THE RITES OF TRANSITION: VOICES OF HONG KONG EXCHANGE STUDENTS
IN CANADIAN TERTIARY CONTEXTS

by

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the complexity and interrelationships of language, culture and identity from the learners’ perspectives. The focus of the study was on the exchange experiences of five Hong Kong students in the Canadian tertiary contexts. The participants were bilingual learners. They came from an educational background which emphasized English as a medium of instruction. In Canada, the students had the language competence to integrate into mainstream courses during their one year stay. This study questioned whether language was also their passport into a new culture.

The study was divided into two phases. The first phase was a pilot study (January 1997-May 1997). Emergent themes from the pilot study guided the research questions in the second phase of the study (October 1997 - July 1998). The methodology employed in this study emphasized a naturalistic inquiry approach and co-authorship with the participants. The research focused on a multiple case study approach with an ethnographic link to highlight the interpretive and sociocultural perspectives of the study. Research strategies included direct and participant observation, home visit, e-mail, phone conversation, informal interview, intensive discussion, secondary informant, artifact and metaphor. Personal narratives were central to the discussions in data analysis.

Data collected in the study support the learner agency framework on the issue of social identity. Themes which emerged from the research process suggest multiple voices, multiple interpretations and multiple realities in the process of language socialization.
Many interactive variables in the social contexts influence the construction and reconstruction of knowledge on language, culture and identity. Language socialization is a complex interweave of meanings between the individual and the environment. Ambivalence, contradictions and uncertainties are recurring themes in the rites of transition. Learners are empowered by their awareness and agency in their struggle. They are active agents of their identities, roles and status in changing sociocultural settings. This study urges the need for language educators to include voices of the learners in language research and to re-examine the notions of language power, cultural diversity, social access, claim of ownership, learner investment and human agency in language pedagogy.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Problem

In recent years, the notion of culture has become increasingly significant in the context of language teaching. Changing perspectives on language education have triggered fervent interest in studies focused on the complexity and interrelationships between language, culture and identity in the learning process. In the 1980’s, with an increasing emphasis on the communicative and interactive approach in language education, it was widely recognized that language was not taught “in isolation” (Brown, 1994; Mohan, 1986) of the context.

As Cazden (1977) stated, “Language is the medium of interpersonal relationships, the medium of our mental life, the medium of learning about the world” (p.42). In the learner-centered curriculum, language activities are designed to involve students in simulated life situations and meaning making tasks. Learners are no longer seen as passive recipients of transmitted knowledge. They are perceived as “complex social beings” (Harre, 1993, p.12) playing active roles in “an interlocking weave of processes” (Harre, 1993, p.12). They bring into the learning contexts their diversified language and cultural backgrounds as well as rich resources of personal histories, learning agendas and social needs. As Mohan (1986) stated, “education is not limited to formal instruction but also occurs by socialization and enculturation throughout the society” (p. 1). This language awareness has shifted the research focus from its emphasis on quantitative analyses of language
acquisition to more qualitative explorations of learning contexts. Ever since the 1980’s, the inseparability of language, culture and learner has emerged as relevant themes in second language acquisition studies (Clement & Knuidenier, 1983, Mohan, 1986, Ochs, 1988). This interdependence of linguistic and sociocultural knowledge was well exemplified in Ochs (1988) sociocultural model of language socialization.

Given that meanings and functions are to a large extent socioculturally organized, linguistic knowledge is embedded in sociocultural knowledge. On the other hand, understandings of the social organization of everyday life, cultural ideologies, moral values, beliefs and structures of knowledge and interpretation are to a large extent acquired through the medium of language. Schieffelin & Ochs call this process language socialization (see 1986a, b), i.e. socialization through language and socialization to use language (p.14).

In this reconceptualized view of language pedagogy, we see “the players, the norm, the conventions, the interaction and the process” (Harre, 1993, p.12) as rich, contextualized factors which problematize the learning process. Language, culture and identity are not fixed and static constructs passed down unchanged over time and contexts. They are open-ended and changing phenomena interweaving the learner variables into a web of meanings in the learning context. “Culture is not just a body of knowledge, it comprises implicit assumptions, dynamic processes, and negotiated relationships”(Norton, 1997, p.415) through “the powerful socializing medium” (Schiefflin & Ochs, 1986, p.172) of language.

Drawing from this sociocultural awareness, language researchers in the nineties are calling for the need to include in their research ‘voices’ of the learners. Much of the quantitative research “has had the strength of an aerial photograph: It shows the prominent features of the landscape but only give hints to what the trees and buildings in
the picture would look like up close” (Green & Oxford, 1995, p.261). Very little is known about the language learners themselves and how they interpret their language socialization experience in their every day lives. The pressing issue in TESOL pedagogy of today is “focus on the learners” (Brown, 1991, p.245).

This study aimed to “search for silenced voices in the margins” (Pao et al, 1997, p.624) and to explore the complexity and interrelationships of language, culture and identity from the learners’ perspectives. This research was centered around the stories of Hong Kong students as “initiates in the rites of transition” (Leach, 1976) in the changing sociocultural contexts. Their personal accounts were voices of the insiders. Over the past decades, researchers had often asked “whether personal/cultural knowledge should be considered as legitimate knowledge” (Banks, 1995, p.15)? My own experiences as a language learner and teacher had convinced me that personal narratives were not only legitimate knowledge, they were also rich resources in the study of language, culture and identity.

1.2 Background to the Problem

1.2.1 Questioning the Claims on Chinese Learners

In my research on the issues of language, culture and identity, I found some of the claims and assumptions about Chinese learners and their learning approach to be biased, deterministic and reductive. They were stories created by the “knowledge producers” (Banks, 1995, p.15). These stories had a “notion of tribalizing or stereotyping the others” (Duff & Uchida, 1997). They did not match my insider’s knowledge of the Chinese
students. For example, I questioned Kaplan’s (1966) theory of contrastive rhetoric which claimed that people of different cultural backgrounds had “different patterns of written discourse” (p.14). He argued that the “Oriental” written discourse was “in a spiraling line” (Kaplan, 1966, p.14). Similarly, Allen & Cooke (1981) also claimed that “Chinese have a much longer attention span, that it is difficult to bore them, and that they would prefer not shifting from activity to activity” (p.26) Their views were supported by Flowerdew & Miller (1995) who claimed that “memorization plays an important and crucial role in Chinese students’ attitudes toward learning. Even in situations where, as Western teachers, we might assume that students needed to use analytical and critical thinking, such as literary analysis, Chinese students rely on memorization techniques” (p.349). As Penner (1995) stated, “Chinese’ resistance is not only a concern with roles in the classroom, but also roles in the culture as a whole” (p.7). Burnaby & Sun (1989) also stated that “Chinese students do not think the way most Westerners think” (p.229). These claims were echoed in Ho & Crookall’s (1995) findings which stated that “[Chinese learners’] cultural background may impede autonomy” (p.238).

The underlying theme of these claims was that Chinese learning attitude and classroom behavior were deep-rooted in the Confucian thinking. They claimed that learners’ “resistance” to class participation was due to their Chinese cultural background. I found “this blanket generalization” (Nunan, 1993, p.8) of the “Chinese view of language learning” (Penner, 1995, p.5) problematic. It produced theories which seemed to “falsely generalize” (Martin, 1995, p.4) the students’ cultural background. These theories also implied that the passive learning attitude and classroom behavior of the Chinese students
were implicit "cultural roles" and "cultural traits" (Ho & Crookall, 1995, p.238) of the Chinese students. However, they ignored the fact that these characteristics were also dominant features of the transmission curriculum which was centered around a teacher-centered approach. Learners in the transmission curriculum were not encouraged to develop critical thinking or active learning. (Further discussions on the characteristics of the transmission curriculum are presented in Section 2.1 under the subheading "The dominant perspective on language issues").

Apparently, many of the articles which focused on the Chinese students were written in the seventies or eighties when language socialization and the learner-centered approach were still not widely accepted as the teaching practice in the language classrooms. Times have changed. Now "focus on the learners" (Brown, 1991, p. 245) is not only a Western educational issue, it is also a global issue (Nunan, 1993). Problems which existed between "the teacher's intention and the learner's interpretation" (Nunan, 1993, p.10) were not specifically Chinese learning problems, they could exist in any learning context. By stereotyping these problems as Chinese learners' problems, past studies had turned their gaze away from the social issues which confronted the learners in the complex learning process.

We cannot live by past assumptions in changing times and changing cultures. We cannot walk into the classrooms with "boxes of cultural labels and language baggage" (Pennycook, 1998, UBC) casting students into stock roles and silencing the dialogue
Students are not stereotyped categories, they are individuals. As Huebner (1996) argued,

After all, education is not mass production, students need our personal attention. Categories are necessary for planning educational activity. Teachers, however, do not see or meet categories; such classification are stereotypes, a form of prejudice. Teachers meet students. Teachers encounter a uniquely formed person different from any other person in the world, a person with his own particular story, which is both history and promise (p. 269).

It is time for language educators to rethink the issues, revisit the sites and re-evaluate the claims (Pennycook, 1998, UBC) based on data grounded in the sociocultural contexts of the learners.

1.2.2 The Conceptual Framework

As I reflected upon my own educational experiences in Hong Kong, I became increasingly aware of my own subjectivity as a researcher. As Eisner (1992) stated, “knowledge is always constructed relative to a framework, to a form of representation, to a cultural code and to a personal biography” (p. 14). I believe research is made more “deeply textured and enriched by the objective/subjective tension” (Banks, 1995, p. 15) in the stories of insiders. I believe my own knowledge of the Hong Kong context had given me an insider’s knowledge as well as a bias in this study. It has allowed me to understand the participants from an “emic perspective” (Fetterman, 1989, p. 30). Yet, I am also aware of the fact that I entered the research field with my own frame of reference and “developed sensibility” (Goldman-Segall, 1995). As Eisner (1992) explained, “the particular schemata we use also structure perception” (p. 12). I believe my own cultural background influenced my conceptual framework. It also influenced the way I asked my questions and
the answers I sought from my participants. In essence, it influenced the way I interpreted the data and the conclusions I drew from them. (Banks, 1995). I acknowledge these assumptions and baggage I carried into the research field. I also acknowledge my tendency to filter the stories of the learners through my own subjective lens. However, I had also decided not to let my Chinese heritage, Hong Kong background and educational experiences narrow my views in the discovery of the learners' worlds. I was in this research to explore what I did not know and not to prove what I knew from my prior knowledge.

As the story teller, I acknowledge that my study was an "interpretive one in search of meaning" (Geertz, 1988). What I wanted the readers to "take away" from this study had less to do with the "factual look" (Geertz, 1988, p.37) or the cause/effect chains than the experience of "being there" (Geertz, 1988, p.37) or "being with" (Heshusius, 1994) the participants and "being in" (Goldman-Segall, 1995) the discovery process. To this end, I intended to explore "multiple sources of information" (Merriam, 1990, p.243) to "capture as much reality as possible" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1993, p.4) in this study. My own story was interwoven into the collective stories linking public knowledge with personal narratives. It was a meaning making process which juxtaposed interrelated themes and competing frameworks to create sites of tension as well as meanings in this research. Before I embarked on this exploratory journey, I decided to take the readers to visit the "home" (Martusewicz, 1997, p.13) where my knowledge took roots.
1.2.3 Language Awareness in the Changing Society

My first contact with language education dated way back to my primary school days in Hong Kong. It was a time when language issues first raised social consciousness in the Hong Kong community. It was an era when English was the only official language in the British Colony. Many social critics argued that English was the language “reserved for the elites” (Siu, 1988) separating the government dignitaries and social elites from the mass population. In the mid 1970’s, this social movement resulted in the government’s recognition of Chinese as the other official language in Hong Kong. Chinese was finally accepted as a language with equal official status as English. In the late 1970’s, the call for “mother tongue” consciousness began to influence the educational scene and emerged as a controversial issue in the Hong Kong language education.

Proponents of the “mother tongue” issue claimed that Chinese was the “language of the heart” (Llewlyn Report, 1982) for the majority of the Hong Kong people. Their argument was based on the rationale of the language movement in the seventies. Yet, in the eighties, the language issue had lost much of its colonial flavor (Bray & Lee, 1993). Hong Kong had undergone rapid changes on the political, social and economic fronts. Bilingualism had emerged as a survival tool in the changing Hong Kong society. Language competency in English and Chinese was required for tertiary admission, career advancement and business endeavors. According to the University of Hong Kong Careers Advisory Board (1995), “the ability to communicate confidently, clearly, succinctly in both oral and written communication, the ability to establish rapport quickly with those from diverse cultures” were considered essential working skills for Hong Kong college graduates. Indeed, in the
eighties, bilingualism had become a part of the identities of Hong Kong as the city took on its new roles as the "window" to China and a major financial center in the world.

In the early 1980's, the call for the monolingual "mother tongue" education was met with strong opposition in Hong Kong. There were overwhelming popular demands for bilingual education in the community. Under the government's laissez faire policy, it was estimated that over 90% of the Hong Kong secondary schools were operating as English medium schools. Many parents were eager to enroll their children in English medium schools for a sound bilingual education. However, many English medium schools failed to deliver what they promised (South China Morning Post, March 26, 1992). In the latter part of the eighties, the declining standards of secondary and tertiary students both in English and Chinese were raising serious community concerns.

The problems with language issues in Hong Kong were complex and interrelated over the past decade. Issues such as teacher shortages, large class sizes, exam-oriented curriculum and diversified learner variables in Hong Kong were to a great extent influenced by changes in the society. The influx of immigrants from China and the mass emigration of Hong Kong families abroad also created significant demographic changes in the schools. These changing variables were all critical to the development of language education in Hong Kong in the early 1990's.

Many critics of bilingual education described the language problems in Hong Kong as the "language bomb" (Phillipson, 1992). They claimed that the declining standards were due
to the English-dominated educational system (Phillipson, 1992). They also argued that the integration of language and content in the curriculum was not suitable for the majority of the Chinese students. According to these critics, learning would be more effective if "mother tongue" or the "language of the heart" (Llewellyn Report, 1982) were used as the medium of instruction. Furthermore, they argued that English should be taught as an isolated subject in the schools preferably by English "native speakers" (Phillipson, 1992, p.185).

Around the mid 1980’s, Hong Kong began to “modify its laissez faire policy of allowing secondary schools to choose their language of instructions” (Tung, 1990, p.524). Over the past decade, the government exercised a “firm guidance” to persuade the majority of the secondary schools to change to Chinese medium schools (Post, 1994). By 1999, most of the primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong have implemented Chinese as the teaching medium under the state-led policy. Only a small number of Hong Kong schools with outstanding examination results in both English and Chinese are still allowed to remain as English medium schools (Post, 1994). To upgrade the English proficiency level of Hong Kong students, the government also introduced a new NET (Native English Teacher) scheme into the Hong Kong schools in 1998. Under this new scheme, each secondary school would assign one or two “native English speaking” teachers hired from abroad to act as teachers/advisors to the English department to “upgrade the students’ English proficiency level” (Hong Kong Education Department, 1998). This new scheme is still in a trial phase and has received mixed reactions from the community as a whole. Many people feel that the message implied in the “native” and “non-native” categorization
is stratification, the superior-inferior dichotomy. They claim that this categorization is based on the ambiguous assumption that “native speakers” use “authentic English” and that they are “real” English speakers (Leung et al, 1997). Many bilingual Hong Kong teachers challenge the prevailing assumptions that “English is best taught monolingually” (Phillipson, 1992, p.491). They believe that if this notion of categorization is accepted, then they are also accepting the inequality for access for “native” and “non-native” speakers. This inferior-superior dichotomy is contradictory to the teaching of TESOL pedagogy on global English, multiculturalism, diversity and pluralism in recent years.

Over the past two years, language issues in Hong Kong have taken on new dimensions and social meanings as Hong Kong stepped into its new role as the Special Administrative Region of China effective July 1, 1997. Today, Hong Kong is a city in transition adapting to its new identity, role and status in the new era. Indeed, so much of what happened in the changing contexts in the past were reflected in the changing attitudes towards language education. As Pao et al (1997) stated, “language is the reflection of culture” (p.623). It was against this backdrop of significant changes in the language education of Hong Kong that issues related to language, culture and identity began to emerge as the interests of my research. What intrigue me most about the Hong Kong context are the learners. Despite all of the discussions and changes on the language and culture issues, so little is known about the learners themselves. They are indeed the “silenced voices in the margins” (Pao et al, 1997, p.624).
1.2.4 The Integration of Public and Personal Knowledge

I agree with Banks (1995) that we are social beings interlocked with our “times and cultures” (p.18). In my case, I found that growing up in the Hong Kong educational system with its contrasting views and diversified values helped me understand the important role that social contexts played in my language education. As a primary school student, I was encouraged to socialize in English, to participate in English drama, musicals and debates. The school emphasized a language socialization approach. Yet I was also under the pressure of an exam-oriented transmission curriculum. The divergent educational aims and approaches were blended and blurred into a “co-emergent phenomenon” (Davis et al, 1996, p.151) in this educational system. This learning experience convinced me that blending and blurring “the child and subject centered pedagogies” (Davis et al, 1996, p.151) of the “dominant” and “reconceptualist” perspectives could produce an interesting and enriched learning experience for the students. In a way, these competing “knowledge frameworks” (Mohan, 1986) also challenged me to look critically at the claims others made on issues related to language, culture and identity.

As Merriam (1990) stated, “language is a way of organizing the world” (p.227). My personal knowledge of language learning was not just about “useful knowledge” (Reid, 1998, p.294) or practical skills. English is my medium of communication. My world is immersed in English through language socialization and “curricular integration” (Kain, 1996, p.163). Ever since the first grade, I have not considered myself as a second
language learner. I claim ownership of English and English has become a part of my bilingual identity.

In the interactive learning context, I felt a sense of “cultivation of imagination” and a “joy of participation” (Eisner, 1979, p. 86) which made language learning a process of discovery of the self and the world. This view of knowledge as discovery (Brown, 1994) continues to influence the way I conceptualize language learning as a teacher. As Davis et al (1996) described, “Individual and environment continually specify one another. Just as I am shaped by my location, so is my location shaped by my presence” (p. 157). Many interactive variables are at play in the learning contexts creating equilibrium and disequilibrium in the language socialization process. I agree with Eisner (1979) that “what happens to the students in the playground is as important as what happens in class” (p. 82). So much of language learning is implicit cultural knowledge. As Duff & Uchida (1997) stated, “Learner's social life, global perception, identities and beliefs are co-constructed, negotiated and transformed on an on-going basis by means of language” (p. 452).

I agree with Davis et al (1996) that “knowledge is doing is being” (p. 155). From my own learning experience, I know that English is not just an isolated subject taught at school, it is a medium which links me to the larger society. The world of language learning is rich with meanings and metaphors. We are “players” of “many parts” making our “exits and entrances” (Shakespeare, As You Like it, Act 2 Scene vii) on the stage by “socialization through language and socialization to use language” (Ochs, 1988, p. 14). Indeed, “linguistic knowledge is embedded in the sociocultural knowledge” (Ochs, 1988, p. 14).
We enter each scene with our histories and our beliefs, we exit from each scene with a new awareness of ourselves and the world. As Martusewicz (1997) described, “we are always in the process of leaving” (p.17).

Looking back at my past, I became aware that in my shift from “cultures of certainty to cultures of uncertainty” (Hargreaves, 1994, p.57) in the different learning contexts, I began to develop a more introspective and personal perspective on the issues of language, culture and identity. It was through the position of marginality that I began to question whether learner had choice or agency in the learning process. I also questioned the discrepancies which existed between public claims and private knowledge. Many public claims on Chinese learners did not seem to match my multiple realities as a bilingual learner. They presented contradictory and ambivalent images in my mind.

Like a quilt maker trying to sew the interesting and fragmented pieces together, I looked for emergent themes and patterns in my research on the bilingual learners to make sense of the gaps which existed between public claims and learners’ private knowledge. I agree with Norton (1997) that “greater attention to the voices of the learners generates unexpected consequences and new understandings” (p.415). There are many worlds yet to be explored and many questions yet to be asked as language research finally turns its gaze on the learners.
1.3 Research Purpose

The purpose of this research was to explore the complexity and interrelationships of language, culture and identity from the learner’s perspectives. It aimed to give “voice” to the learners and to explore their worlds in the changing social and cultural contexts. The research interest was in the narratives of the learners focusing on their changing perception of self and others in the Canadian context. My study was focused on five Hong Kong exchange students in two Canadian universities. These students were all bilingual learners who had graduated from English medium secondary schools in Hong Kong. They had completed a year of their tertiary education at the major universities in Hong Kong. They had also passed the TOEFL examinations with high scores and were enrolled in the mainstream courses in the Canadian universities as Hong Kong exchange students. After a year of exchange experience in Canada, these students had to return to Hong Kong to finish their degree in their home universities.

My research was focused on the participants as “initiates” (Leach, 1976, p.78) in the cultural settings in Canada. The aim was to explore how these learners adapted to their new cultural roles as exchange students “separated from their initial roles” (Leach, 1976, p.78) in the Hong Kong context. The emphasis of my research was on the process and meaning of the rites of transition. The narratives of the participants were studied from the sociocultural and interpretive perspectives. As Mohan (1991) stated, “personal narrative is not simply a reflection of the temporal flow of past events but is a way in which we ourselves create coherent meanings from our daily lives” (p.119). Through our joint effort
to find "coherent meanings" (p.119), the participants and I became co-narrators of their exchange experience in Canada.

1.4 Research Questions

My research was guided by these questions:

1. When we speak the same language, do we share the same cultural knowledge?
   Is "language the passport to another culture" (Pao et al, 1997, p.626) ?

2. To what extent is the learner’s social identity, role and status influenced by the changing sociocultural contexts? How is change complex in their views?

3. How do learners cope with these changes in the changing educational and sociocultural contexts?

4. Whose voice and whose perspectives are reflected in this research?

5. How is knowledge constructed and reconstructed in the process of language learning?
   Whose culture do we endorse in language education?

6. How do the Hong Kong students make sense of their exchange experience in the Canadian tertiary context?

7. Are the stories of the Hong Kong learners relevant to the research on language, culture and identity? Should their stories be considered as legitimate knowledge?

8. What are the emergent themes in this study and what are the implications?
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Competing Frameworks, Tendencies, Patterns and Issues

2.1 The Dominant Perspective on Language Issues

In the traditional view, language is taught in teacher-centered classrooms. The learning objectives are focused on formal linguistic instructions and grammar is taught in isolation (Brown, 1994). In these classroom settings, learners are trained to acquire "useful knowledge" (Reid, 1998, p.294) and to attain high scores in language assessment examinations. The emphasis is on the unit approach and mastery learning. This educational view has been the "dominant perspective" (Reid, 1998, p.287) in the second language teaching for decades. The transmission orientation is rooted in various philosophical, psychological, economic, social and historical contexts. For example, Bacon's emphasis on scientific cause and effect in human action, Locke's notion of education as a process of habit formation, Skinner's theory of operant conditioning, Thorndike's notion of repetitive exercise and concept of use and disuse, Friedman's free market theory to education and Wittgenstein's focus on empiricism, analytic philosophy, logical atomism are influential to this theoretical position (Miller & Seller, 1990). Any deviation from the standard set is interpreted as a problem area which needs to be corrected. Based on this "verifiability theory of meaning" (Miller & Seller, 1990, p.20), problems which are not measurable, are therefore "not genuine questions" (Kaplan, 1961, p.66-67). As Postman (1979) stated, "For what is a curriculum but a design for controlling and shaping the minds of the young" (p.88). Success is measured by the learner's ability to
achieve the standards. In the transmission position, knowledge is regarded as *objective* and *measurable*. There is no consideration for the *subjective* meanings of knowledge.

Language research in the transmission orientation widely accepted the psycholinguistic model which is focused on logical atomism, deterministic positivism and scientific empiricism (Miller & Seller, 1990). In this theoretical model, the emphasis is on measurable causes and consequences. These studies use a scientific and investigative approach to analyze small components of learning behavior in formal classroom settings. Samples collected from this controlled environment are then used as data to test the hypothesis. “Science then takes over to confirm whether the statements are true or false” (Miller & Seller, 1990, p.20). Learners are studied as *subjects* in the tradition of scientific experiments. In this theoretical framework, the notions of learner and the learning context are deemed irrelevant to the research. The studies are guided by the notion that there is a universal solution to every learning problem as learning is “the same in its essentials” (Miller & Seller, 1990, p.40). Language learning is perceived as a fixed construct passed down unchanged by time or context. As Kaplan’s (1961) stated,

> when a philosophic thesis is formulated in sufficiently exact language, there is no longer room for debate- the thing can be settled one way or the other, and once for all. Philosophy could make progress if only the philosopher would rather be definitely wrong than vaguely right” (p.59).

In this empiricist and analytic view, “the self is no more than a collection of mental states” (Miller & Seller, 1990, p.21) and human experience is no more than what can be logically verified. Learning is perceived as a linear, cause/effect chain separating the “purely
intellectual pursuit” (Kaplan, 1961, p.88) from the “pointless disputation” (Kaplan, 1961, p.59) of matters which concern the heart.

2.2 The Reconceptualist Perspective on Language Issues

In recent years, with an increasing emphasis on the learner-centered curriculum, the communicative language teaching approach has become widely accepted as the reconceptualized teaching approach in second language education. This focus on the communicative approach has triggered significant changes in language classrooms. The curriculum objectives, classroom activities, roles of teachers and learners and the choice of teaching materials are all different from the traditional classrooms. The teaching curriculum is more flexible and learner-centered. Compared to the dominant perspective, the teaching objectives are also more focused on life situations and meaning making tasks using language as the means for socialization. Learners are expected to play active roles in the learning process, interacting with the teacher and their peers. Learning is not just confined to what goes on inside the classrooms, it also involves learning which goes on outside of the classrooms in our every day living contexts.

