

Friends from Far and Close: The Transition to Multiculturalism in a School Context

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## School of Graduate Studies

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## **Abstract**

### **Friends from Far and Close: The Transition to Multiculturalism in a School Context**

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Within Canada's history comes multiple immigration surges which resulted in a rich ethnic diversity that currently exists in metropolitan areas. With the diversity of Montreal comes certain experiences that are unique to specific ethnic communities. Many mono-cultural schools exist which are alternative to the mainstream multicultural curriculums. Students in certain communities are immersed within their own culture for years before mixing in an academic setting with diversity. Often, this shift occurs during the transition to high school which is a time of great development within its own. This phenomenological study was interested in better understanding the experiences of students who had transitioned to a multicultural high school setting during a global pandemic after having attended a mono-cultural elementary school. A mixed-method design was employed to capture the essence of the students' experiences including both interview and art-based data. Various art options were available for students to choose from including creating a drawing or collage, writing a song or poem or presenting artifacts that represented their experiences in both elementary and high school. Data gathered from the participants ( $N=5$ ) was presented in a case-study format. Although transition experiences differed for each student, all were affected in one way or another by the pandemic context. In terms of ethnic diversity, some students initially found it difficult to adapt to a multicultural environment although they eventually got used to it. All students spoke about the importance of their friends and other systems in helping them adjust to their new school context.

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## **Friends from Far and Close: The Transition to Multiculturalism in a School Context**

The transition to high school is a major developmental milestone in the early adolescent period which is highly anticipated as it signifies independence and growth. This school transition is an important life experience as many changes are co-occurring which can contribute to students' ability to appropriately adapt to the novelty of the school context (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). Each student experiences this transition differently. For some, it may be more difficult compared to others based on various personal and contextual factors. The last cohort of students who had transitioned into high school throughout the 2020 schoolyear have faced a novel experience of living it during a global pandemic, Covid-19. Holistically, demands were placed on the education system as well as all of society throughout the school year.

Much of the previous research on the transition to high school is dated and focuses on different grade levels as well as geographical contexts (Feldlaufer, Midgley, & Eccles, 1988; Benner & Graham, 2011). Few studies on the perceptions of students undergoing the transition to seventh grade exist (Mitman, & Packer, 1982; Berndt, & Mekos, 1995). Despite the lack of prior emphasis on this topic, its importance is unarguably costly to overlook. One's adaptation during periods of school transition have previously been linked to dropout rates (Gibbs & Heaton, 2014). Quebec has some of the highest financial costs in Canada for dealing with the consequences of the school dropouts (Hankivsky, 2008). Although high school dropout rates have drastically declined in recent years, the financial costs to society still remain high (Uppal, 2017), which is why it is important to address and support a healthy high school transition.

Adolescence is a time of physical and cognitive growth and this stage of transformation is associated with many vulnerabilities. During this life stage, identity formation begins to crystalize which may strongly impact psychosocial well-being and development (Crocetti, 2017). Youth tend to experience an increase in exploration and identify crises as they discover new

interests (Erikson, 1959). Whereas adolescent boys tend to display greater externalizing behaviour challenges during this time (Bongers, Koot, Van Der Ende & Verhulst, 2004), adolescent girls experience more internalizing behaviour challenges (Telzer & Fuligni, 2013). Furthermore, immigrant youth have also been shown to display differential adaptive capabilities during a similar transition phase compared to native-born youth (Birman, & Ryerson Espino, 2007). These challenges experienced by different populations can be explained by the simultaneous changes taking place in different domains of the adolescents' lives including academic, social, and family settings.

Canada's immigration legislation has accepted diversity in academic settings and has given place to the formation of certain multilingual ethnic schools (Asanova, 2008; Maxwell, Waddington, McDonough, Cormier & Schwimmer, 2012). Various ethnic elementary and high schools exist in the Greater Montreal Area for the Greek, Armenian, Jewish and Islamic communities amongst others. Some immigrant parents actively choose to send their children to an ethnic school in order to maintain cultural roots within this multicultural society. Alternatively, others integrate their children into the mainstream schools while providing complementary ways to teach about their ethnicity and culture either through afterschool programs, weekend schools, or through other home practices. These contrasting acculturation experiences can affect immigrant students' transition to high school. Given that these ethnic schools are composed of homogeneous populations, having a later integration with diversity may pose challenges for ethnic students (Douglass, Yip & Shelton, 2014).

The current study focused on the experiences of students who are undergoing a transition from an ethnic elementary school to a multicultural high school in order to gain a clearer understanding of both challenges and positive aspects related to this change. Based on the current review of the literature, there are few studies that have looked at this topic in the past. The studies

about school transitions often focus on quantitative indicators of academic success and adaptation that are gathered through rating scales, testing scores or report cards. Few studies have successfully examined students' experiences of transitioning to a new school environment using qualitative interviews that explore students' individual perspectives. Even rarer are studies that consider the cultural shift of students who have unique education backgrounds in ethnic schools. Therefore, there is a need for further research on high school transitions specifically considering children who are experiencing a cultural shift from an ethnic community school to a mainstream school within their country of origin. Given the steadily increasing immigration rate in Canada, the importance in understanding this topic is related to supporting these multi-generation students. The cost of neglecting this topic can be a great burden to society. Bullying, racism, school dropouts, and poor mental health can all be considered consequences of failing to support the high school transition (Davalos, Chavez & Guardiola, 1999; Andrews & Bishop, 2012; Cornell, Gregory, Huang & Fan, 2013).

The Canadian context and the complexity of attending an ethnic elementary school prior to transitioning to a multicultural high school has not been studied. Moreover, students' perceptions as they transition in this context of a global pandemic presented an important opportunity to study how these students experienced this transition. The current study aimed to fill this gap in the current body of literature by providing a novel perspective on the experience of transitioning to high school based on one's ethnic and educational background. Questions that guided the current study include:

- (a) What are students' perspectives and experiences with transitioning to a multicultural high school after having attended an ethnic elementary school?
- (b) How do students from these backgrounds discuss and identify ethnic backgrounds upon having made the transition to a multicultural high school?

- (c) How do students describe the challenges, pleasures and expectations associated with this school transition for students coming from ethnic elementary schools?
- (d) How do students describe their support systems during this transition to high school?
- (e) How do students feel that the pandemic impacted their experience of their transition to high school?

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Ethnic Identity Formation**

In order to better understand the literature regarding ethnic identity, it is important to define this concept as certain terms (e.g., religion, culture, race) have been erroneously used interchangeably. Ethnicity is related to culture, but the concept is more specific (Sheets & Hollins, 1999). Ethnic identity formation occurs when one affiliates themselves with an ethnic group that pre-exists within a society (Sheets & Hollins, 1999). An ethnic group is formed by individuals who set themselves apart behaviorally from the others based on certain ancestral commonalities or symbolic systems (Schermerhorn, 1974). Ethnic groups can adopt certain cultural aspects such as language, religion, cultural traditions and values which distinguish them from others (Rosenberg & Jedwab, 1992). Various models have been proposed to understand the ethnic identity formation process. Below a summary of a few models is outlined in order to pull out the most relevant features to ethnic identity formation during the transition to high school.

Identity formation, apart from ethnicity, is within itself a unique developmental process that has been well defined by Erikson's (1959) theory of development. The major components of Erikson's identity formation theory include the *exploration* of one's possible identities and interests followed by a *commitment* to a chosen identity (Erikson, 1959). Through this stage model of development, Erikson identified various conflicts and resolutions at each level. Identity formation is one of the major challenges associated with the developmental stage of adolescence.

Those who struggle with this may experience role confusion and therefore may not successfully commit to one single identity, thus potentially creating relational or other psychosocial problems for themselves down the line (Erikson, 1959). Ethnic identity exploration and achievement has been associated with positive psychosocial and academic outcomes for various groups of ethnic youth (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Therefore, it is important to understand this ethnic identity formation process and crisis which may, for some, begin following the transition to high school due to exposure to a more diverse group of peers. According to this theoretical perspective, Students in this stage of development should be given opportunities to explore their interests in a healthy manner in order to avoid having an identity crisis, although this is not always so easy.

Erikson's theory is widely accepted and has influenced many developmental researchers throughout the years however, there are some flaws in this stage model which include the fixed chronological developmental process (Côté & Levine, 1988; Sneed, Schwartz & Cross, 2006). Currently, it is a more widely accepted that identity formation is a lifelong process that can be ever-evolving (Topolewska-Siedzik & Ciecuch, 2019). Marcia (1966) initially expanded Erikson's theory and realized that one can go back and forth between identity statuses (i.e., achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, diffusion) in a less linear model building on previous experience but also adapting to new circumstances (Topolewska-Siedzik & Ciecuch, 2019). Only after having appropriate opportunities for exploration (i.e., moratorium) of different identities can one commit to a healthy identity status. Thus, exploration can only be complete when exposed to diversity. Similarly, Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx and Meeus (2008) suggested a model that emphasizes the evaluation and revision stages during the identity formation process which eventually led to a stable understanding and commitment to one identity. It illustrates the potential for change despite past commitment to an identity if provided with new exploration opportunities. Therefore, one's environment can promote a change in identity.

Phinney (1996) depicted another conceptualization of ethnic identity formation through stages which resemble Marcia's categories. In this model, ethnic identity is achieved if the following conditions are met: (a) they have interest in and knowledge about the ethnic group, (b) they have a positive evaluation of the ethnic group, (c) they show commitment to and have a sense of belonging to the ethnic group, and (d) they are involved in the activities and traditions of the ethnic group. Ethnic identity is fluid and takes time to develop therefore, in early adolescence, it is only beginning to form and is often far from being finalized (Phinney, 1996). This ethnic identity formation process is thought to be experienced differently by minority and majority populations based on varying opportunities of exposure to a specific ethnicity. Evidence supports the contributing role of others in ethnic identity formation, being either by socialization with peers, or by parents (Phinney, Romero, Nava & Huang, 2001; Svensson, Berne & Syed, 2018).

Relatedly, the foundational theory suggests that depending on how central or important one's racial/ethnic identity is to one's personal identity will determine one's attitudes towards interacting with others who share their ethnic membership compared to those who do not (Douglass Yip & Shelton, 2014). The concept of ethnic pride, which has been defined as having a strong sense of affiliation towards one's ethnic group conveyed through "affirmation of dignity, affection and self-respect" expressed towards one's ethnic or cultural heritage (González, Stein & Bentler, 2009, p. 266), also parallels the notion of centrality. Ethnic pride is considered to be a part of ethnic identity (Phinney, 1990), and has been associated with positive adjustment and self-efficacy, and fosters a sense of belonging (González, et al., 2009; Hernández et al., 2017). Thus, centrality and ethnic pride may guide socialization opportunities based on preference to affiliate with own versus other ethnicities.

It is also important to note that there are multiple dimensions to one's core identity that can include one's educational, career, ethnic, gender, age, sexual orientation and religious aspects

of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Meijers, 1998). These can develop in parallel or disjointly throughout one's lifespan. One can potentially display different identities in different environments such that, one might act differently at home versus in class versus with certain friends, as was expressed by Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory. This is crucial knowledge to be able to perceive the fact that identity is not static and can drastically shift, especially when faced with a change in context such as, when immigrating or transitioning to a new heterogeneous high school. One can thus choose what aspects of their integrated identity to display during specific moments in order to be socially accepted. In a study by Noels and Clément (2015) that included first- and second-generation immigrants, as well as mixed-parentage second-generation immigrants, Canadian identities were displayed significantly more in public setting whereas ethnic identities were displayed more in private settings although this effect was greatest for the first-generation immigrants. In this study, those who expressed high centrality also experienced more sociocultural difficulties.

Relatedly, the discourse theory can aid in understanding how the unique socialization process experienced through ecological interactions and participation in culturally oriented activities can influence a person's ethnic identity (Wallace, 2004). It was further suggested that a person can engage in a process of code-switching by choosing which ethnic identity to portray depending on the context (Wallace, 2004). This is likely more commonly observed for individuals that express having a bi-cultural identity who integrate aspects of both their ethnic and the mainstream cultures (Berry et al., 1959).

Moreover, in resemblance to Marcia's identity statuses, Berry and Sam (1997) outlined an acculturation model with four stages: (a) *assimilation* – you accept the host culture and reject your culture of origin, (b) *integration (aka biculturalism)* – you accept the host culture but also maintain your culture of origin, (c) *marginalization* – you reject the host culture and reject your



culture of origin, (d) *separation* – you reject the host culture but retain your culture of origin.

These stages are experienced by individuals (i.e., immigrants or natives) who are exposed to two or more competing cultures, thus provided with the opportunity to explore differences (Berry & Sam, 1997). Similar to the social identity theory, one can draw aspects from different cultures in different contexts in an integrative way. Having an integration profile is associated with the best psychological wellbeing outcomes as one can draw features of both cultures into their personal identity and daily activities (Berry & Sam, 1997). The ease at which one integrates into the mainstream culture depends on various factors such as one's age of immigrating, reasons for immigrating (i.e., forced vs. voluntary), generation of immigrant (Berry & Sam, 1997). One's integration of cultures can influence their ethnic identity formation process therefore it is helpful to understand acculturation in relation to one's immigration experience and development.

Additionally, a mix of both individual characteristics and environmental factors can influence one's experience of acculturation and adjustment to a multicultural high school environment through ethnic identity formation (Arends-Toth & Van de Vijver, 2006; Motti-Stefanidi, et al., 2012; Schachner, 2014). Many of the aforementioned researchers were inspired by Bronfenbrenner (1992) who clearly outlines this concept in his ecological model of the development of the child, which explains that one's developmental adjustment is influenced by an interaction of different environmental agents at different levels (i.e., microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, chronosystem) which also interact with the individual's personal characteristics. This explains how individuals with similar ethnic backgrounds can portray their ethnicity and identify themselves completely differently based on the context in which they are developing.

An alternative ecological model of ethnic identity formation was proposed and tested by Umaña-Taylor, Bhanot, & Shin (2006). This model suggests that parents are the main agents of

socialization of ethnicity in either an overt (i.e., direct teachings) or covert (i.e., indirect exposure) manner. However, this model also incorporates the school's ethnic composition as well as the number of familial births in the country as influencing ethnic socialization. Familial influence is known to change during the early adolescent years as one spends more time with friends and values their advice more than that of their parents (Laser & Nicotera, 2011). Socialization occurs in multiple contexts including and apart from the home environment that can influence one's ethnic identity formation which speaks to the value of gathering information about all the systems that a child is embedded in.

The various theoretical models presented above all build on one another and add knowledge to how we interpret the ethnic identity formation process. To summarize, based on the pioneering work of stage models to identity formation, researchers have expanded the understanding of identity as transient and based on various contributing ecological factors including those related to the individual as well as the context in which that person is immersed (Schachter, 2005). These perspectives will guide the current study by focusing the interview questions on the perceptions of participating students and gathering a holistic view of the students' transition experiences. Experiences of identity formation can vary widely based on these factors. This is important to understand especially given the diverse society that we live in and the consistent flow of immigrant students joining our classrooms. It is particularly important to incorporate this understanding into curriculums specifically in contexts where students make a drastic cultural change, such as immigrating or changing from a homogeneous environment to multicultural environment.

### **Adjustment During School Transition**

Based on ecological system's theory as seen above (Bronfenbrenner, 1992), we understand that one's development and adjustment outcomes are derived from an interaction

between the individual and their environment. We can use this theory to better recognize the adjustment period that students may undergo during a school transition. High school transitions are filled with an array of contextual, physical and psychosocial changes that are co-occurring (Özdemir, Utkualp & Palloş, 2016). These challenges may be experienced by most students undergoing this transitional phase however, immigrant students or minority groups may face a few additional challenges as they also have to adapt to the new cultural environment that is unfamiliar to their peers. For example, Romero and Roberts (2003) reported in their study on Mexicans currently living in the US, that both first- and second-generation immigrants experienced certain stress related to language, discrimination, family and peer factors. Furthermore, both first- and second-generation immigrants tend to experience internalizing symptoms although this trend declines over time (Sirin, Ryce, Gupta & Rogers-Sirin, 2013). Reviewing research previously done on this topic can provide insight about what can facilitate or hinder a healthy transition to high school for diverse groups of students. Student's adjustment to the novelty of the school year can be predicted by prior adaptation patterns that were displayed (Benner & Graham, 2011).

