipsed somewhat in Louis discussion of their role.

6.5.3. On the addition of a Hispanic voice to the discussion

As I read this chapter, I also felt it was interesting to note that I had preferred not to focus my discussion as much on the impact of the students' original cultures on their academic and social achievement as Louis did. Though I do agree there is a link between cultures brought to their classrooms by ILMS and their progress in school, two reasons motivated this choice. First, I would restate my hesitancy here to the use of the label Asian. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, I wonder whether it can represent an actual, rather than ideal, grouping of what I perceive to be similar but also very distinct cultures. Second, as noted in the discussion of chapter three, I would note the interesting difference that the addition of the voice of a non-Asian student, Nansen, had on my interpretation of the findings.

Excluding Nansen, allowed Louis to regroup his informants in the category of Asians and to look to Asian culture as a strong socio-cultural force having influenced their identity. This grouping led him to explain the path that these students took as strongly influenced by Confucianism: a form of cultural legacy they brought with them

from their home country. By including Nansen, I was not able to do this. This is not however something that I regret.

I will confess here, that I think it is too bad that Louis did not choose to take into consideration the voice of Nansen, the only non-Asian student involved in this study. Though I understand why he did not choose to do, I still feel that as a fellow ILMS and future teacher of ILMS that he had some interesting things to say. Moreover, Nansen offered a chance to include a student in our study from a non-Asian cultural background. As mentioned earlier, this provided an important point of comparison between himself and the Asian students in the study. Including Nansen allowed, I believe, a more interesting look at the potential effect of cultural background for ILMS, as well as a possible test as to whether the findings of this study could possibly be generalized to students who did not come from Asian countries. More specifically, Nansen provided an interesting way to check and see if some of findings we would discover would be culturally bound or more cross-cultural. One could surmise for example that if the findings for Nansen, a non-Asian, would be noticeably different, or referring to different factors as having played an important role in his progress as a Hispanic ILMS, that these differences might be explained by the importance of cultural background. One the other hand, if his interview identified similar themes as the Asian students, we might able to suggest that these findings were more universal.

In the end, it turns out that Nansen's interview did bring up many of the same themes suggested by his Asian counterparts. He emphasized, for instance, just as strongly, the important role of parents and the pressure to match their expectations. He also stressed the desire to do well in school and perform at a high level as the product of

parental and family expectations. The fact, that Nansen did echo many of the same notions about the causes of success or failure for ILMS, as in the important role that parents play, makes me want to ask Louis whether the forces he classifies under the title of “the ghost of Confucianism” may not be, perhaps, more universal, and cross-cultural than could have been argued if all of the students in my study had been of “Asian” descent.

This big difference in our theses is perhaps one of these revealing distinctions that can be attributed to our different backgrounds. I would perhaps feel more comfortable with the popular North American “Asian” label if I had had to live with it as Louis may have had. As well, my experiences as the son of an immigrant, raised with what I feel to be many cultures, may have given me a greater sense of a unique immigrant’s culture, one that is more personal and, yes, inspired by the immigrant’s home country but nevertheless different and harder to define than the one which he or she has left behind.

This is a message which was made clear to me by my father who one night when talking about this research told me that I should not forget that “once you leave your country as an immigrant, you are no longer fully a person from that country. You have left, and you have changed your life. In so doing you are no longer French, or Chinese or Italian. You are a French immigrant. You are a Chinese immigrant. That is an identity that most non-immigrants cannot understand. They will tell you that you are French. The truth is you are not. You are a French immigrant in Canada.” This more than anything made me weary about referring to the cultural backgrounds of my informants’ home countries as a direct factor influencing their academic and social achievement. This does not mean that I do not think these important, but I believe that these were too

fluid and fuzzy to truly generalize with in the way that Louis did. In thinking in this way, I could qualify the difference between Louis and my study by saying that Louis was trying to seek the reasons behind the academic and social success of Asian ILMS by focusing on the first adjective in this label, while I was determined to try to learn similar lessons by focusing on the immigrant's experience in general, regardless of the ethnic adjective preceding their label.

Nansen voice itself, I feel echoes my sentiments well in his comments about the dangers of stereotyping students, and forgetting that in the end, we are often more alike than we might think.

Interviewer: how had your own personal background influenced your success as a student? And we've already talk about school, your family, the community. But as a, like in personal background, specifically as someone from Columbia, and a Spanish speaker, do you feel any part of that played any special roles in helping or hinder you or, or, influenced? or hinder you or, or, influenced?

