

“You Can Study With Joy”:  
Exploring International Students' Attitudes and Opinions  
Regarding Their Educational Experiences in a Canadian Secondary  
School

by

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## **Abstract**

International students from around the world are increasingly being recruited and admitted to secondary schools and universities across Canada. As neither immigrants nor native-born Canadians, international students occupy a special space in the student landscape and have significantly different identities than other groups of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The unique experiences and perspectives of adolescent international students in Canadian secondary schools requires further study as this area has been largely overlooked in the literature.

This exploratory study investigated the experiences of international students in a Canadian secondary school through semi-structured interviews with three students, one from Korea and two from Japan. Prior to the interviews, students were given the interview questions in the form of a questionnaire translated into their first language and asked to reflect on and respond to the questions in writing. Students were asked to share their perspectives on the educational and cultural differences between the school(s) they attended in their home country and their school in Canada. The interview transcripts and written responses revealed reoccurring themes corresponding to the key words or ideas within each reply.

The students in this study were very positive in their perception of the Canadian education system and unanimously agreed that they preferred studying in Canada over studying in their home countries. The cultural differences discussed in the interviews were perceived as positive and beneficial rather than problematic. The social differences between Canada and their home countries, in terms of how

they were allowed to interact with others and how others, especially their teachers, responded to them, were found to be the most important and meaningful differences for all three students. These social differences included having more personal autonomy and freedom, both in and out of the classroom, having positive and “comfortable” relationships with teachers and the student-centered nature of Canadian teaching methods. Environmental differences, such as the school schedule and student course load, were also mentioned several times. Strictly instructional differences, in terms of types of class activities and assignments, were only discussed when I asked about them directly.

## **Preface**

The data for this thesis were collected under the permission of the University of British Columbia's Behavioral Research Ethics Board, certificate number H10-00466, and the Delta School District.

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## Glossary

**International Student:** The term international student refers to a special class of students in British Columbia who are registered to attend school, but are not residents of Canada. In the research literature these students are also sometimes referred to as *foreign students*. Typically, these students stay and study in Canada for periods ranging from a few months to a few years. Unlike Canadian residents attending public schools, these students pay high tuition fees. These fees are often referred to as *offshore tuition* in school budgets. International students are sometimes referred to as *ISP* (International Student Program) students in school documents and are classified as *non-resident* students in provincial demographic statistics. Although they have the ability to apply for permanent residency while they are here, this is usually not the goal of the study experience. International students attending secondary school typically reside with Canadian home-stay families arranged by the school district, while elementary school aged students are usually required to reside with a parent.

**Culture:** This term has been defined many ways across several disciplines. In this study I define culture as a shared set of conscious or unconscious values, beliefs, attitudes, expectations, ideas, behaviour patterns and language patterns which both allow group members to interact with one another in purposeful and comprehensible ways and serve as a lens for interpreting ones' own experience in the world. Although culture can "generally characterize a given group of individuals in a given period of time" (Gunderson, 2009, p. 81), it is important to remember that "group members are unlikely to share identical sets of attitudes, beliefs and so on, but rather show 'family resemblances'" (Spencer-Oatey, 2004, p.5). As each of us has membership in several

cultural groups operating at both the micro level (eg. individual, family) through to the macro level (eg. region, nation), individual cultural identities should be understood as interactive and complex (Signorini, Wiesemes & Murphy, 2009). Although some aspects of culture may be relatively stable at both the individual (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005) and group level, being passed down through several generations, culture should also be seen as “fundamentally flexible and dynamic” (Signorini et al., 2009, p. 262).

**Educational Culture:** For the purpose of this study the term educational culture refers to both a group’s ideas, values, beliefs, attitudes and expectations explicitly dealing with education as well as the ways that other aspects of that culture play out and manifest themselves in various educational settings.

**“Eastern” or “Asian” and “Western” educational cultures:** The literature has been fairly consistent in portraying some of the characteristics defining what may be thought of as “Eastern” or “Asian” and “Western” educational culture (Chan, 1999; Liu, Liu, Lee & Magjuka, 2010; Nguyen, Terlouw & Pilot, 2006; Nield, 2004; Watkins, 2000). Though the stereotypical nature of this operational level limits its usefulness because it masks national, regional, local and individual variation, these two broad categories serve as a useful point of entry into the discussion of cultural differences in education. For the purpose of this paper, the term “Western” will refer to the major English-speaking destination countries (MESD) for international students, including Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The term “Eastern” or “Asian” will refer to countries in East Asia with a predominately Confucian cultural heritage. The term ‘Confucian heritage culture’ has been used in the literature to describe the cultural tradition predominant in eastern Asia, especially in China and other

nearby countries historically influenced by China such as Vietnam, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Malaysia (Nguyen, Terlouw & Pilot, 2006; Barron, 2004). While the educational cultures in these East Asian countries are not the same, just as the educational cultures in Western countries such as Canada, the United States and Australia are not the same, they are seen as sharing some common characteristics. Some have argued that the terms “East”, and “West” imply an imbalance of power and carry colonialist overtones (Montgomery, 2010). These terms will be used in this paper with the understanding that the two educational systems represented by these categories are not in opposition or competition with each other, but are both approaches to teaching and learning that have value and merit.

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*To My Parents*

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This study explores international students' attitudes towards the educational culture they have encountered while studying in a western Canadian secondary school. This introductory chapter includes a background discussion of the increasingly important role international students are playing in the changing demographics of Canada's urban classrooms. Successfully meeting the needs of these students is important for both the international students themselves and the school districts that are increasingly depending on the revenue they generate. This chapter provides a brief description of the theoretical framework and research background informing this study. The literature demonstrates that international students perceive and respond to the cultural differences they encounter in various ways. It also suggests that problems can arise when the cultural expectations of students do not match those of the school. The chapter concludes with a description of my aims for the study and hypotheses.

## **1.2 Background**

Canada's urban classrooms are more culturally and linguistically diverse than ever before and this trend is expected to continue (Statistics Canada, 2010). Although immigration remains the leading factor in the diversification of today's classrooms, there is another important and growing group of students adding to the number of linguistically diverse youth attending school. International students from around the world are

increasingly being recruited and admitted to secondary schools and universities across Canada. These students play both a unique and important role in the diversification of Canada's classrooms, especially in British Columbia's Greater Vancouver Region. The international student population attending universities in Canada has increased dramatically over the last twenty years, rising from 36,822 students comprising about 4% of the total population in 1992, to 87,798 international students making up approximately 8% of the total number of university students in Canada in 2008 (Statistics Canada, 2011). British Columbia has seen one of the greatest increases in its post-secondary international student population, which was only 3,858 in 1992 and rose to 16,662 by 2008, totaling 10.6% of the province's university population (Statistics Canada, 2011). This trend can also be seen in British Columbia's secondary schools, where the number of international students has risen from 7,822 in 2006/2007 to the current enrollment of 9,744 in 2010/2011, comprising 3.2% of the total high school population in BC (BC Ministry of Education Reports, 2011). Of course this population is not spread evenly throughout the province, with the majority of international students choosing to study in the suburbs of Vancouver, such as West Vancouver, where international students account for 12.2% of total secondary population, Maple Ridge (6.0%), North Vancouver (5.7%), Burnaby (4.6%), Coquitlam (4.1%), Langley (4.0%), or in BC's capital, Victoria, where the international student population accounts for 6.4% of all secondary school students (BC Ministry of Education Reports, 2011).

These students are being actively recruited for two reasons. One is to promote the internationalization of education, broadening the range of ideas and perspectives of the student body and building cross-cultural dialogue and understanding (Evans, 2006). The

other has to do with money. This is especially true in British Columbia's public school districts. As economic pressures are causing schools to look for supplements to provincial funding, international students have become an important source of revenue for many BC school districts. Yearly international tuition typically ranges from \$11,700 to \$13,000. In many Greater Vancouver school districts, International Student Program (ISP) tuition is the single greatest source of revenue aside from Ministry of Education grants (SD 35, 2011a; SD 45, 2010). A future planning document for one BC school district states that, "the ISP students generate additional funding for the school, which is directly proportional to the number of ISP students in attendance. This funding allows the school not only to provide services and programs to these students such as ESL, but also provides additional resources to the general school budget" (SD 35, 2008, pg.19). This district has also indicated that plans to "grow and restructure the International Student Education Program so that it more fully supports the needs of all schools" is one of its budget considerations for the upcoming 2011/2012 district budget (SD 35, 2011b, pg. 9). Clearly learning how to better serve these learners is a timely concern and a benefit to students as well as school districts.

As a teacher in the Greater Vancouver area, I have had the opportunity to work with several international students in my classes. These students have always been pleasant, quiet, and generally hardworking. Although I have enjoyed my experiences with these students, I have never felt that I understood what they actually thought about their time spent in Canada or about my teaching. Their parents would often insist that their children loved being in my class, but I sometimes found this hard to believe as, for the most part, they would just sit quietly, do their work and generally not interact with me

during class time at all. I knew these international students were paying high tuition fees and I often wondered if they felt that they, or their parents, were getting their money's worth out of the experience.

### **1.3 The issue**

Successfully understanding and meeting the needs of international students is, of necessity, becoming more important to school districts across the Greater Vancouver area. The focus of this study is on developing an understanding of their unique perspectives and responses to the educational and cultural differences between the school(s) they attended in their home country and their school in Canada. Developing this understanding is important because although linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom has the potential to broaden perspectives and increase cross-cultural understanding, it also has the potential to make both teaching and learning difficult. Ideas about education and learning vary greatly throughout the world and not all of these approaches appear compatible with Canadian styles of teaching. Additionally, the way that students from various cultures perceive and understand these differences can have a profound impact on their attitudes towards schooling in Canada as well as their success in the Canadian system (Gunderson, 2007; Gunderson, 2009; Li, 2006). As neither immigrants nor native-born Canadians, international students occupy a special space in the student landscape. As visitors, here for the purpose of learning in a new environment, international students have significantly different identities than other groups of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The unique experiences and perspectives of

international students in Canadian secondary schools requires further study as this area has been largely overlooked in the literature.

#### **1.4 Brief background to the literature**

Educational practices and expectations are informed by cultural beliefs, values and assumptions, and these vary across cultural groups. It is therefore important to understand that the educational goals and practices commonly found in Canada, such as encouraging “students to be curious, interested, critical, communicative, to hold a plurality of points of view, and a desire to question and make sense of it all” are not universally valued (Gunderson, 2000, 695).

Although there is currently little research on the experiences and perspectives of international students studying in North America at the high school level, there is a large body of related research dealing with immigrant students and native-born language minority students, as well as research dealing with international students studying at the university level. This research has identified several points of possible cultural disagreement including: the role of the teacher; style of lesson delivery; the value placed on different instructional practices such as class discussions; debates and homework; forms of teacher feedback about academic progress; appropriate student-teacher and teacher-parent interaction; expected interactions among students; expected forms of parent involvement; attitudes towards printed text; the value placed on cognitive activities such as memorization and critical thinking; and the cultural value placed on formal education. In addition to identifying differences in educational cultures, the literature has also shown that when the cultural expectations of the school and the student do not align,

misunderstanding and problems can arise (Brown, 2008; Egege & Kutieleh, 2004; Fox, 1994; Gunderson, 2000; Gunderson, 2007; Gunderson, 2009; Li, 2006; Reyes, 1992).

## **1.5 Theoretical framework**

The rationale for this study is based on the understanding that students' perception of cultural differences in education is dependent on various personal and environmental characteristics in addition to cultural beliefs and values. Some of these individual differences include: personality, level of social support, level of proficiency with the language of instruction, personal goals and educational aims, previous experiences and knowledge, gender, social status, and actual or perceived level of personal agency (Fox, 1994; Tran, 2011; Ward, 2004). Some of the environmental factors influencing students' perception and adaptation to new educational contexts include course load and content; assessment style; and the level of cultural sensitivity to, acceptance of and support for international students by the individual instructor, the institution and the host society at large (Kember & Gow, 1991; Volet & Renshaw, 1995). It should be noted that research demonstrates that many traditional interpretations of cultural differences in education are incomplete or based on faulty assumptions (See for example, Littlewood, 2000; Watkins & Biggs, 1996). This study seeks to address these issues by investigating students' own interpretations of their cross-cultural learning experiences in their own words.

## 1.6 The study

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the ways that international students in a western Canadian secondary school make sense of and respond to the educational differences they have encountered. The study was aimed at discovering which differences the students themselves saw as most important as well as how the students interpreted the impact that these differences had on their learning. Specifically, this study focused on international students' thoughts about and responses to differences in the following areas: how they interacted with their teachers, how their teachers provided feedback to them, the ways in which they participated in the classroom, the types of activities and assignments they were given, their perceptions of teachers' expectations for their work in terms of originality and creativity, and the level of competitiveness among students.

In keeping with the findings of the related literature, I hypothesized that:

1. The students would identify many educational differences between the school(s) they attended in their home countries and their school in Canada.
2. The students would see some of these differences as problematic or frustrating.
3. The students would perceive at least some of these differences as having a negative impact on their learning.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter is divided into five main sections. The first is an introductory section giving background information on the state and use of the literature in this review. This section explains the necessity of using related research dealing with university level international students and adolescent immigrant students as well as outlining some of the major concerns with doing so. The second section deals with the idea of education as a cultural practice and gives evidence for different educational cultures and interpretations of educational concepts throughout the world. This section focuses on some the differences between the educational cultures of East Asian and Western countries and argues that some traditional Western interpretations of Asian educational practices are either incomplete or incorrect. The importance of considering the diversity within the international student population is discussed, as well as the need to seek students' own perspectives, in their own words, in order to come to more accurate interpretations of their experiences and behaviour. The third section contains a discussion of common acculturation patterns observed among international students and demonstrates that international students adapt to new learning environments in different ways. The fourth section is titled 'cultural differences: student perspectives' and highlights some of the research reporting on students' perceptions of the cultural differences they observed, in their own words. This section illustrates the fact that international students understand and respond to these differences in various ways. The final section is a summary of the review and highlights the need for more research in this area.

## 2.2 Background

Although international students studying at the elementary and secondary level have comprised almost a third of Canada's total international student population in the past (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2002), there is very little published research investigating their experiences (Kuo & Roysircar, 2006; Matthews, 2002; Popadiuk, 2010). Additionally, Statistics Canada does not process information about international students at the secondary level and it is difficult to gain access to demographic and academic achievement statistics for this group. Consequently, research conducted with related groups, including immigrant students attending secondary schools and international students studying at universities, must be considered and is used here to highlight potential themes of importance for research involving international secondary students. Although the differences among students within and between these three categories cannot be ignored and should not be minimized, there are important similarities. In most cases, students in all three of these categories have experienced schooling in more than one educational system. Research suggests that students immigrating to Canada in their teen years and adolescent international students with similar backgrounds may also experience similar levels of acculturation and acculturative stress as they encounter and negotiate their way through new social and learning environments (Kuo & Roysircar, 2004). Adolescent immigrant and international students have also reported similar concerns and experiences while reflecting on their adjustment to Canadian life in high school. Both groups indicated that language, peer-relationships, cross-cultural concerns, and education and the school environment were important factors in their acculturation process (Minichiello, 2001). University level international students

have also reported these same concerns, along with others not mentioned by these younger groups (Thompson & Thompson, 1996; Ward & Masgoret, 2004).

### **2.2.1 Limitations: Using research conducted with different categories of students**

Using research done with university level international and secondary level immigrant students to gain insight into international students' experiences in high school is also problematic. For instance, the self-identities of immigrant students and international students may be very different. It is easy to imagine that an adolescent immigrant, transplanted into a new country by their parents against their will, having little desire to integrate into the new mainstream society and intending on returning to their home countries as soon as they finished their education (like some students described in Minichiello's [2001] study) would view Western education very differently from an adolescent international student wanting to study in a different country and who plans on remaining there in order to attend university. Although neither of these hypothetical students is put forward as typical cases, this does illustrate the need for more knowledge about the backgrounds and intentions of students and the need for caution when comparing students. Caution also needs to be used when considering findings gained from studying university level international students, as illustrated by a 2004 report on a national survey of international students in New Zealand (Ward & Masgoret, 2004). The secondary students participating in this survey reported having more academic difficulties than their university level counterparts and felt less culturally included. The secondary students were more negative in their evaluation of their experience than the university

students, leading the authors to conclude that there were significant differences between the university and secondary populations.

### **2.2.2 Limitations: Using research conducted in different locations**

Studies conducted in several of the major English-speaking destination countries were brought together in this paper in order to highlight themes and areas of importance. Although I feel this is beneficial because it allows for a broader view of the issues, it is also problematic because both the academic and social conditions in each of these countries differ from one another in various degrees. Differences between these countries exist in terms of levels of multiculturalism and racial harmony, as well as levels of institutional support for international students. This is important to note because research indicates that feelings of social acceptance and the development of a social network are two of the major variables influencing international students' experiences (Mori, 2000; Robertson, Line, Jones & Thomas, 2000). The academic practices and expectations in each of the major English-speaking countries may also differ. Unfortunately, there do not seem to be enough studies conducted in each destination country to fully capture the range of issues surrounding international student experiences and as a result, the monolithic terms "Western" and "Western education" are used and refer to these countries as a whole. Likewise, there are not yet enough studies focusing on any one particular national group of international students, a fact also noted by Li, Chen & Duanmu (2010), making it necessary to use research conducted with students of various nationalities.

### 2.3 Education as a cultural practice

Educational practices vary greatly throughout the world as various cultures value different styles of teaching, learning and communicating (Egege & Kutieleh, 2004; Fox, 1994; Gunderson, 2007; Gunderson, 2009; Jones, 1999; Li, 2006, Nisbett, 2003).

Gunderson (2009) argues that many aspects of culture, even those not generally thought of as being directly related to education, affect educational practice. Some of the cultural variables identified by Gunderson (2009) as influencing education include ideas and practices related to:

privacy and personal space, cooperation and competition, time and promptness, eye contact, physical contact, gender roles, non-verbal communication norms, conversation rules (turn taking), religion, fate vs. individual responsibility, the expression of emotion, family structures and roles of family members, child rearing and modes of cultural transmission. (pg. 84-85)

Oster (1989) illustrates how deep-seated cultural values and beliefs can have an effect on both educational practices and cross-cultural misunderstandings:

When we ask students who come from such diverse places as the Middle East, the Far East, Africa, or Latin America to argue an opinion, especially an opinion different from that of a teacher or a text, or more threatening yet, to take a stand where there has been no direction from the teacher, we are often reversing assumptions deeply ingrained in the value system of their culture, implicitly telling them, for example, that a younger person has something new to say to an older one (Anderson & Powell, 1988, p. 208), that words can have value in argument (Barnlund, 1987, p. 164; Becker, 1988, p. 251), that no one will be offended or feel personally attacked (Becker, 1988, p. 245; Osterloh, 1987, p. 81) if a pupil or fellow student openly disagrees with her or him. (p.86)

Cultural ideas inform all aspects of the school context. Hofstede (1986) argues that students' cultural backgrounds are very influential in determining which cognitive abilities they will be proficient in and which ways of thinking they will find difficult. He claims that "part of the 'mental programming' that represents a culture is a way to acquire, order, and use concepts" (p. 305). "Our cognitive development," Hofstede (1986) argues, "is determined by the demands of the environment in which we grew up: a

person will be good at doing the things that are important to him/her and that (s)he has occasion to do often. Cognitive abilities are rooted in the total pattern of a society” (p. 305). Using less deterministic language, Fox (1994) put forth a similar argument, claiming that cultural differences, specifically differences in communication styles, are the result of “tendencies, sometimes strong tendencies, to use particular abilities among many in the human repertoire, to value them, to find them logical, elegant, and sophisticated, to devote considerable attention and care to using them well” (p. xiii).