Research has shown that there is often a significant drop in achievement during various school transitions such as from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school (Alspaugh, 1998). A developmental mismatch hypothesis has been applied to explain the decline in motivation, interest, performance and behavior associated with transitioning to a high school environment in such that the new context does a poor job at meeting the adolescent's developmental needs and cognitive capacities (Eccles, Lord & Midgley, 1991). The organizational structure of elementary and/or American middle schools compared to high schools are often much different. The younger grades are typically held in smaller school contexts in which there is much supervision and many rules, whereas high school tends to be a drastic shift

to independence and responsibility (Eccles, et al., 1991; Symonds & Hargreaves, 2016). This is somewhat comparative to Canadian school contexts although, Canadian students transition from elementary directly to high school rather than to middle school first. Therefore, the change for Canadian students is less gradual and can come as a bigger change and require more adaptation to the novel environment.

Ellerbrock and Kiefer's epistemological study (2013) explored, using multisource data (i.e., focus groups, individual interviews, observations, archival data), how structured (e.g., in class) and unstructured (e.g., lunch, recess, transition events) school contexts meet the developmental needs of the students transitioning into high school. The findings indicated that for middle schoolers, structured aspects of the school day (e.g., homerooms, flexible block schedules) promoted a developmentally responsive adjustment to the novel school context whereas unstructured times provided no such support (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). In contrast, structured aspects of the high school did not seem to match with the developmental needs of the students (e.g., early start, scheduling and classes) whereas the unstructured aspects of the school day had both positive and negative impacts on the developmental responsive environment (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). Similarly, Blyth et al. (1983) also found that transitions to seventh-grade contexts are not appropriately fostering self-esteem and competence. In general, later transition to high school was associated with less negative outcomes (Blyth, Simmons & Carlton-Ford, 1983).

These studies emphasize the importance of adopting developmentally appropriate school organizational structures for different aspects of the school day so that both structured and unstructured contexts support the youth through the transition process and the importance of a timely transition. A large part of socialization occurs outside of the classroom setting during unstructured periods of the day, therefore although this time is often neglected in the literature its

importance should be emphasized and modified to support the developmental needs of the students. Students who may be transitioning into diverse environments from a previously ethnically homogeneous environment may experience a greater mismatch between environments and may need support during unstructured periods of the school-day in order to promote social interactions with students from other ethnic backgrounds.

Benner and Graham (2009) reported that attendance and academic performance declines especially for Hispanic Americans and African Americans following the transition to high school. Specifically, this may be due to the increased stress associated with the school transition and change in ethnic compositions of the school (e.g., cultural discontinuity). Due to having less same-ethnic peers in the school contexts, these students may perceive lower levels of belonging associated with isolation and long-term academic difficulties. In contrast, more congruent school contexts were found to be positively associated with academic performance and attendance (Benner & Graham, 2009). Therefore, we see that school composition may play a role in one's adaptation.

Furthermore, findings from various interview, survey and writing-task research reveal that some of the students' main concerns regarding discontinuity between elementary to high school include an increased perception of anonymity (Blyth et al., 1983), having more demanding schoolwork, taking harder classes, making friends, finding and opening lockers, finding way around the school, understanding rules (Akos, 2002; Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). In Akos' (2002) qualitative study, the major themes that were expressed by older students giving advice to newcomers fell in three categories: academic, organizational and personal/social. According to the mismatch hypothesis, another difference that could be perceived by students is their change in social status (i.e., popularity hierarchy) at the school that could either increase or decrease post-transition due to the new size of the school and diversity of new peers (Blyth et al., 1983). Social

status change can cause psychosocial challenges to students although gender differences exist (Blyth et al., 1983). These studies report multiple factors of concern for students transitioning to high school. It is important to understand how these concerns are similar or vary based on one's elementary school context, and how prepared students feel to face these and other challenges related to adapting to the high school environment. Once this is understood, curriculums could be tailored to better help students adapt.

Despite challenges of experiencing a mismatch between contexts and development, providing opportunities for change is important. Through focus group data, Hoang's (2008) study revealed that girls in their first year of high school felt pressure to grow up due to teachers having high expectations of them from the beginning of the transition to high school (Hoang, 2008). It was argued that certain discourses (i.e., behavioral schemas) can help guide an adolescent through the developmental process as it sets a clear goal for the ideal (Hoang, 2008). However, schools with such strict ethos and promotion of discourses may push students to a developmental stage that they are not yet prepared by forcing them to a premature maturation. This speaks to the mismatch hypothesis. The brain continues to mature through our twenties with various cognitive components developing at different ages (Eccles et al., 1991). Therefore, forcing students to grow up before due time may be counterintuitive and may lead to risky behavior.

Hoang (2008) further explains a "mind-body split" during identity formation in school in such that one may perceive differences in regard to their physical features and their cognitive development stage causing behavioural confusion during this period. For example, some girls in this study experienced paradoxical feelings of identity such as euphoria and abjection towards feminine discourses (Hoang, 2008). Transitioning into high school does not mean that one develops into a young adult and adopts a mature identity overnight. Development takes time and is a process but unfortunately, those who take longer to develop may stand out in their group of

peers in a negative way and be judged (Hoang, 2008). This should be considered in order to promote development and maturation in a healthy way but not put pressure on those who may not be at the same developmental level. After all, students transitioning to high school are still young – many have likely not even hit puberty yet.

Furthermore, the life-course perspective explores how the timing of a major life transition or social change can be experienced as more disruptive depending on the student's developmental stage (Blyth et al., 1983). Thus, during certain critical developmental periods, adjustment to changes may be more difficult for an individual. This perspective advocates that a school transition would be less disruptive if it occurred after the individual has had time to develop a mature sense of physical and psychosocial maturity. Ideally, this perspective suggests a ninth-grade transition to be more developmentally suited than a seventh-grade school transition (Blyth et al., 1983). The reason being, is that the students would have overcome certain challenges related to experiencing puberty by this time and their cognitive functioning would also be further developed therefore the transition would be smoother than if they had to navigate these changes simultaneously. Thus, understanding students' experiences may be more revealing about the risks associated with an earlier transition and if we cannot change the timing then perhaps we can support the youth to reduce the risk factors (e.g., lack of motivation, developmentally mismatched environment) and instead increase protective factors (e.g., various types of social supports) during this time.

On the other hand, transitioning to high school may at first be an exciting experience for students as they are faced with novelty, thus initially contributing to a heightened school liking (i.e., honeymoon period) which eventually fades as they get accustomed to the environment and routine (Benner & Graham, 2009; Symonds & Hargreaves, 2016). In a study of the transition from middle school to high school, it was suggested that this type of transition had negative

implications for students' grades, social relationships and psychological outcomes as they experienced a steady drop in grades, more loneliness and an increase in anxiety (Benner & Graham, 2009). Girls tend to exhibit greater psychological distress than their male counterparts during the transition to high school however, their higher academic performance may counterbalance their psychosocial struggles (Benner & Graham, 2009). Gender differences have been reported various studies which specifically state that girls are more at risk for self-esteem issues during the transition to high school (Blyth et al., 1983), may experience more loneliness and anxiety and may perform worse academically (Benner & Graham, 2009). Having a positive adaptation in certain domains can act as a protective factor for overall adaptation and resilience.

Students tend to experience multiple school transitions throughout their education careers whether it is the transition between schools (i.e., elementary to high school, high school to college) or even transition between grade levels (i.e., grade 3 to 4 etc.). The cumulative hypothesis states that one's previous quality of adjustment to a school transition influences subsequent facility of adjustment (Benner & Graham, 2009). This relates to the life-course perspective in such that developmental processes are cumulative, thus previous success will create an advantage for subsequent adjustment to change, whereas previous challenges may also be repeated throughout developmental trajectories (Benner & Graham, 2009). Transitions are evidentially easier for some compared to others who require more support at different stages of the transition period. Shoffner and Williamson (2000) speak to this with their guidelines for transition which highlight different types of transitory supports that could be put in place prior to, during and after the transition to high school by various agents in a child's environment. They emphasize the collaborative responsibility of supporting youth through school transitions. The student reports from Akos' (2002) study confirms the importance of seeking support from various



individuals in surrounding environments (e.g., friends, parents, teachers, counselors, other family).

Academic functioning is one domain in which stability of performance is apparent throughout educational trajectories. In a study on French-Canadian students, conducted by Duchesne et al., (2005), three distinct academic trajectories were identified and found to be stable between elementary school to the first year of high school. These trajectories included either stable (consistently high or low grades) or declining profiles. Interestingly, the findings suggest that these academic profiles are established as early as kindergarten and that for students who displayed a decline in academic performance it was related to certain contextual factors (e.g., parental divorce) which occurred prior to the transition to high school (Duchesne et al., 2005). Certain personal (e.g., temperament, intelligence and social skills) and familial (e.g., social support) protective factors which can be identified early in elementary school were also found to support students' adjustment to high school and predicting academic trajectories (Duchesne et al., 2005). Other researchers have also found academic performance to be related to ethnicity in such that certain ethnicities (e.g., Asians and Europeans) consistently demonstrate stronger academic performance compared to others (e.g., African Americans or Latinics) (Fuligni, 1997; Strayhorn, 2010). However, cultural, familial and SES factors should be considered when making these types of comparisons. These differences are less apparent in higher levels of education (Strayhorn, 2010).

### **Ethnic Factors Related to Transition**

As alluded to earlier, students that are ethnic minorities may experience various psychosocial issues in addition to other challenges related to the transition to high school. Students' daily experiences and perceptions of new school environments have been linked with psychosocial issues such as anxiety, loneliness and drop in grades (Benner & Graham, 2009).

Related to the ecological model, Douglass et al., (2014) suggested a process-person-context model which considers direct interactions with one's environment to be the main factors leading to one's adjustment. Using a prompting device, students with varied ethnic backgrounds were asked to electronically respond to a short survey at various times of the day which gave insight about the specific context provoking situational anxiety (Douglass et al., 2014). Specifically, the researchers were interested in whether inter or intra ethnic group contact changed student's anxiety symptoms in a given situation. Although overall, anxiety levels were reported to be low in this sample, intra-group interactions were associated with less internalizing and externalizing symptoms of anxiety (Douglass et al., 2014). Students' centrality level mostly explained this relationship and was also associated with higher intra-group contact (Douglass et al., 2014). One explanation given was that those who share some ethnic or cultural commonalities experience a shared-stigmatization phenomenon allowing them to form strong bonds, more comfort and less anxiety in each other's presence as they understand historical challenges faced by group members.

Furthermore, depending on the individual's unique experience with their school context (history of diversity), patterns of adjustment were categorized as falling into one of the following categories: early transition to diversity, late transition to diversity, consistent minority experience, or consistent majority experience (Douglass et al., 2014). Having a consistent school environment, thus opportunity for exposure to diversity and intra-group contact lowers anxiety regardless of centrality. In the group of students who were classified as experiencing an early transition to diversity, intra-group contact was only beneficial if the individual had high centrality (Douglass et al., 2014). The key results of this study explain that centrality, school diversity and timing of exposure opportunities can influence one's adjustment to a new multicultural high school transition.

Moreover, the cumulative effects of school context (i.e., ethnic composition and opportunities for interaction with same or different ethnicities) can play a role in one's adjustment to high school depending on how different the new environment is (Douglass et al., 2014). Similar to the mis-match hypothesis for change in school context, ethnic incongruity also seems to influence students adjustment to novel high school environments with varying levels of diversity among their peers (French, Siedman & Allen, 2000). Benner and Graham (2009) also considered changes in school ecologies pre- and post-transition by comparing school SES, ethnic diversity and congruity levels. They found that the high school transition was more stressful for students who were less representative of the population of their new schools (i.e., Latinics and African Americans), thus having less same-ethnicity peers compared to at their previous schools. In contrast, researchers French et al. (2000) found that the importance of ethnic incongruity for identity formation was supported for Black and European Americans but not for Latinics which they explain by referring to a more recent immigration history for Latinic students compared to others. Overall, congruity does seem to impact the adaptation of some ethnic groups more than others.

The macrostructural theory suggests that opportunities for contact with other ethnic groups that differ from our own will influence the quality of interpersonal relations (Blau, 1977; Fitzpatrick & Hwang, 1992). Thus, having less experience with certain ethnic or cultural groups may provoke more anxiety later on when exposure to others increases. Furthermore, French et al., (2000) also found that an increase in incongruity levels led to more ethnic exploratory behaviors, defined as a *consciousness-raising experience*, for European American students, whereas an increase in academic hassles promoted the same time of exploratory behaviors for Blacks. They explain differences based on the ethnic group being perceived as a minority in the larger society or school context. They also consider both student and staff/teacher ethnic

congruence which had opposite effects for Black and European students related to exploration and self-esteem. Opportunities for prior exposure to diversity can explain one's adjustment during the transition to a multicultural high school environment.

In an ethnographic study utilising interviews to understand Armenian high school students in Montreal, most cases studies presented demonstrated an appreciation of the experience of attending an ethnic school but also expression of feelings of regret of not having more opportunities for integration with other cultures earlier in life (Karilian-Konyalian, 2008). Although students acknowledged the many benefits to maintaining a sense of one's own culture, students also reported their Armenian school to be sheltering them as they had limited contact with peers of other cultures (Karilian-Konyalian, 2008). Some immigrant students reported living difficult and stressful times within the Armenian school due to being from a different background (i.e., different country of origin or different immigration trajectory) or due to parental refusal to integrate into mainstream society, while others reported that the community facilitated their adjustment to their new society. When students in this study transitioned to a new multicultural educational context, being either high school or college, some expressed experiencing shock and feelings of isolation (Karilian-Konyalian, 2008). One student portrayed the two-sided argument in such that he predicted sending his own children to an Armenian school but not past grade-6 that way they will have ample opportunities to interact with other cultures. This would resemble the profile of students for the proposed study.

## **Immigration**

Although immigration to Canada is evidently not a new phenomenon, immigration rates continue to rise. According to the 2018, Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration published by the government, Canada currently has one of the highest immigration rates in the world thanks to its extensive plan to support the Canadian economy following the retirement of baby

boomers and declining birth rates. In Quebec, Montreal is the area which annually receives the highest number of immigrants compared to the rest of the province (Aurora, 2019; Statistics Canada 2019). Various reasons for immigrating could include, living in a war-driven state, seeking refuge, experiencing a financial crisis, living in poverty, seeking education or employment opportunities or other political circumstances (Berry & Sam, 1997).

In a study by Beauregard, Petrakos and Dupont (2014), interviews with parents revealed the importance of the children's education to immigrant parents and how it influenced their decision to immigrate to Canada. Another study by Winchic and Carment (1989) identified thirteen specific categories of reasons for choosing Canada as a destination to immigrate and included, amongst other things, having good career opportunities, having a high national character and high standard of living, having a peaceful atmosphere and democratic politics. Whatever the reasons behind choosing to immigrate to a specific country, the effects of immigration are long-lasting and touch multiple generations.

For example, each subsequent generation of immigrant portrays worse educational outcomes compared to their predecessors (Figlio & Özek, 2020) which can be explained by the heightened motivation for success immediately following immigration that eventually declines once well-established in a receiving country (Coll & Marks, 2012; Jonsson & Rudolphi, 2011). Furthermore, with an increase in familial birth within the receiving country, the ethnic identity diverges away from its original form to incorporate more and more the mainstream culture (Berry & Sam, 1997). On the other hand, discrimination and other negative outcomes associated with immigration may be experienced by multiple subsequent generations, more so if they are considered to be a visible minority. Being a visible minority, puts one at risk for racist victimization even if that individual is not an immigrant themselves (Stefanek, Strohmeier & Van

de Schoot, 2015). Despite the multicultural atmosphere of Canada, discrimination unfortunately still exists.

Adolescents who are immigrants themselves or children of immigrants, may live through a unique experience during high school compared to native students due to factors related to their ethnic origins. Despite the transition to high school being a sensitive period for all students who are facing various developmental challenges, those who are also trying to situate themselves among multiple ethnic identities may have an additional demand placed on them by their families and society. This has seldomly been studied in a Canadian context and specifically in one so unique as Montreal which faces the additional complications of the dual French-English influence.