Nansen: Yes I think so yeah. Definitely you know, it's not a secret that, we know that different cultures they react differently to different thing so they bring different expectations and, and...you know, I, I don't want to be, I mean I don't want to talk about stereotypes cus' that would be like talking about, like shooting myself on the foot right, but uh, I, it just you know that I, coming from a, Hispanic culture right, being a male, raised, being raised in a Hispanic culture, there was more opportunity to have a saying, to speak up, to be you know, the one that's gonna be heard right, and is exactly the same thing here you know, I mean any male here probably has more chances and more opportunities than female, and that's why we talk about gender issues right. And I usually try to always you know make comparisons, I don't know if you guys noticed throughout my whole interview I try to make comparison with the Canadian society, whatever. Because sometimes we, in a lot of research, sometimes we, sometimes we fail to analyze what's happening here and we always talk about they, you know, they, their society, their culture, and how we are gonna bring it to our culture right, how bout' let's talk about the same time our culture is you know, how the similar situation we have in both cultures and the differences that we have in both cultures. Because once we talk about that kind of you know, when we talk about with that kind of trend of thought, usually we start developing solutions at the same time, they're only problems you know what I mean? You know what, it's just that if you talk about the same way that "oh well, you know, I know the Latinos are really macho type, and they really like to speak loud, and they really like to

you know hit on women all the time, you know and I know that they" you know, things like that. Well, I've met a lot of my classmates in Brandon and (unknown) and they talk really loud, and they like to hit on women too and they you know, like beer a lot and like to drink and swear you know. So therefore we've gotta a lot of similarities there right (laugh). You know what I mean, see that's an aspect that we try to emphasize because a lot of the points and I see it all the time in every single classroom, even in the faculty of education here, "oh okay, Indo Canadians, they just you know, they have arranged marriages, and they you know they arrange their marriages and they you know it reach the little kids you know, they talk about you know, a lot of this totally different things that we don't really hear and they try to best you know, find the, the best suitable wife or husband for the kids", whatever. I know a lot of people here too that they you know, always you know wonder about who are they going out with, "is he a good kid, a bad kid, is he still going to school, does he smoke, is he doing drugs, is he, what is his family like? Are they lawyers, doctors or teachers or what do we call that?" you know. Right, it's like, anyway, it's just not, I'm not trying to you know, to be sarcastic, I'm trying to be you know, positive in a way that we should approach.

6.5.4 Common implications for further research

Despite our different focuses, Louis and I do agree in our final analyses on some of the major implications of this study. We both suggest that more studies like this in different contexts and with different age groups and possibly with the ability to follow students over a longer period of time may be helpful in the future. Louis suggests that more must be done to understand how ILMS perceive themselves and their investments both into their majority and minority language(s) and societies. I believe these investments and their identities are the result of their interactions and therefore suggest that a closer look at the type of relationships ILMS establish would also be beneficial. Most importantly, our basic message is the same. Understanding what goes on socio-culturally for these students and how it is perceived by them, is crucial for their success. Both of our theses finish by recognizing the small part they have contributed to this goal, but invite others to go further by giving voice and listening to more ILMS.

6.6. Conclusion

I have tried through this chapter to offer readers a chance to discover some of the similarities and differences which resulted from two researchers with common interests analyzing the same data separately. We have seen that Louis and I shared similar goals based on our own personal experiences and the literature. Using similar methodology and frameworks, we attempted to learn from the experiences of prior ESL students and both found that they had very interesting stories and advice to give. These centred on the importance of the complex challenges that ILMS had to face. They also explored and discussed the determination, support and motivation from family, friends and teachers necessary to achieve both socially and academically in a system that could easily discourage and isolate you. Our combined discussions sought to connect our informants' stories into a theoretical framework that would allow readers to approach and discuss the education of ILMS with a fresh outlook that included an insider's point of view of those who had gone before. In doing so, Louis and I, invite all readers to join us in our collaborative to learn from example and success.

Independently, I sincerely hope that both theses will contribute, if only in a small part to the betterment of the situation faced by ILMS in the Vancouver area. Though similar, it is true that they do reflect in their tones and approaches the different personalities and interests of their authors. It is for this very reason that I would recommend that any reader who enjoyed and/or found this thesis interesting also read Louis' thesis. They are in essence two parts of a whole, two paintings of the same flower and it is as a pair, seen side by side that I feel that the most interesting picture of the situation faced by ILMS in the Vancouver area can be seen.

CHAPTER VII: EPILOGUE

This epilogue is a record of a discussion between Louis Chen and me, Jérémie Séror, pertaining to the questions raised in each of our theses. This dialogue took place after having had the opportunity to exchange our theses and taking some time to reflect and respond to each other's interpretations of the data we had collected together.