With this increasing emphasis on the communicative and interactive classrooms, learners and the learning context emerge as relevant themes in many second language acquisition (SLA) studies. Knowledge is reconceptualized as “relativistic and personal and not subject to cultural validation” (Reid, 1998, p.293). The pursuit of knowledge is on the individual and personal agenda. In this theoretical paradigm, “the idea of a collective cultural tradition has been abandoned”(Reid, 1998, p.293). It is replaced by a focus on
the "bodies of experience" in the "learning community" (p.295) and the "multiplicity of rational ways of understanding" (p.295).

2.2.1 Changing Views of Learner's Motives

On the issue of learner's motives, the "dominant perspective" (Reid, 1998) considers "measuring motivation" (Ramage, 1986, p.192) as the primary objective in motivational studies. Researchers in this traditional framework argue that learners' motives are separated into two distinct and well defined categories: integrative and instrumental (Gardner & Smythe, 1975). The integrative motive is defined as the desire to become a member of the target language community and the instrumental motive is defined as "the determination to acquire another language to achieve such goals as a good job or social recognition" (Clement, Gardner & Smith, 1977, p.124). The "dominant perspective" (Reid, 1998) emphasizes the need to measure extrinsic motivational factors and its effects on the successful performance of learners in second language acquisition (Clement, Gardner & Smith, 1977). The focus of the dominant perspective is to find ways to improve the learning behavior and output performance of the students through the manipulation of the extrinsic motivational stimuli.

With an increasing emphasis on a holistic and humanistic perspective in second language education in recent years, studies in the psycholinguistic models begin to find it hard to present clear cut results in the motivational studies. Researchers in this paradigm argued that the problems with the lack of clear-cut results were partly due to ambiguities in the definition of integrativeness and instrumentality and the unaccounted influence of the
linguistic milieu on the individual’s motivation (Clement & Knuidenier, 1983). Even Gardner (1988) admitted in his more recent work that “a universal in language learning is too simplistic” (p.112) calling for the need to have more studies on the contextual factors of language education. However, this awareness about contextual factors does not translate into changes in perspective. The dominant perspective remains focused on the product rather than the process of language learning. It does not consider the learner’s intrinsic desires as relevant to motivational studies.

In the “reconceptualist” perspective (Reid, 1998, p.291), the focus of studies is on the introspection and intentionality of the learners. Lennon’s (1989) study of the advanced language learners challenged the artificiality of the integrative and instrumental categories. As Lennon (1989) stated, “subjects’ motivation was essentially to learn the language, and they did not fit into the crude classification of integratively versus instrumentally motivated learners very well” (p.376). The reconceptualists do not believe in artificial classifications and superficial group data. They see the need for research to be grounded in the social realities experienced by the learners. They also believe that the heart of the issue is an open-ended phenomenon which can only be understood by looking beneath the surface for implicit meanings. The reconceptualists also see learners’ motives as multiple, contradictory and ambivalent. In Norton Peirce’s (1995) recent study on immigrant women to Canada, she argued for “a conception of investment rather than motivation to capture the complex interrelationship of language learner to the target language and their sometimes ambivalent desire to speak it” (p.9). Studies in this paradigm view learners as individuals and not subjects. Learners interact with the social environment as persons.
with their histories, beliefs, uncertainties and emotions. As Lennon (1989) stated, “Advanced learner performance is characterized by uncertainty, a finding strangely neglected in the literature” (p.390). Furthermore, in the reconceptualist perspective, the learning process is interpreted as changing, experiential, and complex. As Davis et al (1996) stated, “Like any social event, learning is a complex phenomenon” (p.153). In this reconceptualist perspective, the issues of culture and identity emerge as relevant issues in the study on language learners.

2.2.2 Changing Views of Culture

On the notion of culture, I agree with Edge (1996) that “the paradox is a constant presence” (p.14). The dominant view with its “generalizations” (p.9) and its sense of “certainty” (p.21) has the tendency to make simplistic and static representations about learners in their studies. There is also a tendency for educators in a target language to draw conclusions on the language learners as inferior to them. The study of culture is not a study about Others. “Researchers who see students as bound by their cultures may be trapped by their own cultural tendency to reduce, categorize and generalize” (Zamel, 1997, p.342).

In the reconceptualized perspective, culture is redefined as the way people interpret the world and how they “make sense of the world in their every day life” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1992, p.2). It is acknowledged that prior studies had over-simplified the notion of culture. Researchers in this humanistic orientation tended to “adopt an attitude of ‘respect’ and ‘appreciation’” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1992, p.6) for learners’ diversified
cultural values. The world is seen as a multicultural and global community. As Hammersley & Atkinson (1992) stated, “Not only may we not know why people do what they do, often we do not know what they are doing” (p.7). In this reconceptualist perspective, “the search for universal law is rejected in favour of detailed descriptions of the concrete experience within a particular culture and of the social rules or patterns that constitute it” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1992, p.8).

Consistent with a reconceptualist paradigm, Pratt’s (1991) concept of transculturation (p.36) reconstructed the ideas of assimilation or acculturation by recognizing the “active engagement and resistance” (Zamel, 1997, p.350) of participants in the process of adaptation to a new culture. As Pratt (1991) stated, “What were once accepted as objective facts about culture and considered almost sacred icons; are now recognized as having supported highly subjective conclusions; the reality of cultures is that they are highly unpredictable, elusive even chaotic” (p.36). She urged educators to be wary of the “judgments” and “fictions” (p.350) created about the social identities of learners.

2.3 The Issue of Social Identity

Social identity is an issue which has raised much interest in studies across disciplines. In the field of second language acquisition, the conceptual frameworks of language and identity have undergone much controversy. Some of the prevailing theories in SLA are, in fact, derived from models used in other disciplines. Whether the frameworks from other models are “relevant” or “helpful” (McNamara, 1997) in defining the social identity of the second language learner or have drawn artificial distinctions between the language learner
and the language learning context (Norton Peirce, 1995) is a controversial issue. Yet despite differences in theoretical paradigms, most researchers agree that the past concept of identity as a set of fixed coordinates, passed down intact over time and across locations (Morgan, 1997) is a notion which needs to be re-examined.

Recent studies acknowledge identity as a complex issue. The identity of the language learner and teacher reconstruct as relationships are renegotiated in the dynamic and interactive learning contexts. (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Edge, 1996; Flowerdew & Miller, 1995; Lennon, 1989; Leung & al, 1997; McNarama, 1997; Norton, 1997; Parke, 1993; Norton Peirce, 1995; Thesen, 1997; Zamel, 1997). Recent studies also suggest that in second language acquisition, some previous assumptions and research strategies implied that the learners and the learning contexts were static and insular. These studies argue that these implications were over-simplistic and irrelevant to the language learning contexts of today. There is a need to develop a more "comprehensive theory of social identity that integrates the language and the language learning context" (Norton Peirce, 1995, p.12). Studies in the language socialization perspective acknowledge that students are "complex social beings" (Harre, 1993, p.12) active in "socialization through language and socialization to use language" (Ochs, 1988, p.14). Learners’ diverse linguistic/cultural backgrounds and intrinsic desires are interwoven into "an interlocking weave of processes" (Harre, 1993, p.12) in their every day learning activities. Learning does not only take place in a teacher-centered classroom. It is interactive and communicative both inside and outside of the classroom. As Davis et al (1996) state, learning is a “structural dance- a complex choreography” (p.153). Learners do not enter the learning cultural
scenes as blank slates or passive recipients in a “black box” (Lennon, 1989, p.376). They are active participants in the interactive learning process. Reconceptualists see the need to incorporate students’ diverse identities, learning backgrounds and cultural traditions in the language curriculum in order to understand, validate, and enhance their learning experiences. (Duff & Uchida, 1997). In these recent studies, I found competing frameworks concerning the issues of language, culture and identity. I decided to use the terms learner choice and learner agency to identify these competing frameworks.

2.3.1 Learner Choice Framework

Social identity studies which focused on learner choice looked at learner as having the choice in “choosing group membership” through the use of the second language (Flowerdew & Miller, 1995; Hansen & Liu, 1997; McNamara, 1997; Tajfel, 1978, 1981). Consequently, the conceptual framework was more idealistic, well-defined and less complex as compared to the learner agency framework. Learners were either in-group or out-group members depending on learners’ choice and the actual language used in specific contexts. In this theoretical paradigm, researchers cited Tajfel, the social psychologist’s identity theory (Tajfel, 1978, 1981) to explain the self and other categorization, the notion of an awareness of social identity, the social comparison, and the search for psychological distinctiveness (McNamara, 1997). Giles and Johnson’s ethnolinguistic theory which reviewed the role that language played as the salient marker of group membership and social identity also stressed the positive distinctiveness of social identity (Hansen & Liu, 1997). Gumperz (1970, 1982) and Heller (1988) concluded that the phenomenon of code-switching was a learner’s choice. In addition, Parke (1993) in his study of UK
classrooms contended that bilinguals enjoyed a different kind of personal and social experience" (p.79). He argued that "rather than just attempt to create status for minority languages, and hope thereby to promote bilingualism, another way forward might be through promoting the teaching of languages to people who are enlightened about why they should acquire them" (p.83).

2.3.2 Learner Agency Framework

On the competing framework were studies which were more focused on learners as human agents in the learning process. I used the term learner agency to describe the theoretical paradigm of these studies. The authors of these studies were more supportive of the learner's struggles. It was acknowledged that the learner's social life, identities and beliefs were co-constructed, negotiated and transformed on an on-going basis by means of language (Duff & Uchida, 1997, Leung et al, 1997, Norton, 1997, Pao et al, 1997, Thesen, 1997, Zamel, 1997). The interest was in the "silenced voices in the margins" (Pao et al, 1997, p.624). Compared to the learner choice stance, researchers in this theoretical stance were more critical and grounded in the social realities of learning contexts. Some of the common themes in the research of social identity theory in this framework were multiculturalism, power relations, mismatch in categorization and access.

2.3.2.1 Multiculturalism

On the issue of multiculturalism, Duff & Uchida (1997) discussed the phenomenon of implicit modes of cultural transmission in their study on EFL teachers in Japan. Pao et al (1997) also problematized the reality of "distinct and well defined" (p.622) categorization
of racial groups in their study on the identity formation of mixed heritage adults in the US mid-Atlantic metropolitan area. They claimed that any designation was problematic for mixed heritage persons as no label seemed to be able to capture their multiple identities and heritage. Leung et al.’s (1997) study of urban classrooms in England also problematized the prevailing assumption of “authentic English speakers” (Leung et al., 1997, p.553). They argued that the notion of “native speakers” was no more than a human invention of an “idealized” and “imagined community” (Leung et al., 1997, p.553) by monolingual and monocultural English speakers. They contended that there was a need to include the “emerging cultures” of the urban classrooms in language education. As Hall (1992) observed,

> everywhere, cultural identities are emerging which are not fixed, but poised, in transition, between different positions; which draw on different cultural traditions at the same time; and which are the product of those complicated cross-overs and cultural mixes which are increasingly common in a globalized world (p.310)

On the same note, Zamel’s (1997) research also emphasized the importance of “allowing students their multiple ways with language” (p.347). She suggested educators use learners’ diverse backgrounds as a resource to reflect on the dynamic process of language learning. The spirit of this paradigm was captured in her words,

> We, as educators need to keep in mind that the conclusions drawn about the students we teach must be open to questioning and critique (p.390)

### 2.3.2.2 Power Relations

On the issue of power relations, theorists in this paradigm drew heavily on Pennycook’s (1995) views, “that all education is political, and second, that all knowledge is interested” (p.590). They were engaged in raising consciousness on the power relations and multiple ways in which tradition, moral regulation and authority were invoked and resisted in the
dynamic language learning processes. The theme of “how relations of power affect interaction between language learners and target language speakers” (Norton Peirce, 1995, p.9) permeated these studies (Crookes & Rulon, 1988; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Edge, 1996; Leung et al, 1997; Morgan 1997; Norton, 1997; Thesen, 1997; Zamel, 1997).

Norton Peirce (1995) described social identity as a site of struggle. The issue of “the right to speak” (p.18) was a site of struggle for the language learners in her study. Norton Peirce (1995) urged educators to explore “how inequitable relations of power limit the opportunities L2 learners have to practice the target language outside the classrooms” (p.12). Drawing from Weedon’s (1987) feminist postructuralist theory, Norton Peirce (1995) linked “individual experience and social power to the theory of subjectivity” (p.15). In Weedon’s (1987) definition, subjectivity was defined as “the conscious and unconscious thought and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (p.32).

In a more recent article, Norton (1997) explored the theme of subjectivity even further. As Norton (1997) stated, “subjectivity and language are theorized as mutually constitutive” (p.411). Subjectivity was characterized as “the multiple, nonunitary nature of the subject”, “a site of struggle” and “changing over time and produced in a variety of social sites” (p.411) in her article. Norton’s (1997) study illustrated that learners had human agency in their struggle. The relations of power could “serve to empower rather than marginalize” (Norton, 1997, p.412) the language learners in the process of negotiation of relationships in their learning communities. In this human agency framework, Norton (1997) acknowledged that the notion of power was closely linked to
the notion of ownership, categorization and access. By “problematizing” the notion of power and “reframing the power relations” (Norton Peirce, 1995, p.22) the authors in this paradigm were calling for the need to reconceptualize the notion of ownership of English and to re-examine the labels which segregated the “native” and “non-native” speakers (Amin, 1997; Davis et al, 1996; Leung et al, 1997; Mawhinney & Fengying, 1997; Norton, 1997; Pennycook, 1989, 1995).

I agree with these authors that it is important to reject the “one totalizing view” or the artificial boundaries set by the gatekeepers of English. There is a need to search for identity theories “grounded in politics, embodied experiences and historical location” (Pao et al, 1997, p.624). As Pao et al (1995) stated, “rather than relying on male, White, and European perspectives from the center to provide a universal understanding of identity, feminists look to female, non-White, and colonized voices from the periphery” (p.624). I also agree with Pennycook (1995) that, “It is of great importance in looking at questions of language, power and inequality that we examine very carefully the critical framework we employ” (p.35). Leung et al’s (1997) study challenged the critical framework people employed to separate the “authentic” “native” English speakers from the “peoples and languages emanating from former English colonies and third world countries” (Leung et al, 1997, p.546). They argued that the separation of “native” and “non-native” speakers implied the superior-inferior dichotomy. It created an invisible wall which separated the in-group from the out-group.
2.3.2.3 Mismatch in Categorization

Another issue which concerned theorists in the learner agency framework was the mismatch in categorization. Theorists in this paradigm were skeptical of the labels educators placed on the learners. In past decade, multilingual and multiethnic issues had blurred many conventional labels artificially attached to the learners. The discrepancy between the static classification of individuals and the multi-realities in the learning contexts were issues of interests for recent studies (Duff & Uchida, 1997, Leung et al, 1997, Morgan, 1997, Norton, 1997; Pao et al, 1995; Norton Peirce, 1995; Thesen, 1997; Zamel, 1997). These studies also addressed the human agency in the construction and reconstruction of identity. Furthermore, some of the studies also questioned the absurdity of placing multiethnic and multicultural individuals into artificial categories artificially set up by the monolingual and monocultural communities (Leung et al, 1997; Pao et al, 1995). They argued that the diversity and dynamics of the language learners’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds could not be neatly categorized. Leung et al (1997) suggested that terms like native speaker and mother tongue were problematic and should be replaced by language competence terms such as language expertise, language inheritance or language affiliation to reflect the shifting and changing relationships in multiethnic and multilingual urban classrooms. As Pao et al’s (1995) stated, “just as race is not stable but contested, identity is multiple and contested” (p.623).

2.3.2.4 Access

On the issue of access, these theorists believed in the inequality of access by language learners to the target language community. They argued that learners did not have the
choice of access as theorists in the competing framework claimed they had. Norton Peirce (1995) in her study used the concept of investment to describe the learner’s multiple desires for second language acquisition. She argued that investment and access were interrelated and specific to the learning contexts. She illustrated “how and under what conditions the immigrant women in her study created, responded to, and sometimes resisted the opportunities to speak English” (Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 9). As Norton Peirce (1995) stated, “Paradoxically, perhaps, the decision to remain silent or the decision to speak may both constitute forms or resistance to inequitable social forces” (p.20)

As Norton (1997) stated, “identity as dynamic and changing across time and place” (p.419). Leung et al (1997) also claimed that access was a problem in their studied contexts. Although “TESOL practice within the schooling sector in England has been mainstreamed” (p.543), their study revealed that “mainstreaming itself has generated a number of new and unresolved issues in language use, ethnicity and social identity” (p.543). They observed that ESL students were implicitly assumed as “linguistic and social outsiders” (Leung et al, 1997, p. 543) in their learning environment. The interactions between native and non-native speakers were studied “The role of conversational interactions between native speakers (NS’s) and nonnative speakers (NNS’s) in second language acquisition” (p.675) was the research question in Crookes & Rulon’s (1988) study. They found that “NS provided significantly more feedback in the problem-solving, task-related conversations than in free conversation” (Crookes & Rulon, 1988, p.677) with the NNS. Their study supported Chun et al’s (1982) findings that “there was relatively little “on-record” feedback in free conversations between NSs and
NNSs "(Crookes & Rulon, 1988, p.675). They argued that the conversational interactions between NSs and NNSs lacked the "give-and-take" quality in the "negotiation of meanings" and "mutual negotiation of topics" (Crookes & Rulon, 1988, p.678) of free conversations.

In Pao et al (1995) study, the authors argued that mixed heritage persons in their study had problems gaining access to the language communities of their choice as monolinguals. They regarded "bilingualism as a resource " (Pao et al, 1995, p.626). However, their claim that "bilingualism gives mixed heritage individuals a choice of how to identify themselves because language is an individual’s passport to one culture or another"(Pao et al, 1997, p.626) made me question whether their study supported the learner choice or learner agency stance. If, indeed, "identity is multiple and contested" (Pao et al, 1997, p.623) then is a learner’s “nativelike dominance of the languages” (Pao et al, 1997, p.622) a “passport” for entry to the “communities of their choices” (Pao et al, 1997, p.623)? Although I supported the authors’ intent “to promote positive self-identities for mixed-heritage students" (p.622). I questioned if bilingualism was a determinant for access to the desirable language communities.

2.4 The Complexity of Change

I agree with Norton (1997) that “transition is the recurring theme” (p.419) in recent studies on learners’ identities. “The experience of the stranger is not restricted to those moving to live in a different society” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1992, p.8). Learners
make sense of their “new experiences by placing them in the context of a familiar, reliable construction of reality” (Miller & Seller, 1990, p.234). Therefore, the changing of this familiar reality involves deep change in thinking or second order change. To study these deep changes from the perspective of outcome is like scratching the surface without touching the heart of the issue. It is also ignoring the “complexity, dynamism and unpredictability” (Fullan, 1993, p.20) of the changing process.

I agree with Fullan (1991) that, “Educational changes are technically simple and socially complex” (p.65). In shifting from “cultures of certainty to cultures of uncertainty” (Hargreaves, 1994, p.57) people often feel powerless in their position of marginality. They feel alienated in the “social timelessness” (Leach, 1976, p.78) of their new contexts. Their resistance or withdrawal often reflects their reaction to a change which places them in an inferior role or a lower status in the changing social structure. The change may threaten their sense of identity, role and status. It may reach a “threshold” which stops them from going “any further” (Werner, 1991, p.16). The feeling of helplessness and inability to make a difference may lead to withdrawal of energy and a loss of commitment and moral purpose at work (Werner, 1991). I agree with Fullan (1991) that, “Neglect of the phenomenology of change- that is how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended” (p.5) is the heart of the problem with most social changes. Educators need to think of “change as a journey and not a blueprint” (Fullan, 1993, p.22) and to search for “subjective meanings of change” (Fullan, 1982, p.113) in the changing process.
Indeed, change is “full of paradoxes” (Fullan, 1991, p.102). I agree with Ungerleider (1993) that “most changes draw their leadership from persons who are regarded as deviant or marginal in the group, people who embody countercultural values” (p.95). Yet “how is change complex?” (Fullan, 1993, p.19) In Fullan’s (1993) paradigm of change, there is great emphasis on the unplanned, unpredictable, dynamic, non-linear, interrelated and interactive nature of change. Change implies a new frame of thinking. Fullan (1993) pointed out that “every person is a change agent” (p.22). Change encompasses learner’s investment, social energy, personal commitment and moral purpose (Fullan, 1991, 1993) as well as the contextualized elements such as social climate, community acceptance and social support. “Ultimately, the transformation of subjective realities is the essence of change” (Fullan, 1991, p.36). When learners are able to openly address their personal agendas and sites of tension in change, they are empowered to act as change agents. Consequently change becomes the shared meanings and mutual adaptations between the individual and the environment. As Davis et al (1996) stated, “Individual and environment continually specify one another” (p.157). Change can weave learners into social settings through “passion, purpose and politics” (Hargreaves, 1997).

2.5 The Reconstruction of Knowledge

In my review of literature, the question, “what does it mean to be educated?” (Reid, 1998, p.288) kept circling in my mind. It made me reflect on how knowledge was constructed and reconstructed in the different sociocultural contexts of my past. I agree
with Banks (1995) that "knowledge is both subjective and objective" (p.15) and that "social location produces subjectivity and influences the construction of knowledge" (p.15). Our knowledge on language, culture and identity is influenced by our positions in the social structure and our perception of reality in the changing social and cultural contexts. This phenomenon of positionality (Banks, 1995) emphasizes the importance of context in the construction of knowledge. As Banks (1995) stated, "social location produces subjectivity and influences the construction of knowledge" (p.15).

Drawing from this sociocultural awareness, I found Cazden's (1988, 1997) critical analysis of "whose scaffold", "whose world views", "reconceptualization" and "alternative meanings" relevant and insightful. They made me reflect on these questions, "What transfers in the process of language learning? How and whose English culture should be endorsed in English language teaching?" Issues related to language, culture and identity are complex and contradictory. As Banks (1995) stated, "knowledge reflects both the reality observed and the subjectivity of the knower" (p.15). There are discrepancies between how we see ourselves, how others see us and who we represent. To challenge prior assumptions and reconstruct knowledge from the insider's perspective, learners' experiences need to be confirmed "so that the students are legitimated and supported as the people who matter" (Giroux, 1987, p. 176). Questions such as whose text, whose voice and whose reality reflect how knowledge is constructed in the research. They influence the design of the study, the choice of methodology, the context of the study and the research findings. They also question theories which "falsely generalize and create stereotypes" (Martin, 1993, p.4). As Page (1996) stated, "knowledge does not come
labeled as a particular type, already packaged for particular groups of people” (p.21). To label learners in fixed categories is to cast them as “social outsiders” (Leung et al, 1997, p.543). I agree with Leung et al (1997) that “the language learning needs of ESL students are not easily understood in terms of fixed concepts of ethnicity and language” (Leung et al, 1997, p.543). Many bilingual learners actively construct their own knowledge of self and others in the changing contexts.

In the perspective of “education for humanization” (Graman, 1988), a learner is reconceptualized as a self-activated maker of meaning and an active agent in his own learning process. Learning becomes a personal fulfillment in the construction and reconstruction of knowledge when a learner is able to see himself/herself as a self-actualizing individual in the changing social contexts.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 A Qualitative Research

I agree with Hansen & Liu (1997) that “social identity is a dynamic phenomenon, it should be studied with a methodology that is both dynamic in philosophy and in practice” (p.573). My research was “context-bound” and the methodology I employed in this research was consistent with my awareness of the complexity and interrelationship of language, culture and identity. Since my research interest was to explore learner issues in a cross-cultural experience, I decided to use a qualitative research approach in this study. As Watson-Gegeo (1988) stated, “Qualitative research is an umbrella term for many research approaches and techniques” (p.576). In the past decade, many researchers in the language field were inclined to use a qualitative or ethnographic approach to carry out their longitudinal studies. The focus of the procedural trends was on multi-methods data collection strategies which included interviews, field notes, home visits, journals, intensive discussions, direct and participant observation, secondary sources and artifacts. With an increasing emphasis on the learner-centered curriculum in language teaching in recent years, it is not surprising that this approach has become a prevailing trend in current SLA research on language, culture and identity (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Hansen & Liu, 1997; Leung et al, 1997; Lennon, 1989; Morgan, 1997; Norton, 1997; Norton Peirce, 1995; Thesen, 1997).
As Denzin & Lincoln (1993) stated, "Qualitative research is many things to many people. Its essence is twofold: a commitment to some version of the naturalistic, interpretive approach to its subject matter, and an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of positivism" (p.4). Qualitative research emphasizes processes and meanings. It uses an inductive approach to allow the multi-dimensions of the study to emerge from the natural settings. A qualitative research is guided by natural flow of events. Data are collected as bits and pieces of information from the interactions in the social contexts. In an open-ended research scheme, a qualitative research is designed in such a way that it allows the exploration of emergent patterns and themes through the data collected in the research field. As Woods (1985) stated, "concepts emerge from the field, are checked and rechecked against further data, compared with other material, strengthened or perhaps re-formulated" (p.51). Data are juxtaposed against each other to confirm the credibility of the study as well as to problematize the issues. In a naturalistic inquiry approach, the role of the researcher is non-intrusive, observant or participatory. There is a sense of respect and appreciation for the participants in their natural settings. The philosophical framework of qualitative research is based on "a relativist ontology, a subjective epistemology and a naturalistic set of methodological procedures" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1993, p.14).