### **Ethnic Communities in Montreal**

Historically, the Italians, Israeli and Greeks have formed the largest and oldest minority ethnocultural groups in Montreal (Rosenberg & Jedwab, 1992). However according to Census and other statistical data, the number of Asian and African immigrants has surpassed European immigrants in recent years (Arora, 2019; Statistics Canada 2019). The French-English split that is present in the Montreal context allows for more cultural segregation among various ethnic communities to exist as new arrivals tend to preserve their ethnicity (Rosenberg & Jedwab, 1992). Unlike the Italians who were Catholics similar to the French population of Montreal, the Jews and Greeks formed a pattern of self-segregation upon their arrival, and they opened institutions to suit their various needs such as schools that accepted their unique religions. Since multiculturalism was and continues to be promoted, maintaining one's ethnic origins and cultural components is easy to do in Quebec (Maxwell et al., 2012). In the past, Quebec was quite dichotomous with either English or French populations who were primarily Catholic or Protestant. Today, there are more than 250 ethnicities in Quebec related to augmented

immigration trends which has led to a much more heterogeneous population and societal lifestyle. Understandably, there are more ethnically diverse institutions to now exist to better meet the needs of the changing population.

### **Armenian Community**

Following wars, genocides and economic instability, there were three main waves of Armenian diaspora to Canada between the 1900s and 1970s which paralleled the pattern of changes in Canadian immigration laws (Chichekian, 1977). During the third wave, nearly two-thirds of all Armenian immigrants resided in the greater-Montreal area with a high concentration in specific municipalities that had community organizations such as churches, schools, cultural associations and more (Chichekian, 1977). Armenian immigrants come from a host of different countries including Armenia, Greece, Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, Iran and Syria amongst others. A resurgence of Armenians from the middle east have sought refuge in Canada in recent years due to political and war-driven states of their country (Maguire, 2010). Multiple Armenian day-schools, daycares, and summer camps have been established in Montreal over the years. There are two main schools that exist in Montreal that extend from pre-school to high school. One school extends until grade-eight while the other extends up until grade-eleven. Armenian students thus have the option to complete the majority of their base education in their ethnic day-school if desired.

### **Other Montreal Communities**

Few other Montreal ethnic communities have their own day-schools similar to the Armenians. For example, the presence of Jewish immigrants in Montreal dates to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century although numbers increased in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Rosenberg & Jedwab, 1992). Currently, nearly two dozen Jewish schools exist in Montreal, from daycare to high school which accommodate an estimated 50% of Jewish children who are enrolled (Kelly, 1999). Although

both elementary and high school options exist, most Jewish children would historically transition into mainstream public high schools due the high costs of the private education, although enrollment in high school programs saw an increase in certain Canadian metropolitan regions in more recent years (Davis, 2003).

The Greek community is yet another that still has ethnic day-schools. The Greek diaspora since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and following the WWI and WWII initiated the first waves of immigration to Canada (Panagiotopoulou, Rosen, Kirsh & Chatzidaki, 2019). Since 2009, due to the economic crisis as well as the socio-political atmosphere, there has been a resurgence of Greek migrants to Canada and elsewhere (Panagiotopoulou et al., 2019). The elected members of the Hellenic Community provide various services to the population including daycare, schools as well as complementary education (Saturday school), senior residential care facilities and more (Rosenberg & Jedwab, 1992). Although the services are less than that of what the Jewish community provides, centralization is greater for the Greek community (Rosenberg & Jedwab, 1992). The church and the strong sense of Hellenic identity allowed the Greek community to remain strong and unified (Rosenberg & Jedwab, 1992). Now four branches of a Greek elementary school (Socrates-Demosthene) exist around the greater Montreal area, along with Saturday schools (from elementary to college) and after-school language options to complement mainstream education, and recently a high-school option.

Islamics have had a presence in Canada since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century however the significant immigration waves were apparent in the 1970s, 80s and 90s (Mc Andrew, 2010). These include populations from various countries including Morocco, Iran, Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria. In Montreal, only about 2% of Islamic children attend day-schools (Kelly, 1999). Similar to the aforementioned ethnic communities, the Islamic community also has pre-school, kindergarten, elementary and high school programs offered in private day-school formats.



However, many Islamic families choose not to send their children to private day-schools for various reasons including the expense, the fear of discrimination, values and religious beliefs (Kelly, 1999). Due to French roots and financial burdens, a majority of Islamic students attend public French schools (Mc Andrew, 2010).

The immigration histories of these and various other ethnic communities vary greatly. The reasons for immigrating impacted the ways in which these different groups integrated into the Canadian society. For some students who attend private ethnic schools, after six or more years of being immersed in their own ethnic context and having peers that are primarily similar to them in terms of cultural aspects, a portion of these children are faced with the task of integrating in a multicultural high school context. This shift in school contexts can be challenging for these students. It is not something that has been studied in detail across these various Montreal populations. Therefore, the current study hoped to compare experiences of children in different cultures who undergo a similar transition to multiculturalism during the first year of high school.

### **Importance of Researching the High School Transition**

Students' perceptions of new school environments have been linked with psychosocial issues including anxiety, loneliness and drop in grades (Benner & Graham, 2009), which indicates the importance of creating positive experiences during the transition to high school. There is contradictory research about whether or not the transition to high school is linked with negative outcomes (Lipps, 2005). A phenomenological study using journaling to gain access to students' experiences indicated both challenges and positive aspects related to high school transition (Geneson & Ehrich, 2009). When asked about concerns, students reported bullying, grades and organizational aspects (e.g., finding way around school, reading schedules), as well as increased academic demands (Andrews & Bishop, 2012; Geneson & Ehrich, 2009). Positive experiences included new friendships and exciting new learning opportunities (Geneson & Ehrich, 2009).

Comprehensive transition programs adapted to the education systems in different countries can facilitate this period for student. Such programs work best if (a) they foster cooperation between multiple agents including students, families and teachers, and (b) if they are longitudinal in nature as to begin in the months prior to the transition and continue on during the months following the transition (Andrews & Bishop, 2012). In Canada, there are a few transition programs that seem to exist in certain provinces, but most seem to be oriented towards students who have disabilities.

Although transition initiatives differ and are not yet implemented in a consistent manner by the boards of education, some suggestions have been made. Prior to the transition, parental visits, staff contact times, visits, open houses, field days and big brother/sister mentorship programs can aid in preparing students by familiarizing themselves with their new school environment (Odegaard & Heath, 1992). Schools that implemented a transition program decreased the failure and dropout rates and thus supported the students to appropriately adapt to their new school context (Legters & Kerr, 2001).

Further, Ellerbrock and Keifer (2013) suggest that based on the developmental mis-match hypothesis, in order to level the environmental response to older students' needs, early start times are not ideal due to the increased desire for sleep. Instead, having more flexible schedules adapted to the developmental needs may ensure higher attendance rates (Ellerbrock & Keifer, 2013). Furthermore, Ellerbrock and Keifer (2013) propose that for middle schoolers transitioning into this semi-structured context for the first time, the teaming method in which peers are paired for homeroom or other core curriculum is a good way to build social relations and self-esteem as the students would more easily be able to support each other and mingle inter-ethnically. Additionally, the school context should promote participation in extracurricular activities afternoon and during lunch in order to provide more positive peer interactions because it has been noted a drop in such activities following the transition to high school (Blyth et al., 1983;

Ellerbrock & Keifer, 2013). By promoting these aspects schools can help students attain the basic needs of belongingness and competence (Maslow, 1968).

An exploratory study would be useful to better conceptualize students' current experiences and this information could be used to suggest adaptations for transition programs that try to address students' concerns. As we have seen above, the transition to high school is a vulnerable time in the student's life and the quality of adaptation to high school predicts dropout rates, therefore, targeting this school transition is essential to promoting longer educational trajectories which may in turn have positive benefits on society.

### **Pandemic Context**

The current circumstances of a global pandemic require a special note. The present study was conducted during a time of unpredictability and novelty. As a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic that brought the first wave of the virus to Canada in March 2020, schools had closed until September. Many elementary schools did not finish the last academic year and those who did, did so using unconventional methods (i.e., online courses adapted in a short timeframe). Further, the new school year began with new protective measures to maintain health through social distancing. Some grades are currently operating strictly online, while others have a combined method (both online and in-person). Therefore, for students who have transitioned into high school this year, it is an unprecedented experience. Students likely had a lack of appropriate preparation from either their elementary or their new high school to support them through the transition phase due to the circumstances.

Families were in social isolation for several months while children were out of school and parents were either laid off from work or working from home. The entirety of this situation unavoidably caused a negative impact on health, safety and well-being (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). Although children are resilient, preventing them from having social opportunities and an

education at crucial developmental stages may have long-term repercussions that we cannot yet predict. Additional support to students returning to school was necessary upon their return to school in order to catch up and adapt to changes (Douglas, Katikireddi, Taulbut, McKee & McCartney, 2020). Not much is known about whether students received any such support in addition to the regular support offered during the transition to high school. Parents, schools and other professionals will have to continue cooperating to ensure children and adolescents are supported through this difficult time (Wang et al., 2020). Excessive school absences have negatively impact academic performance in the past (Gottfried, 2011). Appropriate intervention can mitigate some of the negative impacts of prolonged school absence (Hawkrigg & Payne, 2014). Therefore, conducting research on school transition at this moment in history was difficult but necessary to shine light on students' experiences of challenges and eases. Having this information may serve useful to implementing programs to better support students in the future if a similar situation arises.

According to Steinberg et al., (2006), particularly following a disaster situation where there has been mass trauma, convenience sampling methods are most commonly utilized to obtain a sample of participants of interest. Furthermore, researchers may be met with some resistance from schools however, it is important to explain to them that children and adolescents have been known to benefit from expressing their experiences following a stressful period (Steinberg et al., 2006). Therefore, there was double benefits to conducting a study on school transition occurring during the pandemic situation being as it provided useful information but also provided a safe place for sharing that may have had positive psychological value for students.

### **Conducting Research on Children from Different Ethnicities**

When conducting research on children, it is important to be aware of the Rights of Children expressed by the United Nations (1989). Students must always be treated ethically and with respect. Ethnographic research emphasized the participant as the expert on the topic which is in-line with children's rights (Hays & Singh, 2012). Although the researcher prepared a set of questions for the interview, the students recounts of their experiences directed the findings by sharing what they believed was important to know based on their personal interpretation of the questions which allowed them to apply their right to freedom of expression. The researcher also engaged in self-reflexive practices in order to ensure that the true voice of the participants was heard rather than a misinterpretation of perspectives (Hays & Singh, 2012). In the adult-driven society that we currently live in, children seldomly receive the opportunity to share their perspectives in a way that can contribute to the progression of the system, but the present study hopes to provide students with a platform to allow their voice to be heard in hopes that the findings will help future students in their transitions to high school.

Moreover, conducting research with children generally has its challenges which include having a greater power difference between the researcher and participant, building rapport, having different cognitive capacities, using more creative methods to engage participants (Kirk, 2007). For this reason, using a combined method which includes an art-based activity was thought to attract them and make them feel comfortable to express themselves more than traditional interviewing methods. The researcher also ensured that a certain rapport is formed with the participants in order to gain their trust to ensure that they share as freely as possible their personal experiences about their transition to high school. Some topics may have been somewhat uncomfortable for the students therefore, it is important that the youth felt secure in the research process (Bradford & Cullen, 2013). At all times, the student was reminded that they were able to

stop if they felt uncomfortable in any way. This option allowed the youth to apply their rights to make informed choices.

There are also multiple factors to consider when conducting research on ethnic minorities. For example, Okazaki and Sue (1998) suggest that researchers should be explicit about the inclusion of ethnicity as a variable, they should also describe in detail their sampling method, and there should be a control group for comparison reasons. Furthermore, the varying ethnic and cultural backgrounds (i.e., histories, values, traditions, social norms etc.) must be taken into account in order to be sensitive towards differences and to ensure that the researcher does not offend the participants (Liamputtong, 2010). Additionally, linguistic misinterpretations should also be considered in order to ensure awareness of both verbal and non-verbal customs prior to interviewing any students. In order to maintain authenticity of the data, the researcher ensured an understanding of any cultural differences so that the results were genuinely gathered and presented.

The research can only be considered genuine if these various factors of age, ethnicity, culture and other demographic factors are thoroughly considered in the process. The current study ensured care when preparing and when conducting the research to work with the populations of interest. Finally, dissemination of the research is also an important factor that is often forgotten in the research process (Bradford & Cullen, 2013). The participants were actively involved, and the researcher shared a summary of the themes as well as ask the participants for feedback on their data. Ideally, the conclusions and suggestions should also be shared with the school boards to help them in addressing any challenges that currently exist as the students make the transition to high school. This may help minimize the negative effects on students' healthy adaptation to their new environments.

### **Present Study**

School transitions are complex at any age - more so for pre-adolescents who are simultaneously experiencing a drastic environmental but also physical change. For students who are immigrants or experiencing a cultural change, this transition may be reveal at an even greater risk for poor adaptation to their new high school compared to other students. According to the previous literature (Blyth et al., 1983; Eccles & Midgley, 1988), the greater the gap between one's elementary school context and their high school context, the more difficult time a child may have in successfully adapting to the changes. Every additional change adds an accumulation of risk for that student. Seeing as every student will go through a habituation process during such a school transition, some students may require more time to feel comfortable than others. In a study conducted on refugees who resettled in the United States, higher sense of belongingness was associated with less depression, higher self-efficacy, greater well-being, and successful adjustment, which speaks to the importance of understanding and improving student's overall school experiences during transition periods (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007).

Much emphasis has been placed on the entry to school (daycare to grade school), however the ball seems to have been dropped in supporting students transitioning to high school. In Canada, different school boards exist that govern the curriculum in unique ways. Certain schools build transition programs straight into the course programme, while others completely ignore it. This inconsistency should be acknowledged on a wider scale. Research shows that students who report having a greater sense of belonging as well as more social support from parents, peers and schools, were more successful academically and also displayed fewer depressive symptoms (Newman et al., 2007), which highlights the importance of supporting students during the transition to high school. Similarly, Hernandez (2009) emphasized the importance of providing social support for immigrants as a coping strategy to deal with stress of acculturation. Andrews and Bishop (2012) compared transition programs in various countries and found that those that

used a multifaceted approach, being as they involved multiple systems and were longitudinal in nature, seem to be most effective. Although there are some guidelines available to aid in the transition to high school (e.g., Beaulac et al., 2012), few widescale transition programs currently exist to facilitate and support students through this type of school transition, and of those that do exist, none specifically focus on the cultural shifts that certain students are experiencing.

Perhaps because Canada is considered so multicultural, we forget that not everyone may have the same cultural experience growing up. As of late, there is an increased emphasis on creating awareness that racism and inequality still exist even in our modern world. Additionally, there still exists culturally segregated communities that live distinctly within the greater multicultural society (Hiebert, 2015). For example, a map of Montreal illustrates some of the major cultural communities (e.g., Italy, Greece, Philippines, China, Lebanon, Haiti) that represent at least 5% of residential district's population (Marin, 2017). Children growing up in certain cultures, may have greater opportunity to explore, in great depth, their own cultural traditions including the language, religion, values and more. While others may be exposed to a wider range of cultures rather than one single culture.

Most high schools in Montreal are multicultural meaning that those who attend will be exposed to peers of various cultures. Some districts may have more evident majority groups. Fewer mono-cultural high schools exist in Montreal compared to mono-cultural elementary schools. This means that a majority of students who once attended a school that was primarily made of peers that shared their cultural roots will have to consequentially make the transition to a multicultural high school environment. Again, this process may be easier for some and challenging for others. Being immersed in one specific culture for a decade might be met with an acculturation experience once the transition is underway. Better understanding and appreciating



the transition to multicultural high schools is a topic that should be given more emphasis as multiculturalism in Canada permits such different experiences.

Given the aforementioned information, the present study aimed to provide insight into students' experiences of transitioning to a multicultural high school when coming from previously mono-cultural school contexts such as from cultural schools that exist around Canada. There is a gap in the school transition research that tend to focus on younger children but neglects the high school transition experience. Even more so, there is a lack of research on transitioning to a new cultural context within your country of origin. Much previous research has been conducted in the United States, on populations of students considered to be visible minorities, however it would be relevant to also study Canadian populations (Lipps, 2005). Even more so important this year to understand this transition phase within a pandemic context.