### **2.3.1 Concepts of “Eastern” or “Asian” and “Western” educational culture**

In the context of many different approaches to education, two broad, overarching categories of “Eastern,” or “Asian,” and “Western” educational culture have been put forth. The literature appears fairly consistent in its descriptions of the major general characteristics defining these two cultural categories (Chan, 1999; Liu, Liu, Lee & Magjuka, 2010; Nguyen, Terlouw & Pilot, 2006; Nield, 2004; Watkins, 2000). Focusing on these two divisions is not meant to imply that there are only two major identifiable educational traditions in the world, but is rather a reflection of both the context of the present study and the limitations of the current state of the literature. Students from Africa, South America and Eastern Europe, whose educational backgrounds are rich and diverse, are largely unseen (Signorini, Wiesemes & Murphy, 2009), presumably because they make up a smaller percentage of the international student population. Defining and describing all of the differences between these two educational cultures is beyond the scope of this review, however some of the typical characteristics attributed to each system are described here.

Education in many East Asian countries, considered to have shared Confucian influences, has been described as having a “group-based, teacher-dominated, centrally organized pedagogical culture, with examinations as the essential way to define performance and compete for higher social status” (Liu, Liu, Lee & Magjuka, 2010, p. 179). Teachers are held in high regard and knowledge in the classroom is transferred in one direction—from teacher to student. Teachers are expected to have a deep knowledge of the subject matter they teach and are expected to be able to answer all of their students’ questions (Nguyen, Terlouw & Pilot, 2006; Pratt, Kelly & Wong, 1999). Lectures, tutorials and seminars are the most common methods of instruction (Nield, 2004). Memorization and the reproduction of knowledge are typical learning practices. Class sizes are large by Western standards, but unlike Western teachers, Chinese educators would generally not see this as a problem (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998). Students do not generally participate in class unless asked to do so by their teacher, typically spend many hours studying, and attend afterschool tutoring classes paid for by their parents, a common practice in Korea and Japan (Harnisch, 1994, Flaitz, 2003). East Asian cultures have been described as being “collectivist” (Hofstede, 1986) and students in these countries report familial and social pressure and obligation to do well in their studies (Fox, 1994; Watkins, 2000).

Western education is portrayed in the literature as more student-centered. In this tradition, knowledge may begin with the student, and the teacher is seen more as a facilitator or guide whose role is to present problems which encourage explorative learning, motivate students to do their best and oversee their group work (Nield, 2004; Nguyen et al., 2006). Students are encouraged and expected to ask questions and openly

debate issues in class with both their classmates and instructors. Excelling academically is generally viewed as an individualistic endeavor (Watkins, 2000).

International and immigrant students have described the differences between high school in Canada and high school in their home countries in a similar manner. The international and immigrant students in Minichiello's (2001) study "viewed the Chinese system as stricter, involving more homework, and based largely on memory; and the Canadian system as comprehensive, with a focus on developing skills in a variety of areas such as presentations and homework projects" (p. 87). When comparing the educational experiences she had in Richmond, BC to those in of Hong Kong, one female student in Minichiello's (2001) study said:

Teachers are more friendly when compared to Hong Kong. In Hong Kong you focus on studying, studying, studying. And in Canada they have a variety of activities in classes. Like you have discussion, homework projects, presentations, and it's more interactive. But in Hong Kong it's like spoon-feeding. So, like the teachers gives you lots of materials and you have to memorize them. And, in here it gives you a chance to really understand the material and discuss with other people.  
(p. 88)

### **2.3.2 Different understandings of educational concepts and practices**

There are several important educational concepts that many cultures do not seem to understand in the same way. Some of these foundational concepts are integral to ones' understanding of what 'good' teaching is and what 'good' learning looks like in practice. A short list of such concepts and practices includes: the process of understanding; the nature of intelligence and motivation; the nature and role of 'foundational knowledge' in a particular discipline; the qualities of a 'good teacher'; what constitutes a good, useful, or even appropriate question; the purpose of homework; memorization and repetition; the organization of ideas in academic writing; group work;

listening; and talking to others. The following sections describe some current interpretations of the differences between Asian and Western ideas about some of these concepts and practices.

### ***2.3.2.1 Concepts of “motivation”***

Concepts about motivation, including what people consider to be motivating and why, affect the way students, parents and teachers carry out their various roles in education. For example, a student’s understanding of the concept of motivation, including what social and personal factors he or she finds personally motivating, may affect why and how he or she approaches school in general and learning activities in particular. A teacher’s understanding of the concept of motivation may influence such things as his or her classroom management strategies and choice of learning activities. A parent’s ideas about this concept can influence both the type and amount of encouragement and pressure they give their children to succeed academically.

Watkins (2000) explains that Western ideas about motivation include two opposing types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation for learning is associated with deep-level study approaches and true understanding, while extrinsic motivations for learning are associated with surface-level study approaches and rote learning. In Western societies, the motivation to achieve is seen as a “highly individualistic, ego-enhancing concept” where the individual is the one most affected by the achievement (p. 167).

Concepts about motivation in Confucian heritage cultures do not seem to include either internal and external divides or the idea that one form of motivation for study produces better learning than another (Watkins, 2000). In these Asian societies, the

motivation to achieve is seen from “a collectivist framework which may involve significant others, the family, peers, or even society as a whole” and academic success is an important element in maintaining family face (Watkins, 2000, p. 167).

### ***2.3.2.2 The process of “understanding” and concept of “intelligence”***

In Western cultures, the concept of ‘coming to understand something’ is often seen as a rather “sudden, insightful process” that just ‘happens’ (Watkins, 2000, p. 166). In my own experience, I have heard teachers describe this as “something clicking” with students, or “having the light go on.” Some teachers I know speak about “the moment” when their students finally “get it.” According to Watkins (2000), Westerners tend to see intelligence as something innate, somewhat fixed, and measureable. It is therefore logical, according to Watkins (2000), that the Westerner sees success in school as due partly to effort and partly due to ability.

These views do not seem to be shared by many Asian peoples. Watkins (2000) explains that Asian cultures, specifically Chinese cultures, see understanding as a long and slow process requiring diligent effort on the part of the learner. In these cultures, memorization and repetition, especially of the foundational knowledge of a discipline, are seen as essential parts of the process of coming to understand something (Pratt, Kelly & Wong, 1999). Watkins (2000) claims that Asian cultures seem to view intelligence as something that can be improved and increased by diligent effort, and as a result, Chinese cultures tend to view success in school as predominately the result of hard work.

### ***2.3.2.3 A “good teacher”***

The concept of a “good teacher” also has different meanings throughout the world. A study by Jin and Cortazzi (1998) found that students in Britain typically saw a

“good teacher” as one who possesses certain teaching skills, such as the ability to pique student interest, explain things clearly, and organize a variety of learning activities. Students surveyed in China highlighted different qualities and indicated that a “good teacher” must possess a “deep knowledge” of the subject matter, the ability to answer students’ questions, and the ability to be a good moral role model (p. 752). A warm and close relationship with the teacher, extending beyond the classroom, was also very important to the Chinese students, more so than the British students in this study.

#### **2.3.2.4 Homework**

Although there is variation in the attitudes of Canadian teachers about what constitutes appropriate homework in terms of both type and amount, it would be fair to say that in general, teachers believe that it is important for students to complete the homework that is assigned, and that the fundamental purposes for homework are to either aid student learning by reinforcing skills and concepts learned at school, or to give students the chance to complete assignments they were unable to finish during regular school hours. Homework would not generally be expected to consistently take up most of a students’ after-school time. A very different view of homework was demonstrated by the Chinese parents in Li’s (2006) study of immigrant students and their families. These parents disapproved of both the type and amount of homework assigned by their children’s Canadian teachers. The parents saw homework as an important social tool that they used to help raise their children. Spending large amounts of time completing homework was seen as an important way for their children to develop self-discipline, and the parents were disappointed with what they perceived as a lack of homework provided by the school. They did not see the reading homework assigned by their children’s

teachers as valuable, and as a result neither did their children. Consequently, these parents would often seek out additional work for their children, which many of the students focused on, to the detriment of their school-given assignments. One parent, claiming to represent the opinions of several parents of first grade students, wrote that “students get addicted to TV in a very early age because they do not have homework to do in the junior grades” (p. 94). This parent went on to say that:

Parents believe that homework can help develop self-discipline of a child. Parents do not agree that homework will kill the imagination of a child. Parents want their kids to learn sense of responsibility, conduct, manners and time-management skills as early as in [grade] 1 because these are very important elements of educated persons. (p. 94)

### ***2.3.2.5 Memorization and foundational knowledge***

The practice of memorizing information, including both its purpose and role in learning, is also understood very differently in Western and Asian cultures. Watkins (2000) suggests that because rote learning, or memorizing without understanding, was historically overused in Western education, it has “fallen into disrepute” and is currently looked down upon by many teachers who typically do not see memorization as an effective teaching or learning strategy (p. 165). Consequently, Western teachers tend to assume that when they see Asian students memorizing content they are rote learning. Chinese students and educators have a very different view of this practice, and see memorization as a way to develop their deep understanding of a topic. They do not see memorization apart from understanding, but rather as two “interlocking processes” (Watkins, 2000, p. 165).

The importance of memorizing in order to understand can be seen when Chinese ideas about the nature of ‘foundational knowledge’ and its role in learning are understood. A study by Pratt, Kelly and Wong (1999) found that teachers in Hong Kong

viewed the acquisition of fundamental knowledge, or the “basic information, facts and principles that must be learned by students,” as an important “first step within a larger sequence and process of learning” (p. 245). This foundational knowledge, according to Pratt et al. (1999), was understood by the Chinese educators to be authoritative and come mainly from texts and teachers’ instruction. Students gained this information through memorization and then had their knowledge assessed primarily through examinations. The process of gaining this fundamental knowledge, aside from its eventual use as a platform from which to think, was seen as a way to develop “discipline and persistence” (Pratt et al., 1999, p. 246).

Western educators in this same study expressed a very different concept of foundational knowledge and viewed it as “less certain, less stable, more contentious, subject to interpretation” and less valuable than “important learning, such as problem solving and critical thinking”(Pratt et al., 1999, p. 246). Rather than seeing themselves as being responsible for teaching the basics, which were viewed as transitory, Western instructors saw the “elaboration, extension, application, or critique of that fundamental knowledge” as their greatest duty (p. 246). Pratt et al. found that while the Western instructors expected students to understand the basics, they did not expect students to memorize them, and viewed rote memorization as “antithetical to understanding” (p. 246).

#### ***2.3.2.6 Appropriate form of academic writing***

A supposed lack of “academic” writing skills is both an observation and complaint that has been made by university professors teaching international students (Egege & Kutieleh, 2004; Fox, 1994; Thompson & Thompson, 1996). Rather than

explaining the discrepancy between instructors' expectations and students' work as a lack of critical thinking skills, as has been done by some instructors, this could alternatively be explained in terms of differences in communication style and audience expectations between Western cultures, which value directness in communication, and other cultures, which value subtly and context.

In speaking of academic writing, Fox (1994) observed that "the dominant communication style and world view of the U.S. university, variously known as "academic argument," "analytical writing," "critical thinking," or just plain "good writing", is based on assumptions and habits of mind that are derived from western-or more specifically U.S.-culture, and that this way of thinking and communicating is considered the most sophisticated, intelligent, and efficient by only a tiny fraction of the world's peoples" (p. xxi). A summary of these "habits of mind" indentified by Fox (1994) include: putting forth a clear, step-by-step and transparently logical progression of ideas; critically examining various ideas and opinions before creating an original interpretation which is very explicit and direct; using references for evidence and authority and attributing ideas to various authors with "meticulous care"; using a language which connotes a voice of authority and making clear and specific recommendations and "reasoned" conclusions; using literal meanings, exact definitions and making explicit cause and effect statements while writing "sparsely and directly, without embellishments or digressions, beginning each paragraph with a general analytical statement and following it with pertinent examples" (p. xvii) "In short", Fox writes, "it is at once a writing style, a method of investigation, and a world view that has been part of Western cultural heritage for hundreds of years" (p. xvii).

Fox (1994) argues that most non-Western cultural groups do not practice or value a direct, literal style of communication and instead communicate in subtle, indirect ways. In many non-Western cultures, background information is given in abundance and seen as a necessity for having a complete understanding of something. The importance of such information is self-evident and need not be explicitly tied to any formal point being made by the writer or speaker. The goal of this 'digressive' style of writing is to give the reader "so much context, to say the same thing in so many different ways, that the audience finally gets the message" (p. 22). This is done, Fox (1994) says, "out of respect for the reader or listener" (p. 22). Fox (1994) writes that:

The tendency to communicate through subtle implication...is shared by world majority students from cultures on every continent... 'in my country, you don't say, 'Listen, I want to talk to you about this!'" said one [student from Côte d'Ivoire], banging his fist on the table. "If you want to talk to me about something and you already said it, why should I listen any further?... You try to make a sort of suspense... and as we say, 'it brings appetite to the conversation', you know? And the person is thinking, 'what is he or she going to tell me?' And you really pull him to listen to you, you see? And finally you say it. And by the time you say it, you are also at the end of what you are going to say"... In cultures that value directness, it is assumed that the reader needs to be shown exactly how any background information is tied to the ideas that the author wants to get across. Not only do we require transitional words and phrases and a careful, logical ordering of information, but we expect reminders of our previous points from one paragraph to the next, as well as a careful emphasis on words that show precise and explicit relationships between ideas... Worldwide strategies of indirection [however]-linguistic, rhetorical, poetic, psychosocial-create a richness that to world majority students makes the spare, relentless logic of the western tradition seem meager in comparison (p. 20-21).

Before judging the writing of an international student to be inferior, instructors should consider the admission of one Chilean graduate student who said:

When I read something written by an American it sounds so childish. It's because we don't see with the same connections. It's just like: 'This is a watch, the watch is brown, da-da, da-da.' For us, that's funny. I think that for Americans, it must be funny, the way I describe things. (Fox, 1994, p. 21)

### **2.3.3 Challenging traditional understandings of cultural differences: Old interpretations; New research**

A growing body of the literature is demonstrating that some traditional Western understandings of characteristics associated with Asian educational culture are traditionally misinterpreted or mislabeled (Biggs, 1996; Kember & Gow, 1991; Watkins, 2000). For example, according to research done by Jin and Cortazzi (1998), teachers in China, who understand listening to be an active learning activity, might be very surprised to hear their classrooms described as passive and teacher-centered or that their large classes are problematic. A discussion of cultural misunderstandings and misinterpretations surrounding traditional Western constructs of the “Asian student” will highlight the complexity of understanding students’ actual lived experiences. This illustrates the need for research that seeks to understand educational issues from students’ perspectives.

#### ***2.3.3.1 Misunderstanding the “Asian student”***

Asian students have been traditionally seen as passive learners who do not question what they are taught and are afraid to express opinions contrary to authority figures (Littlewood, 2000; Stapleton, 2002). To investigate this interpretation of students’ observed lack of volunteered participation during class, Littlewood (2000) had students from several Asian countries, including Japan, South Korea, and China (both mainland and Hong Kong), rate their level of agreement to several statements, including: “In the classroom I see the teacher as somebody whose authority should not be questioned,” “I see knowledge as something that the teacher should pass on to me rather than something that I should discover for myself,” and “I expect the teacher (rather than me myself) to be responsible for evaluating how much I have learnt” (p. 32). The

averages calculated from the responses were very similar for all of these national groups and indicated that students typically disagreed with these statements, leading Littlewood (2000) to conclude that:

The stereotype of Asian students as ‘obedient listeners’-whether or not it is a reflection of their actual behaviour in class-does not reflect the roles they *would like* to adopt in class. They do not see the teacher as an authority figure who should not be questioned; they do not want to sit in class passively receiving knowledge...the results suggest that, if Asian students do indeed adopt the passive classroom attitudes that are often claimed, this is more likely to be a consequence of the educational contexts that have been or are now provided for them, than of any inherent disposition of the students themselves (p. 33)

Littlewood’s (2000) findings and conclusion are interesting for several reasons.

First, the findings add support to other research demonstrating that Asian students are neither passive nor uncritical (see for example Fox, 1994; Stapleton, 2002). Second, his conclusions, while challenging one erroneous belief, also promulgate others.

Littlewood’s (2000) claim that students’ behaviour “does not reflect roles they *would like* [emphasis in original] to adopt in class” is questionable on several levels. First, there is no evidence that he collected any information regarding student satisfaction towards their role in the classroom. His conclusion assumes that these Asian students *wanted to* display different behaviour patterns and would chose to do so if given the opportunity, an assumption not supported by other research (Thompson & Thompson, 1996). Second, this conclusion suggests that displaying classroom behaviour patterns similar to those of Western students is necessary for active learning on the part of the student. This assumption ignores the fact that Asian students could be, and are expected to be, actively listening and questioning the content of what they have learned internally (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998). One eight-year-old student in China said, “I may be listening but I am not passive. I am learning in my head. I learn from my teacher. I also learn from what my friends do. If they make a mistake, I learn from that, too” (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998). Littlewood’s

(2000) conclusion also only considers in-class behaviour and he does not appear to consider the time students may take out-of-class to ask questions. This assumption reveals cultural biases towards ideas about both how students learn as well as when, how and where students' interactions with teachers should take place.