3.1.1 The Multiple Case Study Approach

Before I started my research, I struggled to search for a methodology comprehensive enough to bring out the dimensions in this study. I finally decided that a multiple case study approach with an ethnographic thrust would be helpful to convey the "descriptive, concrete and detailed" experiences of the participants. As Creswell (1998) stated,
"Whereas some consider "the case" an object of study (Stake, 1995) and others consider it a methodology (e.g. Merriam, 1988), a case study is an exploration of a "bounded system" or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (p. 61). I agree with Creswell (1998) that case study shares many common characteristics with other qualitative traditions such as biography, phenomenology, grounded theory and ethnography. Since there are many overlaps in the data collection strategies, "authors may integrate them in a single study" (p. 8).

In this study, I decided to integrate a multiple case study approach with an ethnographic approach in the research process to highlight the interpretive and sociocultural perspectives of the cases. I wanted to be flexible in approach to "bring into focus particular questions" (Fox-Keller, 1985, p. 6) relevant to the research purpose. As Merriam (1990) stated, "The most important is one's purpose in conducting the study in the first place - that is, the conceptual framework, the problem or the questions of interest [which] determine what is to be observed" (p. 89).

This study was an in-depth analysis of multiple cases in their specific contexts. The research process required an "extensive verification" (Stake, 1995) of data in the studied contexts. Data were triangulated from "multiple sources of information" (Creswell, 1998, p. 62) through an extensive period of time to build thick descriptions to the study. The cases were "bounded by time and place" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61) in the exploration of a range of topics including "cultural behavior, language, or artifacts" (Creswell, 1998, p. 66).
Since multiple cases were involved, each case was described and interpreted separately to
discover the themes which were consistent within the case. In the final data analysis
phase, "a thematic analysis across the cases" (Creswell, 1998, p.63) was used to make
sense of all the data and to look for patterns, themes or "lessons" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)
which emerged from the study as a whole. I found that the multiple case study approach
with its flexibility in design, diversity in interests and in-depth analysis on the individual
accounts offered the fundamental methodological framework I needed for this study on
the Hong Kong exchange students.

3.1.2 The Ethnographic Link

To highlight the sociocultural aspects of this study, I integrated a case study approach
with an ethnographic link. I agree with Watson-Gegeo (1988) that "the terms
ethnographic, qualitative and naturalistic are used interchangeably in the educational
literature" (p.576) and that these terms need to be clarified. As Watson-Gegeo (1988)
stated, "ethnography is not a synonym for qualitative research" (p.576). The fact that a
study "involves observation in nonlaboratory settings" (p.576) and social interactions in
the "natural, on-going environment where [people] live and work" (Schatzman & Strauss,
p.1973 p.5) does not necessarily make it an ethnographic study. Ethnography is defined
as "the art and science of describing the culture of a given group of people more or less
shared. In the contemporary definition of ethnography, it is also the topical, stylistic,
documentary, evidentiary and argumentative choices made by an author and displayed in
the text" (Ed.503, 1998). The fundamental question which guides an ethnographic study
is "how can we describe what is happening?" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.52) Since
culture is an abstract term which carries different meanings for different people, an ethnographic approach has to be descriptive, interpretive and naturalistic. Therefore, I disagree with Watson-Gegeo’s (1988) statement that “what constitutes high-quality, scientific ethnographic work has not kept pace with ethnography’s increasing popularity in ESL” (p.575). I believe this statement implies a deterministic stance on “what constitutes high-quality, scientific ethnographic work” (p.575). Furthermore, it implies that we have to study culture from a *scientific* frame of reference.

I believe Watson-Gegeo’s (1988) views on “high-quality, scientific ethnographic work” was a reflection of the *dominant perspective* (Reid, 1998). It emphasized the scientific approach and the measurable outcome. In the *reconceptualist perspective*, ethnographic work is not just about *product*, it is also about *process*. Now we learn to take a more humanistic and holistic look at our participants and at ourselves. We learn to study the participants from an emic perspective. We learn to acknowledge the cultural *baggage* and assumptions we bring into the field as researchers. I believe “impressionistic accounts and very short periods of observation” (Watson-Gegeo, 1988, p.576) do not necessarily mean that some studies are less ethnographic than others. Nor is it true that scientific approach implies “high quality ethnographic work” (Watson-Gegeo, 1988, p.576). I believe what matters is the researcher’s attitude toward the participants and the studied settings. My study was inspired by Malinowski’s (1922) vision on the study of man:

> To study the institutions, the customs, and codes or to study the behavior and mentality without the subjective desire of feeling by what these people live, of realizing the substance of their happiness- is in my opinion, to miss the greatest reward which we can hope to obtain from the study of man” ([reprint 1961], p.25).
3.2 Ethical Concerns

Prior to designing the research, I questioned the possibility of conducting a naturalistic, respectful and non-intrusive research. Morgan (1997) explained in great detail his reluctance to follow any formal modes of discovery.

I have found that many established research methodologies have the potential to be overly intrusive and counterproductive, most of all in terms of encouraging a classroom environment where openness, experimentation, and challenges to the status quo were central to discovering the meaning potential of intonation. Many teacher educators take the position that research should and can be a benign and politically neutral activity (p.437).

What Morgan (1997) attempted to do was to raise public awareness on the issues of ethical concerns in qualitative research. He urged researchers to be sensitive to the intrusiveness of their research methodologies and to understand the power relations in the research activity. He also added that those “who choose not to interview, tape-record or externalize the emic voices” (p.438) should not be excluded from contributing to the knowledge base of the research.

As a researcher, I was aware of the ethical concerns in my research process. My primary objective was to give voice to the participants. The dilemma was that in my effort to tell their stories, I was also revealing their vulnerability and private lives to the readers. Sometimes I questioned whether I had the right to tell their stories. To protect their privacy and the confidentiality of the data, I used pseudonyms to hide their real names and the names of their tertiary institutions. The irony of the situation was that I was at the same time trying to give voice to the students on their identity issues.
I believe that there are always conflict of interests between competing frameworks and moral purposes in the study of social groups or social beings. Other than the use of pseudonyms, I had also prepared a consent form to inform the participants of the research approach as well as my intent to safeguard the confidentiality of their data. However, I believe the consent form was more for formality than for protection of confidential data. What actually matters in this ethical concern is the researcher's discretion to use the research materials with caution. Indeed there are many details in the research process which may be relevant to the research. Yet so often these details are too private and too personal to be included in the write-ups. In this research, some of the participants were also my former students. I was concerned that I would violate their trust in me as a teacher by telling their stories to others. Furthermore, I was concerned that the implicit power structure between teacher and students might influence our rapport as researcher and participants. I had to constantly remind myself to be careful and sensitive in my choice of approach and my use of research materials. This research was about the participants. I had their best interest in my mind.

I knew that it would be impossible for me to repay the participants for their generosity and time. I could never claim that I was able to reciprocate this favor for opening up their new home to me. By sharing their thoughts and feelings with me during this critical moment in their lives, these participants welcomed me into their lives. This act of sharing thoughts and feelings implied friendship, trust and bond. My participants and I were immersed in this research process as co-researchers. While I was observing them, they were also observing me. There was reciprocity in the field relations. We struggled with our
uncertainties and our concerns. We searched for our roles in this co-partnership. Together we tried to make sense of the exchange experience as well as the research experience. I was their sounding board, their listening ears and the shoulder they could lean on in times of needs. My role as the researcher was to understand, to make sense and not to manipulate or change their lives.

3.3 Situating the Study

Before I started the research process, it was necessary for me to situate myself in this study "to enable the readers to locate my biases" (Kouritzin, 1997, p.8) and to understand the limitations of this study. I believe my prior study abroad experiences in Switzerland, France and the United States in my high school and college years had given me the "insider’s perspective" as well as "developed sensibility" (Goldman-Segall, 1995) to the journey the students had to go through in this exchange experience. Having played the roles of foreign student, immigrant student, local student and exchange student in different language and cultural contexts, I knew that each role carried a different meaning for the student even though they might seem the same to others. This insider’s knowledge helped me to empathize with my research participants. Yet at the same time I had to remind myself not to let my past stop me from seeing beyond myself.

This research acknowledged that the studied phenomena were open-ended and changing on an on-going basis as the students’ experiences might carry long term impact on their self identities and world views. Many personal changes were not observable during the time this research was conducted. The research was open to themes which emerged from
the natural flow of events to let data inform theories. There was no intent to provide fixed answer to any of the research questions. Neither were the stories of the individuals generalizable to other Hong Kong students in the exchange situations. Like a piece in the puzzle, this research intended to stimulate discussions, challenge claims and problematize issues through an in-depth analysis of the learners' contexts.

The research was narrow in scope and it was “bounded by time and place” (Creswell, 1998, p.61) in the multiple case study approach. The cases were situated within the Canadian university contexts for several reasons. First, it was more feasible, time efficient and accessible for me as the researcher to use the tertiary contexts as research settings since the students and I were taking full time courses at that time. Second, I saw the relevance of situating the study in the Canadian university contexts as they presented rich and contextualized data on how the Hong Kong bilingual learners adapted to their new identities, roles and status in the new cultural contexts. Third, with the influx of Chinese-speaking students to Canada in the past few years, I believe that there was an urgent need for language educators to learn more about the learners from an emic perspective.

Although the findings of this study were specific to the contexts, it was, nevertheless, a window to the worlds of the Hong Kong exchange students. I believe the stories of the students with their bilingual background, their cultural experiences and their language awareness would “add layers” (Goldman-Segall, 1995) to the research on language, culture and identity.
3.4 Participant Selection

The initial phase of the participant selection was much harder than I had anticipated. My study was guided by my focus on the interrelationships between language, culture and identity and my interest in the Hong Kong exchange students. Since I was new to Canada, I hardly knew any Hong Kong students on campus. My only contact with Hong Kong students were limited to the ones who had kept in close contact with me since I left Hong Kong in 1996. They were students I had taught in an English-medium secondary school during my stay in Hong Kong from 1992-1996. Most of these students were studying at different universities in Hong Kong, England, Australia and the United States. It would be impossible to observe them in Canada. I decided to find my participants through the “known sponsor approach” (Patton, 1990, p.254). As Patton (1990) stated, “Often the best approach for gaining entree is the known sponsor approach. By this tactic observers use the legitimacy and credibility of another person to establish their own legitimacy and credibility” (p.254). In my case, the “known sponsor approach” (Patton, 1990) enabled me to establish my legitimacy and credibility with my participants within a short period of time because they had trust in me either as a former teacher or as a researcher referred to them through a mutual friend.

3.4.1 Hong Kong Exchange Student

Before I discuss my participant selection process, I believe it is important to inform the readers how the Hong Kong students were selected to participate in the exchange program in Canadian tertiary institutions. To be eligible for application to the exchange program, a Hong Kong tertiary student has to have high academic standing and
outstanding TOEFL scores. The student has to go through interviews by the selection committee of their home university to be recommended to the Canadian university which has a reciprocal exchange arrangement with their home university. Some exchange students come to Canada on scholarships from their home universities and others pay their own tuition to their home universities. In any case, they are considered as exchange students because they are in the study abroad program for no longer than one year. Each year, only a few students from the major tertiary institutions in Hong Kong are selected to participate in the Canadian exchange programs.

Unlike the foreign students or immigrant students, the exchange students do not earn any college degree or job opportunities as a result of this educational experience. They are here for one year to learn what it is like to study in a Canadian context and they leave after the year is over. Like most of the international students, exchange students have to apply for on-campus or off-campus housing arrangement through the housing office. They are also eligible for services offered by the International Student Office on campus. Sometimes, the international office can help them to apply for a peer partner (a local Canadian student) who is willing to help them to integrate into the new university community. As far as courses are concerned, Hong Kong exchange students have access to many mainstream courses because of their language competence. They do not need to take any ESL classes. They may earn college credits for the academic courses they take in the Canadian universities. However, some of the courses may not fulfill their college requirements. So they may have to negotiate these credits with their home universities when they return to Hong Kong. There is also a good possibility that they may not be
able to graduate in three years as most of the Hong Kong students are expected to do due to delay in fulfilling home university requirements. The students have to pay a high price for this exchange experience. In a learning context like Hong Kong where English is still used as a language for instruction in the major universities, students are taught by professors who come from all over the world. So what makes these students leave their family, friends and familiar social environment to invest a year in an exchange program?

3.4.2 The Five Participants

My first participant was a former student of mine. She came to Vancouver to study as an exchange student from September 1996 to April 1997. After much trouble trying to locate her on campus, I was finally able to contact her through the help of a friend. My study on this participant lasted from January - May 1997. The initial focus was to construct a portrait on this exchange student. I completed this study five months prior to starting the actual study on the other participants. Therefore, I considered this phase of the study - the pilot study. Through this preliminary study, I was able to reformulate the problem and modify the data collection strategies for the actual study.

The second phase of the study was from October 1997 - July, 1998. After completing the pilot study, I had developed a much clearer picture of what to look for in the actual study with the four exchange students. The first participant in the second phase of the study was also a former student of mine. We kept in close contact ever since she graduated from secondary school. Since she and I had kept in touch through email and telephone calls prior to her arrival, I was able to study her more in-depth to observe the changes in her
world views and feelings in the different phases of her exchange experience. This participant was the only one who studied in a different university. Her story added contextual layers to the emergent themes and patterns in this study.

The other three participants were introduced to me through the “known sponsor approach” (Patton, 1990, p.252). I met one of the participants through a mutual friend on campus. After she was involved in this research, she became so interested that she volunteered to introduce other Hong Kong exchange students to me. She became the “known sponsor” to the two male participants in this research. In effect, the participant selection process was not a deliberate choice, it followed a course of discovery in the natural flow of events. The addition of the two male participants added new dimensions to this study. Since the last three participants were friends in the same exchange program, I was able to study them individually as well as in group situations on different occasions.

3.5 Practical Considerations

In this research, I intended to exhaust every possible means to build fair pictures of the participants in their natural settings. I used field notes, interviews, direct and participant observation, e-mail correspondence, phone conversations, intensive discussions, group gatherings, secondary informants, artifacts and metaphors to triangulate data and to build thick descriptions. My study emphasized co-researching and co-authorship with the participants. However, there were many “practical considerations” (Merriam, 1990, p.89) such as time constraints, media and secondary sources selections which I needed to plan ahead before the study began.
3.5.1 Time Constraints

My first consideration was that I had to work within the time frame of the participants' one year stay in Canada and plan the different phases of the research around this time frame. Because of the unique circumstances of this study, I had to be flexible and open in my research approach. Some participants were in contact with me before they even arrived in Canada, others entered the field mid-way in the school year when they were almost finished with their stay in Canada. To accommodate for the loss of time, I asked these participants to recount their stories from the time they arrived to fill in the missing pieces. My justification for this flexible approach was that the studied phenomena were open-ended and changing on an on-going basis. I did not want to impose standards and routines on the data. After all, the aim of this research was to provide rich data, contextualized details and voices from the participants.

3.5.2 Media and Secondary Sources Selections

Other practical considerations I had to plan for were the media and secondary sources selections. The question was not only about what to observe but how to observe it. I decided that my field work had to start with a “sensitizing framework” (Patton, 1990, p.216). It was important that I did not intrude as “people will behave differently under conditions where an evaluation is taking place than they would if no evaluation were taking place” (Patton, 1990, p.231). My emphasis was on “unobtrusive measures” (Patton, 1990, p.231) to avoid the contamination of the participants’ responses. I used field notes to describe and to record the details in the research field such as physical settings, time, people, interactions and activities. I also recorded my “own feelings and
reactions to the experience, and reflections about the personal meaning, and significance” (p.241) of what had occurred. Most important of all, I used direct quotes of the participants to convey “the emic perspective - the insider’s perspective on reality” (Fetterman, 1989, p.30).

My field notes were descriptive and detailed. I used field notes to record my impressions of the interactions and observations particularly in group situations when I acted as the *silent observer*. However, during intense and interactive conversations with the participants, I found it hard to take detailed notes while carrying on an in-depth interview with the participant. In many situations, I had to rely on running notes to jot down the key points and impressions in these settings. My main interest as the *participant observer* was to interact with the participants and to immerse in the natural settings. I tried to have eye contacts with the participants and to give them my personal responses during our conversations. All these interactions made detailed note-taking quite unfeasible. It was also not practical to simply rely on mental notes of the studied contexts. In most circumstances, I found it helpful to use other media such as camera, tape recorder and video recorder to capture the fleeting moments in the natural settings. They helped me to record the direct quotes of the participants and other contextualized details. In the replay of these data, I was able to review and analyze details which I might have missed in the participation of these events. I believe *common sense* played a key role in my choice of media and secondary source selection. For example, in the initial phase of my research, I avoided using recording devices which might appear intrusive and threatening to some new participants. I was concerned that these data collecting devices might be interpreted
as an intrusion of privacy. As time went by, "the degree of manipulation and resistance" (Patton, 1990, p.251) in the field relations lessened and these recording devices were gradually introduced into the research process.

As for artifact and secondary sources selections, I found that public records such as brochures, application forms, pamphlets on the exchange programs and international programs were helpful for documentation purposes. I also used a wide selection of artifacts to study the inner worlds of the participants. They included metaphors, drawings, photographs, decorations and personal writings which reflected how they perceived the meanings of their exchange experiences. On the other hand, secondary sources such as teachers, friends, dorm mates, house parents, peer partners were helpful to provide insights about the interpersonal skills and social lives of the participants. Prior to using any of these personal data, I made a point to request the permission of the participants again to release these data for use in the study. I believe respect for my participants was crucial to the meanings of this study. I did not want to place the interest of the research above the interest of the participants. After all, the aim of this study was to give voice to the participants.
4.1 Impressions-Aileen

My initial conceptualized framework was to explore the issues of language, culture and identity by providing in-depth analysis on how Hong Kong students coped in different cultural learning environments. This general framework provided me with a direction to search for my participants.

My first participant was a former student whom I had not seen for a year. I would call her Aileen for the purpose of this research. I had taught Aileen for two years in an English-medium secondary school. We had come to know each other quite well in class and were able to communicate with each other on a personal level. I knew that Aileen had plans to study in Canada as an exchange student. However, I did not know whether her plans were firm or not. When I arrived in Vancouver, I had tried to contact her through the school directory but had failed to locate her since I did not remember her last name. Just as I was about to give up on my effort to locate her, I came across a former colleague who was also studying at the same campus. She offered to help me find Aileen through the international student center.

On January 13, 1997, Aileen finally called me on the phone. We were both ecstatic to talk to each other on the phone. Apparently, Aileen had also tried to contact me since November, 1996, two months after she had arrived in Canada. She described how lost she
felt in the first few months and how hectic life had been for her. Her descriptions brought back vivid memories of my first few months studying in Switzerland in my teenage years. I felt empathy for Aileen as this was the first time she left Hong Kong to study abroad. We talked about our shared experiences on the phone and discussed about the difficulties we both encountered in settling down in Canada as newcomers to the country.

This conversation was quite different from our conversations in the past. This time, we touched on more personal aspects of our lives instead of topics related to school work. I noticed how open and candid she was about her feelings and her in-depth perceptions of her new role as an exchange student. After this conversation, I knew that Aileen was the participant I had been looking for to start my research. However, I felt hesitant to ask her for her consent. There was an ethical dilemma I had to resolve prior to making this request. On a personal level, I was concerned that I might be imposing on her by making this request as a former teacher. I was also concerned that my research would expose her vulnerability to others. On an ideological level, I wanted to let her voice be heard to raise public awareness on the difficulties which confronted a bilingual exchange student in changing cultural environment. I finally decided to ask Aileen to participate in this research. However, I also told myself that I would use my discretion to protect her personal data and to paint her with fairness and sensitivity.

Aileen and I met for lunch at the school cafeteria on January 17, 1997. In this first meeting, we talked about people and events in our shared past. I was hesitant to ask her immediately for her consent as I did not want her to think that the sole purpose of our
meeting was for my research only. Indeed, I was happy to see her again. When I mentioned about my conceptual framework for the research topics, Aileen’s face lightened up. She was interested in the research issues and the exploratory approach. When I raised the question, her answer came as a definite yes. It came as a total surprise to me as I had anticipated that she would need time to think it over before she commit herself to this research. In retrospect, I believe her unhesitant and affirmative response had a lot to do with her trust for me as a teacher. In class, she had always been open with me. Therefore, I believe she also trusted me as a researcher. Furthermore, I think her willingness to challenge herself and to take risks in life also influenced her decision to take part in this research. As a student, Aileen had always impressed me with her unconventional decisions. She had pursued a double major in Comparative Literature and Japanese. She also decided to study abroad in her third year instead of graduating on time as the other students. Indeed, Aileen had come to Canada with her ideals and aspirations. She was willing to face the uncertainties in this cultural experience. The question I had was “Did reality match her aspirations?”

To observe Aileen in a natural context, I asked her to describe a typical day and a week’s activities for me. I found that her life in Canada was basically centered around the campus since she did not drive and did not have any out of campus social contacts. Mornings were usually spent working in the student cafeteria, studying in the library or in her room, swimming in the gymnasium or typing in the computer laboratory. She took three courses in the second term. Two of them were language classes and one was a social science class. She was doing well in them. In the evening, Aileen spent most of her time in her
room or in the library or in her friend's room in another dormitory. Since Aileen did not have family or relatives in Canada, all her personal contacts were only with people on campus.

I decided to observe Aileen at work, in the dormitory, in the gymnasium and in class. These field residences were able to provide me with different perspectives of her life on campus. Before our second meeting, we discussed on the phone how to proceed with the scheduling of interviews and filming. Aileen volunteered to seek approval from her friends, her peer partner, her co-worker and her professor to let me talk to them or even film their interactions in these different settings. This phase of the study had gone by much smoother than I had anticipated. I was also amazed that Aileen was participating so actively in this research. In fact, she cleared the way for me to seek consent from all the key informants. I did not anticipate that I would be able to meet so many people in such a short period of time. We were both working hard to fit our research schedule into our daily schedule so that we could finish the observations and interviews before her spring break in mid February 1997.

On January 23, 1997, Aileen sent me an e-mail to invite me for lunch at her dormitory. I sensed that the research project had not created any pressure in our rapport. In fact, it had given us an opportunity to spend more time to build our bond and to get to know each other. I also became more aware of the "give-and-take" quality in our communication. I believe my interactive and informal research strategy enabled us to be open with each
other as researcher and participant. We were co-researchers. I believe my openness with her also made her feel comfortable and secure in the research process.

This phase of the data collection was like an interchange of ideas. We were supportive of each other in our search for a deeper meaning in life. At times, I found it appropriate to study her as a silent observer. For example, I observed her in the language laboratory concentrating on her studies and responding to the questions on the monitor screen in the isolated cubicle. It reminded me of the social isolation that Aileen felt as an exchange student. The image of her lonely figure in the tiny cubicle lingered in my mind. This scene added a layer (Goldman-Segall, 1995) to my understanding of the meaning of social loneliness. Besides this scene, I was also impressed with the scene of Aileen working at the cafeteria making tacos during rush hours. Knowing that Aileen had never had tacos before she came to Canada, I knew how much she was trying to adapt to her new life in Canada.

Most of my data collection strategies were based on a more interactive approach. I wanted to give her personal feedback instead of playing the role of the silent and distant observer. Our second meeting took place at the same student cafeteria on February 7, 1997 at 12:45 p.m. Aileen had just finished working at the student cafeteria in the morning. As she came into the door, she gave me a big beaming smile. It was as warm as the morning sun. In spite of her busy schedule, she made me feel so welcomed in her life.
The cafeteria was as crowded as ever. We sat next to two students who spoke in German. They were foreign students from Germany. Aileen had taken German for two years and she knew what they were saying. We began to talk to these two students. This conversational interaction between Aileen and the German students gave me an opportunity to observe how Aileen interacted with others in a natural setting. I noticed that she was friendly and confident when she conversed with them in English. She also took pride in introducing me as her former teacher. Again, it reminded me of my responsibility as a teacher and a researcher.

The two German students were interested to find out more about Hong Kong when they learned that Irene was from Hong Kong. They wanted to know Aileen’s reaction to the changeover of government in Hong Kong which would happen on July 1, 1997. I observed how Aileen answered their questions. Looking at the ease, she took her time in answering these questions, I could not help but think to myself how many times she must have answered these questions. She was diplomatic and played the role of the good will ambassador of Hong Kong well. Aileen was no longer the shy, young learner that I had once known, she was articulate and confident with her new role in this new environment.

I talked to Aileen about my observation. She agreed that she had overcome her shyness in talking to strangers and using English to socialize over this year. She believed that her exchange experience had helped her to become more confident in her English socialization skills. It had also helped her to clarify her aims in life. Before she studied abroad, she
had plans to work as a translator in a foreign company. Her exchange experience had convinced her that a career in teaching would be more suitable for her.

The most productive part of our conversational interviews took place in Aileen’s room. People say, “a man’s home is his castle”. I believe home is also a metaphorical setting which symbolizes the self. In Aileen’s case, her home in Canada was a dormitory room. It was a single room with a nice view of the back yard of the dormitory hall. Inside the room were the bare basics which included a bed, a desk and a wardrobe. What made this room different from the other rooms were pictures which Aileen had put on the walls. Each picture had a story to tell. Each picture was a part of her treasured past. They covered the room from wall to wall. In the middle of the wall, there was a big map of China. Aileen had traveled down the silk road in the past summer. This map which was placed in an eye catching spot of the room seemed to make a statement of the owner’s identity: she was proud of her roots. She came to Canada with the intent to act as a “good will ambassador” of Hong Kong to tell others about her cultural knowledge of Hong Kong and China. Aileen claimed that one of the reasons which prompted her to apply for this exchange program was a desire for cultural exchange.

We sat comfortably in her room, sipping ice tea, talking and filming. We decided to capture this relaxing and fleeting moment in film. When I held up the video camera, Aileen looked right into the video camera as if she was talking to me. I was again surprised that my participant was not camera shy. Indeed, this research process had been a journey of surprises and discoveries. Changing times and changing contexts let us see
each other under a different light. When I looked at the pictures on the wall, I seemed to see myself in one of those pictures. Like the people in the pictures, I was a part of her past which was interwoven into her new experience.