In order to fully comprehend the multitude of factors that can influence students' transition to high school, the present study drew from different theoretical perspectives to guide the inquiry about students' experiences. Based on the developmental perspective, this study sought to understand whether the transition to high school, in its present form, meets the developmental needs of pre-adolescent students. Further, drawn from ecological models of adaptation, the research attempted to pinpoint which environmental support systems are available to students transitioning to high school. Moreover, grounded on acculturation theories, the study enlightened on the adaptation process that may exist for students who are experiencing a cultural shift during the transition to high school. In relation to this, identity theories also guided our inquiry into students' cultural identity formation process after being exposed to multiple new cultures. Altogether, this was an exploratory study to better understand the transitional experience specifically for students who faced a cultural shift during this period. This knowledge can hopefully help to inspire curriculum implication in order to support students in a more proactive

way, to prevent challenges related to such a transition. Prior to the current study, we were not aware of how smooth or difficult this type of a transition may have been for students experiencing this cultural shift simultaneously. Therefore, this study was unique in providing a preliminary exploration of the students' perspectives and experiences as they discussed their transition from a mono-cultural school to a heterogeneous community school in Montreal.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

Due to the novel and exploratory nature of the present study, a phenomenological approach was utilized to gain insights about students' experiences of transitioning to multicultural high schools. This qualitative study sought to collect students' first-hand perceptions of this transitional period of their lives in order to better understand the entirety of the process including any pleasures or challenges that may have been associated with it. Unlike more traditional research approaches, this method allowed for a deep understanding of the individual's perspectives on lived experiences which highlighted factors that were important to them (Dukes, 1984; Hays & Singh, 2012). Therefore, data and results were primarily based on the nature of participants' contribution rather than predetermined hypotheses. Using this research method, the participants were considered to be the experts on the topic whereas the researcher was merely the messenger tasked with delivering the knowledge gained in a non-biased form (Hays & Singh, 2012). Although participant subjectivity is emphasized with this method, it also aims to compare experiences with others to determine similarities related to the phenomenon in question, while minimizing subjective interpretation by the researcher (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Specifically, the research method that was employed included a mixed-design such that students completed one art-based activity and also underwent one semi-structured individual interview which conjunctly contributed to the gain of knowledge desired by this study. The art-

based activity allowed for more creative freedom to express any topic that the subject chose given the limits of the instructions of the task. For this part of the study, the participants were given the choice between four options including creating a collage, drawing, song/poem or writing about an artifact. On the other hand, the interview provided prompts to obtain knowledge on certain predetermined questions but was initially steered by the experience of the student in order to gain more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Interviews are the primary choice of methods for qualitative researchers who are tackling an underexplored social phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012). However, creative methods are ideal when working with youth in order to facilitate their communication of personal experience. Therefore, having employed this mixed-method design allowed for more holistic understanding of the students' experiences.

Furthermore, some basic demographic information (i.e., school composition, transitional support) of the schools was planned to be gathered directly from the administration with their consent. Due to the circumstances of recruitment which will be discussed further, we did not receive much collaboration from schools. We suspect that having been through the pandemic, they could not take on more projects that involved any extra time. Therefore, some of this information was gathered directly from the students or from any information that was available to the public online about the schools that the participants attended. Utilizing these combined methods essentially provided a voice to the students guided by the inquiry of the transition topic and data from external sources were used to triangulate certain information and/or as conversation prompts during the interview segment.

The chosen methodology was appropriate for this topic being that it had never before been studied in such a context, based on the current knowledge available. Therefore, prior to being at the stage of formulating any hypotheses, manipulations, or suggestions, the "transition to a multicultural high school" phenomenon had to be understood from direct lived experiences of

the students who provided the basic knowledge. Following the gain of this insight, future studies may focus on the impact of creating useful curriculum interventions for students who are transitioning to high school and facing a cultural shift.

## **Participants**

In attempt to understand this experience of cultural shift during an educational progression, this study recruited students who attended a mono-cultural elementary school and who had completed their first year at a multicultural high school. Therefore, the targeted age-group for recruitment included 12 to 13-year-old students (students in grade-seven). An amendment was made to the original inclusion criteria in hopes of reaching a wider audience after remarking that it was difficult to find participants for reasons that will be discussed later on. Therefore, in total the study included five male participants who had previously attended one of the two main Armenian elementary schools. The final sample consisted of two participants that were 12 years old and two participants that were 13 years old. One participant was 14 years old and he was the only one who had just completed grade-eight at a public high school. Since it was his first year transitioning out of the Armenian school, he was still considered to fit the criteria of the study and contribute useful information despite being one grade higher than the others. All other participants had just completed their first year in grade-7 of private high schools. All high schools were considered to be mainstream and multicultural. All students who participated were considered to be either second or third generation immigrants. See Table 1 for a summary of the demographic information of all five participants.

Since Montreal has various cultural groups that offer a private educational experience immersing student within their own cultural communities, this study hoped to include participants from different cultural elementary schools to determine how similar or dissimilar their transitional experience while adapting a new multicultural high school environment. This

would have allowed richer understanding of this experience lived by students from different cultural communities around Montreal. When recruitment was initiated, we hoped to recruit a total of 8 to 12 students for this study (2-3 students per ethnicity). According to Duke (1984), small sample sizes are appropriate to use with a phenomenological approach since we are collecting a large amount of subjective data about a phenomenon therefore this justifies the choice for the sample size.

The targeted communities that were chosen for the current study included, Greeks, Armenians, Jews, and Islamics. The final sample only consisted of Armenian males. These aforementioned cultures are some of the most prevalent ethnic communities that have private elementary schools with high enrollment of students from each population respectively within the greater Montreal area. Certainly, some cultures maintain more strict traditions than others, as previously described, therefore having a mixed sample would have been beneficial to note if there are any differences in the transitional experience based on one's cultural background. We had planned to limit the sample to only include first, second, or third generation immigrants in order to ensure that their cultural maintenance was significant which was the case as the final sample consisted of all second-generation immigrants to our knowledge. This was the primary population of interest for the present study. We expected some participants to be of mixed-cultural backgrounds. This too was the case in the final sample

### **Context**

The context of interest included ethnocultural schools that existed in Montreal. These day schools are primarily composed of individuals that share a specific ethnicity, culture, religion, language as well as values and traditions. In fact, it is often a requirement to have an ethnic origin (e.g., parent or grandparent of that background) in order to be eligible for enrollment in these such schools. The communities that were chosen all had multiple schools that consist primarily of

**Table 1*****Participant Demographic Information***

<b>Participants (Pseudonyms)</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Maternal Place of Birth</b>	<b>Paternal Place of Birth</b>	<b>Maternal Roots</b>	<b>Paternal Roots</b>	<b>Generation of Immigrant (Maternal)</b>	<b>Generation of Immigrant (Paternal)</b>	<b>Elementary School</b>	<b># of Years in Armenian School</b>	<b>Private or Public HS</b>
Steve	14	Canada	Greece	Egypt	Greece	3 <sup>rd</sup> generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	School A	10	Public
Simon	13	Canada	Kuwait	Egypt	Syria	3 <sup>rd</sup> generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	School A	6	Private
Anthony	13	Jordan	Montreal	Lebanon	Egypt	3 <sup>rd</sup> generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	School B	6	Private
Gregory	12	Canada	Canada	Egypt	France	3 <sup>rd</sup> generation	3 <sup>rd</sup> generation	School B	9	Private
Ricky	12	Turkey	Syria	Turkey	Syria	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	School B	9	Private

*Note.* This is a table representation of the participant demographic information. HS = high school.

students who share common roots. These schools were elicited to partake in the current study and to assist the researcher with recruiting their alumni. These schools may have been able to provide a unique sense of community with others who share various cultural aspects but unlike their mainstream counterparts, they may have limited exposure and contact with children or adults who are of diverse cultural backgrounds. The curriculum also differs from mainstream schools as there may be more topics (e.g., history, religion studies) related to their specific culture (Maxwell et al., 2012).

### **Recruitment**

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants from the populations of students in mono-cultural elementary schools. This sampling method required participants to be chosen based on predetermined characteristics that matched the interests of the researcher (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016), and it was appropriate to utilize in this exploratory study. A three-tiered recruitment campaign was launched for this study. In order to achieve the desired sample of participants, recruitment was conducted with the four ethnic communities of interest (i.e., Jewish, Greek, Armenian, Muslim and Canadian).

For the first approach, we had originally hoped to receive collaboration from the targeted ethnocultural elementary schools that would have been able to contact their alumni and promote the participation in the current study. We began contacting schools for participant recruitment immediately after receiving ethics approval in mid-April 2021. We sent schools an introductory email and poster and requested that they return our call to discuss the project in more details. Unfortunately, due to factors such as the pandemic adaptations in schools, none of the targeted schools communicated with us concerning the study. Only one Islamic school spoke to us on the phone and allowed us to present the study in brief to an administrator however, they did not pursue the study thereafter. After multiple attempts to contact different schools numerous times,

we decided to proceed simultaneously with the second-level recruitment strategy to broaden our chances of success.

As a second recruitment method, word of mouth or snowball sampling was used to attempt to gather the desired number of participants. The primary researcher had a few friends and co-workers who were part of the ethnic communities of interest and who had children attending the ethnic schools in two out of the four communities. Although this recruitment method seemed to show promise at the start, it rapidly let through. There were a few potential participants from the Jewish community that were referred to the researcher and although the families showed interest, they did not fit the initial inclusion criteria of the study. Unfortunately, when the inclusion criteria were mended to increase the chance of obtaining participants, those individuals were no longer interested and did not return our emails inviting them to partake in the study. By using this recruitment method, the researcher was able to place an advertisement of the study in a weekly school newsletter which was sent to alumni of a Jewish elementary school. Additionally, two Islamic teachers offered to speak to the school principals to help with recruitment. Despite the efforts of various individuals, none of these attempts at participant recruitment panned out.

There was but one link made with an Armenian administrator that successfully helped for participant recruitment. This link was made via one of the primary researcher's classmates who referred her to speak to a school staff member who knew her family. After connecting with this administrator, she attempted to assist with the recruitment by bringing the study to the attention of the school principal. Unfortunately, because of the laws of the school, they were not allowed to provide us with any contact information of alumni which was expected. Instead, this administrator decided to help via the word-of-mouth method, and she referred a few individuals that she knew on a more personal level directly to our study. Thereafter, once the initial



participant was found, the snowballing method successfully helped to find a total of five participants from the Armenian community. Some parents willingly accepted to help with recruitment by sharing the study poster on their Facebook page or by simply contacting other parents of their child's closest friends from elementary school.

As a third method of recruitment, we also attempted to reach a wider audience via social media (i.e., community pages) in order to advertise the study. The primary researcher shared a poster and brief explanation of the terms of participation. This ad was uploaded to her main Facebook page which was shared by a few of her friends. The researcher also posted the ad in multiple community groups that were specific to the ethnicities of interest. Similarly, the ad was posted on school and alumni pages as long as they were open to posts from the general public. A few attempts were made to be added to certain community pages that were private by contacting the administrators of the groups. Unfortunately, none of those groups posted the study's ad nor accepted the researcher to the group in time for the recruitment phase of the project. The ad was also translated by one of the researcher's classmates and posted to an Islamic social media platform to attempt to reach that community. Since simply posting the advertisement did not receive much recognition, the primary researcher also directly messaged a few parents who she knew had children that had graduated from an ethnic elementary school due to seeing the public posts on Facebook, however this too failed. Refer to Figure 4 for three-tiered recruitment strategy that was used in attempt to find participants for the current study. The advertisement that was originally used for the study was modified upon request of parents who are attempting to help with recruitment to make it clearer and more concise. Refer to Figures 6.1 and 6.2 the two models of the advertisement that were used for recruitment.

The final selection criteria for this ethnic sample included:

- (a) Youth aged who were at least 12 years old

- (b) Youth in the process of completing or who completed their first year at a multicultural high school
- (c) Youth that previously attended one of the ethnocultural elementary schools targeted
- (d) Youth that belonged to one of the ethnic, cultural or religious communities that this study is targeting being either Greek, Armenian, Jewish, Muslim.
- (e) Youth that were considered to be first, second or third generation immigrants (i.e., has immigrant parents or grandparents who were born abroad)

Throughout the recruitment phase of the project, the inclusion criteria were changed a few times in attempt to obtain more participants for the current study. We had attempted to recruit students who remained in the ethnic high schools in order to be able to compare experiences of students who transitioned out to those who continued in those schools. Despite various efforts to increase the sample size, we were unable to recruit any other participants in time to meet the deadlines of the current project.

### **Compensation**

Although it was not originally part of the study's proposal, following the interviews with the participants, the researcher decided to offer students a \$25.00 Amazon gift card as compensation for their time. An amendment was requested and approved in July 2021 to be able to send students gift cards as a way to thank them for taking time out of their busy school and summer schedules to participate in this study. Because the students were unaware that they would be receiving a gift-card which was only sent out following the member-checking process, this compensation could not have influenced their choice for participating in the study. Thus, this compensatory gift card could not be considered coercion of any kind because participants received it after the deadline to withdraw from the study and were never informed about it in advance.

## Procedure

Following ethics approval, we engaged in the recruitment stage of this study as was described in great detail above. A multi-tiered approach was utilized in attempt to broaden the chances of recruitment success. Word-of-mouth and snowball sampling appeared to have success for the present study.

Once we had consent to contact potential participants who were referred to us, we did so immediately to briefly introduce the project, send the consent forms and schedule an interview date. When participation was agreed upon, we had set up a Zoom meeting with one of the participants to obtain informed consent prior to the interview date, to explain the art component, to answer any questions and to schedule the interview date with the student. This was only done for the first recruited participant because for the rest, the parents simply scheduled an interview date with the researcher within a short delay therefore, there was not enough time to obtain informed consent/assent beforehand. Despite not meeting with the students before the interview to explain the art component, we sent detailed instructions to the parents and requested that they send us the signed consent and assent forms prior to the interview to ensure that both the parents and the students were aware of the terms of participation. All parents returned the signed forms prior to the interviews with students. The terms of participation outlined in the assent form was reviewed with students on the day of the interview before beginning the data collection process in order to ensure their understanding. Figure 5 for a complete timeline representation of the research process and to Appendix D for the consent/assent forms.

Some basic information about the ethnic schools was gathered prior to the interviews with students via the schools' websites. This information was simply used by the researcher to have a base understanding of the organization of the two elementary schools. Additional information about the elementary and high schools were reported by students throughout the interviews.

Following the recruitment stage, participants were invited to partake in an individual research session with the primary investigator which included the completion of the arts-based activity as well as the semi-structured interview. The interviews were conducted via the Zoom Application due to the current pandemic circumstances to ensure maintenance of social distancing measures. The time necessary to complete both the activity and the interview was originally estimated to be within approximately one hour, however, this varied for each participant.

The art-activity was the first part of the session which was used to later prompt topics of conversation during the interview with the primary investigator. Two out of the five participants had completed the art component prior to the interview date. The other three were allocated the first 15-20 minutes of the Zoom meeting to complete this segment of the project. For this activity, the participants were given a choice to either (a) draw (b) create a collage (c) write a song or poem (d) write about a chosen artifact. Whatever they chose as the option, it had to represent a part of their experience from their elementary school versus their high school. They were asked to create a total of two representations one for each school context. All parents were provided with clear and written instructions about the art-component before the interview date (see Appendix E and F for art activity instructions). One student requested to simply write a short paragraph explaining his experience. Although this was not one of the original options, we allowed him to express himself using his desired method.

For those who did not complete the art component in advance, we explained it to them during the start of the meeting. Upon completion, participants were asked to send us their creations by email so that we can have access to them and discuss them during the second part of the session (interview phase). While the participants were completing the art component, the researcher turned off her camera to allow the students to concentrate on the task. She then turned

on her camera once they signaled to her that they had completed the task. There was then a short segment at the beginning of the interview that was dedicated to discussing the students' art creation prior to beginning the questioning so that the participant could freely explain the meaning behind their art choice and creation. This served simultaneously as an icebreaker and to allowed students an unstructured platform to express their experiences.