### ***2.3.3.2 Misunderstandings surrounding the role and meaning of questions***

When university faculty were asked to identify behaviours common to international students which were counterproductive, their tendency to refrain from participating in class and not ask for clarifications were the two most commonly cited 'problems' (Thompson & Thompson, 1996). There are several possible reasons for these behaviours other than the traditional assumption that Asian students are passive and uncritical. Some of these reasons may include a desire to be polite or to save face (for both the student and instructor) by not exposing mistakes, to avoid embarrassment by not making mistakes, a lack of confidence in communicating publically in English, or, as suggested by Jin and Cortazzi (1998), a sense of competitiveness where students do not want others to benefit from the answer to their question. Another possible reason not commonly considered is a different cultural understanding of what constitutes an appropriate question. Jin and Cortazzi (1998) argue that students' talk in Chinese classrooms, where talk is usually prepared, has a different form and purpose from students' talk in Western classrooms where it is usually spontaneous. They describe student talk in Chinese classrooms as "talking of the known rather than talking to know" as is the practice in Western classes (p. 743). Jin and Cortazzi (1998) write that:

Chinese students ask more questions after learning because they feel that asking should be on the basis of knowledge, as confirmation, and hence often postpone questions until they know more. In contrast, many British students, encouraged by their teachers, see that asking questions is a way of knowing. The heuristic value of

questioning, which is a key part of a learning dialogue, is therefore based on different cultural values: the Chinese ask after knowing, the British know by asking (p.753)

Interviews with Chinese students in Britain, reported in this same study, support this interpretation of their behaviour. In speaking of British classmates, one student said “often those classmates ask superficial questions. We don’t want to ask those silly questions” (p. 753). Another said, “The British students are so rude. They keep asking questions in class. We students from Taiwan have to prepare questions in advance so that we are ready to ask them. If we don't ask something the British teachers will think you are stupid” (p. 753). Educational differences are complex and may stem from several cultural factors alone or in combination with one another. Considering student perspectives towards their own behaviour and the new learning environments they encounter, described in their own words, is an important aspect of gaining a more accurate understanding of cultural differences.

## **2.4 Cautions and concerns**

While several differences between Western and Asian education are reported consistently in the literature, students’ perceptions of these differences, in terms of both their relative importance and of their negative or positive impact on their experience, are not (Huang, 2005; Fox, 1994; Tran, 2011). This speaks to the great complexity of the issues involved in cross-cultural learning experiences as well as to the great diversity both within the international student population and between the institutions they attend.

### 2.4.1 Stereotypes

Although broad tendencies exist within large groups, it is of paramount importance to remember that these stereotypes cannot be generalized to individuals. For example, contrary to the stereotypical characteristics of Western teachers and Asian students, some teachers in Western institutions do not appreciate or encourage student disagreement with their ideas and East Asian students do not all accept what their professors tell them without question, as the following situation illustrates. Tran (2011) tells of the experience of Hao, a female Chinese student enrolled in a Master of Economics program at an Australian university. Tran (2011) writes that “Hao was interested in showing her critical thinking and addressing a contrasting view to the one that seemed favoured by her lecturer. Yet, her awareness of the lecturer’s expectations prevented her from doing so” (p. 86). Hao explained:

I found someone’s interesting argument about this topic...His argument does not actually meet the requirement for this essay. I really want to use his argument in my essay and I discussed this with my lecturer. She said, “it’s not good for you to say too much about this argument” because it does not quite meet with what she wants we said in this essay. So I just use a small paragraph...Because in this essay we should, we must, we must say that strategic HRM [human resource development] is important and helps us, but for his argument, he said that strategic HRM is not really important in some cases. You know, the lecturer gives us a topic, but I think I can have different opinion with this topic, maybe I can give the evidence for the different way from this topic, but after I talked with my lecturer, I know that I must write that it is important and I can not say that it is not important. (p. 86)

It should also be noted that cultural ideas and practices are not static and neither are the students’ individual expressions of their culture. What may have been observed as a cultural tendency in the past, may no longer appear in the same form or with the same meaning in the present (Signorini et al., 2009; Stapleton, 2002). Likewise, student approaches to learning are “not simply a stable trait that a student possesses, but an

interaction of both personal characteristics and the teaching/learning context”

(Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001, p. 334).

#### **2.4.2 Diversity among international students**

Although generating constructs of national students, such as ‘the Chinese Learner,’ may be useful for certain purposes, such as identifying potential areas for consideration and further investigation, they also falsely imply homogeneity within these groups (Signorini et al., 2009). Reflecting on the variety of individual differences she found while working over many years with numerous students in cross-cultural settings, Fox (1994) said that:

In addition to the variety of languages and cultures that may affect academic writing, I found that students tend to communicate differently, both orally and in writing, according to their gender, their status at home (both in the larger society and within their own families), the area of the country where they grew up, the degree of their family’s “westernization”, the amount and types of writing they have done in the past, their fluency in English, and their understanding of U.S. culture, particularly the culture of the university. Personality seems to play a part, too; some students in my study were extremely resistant to adopting U.S. academic styles and expressed feelings of anxiety and depression over their sense that they were being asked to abandon their identities, their ways of thinking and self-expression, while others seemed to view the new writing style as a welcome addition to their repertoire of ways to understand the world and express themselves in it. All these factors of culture, education, gender, status, personality, and willingness to be “obedient to the system,” as one student put it, affect the writing of our multicultural student population... their writing “styles” do not come in neat packages; they are as complex and varied as the personalities and life experiences of each individual in the human family. (p. xx)

As international students do not comprise a random sample of students from their home countries, it is possible that none of them could be considered “typical students of their home country” (Signorini et al., 2009, p. 260). Volet and Renshaw (1995) have criticized the literature on international students for “underestimating the magnitude of individual difference” within this group and suggested that students’ goals and commitment to academic study are also important factors in their experience that need to

be considered (p.409). This suggestion is important in light of the fact that little seems to be known about the reasons international students attend secondary school away from their home countries. Matthews (2002) suggested a number of possible motivations, including wanting to graduate high school in a Western English-speaking country in order to have easier access to English-speaking universities, wanting an alternative to the educational system offered at home, possibly seen as “narrow and out-dated”, or wanting an “escape from a rigorous and demanding system within which they are likely to fail” (p. 373).

Another factor adding to the diversity within the international student population and influencing students’ experience may be the political climates of their home countries. Fox (1994) relates a story about a student from Singapore who, after being criticized by his professor for not taking a direct stand in an essay, said, “but that was intentional! I don’t want to take a position!” (p. 24). In Singapore, Fox (1994) explains, taking a position on such a topic could have resulted in this student being arrested. Truly the individual differences among international students are vast and these complexities make investigating students’ interpretations of their experiences in their own words an essential part of research in this area.

### **2.4.3 Cultural determinism**

Asking students to relate their own perspectives on cross-cultural learning situations can also help to avoid what I call cultural determinism, a faulty assumption that culturally-based traits alone will determine future behaviour. It is important to remember that cultural differences, especially our interpretations of cultural differences, which may,

as the research shows, be shown to be false, can not explain everything a student does or feels. It is important to remember that students' perception of and adaptation to cultural differences in education is dependent on various personal and environmental characteristics in addition to cultural beliefs and values. Some of these individual differences, discussed above, include: personality, level of proficiency with the language of instruction, personal goals and educational aims, previous experiences and knowledge, gender, social status and level of actual or perceived personal agency. Some of the environmental factors influencing students' perception and adaptation to new educational environments include course load and content, assessment style and the level of cultural sensitivity to, acceptance of and support for international students by the individual instructor, the institution and by the host society at large.

University faculty members have commonly observed that many international students tend not to volunteer participation during class (Jones, 1999; Tompson & Tompson, 1996). After considering students' responses and perspectives on this issue, Roberston, Line, Jones and Thomson (2000) concluded that in some cases "the cause of poor participation may well be language competence rather than cultural reticence" (p. 99). Several authors have suggested that more attention should be paid to the social context and the level of students' personal agency to achieve their learning goals instead of focusing exclusively on explaining student behaviour through the lens of cultural difference (Kettle, 2005; Tran, 2011). Additionally, some behaviour thought to be typical of a cultural group may actually stem from factors associated with the educational environment rather than from cultural beliefs or values. When Kember and Gow (1991) surveyed a group of university students in Hong Kong about their preferred study

strategies and approaches to learning, the results showed that the Chinese students in Hong Kong scored just as highly in their personal preference for deep-level understanding approaches as the Australian students surveyed. Because the students in Hong Kong were no more personally inclined to prefer rote learning and reproductive study approaches than Western students, Kember and Gow (1991) argued that contextual factors relating to the learning environment, not culturally-based preferences for particular learning styles, were responsible for students' choices to use these strategies. Some of the environmental factors they identified included assessment demands, including type and frequency, heavy workloads, didactic teaching styles and lack of intrinsic motivation.

## **2.5 When cultures connect: Adapting to new environments**

How do individuals, who have developed in one cultural context, perceive the differences they encounter when they find themselves living in a new cultural context? For most international students, studying at a Western English-speaking school presents new academic, social and linguistic environments. Although the outcomes vary, international students all go through a process of acculturation, meaning a process of change, retention and negotiation of behaviours and ideas, as a result of living and attending school in a new country. Berry (1997) explains that the classical definition of acculturation is that it includes “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, resulting in subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits 1936, p. 149, cited in Berry, 1997, p. 7). Berry goes on to explain

that “although acculturation is a neutral term in principal (that is, change may occur in either or both groups), in practice acculturation tends to induce more change in one of the groups than the other” (Berry, 1997, p. 7). The outcome of the acculturation process is often referred to as adaptation, which may be positive and successful or negative and unsuccessful, depending on both the goals and point of view of those involved. The complex nature of an international student’s individual acculturation experience and their perceptions of it can be seen when some of the influencing factors are considered. These factors may include: the psychological distance between the culture of the international student and the culture of the host society, characteristics of the host society including its ethno cultural make-up and expected acculturation pattern (assimilation, integration, segregation), the personality and demographic characteristics of the individual including their age, social status, reasons for coming to the new society, previous experiences (education, displacement), as well as other factors including goals and expectations for the experience (Berry, 1997; Kuo & Roysircar, 2004; Zheng & Berry, 1991). This has significant meaning for understanding international students’ responses to the differences in educational culture they encounter in their host countries.

Not all students adapt and react to new environments the same way; however, cross cultural experiences are known to cause stress. This acculturative stress, meaning stress rooted in factors associated with an individual’s acculturation process, usually manifests itself as feelings of anxiety, depression, marginality, alienation and identity confusion (Zheng & Berry, 1991). Russell, Rosenthal and Thomson (2010) identify several sources of stress for international students, including:

Homesickness, loss of support systems, loneliness, lack of meaningful relationships with host nationals, culture shock, perceived discrimination, language difficulties, unfamiliar academic approaches and overload, an altering sense of identity,

unrealistic family and self-expectations, financial problems, and difficulties in their own country. (p. 236)

While the comparative stress level of secondary international students has not received much attention in the literature, international university students have been shown to experience greater levels of stress than domestic students (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen & Van Horn, 2002; Mori, 2000). Russell, Rosenthal and Thomson (2010) identified three adaptation styles among international university students. They found that the majority of the 979 students in their sample, 58.8%, had adapted to university life in a “positive and connected” way, while 34.4% had more difficulty, were more isolated and were categorized as showing an “unconnected and stressed” way of adapting. A relatively small but concerning group, 6.7%, were found to be “distressed and risk-taking” (p.235). This finding supports Zheng and Berry’s (1991) conclusion that problems resulting from acculturative stress “often do arise during acculturation; however, these problems are not inevitable and seem to depend on a variety of group and individual characteristics which enter into the acculturation process” (p. 453). These factors can combine to produce positive or negative results. “Acculturation,” Zheng and Berry (1991) go on to say, “sometimes enhances one’s life chances and mental health, and sometimes virtually destroys one’s ability to carry on” (p. 453).

### **2.5.1 Causes of stress for international students**

International students consistently report that they see difficulties related to the loss of support networks, language barriers and social acceptance to be their greatest challenges in adapting to their new environments (Thompson & Thompson, 1996; Wan,

Chapman & Biggs, 1992). These social issues, involving the ability to form new and meaningful friendships and feeling accepted in the host environment, seem to be the greatest indicators of international student well-being (Mori, 2000; Popadiuk, 2010); however, academic and educational differences between their home and host school have also been shown to play an important part of many international students' experience (Brown, 2008; Fox, 1994; Thompson and Thompson, 1996). Li, Chen and Duanmu (2010) write that:

In addition to the general social culture shock, international students may also suffer from "academic culture shock." Gilbert (2000) argued that academic culture shock is a subset of culture shock and "is a case of incongruent schemata about higher education in the students' home country and in the host country" (p. 14). Academic culture shock is directly associated with the learning environment of an academic institution, including the education system, lecture style, assessment, relationship between students and lecturers, and so on. (p. 394)

### **2.5.2 Adapting to new academic environments**

The literature supports the idea of academic shock and many international students have reported difficulties or concerns related to studying in a foreign academic environment (Brown, 2008; Kuo & Roysircar, 2006; Thompson & Thompson, 1996; Ward & Masgoret, 2004). Brown's (2008) ethnographic study of a diverse group of international graduate students is a powerful description of the negative effects of academic stress and academic shock in the lives of these sojourners who used the words "worried, nervous, scared, afraid, tough, pressured, tiring, hard and demanding" repeatedly (p. 9). In their study of Taiwanese international high school students, Kuo and Roysircar, (2006) found that 74% of 247 participants felt they were "lacking information about Canada" and 41% reported that they were "not adequately oriented for studying abroad" (p. 196-170). These students reported lacking information and/or skills

related to “the Canadian school system,” “new study strategies to succeed in the North American school system,” “ways in which to develop proficiency in English,” and “handling acculturative stress (eg., discrimination)” (p. 170). Thompson and Thompson (1996) report that not knowing the norms, rules and regulations of their new academic environment, for example, not knowing which classroom behaviours were acceptable or how to address professors, was the third most difficult adjustment issue for international students in an American university, following social isolation and language issues, respectively. Oral presentation assignments were also a source of concern and stress for the students in this study and these ranked ninth on the list of most difficult adjustment areas.

## **2.6 Cultural differences: Student perspectives**

The following sections highlight some of the research which reports on students’ evaluation of their educational experiences in Western English-speaking schools and their responses to some of the cultural differences they encountered. These sections include research done with both international and immigrant students and illustrate the fact that students understand and respond to cultural differences in various ways.

### **2.6.1 Student attitudes towards Canadian education**

Various studies have reported on students’ overall evaluation of Canadian education and students’ satisfaction with their educational experience. For example, most of the 407 immigrant secondary students interviewed for Gunderson’s (2007) in-depth study of their experiences expressed negative feelings about their schools in Canada and felt that the education was inferior compared to their home countries. One student

thought that “we waste too much time in school. Too much time not working. Teachers are too lazy they don’t tell you what to do” (p. 211). Another student said that “you get a lot more freedom in Canada’s schools and my friends and me think it’s a waste of time, ‘cuz in Hong Kong they are forcing you to learn” (Gunderson, 2000, p. 695).

Minichiello’s (2001) study, which included both Chinese immigrant and Chinese international students, found mixed results in terms of student satisfaction. Some of the Chinese students in her study preferred the educational culture in Canada while others did not. She reported that “some students preferred the Chinese system because of the heavy homework component and memorization demands, while others preferred the Canadian system because of it’s more comprehensive focus and because the students were expected to think” (p. 87). Unfortunately, Minichiello (2001) did not indicate how prevalent either of these attitudes were among her participants or whether or not there was any difference between the international and immigrant students in their tendency to have a negative or positive view of their Canadian education.

Two surveys of post-secondary international students have indicated that respondents are generally satisfied with their educational experience. An online survey of post-secondary international students in British Columbia, conducted by the BC Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development (2009) and having an eligible response rate of 29%, found that 49% of respondents reported that they were satisfied with the post-secondary institution they were attending while 20% reported that they were very satisfied. Twenty-four percent of respondents gave a neutral response, being neither satisfied or dissatisfied, and 5% reported they were dissatisfied with their post secondary institution, while 1% reported being very dissatisfied. These findings are

similar to another Canada-wide survey, conducted by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (2009) and having a 24% response rate, in which 48% of respondents agreed that they were satisfied with their decision to study at their current university while 39% strongly agreed that they were satisfied. Nine percent of respondents to this survey indicated that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were satisfied with their decision.

Considering that the majority of the students in each of these studies were from Asian backgrounds, these results suggest that cultural background alone does not determine how students will interpret their educational experiences in Canada and that other factors such as age and identity as either an immigrant or international student play an important role in shaping their perceptions.

A study by Lee (2010) looked at differences in satisfaction rates among international students from various ethnic and racial backgrounds. Although the participants were studying in the United States and not Canada, the results are interesting because they offer further insight into the complex issue of why some international students feel satisfied with their experience and others do not. Lee found that international university students from predominately non-Caucasian regions studying in the United States, 80% of which came from East and South Asia, were less satisfied with their university experience and reported more difficulties than their international peers from predominately Caucasian regions, including Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Lee (2010) suggested that the negative attitudes were related to the level of perceived discrimination. More research focusing on how students' backgrounds may influence their perceptions of education in Canada is needed.

### **2.6.2 Students attitudes towards classroom behaviour and participation**

The teacher has traditionally enjoyed high social status in Confucian heritage cultures. In Korea, for example, there is a saying: “One does not dare to step on a teacher’s shadow” (Nguyen, 2006, p. 5). Chan (1999) claims that students of Chinese heritage “have been socialized to respect highly those who provide knowledge and to avoid challenging those in authority” (p. 298). Some international students have indicated that the informal behaviour of the students in many Western classrooms, such as asking questions in class, volunteering information or addressing a teacher informally, would be considered rude in their home countries (Nield, 2004; Tompson & Tompson, 1996). Some international university students in studies done by Brown (2008), Huang (2005) and Tompson and Tompson (1996) indicated that because such behaviours were unacceptable in their home countries, it was difficult or impossible to adopt Western patterns of interaction with their instructors, including Western patterns of class participation. In contrast, Liu et al. (2010) found that international MBA students participating in an online learning environment reported that they enjoyed the more equalized role of their instructor.

Some students may also refrain from participating in class to avoid embarrassment or “losing face” in front of their teacher and peers if they are incorrect (Brown, 2008; Chan, 1999). This seems to be typically true for many Chinese students, one of whom commented that “even if [other international students’] pronunciation is not perfect, I think they are braver to express themselves, and I am always thinking about any mistakes I will make” (Brown, 2008, p. 17).

Alternatively, other international students did not relate their lack of classroom participation to cultural differences, but rather attributed it to difficulties with English and a lack of confidence (Brown, 2008; Tompson & Tompson, 1996). One student said, “speaking up in class is especially difficult and anxiety arousing when you are unfamiliar with the language...I am often unsure of the meaning of the question or the type of response that is expected until other students volunteer answers” (Tompson & Tompson, 1996, p. 56). Brown (2008) concluded that for many international students, seminar and tutorial environments presented both a “cultural and linguistic challenge” (p. 16).

### **2.6.3 Attitudes towards interactions with peers**

International students’ tendency to avoid disagreeing with the opinions of classmates and teachers (Tompson & Tompson, 1996) may have roots in a desire to allow others to save face by not causing public embarrassment by disagreeing with them in front of others (Chan, 1999). Ideas about deference and respect for older individuals can also affect how international students interact with others in the class. One student in Huang’s (2005) study said that:

In the UK, lecturers encourage us to argue about issues, especially in problem-based learning sessions. When my opponent was older than me, even though I knew he/she had a wrong idea, I would not argue with him or her. Because I feel uncomfortable arguing with a person who is older than me, and possibly also has more practical skills and experience than me. (pg. 41)

Cultural ideas can also influence perceptions about whose knowledge can be trusted or is valuable. Learning from student presentations and group work is a distinctly Western practice and differs from the Confucian tradition that the teacher is the primary source of knowledge. In a study by Huang (2005), some international students participating in problem-based learning sessions, where groups researched and presented

solutions to the cases they were given, reported that they were not confident that the information they were learning from their classmates was accurate. This attitude about the role and place of the teacher is also reflected in the comments made by a Chinese student in China after visiting Western instructors had tried to implement their version of group work in the classroom. “Why does the teacher want us to talk together?” the student asked, “[the teacher] can’t listen to all of us talking at once. How can I learn by talking to my friend? He only knows what I know. I may learn his mistakes. I want to listen to the teacher-she knows more” (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998, p.744).