This epilogue is but a sample of the kind of continuous dialogue of ideas and questions that occurred throughout this research process. As was the case in many other conversations, through the dialogue that followed our final exchange of our theses, with the inclusion of our chapters six: a response to our work, our ideas were scrutinized, examined and possibly focused and polished one more time. It is in this sense a perfect example of what we perceive to be a great advantage of the type of collaborative research that we engaged in.

In this study, two researchers examined the same data from two perspectives. Having spent long hours trying to be critical in the development of our own ideas, it was interesting to apply the same standards to the "other's" view of things. This dialogue records this attempt to raise and discuss some of the most interesting and important points made in our chapters six. We admit here, that the ultimate purpose of this discussion was never to simply resolve our differences by arriving at a final cure-all solution or deciding on the "right" or "correct" interpretation. Rather, our discussion was centred on learning from each other by attempting to understand each other's views and reasons behind our interpretation of the data. Moreover, we were perhaps not surprised to see that as an added benefit, new ideas or interpretations could emerge through this dialogue.

The discussion presented below is in the form of a transcript. This transcript was created with the use of the Microsoft Network Messenger software. This technology, which allows two computer users to chat and talk instantaneously through the Internet, was chosen as it enabled us to have a face-to-face conversation while simultaneously transcribing and recording our exchange of ideas.

And so, we now invite the reader to join us in one last discussion.

Jérémie says:

Hi Louis

Louis says:

Hi Jeremie

Jérémie says:

So, what did you think of the review chapters?

Louis says:

It certainly made me question my own findings

Jérémie says:

Yes, me too. It is a great reminder of the different ways in which this data can be approached or, in better words interpreted. I liked the process. It kept us on our toes I think.

Louis says:

Yep, I think I mentioned in my chapter that this approach kept us accountable to each other.

Jérémie says:

Yes... and accountable to ourselves too. The advantage is both for us as researchers and for the readers too.

Louis says:

Absolutely! I am glad our readers can be assured that the data has undergone analysis in great depth.

Jérémie says:

Yes. The ultimate collaborative research project would have the data accessible to anyone, with the possibility for anyone to respond and add to the research in some way. Perhaps, we will see this one day in the future. But, on the other hand perhaps not. One thing that needs to be said about this research procedure, and this type of review, is that it necessitates a strong relationship. It requires trust, respect and good communication. I think we are lucky to have that.

Louis says:

I certainly agree! In addition to that, this project has also taught me a lesson in humility--being open to other possibilities. It's hard to believe, but, I am not always right.

Jérémie says:

Me too...Nicely said. I like that...you are right: humility is important in this. You have to remain open, and ready to requestion everything you've said. It's like the Zen saying: "You can't add tea (learn something new) if your cup is already full".

Louis says:

So now, one question begs to be asked...is this approach for everyone? There is also the possibility that this approach may also destroy a friendship.

Jérémie says:

Hmmm....Good question. It comes back to what you said. I think it could destroy a friendship (or be much harder) for someone who is not as open to questioning, or trying to see things from (an)other point of view. You have to be a good listener. You also have to be able to explain yourself clearly. The absence of these qualities would make it very difficult. You have to be humble. On the other hand...we can't be push-overs either. The advantage of debating things is that it can lead people to potentially coming to a better conclusion (that's if you believe there is a truth out there to discover).

Louis says:

Yes! The issues and questions we are about to discuss have no answers I think. Isn't this one of the main points we are trying to demonstrate? That no data offers a set of answers; it only generates more questions to be explored.

Jérémie says:

Yes, though I don't want to be too relativistic. There are some answers I think, but perhaps we both discovered that they would not be discovered through one thesis alone. More people will have to look at other students and see what they find. There are some definite implications to our research though. They are general but wouldn't they qualify as answers to our original questions...or...at least beginning of answers?

Louis says:

Yes. But my point was that it does not stop here. It is just the beginning.

Jérémie says:

YES!!! I agree. That was for me the biggest thing I learned from this. I was so naive. I really thought it would be more definite, that I could make the whole journey in one study. I discovered I had only taken a small step.

Louis says:

At this point I would like to remind ourselves, our readers, and the research community that the process was equally important to what we've found. Having two people reading and reporting what they've read is very different from having two people conducting the researcher together.

Jérémie says:

Yes. I would definitely recommend this process to others. How about we try and list some of the most important things we think we discovered through this research? We could then discuss them, and see/clarify our interpretations...In other words, what did we learn from this? For example, I think our theses would support that ESL students need the extra-help that has been requested by schools (this in spite of the recent

budget cuts by governments for the education of special-needs students like "ESL" students).