The semi-structured interview then explored various contributing factors that may have facilitated or challenged the students' transition to a multicultural high school during the global pandemic. The following topics were discussed: (a) preparation for the transition; (b) support during different stages of the transition; (c) perceived school contexts; (d) things that were easy versus challenging; (e) perceived changes after transitioning; (f) identity formation process (g) effects of the pandemic on the students' transition process (Refer to Appendix G for interview template). In all, the combined art and interview sessions lasted between 40 to 80 minutes. The interviews were recorded using the Zoom application in order to later be transcribed verbatim by the researcher for coding and analysis. Transcriptions were started manually by the researcher but then the Microsoft Word Processor and Otter Application were used to facilitate the transcription process. The researcher reviewed the transcripts multiple times and transferred them to an Excel file to be organized and analyzed. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant in order to maintain their anonymity and confidentiality.

Once the interviews were transcribed, the data was organized into a table using a multi-cycle coding method. In cycle one of data-coding the content was taken as close to the original form as possible at the sentence level to identify keywords (Hays & Singh, 2012). This line-by-line coding known as in-vivo coding which was used to summarize the statements made and to reduce irrelevant clutter such as repetitive or meaningless wording (e.g., "like" "umm"). The second-cycle coding was then used to categorize the statements for easy identification of

categories and keywords that link to the individual statements. Finally, the third-cycle coding (axial coding), grouping of similar keywords was used to subsequently collapse certain categories into more specific themes (Hays & Singh, 2012). Phase three of coding was only commenced once every participant's data had been coded for phase one and two to ensure that similarities were drawn, and wording was consistently used to group certain themes. Hays and Singh (2012) detailed this coding process as appropriate to be used following interviews.

### ***Trustworthiness***

I as the primary researcher was inspired by my own experience as a student who previously attended a Greek elementary school to inquire about ethnic identity formation during the transition to high school. I had a unique experience compared to some of my peers due to my multiethnic background (i.e., Greek and Polish) however I was immersed in primarily the Greek culture while growing up. Transparency about this influencing experience was important to maintain trustworthiness of the current study. Below, I have included a brief description of my role as a researcher and my reflection as an insider and outsider in this project.

In order to reduce the researcher-bias, I kept a reflexive journal noting my thoughts and perceptions at different stages of the research process. Reflexive journaling is a strategy used in qualitative research to become aware of biases, ensure ethical considerations and transparency in the process (Ortlipp, 2008; Hays & Singh, 2012). This process allowed issues to be addressed if necessary to ensure that interpretations of data reflect as purely as possible the participants' perception and not that of the researcher.

Additionally, to increase credibility, field notes were another tool utilized to document any discoveries made apart from the activity and interview moments. Field notes are also a suggested way to obtain rich contextual information which contributes to the integrity of the data (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). For example, any information gathered from the administration

or from the parents were noted. Also, if the participants shared any relevant information with the researcher outside of the data collection context it was taken note of. Some notes were also jotted down during the interviews in order to help analyse the data.

A form of data triangulation was utilized in the sense that information was gathered via two separate mediums for all participants although the medium of choice varied for each student for the art component. Some additional information was also gathered from external sources either on the internet or via parents or individuals assisting with the recruitment process. Information gathered from different sources was exclusively used as prompts and to corroborate gathered data. Member-checking was another strategy employed to ensure the purity of the data. This ensured that the perspectives of the participants were accurately disseminated (Candela, 2019). Participants were given the opportunity to verify their transcripts and themes derived from their data to give their approval. Approximately ten sample lines were pulled from each transcript and sent to participants for approval in order to minimize the time and effort expected of the participants following the interviews. No necessary modifications were brought to the attention of the researcher within the time limit given to the participants to bring forth their concerns or to withdraw from the study. Only one student revoked a single statement about their elementary school at the end of the interview when given the opportunity to provide their comments or concerns, and this was done to avoid portraying a bad reputation about their school. The participants will also be invited to read a summary of the findings following the defence of the thesis in order to complete the research cycle and ensure that the dissemination of information gathered is done appropriately to allow appreciation of the participants' efforts and experiences.

### **Role of Researcher**

I, as the principal investigator, had previously been a student in a similar context transitioning from an ethnocultural school to a multicultural high school, as a third-generation

immigrant who had attended the Greek elementary school Socrates. Having this first-hand experience gave me an expert-perspective and insider role to manage during the research process. There are both challenges and benefits to holding this insider role when conducting research (Greene, 2014). Some measures must be put in place in order to reduce personal bias influencing the various stages of the research process (collection, coding, analysis, interpretation) (Hays & Singh, 2012; Greene, 2014). These have already been discussed in the Trustworthiness section of the methodology. I have attempted to be as transparent as possible throughout the various stages of this project to parents, students and others involved in the project.

Evidently, this personal experience inspired the current research project which allowed the me, as primary investigator, to bring light to this important topic that has yet to be explored in detail. Although I had strong thoughts and expectations of what some students would have reported, I attempted to remain neutral when collecting and analysing the data as I wished to appreciate the varying experiences. My experience varied to a certain extent from that of the participants in this study due to unequal circumstances however, it cannot be denied that the curiosity about this topic stemmed from my past as most research does.

Since I had experienced this transition over 15 years prior to this study, a few new contextual factors led students to experience this transition differently at the present time. In addition, the pandemic circumstances added a novelty to this year's transition to high school that I could not speak towards having not experienced it during the same stage of my life. Therefore, my role as a researcher was simultaneously considered an outsider being that I had been removed from such a context for many years and there are new contextual factors that contributed to the participants' perspectives. Furthermore, the present study included a different ethnic community, Armenian, which is not a community that I am part of and therefore, an outsider perspective was also relevant in this case.



This being said, my insider role still proved to have some insight about the context although it did not help much to gain access to the milieus of interest. Despite having contacts with certain faculty of Greek schools in Montreal, recruitment in the Greek and two other ethnic communities was unsuccessful. Being an alumnus, seemed to have no particular value for the administration that was contacted at the Greek schools. Furthermore, my experience allowed me to form a stronger bond with certain participants as I was able to understand some of their own experiences more easily having lived through some conceivably similar circumstances. This seemed to help me establish a stronger rapport with the participants which in turn may have elicited their openness to share various information with me during the interview.

### **Findings**

Following interviews conducted with the five male participants, the transcribed data were analyzed to better understand the experiences of students transitioning to multicultural high schools during a global pandemic after having attended an ethnic elementary school. Along with interview data, a more creative art component allowed students to express certain ideas in another light. Each student selected the means of their choice to express a part of their school experiences (e.g., drawing, writing, artifact). The data for both complementary data collection methods will be presented below for each participant in a case-study format. Common themes will also be summarized at the end of the findings section in order to clearly outline experiences that may be relatable to other students who live through similar transitional phases. The main goal of the phenomenological study was to explore the multitude of factors contributing to the transitional phase in these pre/young-adolescents' lives and this was inspired by various theoretical models. In particular, we were interested in:

- (a) The students' general experience of the entire transition phase
- (b) Any perceived differences or similarities between the school contexts

- (c) Any perceived changes or adaptations made by the student during this phase
- (d) Any perceived challenges or positive surprises during transition phase
- (e) Any perceived supports received from the student's surrounding systems
- (f) Any worries or expectations about transitioning to a multicultural high school
- (g) Any perceived change in cultural identity or identity formation process
- (h) Any perceived effects of the global pandemic on their experience of this school transition

Case study data are presented below using pseudonyms. Any data that can link the student to their identity have also been removed for confidentiality purposes.

### **Presentation of Case Study Data**

#### ***Case Study 1: Steve***

The first participant interviewed was Steve. His mother, Jenny, sat in on the interview and occasionally contributed some support or additional prompts to help Steve respond. The researcher verbalized at multiple instances, that the interview was meant to hear from Steve, however, some of the information added by Jenny was equally helpful to Steve's responses. Wherever pertinent, in the analysis, Jenny's contributions will be distinguished from Steve's. It was the mother's choice to remain in the room with her son.

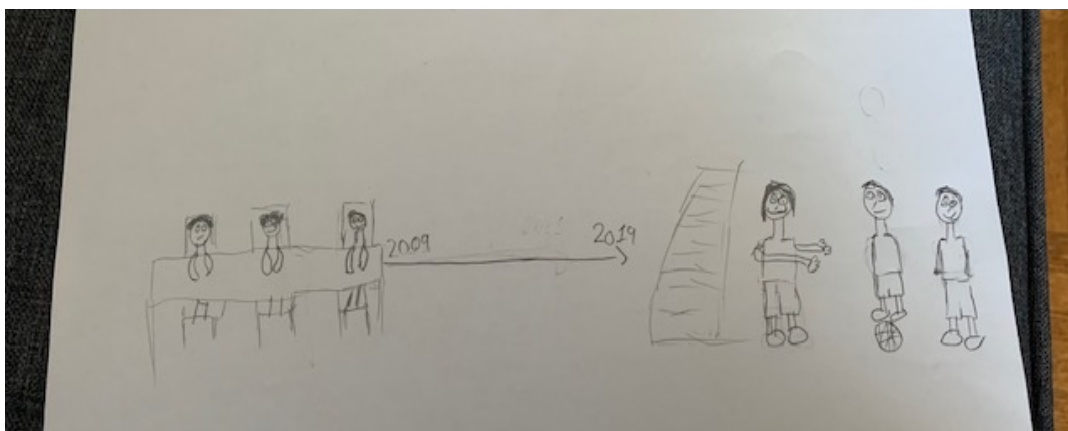
Steve was the only participant who had just completed his second year of high school at the time of the interview, although it was his first year attending a public multicultural high school. He was a 14-year-old male who previously attended a private Armenian elementary school which typically extends until high school. He left his previous school following grade-7 to attend the school that he is currently attending. When asked about his ethnicity he described himself as Armenian. Upon further questioning, it was revealed that his mother is Armenian, and his father is Greek; however, Steve considers himself Armenian being as he has been more

involved in that culture throughout his life and schooling. In terms of spoken languages, Steve revealed that he speaks English, French and Armenian, but not Greek.

When asked to describe himself and his hobbies, Steve named that he is “impatient” (line 24) and “like(s) building Legos” (line 27). Additionally, his mother informed us that he liked playing videogames, and the guitar (line 31). He appeared uncertain about what else he could say about himself which was evident when he asked his mother what else he likes (line 35). For the art-component, Steve chose to draw a picture to represent the comparison between his elementary versus high school experiences (Figures 1.1 and 1.2 below).

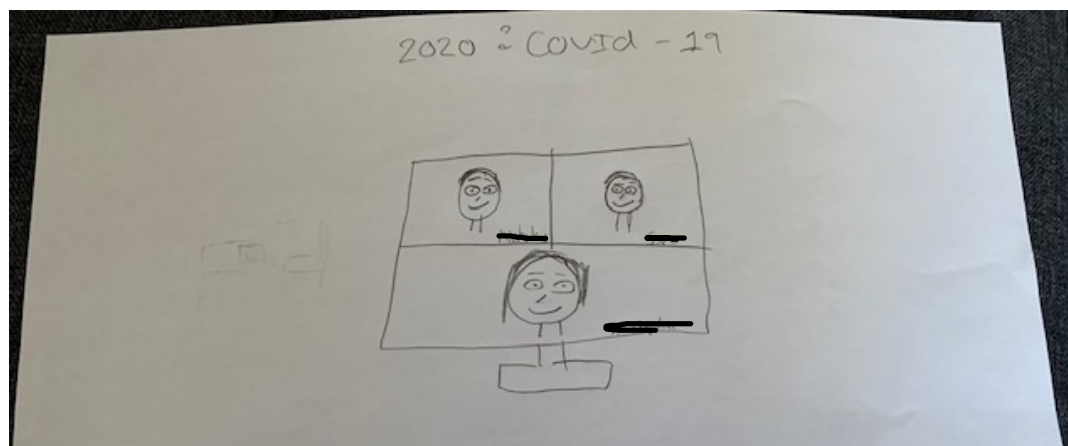
**Figure 1.1**

*Case Study 1 Representation of Elementary Experience*



**Figure 1.2**

*Case Study 1 Representation of High School Experience*



Steve described his drawings in more details when questioned about them. For the first one, he explained that he drew him and his friends when they were three years old and then 10 years later playing soccer together (line 37). He met his friends in pre-kindergarten which is part of the Armenian elementary school. He further explains that he still has the same group of friends all these years later even now that he changed schools (line 39). One of his best memories was the last day of grade six (line 45). He did not provide many details although he explained that “it was just one day that can never be repeated” (line 47). There were various activities taking place that day and his mother added that there were also food trucks (lines 50, 51).

Steve then explained his second drawing which represented his high school experience, he chose to draw a Zoom videoconference screen with all his friends’ faces and names on the screen because he could not see his friends for a large portion of the year as they engaged in online learning (line 55). This drawing represents his experience in grade 7, when he was still at his Armenian school, however, it also somewhat applied to his more recent high school experience, post-transition, although there was less online learning this last year. He agreed that it was difficult transitioning to a new school under these circumstances, but he had one close friend who he explained further in the interview aided him in adapting to his new high school (lines 56, 57).

**Similarities and Differences.** When asked about some differences between his Armenian school and his current high school, Steve explained that the teaching style was different. He disliked the teaching style at his Armenian school and admits that he had difficulty understanding (lines 83, 85, 87), but now he perceives that “teachers teach well” in high school (line 83). It was harder for Steve academically at his Armenian school compared to his new high school (line 88, line 159, 162). He also disliked having the extra language class at his Armenian school (line 103). Some classes were different at his elementary school as they were specific to the Armenian culture. Steve now likes all of his classes, except for math, and his favorite class is music (lines

90, 95). He observed that his grades improved this year due to being at a new school (line 157). Furthermore, he described having a smaller workload and fewer subjects this past year compared to at his previous school (159, 162).

At his Armenian school, Steve loved the varied food served at the cafeteria which included traditional Armenian meals (lines 110, 114, 116). He also loved his friends (line 118). Now in his new high school, he loves his teachers (line 120) who he describes as being “very useful” compared to the teachers at his old school and he agrees that they are open, and he can rely on them if he has any questions or difficulties (lines 124, 125). He also names his one close friend as another thing about high school that he loves (line 127).

**Friends.** Steve explained that most of his friends from elementary remained at his Armenian school still into high school. One friend left the year before and one friend left the same year as he did (line 53, 57). He now has two Armenian friends at his new school but one that he is really close to who was in all of his classes this year (lines 127, 130). Although he admitted having fewer friends compared to at his old school, he perceives them as being “very good ones” (line 169). This being said, he still hangs out more with his elementary school friends compared to his new high school friends (line 284).

Steve explained that “finding friends was hard for the first few weeks but then [he] got the hang of it” (line 138). Overall, he described the process of making friends as being easy (line 79). When questioned further about why it was difficult to make friends, he simply explained that he did not talk to anyone at first, he only knew his one friend and would solely do his class projects with that one friend (lines 140, 142, 146). This prevented him from creating new friendship opportunities since he stuck to only one person at the start. He further stated that he “just got lucky ‘cause [his] friend went [to the same school]” (line 263). Having a friend helped him adapt to his new environment with ease.

**Perceived Changes.** Steve did not perceive any changes in his responsibilities (line 165) nor in his personal identity (line 179). In terms of transportation, his mother drives him to school since they live nearby (line 167). In relation to growing up, he admits having grown more hair recently (line 171). His mother adds that his voice has changed, and he has grown a mustache and also he has grown in height (lines 172, 174). Socially, his friends changed, and he has fewer friends, as mentioned above, but Steve did not perceive any other changes.

**Perceived Challenges, Eases and Expectations.** Steve shared that the easiest part of the transition was having “easy classes” (line 190). He found the curriculum easier than when he was in elementary school because of the added stress of Armenian classes. In contrast, he expressed that the most difficult part of transitioning to his new high school was “starting new, having no friends except one, not knowing [his] friend would be in [his] class” (line 184). He explained that his friend was coincidentally in his class bubble which he was not aware would be the case prior to the first day of school. He was initially worried about not having any friends (line 192). Prior to the transition to high school, he was looking forward to being able to finally see his friend again since it had been over a year that he had not seen him (line 194). His friend had transitioned to the new school last year in grade-seven unlike Steve who only transitioned this year in grade-eight.