Collaborative projects also present an opportunity for cultural differences to influence student behaviour as different communication patterns and values come into contact. In a study by Liu, Liu, Lee and Magjuka (2010), One MBA student from India commented that:

I would not say the cultural differences affect [the collaboration] in the negative way. Cultural differences are certainly there. Culturally, we like to work more in teams, but the students in the U.S. tend to be more independent. We hesitate a bit in saying “no” to anything even though we know it is of a discomfort to us, but most foreign [the U.S.] students do not [hesitate in saying ‘no’]. We are more sensitive and care for others”. (p. 184)

Another student in the same study said that:

Cultural difference is visible. The U.S. folks are more active, normally hold very strong opinions and can hardly be persuaded. For example, if we have both U.S. and Chinese teammates doing one assignment, the U.S. folks will normally take the lead, set-up the framework and, then, finalize the whole assignment. The Chinese students will be more polite, and may have less of a contribution because of their politeness. (p. 184)

Interestingly, the authors indicated that the students in this study did not see these communication differences as having negative effects on their learning and some appreciated the various perspectives that the team’s diversity brought to the work.

Students in other contexts have not been as positive about cultural differences in communication. One immigrant secondary student from Vietnam commented that:

The white kids are big and loud like gorillas. You have to get out of the way because they so big. They think they own school because they are born here. They are so, so loud you can't be friends with them 'cuz they don't talk, they scream. They are so rude. (Gunderson, 2000, p. 697)

## **2.7 Summary of findings from the literature**

The literature describes many differences between the educational cultures of East Asian countries and Western, English speaking countries. Although consistent patterns of cultural differences between Asian and Western education are observed, understanding students' experiences in cross-cultural settings is complex because of the great diversity within the international student population and between the institutions they attend. The situation is further complicated by misinterpretations of cultural viewpoints regarding important educational concepts and practices. The fact that most of the research focuses only on the 'problems' of international students is concerning. There is little focus on what these students do well or what they perceive as positive. Additionally, little research has focused specifically on adolescent international students attending high school in North America and further study is required to better understand their unique perceptions, attitudes and responses towards the cultural differences they encounter in their host countries.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section describes the rationale for using semi-structured interviews and written responses as methods for collecting data. The next section provides background information about the research site and the reasons why it was selected for this study. The third section describes how participants were recruited and self-selected to participate. This section also describes the participants and gives some brief details about their backgrounds. The final section gives a brief outline of how the data were analyzed.

### **3.2 Method selection**

This study was designed to explore student perceptions and attitudes through focus groups. This method was chosen for several reasons, one of which was the potential for focus groups to allow participants to freely discuss issues “they deem important rather than simply responding to prompts important to the researcher, thus [allowing] the participants’, rather than the researcher’s, agenda [to] predominate” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p. 288). This approach however, was not possible as some students were late, absent or requested a private interview instead of participating in a focus group. As a result, individual semi-structured interviews were used to investigate students’ experiences and the meanings they attached to them. It is thought that collecting data through personal interviews “emphasizes seeing the social world from the viewpoint of the ‘actor’” and is advantageous because the responses are “in the form in which respondents think and use language” (Hannabuss, 1996, p. 22). Given the

diversity within the international student population and the complexity of understanding cross-cultural experiences, the insight gained from open-ended interviews is essential for developing accurate understandings of the experiences of international students.

Prior to participating in the interview, students were asked to provide written responses to the interview questions in the language of their choice in order to allow them time to prepare for the interview and reflect on their experiences. This questionnaire is included in Appendix A. The interviews were conducted in English, which was not the first language of the students, and it was hoped that giving students the opportunity to respond in another language would reduce the possibility that items of importance might be left out because of the student's oral English language proficiency or comfort with the interview process.

### **3.3 Research site**

This study took place in a large public secondary school located in a Vancouver suburb. The school is located in a predominately Caucasian, middle-class neighbourhood and is the only secondary school in the community. The school provides instruction in both English and French Immersion for students in grades eight through twelve. The site was recommended by a fellow graduate student who taught at the school and suggested that the ESL teacher would be interested in my research. The site was chosen because of its large, diverse international student population. At the time this study was conducted, April 2011, approximately 4% of the school's total population was comprised of international students, well above the district's average of 2.5%. This population was also diverse with students coming from China (mainland and Hong Kong), Japan, Korea,

Mexico, Germany, Ukraine, and Turkey. The length of time these international students spent studying at the school varied from several weeks to several years. The school offered several ESL classes, including an ESL Skills class which focused on the development of basic communication and academic writing skills, all taught by the school's international coordinator. Many international students attended the ESL skills class in addition to other ESL classes.

### **3.4 Selection and recruitment of participants**

After receiving permission to proceed from the ethical review panels of both the University of British Columbia and the school board, I presented the study to the students in two of the school's ESL classes. These two groups were targeted because many of the international students in the school were enrolled in either one or both of these classes. I described the purpose of the research and explained both the voluntary and confidential nature of participation to the students. At this time students were given an assent form (Appendix B) as well as a questionnaire containing the interview questions which they were asked to bring to the interview. Interested students were asked to respond to the questions in the language of their choice. Both of these forms had been translated into the predominant language of their home country (Korean, Japanese, Mandarin, Spanish, Russian and Turkish). Interested students were given two weeks to return the assent form to their ESL teacher. Translated consent forms (Appendix C) were then forwarded by e-mail to the parents of the interested students who were then able to indicate their consent. Three students, one from Korea and two from Japan, participated in the study and are referred to by pseudonyms. At the conclusion of the study, each participant was entered into a draw for a \$100 gift certificate to a store of their choice.

### **3.5 Data collection procedures**

To increase the reliability of the data, three sources were used in this study: students' written responses to a questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and field notes made during the interviews. Using verbatim transcriptions of the interviews in the analysis was also done to increase reliability and validity.

The questionnaire, included in Appendix A, consisted of the interview questions and was given to the students in advance to help prepare them for the interview. The questionnaire was translated into several languages so that it would be easily accessible and students were given the option to answer in the language of their choice. While a few of the answers to the questionnaire were written in English, most of the answers were written in the students' first languages, Japanese or Korean, and were translated into English for analysis.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted during class time and held in a private room in the school. These interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and followed an open-ended protocol. Students were asked all of the questions outlined in the questionnaire, as well as additional questions based on the students' initial answers in order to clarify or expand upon their responses. The open-ended nature of the first two questions asked ('what do you think about your school in Canada so far?' and 'what are the major differences between the school you attended in your home country and your school in Canada?') was intended to draw out the students' own priorities and indicate which topics they felt were important. After exploring their initial responses, additional questions were asked about their perceptions of some of the specific differences in

educational culture addressed in the literature. These topics included differences in: their interactions and relationships with teachers, their classroom participation, the types of learning activities they participated in, expectations for creativity and originality and student competitiveness. At the end of the interview students were asked to reflect on the way that they dealt with these differences and if any of their approaches to learning had changed as a result of being in a new academic environment. The interviews were all recorded and then transcribed verbatim by me. Field notes tried to capture information lost in transcription such as “tone, pace, inflection, non-verbal communication, . . . humour, emotion, and intensity” as suggested by Carey and Smith (1994).

## **3.6 Participants**

### **3.6.1 Grace**

Grace was a grade 11 female student from Korea. Grace first came to Canada as an international student in grade 6 and attended elementary school in Alberta for two years before returning to Korea at the end of grade 7. Grace came back to Canada, this time to British Columbia, at the start of grade 10 and was almost finished grade 11 when the interview took place. She planned on graduating the following year from her Canadian high school. Her ESL teacher reported that Grace was doing well academically and that she was going to receive one of the school’s academic awards at the end of the year. Grace reported that she received higher marks in Canada than she had in Korea, but that they were still not as high as her parents would like.

### **3.6.2 Ren**

Ren was a grade 11 male student from Japan. Ren had spent the last two years attending high school in the United States where he completed grades 9 and 10. Ren came to Canada at the beginning of grade 11 and was almost finished grade 11 when the interview took place. He planned on graduating from his Canadian high school the following year and then attending university in the United States.

### **3.6.3 Aiko**

Aiko was a grade 12 female student from Japan who was expecting to graduate at the end of the year. While in her Japanese junior high school, Aiko had some difficulties and did not attend regularly. As a result, she reported that her mother offered the chance to study in Canada. Aiko initially came to Canada for four weeks when she was 15 and then returned to Japan to begin high school. She did not enjoy high school in Japan and decided to return to Canada at the beginning of grade 10. Aiko reported having trouble with many of her school assignments and attributed this to difficulties with English. Aiko was almost finished grade 12 when the interview took place. The English interview was difficult for Aiko and she was often unable to answer questions or paused for long periods of time searching for the words to express herself in English. Many of Aiko's responses were in the form of agreement or disagreement of statements made by me in an effort to further understand her answers. Some of Aiko's answers were not consistent throughout the interview and it is probable that her level of English was to blame for the inconsistencies. Only ideas expressed consistently throughout the interview or supported by her written responses were included in the data analysis.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

Initial readings of the interview transcripts and student responses revealed several reoccurring topics or themes corresponding to the key words or ideas within each reply. After making multiple copies of the data, I highlighted each occurrence of the topic or theme in a different colour. As I did this, new patterns and subtopics emerged such as positive or negative remarks about the topic. The responses grouped under each theme were analyzed for patterns of similarity or difference between students and then compared to findings from the literature. Consequently, the results are discussed thematically and not by individual participant.

The interview transcripts and written responses were also analyzed for evidence of students' priorities by giving attention to who brought up which topics, when these topics emerged, and how often these topics were mentioned by students. This was done in an effort to differentiate between which cultural differences the students themselves thought were important and which differences I thought were important.

The next chapter reports the results of my analysis. Some of the major themes discussed include students' general evaluation and satisfaction with the educational systems in Canada and in their home countries, ideas about "good" learning, students' perceptions of their teachers and their interactions with them, perceptions of the level of freedom experienced in and out of the classroom and its relationship to their learning, perceptions about the differences in teaching style and classroom activities between students' home countries and Canada, and the relationship between their experience in Canada to their personal motivation for learning. The analysis showed that all three

students were very positive about their educational experience in Canada. They saw many of the cultural differences they encountered in the classroom as beneficial for their learning rather than problematic.

## **Chapter 4: Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I describe the findings of the study. It is divided into six main sections. The first section contains a description of the themes and topics which appeared to be most important to the students. It shows that the social aspects of their school experience were more important to them than the strictly academic or instructional aspects. In the second section, 'Comparing educational systems', I describe students' evaluations of their educational experiences in Canada and in their home countries as well as the comparisons students made between them. This section contains four subsections which describe students' preference for learning in Canada, their insistence that both systems have merit, their perception that some students prefer studying in their home countries, and the students' explanations of why they felt that they "learned better" in Canada. The third section, titled 'Freedom and personal autonomy,' describes students' perceptions of the increased amount of freedom they felt in Canada and its effect on their learning. This section has three subsections which describe (1) the social freedom they experienced outside of school, (2) the effect of more free time on their learning in terms of creativity, increased understanding and reduced stress and (3) the effect of academic freedom, meaning the ability to express divergent opinions and explore personal ideas, on student motivation. The fourth section, titled "Teachers" describes the importance students placed on relationships with their teachers as well the ways in which these relationships were developed. This section also describes students' comparisons of their teachers in Canada and in their home countries. Students'

perceptions about their interactions with their teachers and the cultural meanings they attached to them are also discussed. This section also compares traditional stereotypes of Asian teachers with the students' perceptions of them. The fifth section, "Comparing teaching styles and methods," focuses on the effect of student-centered teaching approaches on learning and motivation. The final section is a summary of the findings.

## **4.2 Issues most important to students**

One of the aims of this study was to investigate which cultural differences were important from the students' perspectives rather than having them comment only on the differences deemed important by the researcher. In order to determine which differences were most important to the students themselves, three things were considered: students' responses to the initial open and undirected interview question, the number of times students commented on a topic, and who initiated the discussion of the topics. Analyzed this way, the data suggest that the social differences between Canada and the students' home countries, in terms of how they were allowed to interact with others and how others, especially their teachers, responded to them, were the most important and meaningful differences for all three students. These social differences included having more personal autonomy and freedom, both in and out of the classroom, having positive and "comfortable" relationships with their teachers and the student-centered nature of Canadian teaching methods. Environmental differences, such as the school schedule and student course load, were also important and mentioned several times. Interestingly, strictly instructional differences, such as types of class activities and assignments, were only discussed when I asked about them directly. This suggests that the social aspects of

school in Canada were more important to the students than the strictly instructional aspects.

The similarity of the responses and their focus on social interactions is interesting but not altogether surprising considering other research in this area. In a study by Moores and Popadiuk (2011), seven university-level international students were asked to reflect on the positive aspects of their adaptation process and comment on what helped them to adapt to their new environment. Moores and Popadiuk (2011) found that the students viewed the social aspects of their lives as more important to them and their adjustment to life in Canada than the strictly academic aspects. When the students in this study did speak about academic matters, they tended to focus on the relational aspects.

Other studies, although approaching this topic from a negative angle by asking university level international students to describe their most important problems or concerns, have shown that social issues, such as the ability to make friends, the loss of social networks and isolation, not knowing the social norms of the host culture and even finding appropriate clothing and transportation, are among international students' highest concerns (Thompson & Thompson, 1996; Wan, Chapman & Biggs, 1992). Although more research is needed to determine if this trend can be generalized to high school international students, the focus on social issues by the students in my study as well as by students in other studies suggests that such issues play an important role in shaping students' educational experiences.

### **4.3 Comparing educational systems**

Asking international students to compare learning experiences in their home and host countries is not a common approach in the literature; however, doing so can give insight into how different aspects of the Canadian school system are perceived by international students and why.

#### **4.3.1 “I definitely prefer this way”**

When asked which educational system they preferred, all three students unanimously agreed that they preferred studying in Canada over attending school in their home countries. Grace said, “I definitely prefer this way, the Canadian way.” The reasons Grace, Ren and Aiko gave for preferring the learning environment in Canada were remarkably similar, especially in the case of Grace and Ren, although each student placed different emphasis on the importance of various aspects of their Canadian experience in shaping their opinion. Grace emphasized the sense of motivation and autonomy she experienced as a result of the increase in personal freedom she found in Canada. Ren emphasized his increased enjoyment of learning as a result of having less pressure to learn large amounts of content in short amounts of time. He said that “I think I learn better with this way ‘cause it’s like you can study with joy.” Ren also commented that he liked learning in Canada better than in Japan because he felt that he had more opportunities to make friends in Canada, something not mentioned by either Grace or Aiko. Unlike the others, Aiko reported liking the assignments given to her in Japan more than those given in Canada. Aiko still preferred studying in Canada however, because of the improved relationship with her teachers. Better relationships with teachers were also

highlighted by both Grace and Ren as a reason for preferring their school in Canada. All three students also spoke about the student-centered nature of the teaching methods in Canada. Grace and Aiko both spoke about the individualized help they received from their teachers. Grace appreciated the personal control and direction she had over some of her projects and Ren appreciated the fact that his teachers saw value in his thinking and problem solving process even if his answers were not completely correct. Grace and Ren also spoke about other aspects of their experience that Aiko did not, including the more relaxed school schedule and their perception that their ability to learn was improved as a result of studying in Canada. The three most repeated reasons for preferring the Canadian learning environment were increased freedom both in and out of the classroom, improved relationships with teachers, and the student-centered nature of Canadian teaching methods.

It is interesting to compare these findings to other studies investigating the high school experiences of students in the Greater Vancouver area. The findings of Gunderson's (2007) large-scale study of immigrant students in the Vancouver school district are not consistent with the findings of this study. The majority of students in Gunderson's (2007) study did not have positive opinions about their school in Canada and believed that the education they received in their home countries was better. Comparing the findings of these two studies suggests that identity and personal circumstances play an important role in a student's perception of their experiences. The students in Gunderson's (2007) study were immigrants and it is possible that their view may have been different if they were studying in Canada as international students. It is possible that the degree of personal control a student feels that he or she has over the

decision to come and study in Canada, as well as the ability they may have to leave and return to their home countries, may be an important factor influencing students' perception of their experiences.

In contrast, Minichiello's (2001) study of Chinese students in Richmond, BC, which included two international students and 21 immigrant students, reports mixed results in this area with some students preferring the "Canadian system" while others preferred the "Chinese system" (p. 87). Unfortunately Minichiello (2001) does not state the frequency of these preferences or relate them to any background information about the students so it is not possible to know if the two international students in the study had a more positive perception of their Canadian school than the immigrant students. More research on the context of the decision to come to Canada and its possible relationship to students' perceptions of the Canadian educational system is needed.

#### **4.3.2 "They both have their advantage"**

It was interesting to note that neither Grace nor Ren appeared to see either educational system as being absolutely or universally superior over the other. Grace mentioned multiple times that she did not know which system was better, while at the same time maintaining that the Canadian system worked best for her. Both Grace and Ren saw value in how they were taught in their home countries. Ren said that "they both have their advantage. I mean, um, it really, I think depend on the people". In speaking of her education in Korea, Grace said that "It still helped me, but it just didn't really motivate me to do harder." Grace also reported several times that, while the Korean education system was not for her, the students there worked very hard and learned a lot. "It's more fun I guess, to learn in Canada" Grace said, "but still, in Korea, since everyone

is so competitive and there's tests coming up, like in two months, every two months, they're kinda really hard working and trying to learn as much as they can."

It is possible that their reluctance to declare one system absolutely superior to the other was influenced, in part, by their identification and positive feelings for their home country. Near the end of her interview, Grace stopped her train of thought, describing reasons why Korean schooling did not work for her, and commented that "uh, I'm kinda bashing Korea, but" and laughed nervously. This might suggest that while Grace had strong opinions about the educational environment in Korea, she was perhaps somewhat uncomfortable with the implications of those opinions.

#### **4.3.3 "Some people prefer the way Japanese teachers teach"**

Ren and Grace repeatedly expressed the idea that while Canada's education system was better for them personally, the education in their home countries might be better for other students. Grace explained this in terms of some students being more "used to" the education system in Korea, although she did not explain why she might be less "used to" this system than the other students.

Amanda: Do you think that other students in Korea, do you think that they would feel the same way [preferring Canada] or do you think that that system works for them?