Louis says:

Oh certainly! Simply put, most of our participants suggested the need for more individual attention. We need more teachers, especially teachers that are aware of the difficulties ESL students face.

Jérémie says:

Yes, and more people need to be made aware of these difficulties. Ignoring these difficulties or refusing to acknowledge them, in order to treat all students equally, is in my mind a devious form of discrimination. The truth is that they are not equal. All parties involved (not only the students) need extra help to help foster academic and social achievement.

That's one thing I noticed with the students. I really felt that their discourse reflected the individualism (and consequent isolation) that is fostered in North American schools. That is tragic, I believe, in the case of ILMS especially. I don't think it is simply a matter of "If "you" want to do it, "you" can do it!" What do you think?

Louis says:

Well, from our data, it appeared that the participants believed that if they worked hard, they would succeed in all of their endeavours. However, almost all of them expressed how difficult it was for them to be taken seriously, especially by their Canadian counterparts. So the question is a very complex one.

Jérémie says:

Yes. It is complex because the belief system seems contradictory to the actual reality of what it takes to succeed. It is part of what I call the two big lies promoted in this society: a) that one man or woman *can* individually make a difference and b) that things can be changed. The message is out there that these things are true. I however question whether they really reflect reality. In other words, would more

students succeed, if we promoted explicitly the message that it is not effort, but also their social networks, which will allow them to succeed?

Louis says:

Although I should mention that it seemed to me they were speaking strictly in their immediate contexts. That is, they were confident in their close social networks but, to rise above the dominant culture didn't seem to be possible.

Jérémie says:

Yes...that is definitely, something that seemed to be there, more implied than direct though, the feeling that they did not completely feel like they could join "the dominant culture". But, I want to say, that the word "dominant culture" bothers me. It seems to set up a relationship based on conflict. Do we really want to frame this discussion in this way? Is it really a fight? Perhaps it is? But would it make a difference if we changed the discourse and saw it more as a "joining the majority culture".

Louis says:

To answer this, we need to first ask: according to participants, what is "majority culture"?

Jérémie says:

Yes...that it is slippery too. I guess it would be whatever they felt defined the community that they would qualify as the community of everyone else in this society: the society of the insiders.

Louis says:

In that case, it would be people of the same ethnic background?

Jérémie says:

I don't think so...or at least not to such an extent in some cases in Canada... I know some people who feel part of Canada (though they are second generation Canadians), and this despite the fact that their ethnic backgrounds are different.

Also, we could ask...does anyone ever feel like they can join or rise above the majority/dominant culture? Even language majority students?

Louis says:

In response to the comment about people who feel part of Canada despite the fact that their ethnic backgrounds are different, didn't it seem to you that most of our participants interacted very little with people outside of their ethnic backgrounds?

Jérémie says:

Yes...and no... some of them did interact with people from outside their ethnic backgrounds, or groups where ethnicity was not the defining criteria for membership. For example, I think we saw examples of students who had formed memberships in groups where religion and similar interests were the defining criteria. In these cases, it seemed to me that their interactions were quite varied. In other words, I think interactions with other students outside ethnic backgrounds were more difficult to establish, but that they were established nonetheless.

Louis says:

In regards to rising above the dominant culture...majority students may not feel that way but they are aware that they are in a culture that they feel comfortable about calling it their own, whereas immigrant students have the tendency to perceive the dominant culture as belonging to someone else.

Jérémie says:

That's true...It has to do with ownership....or membership. Unless you are born in a community, whenever you enter a community, there will always be that feeling. As applies to the case of ILMS and membership/ownership is something that is negotiated (here I go again stressing the role of interactions) when you enter a community with people inside of it. I think the interesting question that we could ask, is whether people

in the majority language culture are really willing to let these guys in/give them membership?

Louis says:

Yes, they were established however, were close friendships established? Surely they interacted with people outside of their ethnic backgrounds everyday (bus rides, shopping) but I am not sure these interactions progressed beyond the level of acquaintances.

Jérémie says:

Hmmm....How about the close friends that Mari reported. Or that Beth and Naomi reported. Or the fact that Kenneth reported that he mostly socialized with non-Koreans. There are also the deep relationships they established with teachers and tutors. These did not seem to be superficial.

Louis says:

Going back to your original question though, were they willing? Multiculturalism has taken a new definition to mean "non-white".