Looking out the window, we could see the beautiful campus backyard. It was a quiet day. We could hear the birds chirping and the leaves swaying. When we paused at intervals, sometimes we could even hear our own heartbeats in this quietness. It was not easy for Aileen who came from a big family and lived in a populated city like Hong Kong to get used to this quietness. This solitude and quiet environment made her feel lonely and isolated at times. Before she came to Canada, she never anticipated that this void would be her biggest problem. She never thought that she would find herself so alone in the foreign land. Aileen suffered from “cultural loneliness”. It was a loneliness which made her feel that she was cut away from her customary way of life. Leach (1976) called this phase of life, “social timelessness” (p.78). Aileen was going through the" rites of transition" for an “initiate” (Leach, 1976, p.78). The theme of cultural isolation began to emerge in the process of this research.

Aileen found comfort and support in her circle of new friends who were mainly international students she met on campus. They understood how she felt to be “alone in the foreign land”. Aileen used these words to describe her feelings about her exchange experience. In fact, she found it hard to integrate into the social circle of the local students. Some Canadian students were interested to find out more about Hong Kong from her. Others seemed to treat her like an outsider. She looked forward to the
weekends when her international friends who drove would take her to downtown for movies or dinners. She also enjoyed going to work. The uniform and the team work gave her a sense of belonging. It also gave her the opportunity to communicate with local Canadian students.

At night, Aileen liked to go to her friend’s room to chat. Since I was unable to interact with her friends during these gatherings, I asked Aileen to take pictures and to explain the events to me in our regular meetings.

4.2 Aileen’s Story - “Alone in a foreign land”

In my attempt to understand the participant’s meanings, I asked Aileen to describe her exchange experience both verbally and in writing during our three months research period. I decided to use open-ended questions to let data guide our discussions. I also asked the participant to think of suggestions to help me observe her in her daily routines. She had the choice in showing me the people, the places and the interactive activities that she thought would be relevant for this study. Aileen played an active role in the design of this study. Although my research strategy might seem unconventional at times, I believe it allowed the complex meanings of this study to emerge through the active engagement of the participant in this research process. I decided to let my participant invite me into her world and show me how she saw the world from her perspective.

Aileen described her first impression of Canada with one word: “Loneliness”. As she said, “When I first came here, I was left by myself in my room and no one was there. On
my way to [the university] nobody was on the street. In Hong Kong, it was very different, there were people every where on the street no matter what time of the day. The first night I was here, I saw nobody on the street. I felt very lonely”.

In her February 6, 1997 e-mail, she described an experience at the airport which had created a negative impact on her from the beginning of her study abroad experience. As Aileen wrote, “It seemed to be a story which happened long time ago (probably five months ago), but it’s like a scar on my mind and my heart. It was the first time I was in a foreign land, I had never gone out before to a western country. Or let me put it into another way; it was the first time I went beyond Hong Kong and China. After I arrived at [the airport], I still remember vividly how I felt at that moment... I wanted to cry. I think there are two reasons; first, it’s because I was away from my home, my place, and my family and my friends. You know, I got used to being protected by my family and friends. That day was the first day that I had to learn to take care of myself. I felt strangely lonely at the moment, because I just couldn’t get used to the feeling that I was surrounded by lots of my friends and family members just several hours ago, [then ] I had to start to live by myself. To make my feelings worse, I met some [very unfriendly people] at the airport, they were rude to me. I felt really bad about them. You know, before, I came here, I did have much expectation or conception about the “liberal western countries”. But the first experience of my encounter with [the people] who were so rude that it did change my impression of the western countries. It really scared me. I was thinking whether I would be discriminated in the coming days”.
In our conversations, Aileen also mentioned how her life in Canada was different from her life in Hong Kong. She missed the familiar things such as having dinner with the family, going out with old friends or eating Chinese food. However, she also believed that it was necessary for her to make this transition in life. “Personally, I learn to be more independent. In Hong Kong, you can always call your family or friends. But here, it is long distance. Sometimes, you cannot call Hong Kong due to time difference. You have to know how to be independent and how to handle human relationships. You have to make friends here. It’s a personal growth. I have to learn to deal with the problems myself. I think it makes a difference. I learn to be more independent here. Since now you only have yourself”. She was ambivalent about her aspirations at times. “They ask me about 1997 like “Next year is 1997, what do you think?” After answering questions like this for so many times, I find it quite bored. I don’t think my future is affected by the politics. Some of the changes are beyond our control. I don’t think these political changes will affect my life. At first I still try to explain to them what it means to me. But later on, I get the impression that they just want to say that our lives will be miserable. Besides, I don’t think they are really interested. I just answer them without bothering to explain. They are not really interested in me as a person. They just want to be polite to ask. Anyway, I don’t think they have much knowledge about Hong Kong or China”.

The biggest problem in her new life was socialization. With her fluent English, Aileen admitted that language was not a problem in socialization. However, she found that most of her conversations with the floor mates with limited to “hellos” and “good-byes”.
These friendly gestures could not fill the void she felt inside. Most of the time, she felt lonely and cut off from the society. She had no sense of belonging in this new community.

Aileen found it easier to share her problems with the other international students she met on campus. She showed me many pictures of her gatherings with her international friends in the evenings. She also enjoyed going to dinner with them although they lived in a different dormitory. "When we go to dinner or lunch, we always sit together. It's easier for us to get together. I seldom go to dinner with my own floor mates. I think we [the international students and I] are closer because we share the same experience, the same difficulty in socializing with the local students. They are not interested in what we talk about. They are interested in other things like sports or nature. It's not that I don't like sports or nature, but it's just something I am not used to [talk about]. Besides, I don't know much about what they are saying." Other than these new friends, Aileen also shared her feelings with her peer partner whom she had met through the international student center. Her peer partner was an Asian immigrant student who came to Canada as a child. She was empathetic of Aileen's experience as an outsider.

In one of my visits, Aileen also introduced me to her co-worker in the cafeteria. He was an older Chinese who had lived in Canada for years. When I asked him to describe Aileen, he said, "She is a very friendly and nice Chinese girl from Hong Kong". He noticed that over the past years, there was "at least over fifty percent" increase in the number of Chinese students on campus. Furthermore, he added that, "The Chinese from Hong Kong are different from the Chinese born here. You know, different manners. Just like my
kids, they are born here. No culture difference. They don’t speak Chinese at home. I speak to them in Chinese. They talk to me in English. Aileen speaks in Chinese. So [we are] more closer. Easier to talk [to]”.

As for the courses she took in Canada, Aileen doubted that any of them would be applicable towards her graduation in her home university. Yet she still considered the year in Canada well spent. For example, she found a theater course she took in the first term most “stimulating”. “Intellectually, I think I improve a lot here. I think I would not be able to learn so much had I stayed in Hong Kong. Over there, I have a busy schedule. There is no time to think or to read leisurely”. She was also able to use this year abroad to reevaluate her career goals. “My double major in Hong Kong are Comparative Literature and Japanese. I used to think that I study literature for interest and Japanese for career purposes. Now I have changed my mind. Even if you speak Japanese, you don’t speak like the Japanese themselves. Besides, I am a woman and it is difficult to find work in a Japanese company. I have decided to go into teaching when I graduate. Then I will also study for my master degree. The trend in Hong Kong is that every one goes into business administration, finance or accounting. I don’t know if they are interested but they think it is practical. I don’t want to just work. I want to do something I find meaningful like teaching the next generation”.

4.3 My interpretation - Cultural loneliness

I began my research focusing on the overseas educational experience of a Hong Kong exchange student, my data opened up a new world reformulating my research focus on the
"rites of transition" for "the initiate" (Leach, 1976, p.78). I became interested in the phenomenon of "cultural loneliness" which Aileen experienced in this year and wanted to find out more about how it influenced a learner's identity and world views in the changing environment. The void that Aileen experienced had changed her beliefs, her feelings and her perceptions about herself and her relationships with others. She learned to appreciate her culture, her past and her close rapport with family and friends even more than before. This overseas experience had brought to light cultural values which she had overlooked in the past. This journey to explore the world became a journey of self discoveries.

In this pilot study focusing on the story of Aileen, I worked diligently to sort out the private material from the research data. All the data helped me to make sense of Aileen's life in Canada. At times, I felt like a spider entangled in my own web. Field notes, observations, video tapes, pictures, e-mail, key informants, theories and issues were all piled up in front of me. I had to compile them skillfully to add credibility and meanings to the story I was creating with the help of my participant. My understanding of the experience of the participant was based on multiple sources of information. To gather background material on the exchange process, I talked to the participant, the key informants and read brochures about the exchange applications and the housing arrangements. I found out that some of the dormitories were open all year round to accommodate students who stayed on campus during the long holidays. I could imagine how empty and lifeless the halls were when everyone else had gone home to celebrate the holidays.
Aileen’s story reflected the problems she had to face in changing from “cultures of certainty to cultures of uncertainty” (Hargreaves, 1994, p.57). It also reflected her problems in trying to integrate into the mainstream culture of the new learning environment. Contrary to the belief that “language is the passport to another culture” (Pao et al, 1997, p.622), Aileen’s story revealed that language fluency was not a “passport” for her to gain access to the new culture. Her difficulties in integrating into the new culture involved ambivalent desires and a lack of cultural knowledge and social rapport with the people she met in the new social contexts. The feeling of “alone in a foreign land” threatened her sense of belonging, and ultimately, her sense of identity.

As I progressed into the different phases of observation, research and reflection, I began to understand that underlying the multiplicity of methods and the complexity of issues, was a simple respect for humanity. As a researcher, I was there to understand, to make sense and to share Aileen’s story with others. By playing the roles of the observer, the researcher and the participant observer, my study had helped me to develop the sensitivity and the sensibility to observe the world of the participant from different perspectives. The beauty of this ethnographic approach was captured in Tyler (1986) descriptions, “A postmodern ethnography is a cooperatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer on emergent fantasy of a possible world of common sense reality and thus to provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect (p.125).
The idea of "therapeutic effect" introduced new dimensions to the way I interpreted the data. My past experience as an exchange student began to make sense to me as I became immersed in Aileen's world. Through the discovery-inquiry approach, the participant, the reader and I collaborated in the research process. The reader also became interactive with the research process through the advance technology of photographs, video tapes, audio tapes, email etc. They played an active role in the interpretation of the data. Thus each of us came out of the research experience with a different level of understanding of self and others. We found ourselves "in the same boat" trying to understand our human conditions. There was a touch of Zen in the way this research had unfolded itself in its own mystery. As Tyler (1986) stated, "it provokes an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect...." (p.125) on all of us.
4.4 Impressions - Juliana

After I finished my pilot study with Aileen, I took some time off to reflect on my research before I started working on my actual study in October, 1997. The first participant I contacted in this second phase of the study was also a former student of mine. Like Aileen, I had taught Juliana for two years in the same secondary school. The two participants did not know each other. At school, Juliana was an active and well-rounded student. She was keen in sports as well as in studies. She had a wide variety of interests including science, literature and social studies. Like Aileen, Juliana also studied in a reputable university in Hong Kong and planned to work in Hong Kong when she finished her bachelor degree. She wanted to be involved in social work and law enforcement in the future. However, she also planned to work in the business fields for a few years before she devote time and energy to community work. She did not want to spend her whole life “working for nothing”. It was important for her to have a sense of fulfillment in her work. Juliana found that her desire for a sense of “balance in life” influenced many of her decisions in life. For example, her decision to major in business administration and minor in philosophy was to balance practical needs with intellectual needs. She wanted to have sound business preparation training as well as “train the mind” to think critically. Therefore, when she was selected to participate in the exchange program, she saw it as an opportunity for her to explore her inner world as well as her outer world. She also saw it as an opportunity to improve her English communication skills and to find out more about other cultures.
Juliana's decision to study abroad had not been an easy one for her and her family. As the eldest daughter, she felt that she was obliged to stay close to her family. The study abroad program also meant extra expenses imposed on her family and a loss of steady income from her part-time job as a tutor. Her parents were concerned that she would be living in a country where she had no relative or friend. It took her a long time before she was finally able to convince her parents to let her join the exchange program.

My data collection on Juliana had been on an on-going basis since October, 1997. Prior to this study, we had kept in close contact by phone and by e-mail before she left Hong Kong. Juliana knew that I was doing a pilot study with a former student and she expressed interest in participating in my study. I decided to use the findings of the pilot study to guide the second phase of this research with Juliana. Based on my own exchange experience and the story of Aileen, I knew that the first few months of the exchange experience were hectic and confusing for the student. Since Juliana was in a different university, I did not want to impose on her that we had to meet during this critical period. Instead, I kept in close contact with her by phone and by e-mail. We wrote to each other on a weekly basis and called each other whenever time allowed. We also decided to meet in December, 1997 during our winter break.

The first e-mail Juliana sent to me in Canada was on October 10, 1997. Her e-mail was titled, "Hi, I'm in Canada!". I read between the lines that Juliana was happy with her new environment. The topic of this e-mail was centered around her home stay arrangement in
Canada. She wrote about her new “house parents” and “house mates”. She also mentioned about her plans to travel around Canada to visit her old school mates.

During the first two months of Juliana’s stay in Canada, her world was focused on her relations with her host family and her three house mates. She was happy to have found such kind and understanding “host parents”. This home stay experience had given her an opportunity to learn more about the Canadian life style. She told me that her “host parents” were empathetic and understanding. She felt that she was able to talk to them.

The most difficult problem Juliana encountered in the first two months was to reach out to make new friends. She described herself as “an introvert” and was concerned that she would have problem interacting with others. She wanted very much to socialize with her house mates who were also students from other countries. However, she found it hard to communicate with them. They seemed to have different goals and aspirations. She often struggled with her decision as to whether she should go to parties with them or be a loner in the house. Her house mates did not have to take full-time courses like her. One of them was a working woman from Venezuela. The other two were high school graduates from Mexico and Japan. They were in Canada for only three months to study English. Juliana wished that she could join them in their social activities. However, she was the only one in this group who had to face the academic pressure. As a newcomer, the heavy work load and examination pressure meant that she had to work extra hard to adjust to the changes in her academic and social life. There was a conflict of interests between her study and her socialization. Most of the time, she would end up going out with her house
mates as she did not want to “suffer a distant relationship with them”. It was an on-going dilemma which troubled her during the first few months of her stay.

When I asked Juliana whether she liked her living arrangement in Canada, the answer was a definite “yes”. She was happy that she could be exposed to the Canadian culture as well as learn how to “live with students from different cultures” in this home stay program. She enjoyed their dinner time and considered it a “family ritual”. Dinner was a time for this “international family” to sit down together, to share food and to listen to each other’s story. Every one in the house would prepare dinner once a week. Most of the time, they would cook authentic food from their own countries. After dinner, they would share the dish washing chore together. It was a time to bond and to share after a busy day’s work.

For Juliana, this dinner ritual was a new experience for her. First, she had never cooked before she left home. Her mother used to be the one who did all the cooking. In one of her calls to me in the first few weeks, she talked about her apprehension to cook for so many people. In Hong Kong, she led a busy city life and seldom had time to stay home for dinner. Her university was far away from her home. She also had to work part-time during the day. So she did not pay much attention to what she was eating or how it was cooked.

The word dinner took on a new meaning in this new social environment. I observed that Juliana was actually looking forward to her turn to cook after a few months. She gradually learned to master her cooking skills and began to enjoy this cultural experience
in cooking. She tried many different recipes her mother and her friends sent her from Hong Kong and became quite a chef in the Chinese cuisine. This new accomplishment gave her a sense of pride. It made her feel resourceful and more aware of her own Chinese culture. I observed how this sharing experience empowered her in her marginalized position. It made her feel that she belonged to this new “family”.

I was interested in the way Juliana described their dinner rituals. Juliana volunteered to ask her host family for their permission to tape one of their dinner gatherings for our research in early March, 1998. She also asked her three new Japanese house mates for their approval to tape them. Her host parents provided her with a tape recorder and helped her set it up. They placed it in one corner of the room during dinner so that they would not be conscious of the taping.

I was appreciative that Juliana played such an active role in this research. She made it possible for me to observe their dinner conversation without being intrusive. We discussed the details of the recording after I listened to the tapes. I told her my first impression was their delightful ambiance. The room was filled with laughter and casual small chats. It was a time for everyone to socialize and it was natural that English was used as the language for socialization. The “host mom” asked open-ended questions like, “So what did you do at school today?” This discourse scaffold had a relaxing effect which started the dinner conversation. They focused on topics like food, family and currency in their discussion. The participants were encouraged to talk about issues which were familiar to them. They were also encouraged to see themselves as knowledgeable of their
own cultures. In one occasion, the host father, in his good sense of humor, gave the
participants some puzzles to solve. Every one seemed interested in the game. Juliana told
me that after dinner they often do something together as a group like washing dishes,
solving puzzles or playing board games. The dinner conversation was interactive and
dynamic. I was impressed that the host parents were sensitive and caring to include every
one in their conversation.

The interactions between the students and the host parents reminded me of a “student-
centered” language classroom with “family dinner” as group activity. In the conversation,
whenever someone had trouble expressing her thoughts in English, the host parents would
gently re-structure the phrase and guide her response. The participant was never
embarrassed. There were also exchange of cultural knowledge in the process of language
socialization. I observed the “give and take” qualities in their conversation and was
impressed with the “negotiation of outcome” and “negotiation of meanings” (Crookes &
Rulon, 1988) in their discussions.

Juliana told me that her “host mom” and “host dad”, terms she used endearingly, had a lot
of study abroad experiences. They had been involved with housing exchange students for
a number of years and had met students from all over the world. I had the opportunity to
talk to her host mom in one of my phone calls to Juliana in February, 1998. She told me
how pleased she was to have Juliana in her home. She was also impressed with Juliana’s
eagerness to engage herself in her new life in Canada.
Juliana told me that learning in this new schooling system was no problem for her. She enjoyed the challenges. However, she often felt frustrated with the pressure of making friends in this new environment. In class, Juliana felt alienated because she could not talk to people “in depth”. I felt that she was ambivalent about the people she met in Canada. For example, she found that people she met in Canada liked to “talk things out” and were “straightforward”. She appreciated the ”simple” lifestyle and the “uncomplicated” relationships. Yet she also found that some people were “narrow-minded” and did not know “how to respect other people”. Juliana observed that there were advantages and disadvantages in being “an outsider”. As she said, “It’s a trade-off”. In a way, her position as a newcomer allowed her to see herself, her role and her status more clearly in this social context.

As an exchange student, Juliana considered herself different from other Hong Kong students on campus. She had an affiliation with her home university in Hong Kong. She was also the only Hong Kong exchange student who majored in business administration this year. According to her observation, some of the Hong Kong students had lived in Canada for many years. They were well integrated into the Canadian culture and would no longer identify themselves as Hong Kong students. On the other hand, some Hong Kong students who had just landed in Canada would try to cling on to their past by “living as much like in Hong Kong as possible and they study very hard”. Juliana saw herself as different from these students. As she said, “For exchange students, I think it really depends on what they want to get out of the exchange experience.” She was aware of the limited amount of time she had in this exchange experience. She looked at this
experience as a “once in a life time opportunity”. She felt the urgency to see as much of Canada as possible in her short period of stay. She also chose not to “hang out with other Hong Kong students” nor to speak any Chinese on campus. She wanted to explore her new world. She wanted to learn new sports like hockey and skating. She wanted to be totally involved in her new environment by volunteering, making friends and traveling. She made every effort to meet students from different countries. After the first few months of feeling lost and isolated, she began to make some new friends on campus. One of her closer friends was a student from Germany who was also an exchange student. They both enjoyed the same sports and shared insights on their exchange experience.

For extra-curricular activities, Juliana had signed up for swim team and volunteer work. Her try out for the swim team was an unsuccessful attempt. However, she was happy that her application as a part-time volunteer was accepted. Juliana volunteered to participate in a prison visitation program and was interested in their discussions on issues related to aboriginal rights and women issues in the prison system. This experience made her more determined to involve herself in law enforcement and community work when she returned to Hong Kong.

In this new environment, education took on a much broader meaning for Juliana. Although she was still spending a significant amount of time on school work, grades no longer mattered so much to her. In fact, it was doubtful whether some of the courses she took in Canada would be applicable towards her graduation from the university in Hong Kong. Juliana did not regret spending this year abroad. Literature and psychology were
courses which she had always wanted to take in college. She was happy to be able to take them in Canada. They gave her a sense of personal fulfillment.

Juliana noted that she became more aware of her resources and needs in this study abroad experience. The first few months in Canada were critical moments which made her reflect on her inner self. For example, she was more observant of her social relations with others in the changing contexts. This exchange experience also enhanced her appreciation for cultural diversity and encouraged her to think of alternatives in life style. Juliana believed that she would have felt that “something is missing in [her] university life” had she stayed in Hong Kong. As she said, “this experience has helped me understand myself better and has helped me to prepare for the future”. She knew how far she could stretch and where her “bottom line” was. New frames of reference and cultural codes made her re-examine her values in life and rethink her social relations with others.

In our e-mail correspondence, Juliana answered each of my questions in great detail. She wrote with vivid descriptions and insightful reflections. They reminded me of the essays she wrote in her social studies and literature courses as a secondary school student. Juliana was a person of few words but her writing was always articulate and expressive. In the past, I had often noticed that Juliana needed time to warm up before she could open herself up in a class discussion. However, once she started talking, she always had strong arguments to support her views. Although Juliana was quiet and reserved, she was not a passive learner. She believed in challenging herself to overcome her own difficulties. In fact, she was an active member in the English debating team in her home
university and represented her school in many joint school debates. In her e-mail correspondence with me in October, 1997, Juliana described how she struggled to overcome her problem with class participation in Canada. Her story challenged claims which categorized Chinese students' reluctance to speak out in class as implicit "cultural roles" and "cultural traits" (Ho & Crookall, 1995, p.238).

After a few months of regular correspondence by e-mail and by telephone, Juliana and I finally met in December, 1997 during our winter break. I noticed that Juliana had cut her hair even shorter than the last time I saw her in June 1996. She liked to keep her hair short for her sports training. We were happy to talk about our days at the secondary school in Hong Kong. I was surprised that Juliana was more open with me in this informal interview than in the past when we were teacher and students. The invisible wall had disappeared. I sensed that she was at ease with my new role as a researcher. We sat in a cozy little restaurant in a busy part of town. We talked about our life in Canada and our future goals. Indeed, changing times and changing contexts had brought us closer together. This new rapport added layers to our familiar past. This year had given us an opportunity to see each other under a different light in a new setting.

I believe Juliana trusted me as a researcher because she knew me as her former teacher. Yet, I also questioned whether she felt any pressure in answering questions from a former teacher. "How did Juliana interpret her role in this research?" "Who benefited from this research?" "Is research a power neutral activity?" were questions which came to my mind in this research process. Juliana told me that my questions reminded her of the questions I
asked them in my social studies course in which the students were asked to write their personal responses on social issues. So as soon as she finished the answers she titled her email, “homework done!” and “second assignment done!”

Juliana’s room was like the person herself, simple and low-key in taste. She did not have many decorations on the walls. She only wanted to put “all the necessities in place”. There were her good friends’ photos on her desk. The letters they wrote to her were put in a neat pile next to their photos. Juliana also put some of their farewell presents on the cabinet next to the desk. The center of attraction was a bed spread sewn by her mother. At first, Juliana was hesitant to bring this bed spread to Canada as it was quite heavy and took up a lot of space in her luggage. However, she discovered that every night when she lied underneath the warm bed spread, she would think of her mother.

Juliana did not realize how much her family meant to her until she was alone in Canada. This distance had drawn them closer to each other. In Hong Kong, she was too busy to spend much time with the family although she lived at home. In Canada, she had more time to write and call her parents. Although her host family gave her the warmth of a family, “it was still not the same feeling as home,” said Juliana.

Her host mom gave her a small plant to add a little more life to the decor of the room. Juliana placed it next to the window and watered it every day. However, she observed that the plant was “not very happy” living in her room even though it had plenty of water and sunlight. Somehow, her description of this little plant reminded me of Juliana herself in
the initial phase of her exchange experience. In the first few months, she often felt tense and stressed. Every day was a new challenge in the "cultures of uncertainty" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 57). It was not until the end of the second term that she finally felt more relaxed and sure of herself in her new setting.

Juliana showed me some of the work she did for her literature class. There were three poems. Two of them were written by Canadian students and the third one was hers. She asked me to read them and to guess which one was written by her. These poems were all recommended by the professor as outstanding work. It came as a total surprise to her that her name was read out loud in class. As Juliana said, "The professor discussed these three poems in a very big lecture theater and even asked me to write more. I have never been so honored!" It was an unforgettable moment in her new life. I believe this encouragement gave her a sense of empowerment and confidence which boosted her morale and reconstructed her social identity in this learning context. Not long after she mentioned this incident to me, Juliana decided to write about her exchange experience and submit an article to her home university newspaper.

I was impressed that Juliana developed such confidence in her English writing over a short period of time. Her achievement in her English literature class meant more than social recognition to her. It meant that she gained access to the mainstream culture and that she was accepted for who she was as a bilingual student. Her case challenges Kaplan's (1969) theory of contrastive rhetoric which claimed that people from different cultural backgrounds used different discourse patterns. As far as the poems were concerned, there
was no difference between a “native” and a “non-native” speaker’s. I believe Juliana was fortunate to have a professor who refused to believe in claims which stereotyped learners. Instead, his words of encouragement helped her to validate her prior learning experience in Hong Kong. They helped her to build confidence and to claim ownership of English in an English-speaking world. They helped her to reconstruct a positive social identity in the new environment.