Grace: Yeah, yeah I guess. Some people, like when I tell them how I get educated in Canada, or how the school's going, or, they, they pretty much know because there's so many students now going to Canada, US and Australia right. When they hear that, they like, like Western, like this way too. But since they are in Korea they are kinda used to it so they don't see any, that much problem with it.

It is possible that these students in Korea were "used to" the Korean education system because they had not experienced anything else, unlike Grace who had direct experience

with another learning environment. It is also possible that being “used to” a particular educational system has to do with which system the student currently identifies with, as suggested by Grace’s comment that “I guess I’m kinda pretty much following this system now,” meaning the Canadian system. This interpretation is also supported by Ren’s comment that, after having been away from Japan for the last three years, “I’m not used to that environment study in Japan. Like in that way I think I can’t learn.”

Ren explained his opinion that different educational systems worked better for different students in terms of individual preference and personality. Although he was consistent in his opinion that Canadian education was better for him, he did not think that this was true for all students.

Ren: Basically, some people prefer the way Japanese teachers teach, like the strict way. But some people prefer more like their... (inaudible), so yeah, I like this way better.

Amanda: Do you know some people who prefer the way that the Japanese teachers teach?

Ren: Yeah, yeah I know some people that like to; they don’t like to be, they don’t like when the teacher talk about other stuff, they really like to learn but, they, the te-, the student I know, like, he likes to be controlled (laughs). Yeah, some, yeah I know somebody (laughs).

The insights and comments made by Grace and Ren on this subject support the need to look beyond stereotypes and critically examine national categories of students (Signorini et al., 2009). Clearly the students in Korea and Japan do not make up homogeneous groups who think and learn alike.

#### **4.3.4 Learning more, learning better**

In speaking of the differences between the Canadian education system and the one they experienced in their home countries, Grace and Ren made an interesting distinction between the concepts of “learning more,” which involved learning more content, usually

through memorization, and “learning better,” which involved understanding concepts more deeply and remembering them, as well as enjoying their studies. The following exchange illustrates this difference:

Grace: [In Korea] all they try to do is, like, teach and they want us to follow everything in one day and you just want to get through everything really quickly because there are lots of things to learn. Here, even though maybe in Canada teachers teach less stuff or kinda easy stuff, it’s more like us actually learning it. In Korea, I’m just more like, ‘K, I listen, I heard what they said, I don’t really catch everything they kinda taught us’. So I guess actually learning it, it would be in Canada. But afterschool in Korea they teach you lots and they kinda tells you until you understand it and just kinda force lots of work, so you could in Korea too.

Amanda: Have you ever noticed, of the things you learned in Canada or the things you learned in Korea, do you remember one better?

Grace: Canada.

Throughout the interviews, Grace and Ren described several aspects of their Canadian experience that helped them to “learn better.” Grace attributed her ability to ‘learn better’ in Canada to her increased motivation. Although she thought students still learned in Korea, she often mentioned that the teaching methods and expectations found there did not motivate her. On the other hand, she found the instruction in Canada very motivating. Grace found that talking and working with other students in Canada helped her and she commented that “I think I learn more in Canada. But, yeah, it’s just, in Korea, like usually I come home and I have to do everything by myself, like self working, so, it still helped me, but it just didn’t really motivate me to do harder.” Later in the interview she said that “I definitely work, like, much harder in Canada...even though I do, kinda not as good as much as how my parents or somebody expect me to do, I still want to do hard, like I want, still want to try harder to get that mark.”

Ren gave several reasons for his ability to ‘learn better’ in Canada. One was the relationships he developed with his Canadian teachers, as the following exchange illustrates:

Amanda: Which system do you think you learn the most in?

Ren: I would say this way [in Canada] because I do ask teacher when I don't know stuff, so I basically the tea-, it's so easier to talk to the teachers so that's why I learn so much more here in this way, yeah.

Ren commented several times that he thought students learned more in Japan, but still maintained that Canada was still a better place for him to learn:

Amanda: So which system do you think is better for you to learn in?

Ren: Learning, I think this way [in Canada] is easier because there is too much pressure [in Japan] and maybe some people like that pressure, but I, for me is not that.

Amanda: Not that good?

Ren: (nods) Yeah.

Amanda: So do you think you actually learn more? Or is it just more comfortable or more enjoyable?

Ren: More like the second choice, more comfortable and not feeling all the pressure. Yeah, learning, I think in Jap-, maybe the way I learn before was leaning more like you have to memorize all these things, you have to, so you kinda have to know it, so. But, yeah, so more like comfortable to learn here.

As indicated in the above statement, another explanation Ren gave for his 'learning better' in Canada was the increased enjoyment of his studies he found as a result of reduced stress levels. "I think I learn better with this way," Ren said, "'cause it's like you can study with joy. Something, so you, if you are do more, like to study, not like you hate studying but you have to study. Yeah, that is the big difference." Ren also felt he "learned better" in Canada because he was able to focus more on understanding the work during class time rather than worrying about writing things down to memorize.

Ren: In Japan, I was basically, like take notes, all the notes and memorizing the notes, basically. Maybe I changed because I not doing much more memorizing compared before. So maybe I actually, but just taking notes, I start to like know what they are teaching. I usually doesn't take afterschool time to memorize all the things, I usually can try to study during the class time, like when the teachers are teaching so maybe less stress to learn.

Ren's comments about memorization are very interesting in light of the work of Watkins and Biggs (1996), which raises questions about traditional Western

interpretations of the role and meaning of memorization in Chinese educational culture. Rather than seeing memorization as an important way to develop understanding, Ren and Grace both expressed negative opinions about having to memorize content in Japan and Korea and their views reflect stereotypically Western ideas equating memorization with rote learning (Watkins, 2002). Further study on the role of memorization in the specific context of Korea and Japan is needed.

Although not a theme explored by Minichiello (2001), the idea of ‘learning better,’ or coming to really understand things in Canadian schools rather than only remembering information through rote memorization, is also present in the comments of at least one of the Chinese students in her study. Again, the concept of memorization described here is stereotypically Western and does not reflect the traditional Chinese understanding argued for by Biggs and Watkins (1996). It is interesting to note that this student does seem to see instructional differences as being important. In speaking of her high school experience in Richmond, BC, this Chinese student said:

Teachers are more friendly when compared to Hong Kong. In Hong Kong you focus on studying, studying, studying. And in Canada they have a variety of activities in classes, like you have discussion, homework projects, presentations, and it’s more interactive. But in Hong Kong it’s like spoon feeding. So, like, the teachers gives you lots of materials and you have to memorize them. And, in here it gives you a chance to really understand the material and discuss with other people. (p. 88)

#### **4.4 Freedom and personal autonomy**

Aiko, Ren and Grace all reported that the increased freedom and personal autonomy they experienced in Canada was important to them. Interestingly, this topic has not received very much attention in the literature and warrants further investigation. Taken together, Grace, Ren and Aiko described three areas in which increased freedom

made the most difference: their social lives outside of the classroom, their available time and their academics. While Aiko focused solely on the freedom she experienced outside of the classroom, Ren and Grace spoke about all three of these areas and indicated that the freedom they felt in Canada played a major role in creating a positive academic experience for them.

#### **4.4.1 Freedom outside of the classroom: Social freedom**

All three students indicated that the increased freedom they encountered in their out-of-school lives was a major difference between attending school in Canada and attending school in their home countries. The students mentioned such things as the freedom to hangout with friends, have boyfriends or girlfriends, wear make-up, get a driver's license and wear clothes of their choice to school. This was one of the biggest and most important differences for Aiko. When asked at the beginning of the interview what she thought about school in Canada so far, Aiko said "I think Canada school is so, so much fun for me. It, in Japan we cannot dye hair, no piercing, yeah, it's kinda all stuff, so it's very strict for me. So, yeah, I think this place is better." Aiko reported that for her this was one of the biggest differences between school in Canada and school in Japan. Although Aiko felt that this increase in freedom affected the academic performance of other students, she was not able to explain in the interview how or why and it was interesting that she did not feel this way about herself.

Freedom of expression was also very important to Ren who said that:

Freedom, you can have a girlfriend here. But in Japan you can, but, how to say? It's not open. You can't just do something in public (laughs). But here, you, yeah. That's one kind of freedom. And you can talkback to teacher, that's another freedom. Yeah, that's the important ones.

#### **4.4.2 Time and freedom**

For Grace and Ren, the amount of free time they enjoyed was an important difference between attending school in Canada and in their home countries. Both Grace and Ren described the educational practices in their home countries as demanding and restrictive, allowing little time for anything else, even sleep. In speaking of the students in Japan, Ren said “they don’t have time to do other things.” Ren reported that the pressure to learn and the pace of instruction resulted in students spending even the five minute breaks between classes studying. Alternatively, attending school in Canada allowed them to choose how they spent their time, something they felt was very beneficial for their learning. Grace described it this way:

In Korea, afterschool we have another school and even at school we have to be, uh, stay until like ten o’clock at night to studying in high school. Here we can do activities like sports, or even others. And, or we can just have a free time, which is we could do our homework and stuff. And, um, I think, I’m not sure, like which one is better, but for me, like, having lots of free time, I also have, like, lots of, I just rest a lot too and I just hang out with my friends too.

...

In Korea actually we don’t get that much homework from the school. It’s just afterschool we have like tons of homework. And if I have to finish that homework and plus, like, little bit from the school, like, it’s not possible to go to bed before 12 o’clock at night.

Both Grace and Ren felt that the more relaxed schedule they experienced in Canada and the freedom to choose how they spent their time helped them learn and gave several reasons for this. These included more time to think about and understand the material instead of rushing through it, more time to talk to teachers and group members to help with completing homework and projects, the ability to focus on and spend more time on areas of need, feeling less stress and pressure and getting adequate rest.

##### ***4.4.2.1 More time, more understanding***

Grace felt that the pace of instruction in Korea, which she found very quick, did not give her the time she needed to understand all of the material. She said “they want us

to follow everything in one day and you just want to get through everything really quickly because there are lots of things to learn.” Conversely, the more relaxed atmosphere she found in Canada was not only more enjoyable, but also gave her the time she needed to finish her work and understand it. In speaking of her school in Canada, Grace said:

Grace: ... It’s not like all the homework in one night. Kinda, they kinda give you time, or sometimes its like Socials homework are like due today and other subjects for homework are like due next week kind of. We have more time and especially it’s easier to talk to the teacher and kinda do the group work. It’s easier or better to finish.

Amanda: Do you think that having more time helps you understand the work better?

Grace: Yes. Because then we don’t have to rush through the time and just kinda finish the homework and, cause we even, in Korea we are also punishment, so if we don’t finish our homework (laughs). So we just have to kind of ssssssss (makes rushing motion with hand).

In addition to having more time to understand and complete her work, Grace also saw the ability to focus on and spend more time on the areas she felt she was weak in as a benefit of having more freedom to choose how she spent her time. She said that, in addition to “hanging out” with her friends, she also knew “that I have lots of time to study and, like, just kind of study for the stuff that I not good at, so it’s kinda better for me.”

#### ***4.4.2.2 More time, less stress***

Ren also commented on the increased freedom he experienced in Canada, commenting, “I would say that here we have much more free time.” He emphasized the resulting reduction of stress as its main benefit and felt that this helped him learn.

Amanda: And do you think that that makes a difference for your learning? The freedom? Or lack of freedom?

Ren: Um, yeah, I think it will influence for studying. Because in Japan the way you learn is like keeping studying. So maybe for some people, like, that’s the way they learn more, but I think sometimes, you, studying and rest, to have some freedom is better. Yeah

Amanda: Better for learning or just-?

Ren: Better for learning I think. Yeah, because you get so stressed and you don't sleep and it not (laughs and shakes head "no").

Although Grace and Ren emphasized the benefits of having more free time differently, it is important to highlight that, rather than just opening up more time to have fun, the more relaxed Canadian schedule also created conditions for more meaningful learning by opening up more time for getting academic help from teachers and friends, allowing them to spend more time on areas they needed help in and allowing for adequate rest.

#### ***4.4.2.3 Time and creativity***

Another area of difference noted by all three students was the expectations for creativity by their teachers in Canada and their teachers in their home countries. Aiko, Ren, and Grace all agreed that creativity was important, but that it was emphasized and expected more in Canada than in their home countries. It was interesting that one reason Ren and Grace gave for the lack of creativity they and their classmates showed in Japan and Korea was related to the amount of time they had, or more accurately, didn't have to complete their work. While both Aiko and Grace maintained that some students in their home countries were creative, creativity among students, themselves included, was sacrificed in order to keep up with the pace of instruction. Ren had a unique way of describing this trade-off. When I asked if his Japanese teachers wanted him to be creative in his work, Ren said "not creative, I wouldn't say creative, but (pause), efficient. Efficiency, yeah". Grace also articulated the idea that students' lack of time made it difficult for them to be creative. After describing the long hours students spent in classes during the week and on weekends, as well as the time spent studying at home, Grace

commented that “yeah, it’s just, I guess that now, so people say that that’s why the kids don’t have crea-, like they are not creative, because it has to be all same, we are used to being all same.”

Grace also felt that her teachers in Canada had different expectations about students’ creativity than her teachers in Korea.

Grace: In here, in Canada, teachers kinda expect, like, us to be really creative. In Korea, they kinda do, but also they don’t really mind if we don’t really because we don’t have much time to be thinking or trying to make it creative, creatively, because we kinda don’t have much time to. Study, study, study. So I guess they don’t really have a big mind of, uh, being creative.

Amanda: So you don’t think it’s that important to teachers?

Grace: I think that it’s important, but it’s just in Korean school I guess and teachers don’t really think that’s important.

Interestingly, even though they reported that they had more time to complete their assignments, both Grace and Ren felt that creativity was still an area they needed to work on. While Grace admitted that creativity was something she was still “struggling with,” she also said that since she came to Canada she was thinking more about “how could I change, like think this different way” about her work. The findings related to free time and students’ creativity give some support for Kember and Gow’s (1991) suggestion that environmental factors such as heavy workloads and high-pressure assessments influence student behaviour and study approaches.

It is interesting that both Grace and Ren also blamed part of their perceived lack of creativity in Canada on their past experiences in Korea and Japan. When asked if she thought being creative and original helped her learn, Grace responded this way:

Yeah, I think that is important. But, hum, yeah, that, I think creativity is important to learn, but that’s what I’m weak at, that’s my weakness in learning. Because I can’t really creative because, I don’t know, in Korea there is lots of people, even though we have to follow whatever the teacher say, there’s still students who are really creative. But since

I'm kinda more used to that, I can't be really creative in some parts. So I think that's definitely important from my learning. Yeah, makes it different.

Ren also described his lack of creativity as a result of being “used to” the way he was taught in Japan. When asked what he thought about being creative and if it was important to him he said:

For me, maybe. I usually not like talk about my, share about my things. So I usually hear what others think and if they pretty good idea enough, you know, then I will just follow it. You know, (laughing), maybe I am used to being controlled.

In his written response, Ren wrote that “In Canada, every student has a lot of unique ideas and it feels like they can come up with all these ideas in a short time. Conversely, it takes a lot of time for Japanese students to think of even one idea.” Ren and Grace did not say anything about creativity coming intuitively or naturally to students and their comments suggest that they saw creativity as something that was difficult, required sufficient time and was developed with practice and encouragement.

#### **4.4.3 Academic freedom**

In addition to having more free time, a major point of difference that Grace emphasized throughout her interview was the academic freedom she found in Canada. In Korea, Grace described a situation that was teacher directed with little room for deviation or creativity. Throughout her interview Grace used the phrase “whatever they say” to describe her Korean education. In contrast, Grace found that in Canada her teachers gave her the freedom to express and explore different ideas, something she found very motivating. In speaking about her homework in Korea, Grace said:

We have to kind of do it, whatever they say. We don't have that much opportunity, kind of we just have to follow what teachers say, what they tells us to do. It's kind of like sometimes, and they, I don't know, I'm kinda getting nervous. But, ah, it's kinda different than here. Like here, the project, it's like, “oh this is kinda what you have to do” and then they don't touch with anything else. And once we do it they just kinda give us feedback.

It's not like in Korea, they kind of "oh no, you can not do that way. You have to do this way" and then everything is kind of same with others.

The push for conformity seemed to frustrate and alienate Grace. She said, "In Korea, for me, even though, like, sometimes I don't like the way, if they tells us exactly how to do, I just have to follow them." Grace also said that:

Teachers know, like, you have to do it this way. And then everybody's, like, doing that way and then I can't, kinda, if I don't fit in that kinda level, or like kinda that, I kinda feel out of it and then I don't know how to do it, or I have my own way.

It is possible that her feelings of being "out of it" contributed to her desires to come back and complete her studies in Canada.

#### ***4.4.3.1 Academic freedom, agency and motivation***

The academic freedom Grace experienced in Canada gave her a greater sense of control over her learning that she found very motivating. In Korea, Grace described a situation where she felt forced to work and did so to avoid her teachers' punishments. "In Korea" she said, "like they give you homework with something and if we don't do it we are, like, in so much trouble and we are kinda, like, we have to stay afterschool to finish it." Her educational experience there was characterized by teachers and parents forcing her to work. In her questionnaire, Grace wrote that "In Korea, students generally do their study, not because of self motivation, but because of pressure given by others." In Canada however, instead of doing things because she felt "forced" to do them, Grace was learning and working hard in school for herself, because *she* wanted to. Rather than being told exactly what she should do, Grace was given guidelines and then expected to act independently. When asked at the beginning of the interview what she thought about her school in Canada so far, Grace said:

...Canada school, uh, it's more of like we have to do our own work, it's not like the teacher forcing you to do it, or, they are like if you don't do this you are in so much

trouble. It's kinda like, you have to do it, but if you don't do it you just don't get the mark, right...

Amanda: So when you said freestyle, can you describe for me a little bit more about that?

Grace: That's what I said about the working, by like how WE have to decide if WE want to do it and how much we want to do it.

Grace valued the increased responsibility and power to make decisions about her learning, including decisions about how to use her time, as discussed above. She saw this as an important part of her learning experience. The following comments reveal not only Grace's increased motivation to study, but also her increased confidence in herself as a result of being allowed to work and think on her own and in her own way:

I can say that I definitely work, like, much harder in Canada. And, um, more self, uh, I'm not sure how to say, I plan everything by myself and then actually try and follow my schedule and, like, my plan and learning. 'Cause in Korea, it's more like my parents tells me, or kind of forces me, or teachers kinda tells us to do stuff, or, and there's lots of pressure. It's like, "oh, you have to get 90 percent on everything", or somebody expect me to do. [in Canada] I still want to work hard, like I want, still want to try harder to get that mark. And because there's, like, teachers and everybody kinda trusts me and kinda, like, tells me that "oh, you can do this", I am more like "oh", getting it done.

The confidence Grace felt as a result of the responsibility and trust she was given allowed her to move beyond working to fulfill others' expectations and work in order to achieve her own goals. In her written response, Grace wrote that "In Canadian schools, I think I have learned 'self-management skills' and realized what I should do and prepare to make my future dreams and career come true." Grace's comments about motivation give important insight into why she preferred studying in Canada over studying in Korea. It is unfortunate that student motivation and its relationship to teaching styles is not an issue that has been given wide attention in the literature on international students.