Jérémie says:

Yes...The sad truth is that if majority language students are not willing, there is not much we can do to improve the situation. Nothing the immigrant language minority students will do will help much. Or in other words, perhaps we should not concentrate on minority language students, but rather, on the majority language players in this relationship, to try and help them understand the benefits of "being willing".

Louis says:

But I would argue that the majority of the students in the study commented on the close friendships they have are with those from their own ethnic backgrounds.

Jérémie says:

YES! But I think that if there were exceptions, and that it is exactly these exceptions that helped them the most. Plus...what about the friendships that were reported with second generation Chinese....for example. Where do we put these friendships? Do they fall in the same ethnic background

category? Is it the ethnicity that matters, or the fact that they share the same experience as language learners and immigrants? It would be interesting to do a little quantitative study of how many friends belonging in various categories immigrant language students have.

Louis says:

I agree. This goes back to your previous comment that if the majority are willing to let them "in", we would see many more inter-cultural friendships established. I think it is mostly the experience that brings them together. However, we tend to be drawn to those who share the same experiences and speak the same language as we do.

Jérémie says:

I guess, you can't simply take membership. Nor can you simply give it. It has to be built willingly by both parties involved: those entering the community and those exiting it. Yes...that is the tendency to be drawn to those who share the same experiences...but what do we say about it? What should we do as educators if we accept this? Should we fight it? Should we encourage it? I think we should do a little of both, and I think this was supported by the advice given by the students: i.e. you need friends who are native speakers of your languages/cultures, but also friends from other categories.

Louis says:

Of course we need friends from other categories too, but as you said, we cannot impose a friendship on anyone. I am just stating a natural tendency and hoping that teachers and researchers take that into consideration.

....BREAK....

Jérémie says:

During this lunch, I was struck with the idea that in the end, perhaps it does not really matter so much what the intentions of the majority community and those of the students trying to enter it really are. What really matters is how these intentions are perceived. One of the things I learned in this thesis is that sometimes, the reality and the perception can be very different.

Consequently, I think one of the implications of these theses was that what we need to do is focus more on how things are being perceived, rather than simply trying to describe how things are in schools.

Louis says:

I couldn't agree with you more. After all, that's why we conducted this research- to understand through the experiences of participants and their own words.

Jérémie says:

That's right! So if I were to ask you what you felt their perceptions of the situation were, what would you answer?

Louis says:

I think they still perceive themselves as outsiders looking in, however, they seemed to have become comfortable in their own social circle so perhaps there were less urgency to be in the "mainstream", rather, they have come to build their own "mainstream". A sub-culture I call the "Chinatown phenomenon". It is quite simple, people on the outside create their own society and culture, together, find ways to exist without conforming to what the mainstream imposes on them.

Jérémie says:

That makes it sound like the mainstream has no influence on them...Is this what you mean?

Louis says:

Oh no, it is the mainstream that leads them to such mentality.

Jérémie says:

Hmm....Okay. So what happens to those students who are completely alone (the Vietnamese and the Ukrainians) the ESL students who may not have the resources (or the people) around them to make a sub-community? Is this why they fail more than some of the other ethnic groups? Or is it possible for one individual to form a sub-community of one.

Louis says:

I think you have just hinted at the reason why I think many of these students you've just mentioned tend to be less successful. In some ways

I think this point you've just made is one distinguishing factor between our participants and the Vietnamese and the Ukrainians, those that didn't respond to our call for participants.

Jérémie says:

Hmm...I think I understand, so you're saying they didn't answer our call for participants because...???

Louis says:

Because many of them do not make it to post-secondary institution, as Dr. Gunderson's research (2000, 2001) has addressed.

Jérémie says:

Ok...but I wonder, did all of our students feel like they were on "the outside looking in"? Did Celeste see herself as an outsider? She seemed pretty confident! And perhaps suggested that we are all outside looking in (immigrants and non-immigrants alike). I think that if we take this position then it empowers immigrants, because then the onus is no longer on membership (or rather it changes the rules of membership, and who can assign it, making the community easier to enter). I guess that's one way that native English speakers empower themselves...they assume they are part of the community. They don't question it as you said.

Louis says:

Not Celeste, but it seemed to me that the majority spoke as outsiders during the interview. Of course the non-immigrants do not question, look at the title we give them, "THE MAINSTREAM", "THE NATIVE SPEAKER OF ENGLISH".

Jérémie says:

Exactly you are right....that's why, I tried to stay away from these words in the theses and even now... I completely agree with Gee and Delpit. The very words we choose, the discourse we use, even in simply discussing these issues in an informal way like this, really has an impact on the shape of the arguments.