**Perceived Supports.** Steve did not perceive that he received any types of support from anyone in his surrounding systems throughout the transition process. Some examples of supports (e.g., school, familial, peer support) were provided to inquire further about this point but both Steve and his mother did not believe that he received any of the types of supports mentioned. This being said, when questioned further, it was revealed that on his first day at his high school, a school staff-member did show him around with other new students to help orient them in their surrounding (lines 218-229). Additionally, Steve’s friend introduced him to some peers and

helped answer his questions about the school which could also be considered a type of social support (line 245).

**Cultural Aspect.** In terms of culture, Steve described his current school as having “just a few Armenians and the rest are just Greek, Italian...” (line 268). This contrasts his old school where everyone was Armenian. Other than that, the topic of culture was not very relevant for Steve. He appeared to have made new friends that are of multicultural background although he gravitated to some Armenian friends as well and still chose to spend most of his time with his old Armenian friends. When asked if Steve has any Armenian friends at his high school he stated that “he [has] a few, two... yeah” (line 76). His other friends are from other cultural backgrounds.

**Reasons School Change.** Steve explained that he chose to change schools this year because he disliked the rigid discipline and teaching styles at his Armenian school (lines 83 to 87, 255). He explained that: “The teachers, the environment, I just didn’t like it anymore” (line 255). It appears that this was the main motivation for change. He stated that “[at his] current school, [his] teachers teach well. [At his] old school they [didn’t teach well] ... He never [understood] anything there” (line 87). After being in his Armenian school for a prolonged period of time, he craved a change.

**Pandemic Experience.** Steve was asked if he perceived any negative consequences due to the pandemic, and he explained that during his first year at high school at the Armenian school, “half of [his] year was online. [He] couldn’t see his friends for six months, all [he] saw was their face on the screen” (line 55). When they physically went back to class in the beginning of the school year, Steve described it being “weird to see new faces” since he had not seen anyone in person throughout the pandemic (line 286). This was also his first time entering a new school in grade-eight after being at his Armenian school for nine years. This last year, although they were back in-class most of the time, there was approximately one month, that his group

stayed home due to exposure to Covid-19 cases. He explained that he barely went to school in October due to class closures. Additionally, Steve has been participating in Armenian Scouts since he was six years old, but due to the pandemic it was also done online throughout the last year, which he did not like much (lines 203, 205, 207). Furthermore, there were no extracurricular activities this past year either in or outside of school (lines 272, 274, 276), which his mom also describes as being rough (line 276).

Another consequence of the pandemic was related to the school functioning. Steve illustrated that “they only put lockers around November [...] Our books we keep with us, we left the jackets in the locker” (lines 231, 233). All other academic material had to be carried in the students’ backpacks which they would bring with them to class. Furthermore, Steve explained that “all [his] classes were in the one class except for music and gym” (line 235). Therefore, Steve did not get to experience a typical high school but rather transitioned during a time of change. Additionally, when asked about the safety measures implemented at his high school, Steve explained the mask-wearing:

“Well at the beginning of the year, we had to wear it in all common areas except for our classroom, when we're sitting down. But then when the Covid cases started going up, we had to wear it on at all time” (line 295).

Despite these negative consequences, Steve illustrated that during the online learning and school closures, he “lik[ed] being home. It was fun [...] [he got to stay in] pyjamas all day” (lines 60, 62). Other than that, he did not name any other positive or neutral consequences of the pandemic. If the pandemic did not occur, he believes that it might have been easier to talk to new friends face-to-face and to socialize (lines 289, 291). When asked about any advice that he could give to future high school students making the transition from a similar elementary experience, Steve could not think of anything. His interview was the shortest out of the five interviews.

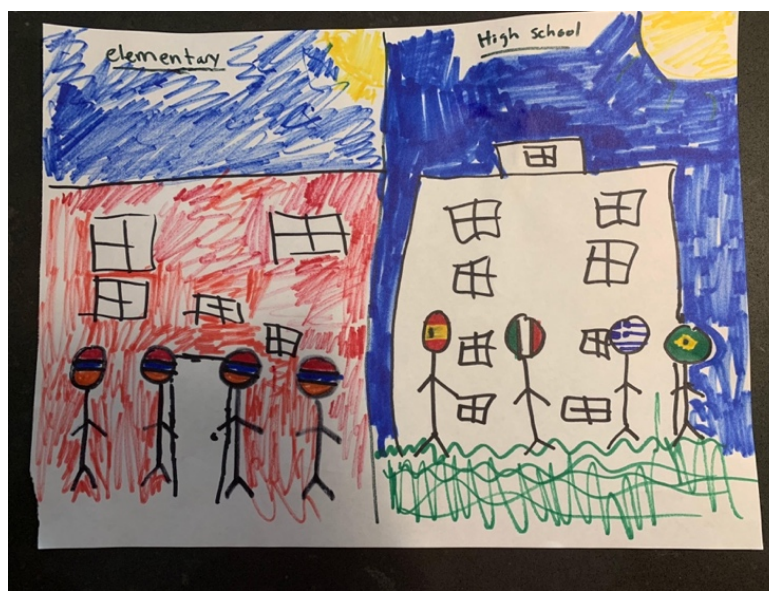


### ***Case Study 2: Simon***

The second participant, Simon, was a 13-year-old male currently frequenting a mainstream private high school in Montreal. He had just completed 7<sup>th</sup> grade at the time of the interview. He had previously attended a private Armenian elementary school. When questioned about his ethnicity he named being Armenian although he was born in Canada (lines 12, 15). He explained that his mother is fully Armenian, and his father is partially Lebanese (line 14). When asked to describe himself, Simon expressed being active (line 16). He further noted that he likes playing hockey and has been playing for approximately six years on a multicultural community league (lines 18 to 22).

For the art component of the project, Simon decided to draw a contrasting image which can be seen below in figure 2.1. He explained that he attempted to depict his “elementary school [which] was just one culture – Armenians. [Compared to] high school [they] got Italians, Spanish people, Greeks... [...] it’s multicultural” (line 30). This was done by representing figures with the Armenian flag as a face for his elementary school versus figures with different flags as faces for his high school. When questioned about why he chose to draw this, Simon did not have any specific reason and did not elaborate on its significance to him (lines 30, 31). Further analysis of his experience was drawn more from the interview component which follows below.

**Similarities and Differences.** When describing his two schools, Simon explained that both his elementary and his high school are similar in the sense that they are both private schools and therefore he wears a uniform (lines 36, 58, 250). He also discussed the physical and organizational aspects of the schools being that they both have breaks and cafeterias, and both schools have similar classes just taught in different languages (lines, 60, 62).

**Figure 2.1***Case Study 2 Representation of Elementary Vs. High School Experience*

The main difference that he described is that his high school is multicultural, and that English is the main language compared to his elementary school where the main languages were Armenian and French (line 36). He admits that it is easier for him now that the school is English (line 96). Upon further questioning, another difference discovered was the schedule varies, the hours of his high school are slightly shorter compared to his elementary school (line 64). They have more breaks in high school which is something that Simon really liked (line 96). He illustrated that the breaks vary in length but also in how the students choose to spend their time. Whereas in elementary school students would go outside to play sports, tag or in the snow (lines 104, 106), now in high school they just talk instead (line 112). Simon also explained that his high school is much bigger compared to his elementary school (lines 68, 70, 72). It is approximately double or triple the number of students in one grade. This being said, Simon stated that he did not realize the difference right away but rather only noticed it towards the end of the school year (line 74).

Another difference was that they had different teachers for each subject in high school compared to in elementary where the same teacher would teach different subjects (line 118, 120). For Simon, apart from the difference in language and cultural composition of his two schools, he also described that high school should feel a lot different since they were supposed to move between classes, however he did not get the chance to do so due to the protective measures related to the pandemic (116).

**Likes and Dislikes.** Specifically concerning Simon's elementary school, he explained that he disliked the fact that when "they teach [them] Armenian and [...] they get into all the little details [...] it's too much stress on [them]. The Armenian is way too much" (line 78). He continues to elaborate that they learn "big words [...] and all the rules [of grammar]" (line 80) and have "way too much [Armenian homework]" (line 84). Simon expressed that "since French here is the main language, [he would] like to focus more on French" (line 82) although he still appreciates the Armenian language and culture (line 80). In summary, Simon felt more stressed by learning an extra language in his elementary school which added extra work and he believes that there should be less emphasis on Armenian. Instead, it would be more functional to place more weight on the official provincial language, French, which, in Simon's eyes, is more important.

**Friends.** Simon stated that the aspect from his elementary school that he will never forget are his friends (lines 46, 50). Although he was close to his friends, none of them went to the same high school as him, so he was required to make completely new friends (lines 52-55). He now has different friend groups although there is one that he hangs out with the majority of the time (line 168). He explains that "it was new for everyone" and no one knew each other at his high school since they all came from different elementary schools (line 56, 164). He emphasized this point multiple times throughout the interview being as he believed that making friends was easy

since everyone was in a similar position of not knowing each other. When questioned about the process of making friends, he explains that since he is shy, he typically waits for others to start talking to him (line 184). Most of the friends that he made were from his class bubble (lines 187, 188). Also, he stated that does not hang out with them outside of school but rather communicates with them via Facetime (line 170). They share similar interest in sports and videogames (lines 200, 204).

**Perceived Changes.** When questioned about academic changes, Simon explained that he perceived having slightly more homework in high school however, he would complete most of it during lunch break so that he would be free after school (line 129). He also admitted that his grades were lower this past year in high school compared to when he was in elementary, although this year was a revision with a few new subjects (lines 133 to 139). Simon explained that in “elementary [he] didn’t have to study as much since subjects are like ‘elementary level’. [In] high school, [he] feel[s] like [he] had to study much more. Not much more but just a bit more 'cause they gave [them] more stuff to study” (line 155). He was also more independent with his homework in high school and required less parental assistance (lines 156, 157). Overall, this appeared to depict an increased sense of responsibility and maturity.

In terms of pubertal changes, Simon describes that his mustache grew, and he has more hair. He explains that he has always had a lot of hair because he is Armenian, thus it is a cultural thing from his ethnic roots (lines 174, 176). Regarding his personal identity, he does not feel that it has changed at all over the last year. Simon did not perceive major changes in his identity.

**Perceived Challenges, Eases and Expectations.** Simon expected to move between classes in high school and that he would make new friends although this was not the case (line 126). At first, he was a bit nervous about making friends and it was a main challenge of transitioning to high school, but he explained that since he knew that everyone was in the same

position as he was and did not know anyone, this helped to calm him down (lines 166, 182, 211). He thought it would be difficult to make friends, but in the end he recognized that it was not as hard as expected and he was able to make friends within the first two to three days although his friend groups frequently changed (lines 194, 196, 198). He repeated a similar statement in his advice to future students to remember that it “isn’t as bad as you think” (line 266). Simon also reveals that he was stressed by the high school entrance examination that he studied for which took place at the beginning of sixth grade in order to get into the desired high school (line 215 to 219).

**Perceived Supports.** In terms of perceived support, Simon described that he attended both an open house and an orientation day where he was shown around the school and explained the rules of the school which was also an opportunity to meet friends (line 238). He agreed that this was helpful to him (line 241). Simon explained that his parents helped him buy the school uniform, school supplies and drive him to school but did not offer any other type of support (lines 251, 252). Other than that, he did not perceive receiving any other types of support from any of his surrounding systems in terms of the transition to high school (line 241). Even when prompts were offered he explained that no additional support was received during this time.

**Cultural Aspect.** Simon explained that he “never really cared” about being with people that shared the same ethnicity as him and he does activities with anyone, not only Armenians (275). He “like[s] the language, [he] respects [his] culture” (line 80). He believes that his Armenian is “good, but it’s not as good as [his] friends’ because at home [he] speaks English. The only time that [he] speak[s] Armenian [was] at school” (line 86). Since, graduating elementary school, his opportunities to speak Armenian are more limited and he only speaks it with his grandfather (line 88). Additionally, there was a difference in cultural composition between his two schools going from Armenian to a multicultural environment however, Simon

did not find it weird - he expected it (lines 270, 272). He also still keeps a connection to his cultural roots (line 273).

**Reasons for Changing Schools.** The Armenian elementary school that Simon attended also extends into high school, however, most of his friends left the school (line 256). When questioned about why he chose to leave, he explained that he did not want “to continue in the same school for like the next five years, the same exact school, [he] needed a change” (line 258, 260). When questioned further about why he needed a change, he made the following statement to clarify: “Too many years... all my friends were leaving ...so I said, ‘you know what? I’m going to leave too’ ...But even if they didn’t leave, I would still leave” (line 262). It was both his choice and his parents’ decision to change schools for high school (line 264). It appears that it was an active choice to leave the Armenian school at this time and Simon is content with the decision.

**Pandemic Experience.** The pandemic affected the way that Simon’s elementary school ended as he was not able to see his friends for the last few months, although they had a small graduation ceremony in June 2020. At the time, there was no mask mandate (line 221). Simon explained that it was fun reuniting with his friends for the graduation ceremony at the end of the school year and students got to catch up with one another after not seeing each other for months (lines 226 to 228). He stated that because he was used to not seeing his friends in a while since the school was shutdown, it was not sad or stressful to him knowing that they would be parting paths for high school thereafter (line 230). The pandemic may have even eased the experience of ending elementary school for Simon and separating from his long-time friends.

In regard to the pandemic experience, Simon admitted that he was happy the first few days of the shutdown since they did not have any homework however, at that point, no one was aware how long it would last (line 230). After a few weeks, Simon describes being “fed up” (line

232). During the closures at his elementary, they had a lot of homework but rarely had any Zoom calls (line 297) and in his high school they only closed once because a class near theirs had a potential Covid-19 case (line 290). Other than that, they were physically in class five days per week in high school.

Simon explained that because of the pandemic context, the students did not move between classes in high school as he had expected to do, but rather, they remained in one class and the teachers came to them (line 123). This past year, students remained in the same group as their class bubble as a consequence of the pandemic even during lunch (line 186, 190). Therefore, they were limited in the amount and diversity of peer interaction opportunities that were available to them in the school environment. This being said, Simon did not feel that it affected him much, since it was the first year of high school, he did not expect to make many friends, so he did not perceive that this had any negative effects on his socialization (line 186). Neither was he bothered much by the mask mandate (line 186), he got accustomed to it after about a month of starting school (line 282). The mask mandate was in place up until the last month of school (line 284). For these reasons, Simon reiterated that the pandemic did not affect him much (line 299). This being said, he believes others may have been more affected by the pandemic than he was (lines 303, 305).

### ***Case Study 3: Anthony***

The third interview was conducted with Anthony, who was a thirteen-year-old male currently attending a private high school. At the time of the interview, he had just completed his first year of high school, grade-seven. Previously, Anthony attended a private Armenian elementary school. He was born in Canada but considers himself to be Armenian similar to both of his parents (line 59). He has a younger sister (line 67). The adjectives that he used to describe himself included: fun, creative, energetic, “a little bossy,” and talkative (line 63). In terms of

hobbies, Anthony likes to make videos, take bike rides, play outdoor sports, and be with his parents (line 65). He also has a YouTube channel where he uploads videos of himself playing videogames which he makes some money from having paid ads and subscribers (line 71, 237 to 242). He plays a variety of sports either at his school or with family but does not play on a team (line 80). Additionally, he plays the piano and is self-taught (lines 92, 94).

For the art-component of the project, Anthony decided to make a side-by-side collage of two of his own pictures as is seen below in Figure 3.1. The picture on the right represents his elementary class and the one on the left represents his high school class. He explained the significance of this collage as follows:

“For the class of 2020, you can really see that like we're like a big family and at my Armenian school, like everyone knew each other, we spoke the same language, all our parents knew each other so it was really a big big family. And in my high school, it was a little different because there was a bunch, a bunch of ethnicities, different people, and I wasn't too comfortable at first, because I'm used to like everyone knowing each other. So it was a little challenge. And in the photo you can see, that like in the first one, we're all huddled up like we know each other you know we're comfortable. But in the other photo were like a little like shy, we're keeping our distance and umm and yeah. That was the first day so it was a little nervous for for me” (line 4).