In my study with Juliana, I asked her many questions related to her exchange experience by e-mail, phone conversation and interview. My intent was to explore the world of Juliana through her own words. My questions were inspired by my pilot study with Aileen. In the first cluster of questions, I asked Juliana to describe her investment and her aspirations in this exchange program. I also asked her to describe her living arrangement as well as her social circle both inside and outside of the campus in Canada. In my second cluster of questions, I asked her to think of her social identity, language ability and learning competence in this new environment. I also asked her to describe her social needs and sites of struggle in this learning experience and how she learned to cope with these difficulties. In my last cluster of questions, I asked Juliana to describe whether her reality matched her aspirations. Then, I asked her to reflect on background knowledge which she would consider necessary for students to prepare themselves for an exchange experience. Last of all, I asked her to evaluate her exchange experience and to share her views on this transitional phase in her life. To understand her meanings, I also encouraged Juliana to use metaphors to describe herself in her new world. As Bruner (1986) stated, “The artist creates possible worlds through the metaphoric transformation of the ordinary and the
conventionally "given" (p.49). My interest was to explore the possible meanings in her changing world. I decided to ask other participants these same questions to observe emergent themes and patterns in this research on case studies.

4.5 Juliana's story - "I see myself as an outsider"

I want to see what kind of life I would live without my family. I have lived with my family for twenty two years. Certainly they have influenced me a lot. I also think three years in university are not enough. I feel that I need to learn more and better equip myself before I go to work in the society. It seems that I cannot learn much except from books and theories if I stay in Hong Kong. Besides, I want to study courses apart from my major courses. If I stay in the university for just three years, I won't have this opportunity. The last reason is more of a personal nature. I want to experience more and test myself, to see whether I can live independently as well as with other people, get adapted to the new environment. People do grow and become more mature when they understand themselves better after going through some big changes, like going on an exchange.

I think reality has matched my aspirations. I face a lot of challenges here. They are really beneficial to me and help me understand myself better. For example, I need to get along with my house mates, [I need to learn] how to handle loneliness, how to find my way home, prepare meals and depend on myself in a new environment. [These are] things that you didn't think are problems when you could depend on other people, like your family, friends. But now, even if you have a problem which you can't solve by yourself, you need to do something at least, finding ways to help yourself to solve it. I
met new ways of teaching here, new classroom atmosphere, less complicated relationships and more freedom for oneself 'cause people don't care much what you are doing, less pressure to conform. That's why I think it has matched my aspirations. Now the opportunities are here around me, the key thing lies in my effort to overcome these challenges.

[In terms of social identity] I still see myself as an outsider here especially when people are talking about their own business or when I go to places outside of the campus. But when I am in the classroom attending lectures, I would see myself as one of the university students, same as all the other classmates. In terms of language ability, I think most of the time, I can handle it but when people talk about things like rumor in school, their friends and gossips, I cannot join in the conversation at all. I find it uncomfortable to speak up in class or have discussions and project meetings, because it's difficult to really get into discussion with local students.

The major difficulty as I've mentioned in the previous question is how to get along with local students. It's hard because they have their own social groups. The other difficulty is to push myself to participate and speak up in class. My English is not as fluent as my classmates and you don't have the courage to speak up in class. I think speaking up in class requires self confidence. Feeling lonely is another challenge here. You don't really have close friends to talk to frequently. And there is so much extra time here. You simply have to plan what you are going to do. Other difficulties are not that important, like cooking, I can handle it after all. As for how I cope with [these difficulties],
generally speaking, one has to depend on one self to overcome them. You can't rely on other people. Otherwise, you are not actually solving these problems. In order to push myself to speak up in class, I told myself to start with easy questions, those I feel confident to answer, try to do it step by step. This helps because I think speaking up in class requires self confidence. If I answer the difficult questions first, I may get disappointed if I cannot get it right. And I won't set expectation or pressure on myself 'cause it will hinder my performance. Sometimes other people do help. For example, the teachers, they sometimes try to give you an opportunity to speak by encouraging you and giving you clues.

When I have problems and I want to talk to somebody I will email and phone my friends in Hong Kong. But it’s not always possible. Feeling lonely is a big challenge here. I just have to calm down and handle my own emotions. Going out with house mates and swimming may help to relieve one's emotions, though I don't discuss my problems with my friends here. Occasionally, I will seek suggestions from my host family if the problem I have is not a personal kind.

I don't have contact with a wide range of Canadians here. But from what I see in my host family, I like their life style: how they organize their lives. They work, they study, they play sports, all kinds of things, very all-rounded, not just working and sleeping all the time. They look very relaxed and lead a very healthy kind of life. They take an active role in planning their lives, not just passively accepting what is demanded from them. They enjoy their private lives.
I am more than satisfied with the courses. As for courses in my major, I've really learned how to apply theories and concepts into real situations. And the teachers are very good too. They give detailed comments on every assignment. You know your strengths and weaknesses. It's not spoon-feeding and exam-oriented. We have to prepare for each class and do a lot of assignments, cases and readings regularly so that the teachers can find out about our progress. You can't possibly get an A if you skip all the lessons and study the book two weeks before the final exam. So I like this approach. We can really learn something instead of memorizing materials.

I have twelve hours of class every week. I spend every morning in class. Every day, I spend one hour sending emails. In the afternoon, I'll either prepare for class or do homework for two hours. Then I'll go to swim or to play tennis. In the evening, I'll spend an hour or two cooking like making muffins or watching television. Then I'll study again for the rest of the evening. Starting next month [November, 1997], I'll go to visit prison every Tuesday. I learn French every Monday and Wednesday night and on Thursday, I'll spend the afternoon to prepare for supper. I also join the tours to visit places regularly. But I still spend most of my time studying because there is so much work to do. I want to spend more time visiting places like prison or join activities which give me more real experience. I want to spend more time reading the books I want to read.

[What do I miss about Hong Kong?] I miss my close friends most. I also miss my family. I miss the days that I spend with the swimming team at my [home] university,
how we trained together, went to competitions together and went out to eat together after
training. In the past two months [September and October, 1997], I learned that I was
not as strong as I thought I was. I need the care and support of my friends and family
when I have problems and feel lonely. I know that I need to get along harmoniously with
all sorts of people, those who work with me, those who live with me. Actually, before I
came here to study, I had a rough idea of what kind of person I am, now I get a closer
look at myself, my strengths and weaknesses. My character looks more vivid to me as I
observe myself in my daily activities and interactions with people. [I think] part of the
reason is that I become more mature and therefore pay more attention to what I am
observing and what I am doing.

I don’t like to hang out frequently with people who can’t really talk with me. I am not a
very sociable and talkative person when I’m with new friends. It’s difficult for me to start
a conversation with people. However, I did push myself to attend more social activities
and talk to people here. [In Canada], I learned more about what I need. I can’t just
sleep and study all the time. I need to lead a sort of well-balanced life. For the time
being, it’s hard to tell if my priorities have been altered because of this new [exchange]
experience. But so far, I guess this new experience have helped me to arrange for my
priorities. I always want to lead a balanced life, studying, playing sports, reading,
business and philosophy. In Hong Kong, there are always some external distractions
which hinder you from having this kind of life. But here, I have more time to reflect and
plan my daily schedule. It seems that now I feel more sure that it’s the kind of life I want.
I’m getting comfortable with this kind of life. This experience really helps me to grow
stronger when I have to face similar situations or some kind of challenges or difficulties later in my life. It's a tough training I guess. I know how important my family and friends are to me now. I learn to treasure them. Getting high marks in the school all the time doesn't mean anything. It's the ability to learn and still retain good performance in a different environment which proves that you are a capable person.

[To describe myself in a metaphor], I would think of myself as an audience sitting very close to the stage of a circus performance. I pay close attention to the circus, watching them performing and at the same time, I want to do this by myself. And sometimes the performers would ask me to come up and try. I feel excited and sometimes afraid. But the circus people still treat me as an amateur. I think the reason why I see myself this way is because I don’t think I've already got into the social life and circle in this community. On the other hand, people here treat me like a “visitor” and always pay extra attention to me and then they'll get back to their own way of doing things.

I have written an article about my life in Canada and I would submit it to [my home university] newspaper. (Excerpts from the article - email March, 1998):

“....These days reminded me of the feeling I got when I first came to Canada. Didn’t have any close friend to talk to when I felt sad. No one to cook my favorite Chinese dish. Didn’t have any grand shopping mall to hang around during weekends. I missed things when seemed ordinary to me when I was in Hong Kong.
Excited about the new surrounding, I asked myself, “What am I going to do?” First, I must re-establish my daily life. May be something different from what I had in Hong Kong. I must make the most of this year. Get as much as I can in experience and in exposure. I tried hard to persuade my father to let me come here. I must prove to him that his decision was right. Bearing in mind this self-promise at all times, I tried everything which was new to me....”

“My life was suddenly enriched with exposure and excitement. I realized that we can have alternatives to live a life, not just studying and working. Sometimes I felt so eager to do something that I would put aside my study which used to be one of my top priorities. There are other things which are more important to one’s life than getting good grades and jobs. If I miss the chance to do it now, I am going to miss it forever.”

“No doubt, life wasn’t so full of excitement every day. I felt lonely and homesick at times. I felt like I wanted to fall into a deep sleep like a coma that I could get myself away from reality. I told myself, “I am being tempted to give up”. No, I am not going to surrender. I must keep my head up. It is a wonderful journey of self-discovery. I always keep track of my own emotions and reactions in different occasions. Now I have a better understanding of myself, how strong I can be, when I will break down and cry. A bittersweet memory.”
4.6 My interpretation - Re-examination of identity, role and status

The story of Juliana intrigued me as it reflected a learner's changing identity, role and status in a new environment. It also illustrated a learner's investment and agency in the rites of transition. This story reminded me of my first days in a California high school. Like Juliana, I entered my new settings with a new set of identities as an international student and a boarding student. I did not know any one in the new country. It was a critical moment in my life. I had to rethink my roles, re-establish my social ties and re-evaluate my personal strengths and weaknesses in a new cultural context. Language was not a problem for me. However, in the new learning context, language and culture took on new meanings.

Like Juliana, I also had problems in class participation. I found myself in a classroom where students were seated in a circle and the teacher was seated outside of the circle, I did not know how to handle myself in this kind of setting. I never had problems with class participation in Hong Kong as the teacher was the one who was in charge of the timing and the sequence of the discussions. Therefore, I found it difficult to open my mouth when no one called on me. The teacher and students seemed to have reversed roles in this classroom setting. The teacher played the role of the “silent teacher” (Huebner, 1996, p.271) and the students were in charge of their own exploration of meanings on issues. It was an unfamiliar learning approach as compared to the transmission and transaction curriculums which I was more familiar with. I expected the teachers to be the task designers and facilitators. Instead, I found myself in a classroom which resembled an “experimental” stage with neither script nor director. I was in awe of the spontaneity of
the "free" discussions. As Juliana described, she found this kind of discussion "chaotic and confusing" at times. She was unfamiliar with the way these discussions worked. She was frustrated with her passive classroom behavior. She did not want to fit into the stereotype of the "shy and passive Asian student". She struggled to shed this role as the "passive student" by taking small steps to "push" herself to join in her class discussions. I understood how frustrated she felt in her inability to gain access to the group discussions. I also felt helpless and lost in the first few weeks at school. However, we were both fortunate to have understanding and empathetic teachers to give us a hand in times of need.

In Juliana's case, her home stay parents and instructors at the university gave her moral support in this language socialization experience. At times, she felt ambivalent and overwhelmed by her new environment. In those difficult moments, she would remind herself of her investment in this exploration journey to guide herself with her aspirations. They helped her to think of her new experience as a continuum which included her past, present and future. They also helped her to see the construction and reconstruction of her social identity through this language socialization experience in Canada.

As Eisner (1979) stated, "schooling is a cultural system that itself teaches important lessons" (p.91). Juliana looked at the exchange experience as a period of "tough training" which helped her to build her character and strength for her future. As Stengel (1997) described, "If education was life, then curriculum is experience". Juliana struggled to find an equilibrium in her new life in Canada. This experience with its "disequilibrium and
re-equilibrium" (Doll, 1989, p. 251) were integrated into one cultural learning process which helped Juliana to "search for and examine critically the bases for [her] views" (Graman, 1988, p.15).

When she returned to Hong Kong in April, 1998, Juliana found herself more observant and critical of her familiar surrounding. It was as if she saw Hong Kong for the first time through an outsider's perspective. She missed Canada, "the weather, the people and the sports". As she said, "I wish I could go on an exchange again". She became involved in the exchange orientation program at her university. She also submitted her article on her exchange experience to the school newspaper. Juliana wanted to share her cultural experience with others. She also wanted "to get a job which offers [her] overseas training". In her e-mail in July, 1998, she mentioned that she planned to "re-live" her exchange student's life by sharing a room with an exchange student in the student hostel in September, 1998.

The story of Juliana illustrated the themes of investment, needs, agency and ambivalence in a cultural exchange experience. Juliana had multiple desires and multiple goals invested in this study abroad program. She also had human agency in her struggle. She was ready for "a tough training". As she said, this was a "once in a life time opportunity" and she wanted to learn from her experience. Her search for a "well-balanced life" became her source of strength as well as her source of frustration. Her biggest challenge was her need for a sense of belonging in this unfamiliar environment. No one seemed to understand the struggle she had to go through in those critical moments, not even the people who were
close to her heart. They were too far away to understand the loneliness she felt in her heart. Her fluent English made it hard for others close by to see her as a person in need of their support. Sometimes, the feeling of isolation made her want to “forget about reality”. To her, this “big change” was “a bittersweet memory”. Like she said, “It’s the ability to learn and still retain such good performance in different environments that prove you to be a capable person”. This experience made her more certain of what she wanted in her life and the urgency to realize her dream.

4.7 Impression - Charlene

I remember the first time I met Charlene, the third participant of my study, was in October, 1997. Charlene was standing outside of the university bookstore waiting for my friend. It was a windy day. She was running a high fever and was wearing a heavy overcoat. Her tiny figure and tired looking face made her look weak and helpless. They were supposed to go to the Chinatown legal clinic and work as volunteer legal aides that evening. As a new acquaintance, I was impressed with Charlene’s dedication to work and her team spirit. Little did I know that Charlene was also going through a period of transition in her first month in Canada. She was making her best effort to integrate into a new educational, social and cultural context. She told me later that this was a “hectic period” in her exchange experience because she was “testing the waters” and was unsure of herself and her new role in this changing social setting.

Charlene became a participant of my study three months after we met. When I started my participant selection process, I asked my friend to inquire if she would be interested to
participate in my study. To my surprise, her answer was favorable. Charlene gave me her phone number and asked me to contact her. I discussed with Charlene in great detail on the phone regarding my research focus and my research approach. In addition, I explained to her my views on ethical issues related to this research process. Charlene graciously accepted my request for participant observation and interview after our phone conversation in January, 1998. However, she also expressed her concerns about the confidentiality of data and her discomfort with the use of a tape or video recorder. I was grateful for her willingness to participate in my research and was more than happy to comply with her request that “we just talk about the issues”.

We met in the faculty of law a week later. She told me that she had mentioned my research to the other Hong Kong students in the exchange program. Two of them were interested to meet me on the same day. This participant selection process which I anticipated to be a tedious task had become a self-promoting process with volunteers willing to participate in my research. I knew that much of it had to do with the chain link effect of the “known sponsorship” approach. Charlene was willing to help me because we were introduced by a mutual friend. She knew that I was going to be non-intrusive and empathetic in my study approach. Her friends were willing to participate because they knew me through Charlene. We met as a group on campus that day. I was able to observe how they interacted as a group and how they interacted with the other students in the university setting. I also found out that they seldom had the opportunity to meet due to their different faculties, different dormitories and different class schedules. Charlene was the only exchange student in the exchange program studying law. As a second year
undergraduate student from a Hong Kong university, Charlene was also the only student in her class who was still an undergraduate student.

My impression of Charlene in this second meeting was quite different from the first time we met. Three months had past since I last saw her outside the bookstore, I could hardly recognize her. She looked healthier and more confident. This second meeting made me reflect on the importance of a prolonged period of observation in order to paint a fair picture of the participant. It was also important for me to use multiple sources of data to present the participant from different perspectives. My initial impression of Charlene changed over a period of time with our weekly contacts by phone and e-mail. I became more aware of her values, beliefs and feelings through our interactions. I began to understand her goals, social needs and desires to integrate into this new community. We became both research participants and friends.

Our second meeting gave me an opportunity to see Charlene interact with her peers and to observe her role in the different social groups. Before I met Charlene at the faculty of law student lounge, I had the opportunity to chat with one of her Canadian classmates. “I’ve never considered Charlene an exchange student. She is just like any one in class,” said her friend. She also added that she did not think there was any cultural difference between a Canadian and a Hong Kong student. She was defending Charlene’s “in-group” status in this social context. When I mentioned to Charlene about her friend’s response, Charlene agreed that she felt like an in-group member both inside and outside of her class. However, her life in the dormitory was a different story. She admitted that she still felt
like an “outsider” in that setting. She was placed in a graduate dormitory and sharing a flat with three local graduate students who were not friendly to her. They made her feel unwelcomed as a newcomer.

Charlene and I kept in touch through e-mail and phone conversation in the first few months. I observed that her answers which began as short and formal eventually became longer and more informal. I believe as time went, she began to build her trust in me as a researcher. She became more open and in-depth with her answers. In the beginning, Charlene had put a frame around herself allowing only a part of her self to be revealed. Over a period of three months, she began to enjoy her role as an active agent in telling her own story. It gave her a new sense of identity as a co-researcher in this study.

We met for a third time at the end of April, 1998 after examinations were over. I was surprised that this time Charlene invited me to visit her dormitory. She also asked me if I needed to tape the interview. In the dormitory, she brought out her camera so that I could take pictures of her room. I felt both honored and surprised in her change of attitude toward these “intrusive” devices. Then I realized that it was not the devices which mattered. The key factors were her trust and confidence in me as a researcher. She welcomed me into her world as a friend and a researcher. Her trust made me feel the burden of my responsibility as the narrator of her story. Again, I reminded myself of the ethical issues in this research.
Our third meeting was a day of fun and interaction. Charlene arranged with the other two students so that I could visit all their dormitories on the same day. She wanted to save me a trip from traveling back and forth to campus during the examination week. We taped our conversation while having lunch in a Chinese restaurant. We chatted in both Chinese and English. We touched on many topics related to Hong Kong, Canada, life styles, family, school and the exchange experiences. I believe my own Hong Kong cultural knowledge and bilingual background helped me to bond with her.

When I received an e-mail from Charlene in mid May informing me that she had returned to town after two weeks of traveling in Canada, I was totally surprised. Like the other Hong Kong exchange students who participated in this research, Charlene made plans to return to Hong Kong after she finished her examinations and travels. However, she changed her mind and decided to stay for two more months in the summer. In her e-mail to me, she also offered to assist me in my research during her extended stay. I was more than happy to accept this offer for further study.

On May 25, 1998, I e-mailed her and asked her where she would prefer to meet. Charlene e-mailed me and told me that she was still looking for a place to stay. I sensed that she was going through another critical period which made her feel quite helpless and lost. She had to face the dilemma of house hunting and job hunting. I waited for her response as there was no way for me to contact her except through her university e-mail address.
In early June, I found another e-mail from Charlene. She told me that she found a new place to stay through the computerized housing network on campus. This temporary housing was close to campus. Her landlady was a young lawyer who sublet a room to her. As a part of the rental agreement, Charlene agreed to take care of her two dogs while the lawyer was on her business trip. I called her a week later at her new residence. Charlene sounded happy on the phone. She urged me to visit her at her “new home” which she described as “very nice, very comfortable!” She also wanted me to bring my video camera to film her playing with the dogs. Our meeting was set on June 16, 1998 at 11a.m. I told her that I would spend approximately two hours with her during this session. I would observe and interview her. After the meeting I planned to take her out for lunch as a welcome back greeting and as a gesture of my appreciation for her contribution to this research. Charlene told me that she would need to go to a downtown legal clinic after lunch as she had started working as a volunteer legal technician during her extended stay in the summer.

Charlene and I discussed the possibility of filming and recording for this observation and interview session. She suggested that we could film her doing her daily chores. I was grateful for her suggestions. However, I was also concerned with the ethical issues. Since her landlady was away on a business trip, I was unable to obtain her written and informed consent to film her residence. We finally decided to film and tape record Charlene in her bedroom for this interview. After considering the setting, the time and the ethical issues, I turned my attention to my role in the observation session. “Do I choose to be participatory or non-participatory role in this observation?” “Where do I position myself in
the setting?" "What are the observable and unobservable codes?" "What are my assumptions and biases as a researcher in the interpretation of these codes?" "How do I "make sense" of the cultural scene from the participant's perspective?" were questions which came to my mind.

On the morning of June 16, 1998, I drove along the west side of town looking for Charlene's new residence. Our appointment was set for 11 am, I left home around 10 am in anticipation for traffic problems. The trip took much longer than I expected. I found myself driving up and down that unfamiliar part of town and kept missing her house at the intersection. It was getting close to our appointment and I was getting anxious. Finally, I called Charlene on my cellular phone. She answered her phone in her cheerful voice and offered to meet me at the street corner. I asked her to stay by the phone in case I needed further instructions. Fortunately, I was able to find her house soon after this call.

I decided to write about this episode because it reflected how Charlene cared about people and our rapport in this research. I observed how she volunteered her service to help others who were in need in different occasions. Her willingness to share and her positive mental attitude enabled her to look at the brighter side of life even in the most difficult times of her stay in Canada. This episode also revealed the subtle and interchangeable roles that Charlene and I played in this research. We allowed ourselves to be human and vulnerable in this naturalistic inquiry approach. It had become our research culture that Charlene and I were both involved in this research as observers and participants. As she said, "I became more open up in the past five months because I feel that you are always
non-judgmental and open to me”. Through our interaction, Charlene became more comfortable with her active role in the research. She was not under the scrutiny of an investigative and intrusive observer. It was as much of her research as it was mine.

Charlene’s new residence was an older home built in the fifties in the west side of town. When I rang the doorbell, nobody answered. After waiting for five minutes, I decided to call her again. This time Charlene came out from the back yard to greet me. Her room was in the basement of this house. It had no doorbell. The three renters who were on the main floor were working women. They had gone to work. Charlene would have never heard my doorbell.

I did not know if Charlene had any visitor. She did not seem to mind the inconvenience of living in a basement without a doorbell. She greeted me with her big cheerful smile. Her short hair had a healthy shine under the summer sun. She looked comfortable in her casual T-shirt and jeans. There were two friendly looking dogs right behind her as she came up to greet me. They greeted me with equal enthusiasm, wagging their tails, jumping up and down. “Say Hi to my friend, Cha Cha and Bobby!” Charlene talked endearingly to the mixed breed German Shepherd and Chihuahua. I was surprised that Charlene had built such a warm rapport with them. After all, she had only been in this house for two weeks.

I observed how she petted the dogs, throwing them a ball and cooing them like they were little children. In a short period of time, she had made this place her “new home”. I could
tell that the dogs were attached to her. They followed her around everywhere. Charlene jokingly remarked that her “new friends’ only understood English. Every time, she talked to her Hong Kong friends on the phone, the two dogs would give her a puzzled look. At one point in our conversation, “Cha Cha” came into the room and sat on my lap while I was filming Charlene. We could not help laughing at this comic situation. This fleeting moment was also captured on film.

I observed how Charlene played with the dogs and was surprised to find out that she never had the experience of taking care of dogs before she came to Canada. Charlene lived in a high-rise building in the inner part of the city of Hong Kong. It would not be feasible for her family to keep a dog, let alone two dogs which ran wild in the backyard. Charlene said she would miss them when she returned to Hong Kong at the end of August. They gave her a sense of belonging in her “new home” and she enjoyed being their caregiver.

I observed the setting which Charlene described as her “new home”. The backyard looked quite deserted with old broken furniture stacked under the corner of a staircase leading to the main floor of the house. The yard looked more or less like a big play pen for the two dogs with dog food, dog blanket, dog toys and dog fence lying all over the place. Every time Charlene had to leave for work, she would go through the ritual of feeding the dogs, playing with them and fencing them in under the staircase of the back yard. The ritual could take up to half an hour. But she did not mind. It made her feel responsible and needed.
I noticed that the basement was small and sparsely furnished. The center of attraction in the living area was a big couch with broken springs. It had a new sofa cover which Charlene’s house mate had bought “for the dogs to chew on”. A small black and white television was placed in one corner. Charlene seldom watched television because the reception was poor. A bronze Buddha was placed on top of the television giving this decor a touch of Eastern mystique. On the walls, there were souvenirs and pictures which were brought back from different parts of the world by the young lawyer. They added a touch of international flair to the decor.

The living area and the kitchenette were common areas in the basement where Charlene would interact with her Canadian house-mate in their daily chores. I wondered how often they socialized with each other and whether the three working women living above the basement ever found out about Charlene. I knew that Charlene anticipated that this off-campus housing would provide more opportunity for her to socialize with local people and have more cultural exposure. Did reality match her aspirations in this extended stay?

Charlene showed me her new room with a sense of pride. She told me that when she decided to move in, her house mate gave her the only bed in the basement and slept on the couch herself. She also helped Charlene to decorate her room with posters she brought back from France. The pipes which stuck out on one side of the bedroom wall were covered with lace curtains which Charlene thought was a “creative” touch. She was also happy to have a computer in the room although it was not in good working condition. Charlene had to take the bus to campus whenever she wanted to e-mail her friends. She
did not mind these “minor inconveniences” and was grateful that she found this “new home” in a short period of time.