I wonder then, if it is true that they are outsiders, can we change it? What made some of the students, such as Celeste in our study, feel like insiders? What can we learn from that? Personally, I really think it has to do with replacing the formula/discourse from the focus on ethnicity (where you are from?) to actual participation (what you are doing) as the defining criteria for membership. Doing so, disempowers majority community members, but allows more people to join the community without the insecurity and shame demonstrated by the students. I guess I am stressing this point because I feel that if the ILMS end up feeling as outsiders, that this is a failure on the part of the schools.

Louis says:

Well...if we lose focus on ethnicity, it may be perceived as downplaying ESL students' first culture. I do agree that we need to recognize what they are doing, however, what they are doing is very much connected with where they are from and where they position themselves, and hence, how things are perceived...The reality is...they need to learn about The Simpsons, Starwars, and Hemmingway in order to get "in", otherwise, they'll continue to live in Chinatown where there's no need to know these things to be a part of a community.

Jérémie says:

Yes....I don't think we should lose focus of their first culture but I wonder if it is too difficult to talk about the first culture: what does that mean? How long does it have an impact on them? I don't want to play it down. I believe it has a great impact on how they approach/perceive things, but I also don't want to say that it is the most important thing...because I am not sure if it...really exists for immigrants. I think back to what I said in chapter 6 about immigrants not really being "Chinese" anymore as soon as they immigrate. They become "Chinese-immigrants"...Is that their first culture? Or is it something else? I think it is something else...a composite of the dominant and original culture.

Louis says:

I'm thinking that I am agreeing with you. The one point, however, we cannot overlook is that their first culture is a big part of their identity, it is the only culture they know prior to immigration. Of course their

identities undergo changes as soon as they arrive, however, the first culture does not disappear, it is their only reference for judgement and comparison.

Jérémie says:

Only reference????

Louis says:

Their only cultural reference, which include beliefs and values.

Jérémie says:

Ok...So their first culture is their starting block. Yes. It affects how they see schools and people (as suggested by Ogbu)...at first. Don't you think that the first culture might disappear with time....Could it disappear as a new culture is created? I think part of the problems and frustration faced by some ILMS is the conflict that occurs when one tries to hang on tightly to something which is in actuality not a solid, but rather a liquid, and which has to change in a new environment (I see that as the problem of some parents who try to force their children to do things in the same way as back home...)

Louis says:

First culture never disappears, it's our ethnicity, our essence, our color. It's also our history and our foundation; it changes as we add to it but it can never disappear. Now, we are talking about first and second-generation immigrants here only right?

Jérémie says:

I think it does disappear (or at least it changes....gets diluted)...like adding a new liquid to a soup. The original liquid disappears to make room for the new one. The ingredients do not stay separated... And yes, I think we are talking about first and second generation immigrants, but I think this could apply to any move from one community to another, where two cultures meet.

Louis says:

Well...referring back to what your father said, in his case, his is a French immigrant, that pronoun should never disappear or become an adjective. It will remain a pronoun for your father always. So your

father will always be French! All of his memories and experiences have elements of French culture in them. The degree to which one retained those things is up to their own choice. However, he will always be French.

Jérémie says:

Agreed, but he would argue that it would be hard to explain his actions by referring to this French identity, since it is much diluted from "the standard"....or since you need to know much more than the French culture to understand the memories and experiences he has (that's if a standard French exists anyways...).

You know, I as we speak, I really think our interpretations were indeed connected to our own backgrounds, as suggested in your thesis. My grandfather immigrated to France from Tunisia, and my father immigrated from France to Canada. I myself am contemplating spending my life in another country: Japan. So perhaps this is why I feel so strongly that the "Pronoun" cannot capture everything. Personally, in my family, we're all mixed up now. I don't even know what my pronoun really is. Does this mean I am on the outside looking in. This is why I think perhaps this happens to everyone

Louis says:

Let me respond to that by giving you this scenario...if you had never met me and we were introduced today, would your first thought be "Louis is Canadian"? I believe every time I am introduced to a stranger, I am perceived as an Asian. As a matter of fact, every time after I introduce myself as a Canadian, people never fail to ask, "so where are you *really* from"? So, whether I like it or not I am always an Asian. If the stranger really cares, he/she may ask me specifically "from what country?" So this answers the question you posed in Chapter 6 as to why I chose to use "Asian". Although I will admit I may have used the word too loosely and for that I apologize to you and my readers.