## 4.5 Teachers

### 4.5.1 Importance of relationships

The relationships that the students enjoyed with their teachers in Canada played a prominent role in all three interviews and it was clear that their teachers were an important part of their experience in Canada. Aiko, Ren and Grace all saw major differences in the student-teacher relationships they experienced in their home countries and in Canada. All three students felt strongly that the relationships with their teachers in Canada were better, “more friendly,” than they had been in their home countries and all three students felt that these improved relationships played an important role in their learning, as well as making their time at school more enjoyable. This was especially true for Aiko. Aiko preferred the types of school work she did in Japan but still preferred to study in Canada because of the positive relationships she had with her teachers, which she described as “more close.” In speaking of Japan, she said “I don’t know why, but, uh, the relationship between the teacher and me is not good. So even though I had a lot of friends, I did not go to class.” I then asked her what she felt the most important differences were between school in Canada and school in Japan, to which she replied, “I think that the relationship between teacher and student is most important for me.”

### 4.5.2 Comparing relationships: “Strict” and “scary” vs. “close” and “friendly”

Aiko, Grace and Ren all described the teachers in their home countries similarly, with words like “strict” and “scary,” and all three described their Canadian teachers as “friendly”. The cool, distant relationship they experienced with their teachers in their home countries was one factor that limited students’ interactions with them. Ren wrote

that “In Japan, the teacher seemed strict, so it’s nervous to talk to him/her”. When asked why he didn’t talk to his teachers in Japan, Ren explained that they were “scary.” Grace, Ren and Aiko all mentioned teachers punishing students in their home countries, usually for not completing homework and it was evident that fear played a role in students’ classroom behaviour. In speaking about homework, Ren said that “teachers check it, I mean ALWAYS check it, so you feel like you have to do it.” Grace said that “in Korea we are also punishment if we don’t finish our homework.”

In contrast, all three students reported that their teachers in Canada were “friendly” and that they spoke more with their teachers in Canada because of the warmth and closeness they felt here. When asked what the best thing about school in Canada was, Grace gave two answers: “Lots of time and teachers are more friendly.” Grace also said, “you can communicate with your teachers, a lot more than how I used to in Korea.” Aiko said, “In Canada, most students, uh, how to say that, the relationship between teacher and friend is more friendly, in, from my point of view. But in Japan, is not so much friendly.” Ren said, “it’s very different from Japan and the teachers, they are, like, easy to talk with.” Grace felt that some of the Canadian teachers were strict as well, but this did not seem to change her overall opinion that teachers in Canada were friendlier. She said, “I think the teachers make the atmosphere to be more comfortable too. And, like, teachers, kind of, some teachers are like really strict too, but some teachers are more, like, friendly. More like friend.”

### 4.5.3 Developing positive relationships

Ren and Aiko were both descriptive about how these warm relationships were developed and how this affected their learning. Given the importance students placed on positive interactions with teachers, the insights provided are valuable for teachers wanting to develop good relationships with their students. For Ren, his Canadian teachers' willingness to joke and share personal information played a large role in developing a close relationship, as the following exchange illustrates:

Amanda: You said the teachers were different, can you describe that?

Ren: Yeah, they are like friendlier. They are, like, you really can feel like the teacher is, like, your friend or something. But in Japan they are, like, they have so high, um, how to say, pri- priority? You have to listen to them and, um, it's kinda scary to ask questions. So for here it's easier to ask question when you don't know something.

Amanda: Can you describe maybe how the teachers act? What makes the Canadian teachers more friendly? What do they do that is different?

Ren: They say some jokes about, yeah, and they sometimes, they also talk about their family, so, like, so you know more about the teacher. And it's different, each teachers are different, but yeah, some teachers do the "walk of shame" when you are late, and that's, that's pretty funny too (laughing).

Amanda: So how would you describe your teachers in Japan? What makes them unfriendly?

Ren: They basically just talk about, talk about class and what they are teaching, they just teach. They don't talk about fun things, about, or they don't share information about teachers experience or life. They just look kind of strict.

...

Amanda: So how come you don't talk to your teachers in Japan?

Ren: Um, they scary (laughs). But some, yeah, most of them are scary, but some are not that scary, but you don't have find many topic to talk with.

Amanda: No, nothing interesting? (Ren Laughs) So what kinds of things do you talk about with your teachers in Canada?

Ren: I, sometimes, like that teachers, they put some, put some pictures on the wall or something, so I ask about, like, "oh, where, like how, when did you take these pictures?", like this type of stuff. And also about where I don't know where I am studying. Like, yeah, but I do talk with some other things other than studying.

In addition to making his school experience more pleasant, the warm relationships Ren developed with his teachers in Canada also influenced his feeling towards his school work. When asked how his relationships with his teachers affected him as a student, Ren answered, “I think I learn better with this way ‘cause it’s like you can study with joy.”

In Aiko’s case, the feeling that her teachers cared about her personal success and learning helped her to build positive relationships with them. The amount of individual attention and help Aiko received from her teachers in Canada was an important difference between Canada and Japan. Aiko said that “In Japan, if they [students] make a fault, it does not have meaning. However, in here, if I make a fault, unsure that fault, they [teachers], uh, how to say, they pay attention to me more and more and make some help.” Aiko found that personal interest and attention her teachers gave her to be very motivating. She wrote that “If you work hard, your praised. My perception is that they know each and every student. If you do it, because they recognize you, I think you try harder.” Additionally, Aiko also seemed to appreciate that her Canadian teachers allowed for second chances. “In the case of Japan,” she wrote, “if you cross your teacher once, it’s hard to repair that relationship of trust.”

The positive relationships Aiko developed with her teachers were also a significant factor in shaping her attitudes about school in Canada and her decision to return to study here for a longer time period.

Aiko: When I was in junior high school, I was not able to go to school and there I did not like school. Yeah, so my mom says, “if you want to go there, study abroad, you can go”. And I said, “yeah, I want to go”. I came to Canada about four weeks when I was 15 years old and at that time I was able to go to school everyday. And then I go back, I went back to Japan, and I entered Japanese high school, but it so boring. So I decided to come here again, yeah.

...

Amanda: Earlier you said you didn’t like school in Japan, how come?

Aiko: I don't know why, but, uh, the relationship between the teacher and me is not good, so even though I had a lot of friends I did not go to class.

#### **4.5.4 Interacting with teachers: Observing cultural differences**

Aiko, Ren and Grace all reported that they interacted with their teachers more in Canada than in their home countries. They also reported that students interacted with teachers differently in Canada and that the behaviour of some of the students was a shock to them when they first arrived. Aiko said that:

When I came here I was surprised that the students call the teacher like "hey, yo". In Japan if we do the same thing, the teacher upset about this. Some students call the teacher like, uh, without Mr. or Miss. Yeah, I was very surprised.

It is interesting that Grace believed that both Korean and Canadian patterns of teacher/student interactions showed respect. In speaking of Canada, she said that:

Some teachers are really strict too, but some are more, like, friendly, more like friend. And students, kinda like even though they say, "I don't think that's right, blah, blah, blah", but they still respect the teacher. It just a different way of discussing stuff, but I think it's just different.

#### **4.5.5 Interacting with teachers: Holding on to cultural patterns**

Interacting with teachers seemed to be an area in which Aiko, Grace and Ren held on to the cultural beliefs and practices from their home countries. Even though all three students reported that their communication patterns with teachers had changed since they had been in Canada, the students did not fully adopt all of the patterns and habits of their Canadian classmates such as speaking and behaving informally, asking the teacher questions during class time and challenging the teacher's position in class.

As Grace spoke about her classmates informality in the classroom, it was interesting to note that while she said the behaviour did not bother her, she did not adopt these behaviours even though her teachers “don’t really have a problem with it.”

Amanda: So then is there anything you find, being in school in Canada, is there anything you find that other students do in Canada, in class, that you just don’t feel comfortable with or that you just don’t do?

Grace: At first I was surpr-, I thought, we, like, when I saw some students, like chewing gum or listening to music, kinda like while that teacher is speaking, or kinda even they are not listening, like plugging ear phones, like, one ear kinda like “ohp!”. Oh, that’s kinda, like, awkward for me to see. And, or, like I said, when teachers are saying something they are kinda giving their ideas or kinda trying to talk to them or sometimes, like, talking back to teacher. Like, even though, like, some teachers, I don’t think they don’t really have a big problem with it, I think that’s just a way of, I guess they think it’s just way of talking to each other. At first that kind of surprised me, but there’s nothing that actually bother me or that I don’t like or anything like that.

Amanda: So have you found that you are used to students doing that now? Talking back to their teachers?

Grace: Yeah. Yeah.

Amanda: So do you do that now?

Grace: No, no. (laughs and shakes head)

Grace’s facial expression and the shocked tone of her response to the question of whether or not she behaved that way suggested that she thought it was inappropriate and that even hinting that she would act that way was humorous.

These findings are consistent with those of Tompson and Tompson (1996) where university level international students in the United States also indicated that they found their host country’s classrooms more informal than those of their home countries. Like Grace, most of the students in this study agreed that it would be difficult to adopt the in-class behaviours of the other students because these behaviours would be unacceptable in their home countries.

Despite the fact that she believed that her classmates still respected their teachers, Grace and Ren consistently described student input into the lessons in negative terms. Ren described asking questions in class as “interrupting” and both Grace and Ren described openly disagreeing or challenging the teacher as “talking back.” These negative views of student participation during a lesson are consistent with the findings of Jin and Cortazzi (1998), who reported that the Chinese students they studied in the UK did not appreciate the comments made by their British classmates and thought they were rude for interrupting the teacher.

#### ***4.5.5.1 Asking questions***

All three students expressed a reluctance to ask their teachers questions during class time. The two factors that seemed to influence this behaviour were cultural ideas about how to show respect and concerns about language proficiency.

Both Grace and Ren described situations where there was very little interaction between teachers and students during class time in their home countries and asking questions was seen as rude, even when students were having problems. Grace said that in Korea:

They are, like, we have to respect the elders, right. It’s like even though we have kinda problem, we cannot directly or tell them straight. Here, like when I first came, I was kinda shocked or surprised at how students can kinda tells the teacher right way.

When asked if there was any difference between how students asked questions in Canada and in Japan, Ren said that:

They ask differently, because in Japan there are student ask, but they ask after school, I mean class. They go to the teacher individually, not in the class they raise hand. But here, any student ask the question right after when student doesn’t know the question. Yeah, that’s the difference, so they both actually ask a lot of question, I mean most Japanese student and Canadian student, just the way they ask is different.

The literature has also been consistent in portraying Asian classrooms in this manner (Chan, 1999; Jin & Cortazzi, 1998). In addition to showing respect to the teacher, Grace also identified logistical factors as a hindrance to students' interactions with teachers due to the high number of students in her classes.

Ren and Aiko maintained their pattern of asking questions outside of class even though they felt comfortable with their teachers and saw other students asking questions in class. Aiko wrote that "because you're usually in the same room, you can get to know them [teachers] and it makes asking questions easy (outside of class!)." Ren said that:

I am so used to asking the teacher individually, so I actually, like, even in this school, I usually ask the teachers after class. I don't know how teacher feels, but I feel kinda rude to ask, I mean interrupt. Yeah, so I can't do it.

When asked what he thought about his classmates' questions, Ren said "sometimes, like when I don't know this question, and the other student doesn't know as well, so I feel like, oh, they do the work for me so I don't have to ask. So that's good." Ren's comments are similar to ones made by a group of Chinese students in Britain in a study by Jin and Cortazzi (1998). These students stressed that "sometimes they do not ask questions because they do not want to disturb the class or waste time; they respect the teacher and do not want to give problems to the teacher" (Jin & Cortazzi (1998), p. 753). Unlike Ren however, the Chinese students in this study did not appreciate the questions their British classmates asked in class.

Grace identified language difficulties and the desire to avoid embarrassing situations for herself as a hindrance to asking questions during class in Canada. When asked if she participated and asked her teachers questions more in class in Canada, she said:

Yes. But sometimes it's hard because, like, like I do talk to teacher a lot and I do ask questions, more than I used to in Korea, but sometimes, like in a Socials class or like some kinda of class that has to do with hard language or, like, vocabulary or stuff that I don't know, like history and stuff, it's hard to ask because, (pause), I don't really feel embarrassed or anything, but it's just, like, what if I speak in wrong way, or if I used the wrong vocabulary? And I just, 'cause, like, I'm not Canadian, and there's so much, like, Canadian friends that kinda looks at you when I ask questions, kinda nervous. But, yeah I try.

These same concerns over language were also mentioned by the university level international students in studies by Tompson and Tompson (1996) and Brown (2008) who indicated that their English language proficiency hindered their participation in the classroom.

#### ***4.5.5.2 Disagreeing with teachers***

Grace indicated that students' ability to openly disagree or challenge the teacher was a major difference between Canada and Korea. Grace said this about communicating with her teachers:

It's like, in Korea, it's like they're elders. They are, like, we have to respect the elders, right. It's like even though we have kinda problem, we cannot directly or tell them straight. Here, like when I first came, I was kinda shocked or surprised at how students can kinda tells the teacher right away; or their, like, ideas, or kinda when the teachers, they say something, "oh, I don't think that's right, blah, blah, blah", kinda like communicating, debating with each other. It's like, for me in Korea, like, we have like forty two, we used to have fifty students in one class so it's, like, first of all hard to actually communicate with teacher directly and it's kinda only saying or teaching, or stuff. We cannot kinda object the ideas or telling them "oh, I think this way" kinda. It's because they're telling us, they're teaching us and they're like so much older than us.

Although Grace felt that she could not openly disagree with or challenge her Korean teachers in class, this did not mean that she passively accepted or agreed with everything they said. Grace made several remarks that indicated that she did not always agree with or like what her Korean teachers told her to do. She said "In Korea, for me, even though, like sometimes I don't like the way, if they tells us exactly how to do, I just have to follow them." These comments highlight the need to more critically examine the stereotype of the 'passive Asian student' and support Littlewood's (2000) argument that

“Asian students do not, in fact, wish to be spoon-fed with facts from an all-knowing ‘fount of knowledge.’ They want to explore themselves and find their own answers” (p. 34).

For Grace, Ren and Aiko, the social meaning of their communication with teachers went beyond learning and acquiring information and was closely tied to issues of respect. It is interesting that after being exposed to Canadian classroom communication patterns, Aiko, Grace and Ren still maintained the cultural practices of their home countries, even though they realized that it was acceptable to behave differently. This is consistent with the literature on acculturation and adaptation which describes the process as one of negotiation in which some new cultural patterns are adopted while others are not (Berry, 1997).

Differences in power and position between teachers and students in Japan, Korea, and Canada are evident in the students’ comments. The patterns of interaction described by the students seem to support Hofstede’s (1986) dimension of *power distance* in his four dimensional model of cultural differences. In this model, *power distance* refers to “the extent to which the less powerful persons in a society accept inequality in power and consider it normal” (Hofstede, 1986, pg. 307). According to this model, Canada’s mainstream culture rates lower in power distance than either Japan or Korea, meaning that explicit signs of inequality are less accepted here than in either of those countries. The relatively high power distance scores for Japan and Korea corresponds to the higher level of formality in the classrooms of those countries reported by the students and the relatively low power distance score for Canada corresponds to the lower level of formality the students perceived in Canada.

#### 4.5.6 Teachers: Comparing stereotypes and reality

Considering the different social roles and expectations of teachers in Asian and Western educational cultures, it is interesting that Aiko, Ren and Grace all expressed the opinion that their Canadian teachers worked about as hard as the teachers in their home countries. When asked if there was any difference in how hard the teachers worked, Ren said, “I don't really know about Japanese teachers because they never share story and, but, maybe I think all teachers are working hard.” Aiko and Grace both felt that some teachers in both countries worked hard while others didn't, something that seems to be at odds with the image of the stereotypical Asian teacher who is respected and must have all the answers.

Amanda: ...Do you think there is a difference in the teachers? Do the teachers work harder in one country or another?

Grace: Um, I think teachers work kinda harder in Korea because there is lots of really smart, or people who really want to learn more. They kinda ask them question, or, they, you know. So I guess teachers have to know more, lots more than students know because now these days the students know so much more than some teachers do. There is after schooling. But, but I think it half, half because in Korea usually teachers have to work harder than, like, here because they have to know lots of, more than students do. But sometimes because students know more and student learn all from the tutoring, they kind of have attitude, or kind of think that “oh, you know, I don't know because you guys learn everything afterschool, so”, kinda like that. I say half, half.

Grace's comments both confirm the general assumption that Asian teachers are seen as all-knowing authority figures while at the same time exposing this as stereotypical and not true of all teachers. Aiko's comments also reveal this pattern.

Amanda: So do you think that teachers work harder in Japan or Canada? Do you think there is a difference at all or are they maybe the same?

Aiko: Some teacher work hard, but some teacher didn't.

Amanda: So they, would you say that some work hard and some don't? (Aiko nods). Is that the same as Japan?

Aiko: Yeah, same.

## 4.6 Comparing teaching styles and methods

### 4.6.1 Student centered vs. teacher centered

Aiko, Ren and Grace all noted differences in the teaching styles and methods used in their home countries and in Canada. The overall picture of the educational culture in their home countries was portrayed as being teacher-centered. Grace wrote that “in Korean schools, students’ learning and other events are led by teachers.” Grace was by far the most descriptive in this area and she described a system where students were expected to accept and memorize what their teacher taught them. In the system Grace described, “telling” was equivalent to “teaching.” She said, “they’re telling us, they’re teaching us.” Grace also felt that “In Korea, they’re like, well no one explains. We just have to take notes and we just listen and that’s like about it.” Grace also indicated the primacy of the teacher’s knowledge when she said that “in Korea they kinda tells you all the instruction right, and they kinda tells you how to do it, how to follow.” Grace also said that in Korea, “we don’t have that much opportunity, kinda of. We just have to follow what teachers say, what they tells us to do.”

Ren and Aiko did not describe the differences in teaching styles in-depth, but their comments also suggested a teacher-centered approach. In speaking of his teachers, Ren said, “you have to listen to them and, um, it’s kinda scary to ask questions.” Ren also used the phrase “being controlled” to describe students in Japan. Aiko described a teacher-driven classroom where teachers made the decisions about who participated in class and how:

In Japan, all students have to, uh, uh, I, uh, when teacher gives a question, you have to answer it in front of students, or yeah, all the time. In Canada it’s not all the time. If student want no answer the question, they just say, “ra, ra, ra” [waves hand to indicate refusal], but in Japan they have to do it.

In contrast to the more teacher-centered classrooms found in their home countries, the students described their Canadian classrooms as more focused on the individual students. Again, Grace was the most descriptive in this area and she wrote that in Canada, “most students do their works following their own plans and towards their own dreams. In their school lessons, students have more conversations with their teachers, more times for self-study and less time to listen to teachers’ explanations.”