Charlene’s bedroom was neat and well arranged as I had expected. I had seen Charlene’s room in the dormitory before. She always wanted to present it at its best whenever I visited. For example, when she found out that the lamp in her new room had no lampshade, she asked me to hold my filming until she put on the lampshade. I found myself making a mental comparison of her new room with her dormitory room. I could not find the pictures, the greeting cards, the letters and the cheerful notes she once taped all over her walls. It seemed to lack that personal touch, or simply, a claim of ownership. Instead, there were two boxes of books and clothing stacked on top of each other next to her bed. They gave me a sense of restlessness. They seemed to remind me that the resident had no intent to stay. She was just passing by. In this private corner of Charlene’s life, perhaps she was indecisive about her extended stay? The bareness and the quietness of the setting conveyed a sense of loneliness and isolation. I found that her joking remark, “now only the dogs are keeping me company” had a ring of truth to it.

I came to the setting with the anticipation of observing Charlene in her daily routines. The main activities I observed in the two hours were her interactions with her dogs. However, during our conversation, I did manage to catch a glimpse of her interacting with her neighbors. The topic of their conversation was related to the dogs. While we were doing the interview in her room, the dogs recognized the neighbors and barked in the backyard. Charlene and I had to stop the interview to go out to greet the neighbors. She introduced
me as her “friend from the university”. We had a friendly chat with these neighbors. Charlene liked her new neighborhood and found that the people there were friendly. She told me that her parents were concerned about her safety when she informed them that she would rent a room off-campus and live by herself. She had to convince them that it was a safe neighborhood. In the evening, she enjoyed going to the park with her dogs and “just talked to the people”.

Our interview started at around 11:30 am, half an hour after I arrived. Initially, I planned to interview Charlene for an hour. However this interview had to be cut short due to the interruption of the dogs. During this half an hour, we touched on many different issues related to her intent, feelings and views on this exchange experience. In the past, when we met on campus, there were usually other students around. On the few occasions that we met privately, we were usually pressed by time due to our conflicting class schedules. It was hard to discuss any in-depth issues and to explore sensitive themes in group settings. We found that e-mail and phone calls were more effective means to communicate thoughts and feelings. They gave us the flexibility of time and space. Nevertheless, it was never the same as face-to-face contact in which I could observe her facial expression, her body language, her tone of voice, her verbal and non-verbal expressions, and her role in the setting. I could also observe the spontaneity of our interactions and her changing perspectives in the course of our conversation.

I started my interview by thanking Charlene for the opportunity to interview her. She expressed her pleasure in helping me in this research. Then I started with a spontaneous
and open-ended question, “May be we can start by talking about yourself and what you are doing here this summer…” I think this kind of “tell me” question helped her to decide on what areas she wanted to focus on. Charlene explained her intent to stay for the summer as “I want to see Canada in its full cycle”. She had seen autumn, winter, spring, “so why not summer?” Furthermore, she wanted to take some summer courses and work part-time to gain more experience and to maximize her opportunity to study in Canada. During the summer, she wanted to find “something meaningful to do in Canada”. She consulted with her friends in the law faculty and they urged her to stay. She was aware of the advantages and disadvantages of this extended stay. It meant “extra expense” for housing and “less time” with her parents and friends.

I listened attentively to her descriptions. The key word which I liked to explore in this context was “meaningful”. It appeared several times in her response. I used it as a guide to explore the theme of volunteer work. Before the interview, she told me that she had started working in a downtown clinic. I prompted her to give me more details on this topic.

Charlene used the term “legal technician” to describe her part-time job. She spent most of her afternoons taking up referred cases in a Chinatown clinic. She was familiar with the clients in the clinic and felt that her English, Cantonese and Mandarin “definitely” gave her “an edge” over others in dealing with cases which required multilingual skills. As she said, “I am the only one in the group [of volunteers] who is fluent in English, Cantonese and Mandarin. The other students are mostly Canadian born Chinese or immigrant Chinese
students who spoke very little Cantonese or Mandarin. They lack the fluency needed to communicate with Chinese clients on their cases”.

Our discussion gradually changed from the issue of “volunteer work” to the issue of “language socialization”. I decided to explore this theme further to find out more about Charlene’s language experience. Charlene said that she communicated to her clients in Chinese and she used English to discuss cases with her colleagues. In another clinic which she also worked part-time, she communicated mostly in English as the clientele was different. They were people from “all levels of the society”. “Most of them are on welfare or are having trouble in life”. “They have a different set of problems,” said Charlene. She enjoyed working at both clinics. As she said, “I really enjoy working for them because I really get to help people who need help”. She saw her volunteering service as “an opportunity to contribute to the community”. As she said, “I get to talk to clients, I get to present in English which is a good training for my English language. At the same time, I push myself to do some legal work so I won’t waste my time. It is a valuable experience.”

I tried to follow the lead of the conversation to explore the emergent themes. I tried to pick up key words in her responses and avoid asking “why” questions. Indeed, interview is a “conversation with a purpose” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.268). When I heard that Charlene wanted “to help people.” I asked her whether she would ever be “personally involved” with the cases. She answered, “Oh, that’s a funny question…” Then she explained to me that “one of the golden rules for legal advisor is to never get emotionally
involved.” Later, she added, “Just caring... as a third person but not emotionally involved.”

I decided to explore more in-depth her experience as an exchange student. Since she was in her extended stay, I asked her to reflect on her experience as an exchange student in the past nine months. The following is Charlene’s description of her story as recorded in this interview.

4.8 Charlene’s Story - “A whole new environment, a whole new opportunity”

Canada is a whole new environment, a whole new opportunity for me. I get to explore a whole new system which is very different from the Hong Kong system. Because of the limited time, a whole new system, I’m always on the go, go, go.

When I first came, it was a hectic situation. I was not in a position to say whether I like the situation or not. I haven’t even got involved yet. Now, I feel involved as a traveler. It’s like someone who is passing by. I get to know people with a full awareness that the that I’m just passing by. They know that I am going to leave one day. We cherish every opportunity we have together”. “My friends really care, they are very good people”. They often call me and ask, “How are you doing? Do you need a ride? Do you need some work? Let’s hang out more this summer”. “Many of my friends are going to Hong Kong as exchange students this fall”. [“Are they going because of you?”] “Well, in a naive way, I want to think of it that way. I have never asked them to find out. Hopefully, I’m one of the reasons. Hong Kong is an attraction. It’s a financial center, it’s a
former colony. The culture there may be easier for them [friends] to adapt to. They get to see Hong Kong and they can use it as a stepping stone to see China or Asia.”

["Are any of your friends surprised that you speak such good English?"] “Yeah, most people say, your English is pretty good and I say, “Oh, it’s because of the good teachers I have in Hong Kong.” “I am just a traditional Hong Kong student. I think what makes me different from others is because I want to speak it. I love to communicate. I find that speaking English is another way I can communicate to a larger pool of people.” “Yeah, it’s an international language. Like people from Holland, Switzerland, they still use English. By using English, I can communicate with people from North America and South America and different parts of the world which is fascinating, totally economical. I look at it as a tool. Even if my pronunciation or fluency are not that good, to me, language is just a tool as long as I communicate.”

["How do you see yourself in this new context?"] “When I find myself with people who have dark hair, yellow skin, I know that I am one of them. When I’m with lots of Caucasians, if I’m the only one who has dark hair, dark eyes, yellow skin, I would really know that I stand out as an Asian. The context reminds you more of who you are more than your language.” “As for culture, I’m still learning it right now. One of my classmates told me that I’m sometimes rude. May be because of the mixed use of languages. You might just translate. Sometimes, I might appear to be rude or indecisive or indifferent. It took me a great deal of time and effort to learn. If she didn’t tell me, I wouldn’t have a clue why she was mad...If I don’t do the wrong thing, I would have never learned.”
My interview with Charlene ended abruptly due to interruption of the barking dogs in the backyard. Charlene left a month after we had this interview. She did not stay the length of time she had anticipated to stay. In reviewing my notes on this interview, I observed the changes which took place in her response over the past few months. Excerpts of her email responses taken during the second term of her stay are as follows:

[On exchange program] I want to see the world, more specifically, the more advanced countries and systems in North America. I want to learn to take care of myself 'cause at home my parents tend to do all the things for me, all I needed to do were studying and going to exams. Also I want to get, hopefully a different perspective of how the world works, and myself too. [On social identity] I see myself as a minority. Back in Hong Kong, it's very different. Almost everybody speaks the native language, with the same hair color, skin color. Here an Asian just stands out. Back home it was the Caucasian who stands out. [On English language] I'm not native. Though I can speak English fluently, I still feel the difference when I play games with my friends. Those games basically test us vocabularies and that's the time I realize how many local or daily words I don't know. I might have the same language capacity as locals do in the academic context due to the limited professional vocabularies that we use in class. But when it comes to local and daily things, there are still many vocabularies that I don't understand, especially those which they say on the local TV programs.

[On learning competence] I'm involved in the law program in which most of the students have at least one undergraduate degree in a special field already, and generally their
attitude toward life and study are mature and independent. But my opinion is only confined to [the students I met] in the law program. Nonetheless, I see myself equally competitive in my studies in this environment.

I have a fixed schedule to follow so that my life is not chaotic. My dorm is just twenty minutes away from my faculty which is fairly handy. The only drawback is that I have to cook for myself. I think I would like to have a dorm with a meal plan to save me cooking time.

In the beginning of the term, it seemed like there were many disadvantages to live by myself. Like I have to cook or else I'll starve. I have to do the laundry or else I'll have nothing fresh and clean to wear. I have to make every decision, big and small, in my life in order to get my life going and in place. But most of the disadvantages in the beginning of the term turn into advantages now 'cause I learn a lot from them. Like the freedom I want in my life and the duty to keep my life in place. So it's hard to conclude which ones are advantages and which are disadvantages 'cause all the things are changing all the time. Disadvantages now may turn into advantages tomorrow when I learn to appreciate them, and of course, vice versa.

[On Hong Kong] I miss the energy, the sunshine, the speed, my friends and the life there. Of course, [ I miss] my parents the most. [ On exchange experience], I discovered my weaknesses in many aspects, like in interrelationship, in study method, in the way I look
at the world, in my attitude towards life. I think they are the results of my testing myself in different environments. Now I try to learn how to improve myself.

My priorities changed a bit after coming here. I no longer consider work and achievement [as top priorities] though they are still of paramount importance to me as well as to others who come to this university. But now I recognize the importance of enjoyment in life which is equally important as work. The sunshine, the bird singing, the beauty of mother nature...I guess one of the reasons for this change is that in Hong Kong one doesn’t have this kind of attraction to stimulate people to admire the beauty of nature.

Generally, I might look less tense and more friendly and willing to make eye contact with people. And my clothing might be comparatively more casual than that in Hong Kong. I use back bag here and wear sports shoes every day. In Hong Kong, I would use business bag and wear business shoes. I guess I have become more relaxed and more flexible-minded. Before, most of my thinking is on study and work. Now I recognize the importance of relaxation and enjoyment of life. I don’t think having these would slow me down in my work pace. Instead, I would say they help me to relax and enhance me to be more efficient when I work. Also I become tougher in personality and getting to be more independent-minded. I wouldn’t back off in some situations which I think I might have done previously. Now I would fight for what I think I deserve or [I think] is right.
[On impact of this exchange experience]. Definitely, I've brushed up my speaking and hearing ability here which I think would definitely help me in my career. And my exposure to western culture will give me an edge. My exposure to the Canadian context have broadened my perspectives. I think I would be more liberal minded after this year's experience. This would help me in my problem solving approach and thinking process. I think these are critical 'cause life is a continuous process of self education. Through this analysis, I have come to such a favorable conclusion about this exchange or study abroad experience that I'm tempted to go on another similar trip when I have the chance.

I think this transition is a necessary phase in my life. Without this phase, I can never get out of the invisible cocoon formed by the culture, society and the way of life in Hong Kong. I can never have a distant look at my country [to observe] the merits and drawbacks of the system and hence learn to be critical of it from a new dimension. I will never learn, or at least it'll take much longer time and a whole lot more effort had I not come here (to Canada)...

I think exchange students need to be prepared for the living arrangement. Interpersonal relationships can be a consuming experience. If you live in the dormitory, you have a good chance of living with people from totally different backgrounds, so there is bound to be differences in standards in a whole lot of things, big and small. For example, it could be something like “what is the meaning of cleanliness on the kitchen floor?” These could well be differences which could lead to conflicts later. Generally, I don't
think new exchange students need to worry about culture shock and stuff like that too much. Just keep an open mind and observe well. Make comparisons and learn. Basically, view yourself as an empty glass waiting to be filled with water.

I would picture myself as a young deer wandering in a big pine forest, exploring and looking and learning about here and there. Sometimes I found swamp, sometimes beautiful streams, awesome falls, all different, both good and bad. I don't remember how I pictured myself before coming to Canada. Possibly a moth still in cocoon. The world was pretty blurry to me then and my ability to see and understand was limited.

The above responses were collected over a period of three months and most of the details were taken directly from an e-mail that Charlene sent me on May, 1998. In her e-mail, Charlene expressed uncertainty and ambivalence about her new role in this English-speaking world. However, in my interview in June, 1998, I observed that Charlene was much more confident of herself in her relations with others during her extended stay. Charlene no longer identified herself as a “deer in a big forest” or “a moth in a cocoon”. As she said, “I’ve changed the way I see myself. Now, I see myself more like a craftsman. I feel that I am specializing in one area instead of the rough shape. I’m carving the finer details. I’m doing the head right now.” Her positive mental attitude and increasing self confidence showed that learner had investment and agency in her changing contexts.
4.9 My interpretation - Learner investment and agency

The story of Charlene illustrated the interrelationships of language, culture and identity. It touched on themes such as learner's investment, agency and changing identities in the changing social contexts. Charlene did not play a passive role in her marginalized position. She struggled to integrate herself into her new social environment. She was determined to explore her new world with a positive frame of mind.

I find it interesting to observe how her views on her identity, role and status changed over time in different social contexts. Before she left Hong Kong, she was a moth trapped inside "an invisible cocoon". Her views on identity, role and status were "blurry". Her whole world revolved around school and home. She was "a traditional Hong Kong student" who was preoccupied with school work and examinations. It was not until Charlene arrived in Canada that she made a decision to change her life style. In the first few months of her exchange experience, Charlene found herself in a position of need and uncertainty in an unfamiliar environment. Her problems with language expression in everyday life and her experience with unfriendly room mates made her feel like "a deer... exploring and learning in the deep forest". She felt lost and uncertain in the "new culture". Although she had no problem with academic English, her experience with communicative English in this new cultural context was a different story. She felt like an "outsider" when people laughed at jokes on the television programs or played word games using colloquial expressions.
Charlene refused to be silenced in her struggle. She claimed the right to speak and the right to “fight for what she thinks she deserves” in those stressful months rooming with graduate students. She also chose not to draw a conclusion or classify her experience as positive or negative. Instead, she decided to think of her exchange experience as an open case in which “disadvantages might turn into advantages”. After all, “it’s hard to conclude which ones are advantages and which ones are disadvantages” in the long term. She decided to use an open mind to view her own experience. She found herself emerging from this experience with more appreciation for flexibility and uncertainty. As Charlene said, “life is a continuous process of self education”. After all, she discovered that “there is one thing which is certain and that is things are changing all the time”. She decided to became the “craftsman” of her own life and to play an active role in helping others to overcome their problems with her legal knowledge and multilingual skills.

4.10 Impressions - Lawrence

The first time I met Lawrence was in February, 1998 at the campus bookstore. He came by to say hello to Charlene and we were introduced. Lawrence impressed me as someone who was raised in Canada. He had a casual and relaxed air about him. His long hair was tied back in a knot. He liked to carry a heavy back pack with a bottle of water sticking out from the side. His hiking boots and ski cap reminded me of someone who liked the out-door life. I would have never imagined that Lawrence had lived in a big city like Hong Kong all his life and this was his first time in Canada.
From our conversation, I observed that Lawrence communicated fluently in English. He told me that he tried to speak in English as often as he could. He would even speak to his Hong Kong friends in English, although most of his friends preferred to speak to him in Chinese. In Lawrence’s case, he felt an urgency to practice his English during his stay in Canada. He also found it hard to switch back and forth from Chinese to English. Therefore, he preferred to speak only in English in Canada. He told me that he would switch back to Chinese when he returned to Hong Kong.

When Lawrence found out from Charlene that I was doing research on Hong Kong exchange students, he expressed his interest to take part in it. We talked on the phone in early March, 1998. From our conversation, I could tell that he was familiar with different research approaches. He asked me whether I would be doing qualitative or quantitative research. He was also inquisitive as to whether I would be collecting empirical data for this study. Lawrence was familiar with the quantitative approach in his scientific studies. His was comfortable using research terms such as statistical figures, categories, systematic approach and quantitative data analysis. When he found out that I was more inclined to use a qualitative approach, he was interested to find out more about it. I found that Lawrence had the intellectual curiosity to take risks and to open himself up to different learning experiences. While I was observing him, he was also observing me as to how I conducted this qualitative research. In fact, Lawrence planned to study for a master degree in clinical psychology after he finished his undergraduate studies in Hong Kong.
Our research started at the end of February, 1998. It was in the middle of the second term. The undergraduate students were busy preparing for their examinations and assignments. After I talked to Lawrence on the phone, I decided to send him the research questions for review before we met for an interview. We both felt that there was time pressure to finish this study in a limited amount of time. Lawrence had to leave Canada in April, 1998, so we only had two months to finish this study. He was kind enough to suggest that we should meet once a week so that I could collect my data in a timely manner. I appreciated his kind consideration and his willingness to accommodate for the inconvenience of starting a research in the middle of his second term.

In our discussion, Lawrence was eager to share his personal insights and observations on his exchange experience. I appreciated his trust in me as a researcher and I believe the “known sponsor approach” gave us a good start as Charlene was our mutual friend. Lawrence told me that prior to coming to Canada he was hesitant to share his feelings or thoughts with others. Yet, this year abroad had changed his attitude and outlook in life. He was delighted with his own “improvement” in socialization. As he said, “I take the initiatives to interact with people, sometimes even I think I am not acting the way I used to” Then he added, “but I see it as an improvement of my social skills.”

In our first interview in early March, 1998, we discussed his e-mail response to my research questions. The purpose of this meeting was to clarify the meanings of his answers and to get to know each other as co-researchers in this study. I mentioned to Lawrence how impressed I was with his thorough and insightful responses. I also told him
that he was expressive and articulate in his oral and written responses. Lawrence appeared surprised. He told me that he was concerned with his oral English and the way his transcript would appear in this research paper. He asked me repeatedly if I could understand what he was saying. He was concerned that he would make many grammatical errors and that I would have trouble understanding him during our interview. I assured Lawrence that I had no problem understanding him and that he expressed himself well.

We discussed the difference between academic English and communicative English. From this first interview, I found out that Lawrence’s doubt about his communicative English was rooted deep in his past.

Lawrence came from an educational system which placed much emphasis on accuracy and examination results. Under the influence of the transmission curriculum, Lawrence believed that he had to “master” his English and speak like an “English speaking” person before he could be accepted as a “participant” in the new culture. His “English-speaking” instructors in Hong Kong had convinced him that his English communication skills needed “improvement”. He felt that he needed to attain a “competitive working standard” so that his English could be understood by “English speakers”.

Lawrence believed that his problem with English was the main reason why he could not gain access to the local community. He was frustrated that his improvement was slower than he had expected. He believed that the problem with his communicative English had to do with the fact that his first language was not English. In his language socialization experience, he often felt “restricted” by his lack of cultural knowledge in English
expressions. He searched for opportunities to "improve" his English communication skills to be a "participant in the new culture". He volunteered in many extra-curricular activities inside and outside of the campus. Yet, they did not change his belief that he was still an "outsider" in other people's eyes in this new social context.

What made this discussion interesting was that Lawrence separated his communicative skills from his academic performance. He told me that he had no problem adapting to the new learning approach in Canada and he was one of the top students in his class. Therefore, Lawrence believed that he had the language competence to cope with the academic demands. However, he lacked the cultural knowledge to communicate with others in language socialization in his every day life. As Ochs (1988) stated, "linguistic knowledge is embedded in sociocultural knowledge" (p.14). Lawrence was frustrated that he was "a visitor" who could not gain access to the "backstage" due to his lack of "understandings of the social organization of everyday life, cultural ideologies, moral values, beliefs and structures of knowledge and interpretation" (Ochs, 1988, p.14) through his use of language.

To understand Lawrence's life on campus, I decided to observe his interaction with his dorm mates and his friends on the day after their examinations. It was the last week of April, 1998 and the exchange students had finished their examinations already. Charlene helped me to arrange for a group gathering as a farewell party to the exchange students.
I was invited to visit their dormitories. We met at Lawrence’s dormitory on our first stop. As we walked up to his room, I saw many students playing frisbee in the front lawn. They threw the frisbee at Lawrence and asked him to join them in the game. He had a friendly exchange with them. I could tell that he knew many people in the dormitory. When we walked up the stairs, he was greeted by some more friends. Lawrence enjoyed playing basketball, computer games and watching television with his floor mates. He seemed to fit right into this dormitory scene. It would be hard to tell from an outsider’s perspective how hard Lawrence tried to become “a participant in this new culture”.

My first impression of Lawrence’s room was the big poster he put on his door. On this poster, he wrote a poem in which he compared himself to “Santa Claus”, the good-will ambassador to the world. He said his “home” was open to visitors all the time. All they had to do was knock and enter.

When the bedroom door opened, I was amazed at what I saw. I finally understood what Lawrence meant by, “personalizing” his room. There was a colorful printed cloth hanging from one end of the ceiling to another. There were creative and colorful designs all over the walls. I could imagine how Lawrence would lie on his bed staring at the beautiful designs on the ceiling and the walls. Like he said, “It is my place for solitary refuge. I have this space to store my collection of anything”. This was the first time Lawrence ever had a room of his own. He found it a luxury and he intended to make this room his personal statement.
Lawrence did not spend time making his bed before we came. He did not care much about these daily chores. There were other priorities in his life. In his study abroad experience, Lawrence learned that life was not just about work and study. Lawrence wanted to see more of Canada before he went back to Hong Kong. His intent to travel around the world was “solidified” after his exchange experience. He spent a month traveling in his backpack around the United States and Canada before he headed home.

4.11 Lawrence’s story - “I’m not expressing what I really want to express”

Lawrence preferred to think of his personal accounts as empirical data rather than as a personal story. The following is what he shared with me during this research:

I have been hoping for the opportunities to study abroad. However, knowing my financial situation, it is nearly impossible for me unless I get a very generous scholarship. Therefore, I apply to the exchange program to fulfill my wish before I finish my undergraduate study. The reason for studying overseas - I think I am quite a stimulus-seeking person, who is always looking for new experience, new thought and new impact. I also want to master my English. I think I can do it more efficiently in an English-speaking environment. Canada is a built-in case. English is the spoken language here. I also considered Canada’s multicultural environment and thought it was a good place for cultural exchange. I didn’t do any research basically. Just talked to some friend in the senior students dormitory and shared his experience. If I didn’t have any scholarship, I probably wouldn’t be here. Before I came here, I had to negotiate the psychology courses I take here to make sure they are equivalent to Hong Kong’s. There
was no restriction or prerequisite for the courses in the psychology department. Since Hong Kong is a three year system and Canada is a four year system, I find the courses quite easy here. I can handle my study without much difficulty. Without much preparation, I can sometimes get to the upper ten percent in a mid-term exam or essay.

I still don't think my English is at a competitive working standard. For language, I think there are several standards, like buying stuff and daily life situations, those are the basic social skills. Then, there is the working level. When I talk to people here, normally they expect me to be quite fluent in English. But sometimes, I don't understand when they speak too fast or they don't understand me because of my accent. Sometimes, I can't express myself in English. If I have enough time to think, I can express myself better. I know some exchange students from Britain, they also have misunderstanding about some terms used here. But they have been speaking in English all their lives. So they don't have my problem. In Hong Kong, I speak in English to my English-speaking professors in the university. I had more chance to speak in English in the university. My only chance to speak in English in the secondary school is in the English debating team. Outside of class, we speak in Chinese. Here, I prefer to speak in English 'cause that's the reason I came here. I want to improve my English. Sometimes, it is difficult to switch back to Chinese. Like in Chinese restaurants, when I look at their menus, I find it hard to switch back to thinking in Chinese words. I know some exchange students like Charlene, they don't have this problem, they have the ability to switch to either Chinese or English with no problem. I have a hard time. I feel like I am trying to detach myself
from the Chinese community and I feel bad about it. Yet, I want to be here to practice speaking English.

Certainly my language ability affects my integrating into the community. Although my understanding of both written and spoken English are of a working level, my expression competency of the language makes my interaction with people restricted only to a superficial level. My English has improved by my being in the English speaking environment, but the progress is not what I expected. Due to my study and my character, sometimes I do not speak more than ten sentences in one day. Even if I speak, I am always feeling the self-incongruity that I am not expressing what I really want to express and I am not always being understood. I have to repeat most of the time what I have said.

I always remind myself of my mission of bridging the cultural understanding and of exposing myself to as many experiences as I can. Therefore, I take the initiative to interact with people, sometimes even I think I am not acting the way I used to (but I see it as an improvement to my social skills). I join different activities for meeting new people and seeing new things. I think my language problem is what keeps me from access to this community. I think culture plays just a certain part in it, but it is not all about culture. I live in a junior dormitory. Interaction here is rarely deep and personal. It may be because of my language ability. To them, I am not a participant. On the whole, I accept my living arrangement although I wouldn't say I like it, I would probably choose the
same route if I could choose again. It is the first time in my life that I have a single room by myself, how can I ask for more?

I come with four other exchange students from [the university in Hong Kong]. I met them before, but it was through this exchange program that we know more of each other. I made some new friends here. Some are from the international house and most of the others are from the floor which I live in. I find that my communication and my closeness with my friends depend much on the proximity. The exchange students from Hong Kong are not as close as the friends I make on my floor since they live in other residences. I usually email my friends in Hong Kong. Sometimes I phone them.