Jérémie says:

Same thing happens to me...(because of my family name...and even my looks believe it or not)...So, yes...that label of a foreigner is imposed on you(us) by others (in this case,

members of the majority community). But does that make the label correct? Are you Asian because they say you're Asian. I feel strongly that I am Canadian, even though some might say that I am not, but I know that it is easier for me to say perhaps as I was born here. That gives me a special kind of confidence (by the way...you don't need to apologize for the use of the term "Asian". It is very popular and is used a lot).

Louis says:

I very much agree that a simple term such as "Asian", "French", or "Chinese" does not even begin to allow us to understand an individual. However, for those that just arrive in a new country, that term "Asian" may also be a safety net because it allows them a place to belong to. It fills an individual's heritage deficit. It's a deficit that results in most immigrants' lives because they lose touch with their first culture by being in a new culture where most things look foreign to them. Keep in mind, that for people like myself, I am in between cultures, or rather, I possess two cultures. I am not just Chinese or Canadian. My identity is broader, and "Asian" yields that possibility to be both.

Jérémie says:

Oh...that is interesting. I never considered the Asian label as containing more than one possible identity!!! Yes... I guess, that you are identifying the benefits of these larger labels. They can either include (when used by the immigrants) or exclude (when used by the majority speakers), but in the end, I am cautious about both those uses. They might make them feel safer, but it might also create a false image of who they really are. Is it fair to tell a kid raised in Canada that they are Chinese? Are they really? Doesn't that confuse the heck out of them? I think we should tell kids they are hybrids, that they don't have to be one or the other...because it is impossible division.

Louis says:

Not only is it an impossible division, they need to understand the benefits of a bi-cultural identity as our participants so eloquently expressed in the interview.

Jérémie says:

As you know, I've actually had to put a lot of thought into this, as I prepare the birth of my son. I think you should tell kids that if people tell them that they are a little bit of that and the other, and that this makes them different from other people who think they are made up of only one thing, that these people are wrong. Everyone is made up of a little of that and the other. Second, I think we need to tell them that it IS a good thing to free ourselves from monocultural labels. As you said, this is something that the participants in this study reported well. Multi-culturality in the real sense of the word IS an empowering force.

Louis says:

A note to our readers: by now we hope you've come to see just how complex and confusing an ESL immigrant student's life can be. The more we dialogue, the more I am confused myself. Who am I? and whom do I need to be in order to succeed? Who are my friends? and how do I become friends with those who have no ideas what we're talking about here?!

Jérémie says:

I agree strongly. The education of ILMS students or more generally of language minority students is not something that can be simplified. And this is why this kind of dialogue is important. Perhaps the best way to understand something complicated is to look at it from many sides, and perspectives. No one can see the whole thing, but we can put our sides together to try and paint a clearer picture.

Louis says:

On that note, I'd like to say that this dialogue has been a tremendous help in clarifying some points I had about your chapter 6. Moreover, this dialogue has forced me to think deeper about my interpretations. I've learned to be more careful in my interpretation and my choice of words. I am glad to have you pointing out some questionable areas of my thesis.

Jérémie says:

The same applies with me. I leave with a stronger understanding of the impact that the labels we have assigned to us have, whether they truly apply or not, and a renewed

interest in where these come from and the role they must play for ILMS. Most importantly, I leave with the great feeling that I have explored and seen something new. Thank you Louis.

Louis says:

What remains to be said is that we could do this all day. These are complex issues made more complex by our different backgrounds and perspectives. We may not have come to a final conclusion and a cure-all answer, but that was never the purpose for this dialogue. What this dialogue has done is showing me more issues I still have yet to discovered. Thanks Jeremie! for asking all the tough questions.

Jérémie says:

Thank YOU for the talk...It is my sincere wish that it might be the followed by many more in the future as we continue our journeys of exploration.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

Appendix B: Information form

Information Form

Name:

Date:

Faculty/Department:

Program:

Year of program: _____

Number of years as a UBC
student: _____

Country of origin: _____

Age of arrival in
Canada: _____

Schools attended in Canada:

Date/year of entrance in an ESL program: _____

Date/year of exiting an ESL program: _____

Languages you speak:

L1: _____

L2: _____

L3: _____

Other: _____

In which language are you most proficient?

1) Speaking: _____

2) Reading: _____

3) Writing: _____

Appendix C: Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE

LEARNING FROM EXAMPLE: EXPLORING ESL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE FACTORS HAVING INFLUENCED THEIR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

(RE)CONSTRUCTING AND (RE)NEGOTIATING IDENTITY: EXPLORING ESL STUDENTS' INTEGRATING AND SOCIALIZATION PROCESS INTO CANADA

Name: _____

1. Please tell us about your life before coming to Canada.
2. Tell us what happened when you arrived in Canada.
3. What was it like to be an ESL student in the Greater Vancouver area.
4. Tell us about how you studied when you were an ESL student.
5. Tell us about how you study now. Has anything changed?