Anthony continued to explain that although he was nervous in the beginning, it took about a month to become more comfortable and to get accustomed to his “environment, to the people, [his] classmates, teachers” (line 10, 112). He also explained that his elementary ended around the time of Christmas break which was the last time that he actually saw his classmates in person since they did not get a full graduation ceremony due to Covid-19 (line 24). At the time, he did not know that it would be the last day that he would see his friends. He remembers thinking of it



as an “ordinary day” (line 26). He explains that “it was hard, but of course [they had their] phones, Facetime, so that helped [them] a lot” (line 28). Anthony reports that he still keeps in touch with his elementary school friends and that they are a big group that are really close to one another (line 30). This being said, he was still able to make new friends at his high school although they are a smaller group (line 32). At the beginning of high school, due to the safety measures, the school had enforced the class bubbles but throughout the year the measures lessened and eventually they were able to mingle with other classes (line 34).

**Figure 3.1**

*Case Study 3 Representation of Elementary Vs. High school Experience*



**Similarities and Differences.** In terms of differences between the two schools, Anthony explained that there are more subjects in high school, more extracurricular activities, the people are different, there are more ethnicities, more students in his high school compared to his elementary school (line 86). The new classes that he had this year included geography, art and music (line 90). In contrast, they had a specialized Armenian class at his elementary school which they do not have in his high school. The main languages at his high school are English and French but later on they might also get to learn Spanish as an extracurricular class (line 98). Anthony is in the French immersion program based on his parents’ wishes (line 100).

Furthermore, he adds that the functioning is different in high school since the students travel from class to class rather than the teacher coming to them as was the case in elementary school (line 86). This being said, due to the pandemic, at the start of the year, it resembled the elementary style as students would remain in one class all day and teachers would come to them instead of them traveling between classrooms (line 106). Additionally, there are more extracurricular options such as sports, art, film, video (line 118). Anthony expressed liking the fact that there are more ways to socialize after school with his friends doing various activities in high school compared to his elementary school where they would go home immediately after school (line 118). Another difference that he noticed was that in high school, they had fewer breaks and students did not go outside as much for recess compared to when they were in elementary school (line 130, 132). Anthony also named having a better relationship with his teachers in high school compared to his elementary school since he was able to email them for help or if he did not understand something (line 154). He describes the community at his high school as being “really good” (line 154).

In comparison, Anthony mentions that there are also many similarities between the two school contexts. First, he explains that him and his friends all sit together at lunch which is similar to his elementary school (line 88). Also, the food was good at both schools although at his elementary school they had Armenian food compared to regular food at his high school (line 88, 126, 128). The activities done in gym class are also very similar (line 88). Therefore, in general, Anthony noticed similarities in terms of structure and functioning.

**Friends.** As explained in a previous section, Anthony felt like a family with his elementary school friends and was less comfortable with his high school friends during the first few months since they were from different ethnicities and new people (line 4). He keeps in touch with his elementary school friends on a daily basis via videos, calling and by hanging out (line

230). He hangs out less with his high school friends although they do call each other occasionally (line 232). None of his elementary school friends attended the same high school as him, however he has a family friend at the same school although he was not in his class this year (line 136). Anthony explained the friend making process as easy although it took some time at first (line 180). He highlighted that the students were not allowed to talk to peers from other classes due to the pandemic therefore, all his friends are from his classroom (line 184). Specifically, he made friends based on the class seating plans since it was easiest to talk to the people around him (line 184). Also, Anthony expressed that he likes to do any activities with his friends. For example, they signed up to various sports at school together (line 214). As advice to future high school students, Anthony made the following statement which emphasized the importance of friends in adapting to a new school context:

“Be kind to people... And, and be open, don't be shy and like timid ‘cause...just don't be like shy and timid...It's okay, like in the first couple of days, but after like open, like, like open up... like talk to people...It would really do, you good to start finding your friends... like, at first, you know?”(line 212).

**Perceived Changes.** When asked about perceived changes experiences during the last year and transition to high school, Anthony was not certain how to answer and required some additional prompts. He admitted that some teachers in his elementary school would yell at the students because they would mis-behave (line 114). However, now in high school, the students are more mature (line 115). Furthermore, he states that he was not used to the schoolwork being heavier in high school and having to do more homework on a daily basis compared to during elementary they would have homework every few days (line 140). This was one thing that he had to slowly adapt to. His grades declined at the beginning of high school since it was academically more challenging than elementary school, however by the end of the year his grades had

improved (line 142). One change that he expressed was that he developed some independence in high school since he was allowed to walk to a bagel shop with his friends after school and he had to be responsible for paying for himself (line 148). In regard to puberty, Anthony explains that he grew taller and his voice got deeper (line 160). Additionally, Anthony illustrated that throughout the first year of high school, he tried new activities and learned to be more open and talk more to people, he became friendlier (line 164). He expressed being more responsible in high school and having to be more independent with his homework (line 170). As another piece of advice, Anthony stressed that finishing schoolwork on-time is important to avoid getting any punishment or negative consequences (line 212). Although at the beginning of the year he did not take it seriously, he quickly matured to avoid any consequences (line 212).

**Perceived Challenges, Eases and Expectations.** One challenge that Anthony mentioned multiple times throughout is illustrated well by the following quote:

“I said this earlier but, what I really liked is that the community on my old school was really close and we really knew everyone, so like, it was really comfortable. But as you know as my high school was different ethnicities, different people so it was, it was really hard for that. And in the first couple months I didn't feel comfortable, but then I started getting used to it.” (line 112).

Despite the challenges to adapt to this new school context including the diverse ethnic make-up, Anthony further stated that “Yeah, it took some time but I think the easiest thing was making friends” (line 182). He admitted that the most difficult part of the transition to high school was adapting to the large amount of homework which was “drastically different from [his] elementary school” (line 168). He illustrated that it hit him quickly from the first day that he received multiple assignments to complete all at once (line 168). Another challenge was that his high school is much further away compared to his elementary school and it is somewhat tricky to

coordinate the carpooling with his neighbour (line 174). In comparison, one thing that was particularly easy during the transition was finding his way around the school since his high school is quite small (line 196).

Anthony admitted that before entering high school, he was worried about bullying and having good teachers that did not yell too much, and the types of foods that would be served in the cafeteria (line 186). He explains that he is really picky and did not want to be made fun of for not liking certain foods (line 186). When questioned about whether he experienced any bullying, Anthony replied the following “Not at all for me I was surprised, very nice community there. Um, maybe there are some that I don't know of, maybe other classmates but not...” (line 188). In terms of his expectations beforehand, he was looking forward to simply being able to say, “I’m in high school” (line 190). He was also enthusiastic to meet new people and stated that “at some point you kind of get tired of seeing the same people, for like six years, like every morning, you know? So yeah it was a good change” (line 190).

**Perceived Supports.** In terms of support, Anthony explained that his parents helped him with homework much more in elementary school but less so now in high school although he can still rely on them if he has any questions (line 170). He also named that his father provided support during the beginning of the transition by explaining the high school experience, providing tips, helping to pack bag and motivating him (line 192). Furthermore, the principal explained about some school policies and spoke about bullying the first day (line 194). Teachers also helped him understand the subjects and provided support via email in case of questions or concerns (lines 154 , 196). Therefore, various members of Anthony’s microsystem supported him at different stages of the transition.

**Cultural Aspect.** Anthony admitted being somewhat uncomfortable with his new school environment at the beginning because there were all different ethnicities (line 4, 112). This being

said, he quickly became more comfortable and made new friends. He later explained that because he has a YouTube channel, he chats with people from around the world that are from different backgrounds and ethnicities which he enjoys (line 166). This is a source of socialization for him. He stated that he does not care about being with only Armenian friends, people's ethnicity is irrelevant to him (line 214). In terms of school ethnic composition, there are fewer Armenians at his high school (line 224). Everyone was Armenian at his elementary school compared to now there is a lot more diversity (lines 225, 226).

**Reasons to Change Schools.** At Anthony's elementary school there is an option to continue until grade-eight however, he did not want to continue as he started to get tired of the school being as he was enrolled there for many years (line 206). Additionally, he explained that if he were to transition to a new school in grade-eight, he believes that it would have been more challenging since he would not have any friends and everyone else would have already established their friend groups (line 206). It was a joint decision to change school between Anthony and his parents (line 206). He expressed being happy with his decision (line 208).

**Pandemic Experience.** As Anthony mentioned in the art component, the pandemic affected how they ended their elementary school experience being as it ended abruptly without warning and they did not see their peers for months prior to the graduation ceremony (lines 24 to 28). Another main effect of the pandemic concerning Anthony's elementary experience was that they missed out on their graduation trip to Quebec City which was anticipated as a bonding experience with friends (line 244).

The safety measures made the functioning of the school different than what was expected. In the beginning, students remained in one classroom and teachers went to them similar to elementary school but as the year progressed the measures loosened and eventually the students traveled between classrooms (line 106). They also had to wear masks for most of the year and it

affected their freedom (line 244). Anthony explains that because the mask covers your mouth it makes it hard to breathe and “the bad thing was [that they] couldn’t take it out like at all, except to eat. Even at recess, [they had] to sit at [their] desks” (line 108). At the beginning of the school year, they had to remain in their classrooms to eat lunch, however, later on they were allowed to go to the cafeteria and the studio which was fun for him because it had couches (line 110, 246). This also limited his opportunity for socialization with other peers from outside his class. Furthermore, due to the pandemic, Anthony explained that there were limited opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities although he hopes that more will be available next year (like 120 to 124, 246). This year, any activities that required close proximity or taking bus transportation was banned to avoid any risk of contraction (line 122). Due to the pandemic, students were also forbidden from going outside during breaks, but this changed towards the end of the year as they were finally allowed to go on walks with a counselor which Anthony really enjoyed (line 132). Furthermore, because of the class bubbles, he was not able to talk to students from other classes which limited his socialization to a certain extent (line 136). Additionally, there were no lockers at the start of the schoolyear as a safety precaution and therefore students brought their personal belongings with them to class for the first month of school until the lockers were later implemented (line 198).

Despite the negative impacts of the pandemic, Anthony also identified a few positive consequences including the fact that there was no end of the year examination period (line 248). Additionally, he was also able to start his YouTube channel because of the pandemic (line 248). He also found ways to stay connected and communicate with his friends via FaceTime (line 28). If Covid-19 did not exist, he anticipated having a different experience including being able to travel at the end of the year, having a prom, and having a normal high school experience (line 250).

#### ***Case Study 4: Gregory***

The fourth participant was Gregory who was a twelve-year-old male currently attending a private high school in the Greater-Montreal-Area. Previously, he attended a private Armenian elementary school. At the time of the interview, he had just completed grade-seven. When questioned about his ethnicity he explained that that his mother is Armenian, and his father is Jewish: “I’m a bit Jewish [...] but I’m more Armenian” (line 16). He described himself as being a person who is active, sociable, risky (line 18). He likes playing sports including basketball, football and hockey (line 18).

For the art component, he had not prepared anything in advance. When presented with the various options he asked if he could simply write a summary of his experiences and the primary investigator agreed although it was not part of the predetermined options. Below is his written component of the project unedited which will be analyzed in the sections below.

“In elementary school I would always speak english with my friends even though it would be a French school. My elementary school would feel more like home because I would be there everyday for 9 years straight and it was much smaller. Coming into high school everyone was french so I would have to speak French. Friends were harder to find since everyone’s first language would be French. The hardest part for me was seeing how bigger the school was so I would sometimes be lost. The first few weeks we’re hard but once you understand the concept of the school you get more comfortable with the school.”

**Similarities and Differences.** Based on Gregory’s written component, the first topic that is broached is the language difference between his two school contexts, being that he spoke English to his friends in elementary and, now in high school, he speaks French (written component, line 31, 34). This being said, both schools are considered to be French schools



although his elementary community was Armenian (line 32). Due to the higher French level at his current school, Gregory admitted not doing well academically at the beginning of the school year although his grades eventually improved (line 60). He explained that French was easier at elementary school, but math was harder (line 118).

Structurally, Gregory mentioned that the schools were different in size. In high school there were approximately 400 students in one grade compared to his elementary which had 300 students in the entire school (line 58). In the written component, he described his elementary school being much smaller and feeling more like home since he had attended the same school for nine years (written component, line 43). In the interview, he added that because his elementary school was Armenian it made it feel more like home (line 48). This being said, his high school still feels like home but less so (line 48). Furthermore, he explained that this past year in high school, he would go for remediation during lunch which made him feel more comfortable with the concept of the school and it felt more like home since he would talk to various teachers who would help him (line 76).

Another difference that Gregory described is being able to have phones with them in class during high school, compared to in elementary school phones were completely forbidden (line 92). He later clarified that in high school they still could not have the cellphone on the desk during class, but they were allowed phones during breaks (line 94). He also indicated that the breaks are different between elementary to high school (line 94). Furthermore, another difference that he noticed was having one main teacher in elementary school compared to one teacher per subject in high school (line 94).

**Likes and Dislikes.** When asked about what he liked or disliked about his elementary school, Gregory expressed love for the school community and functioning (line 96). He explained that he was part of a student committee that would organize different activities for

students such as events for various holidays (line 96). In contrast, he did not like having the many specialized Armenian classes and admitted that he does not know Armenian too well despite attending the specialized school for all those years and being exposed to the culture and language (line 116, 117).

In terms of what Gregory loves about his high school, this included the variety of extracurricular sports that students could potentially sign up to under normal circumstances (line 96). In high school, Gregory and his friends go to play sports after school which he did not get to do in elementary school (line 96). He was able to try football for the first time in high school (line 98). Furthermore, he explained that he found the teachers in high school were slightly too strict about certain protective measures and would exaggerate the scope of non-compliance with the rules (line 114).

**Friends.** All of Gregory's friends are now francophone compared to his old school where they were anglophone Armenians (lines 37, 38). He described the process of making friends at his high school as being more difficult because of the language barrier (lines 40, 42, 146). However, Gregory still talks to his elementary school friends on a daily basis and occasionally hangs out with them (lines 44, 46). During the summer, he hanged out with his elementary school friends daily (178). Furthermore, he indicated that a few of his elementary school friends attended the same high school as him although they were not in his group (lines 62, 64).

Gregory explained that his class bubble was a group of dance students therefore, there were mainly girls in his class, the ratio was 31:3 (line 130). Although, the boys were drawn to each other and immediately started talking on the first day of class, eventually the entire group became friendly with each other (line 130). He admits acting like the class clown at the beginning to try to become known by his peers (line 130). After a while, they were also allowed to mingle with other class bubbles, so Gregory stated that by the end of the year, he had made a lot of

friends from other groups as well (line 132). Gregory stressed the importance of friendships and “not separating from others” but rather make friends to socialize and to help with schoolwork (line 184, 186). He further stated that he became friends with a girl in his class that helped him a lot over the past year and made things much easier for him to adapt (line 188).

**Perceived Changes.** Gregory did not experience many changes during the last year. One change that Gregory described was having to bring an extra bag to school for gym or dance which was a new responsibility for him in terms of remembering his own daily class schedule (line 124). In relation to academics, although he noticed a drop in grades at the start of the year, he also noticed that there was less homework compared to his elementary school (line 126). The following quotes describe Gregory’s perceptions of changes that he experienced in the last year:

“I guess I’ve got a bit more mature. Yeah, I hit puberty a bit, but like, no changes for me. Like, there was like no changes that I had, like, I had to learn how to become a bit more mature, when I went to high school, but no changes physically.” (line 136) [...] “Like, I was always a class clown in school, had to learn to stop that. Because like I could have gotten in trouble, like I used to get in trouble in my elementary school, but I would stop...But I needed to learn to like, to stop fooling” (line 138).

Furthermore, as advice to new students, Gregory provided the following statement based on what he learned throughout his experience of the transition to high school:

“Um, listen in class a lot like, make sure to write notes down. Like it’s not like... you don’t need to, but it would really help like them a lot, to write notes down. Umm... Don’t try to separate from everyone. And I would say, don’t try to break the rules or anything but try to explore the school, a bit. That’s what I did... like you weren’t really allowed to explore the school, just on my free time I went downstairs and explored the school to be in advance about it.” (line 184).