I finish my class at 13:30. I have the whole afternoon free. Sometimes I play basketball with my “brothers and sisters” on the floor, or if I am busy with my study, I do some studying. I spend at least half an hour running every day to prepare for [a charity run] in April. I have dinner with my “brothers and sisters” and then I like to watch a little TV in the lounge. Sometimes, I go to the pub with my “brothers and sisters”. But mostly, I study in my room. Tuesday and Thursday, I have late classes so I email and read newspaper from Hong Kong through the internet. At night, I study. Sometimes, there are intramural hockey games on Thursday and I am one of the team-member on my floor team, certainly I don’t waste this opportunity to get away from my work and energize myself. On Friday, I have class till 13:30. Then I go to the [local] Hospital for my volunteer work till 16:00. I usually study afterwards, but if someone asks me to go anywhere else to have fun, I will certainly go.
In my travel in Canada, I see many youngsters, some younger than me, they spent their early life traveling around and gaining new experience before they stop and start to think about their career. It is acceptable here for a person not knowing what to do at all even in his late twenties. Life is to enjoy and contribute, not mere work. It makes me think more about my value in life.

Humans should have "multi-metaphors" and not be fixated, otherwise what we have are obstinacy, dogmatism and stubbornness. Before I came here, I thought of myself as a "newcomer on Earth" or an alien, trying to see everything around me as new and valuable. Under this metaphor, I protect myself from all stereotypes, ideologies and thought frameworks. Therefore, I can see everything in a new eye and perspective. It has its drawback, I don't have enough cognitive resources to be interested in everything and finally trivializing results and even affecting my social behavior. When I come here, I feel more down to earth, at least my "alienation" is restricted only to my intellectual environment. I change this metaphor so that I become a "newborn baby", rather than an "alien on Earth". My interest of accepting new ideas still remain, but I care more about other people due to the recognition that I am also subject to other people's observation. I learn to be more caring and empathetic. I understand my potentials and my advantages. I also know my limits. Sometimes to the extent that I lose my self-confidence. My language skills have not improved much, though I still see some. There is some improvement in my social skills, but for an introvert (like me), I think I can do much better.
I find myself like a tourist visiting the stage which illustrates the life of [Canada], rather than the backstage of how it works. Even though I try to enter into the community by doing some voluntary work, this psychic does not cease. It may be due to my own attribution that I will not stay here for long. Canada is quite a good place to live in. I like the mountains and the nature here. I don’t reject the idea that I will come back again but not in the next five years.

Yes, this transition is certainly a necessary part of my life. In fact, I decided to change right before I came here. The exchange program worked as a practicum for my newly devised personality. I believe every person has to go through the stages of identity search. For me, I may start late, or more exactly, I see the search of identity as a life long process.

4.12 My interpretation - Access and ownership

Lawrence and I had an interesting discussion in one of our interviews in March, 1998 on the notions of “access” and “availability.” Lawrence believed that many opportunities were available to him as an exchange student to help him integrate into the local community. Yet, he did not feel that he could gain access into the “backstage” of the community due to his short stay and his language problems. For him, “access” and “availability” carried different meanings. The lack of cultural knowledge “restricted” him from access to the “back stage” although he was allowed to see the “front stage” as a visitor. He came to a conclusion that “social skill for intercultural interaction and some
understanding of the place are important preparation” for a cultural exchange experience.

He also added, “People also expected you to have some knowledge of your own culture and history.” This exchange experience made him more aware of the role that culture played in language education.

Lawrence’s story illustrated the complexity of a language socialization experience. As an advanced language learner, Lawrence was confident of his academic English. To him, the notion of ownership of English carried different meanings in different social contexts. For example, he felt that he had ownership of his academic English. Yet, he did not feel that his communicative English was competent enough for him to socialize effectively with Canadians. He was unable to integrate into the cultural scene due to this language barrier. There was a constant struggle for him to claim “the right to speak” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.75) through his active agency in volunteering work and team sports.

The paradox of Lawrence’s case was that the learner appeared articulate, self-confident and actively engaged in his social life. Yet, his subjectivity was a site of struggle. His frustration came from his inability to cross the native/ non-native language barrier and the inaccessibility of insider’s knowledge about implicit cultural codes and social conventions. In his secondary school days, Lawrence was an active member in the secondary school English debating team. He was confident of his communicative English back then. As he grew older, he began to believe that his English was not “authentic English”. He felt vulnerable and uncertain of his identity, role and status in the world of “English speakers”.
This sense of uncertainty made him feel like an "outsider". He longed to have a sense of belonging in this exchange experience.

Lawrence’s introspection and sense of uncertainty support Lennon’s (1989) findings on advanced L2 learners in changing social contexts. As Lennon (1989) stated, “Perhaps the single most interesting finding that emerges from the present study is that advanced learner performance is characterized by uncertainty, a finding strangely neglected in the literature” (p.390). Learners are complex individuals with multiple desires and goals which can influence their social interactions in the changing social contexts. For example, Lawrence described his interactions with others as “rarely deep and personal” and attributed this social problem to his language problems in every day life. Yet, he also called his dormitory friends, his “brothers and sisters”. He also participated actively in the intramural hockey team, volunteer work and charity run. Lawrence’s story supports Norton’s (1997) view that “subjectivity and language are mutually constitutive” (Norton, 1997, p.411). His decision to play an active role in his changing social context affirmed that “subjectivity as changing over time” (Norton, 1997, p.411) in the reconstruction of a new social identity in the changing contexts.

4.13 Impressions - Kevin

The first time I contacted Kevin was by phone. It was in late February, 1998. He expressed his interest to participate in my study our contacts with Charlene. Kevin and Charlene were from the same home university. They knew each other through the
exchange program. After they arrived at the university in Canada, they were placed in
different dormitories. Since they were in different majors, they did not have any class
together. So it was hard for them to meet for social gatherings. They were like most of
the exchange students in the program, struggling on their own to cope with difficulties
they encountered in this new culture. Before they came to Canada, they did not anticipate
that the campus would be spread out and that they would live so far away from each
other. It was different from their campus in Hong Kong where the dormitories were
minutes away from each other. Most of the exchange students tried to keep in touch with
each other by phone or by e-mail. They also tried to meet for social activities organized
for international students or occasionally gathered at one of the dormitories for dinner
together.

I appreciated Kevin’s enthusiasm to “help” in this research. After our phone conversation
in February, 1998, he e-mailed me in early March to express his interest in my interview.
He informed me of his class schedule and the hours he would be available for our meeting.
I was appreciative of his enthusiasm in participating in this research. I was also surprised
that he preferred to use Chinese, his “mother tongue” as the language for communication
in our interview. As he said, “It’d be more enjoyable if it’s conducted in my mother
tongue”. This short email was my first encounter with Kevin. I was intrigued by his
language preference and his intellectual curiosity. Kevin was interested to find out “what
kind of questions” I would ask him in this research.
I was interested to find out why Kevin requested to use Chinese as the medium of communication in our research. In my other interviews with Aileen, Charlene, Juliana, we communicated in English for research data. Then we would switch to Chinese in our private talks. This mixed language code was quite common among Hong Kong students, particularly for those with a bilingual education background. English was regarded as “a useful language” and Chinese was regarded as “a home language”. I found that my familiarity with this implicit language code helped me to understand my participants and to build bond with them. The different language codes also allowed me to separate my public data from my private talks. Lawrence was the only participant who preferred to communicate with me in English all the time. In Kevin’s case, his preference for “mother tongue” communication was another new experience in this research. Indeed, the participants played an active role charting the course of direction in this research.

Kevin surprised me with his fluent and articulate English when he responded to my questions in the e-mail. I was even more surprised to find out later that he was not only articulate in English but he was also knowledgeable in other languages like Greek, Latin and German.

My first impression of Kevin was quite different from the way I pictured him in my mind. I thought Kevin would be an outgoing and assertive person from the way he expressed himself in the email. In person, I was quite surprised to find that Kevin was a quiet and reserved young man. We met at the lobby of the building where he was running from class to class. Kevin was thoughtful and kind to use his lunch break for this interview. He
greeted me with a polite and friendly hello. Then he was waiting for me to ask him specific questions related to the exchange experience. I found that Kevin was uncomfortable talking about himself when I asked open-ended questions such as “tell me about yourself”. I observed his uneasy reaction and decided not to ask him any more questions involving his past learning experience or other personal details. Instead, our conversation was focused on the specific details such as his class schedule, his living arrangement and his courses at the new university. We also talked about my research purpose and strategies.

Kevin specified that he did not want to be taped or filmed. He was not comfortable to be observed in public settings. However, he welcomed my interviews and my questions regarding his exchange experience. I sensed that Kevin was trying to protect himself from any intrusion of his privacy and I respected his decision for doing that. It also made me more aware of the importance of time and trust in building bond with participants in a qualitative study. In Kevin’s case, I knew that I needed time and contact to develop better understanding of my participant.

I found myself faced with a dilemma. I was trying to meet the needs of my research agenda, and gather as much data as possible in a short period of time. I was also aware that I needed to take time to get to know my participant as a person and to let the natural flow of events guide the course of this research. I understood why Kevin was not comfortable talking about his personal feelings and thoughts. He needed time to warm up and to open himself up. He also needed to know me as a researcher. If I were Kevin, I
would not be comfortable talking about my past and my story to a stranger who met me for a brief moment between classes.

In his second e-mail to me, Kevin surprised me again with his long and descriptive answers. He seemed more at ease expressing his thoughts in writing than in our interview. This discovery made me reflect on the importance of listening to learner's needs in language research as different research strategies may produce different responses from learners. In Kevin's case, I believe the familiarity of the questioning approach and the absence of time pressure all contributed to his favorable responses.

I believe Kevin's language learning background had an influence on his language preference. He came from an academic culture which emphasized "mastery of English" and English as a medium of instruction. Kevin was confident of his English until he came to Canada. In this new social setting, he felt that his ownership of English was challenged and his English was judged by others for its foreign accent. He also felt that people categorized him in the stereotyped image of a Chinese student and he became "merely another Chinese student" on campus. He felt that he had lost his identity. Instead, he became a silent member of a subculture which was not fully accepted by the mainstream. His feelings of resistance was his way to protest his "outsider" status. During this language identity crisis, Kevin also became more aware of his own "reaction to different culture" and his own "language attitude". He began to turn his gaze to his inner world to explore and re-examine his identity, his needs and his beliefs in the changing cultural contexts.
Kevin was eager to “sort out and organize” his reflections through the questions I asked him in this research. He chose not to frame his experiences as either positive or negative. He believed that views and feelings could change under different settings and different circumstances. Therefore, he preferred to see this exchange experience as an exercise for “self-examination” and “self-exploration”. Therefore, he reserved his opinion on its long term impact on his future. As Kevin said, “It was not necessarily a good or bad experience as long as one can discover through the exchange experience the goodness of human life”.

Kevin used a flexible frame of reference to think of his exchange experience. He believed that this experience was necessary because it was “a good way to improve [his] self-discipline”. I appreciated his long and thorough answers in his written responses. I was also grateful that over the two months period, Kevin seemed to finally warm up to the informal and open-ended interview approach. In our last interview, he even invited me to take pictures of his dormitory room and helped me with taping our group gathering at the Chinese restaurant.

On the last week of April, 1998, I visited the exchange students’ dormitories. Our last stop was Kevin’s room. Kevin shared a flat with three other graduate students. The setting was similar to Charlene’s dormitory. The students each had their own room and they shared the kitchen and bathroom facilities together. Kevin told me that his room mates were cooperative and they cleaned the flat before our visit. They were surprised to
see that Kevin had three visitors on that day. Kevin had a good rapport with his room mates although he seldom socialized with them as they all had different class schedules, meal time and study habits. One of his room mates once asked him questions about Hong Kong and Kevin was more than happy to answer his inquiry. As he said, “He asked the right person.”

Kevin’s room was neat and well organized as I had expected. It was simple in taste but cozy and comfortable with plenty of sunlight and space. Kevin had posters of Canada and maps on the walls. There was no picture or personal belonging on the desk. Instead, he had a Bible and a candle stand which he collected from an antique shop placed on a cabinet. Next to them were souvenirs which he collected over his nine months stay in Canada. Kevin told me that he would “relocate every thing in [his] room every two months except the posters, the maps and the immovable things”. As he said, “It’s a good way to improve my self-discipline to live by myself”.

Kevin liked to travel during his holidays. He enjoyed traveling alone to different parts of Canada and the United States. He was fascinated by the beautiful nature in Canada and his first e-mail was titled, “beautiful Canada”. There were many books on languages, cultures and philosophies on the book shelves. Some of them were written in Greek and Hebrew. Kevin enjoyed classical studies. Every time he wrote his e-mail, he would end with “bonam fortunam” or “optimam fortunam” to wish me well. Sometimes, he would also add a quote from the scripture as his thought for the day.
I was glad that I had the opportunity to visit Kevin’s room before he left for his travels. It allowed me to see Kevin in a different light. I began to understand the richness in Kevin’s world and what he valued most in his life. In this trying year, he often turned to his faith and prayers to help him cope with his difficulties. However, he never felt lonely in his struggle. In his mind, this year was a necessary step for him to discover his priorities in life and to build his character and strength. It was preparation for challenges in the future.

He used his spare time to “browse the libraries of the theological colleges on campus, listen to audio-tapes of lectures on theology and biblical studies, read, email, shop or just take bus to explore different parts of the town”. He also liked to “spend time cooking”. This year had given him time to read many of the books that he always wanted to read. It was a soul searching experience which helped him to re-examine his own needs and values in life.

4.14 Kevin’s story - “Merely another Chinese here”

I thought of applying to go on exchange in 1995, but I didn’t do it. The idea came up to my mind again the next year. I didn’t think I was that sort of out-going person and active organizer or brilliant student who could convince the interviewers that I was the right sort of person to select. You know, I had extended my period of study for one year. It seemed good that the extended period was spent overseas as exchange student than at the same place doing more or less the same sort of things. Nevertheless, the crucial incentive that motivated me to apply and boosted my confidence to give it a try was my thriving interest in classical Greek, as I was doing the course “New Testament Greek
Exegesis” in the fall term 1996. I had always dreamt of studying Greek and Latin but this
dream was impossible to be realized in Hong Kong, as you can find no classical studies
department there. The international students office in my home university always
encouraged students to join the exchange programmes to do different sorts of courses
that would not be offered in the university in Hong Kong. That just provided me with a
good “excuse” to apply - thus I got the best reason to make use of my extended period of
study. But candidly speaking, these considerations also count: greater chance to be
employed, as people say, for exchange students. You look “better” in some sense if you
have gone on exchange; a good opportunity to improve fluency in colloquial spoken
English, and so on. But I don’t think I’m here for merely these reasons.

Primarily, I see myself as an international student here, which means I exist in the
university for academic reasons only. But my ethnic identity has made me more than an
international student, for I just cannot tell others (unless being asked) that I am not one
of the huge number of Chinese students here (from Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland
China alike) of whom there are many Canadian citizens. I desire to be seen as merely an
exchange student, who is willing to tell whosoever interested what is going on in Hong
Kong or something interesting about my culture, or to share some views about some
universal issues. But the fact that I am seen as “merely another Chinese here” has told
me that what I had expected to do during my exchange year seems quite impossible. So
finding myself on campus or anywhere in [here], I seem to be pretending to be that kind
of Chinese, but I always resist the thought to withdraw my root from Hong Kong to
transplant myself here even temporarily. Being in a Chinatown restaurant eating “Hong
Kong food”, being at a Sunday service conducted in Cantonese which used the same liturgy as my own church in Hong Kong, and being with Chinese students at the university who hope to live here and work here for [the rest of] their lives, I feel the same resistance in my heart.

Language ability, language use and language competence has something to do with social identity. First, if you are proficient in Canadian colloquial English spoken by young people, you will feel easier to mix with the young people here and will find less resistance to the culture of this place. Second, if you are willing to use the sort of language Canadian people speak, you’ll find yourself much easier to be absorbed into their society. Before I came here, my picture was much simpler: people use English here and my being here would push me to use English constantly and my English would thus get improved. But coming here I did not feel that I like the spoken English used here, which is more or less influenced by the Western accent in some western states. May be it was because I was a bit weak at listening or oral English: my dislike for the sort of English used here gets less and less strong as I got used to the English speaking environment here. May be it was because of the fact that I don’t like following what most folks are doing; I rather use the accent of Hong Kong’s former colonizers than the one that sounds more natural here.

People seem hardworking at [the university], and people like to speak up and voice their opinion in class (just like what many people who came back from Canada and US told me). Other things are more or less the same as my university [in Hong Kong] except for
the complete English-speaking environment. I was not coming with great proficiency in English, and I would be less willing to speak in class and communicate with other students here. [Charlene] might be right to have said that I sought to speak “perfectly” and this I think greatly hindered my fluency and my confidence in speaking up. I am happy that this term I have more communication with a few classmates. But it should be noted that I didn’t know many people, not even a handful, in class when I was at [my home university]. I only had a couple of good friends in class. I always found myself rather “independent” in class.

Time and patience, and constantly reminding myself why I came here and how I could make use of the days helped me to cope with the difficulties in my life here. And the belief that life cannot be as bad as that...I have learned something about myself in the past few months: my reaction to a different culture, my language attitude and so on. I need some more time to sort them out and to organize them in such a way that I can understand what I have learned. I believe I can give you a better answer to this question some time after I return home.

Before I came here, I did not know my priorities. But my experience here will definitely influence the priorities in my life (i.e. what I’m going to do and what I think is important). However, don’t be surprised that I am still leaving [my priorities] open and flexible. I told my friend that since it had taken so many years for me to become who I was, it would not be so easy for me to change in just a few months. I have experienced and got to know many new things and met many people, but it seems that they aren’t
strong enough reasons to cause any changes in me that are noticeable to myself (perhaps there are some that might be noticeable to others who know me).

I miss being with my friends. That's to say the proximity of friends whom I can see face to face with. I miss the opportunities for me to share my feelings and thoughts with people I've known for a long time. That includes church life too. The second thing is to travel and to eat in places I'm familiar with. I would not miss these things had I not left Hong Kong for a while. I suspect that I won't like them as much as I desire to enjoy them now when I actually return to my life in Hong Kong.

In Canada, the first ones I name as my friends are those Hong Kong exchange students. We've known each other for six months and we speak in Cantonese and share more or less the same culture. I know one or two graduate students who are from Hong Kong and speak Cantonese. Then a number of exchange students who are mostly females and they are from Korea. My peer partner is from Taiwan (we meet once a month and we communicate by e-mail).

In some sense, every phase of my life is "necessary." May be the inspiration of doing something in which I will devote my life to in the future comes from my exchange experience. To me, if I come to understand myself better because of this experience, I should be grateful for this opportunity to experience life. I think self-understanding is essential if we are to live a life in the right direction. Socrates said, "An unexamined life is not worth living for a human being." Mencius said, "There is no greater joy in finding
out that one is true to oneself in self-examination.” We leave our country for a while for another country because we need to challenge and to illuminate our beliefs and our way of thinking. But I don’t think an exchange experience should necessarily be considered “good”: it’s good, I think, as long as one can discover through the exchange experience the goodness of human life, which appears in different ways in different cultures with different frames of minds.

I haven’t thought of any good metaphor to describe myself. Something quite clumsy but close to the ideal metaphor would be a ship floating along a river looking for a place to put its anchor; or a mortal traveling from one town to another and from one country to another looking for a place to realize his farming plans though he hasn’t decided which agricultural products he was going to plant.

I can’t think of any (background knowledge which exchange students might need before they get into an exchange situation). Let them enjoy the experience of discovery and exploration. They are coming to study, to gain credits, to experience a different sort of life and to live an independent life in a foreign country. They need to gain their own real experience, face the real thing and rely on what limited mental resources they came with. This is what I think now. It’s very likely that I’ll think differently later.

(Email from Hong Kong June, 1998) Returning home, I felt happy, just like going home after a long journey. I brought along with me all the experiences and new thoughts and
knowledge. Perhaps a slightly different frame of mind. I think my old friends will be
disappointed that this guy is just the same in appearance as in thought.

I haven't consciously thought about my life in Hong Kong since I was back. But I still jot
down my daily thoughts about many things, if they can really force me to sort out what I
really believe in. Unfortunately, I have little time even to do this thing. Two weeks after
I was back, I started to do an eight week German intensive course at my university, which
amounts to two-year German course. Actually the workload of the course isn't that much.
I always find myself struggling to reverse my undisciplined life since my return. But I
also feel more confident and determined to do this than before I went to Canada. I am
not yet able to account for this change.

4.15 My interpretation - Resistance, ambivalence and marginality

Kevin's story illustrated the themes of ethnic identity, resistance and ambivalence in
change. Language is considered to be one of the most important and powerful influences
on ethnic identity development (Gumperz & Crook-Gumperz, 1982). Kevin had
contradictory feelings and ambivalence about his ethnic identity in his marginalized
position. He was frustrated that others perceived him as "merely another Chinese". He
resisted the stereotypes and claims others made on Chinese as a subculture. They made
him feel like an "outsider" to the mainstream culture. At the same time, he took pride in
his ethnic identity, his learning background, his exchange status and his ownership of
English. His identity as a Chinese student from Hong Kong gave him a sense of belonging
as well as a sense of frustration. He felt resistant and ambivalent when he could not understand what others were saying in his every day life simply because they spoke English with a different accent and language expressions.

In his resistance, he decided to claim ownership of his own English accent and associated mainly with Chinese-speaking students. It was a paradoxical situation which created tension and struggle in Kevin’s new life. The problem was that his English was not a passport to the new culture. Kevin’s inability to use “colloquial spoken English” made it difficult for him to “mix with people” and be “absorbed into their society”. His resistance gradually “diminished” as he began to understand the language expressions and “western” culture. He also felt that other students gradually accepted him not only as a Chinese student from Hong Kong but as someone who came to share his resources of cultural knowledge and learning experience.

In my later phone conversations, interviews and e-mail correspondence with Kevin, we discussed in great depth issues related to language, culture and identity. Kevin felt that there were discrepancies between how he saw himself, who he represented and how others categorized him. His language socialization experience in the Canadian context was at times frustrating and disappointing to him. In his struggle to cope with the difficulties in life, he began to turn his gaze to his own self-discovery. Kevin found that his own “discovery and exploration” of his changing social identity in the changing social contexts was a fulfilling learning experience. He was happy that he could use this one year to sort out his priorities in life and not “stay in the same place doing more or less the same sort of
things”. Like the other participants in this research, Kevin believed that this exchange experience had helped him to improve on his social skills.

When Kevin returned to Hong Kong, he felt more “confident and determined” than before. He felt like he came back from a long journey. His metaphorical image of “the ship” finally found a place to put its anchor down. He no longer needed to travel like a nomad to go “from one town to another and from one country to another”. Kevin was grateful that he had the opportunity to explore his own strengths and weaknesses in this exchange experience and that he found out what mattered most in his life.
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Discussion of the Study

5.1.1 The rites of transition

The stories of the five Hong Kong exchange students illustrate how ambivalence, contradictions and uncertainty are recurrent themes in the discussion of language, culture and identity. When the learners were first “separated from their initial roles” (Leach, 1976, p.78) to become exchange students, they were in a critical phase of transition. It was a period of uncertainty, vulnerability and “social timelessness” (Leach, 1976, p.78). They became the “initiates in the rites of marginality, without status, and outside the society, outside the time” (Leach, 1976, p.78) in “cultures of uncertainty” (Hargreaves, 1994, p.57). The students needed time and social support to make sense of the cultural changes and language socialization process. Internal and external connections must co-exist in the dynamic fusion of interactive variables between individual and environment (Fullan, 1993). Language itself is not a passport into another culture. It is through language socialization, cultural awareness, and human agency that learners’ “identities and beliefs are co-constructed, negotiated and transformed on an on-going basis by means of language” (Norton, 1997, p.419).
5.1.2 Multiple desires

The students came into their exchange program with their aspirations, passions, moral purposes and commitments. They had multiple desires invested in this exchange experience. Their moral purposes, intrinsic desires and personal commitments were change forces (Fullan, 1993) which gave them the drive to take initiatives in the rites of transition. The students wanted this experience to “make a difference” in their lives as well as in the lives of other people. They wanted to be “good will ambassadors” to “share cultural knowledge”. They wanted to improve their English communication skills and to explore different cultures. They wanted to integrate into the mainstream culture.

They came with their own cultural expectations as to what roles they would play in their new social settings. They came with a belief that language would give them access to in-group membership in an “English-speaking” community. With their bilingual backgrounds, their exchange status and their participation in mainstream courses, the students anticipated that they would become actively engaged in their new environment. Kevin thought it would be a “simple picture”: By living in an English speaking country, he would have more opportunities to speak in English and interact with English-speaking people. Lawrence also came with a belief that “Canada is a built-in case” for his desire to immerse himself in an English-speaking environment. Juliana made a decision to “push herself” to take part in class discussions and join different social groups. She wanted to explore “alternative life styles” and reach out to people from different cultural backgrounds. Charlene looked at language as a “tool”. She wanted to use this “tool” to communicate to a “larger pool of people” to broaden her world view. Aileen wanted to be
a “good will ambassador” to tell others about Hong Kong and to learn more about the Canadian culture.

5.1.3 Sites of struggle

The students did not anticipate that “loneliness” and “interpersonal relationships” would be their biggest challenges in this exchange experience. Aileen described her first impression of Canada as “loneliness”. The other participants in this study all shared her feelings of vulnerability and helplessness in their “hectic” first few months in Canada. They did not know any one and had no sense of belonging in Canada. Besides the emotional pressure, they also had to deal with the practical demands of everyday life like cooking, cleaning, finding the way home, sorting out priorities and learning to study under a different educational system. They felt alone and isolated in their struggles. Their families and friends were so far away. There was an urgent need for them to establish social ties, to bond with others and to find their places in this new social setting.