6. What were your goals when you were an ESL student and how did you go about achieving them?
7. How would you rate your English language skills?
8. Some would say that as a former ESL student, who is now attending university, you have been quite successful. What do you think of this?
9. How has your own personal background influenced your success as a student?
10. Where do you feel most comfortable socializing?
11. With whom do you feel most comfortable socializing?

12. Which language do you feel most comfortable socializing in?

13. In terms of your values and lifestyle, what do you view yourself as? Ex. Canadian, Chinese, Chinese-Canadian, Canadian-Chinese. Why?

14. Has English helped you to become a Canadian? How/Why not?

15. What advice would you give to other ESL students now in the same situation as you once were and who would also like one day to be able to attend university in Canada?

16. What advice would you give to instructors who work with ESL students?

17. What advice would you give to parents of ESL students?

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Interview Questions

Interview prompt items	Comments/Notes
<p>(1) <u>Please tell us about your life before coming to Canada?:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What languages could you speak? read? write? • Why did you come to Canada? • How did you feel about coming to Canada? (Excited, nervous, happy etc...) • What kind of education did you receive prior to coming to Canada? <p>(2) <u>Tell us what happened when you arrived in Canada?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long did you wait before going to school in Canada? • How did your parents choose your school? • What were your initial reactions to your school? <p>(3) <u>What was it like to be an ESL student in the Vancouver area?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you think of the experience? Why? • Did you have to overcome any difficulties? How did you cope with them? How did you feel about that? • What were some of the advantages/disadvantages of the ESL program? <p>(4) <u>Tell us about how you studied when you were an ESL student?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What strategies did you use to learn English? • How much time did you spend doing homework? • Did you have any extra help (tutors, native friends, extra classes)? <p>(5) <u>Tell us about how you study now. Has anything changed?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you prefer to study for your school subjects? Why? <p>1. Alone 2. In pairs 3. In groups</p> <p>-How do you prefer to study for English?</p> <p>1. Alone 2. In pairs 3. In groups</p> <p>(6) <u>What were your goals when you were an ESL student and how did you go about achieving them?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was going to university one of your goals? • Was becoming an active member of Canadian society one of your goals? • Do you feel that you have achieved all/any of these goals? • What goals remain? <p>(7) <u>How would you rate your English language skills? 1= weak; 5= fluent.</u></p> <p>Reading: 1 2 3 4 5 Writing: 1 2 3 4 5 Listening: 1 2 3 4 5 Speaking: 1 2 3 4 5</p>	

(8) Some would say that as an ex-ESL student who is now attending university, you have been quite successful. What do you think of this?

- Would you consider yourself a successful student? Why or why not?
- How would you define a successful student?

(9) How has your own personal background influenced your success as a student?

- Do you feel that your mother tongue helped or hindered you as an ESL student?
- Do you feel that there were any parts of your own personal culture which have helped or hindered you?

(10) Where do you feel most comfortable socializing?

- At UBC? Where?
- Outside of UBC? Where?

(11) With whom do you feel most comfortable socializing?

- Do you find yourself socializing with members of your own linguistic background?
Yes or no? Why?

(12) Which language do you feel most comfortable socializing in?

- When you are angry or upset, which language do you use to express yourself?
- Which language do you think best suit your personality?

(13) In terms of your values and lifestyle, do you view yourself as:_____. Why?

For example:

Chinese, Canadian, Chinese-Canadian, Canadian-Chinese

(14) Has English helped you to become a Canadian? How/Why not?

- When you speak English, do you feel like a Canadian?
- When you speak English, does it remind you that English is not your first language?

(15) What advice would you give to other ESL students now in the same situation as you once were and who would also like one day to be able to attend university in Canada?

- Is there anything you did when you were in school that you would really recommend to someone else?
- Is there anything you did which you would not recommend to someone else?

(16) What advice would you give to instructors who work with ESL students?

- Was there anything that an instructor ever did which you felt made a big difference in helping you succeed and integrate as a student/Canadian?
- Was there anything that an instructor ever did that you felt was particularly destructive or negative?
- Was there anything that you wish instructors had done which was not done?

(17) What advice would you give to parents of ESL students?

- Was there anything that your parents ever did which you felt made a big difference in helping you succeed and integrate as a student/Canadian?
- Was there anything that your parents ever did that you felt was particularly destructive or negative?
- Was there anything that you wish your parents had done which was not done?