Rather than give detailed, teacher-generated explanations and directions at the outset of an assignment to guide students to the final objective, the Canadian teachers gave Grace more general outlines or guidelines and expected her to develop her own ideas and approaches which were then used to teach the intended outcomes. Grace described it this way, “in Korea, before you hand stuff in, they give you lots of feedback, like, or how to do it. And here it’s like after you, they give you feedback.” She also said that:

Like here, the project, it’s like, ‘oh this is kinda what you have to do’ and then they don’t touch with anything else. And once we do it, they just kinda give us feedback. It’s not like in Korea, they kind of, ‘oh no, you can not do that way, you have to do this way’ and then everything is kind of same with the others.

Although Grace appreciated that the academic freedom she found in Canada allowed her to develop her own ideas, she sometimes found this frustrating because she was not always sure what her teachers wanted her to do. When asked if there was anything that her teachers could do to help her, Grace responded this way:

I don’t know, I usually, sometimes I don’t get the, like what they want us to do, cause, like, like I said, it’s kinda different from Korea. It’s like, they’re like, they say, “oh, this is what you have to do, kinda looks like this, but you have to finish this, and then due next day”. And I’m like, “so what exactly do you want us to do?”

#### 4.6.2 Motivation and teaching style

The Canadian teaching styles and methods were a source of motivation for Grace. Because her teachers did not always give her explicit, detailed directions, Grace found herself working much harder as she tried to produce assignments that her teachers would approve of. Grace also felt that receiving feedback after trying assignments on her own helped her to learn more than receiving detailed instructions beforehand.

Grace: In Korea, for me, even though, like sometimes I don't like the way, if they tells us exactly how to do I just have to follow them, but then there's lots of competition because everybody is kinda, like, doing the same way right. But here, it's like having, like, lots harder time to do or finish my work, but then after, then they give you feed back, so I kinda learn stuff, but then still it's like my mark is still kinda lower kinda.

Amanda: So you find your marks are lower in Canada then?

Grace: Um (pause)

Amanda: Is that what you meant or did you mean something else?

Grace: I guess I kinda said it in that way, but no, my mark is actually better here. Because I try lots. I guess, yeah they give you feedback after, I don't want to get lower mark, I guess I try harder.

...

Amanda: As far as learning and understanding the ideas that your teachers are trying to help you with, did you find that the Korean way of giving instruction you handed your work in, did that help you understand better or did the Canadian way of giving feedback afterwards? Which way do you think helps you understand?

Grace: Oh, this is hard (pause). Laughs. Canadian.

One of Grace's comments also suggests that she may have found the educational environment more able to respond to her individual needs rather than expecting her to fit into a pre-defined mold. When asked if she found speaking with the other students during group projects and at school helped her, Grace said that "yeah, kinda. Like when I have a problem it's easier to ask my friends and teachers sometimes 'cause they more think kinda more like how *I* can understand better."

Like Grace, Ren also found the teaching style in Canada more motivating than the one he experienced in his home country. In addition to the motivation he found from being able to “study with joy,” Ren also found the more student-centered Canadian practice of valuing a students’ process as well as their product to be very motivating. Ren felt that this teaching style, where he received credit for his thinking process, even when he did not get the answer completely correct, helped him to ‘learn better’ and inspired him to work harder because he didn’t feel like his efforts were a waste of time.

Amanda: So did you find that there is any difference in how strict they are with their marking? Do they mark easier? Or harder? Or the same?

Ren: Depends on the teacher actually. Yeah, yeah really. Some teacher really marks easier and some teacher really strict, even in Canada. So yeah, in Japan I think the teachers are pretty picky, I mean strict. Even if a little bit wrong they just going to say the whole question is wrong. No mark for (shakes head “no” and laughs).

Amanda: And you don’t find that as much here?

Ren: No, not really. They usually give you credit, they think the way your thinking is right so you have half mark and stuff.

Amanda: And what are your thoughts about this?

Ren: I like this way better (laughs).

Amanda: You like this way better (laughing). Do you find that you think you are learning more or is it just easier to get marks?

Ren: I actually think it is learning more because in the Japanese way, they, when I try hard, but, they kind of think if the answer is not right then it is all wrong and I feel like my effort is all gone. So I feel like, so, like, I don’t want to do this and stuff like that. But this way they try to make you, like, not give up. So yeah, I prefer this way.

#### **4.6.3 Comparing classroom activities and assignments**

Of all of the differences reported by the students, the differences in the types of class work and activities, such as essays, projects, presentations, worksheets, individual and group work and homework, seemed to be the least important to them. None of the students brought these differences up themselves and they all needed prompting from me

to discuss them in detail. Each student differed in the degree to which they felt Canadian practices differed from those in their home countries. Ren and Aiko found few differences while Grace felt they were very different. The common difference noted was that the students did more group work in Canada than they did in their home countries. It should also be noted that Ren and Aiko's perceptions of the differences in school work were not consistent throughout their interviews and they changed their minds as I asked them more questions. As noted in the previous chapter, it is possible that in Aiko's case this may have been partly due to the difficulty she had with the English interview. It is also possible that these changes in opinion stem from the fact that these differences were unimportant to them and as a result they had not really thought about them very much and it required more questioning and thought to reveal their true opinions.

The following passage illustrates how Aiko's views on school work changed throughout the interview. Initially Aiko said that the school work in Canada was almost the same as it was in Japan, but further questioning revealed that she thought that there was more individual work in Japan and more group work, projects and presentations in Canada, although these types of activities were done in both countries.

Amanda: Now I am wondering about classroom activities. And what I mean by that is group work, or working together, or just listening to the teacher, or just working on worksheets, or projects or different types of things you might do. (pause, Aiko nods). So in terms of things that you do in the classroom, like the assignments your teacher gives you, are there any differences in your classroom work that you can think of?

Aiko: Almost same...

...

Amanda: Are there any differences you can think of? Like maybe in terms of group projects?

Aiko: In here a lot of group work, yeah. Um, and a lot of presentation.

...

Amanda: So a lot of group work and a lot of presentations?

Aiko: Yeah (nods).

Is that the type of work you do in Japan too?

Aiko: Not so much. Sometimes they do that.

Amanda: So what type of class work would you do in Japan?

Aiko: They are individual.

It is interesting that Aiko did not seem to like the differences in school work. She said that she preferred the individual work that she did in Japan because “I can do what I want to do” she said.

Both Aiko and Ren reported that they did not have very many class discussions in Canada. When asked if he had more class discussions in one country or another, Ren replied, “In Japan I think they have more. The students like to talk more...yeah it depends on student. In here some student really talk, so (pause), but the ones I know, I will say the Japanese student will talk more.” Ren’s comment about Japanese students speaking more in class than Canadian students is interesting in light of the fact that he said earlier in the interview that the Japanese students do not ask their teacher questions in class but the Canadian students did. It is possible that these comments reveal a classroom power structure in which students are allowed and encouraged to speak to other students, or peers, but not to their teachers who are in authority over them. Aside from observing that Japanese students participate more in class discussions, the only other difference Ren perceived was that teachers allowed more group work in Canada, although this view only came out after a series of questions probing his responses.

Ren: Oh, that’s (long pause), actually I can’t find any difference. It’s about the same I think, when the work, the types of work, yeah.

Amanda: How would you describe, like what type of work does your teacher get you to do?

Ren: Basically they give you the book work, on like what page and you do it, usually individually in Japan. Group work, then usually a discussion, things you do in group work.

Amanda: So you did that in Japan?

Ren: In Japan, discussion, if it is related to discussion, then we will do make groups, but if it's just a bookwork, usually they don't do group work. I mean in Japan they just do individual. Actually here sometimes, even the bookwork the teacher will say you can work group or individual.

Amanda: So if I am hearing you correctly, both in both Japan and Canada, they both give a lot of bookwork. And sometimes you can work on it in groups here, but in Japan it's mostly individual?

Ren: Individual bookwork, yeah.

Grace on the other hand found a great deal of difference between the work she did in Korea and the work she did in Canada. She reported that in Canada she did more group work, project work, presentations and essays, while in Korea she was assigned more individual work, worksheets and tests. Grace also felt that the Canadian activities were better for her learning and provided more motivation for her to work hard.

Grace: In Korea we don't have that much project actually. And essays, I don't think we write any essays. But there is definitely lots of worksheets that we have to do. Um, we usually follow our textbook. Here [in Canada], more like, like notes and kinda teacher explaining and then we do project and work and homework. We usually learn everything by textbook and we have to do the works on textbook and like notes, [In Korea] it's kinda like same as here but worksheet and, like group project, not really, it's just more self think we have to do and then it's just lots of tests. Like here [in Canada] we have kinda one test tomorrow and then Socials test next week kind of. But in Korea, we have mid-term and final and that's pretty much all the test we have but that's really a lot of tests.

Amanda: So in Korea you have less tests?

Grace: More. Because here it's more like quizzes and big tests, but in Korea, even though we have like every two months, it's like really big tests and we have like eight that are like written all together.

Amanda: So just to make sure that I understand. So in Korea you said it's mostly all individual and worksheets and mostly textbooks and taking notes. And in Canada, the difference is more group work, group project and individual projects?

Grace: And projects and essays and yeah. Yeah.

Amanda: So the activities sound quite different, do you think you learn better with one style of activities over another?

Grace: (long pause) Um, learning, um. I think I learn more in Canada. But yeah, it's just, in Korea, like, usually come home and I have to do everything by my self, like self working, so, it still helped me, but it just didn't really motivate me to do harder.

Grace's descriptions of school in Korea and the differences in school work she noted between Korea and Canada are in keeping with the generalizations made in the literature about education in both Confucian Heritage-Culture and Western countries. Although further questioning revealed that Aiko and Ren did perceive some differences between the class activities in Japan and Canada, it is interesting that their dominant impression seemed to be one of similarity. It is possible that the similarity of classroom activities observed by Aiko, who felt they were "almost same," and Ren, who said that "actually I can't find any differences," is a result of the fact that the descriptions of Eastern and Western education found in the literature are generalities that do not describe individual classrooms. It is possible that the classrooms Aiko and Ren experienced in Japan and in Canada did not fit into the stereotypical patterns associated with education in these two countries. Aiko and Ren's responses may also stem from the fact that neither student had attended high school in Japan before coming to Canada. When asked in the questionnaire whether there were any differences in the types of classroom activities Aiko wrote "when I was in junior high I didn't really go to school, so I don't really know." Ren left Japan after completing grade eight and spent two years in the United States before coming to Canada. Aiko and Ren therefore had limited experience with high school in Japan and were possibly comparing their experiences in Japanese elementary and middle school schools to Canadian high schools. Some authors have suggested that the instruction in Japanese elementary schools is very student-centered and that teachers use a variety of instructional materials and approaches and that it is not until middle school that students start to receive more direct, lecture-style instruction (Flaitz et al.,

2003). It is also possible that Aiko and Ren's impression of instructional similarity might also be a reflection of more recent changes in Japan's educational culture, which Stapleton (2002) suggests include Western influences and practices.

#### **4.7 Summary**

Although each student in this study placed different emphasis on certain aspects of their experience in Canada, the similarities in the students' responses reveal important patterns. The students in this study were very positive in their perception of the Canadian education system and unanimously agreed that they preferred studying in Canada over studying in their home countries. Most of the cultural differences discussed in the interviews were perceived as positive and beneficial rather than problematic. The students in this study were most concerned with the social aspects of their experience and both the relationships they developed with their teachers as well as the increase in personal freedom and responsibility were seen as very motivating. Further study is needed to determine how common these attitudes are among international high school students. The implications of these findings for future research and suggestions for classroom practice will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusions**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The first half of this final chapter contains a summary of the preceding four chapters. In this summary section I briefly describe the background of the study and the issues that motivated me to conduct it as well as a recapitulation of the themes found in my review of the literature. The method as well as a short discussion of the major findings are also included. In the second half of the chapter I describe my conclusions. In this section I reflect on the methodology and how it may have influenced the findings, discuss my hypotheses and the support, or lack of support they received from the findings of this study. This chapter concludes with my thoughts on what the findings might mean for the classroom and my suggestions for future research.

### **5.2 Summary**

#### **5.2.1 Background**

International students play a unique and important role in the diversification of schools in Canada. The number of international students attending school in British Columbia, both at the university and secondary level, has grown substantially in recent years (BC Ministry of Education, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2011). One can expect this trend to continue as international students have become an important source of revenue for many BC schools. Understanding and meeting the needs of international students is therefore a benefit to both students and school districts.

### **5.2.2 The issue**

Ideas about education and learning vary greatly throughout the world and researchers have identified several points of cultural disagreement such as the role of the teacher and expected patterns of classroom communication (Gunderson, 2009; Jones, 1999). The way students from various cultures perceive and understand cultural differences in education can have a profound impact on their attitudes towards schooling in Canada as well as their success in the Canadian system. Studies of cross-cultural learning experiences have indicated that when the cultural expectations of the school and the student do not align, misunderstandings and problems can arise (Brown, 2008; Fox, 1994; Gunderson, 2000; Gunderson, 2007; Li, 2006; Reyes, 1992). As neither immigrants nor native-born Canadians, international high school students have a unique identity. Unfortunately, their experiences and perspectives have been largely overlooked in the literature and little is known about these students.

### **5.2.3 Themes from the literature**

Although there is currently little research focusing on the experiences of high school international students studying in English-speaking Western countries, there is a large body of related research dealing with university level international students and adolescent immigrant students. The findings of this research demonstrate that the international student population is very diverse (Fox, 1994). This research also indicates that students in cross-cultural settings react to educational experiences in different ways and that these reactions seem to depend on several personal and environmental factors (Tran, 2011). Research also indicates that some common Western interpretations of

educational practices in other cultures may actually be misinterpretations. An example of this is the tendency of some Westerners to view the absence of Chinese students' voluntary classroom participation as a sign of passivity, while Chinese students do not (Littlewood, 2000). This underscores the need for more research aimed at understanding how students themselves perceive and interpret their experiences.

Interestingly, most of the research on cross-cultural learning experiences is concerned with students' problems and there is little focus on what international students do well or what they perceive as positive. This is concerning and suggests that research in this area has been directed by a narrow view of the international student experience.

#### **5.2.4 Method**

In this study I explored international students' perspectives on the cultural differences they encountered while studying in a Canadian high school through semi-structured personal interviews and written responses. Three students participated, one from Korea and two from Japan. After having the purpose of the study explained to them, students were given the interview questions in advance and asked to respond to them in writing. The questions had been translated into their first languages and students were asked to answer in the language of their choice. Students, for the most part, chose to answer in their first language and their responses were later translated into English. A semi-structured interview was then conducted and recorded at the school where students answered the interview questions in English. The undirected nature of the initial interview question was intended to give students the opportunity to indicate which issues

were most important to them. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed me to ask students to expand and clarify their answers.

### **5.2.5 Data analysis**

The interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim by me and together with the written responses were analyzed for themes and patterns. Responses containing recurring topics or ideas were grouped together under various themes and analyzed for patterns of similarity or difference between students. The students' responses were then compared to findings from the literature.

The interview transcripts and written responses were also analyzed for evidence of students' priorities by giving attention to who brought up which topics, when these topics emerged, and how often these topics were mentioned by students. This was done in an effort to differentiate between which cultural differences the students themselves thought were important and which differences I thought were important.

### **5.2.6 Major findings**

The students in this study were most concerned with the social aspects of their experience and cultural differences relating to their interactions with others, especially their teachers, were discussed at length. Some of the topics discussed by the students reflect those already found in the literature, such as relationships with teachers and class participation. Other topics, such as motivation and the role of personal and academic freedom in learning, are less prevalent in the literature. The social aspects most discussed by all three students include the increase of personal freedom and autonomy they felt in

Canada, the positive relationships they had with their Canadian teachers and the student-centered nature of the Canadian teaching methods.

Personal freedom and autonomy came in many forms and included having more freedom outside of the classroom, such as the ability to openly have a boyfriend or girlfriend, and having more freedom inside the classroom, such as the ability to openly disagree with the teacher, ask questions during class time and make decisions about how to complete school projects. One student said that the autonomy and personal responsibility she felt greatly increased her motivation to learn and work hard in school.

The positive relationships students had with their teachers were very important to all three students. Teachers were described as “warm” and “friendly.” The use of humour and the willingness of teachers to talk about subjects other than the course material, including appropriate personal stories, helped to make the Canadian teachers seem approachable and helped the students feel comfortable asking class-related questions. Students saw the willingness of teachers to re-explain concepts and help correct individual mistakes as evidence that their teachers cared about them and this also helped in building positive relationships. Although students reported that they spoke to their teachers more in Canada than they did in their home countries, they did not fully adopt their Canadian classmates’ communication patterns when interacting with their teachers. Participants reported that they did not address their teachers informally or ask many questions during class time.

The participants saw the student-centered nature of the Canadian teaching methods as both helpful and motivating. One student appreciated the opportunity to make decisions about how to approach her projects. She said that the lack of explicit, teacher-

directed instructions given about assignments and projects motivated her to work harder in Canada than she had in Korea. Another student found that the value his teachers placed on his thinking process by giving partial marks was motivating because he felt that his effort and partial understanding was valued and not a waste of time or effort.

Differences relating to the school environment, such as the less strenuous school schedule and course load, were also important to the students. Students appreciated the increased amounts of discretionary time they enjoyed in Canada and felt that this free time helped them to learn by reducing their stress levels, giving them more time to come to a deeper understanding of topics covered in class and allowing them to have the time they felt was necessary to be creative in their work.

The social and environmental differences were all perceived as positive and students reported feeling more motivated and less stressed because of them. The students felt that these differences increased their enjoyment of learning as well as their ability to learn. Instructional differences, in terms of types of classroom activities and assignments, were also discussed but did not seem as important to students.

All three students said that they personally preferred studying to Canada to studying in their home countries, however they did not seem to feel that one system was better than the other overall. Although the students said that the Canadian system worked better for them, that they enjoyed learning in Canada more than in their home countries and that they felt they understood what they were learning in Canada better than they understood it at home, both systems were seen to have advantages. Grace and Ren expressed the opinion that each educational system could work better for different students depending on their personal preferences and background.

## **5.8 Conclusions: Reflections on the methodology**

This study was originally designed to explore student perceptions and attitudes through focus groups. This approach however, was not possible as some students were late, absent or requested a private interview instead of participating in a focus group. As a result, individual semi-structured interviews and written responses were used to investigate students' experiences. This change in approach highlights an important observation about doing research with this group: it is difficult. In addition to participants' attendance, there were other obstacles to conducting the study. For example, both the assent and consent forms had to be translated into the first languages of the students. As there were six first languages spoken in the ESL classrooms I visited (Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, Turkish, Spanish and Russian), this process was both time consuming and costly. Working within timelines acceptable to the school district was also a challenge because taking students out of the classroom, especially around exam periods, was a concern and necessitated a delay in the timing of the study. Additionally, a substantial number of international students attend school in Canada for short periods, ranging from a few months to a few weeks. The transient nature of this student population affected the level of participation in the study as some students who expressed interest in participating were not able to do so because they were returning home before I was scheduled to come back for the interviews.