The students felt ambivalent about their interpersonal relationships in this unfamiliar culture. As Lawrence said, “I want to be here to practice speaking English”. Yet, “due to my study and my character, sometimes I do not speak more than ten sentences in one day. Even if I speak, I am always feeling the self incongruity that I am not expressing what I want to express and I am not always understood”. Charlene echoed the same sentiment when she said, “I never knew that interpersonal relationships could be such a consuming experience”. Aileen was disappointed that “[the local students] are not interested in what we talk about” and she also did not “know much about what they are saying”. She was
disappointed that there was no "give and take" qualities in their "polite exchanges" and casual conversations. The feeling of "void" lingered throughout her exchange experience. It was a "bittersweet memory", as Juliana described, of cultural loneliness and social isolation. Juliana expressed her "loneliness" in these words, "Didn't have any close friend to talk to when I felt sad. No one to cook my favorite Chinese dish. Didn't have any grand shopping mall to hang around during weekends. I missed things which seemed ordinary to me when I was in Hong Kong". Indeed, the students were "silenced voices in the margins" (Pao et al, 1997, p.624) struggling on their own to face a world of uncertainty, frustration and isolation.

5.1.4 Language socialization

In their struggle to negotiate meanings and relationships in changing social environments, learners became aware of the implicit meanings of language socialization. Lawrence's description of his experience with language socialization illustrated the language difficulties he encountered in this exchange experience. "When I talk to people here, normally they expect me to be fluent in English. But sometimes, I don't understand when they speak too fast or they don't understand me because of my accent. Sometimes, I can't express myself in English. If I have enough time to think, I can express myself better". He felt that this experience helped him to evaluate his progress in his English communication skills. At times, he was so critical of himself that it also shattered his confidence in English.
Aileen felt that the local students were not interested in what she had to say. As she said, “They are more interested in other things like sports or nature”. She eventually became ambivalent about her role as a “good-will ambassador” in this cultural exchange. As she said, “[On the issue of political changes in Hong Kong] At first I will try to explain to them what it means to me. But later on, I get the impression that they just want to say that our lives will be miserable”. In the end, she was nonchalant in her effort to build social ties with the local students and turned to her Chinese friends and international friends for support and understanding.

Juliana had contradictory experiences in language socialization and class participation. She enjoyed her dinner rituals and her participatory role in her host family. She found that the “family gatherings” gave her a sense of belonging which she desperately needed in her isolated world. However, she was also frustrated when she could not “join in the conversation” with students on campus. They talked about things which she had no knowledge of “like friends and gossips”. As she said, “It is difficult to really get into discussion with local students”. She felt like an “outsider” who had no access to their social groups. “It’s hard because they have their own social groups. The other difficulty is to push myself to participate and speak up in class”. She had to continually “push” herself to take “small steps” in class participation and in language socialization. The exchange experience was a “tough training” and a “bittersweet memory”.

Juliana believed that “confidence” played a major role in her willingness to take risk in class discussions. Her confidence was boosted when her professor praised her work in
class. It was an “unforgettable moment” in her life. Although they were a few words of encouragement, to her these words had symbolic meanings. They validated her past learning experiences and legitimized her ownership of English as a bilingual student.

Charlene found that she learned to socialize in English through trial and error. She was grateful to the people who pointed out to her the problems she had in language socialization. She believed her language problems were related to her use of mixed codes mingling English with Chinese words when she communicated to her friends in her private talks. She also thought they had much to do with her tendency to use “direct translation”. Like the other exchange students, Charlene grew up in an exam-oriented learning environment. She had few opportunities to use English as a communicative language. Her knowledge of English came mostly from text books. Although she was active in secondary school debates and English activities, she seldom used English as a language for communication outside of the classroom. In fact, during her school days in Hong Kong, her priorities in life were “studying and going to exams”.

In Canada, Charlene was aware of her changing priorities and changing identities in the new environment. She became aware of “alternative life styles” and the need to balance work with relaxation. She became aware of other things in life like nature, human relationships and daily chores other than work and studies. She began to question her prior beliefs and values in life. Charlene was grateful for the opportunities to discover more about herself in this growing process. However, she was also frustrated with her lack of knowledge of the implicit cultural codes and colloquial language expressions. As
she said, “When it comes to local and daily things, there are still vocabularies that I don’t understand, especially those which they say on the local TV programs.”

Kevin found that “language ability, language use and language competence has something to do with social identity”. He felt that being “a bit weak at listening or oral English” contributed to his inability to gain access to the local students’ social groups. As he said, “If you are proficient in Canadian colloquial English spoken by young people, you will feel easier to mix with the young people here and will find less resistance to the culture of this place. Second, if you are willing to use the sort of language Canadian people speak, you’ll find yourself much easier to be absorbed into their society”. Kevin’s resistance to the colloquial language expression and the “western accent” was his way to defend his claim of ownership in English. His “dislike for the sort of English used here gets less and less strong” as he gained more confidence and felt less threatened in his ownership of English.

In their struggle, the students regarded bilingualism as a resource and a positive attribute (Norton, 1997; Pao et al, 1995) which empowered them to shift between alternative frames of reference and identities. The students often wrote or called their loved ones at home for comfort and moral support. They used mixed language codes in their communication with their friends. They enjoyed this unique blend of English and Chinese in their private conversations. However, bilingualism was a private issue in this English-speaking environment. Juliana and Kevin preferred not to speak in Chinese in public. They also did not want to “cling on to the past” during their short stay. There was a sense of urgency for them to “learn as much as possible and explore new worlds and new
cultures in this exchange experience” in this one year. Consequently, Chinese became a home language for private communications with friends and relatives in Hong Kong. This language gave them a sense of identity and a sense of belonging amidst the changes in “cultures of uncertainty” (Hargreaves, 1994).

To understand the students’ dilemmas with language issues, it is important to take into account the learning environment they came from. The students came from an academic culture which emphasized a “spoon-feeding and exam-oriented” curriculum. Although in recent years, there are increasing emphases on the communicative and interactive learning approaches in the language classrooms in Hong Kong, the language curriculum remains the same. Language assessment still emphasizes written examinations as a tool to measure accuracy and fluency levels. The focus is on product and not on process of learning. No doubt, the exchange students were confident in their written English. Yet, they were unconfident about their communicative English. In Hong Kong, English was their “functional language” used for study purposes. Outside of the school contexts, Chinese was the students’ everyday language.

In Canada, the students found that English became an everyday language. Their lack of practice in oral English in Hong Kong made it difficult for them to use English to socialize with others in their every day life in Canada. Furthermore, they also found that their accent and their language expressions were different from the local students. They began to have doubts about their ownership of English and even their bilingual identities. The notions of categorization, access and power relations also problematized their “simple picture” of
what language learning was all about. They found that in this English-speaking context, language socialization was not simply a matter of choice, but a matter of survival. As Charlene said, “Like I have to cook or else I’ll starve. I have to do the laundry or else I’ll have nothing clean to wear”. They had to socialize in English, or else they would have no friends and no social relationships. English became a “real life” experience, a necessity in life.

In the process of language socialization, the students faced dilemmas and contradictions in their dichotomous positions in language power. They were in a “position of strength” (Pierce, 1995, p.27) in written English and a “position of weakness” (Pierce, 1995, p.27) in oral English. These contradictory positions created contrasting images in their minds influencing their changing perspectives on language issues. These contradictory positions became sources of empowerment as well as sources of frustration in their search for meanings in the new language environment.

5.1.5 Cultural awareness

As Norton (1997) stated, “Culture is not just a body of knowledge, it comprises implicit assumptions, dynamic processes, and negotiated relationships” (p.415). The students had ambivalent feelings about their cultural identities in their changing social contexts. They took great pride in their Chinese heritage. Yet, they also resisted being categorized as “merely another Chinese student here”. This ethnic label created stereotypes which did not fit their self perceptions. They questioned what it meant by “Chinese learning approach” (Penner, 1995). Deep within this word “Chinese” was the connotation of “The
Others”. The students felt that they were shuffled into this “blanket generalization” (Nunan, 1993, p.8), this totalizing view which made assumptions about them without acknowledging them as individuals.

As Kevin said, “But my ethnic identity has made me more than an international student, for I just cannot tell others (unless being asked) that I am not one of the huge number of Chinese students here”. Juliana decided not to “hang out with other Chinese students” nor speak Chinese on campus so that she could explore “other life styles”. As she said, “I want to make the most of this year. Get as much as I can in experience and exposure”. She wanted to venture into “the cultures of uncertainty” (Hargreaves, 1994) and explore her potentials. Similarly, Lawrence also decided not to speak in Chinese during his stay in Canada. However, his rationale was different. He found it hard to code-switch between English and Chinese. He was also frustrated with his slow progress in communicative English. Therefore, he decided to immerse himself in the social activities and volunteer work where he could be a contributing member in the English-speaking communities. However, he also felt “bad” about his language choice as it made him feel “like [he] was trying to detach [himself] from the Chinese community”.

Charlene never felt that she was a “Chinese student” until she came to Canada. She considered herself “a traditional Hong Kong student”. Like the other exchange students who grew up in Hong Kong, her mind was focused on “studying and going to exams”. In Canada, she became aware of the social dimensions and cultural implications in language issues. As she said, “Here, an Asian just stands out”. She identified herself as “a
minority” and “not a native” English speaker. As she said, “contexts reminds you more of who you are, more than your language”. She learned from her social interactions that she “might appear rude, indecisive or indifferent” due to her use of language. Charlene was frustrated with her lack of cultural knowledge and language expression in her Canadian context. Her accent, her language expression and even her sense of humor made her feel like an “outsider” in this new culture. Through her language socialization experiences, Charlene discovered the subtleties and the power in language. Her own cultural identities were constantly emerging and changing in her “different positions” (Hall, 1992) and changing frames in this new culture. Indeed, cultural identities are not static and fixed entities. They are blending and blurring in learners’ subjective realities.

In this study, the students were empowered by their increasing awareness of the complexity and interrelationships of language, culture and identity in their social contexts. They became more aware of their own desires, resources, needs and human agency in this exchange experience. They also became more aware of the discrepancies which existed between public claims and personal experiences. Their prior assumptions and beliefs were challenged by alternative frames of thinking. They discovered multi-interpretations, multi-realities and multi-voices in the process of language socialization. Knowledge was reconceptualized as personal and relativistic in their search for subjective meanings in this exchange experience. As Davis et al (1996) stated, “Unformulated knowledge/ action is as much a part of the identity of the learner as formulated knowledge” (p.156). Learners discovered that many interactive variables were at play in the process of negotiation of meanings and relationships in their changing social contexts. They learned to use reflexive
sensitivity and critical thinking to observe the changes which happened around them. As Banks (1995) stated, “knowledge reflects both the reality observed and the subjectivity of the knower” (p.15). The juxtaposition of rich, contextualized factors created new meanings to their understanding on culture. “Whose voice gets articulated in the learning contexts?” and “Whose culture is endorsed in the process of language socialization?” were questions which emerged from this cultural awareness.

5.1.6 Learner Agency

The stories of the learners support the learner agency framework on the issue of social identity. Learners’ social identities were constantly emerging and transforming in their changing positions and changing roles in the social contexts. As Charlene stated, “life is a continuous process of self education”. Kevin also claimed that “we need to challenge our beliefs and our way of thinking”. He came to live out a “real experience” in life. Juliana took “small steps” to explore her role and her confidence in class participation and language socialization. Like the other exchange students in this study, she made deliberate effort to balance her life with studies, volunteer work, social activities and private time. Charlene observed her changing social identities in this exchange experience with amusement using metaphors to depict her changing perspectives of self in relations to her environment. She saw herself as “a moth in a cocoon “ before she came to Canada. Then she described herself as “a deer in a big forest” during her “hectic” first few months in Canada. As she gained more confidence in the new environment, her metaphor also reflected her increasing self confidence and active agency in the process of self actualization. She described herself as a “craftsman” sculpting the finer details of a head.
Learners’ changing perceptions of self and environment reminded me of “cycles of carnation and reincarnation” (Irwin, 1998, p.48). “Their transformation are sometimes subtle, sometimes dramatic. They may be embodied in changes of attitude, changes in perception, changes in belief. These changes are incarnated, and reincarnated or reborn, again, and again, and again. Cycles of carnations and reincarnations illustrate that relearning must occur as individuals commit to growth” (Irwin, 1998, p.48). The process of relearning starts with a willingness to take risk and to explore alternatives. It is also a willingness to accept ambivalence, contradictions and uncertainties as a part of life. As Fullan (1993) stated, “Complexity, dynamism and unpredictability are not things which get in the way. They are normal” (p.20) Cycles of “disequilibrium and reequilibrium “ (Doll, 1989) are necessary phases for personal growth.

Kevin found that, “in some sense, every phase of my life is “necessary”. He considered “self examination” and “self understanding” essential to an “experience of discovery and exploration”. Relearning is a process which involves changing interactive framework, “finding alternatives” and “shifting priorities” in life. As Juliana described, “Now, I get a closer look at myself, my strengths and my weaknesses. My character looks more vivid to me as I observe my daily activities and interactions with people”. Charlene also echoed the same feelings in her personal narrative, “I think this transition is a necessary phase in my life. Without this phase, I can never get out of the invisible cocoon formed by the culture, the society and the way of life in Hong Kong. I can never have a distant look at my country [to observe] the merits and drawbacks of the system and hence learn to be
critical of it from a new dimension”. She found that “after all, there is one thing that is certain and that is everything is changing all the time”.

The students’ willingness to live with uncertainties and to go beyond the “old self” reflected their commitment to personal growth in this exchange experience. Charlene found that “most of the disadvantages in the beginning of the term turn into advantages now ‘cause I learn from them”. She also added, “So it’s hard to conclude which ones are advantages and which are disadvantages ‘cause all the things are changing all the time. Disadvantages now may turn into advantages tomorrow when I learn to appreciate them, and of course, vice versa”. Kevin also said, “My experience here will definitely influence the priorities in my life”. He added, “Maybe the inspiration of doing something in which I will devote my life to in the future comes from my exchange experience”. Awareness empowered them to look at themselves and their environment from a new perspective. The students “kept an open frame of reference” in the evaluation of their exchange experience. As Stengel (1997) stated, “All knowledge is knowledge in use” (p.599). The students did not “draw conclusions on [their] experience as negative or positive”. Instead, they were more interested in the “long term impact” of this exchange experience. As Fullan (1991) stated, “Ultimately, the transformation of subjective realities is the essence of change” (p.36).
5.2 Pedagogical Implications

In this study, I have examined the notions of investment, agency, ownership and needs based on the individual accounts of the exchange students. I have also discussed the interconnectedness of language socialization, cultural awareness and learner agency. Though the study was situated in a Canadian tertiary context, these underlying themes are relevant to all those who are concerned with the aspirations, social needs and language learning experiences of the students in the broader context. The stories of the exchange students support Norton Peirce’s (1995) theme of social identity as a site of struggle. They also support Lennon’s (1989) findings of the state of uncertainty experienced by advanced language students in cross-cultural experiences. The pedagogical implications of this study are centered around these themes: the interdependence of linguistic and sociocultural knowledge (Ochs, 1988); the mutual enhancement of interaction, ownership and agency and “the construction of identity in intercultural discourse” (Pennycook, 1996, p.217).

As described in this study, the process of language socialization does not come naturally or easily for bilingual students. It is a grueling process of introspection, reexamination, learning and relearning. Sometimes, the learners feel ambivalent, contradictory and uncertain about their desires to speak. Other times, they feel frustrated and isolated from the environment due to their lack of cultural knowledge and social ties. These daily interactions are unpredictable, dynamic and changing on an on-going basis. Indeed, learners have agency in these interactive processes. They do not internalize the public
images others created of them. Instead, they create their interactive frameworks and subjective realities through their personal experiences. As Nunan (1993) stated, “Learners did have views on the learning process, and were able of articulating these” (p. 8). They are integrated into their new culture “without simply assimilating to them and losing themselves completely” (Leung et al, 1997, p. 551). Consequently, language socialization is a process of mutual adaptation between the individual and the environment.

In this study, I found “discrepancy between conventional categories by which the students are identified and the way the students describe themselves” (Thesen, 1997, p. 487). The stories of the exchange students revealed that learners do not identify with the cultural labels imposed upon them. Instead, they have their own perceptions of cultural identities. The students in the research preferred to think of themselves as “exchange students” and “international students” and not “merely another Chinese student”. As language educators, we need to be sensitive to learners’ emerging cultural identities in changing contexts. We also need to be reflective and critical of our own cultural bias and working assumptions (Leung et al, 1997) in the language classrooms. Labeling and stereotyping can have detrimental effects on learners’ self esteem and learning progress (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Leung et al, 1997; Morgan, 1997; Norton, 1997; Norton Peirce, 1995; Thesen, 1997; Zamel, 1997). Categorization implies power differentials, social segregation and threats to ownership. Our students are not cultural labels or social categories. They are individuals.
This study was guided by questions centered around the issue of culture. "Whose culture do we endorse in language education?" This is an open-ended question which intends to raise awareness on relevant issues such as "whose voice", "whose knowledge", "whose text" and "whose subjectivity" in the teaching of cultural issues. Indeed, culture is an interpretive, subjective, personal and changing phenomenon. As Geertz (1973) stated, "Culture is not power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed" (p. 14). It is a context which can only be intelligibly described, or as Geertz (1973) stated, "thickly described" (p. 14). Therefore, the teaching of culture should emphasize on cultural sensitivity, cultural awareness and not on cultural transmission.

Sometimes, teachers are hesitant to bring cultural issues into the teaching context. They find it hard to teach something which is interpretive and subjective. Furthermore, they are concerned with cultural bias or generalizations. These concerns are understandable. Yet they also reflect that language teaching is still "teacher-centered" and not "learner-centered". As shown in the stories, students bring with them rich resources of language histories and cultural knowledge. Each student has a story to tell and each story is a unique experience. Together, these stories are like different instruments playing beautiful music in an orchestra. They bring harmony, understanding and meanings to our understanding of culture.

I agree with Norton Peirce (1995) that the use of "reflection and analysis" help students to "reframe power relations" and "validate their own experience" (p. 25). As Miller & Seller
(1990) stated, "there is deep-seated impulse in all of us to defend the validity of what we learned, for without it, we would be helpless" (p.234). When students find themselves in a position to share knowledge and to voice their experiences, they are empowered to play contributing roles in the learning community. Therefore, we need to tap into these student resources and bring cultural dialogue into the language classrooms.

This study revealed that interaction, ownership and agency mutually enhance each other in the language socialization process. Through their social interactions, the exchange students became more aware of their problems in language socialization. They came from an academic culture which did not emphasize communicative English. They were confident in written English but lacked practices in communicative English. They learned from their own experiences that accent, colloquial language expression and cultural knowledge all played important roles in the process of "negotiation of meanings" (Crookes & Rulon, 1988) in a new culture. They also learned that ambivalence, contradictions and uncertainties were necessary phases in the process of learning and relearning. Finally, they struggled to "overcome feelings of inadequacy and gain self confidence" (Norton Peirce, 1995, p.27). Through their active agency in the learning process, the students gained awareness and confidence in themselves and in language socialization.

The stories of the students highlight the importance of language socialization in language education. As Norton (1997) stated, "English belongs to the people who speak it, whether native or nonnative, whether ESL or EFL, whether standard or nonstandard"
When students are able to use English in their everyday life, English becomes their everyday language. It is no longer a language confined for use in the classrooms, it becomes a language which brings meanings into their lives through their interactions with others. Therefore, we need to incorporate language socialization into our language curriculum and encourage learners to use English in their everyday social contexts.

The stories of the exchange students showed how students coped with changes in changing educational and sociocultural contexts. The students found that their increasing awareness in the interrelationships of language, culture and identity helped them to deal with changes in their own lives. Drawing from their insights, we need to design language activities which would help students to develop sensitivity and awareness in themselves and their social environment. I believe these language activities should also encourage class participation and language socialization. Communicative and interactive tasks such as group discussions, group projects, oral presentations, dramas and skits are helpful to build confidence and oral communicative skills. Students can learn from each other through their discussions, sharing of meanings and observations.

To encourage free flow of ideas and shared meanings, we need to encourage a positive learning climate and a community spirit. Each student is a contributing member in the learning community and each student has a voice in the social group. Students are encouraged to develop a “sense of self” and a “sense of belonging” in the learning community. In essence, we are transforming a language classroom into a language community which emphasizes trust, bond and sharing of knowledge.
This study also illustrated the importance of rituals, discourse scaffold and social identities in encouraging agency in the language socialization process. For example, Juliana found that the relaxing family ambiance, the dinner rituals, the cultural activities and the discourse scaffold all helped her to feel at ease and eager to participate in the dinner discussions. Furthermore, her host parents also encouraged her to talk about things which were familiar and interesting to her. Learning from her socialization experience, we also need to explore learners’ preferences and interests in our language activities. Discussion topics should be relevant and interesting to students as young people. We need to tap into their worlds and their learning cultures. Some of the suggestions for discussion topics include the influences of pop culture, mass media, high technology and peers on language socialization and social identities.

In this study, I found that students enjoyed sharing their thoughts in their e-mail correspondence. E-mail is a creative and spontaneous communicative tool. I believe it is also an effective means to encourage students to reflect on their inner thoughts and feelings. I also suggest teachers to encourage students to write diary or journals entries so that they can keep a record of their feelings, thoughts and changing perspectives on issues. Students need time and space to reflect on their learning experiences. We should encourage them to be action researchers of their learning progress. Written examinations can never find out the personal experiences of each individual learner. We have to make changes in our language assessment and place more emphasis on the learning process and self evaluation. Indeed, our students are our co-researchers and co-authors of their
learning experiences. As Edge (1996) stated, "Because individual development is a social phenomenon, increases in authorship and ability are accompanied by a desire for increased responsibility- for one's decisions, for one's action, and for one's outcomes. One steps from the culture of blame to a culture of responsibility" (p.22).

To make learning relevant to the students in "real life experiences", we need to take learning out of the classrooms. We need to encourage learning activities which link students to the larger society. In the study, the exchange students were active participants of volunteer work, part-time jobs, dormitory life, host family, field trips and social functions. We can also encourage our students to join social activities and community work. We can arrange for students to visit other schools and organizations. They are also encouraged to interview representatives from different organizations. They could then report their findings and analysis to the class. These language activities would combine language socialization, written report and oral presentation in group settings. Students are also encouraged to talk about their experiences working as a group and their personal insights on the learning process in their reflective self analysis.

The exchange experiences of the students reflect that cross-cultural experiences are invaluable experiences for personal growth and cultural exposure. Although Juliana described her experience as "a bittersweet memory" and Kevin described it as "going home after a long journey", all the participants agreed that they would go on an exchange again if they were given the opportunities. Therefore, I believe the school community should encourage students to join field trips or exchange programs so that the students
learn to appreciate different languages, different cultures and different life styles. These discoveries will help them see themselves as world citizens, to appreciate English as an international language and develop a wider world view on global issues.

Finally, I suggest more attention be given to the meaning making process in language socialization. "To what extent does language socialization influence the formation of identity in changing contexts?" "To what extent do cultural issues influence the process of language socialization?" "To what extent do interaction, ownership and agency mutually enhance each other?" are questions which need to be further explored. These questions are intended to add dimensions to the discussions on language, culture and identity. Like the exchange students, language students who are new to a learning culture also need a good social support system to help them go through "the rites of transition" (Leach, 1976). I believe further studies are needed in these areas to raise community awareness on the sociocultural and psychological needs of the language students.

As language educators, we need to be action researchers in our own classrooms. We need to address learners issues, to challenge commonly held stereotypes and to encourage cultural sensitivity in language education. Most important of all, we need to listen to the "voices" of the learners. Their personal knowledge is not only legitimate knowledge but rich resources which inform theories in language education. By providing a positive learning climate and a trusting social environment for language learners, we are encouraging them to take active roles in their own learning process and be active agents in the reconstruction of knowledge. Through our continued effort to integrate language and
culture in a holistic approach, we will help our students to integrate into their new learning environment and develop a sense of belonging in the community. As Eisner (1992) stated, “Helping people participate in a plurality of worlds made, I believe, is what education ought to try to achieve” (p.14). After all, we have multiple voices, multiple interpretations, and multiple realities in the world of language socialization.
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Appendix A: Letter to the participant

Dear ________________.

I appreciate your consent to participate in my study on Hong Kong exchange students in a Canadian tertiary context. The purpose of my research is to explore the interrelationships of language, culture and identity from the learner’s perspective. My research will be based on literature review and data obtained from observations, interviews and other means of correspondence with you and other participants over a period of one year. The materials collected will be analyzed and reorganized to be used in my M.A. thesis on “The rites of transition: Voices of Hong Kong exchange students in Canadian tertiary contexts”.

I guarantee that I will use pseudonyms for the institution and the individual(s) I deal with to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of the sources of data. I need to observe and interview you on a regular basis for no more than one hour each session either at your residence, on campus or in any social setting we see fit. The purpose of the sessions of observation and interview is for more in-depth understanding of your new social environment and learning context in Canada. I will meet with you individually or with other exchange students as a group. I will be considerate of your busy schedule in the new university and will be flexible with the arrangements of our meetings as to the time, place and duration.

Please sign the consent form below and keep one copy for your own reference.

Thank you for your kind cooperation.

Sincerely,

Margaret Y.M. Shen
Appendix B: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

I, ___________________________ AGREE THAT MARGARET SHEN WILL CARRY OUT INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS AND OTHER MEANS OF CORRESPONSE AS DESCRIBED. I HAVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM FOR MY RECORDS.

SIGNATURE ___________________________ DATE _____________________