The difficulty inherent in conducting research with adolescent international students has been noted by others. Reflecting on the lack of research on this group, Popadiuk (2010) noted that:

Research projects with adolescents or specifically identified organizations, like school districts, often require lengthy ethics approvals from both the university and the organization. Since these issues are complex, time consuming, and costly, I believe that many researchers focus on post-secondary international students as a way of streamlining the process. Unfortunately, this means that younger, more vulnerable international students are rarely the focus of research inquiries. (p. 1523-4)

Despite the difficulties associated with conducting research with international students attending high school in Canada, this area is deserving of more attention.

The small number of students participating in this study and the self-selection process preclude making general assumptions about international students and it is not possible to know the degree to which the attitudes expressed in this study represent international student opinion. The findings do however, contribute to our understanding of international student experiences and can be used to support various models and theories about cross-cultural adaptation in the context of international education.

It is possible that the positive nature of the students' responses, common among all three participants, was a reflection of the self-selection process because students who held negative views may have been either uninterested or uncomfortable in participating in a study such as this.

It is also difficult to know with certainty whether or not the views expressed by the students in this study actually represent their true feelings, however the consistency of the students' views in the interviews and written responses suggests that their answers did reflect their actual feelings, as does their self-reports about their past behaviour. Both Aiko and Grace reported that they had attended school in Canada, gone back to their home countries, and then chosen to return. Assuming these accounts are accurate, coming back to Canada is something they would presumably not have done if they did not like the Canadian educational system. On the other hand, the positive attitudes

expressed by the students may have been influenced by my position as a member of the UBC community, thereby making me a part of, or perhaps in the students' eyes a representative of, the Canadian school system I was asking them to comment on.

Although I think it is unlikely that the students in this study were intentionally deceptive and held negative views about their Canadian education while expressing positive ones, it is possible that my position as a UBC graduate student may have encouraged students to over emphasize the strength of their positive feelings in an effort to please. The fact that each student was nearing graduation and was therefore potentially considering attending university in Canada could possibly have provided some incentive to please and provide positive answers.

## **5.9 Conclusions: Reflections on the hypotheses**

### **5.9.1 Many differences**

Of my three original hypotheses, my findings supported only the first: that the students would identify many educational differences between the school(s) they attended in their home countries and their school in Canada. Several differences were noted by the students and these differences were important and meaningful to them. Grace, Aiko and Ren all saw these differences as enhancing their ability to learn as well as their enjoyment of learning.

Interestingly, the students did not focus on the instructional differences in terms of classroom learning activities and assignments. These differences were only discussed when prompted by me and although all three students identified some instructional

differences, at different points in the interviews both Aiko and Ren said that they didn't think there were many differences between the learning activities in Japan and Canada.

The students' observations about the differences in education reveal that not all cultural differences were of equal importance to them. The social differences, especially their relationships and interactions with teachers and the independence and freedom they felt, were more important to them than the instructional differences, a conclusion also supported by the findings of Moores and Popadiuk (2011). This was clearly evident in Aiko's interview where she said that even though she liked the individual work done in Japan more than the group work done in Canada because she enjoyed working on her own, she still preferred studying in Canada because of the improved relationships she had with her teachers which were more important to her. This suggests that teachers should not underestimate the importance of their relationships with their students and view the effort put into these relationships as a valuable investment.

Although only specifically asked about the educational differences they experienced in Canada, the students spoke about some societal differences not specifically related to the classroom, such as the ability to openly have a boyfriend or girlfriend, have piercings and have a driver's license. This suggests that students' experiences in Canada outside of the classroom are important to them and perhaps have an influence on their perception and evaluation of the Canadian educational system. These societal differences along with the non-instructional school-related differences, such as wearing make-up and one's own clothes to school, highlight the rich cultural and social context in which learning takes place. These findings demonstrate that the experiences and perspectives of international students cannot be understood by looking at

instructional differences in isolation with no consideration of the larger social context these differences occur in.

### **5.9.2 Differences seen as positive**

My second hypothesis was that the students would see some of these differences as problematic or frustrating. This was not the case. Although there was one instance where Grace reported that the open-ended nature of her Canadian assignments sometimes confused her because she did not always have a clear understanding of what her teachers wanted her to do, the students were very clear in their evaluation that, overall, the differences they described facilitated their learning rather than caused problems.

Given the tendency of some research dealing with international students to focus on the more negative aspects of their experience and on the problems created by cultural differences, the positive responses given by the students in this study are somewhat surprising. This is not to say however, that the absence of discussion about problems or frustrations in the interviews and responses means the students did not have problems, that they had always held such positive feelings about schooling in Canada, or that there was nothing about their Canadian school frustrated them. The specific differences noted and discussed by the students however, were seen positively. One possible interpretation is that the negative focus in the literature is the result of researcher bias rather than a reflection of students' own perceptions of their experience. Another interpretation is that the attitudes expressed by the students in this study are not commonly held among international students and may be a reflection of the self-selection process or influenced by a desire to please the researcher.

Although not enough background information about the students was collected to suggest which influences may play a role in the students' positive views of their Canadian education, it is possible to explain these findings in terms of various models of cultural adaptation. According to the traditional U-curved model, sojourners are initially positive about their new experiences, then go through several periods of adjustment and cultural negotiation, often characterized as difficult, and later come to have fewer difficulties and a more positive outlook (Lysgaard, 1955). A newer model, proposed by Ward, Okura, Kennedy and Kojima (1998), describes the acculturation process as one where adjustment problems are most difficult in the initial stages of the sojourn and then decrease over time. Although these models describe the acculturation process differently, they both suggest that a positive attitude will be correlated with the length of time that a sojourner has been in the new society. The students in this study had spent considerable time in Canada prior to the interviews and the positive nature of their responses may be explained as a function of the amount of time spent studying in a Western environment, as predicted by the two acculturation models discussed above.

It is possible that the amount of control students believed they had over the decision to study in Canada also influenced their positive view of the experience. Both Grace and Aiko said that they had spent time studying in Canada before returning to their home countries where they then made the informed decision to return to Canada.

### **5.9.3 Differences facilitating learning**

My third hypothesis, that the students would perceive at least some of these differences as having a negative impact on their learning, was also refuted. The students

in this study saw the cultural differences in Canada as enhancing both their ability to learn as well as their enjoyment of learning. This finding supports the conclusion that while learning styles and preferences may still be influenced by culture, they are not determined by it as all three students preferred learning in a foreign cultural context.

It is also noteworthy that while the students felt that Canadian educational practices were beneficial for their learning, they did not adopt all of the cultural patterns they observed, specifically not adopting the informal manner with which many of their peers interacted with their teachers and the practice of asking many questions during classroom instruction. This finding supports theories of cross-cultural adaptation which claim that acculturation is a process which involves negotiation with some old cultural practices being retained and some new practices being adopted and not a process in which one changes from having one culture to having another, or becomes bicultural by alternately switching between two distinct ways of behaving or thinking about the world (Berry, 1997).

## **5.10 Implications for the classroom**

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions may be of benefit to classroom teachers. In the interviews, all three students repeatedly described their Canadian teachers as “friendly” and this was very important to them. “Friendly” teachers help them to feel comfortable in the classroom and comfortable asking questions and discussing their assignments which helped them learn. Consequently, teachers should realize that the positive interactions they have with their international students may be very important and meaningful to them. Teachers should feel confident that the energy

put into building these relationships is worth the effort. The students described several ways in which their teachers had created an inviting classroom atmosphere and warm relationships and the following suggestions reflect their descriptions.

Teachers may want to consider sharing appropriate personal details and stories about family and various out-of-school interests and activities. This could include posting various photos or other artifacts gathered from vacations or other events. Having information about his teachers' lives and experiences gave Ren the impression that they were friendly and approachable. Ren's comments suggest that photos his teacher had posted in the room provided a starting point for conversation as he was able to ask about where the photos were taken, thereby opening lines of communication. For Ren, having conversations about things other than the school curriculum was an important part of having a good relationship and made asking questions about school-related work more comfortable. Teachers may also want to consider their use of humour in the classroom. Telling jokes and engaging students in humorous ways with witty remarks were important to Ren.

Teachers may also want to consider the time spent helping students with their assignments both during and after class. The willingness of teachers to assist them with their work was very important to all three students. Making the effort to offer alternate explanations and helping students correct their individual mistakes were also very important in helping students feel like their teachers cared about them. Although assisting students in this way is already considered a hallmark of good teaching, the findings of this study give additional insight into the importance of these practices from

the students' perspective and serve as encouragement for teachers to continue showing recognizable concern for their students' individual progress.

This study's findings also suggest that teachers should not make assumptions about international students' understanding of the course material by their classroom participation or expect that they will always ask questions in class when they don't understand something. If teachers want students to participate freely during lessons, it may be beneficial for teachers to explicitly explain to them that comments and questions are welcomed during class and not considered rude or bothersome. Explicitly offering time for questions to be asked after class may also be helpful and make international students feel more comfortable approaching their teachers.

Teachers should also consider the amount of choice and self-direction given with regards to assignments and learning. For one student, Grace, this issue seemed to be one of the most meaningful differences for her and an important source of both motivation and satisfaction. Despite her positive view of the opportunities for choice and self direction however, Grace also said that she sometimes found the lack of specific direction and concrete examples for projects confusing because she did not always understand what her teachers wanted her to do. This finding highlights the need for teachers and students to communicate with each other about their expectations and the purpose of the assignment.

### **5.11 Suggestions for further research**

The experiences of international students in Canadian secondary schools is a rich, relatively underexplored area which deserves further attention from researchers. More studies on international students' attitudes are needed in order to establish what patterns,

if any, exist within and between different populations. For example, future research might explore and compare trends in attitude between individual host schools, districts, provinces and countries. Comparing trends in attitudes among students in different locations may reveal important environmental factors which influence students' perception of their educational experience. In the future, research in this area should be more sensitive to the diversity within the international student population and look for patterns among and between different categories of students. For example, studies could explore what patterns, if any, exist within and between international students from various countries, ethnic backgrounds, social classes and genders. More attention should also be placed on understanding students' backgrounds and how their previous experiences and personal characteristics may influence their perception of and performance in Canadian schools. For example, are there significant correlations between having a positive attitude towards Canadian education and aspects of students' backgrounds such as the level of control over the decision to study in Canada, their academic achievement in Canada, their personal beliefs and educational philosophy, or their goals and purpose for studying abroad?

Although this study does not provide evidence that the educational differences students noted actually did improve their learning in a measureable way, it is interesting that the students perceived this to be the case. Future research might also focus on possible changes in student achievement during their time studying away from home. Another area for future exploration is how students' attitudes and perceptions of their Canadian school might be related to their academic and social behaviour in and out of the classroom.

This study explored students' attitudes at one point in time during their international experience, after they had considerable time and experience in Canada. It will be important for future studies to investigate if and how student opinions and perceptions change over time.

International secondary students are a unique and important group of students who deserve more attention in the academic literature. Research allowing students to express their views in their own words will assist our understanding of their experiences as well as how we can better serve them.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Student Questionnaire

#### Questionnaire:

Please answer these questions in the language of your choice. You may type your answers on a separate paper if you wish. DO NOT hand this form in to your teacher. Please bring this form with you to the group interview. These questions will be discussed during the focus group interviews. Your identity will be kept completely confidential.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of time spent studying in Canada: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Questions:

1. What do you think of your school in Canada so far?
2. What are the major differences between the school you attended in your home country and your school in Canada and do you think these differences have affected your learning in any way?
3. Compared to your home country, do you think the teachers are different in Canada? How are they different?
  - Do you talk to your teacher differently in Canada than you did in your home country?
  - Does your teacher in Canada talk to you differently than your teachers in your home country?
  - Are there any differences in the ways that your teacher in Canada gives you feedback on your progress and assignments?
4. Did you ask a lot of questions at school in your home country? Do you ask a lot of questions here? Why?

5. Are there any differences in the types of classroom activities used here and in your home country?

- Are there any differences in the way group work is used in your classes?
- Are there any differences in the class discussions?

6. What do you think about being creative and original in your schoolwork? Are there any differences in expectations in this area between Canada and your home country?

7. In terms of competitiveness, how would you compare the students in Canada with the students in your home country?

8. Is the homework in Canada different from the homework you were assigned in your home country?

9. How did you deal with the differences? Have you changed the way you do things as a student in Canada compared to the way you did things in your home country?

## Appendix B: Student Assent Form

December 1, 2010

2125 Main Mall  
Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z4  
Tel: 604-822-5211 Fax: 604-822-6501  
educ.ubc.ca

### **Student Assent Form:**

Exploring International Students' Attitudes and Opinions Regarding their Educational Experiences in a Canadian Secondary School.

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Lee Gunderson, Department of Language and Literacy Education, 604-822-8456.

**Co-investigator:** Ms. Amanda Arnott, MA student, Department of Language and Literacy Education.

As an international student at South Delta Secondary School, you are invited to participate in a study that looks at the attitudes and opinions of international students towards the educational experiences they have had in Canada. The focus of this study is on your opinions about the differences between the school you went to in your home country and your school in Canada. The goal of this project is to better understand the opinions and needs of international students attending school in Canada. This study is a part of the co-investigator's graduate program at UBC and is being conducted under the supervision of the principal investigator, Dr. Lee Gunderson.

### **Study Procedures:**

As a participant in this study you will be asked to complete a questionnaire, in the language of your choice, and take part in a group interview with three to four other students. In both the questionnaire and the group interview you will be asked to share your thoughts and feelings about your experiences as a student in Canada and the ways you have responded to the differences between your school in Canada and your school at home. The co-investigator, Amanada Arnott, will lead the group interviews. The interviews will take place at the school, during your ESL Skills class, and last for approximately one hour. Your ESL teacher will ensure that any work you miss can be made up in future classes. After the group interview is over, you may choose to meet with the co-investigator by yourself if there is anything you want to discuss privately. If you do not want to meet with a group, but would still like to participate, you can choose to meet with the co-investigator by yourself instead of with a group. Any individual interviews will take place at the school, during your ESL skills class and will not be longer than one hour. The interviews

will be audio taped and then transcribed. The co-investigator will also take notes during the interviews. Your written responses, the interview transcriptions and the co-investigator's notes will be used as data.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. Withdrawing from the study will have no effect on your grade in your ESL class. If you would like to participate in this study, you have three weeks to sign and return both this form and the consent form, which must be signed by your parent or guardian. The forms must be returned to your ESL teacher by \_\_\_\_\_. Only twenty students may participate in this study. If more than twenty students wish to participate, then twenty students will be randomly drawn from the total.

**Incentive:**

At the conclusion of the study, each participant will be entered into a draw for a \$100.00 gift certificate from Future Shop.

**Confidentiality:**

Your identity will be kept confidential by all investigators associated with this study. Focus group participants will be instructed to keep the content of the group interview confidential. All documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the Principal Investigator's office. Computer files will be password protected. Confidential information will not be exchanged via e-mail. You will not be identified by name in any reports of the study.

**Contact for Information about the study:**

If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Dr. Lee Gunderson at 604-822-8456.

**Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:**

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

**Please keep this copy for your own records.**

**Assent**

Your participation in this study is entirely your choice and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time.

When you sign below you are showing that you have received a copy of this assent form to keep at home.

---

Student Signature

Date

---

Printed name of student signing above

I want to meet individually with the co-investigator instead of participating in the group interview.

Yes / No

(Please circle one)

**Please return this copy to your ESL Teacher**

**Assent:**

Your participation in this study is entirely your choice and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time.

When you sign your name below you are showing that you want to participate in the study.

---

Student Signature

Date

---

Printed name of student signing above

I want to meet individually with the co-investigator instead of participating in the group interview.

Yes / No

(Please circle one)

## Appendix C: Parental Consent Form

December 1, 2010

2125 Main Mall  
Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z4  
Tel: 604-822-5211 Fax: 604-822-6501  
educ.ubc.ca

### Consent Form Exploring International Students' Attitudes and Opinions Regarding their Educational Experiences in a Canadian Secondary School

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Lee Gunderson, Department of Language and Literacy Education, 604-822-8456.

**Co-investigator:** Ms. Amanda Arnott, MA student, Department of Language and Literacy Education.

Dear Parents/Guardians:

Your child, an international student at South Delta Secondary School, is invited to participate in a project with the purpose of investigating the attitudes and opinions of international students towards the educational experiences they have had in Canada. This project will specifically focus on students' attitudes towards the instructional differences between the school they attended in their home country and their school in Canada. The goal of this project is to better understand and raise awareness of the unique perspectives and needs of international students attending school in Canada. This study is a part of the co-investigator's graduate program at UBC and is being conducted under the supervision of the Principal Investigator, Dr. Lee Gunderson.

#### **Study Procedures:**

We are asking permission for your child to answer a questionnaire and to participate in a focus group to discuss his/her attitudes and opinions about his/her experiences as students in Canada and the differences in instruction between their school in Canada and their school at home. The co-investigator, Amanda Arnott, will conduct the interviews. These group interviews will last for approximately one hour and take place at the school during your child's ESL Skills class. Your child's ESL teacher will ensure that he/she will be able to make up any missed work in subsequent classes. If students would like to participate in this study, but do not wish to meet with a group, they may choose to meet with the co-investigator individually. If, after participating in a group interview, students would like to meet with the co-investigator to discuss their responses individually, they may request to

do so. All interviews will be audio taped and then transcribed for analysis. The co-investigator will also take field notes during the interviews.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and your son/daughter may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence to their academic standing. If you would like your son/daughter to participate in this study, the consent form must be signed and returned to his/her ESL teacher by\_\_\_\_\_. Only twenty students will be allowed to participate in this study. If more than twenty students request to participate, then twenty students will be randomly drawn from the total.

**Incentive:**

At the conclusion of the study, each participant will be entered into a draw for a \$100.00 Future Shop gift certificate.

**Confidentiality:**

Your son/daughter's identity will be kept confidential by all investigators associated with this study. Focus group participants will be instructed to keep the content of the group interview confidential. All documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the Principal Investigator's office. Computer files will be password protected. Confidential information will not be exchanged via e-mail. Participants will not be identified by name in any reports of the study.

**Contact for Information about the study:**

If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Dr. Lee Gunderson at 604-822-8456.

**Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:**

If you have any concerns about your son/daughter's treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

**Please keep this copy for your own records.**

**Consent:**

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and your son/daughter may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

I consent to my child's participation in the study

I do not consent to my child's participation in the study

(Please circle one)

---

Printed name of student participating

---

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

---

Printed name of Parent/Guardian signing above

**Please return this copy to your son/daughter's ESL Teacher**

**Consent:**

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and your son/daughter may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature below indicates that you give your son/daughter consent to participate in this study.

I consent to my child's participation in the study

I do not consent to my child's participation in this study

(Please circle one)

---

Printed name of student participating

---

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

---

Printed name of Parent/Guardian signing above