**Perceived Challenges, Eases and Expectations.** Gregory described in both the written component and the interview that it was difficult to make friends due to the language barrier. He also found it hard to navigate around his high school due to its larger size (written component, lines 51, 52). He explained that it was hard for a few weeks but “once you understand the concept of the school, you get more comfortable with [it]” (written component). Still to this day, he admitted feeling lost when he had to find his activity class (line 52). He also explained that he had a hard time academically at the beginning of the year, but he caught up for the end of the year (line 122). He reports that students would speak with French words that he was unfamiliar with and he occasionally had to ask the teachers if he could respond in English (line 142). The students and teachers used a type of slang and expressions that he had never heard before which took some time to adapt to. This was one of the most difficult things for him during the transition to this new school (line 142).

He did not understand the concept of the school at first or the teachers’ methods of functioning which was a challenge for him (line 76). He expected to take the city bus but instead his parents’ drove him due to the pandemic (line 102), although he still hoped to try to take it next year (line 104). He also expected to change classes and have lockers but due to the circumstances of the pandemic the school did not function in that way which he admitted probably made things easier in the end (line 148). Gregory explained that prior to transitioning to high school, he was also excited about getting to know a new community and make new friends (line 152).

Prior to the high school transition, Gregory was worried about being judged by others because he was not as French and that he would not have any friends (line 158). In the end, he perceived that everyone from his class was his friend (line 160). Furthermore, he was worried about being influenced by the wrong peers (line 198). There were a group of students who he

explained that would engage in vaping activities, and because this worried Gregory, he went as far as asking the principal to change groups (line 198).

**Perceived Supports.** Gregory's parents would drive him to school each day. He acknowledges that they helped him slightly with homework (line 126). His mother helped him study for exams by quizzing him (line 126). Some teachers from lunch time remediation also helped him to prepare for upcoming exams (line 162). At the beginning of the year, the school also provided an orientation to show students their classes and to explain the pandemic rules and ways of functioning (line 162). Furthermore, Gregory's older brother who attends the same school as he does explain the school concept to him, although it was a different experience before the pandemic (lines 166, 168).

**Cultural Aspect.** In terms of culture, the only change was the majority language of the schools going from English Armenians to French Quebecois students (line 192, 194). Gregory mentioned on multiple occasions that he was nervous about transitioning to this francophone school because he was worried about his level of French being lesser than his peers, thus was concerned about bullying and not making friends. In his high school, there were also fewer individuals that shared his cultural background although, he still had some Armenian friends there (line 194).

**Reasons for Changing School.** Although Gregory's elementary school continues until grade-eight, he and his parents decided that it would be best to change schools immediately (line 173). Additionally, most of Gregory's friends also left the school although he estimated that approximately half of his cohort remained in the Armenian school (170). His reasoning for changing schools this year was that he wanted to get used to the high school from the beginning rather than enter a school in grade-nine. He further explained that "I would have stayed but like I

wanted to get to like new friends, get to know new communities, I wanted to explore, not a new world but like a new experience” (line 174).

**Pandemic Experience.** At the end of elementary school, he missed out on approximately 3-4 months of school during which he stated that he relaxed (line 108). Eventually, teachers started giving homework to be completed on a daily basis which they would review on specific days through Zoom (line 108). Due to the school shutdown, they missed the algebra lesson which they were supposed to learn at the end of elementary (line 118). This year, although they returned to classes for high school, they had to be confined for two weeks if they came in contact with someone who had the virus which happened twice for Gregory (line 110,112).

Gregory explained that because of the pandemic students remained in one class except for their choice of leisure activity, and teachers would come to them rather than them migrating to different classrooms (line 52). At the beginning of the school year, the students were required to remain within their class bubble at all times including during breaks (line 66). The school also put cones around the public spaces to maintain class bubbles and social distancing (line 66). Gregory explained that he anticipated the regular high school experience but due to the pandemic did not get to experience changing classes, instead the teachers would go to their class (line 66, 202). The only classes that students traveled to included dance and science (lines 52, 70, 72). Eventually the school allowed students to mingle during free time with other groups, although they maintained the class bubbles for each period (lines 67, 68). The classes were grouped by art-choice therefore, all the dance students were grouped together for all classes to maintain the class bubble (72). He named that some of these functional changes were actually positive and made things easier for the students (line 202). However, he admitted that it would be more difficult if there was no pandemic (line 206).

Gregory explained that in elementary school they had more freedom prior to the pandemic, they were allowed to go where they wanted around the school grounds but now they are restricted in their high school (line 82). He continues to explain that there were also no masks compared to now, they have strict rules and students get punished if they lower their mask in his high school (line 82, 208). Furthermore, they did not have a proper graduation for elementary school although they were invited back this summer, one year later (line 84). Additionally, this year in high school, there were no sports teams, extracurricular activities, nor any student groups (line 88, 102, 202). Gregory explained that he signed up to football at the beginning of the school year, but it was rapidly cancelled thereafter due to changing health guidelines (line 88). Furthermore, Gregory's expectations of taking the bus to school did not happen because of the pandemic, his parents decided to drive him instead (line 102). A new procedure that was also adapted this last year, was that school staff took attendance during lunch to ensure that students were still there (line 134). Lockers were removed after the first few weeks of school to eliminate risk (line 150). At lunch time, they also had to remain within their own class bubble and were forbidden from mingling with other groups (line 206). This made it harder to talk to friends in other groups and it was uncomfortable speaking with masks on (line 208).

### ***Case Study 5: Ricky***

The final participant was Ricky, a twelve-year-old male currently attending a private high school. He previously attended a private Armenian elementary school and was at the same school since pre-kindergarten, since three-years old, a total of 9-years. At the time of the interview, he had just finished his last year in high school. He considers his ethnicity to be Armenian (lines 12, 13). His parents were born in Syria and Turkey respectively (line 15). He has two older sisters that attended the same high school as him (line 17).

When asked to describe himself, Ricky explained that he is sporty and artistic and likes designing websites, taking pictures, fashion and investing (lines 19, 21, 173). He creates websites to sell his art (line 19). He is also part of the Quebec tennis league (line 35). These hobbies are considered recent as he started becoming invested in them throughout the last couple of years (lines 29, 173-175). He had recently prepared a Doodle art piece inspired by his trip to Japan which he was planning to use for the project, but when questioned about it, it did not fit the criteria of the art-component as it was not linked to his school experiences in any way. Instead, Ricky decided to choose two artifacts to present during the interview: a medal and a book (line 43). His explanations are presented below.

For the medal, which was a representation of his elementary school experience, this was won at a sporting competition in grade-five. He stated that “[he] got this important thing that [he] was really proud of [since he had] never won one before” (line 45). He continued to explain that he chose this object because it was “it was around the time that [he] started playing tennis so that’s why [he remembers it]” (line 49). Ricky further adds that this was “[his] most exciting moment of all [his] elementary” (line 65). He explains that another important memory were his traditional end-of-year trips to Baskin Robbins with his friends to celebrate and reminisce on the year, but he did not have a physical object that represents those moments (line 65, 71). He added a memory about the last day of school in grade-five where he described the day as follow: in the morning there was free-time, then they would go outside with all their friends, finally when the last bell rang before summer vacation, they would throw water in the air and run out of the school (line 77). He explained that in grade six they never got a day that resembled those previous years (line 79): “Everything ended online” (line 81). He therefore maintains the previous memories.

The French book that Ricky chose to speak about was called, ‘*Meto*’. He explained that this last year in high school, “[he] did not enjoy [French] as much as other years” (line 54). He



chose to present this book as an artifact to discuss because it was the one book that he liked out of all the books that they read and since he got good grades for it, he was also proud of himself (line 54). The significance that this book played for Ricky was that it was the most fun academic experience for him throughout the last year of high school (line 65).

**Similarities and Differences.** Ricky's high school is more francophone although many of his friends from his class speak English which he classified as an exception (lines 55, 57). He explained that his elementary school was more focused on grammar but now, in high school, they read more books (line 67). The teaching styles vary between the two schools and so do the punishments employed by staffs when enforcing rules or expectations of students (line 93, 199). In high school, he described the students as more independent compared to in elementary school in terms of their academics (lines 161, 163). They also have more team-building activities in high school which Ricky enjoys and finds important (lines 199, 201, 203). He stated that he likes his teachers more this year although some appear to have less passion for their jobs (line 95). He also mentioned that his teachers communicate less between one-another compared to in elementary school which is somewhat overwhelming for exams that all fall on the same day (line 145). His elementary school teachers would collaborate with one another to ensure that they did not give too many assignments or tests that were overlapping (line 145). While comparing classes between the two schools he stated that most classes were either harder or they learned more this year, math was the same and they no longer have the Armenian class (lines 147, 149).

The physical size of the school is also different when comparing his small elementary school to his high school (lines 97, 145). He explained that he knew both the students and teachers very well and could name the students in every grade back at his Armenian school (line 97). He described it feeling "more like family" compared to now where there are many people that he does not know (line 97). Many of his peers are strangers to him. Whereas in elementary

school they were approximately 350 students in the entire school, his current school had around 400 students in one grade which speaks to the significant size difference (line 99). He admitted getting lost at the start of the school year but eventually got adapted to his environment (line 101). He stated that he can still be lost in the school to this day because of its size (line 137). There are multiple buildings attached together (line 139). It took him approximately 10 minutes to get to one of his classes and there are many flights of stairs that exhausted him in the start of the year although now he got used to it by the end of the school year (line 141).

The school functioning was also very different especially due to his elite sports-etude program (line 107). Ricky got to leave school early to practice tennis and he had one class with students from other grades who were also in that same specialized program which they used to catch up on any missed work from their regular classes (line 107). He added that the ethnic composition of the school's student and teachers is different and more diverse compared to his elementary school who were all Armenian (line 117). Furthermore, there were a few new classes depending on the program of choice which replaced the extra Armenian classes that they had in elementary school (line 119).

**Likes and Dislikes.** Ricky explained that in elementary school, he disliked some of his teachers and describes them as being grumpy, strict, screaming a lot, giving many unreasonable and extreme punishments (line 93, 149). He provided a few specific examples to justify his response but for the purpose of this paper they are irrelevant. He adds that the administration disregarded any problematic behaviors when brought up by the students (line 127).

Ricky expressed that he loved his friends from his elementary school and they still talk multiple times per day (line 121). He also stated that he "connected with [his] elementary friends more" (line 121). They feel less like family in high school although, he has a few really close friends, but since it is such a large school, it is hard to know everyone (line 137). Furthermore, he

expressed loving his high school education more than that of his elementary school as well as the physical aspects and events of the school (line 121, 199). Every third Thursday of the month they get to experience new activities which Ricky really enjoyed, and he explained that his elementary school did not have as many diverse activities (line 123, 145). His favorite class and teacher were English (line 153). Overall, he loved his high school environment and had much school spirit (line 199). He expressed that “they try and make [it] feel like home” (line 199).

**Friends.** Ricky had to make completely new friends this year in high school since none of his old classmates attended his high school (lines 58, 59). He had one cousin that attended the same high school although they were not in the same group therefore, they could not socialize much (line 61). Ricky explained the friend-making process as being more difficult in high school since people are more hesitant to be friends with “the wrong people” in order to maintain a certain social status (line 103). On the other hand, being in a class bubble made it easier to get to know certain people very well due to consistent seating arrangements (line 105). Most of Ricky’s friends are from his group although he has a few from other class bubbles (line 169). Still, the friend groups in high school are much smaller compared to in elementary school (line 167).

Ricky further mentioned that Instagram helped him get closer with his friends since he would not always be able to interact with them all during school due to the class bubbles and he was able to connect with friends of friends via this online platform (line 221). He explained that him and his high school friends communicate mostly through Instagram (line 221). He also still keeps in touch with his elementary school friends and he takes an online art-class with one of them (235). Some advice that Ricky would give to future students is to not worry much and make good friends to help make the high school experience enjoyable (line 223).

**Perceived Changes.** Academically, Ricky’s grades had dropped slightly in high school compared to his elementary school, but he stated that he still worked hard but the content is just

harder and there are more evaluations (line 151). He also explained that in high school, the students had more responsibility in terms of their academics as they have to autonomously organize their computers including the files and the agenda (line 161 to 163). Furthermore, he illustrated that teachers in high school do not always check if the homework was completed, rather it is the students' responsibility to complete it in order to learn and be prepared for the exams (line 163). As advice to future students, Ricky emphasized the importance of learning the individual teaching styles of each teacher to do well academically and complete the homework in order to be prepared for the exams (line 223). He further explained that the homework helped most of the time and occasionally, you could receive bonus points for having completed it (line 225).

Ricky did not notice many pubertal changes except that he got taller, stronger and has more muscles however, he associates these developments to his tennis fitness training (line 171). In terms of personal identity, he had developed his hobbies more including art and investing (line 173). He was inspired by YouTube for his art passion, by his parents for his love of tennis, and specifically by his father and elementary school friends for his hobby of investing since it is a common interest of theirs (line 175).

**Perceived Challenges, Eases and Expectations.** Ricky and his classmates were disappointed because they were unable to go on their graduation trip to Quebec City which was anticipated throughout all of elementary school (line 83). He stated, “that was supposed to be the best part of elementary school, everything would build up to that” (line 83). Therefore, his expected end of elementary school was different than he had imagined it due to the pandemic situation.

In high school, Ricky indicated that the most difficult part of the transition was adapting to the more advanced French language and getting used to organizing his laptop (line 185). He

further explained that his high school is also part of an elementary school therefore, other students who attended that school previously were already familiar with using and organizing their own computers but for him this was a challenge that he had to get used to (line 185). Furthermore, he had to adapt to having multiple teachers, one for each subject, compared to before where he had one main teacher and his Armenian teacher (line 185). Ricky explained that he had to familiarize himself with each teacher's personal style in order to know how they graded students (line 185). Other challenges for Ricky when transitioning to high school included adapting to the size of the school which was much larger, thus navigating around was somewhat difficult (line 187).

Prior to transitioning to high school, Ricky was initially expecting to be nervous about making friends but although it was somewhat difficult he made friends quickly (lines 187, 189). Furthermore, he was uncertain if he would get accepted into the sports-etude program and which he had hoped for (line 191). He only began playing tennis tournaments to qualify for the program a few months prior, therefore, he had some self-doubt about being accepted (line 191). In the end, he found out a few days before the new school year started that he got accepted which he was thrilled about (line 191, 195). Before his acceptance into the sports program, he was excited about going into the art program which he had also done an interview for (line 199).

**Perceived Supports.** In terms of supports, Ricky explained that he has a tutor that helps him with his academics (line 205, 221). For his tennis skills, he acknowledges that his parents helped get high rankings by signing him up and driving him to tournaments (line 205). His parents also motivated him to follow his passions which he is thankful for (line 205). Additionally, although his sisters spoke to him about the high school in the past, he does not remember them giving him much advice about starting high school (line 207). He further stated that his elementary school did not provide much support either for the high school transition,

although he explained that they overexaggerated certain aspects to scare them into working harder and behaving (line 209). When he arrived at his new school, the homeroom teacher gave an overview orientation about the functioning of the school and how to use certain programs on the computer, although much had to still be learned independently (line 211). Additionally, the teachers showed them how to get to certain parts of the school in the beginning (line 213). The only peer support that Ricky recognized was that his cousin motivated him to run for class president which he did and won (lines 215, 217). Finally, he mentioned that Instagram helped him socialize over the last year with his high school friends (line 221).

**Cultural Aspect.** In terms of cultural aspects, Ricky explained that was not important to him (line 227). He stated that although it helps that his Armenian friends spoke the same language as him, he was content speaking other languages with his new friends (line 227). He expects that if he finds another Armenian, he would be friends with them but for now, he did not know anyone at his new school that was Armenian (line 233). At his elementary school, they did Armenian dances and participated in some school events that his parents were also involved in (line 237). For the moment, he explained that he is not involved much in the Armenian community although he still keeps in touch with his Armenian friends.

**Reasons for Changing Schools.** Although Ricky's school extends into high school, he decided to change schools. Ricky's closest friends also left the school this last year although some remained at the school (lines 87, 89). He stated that "[they] all wanted to [...] go to a new school" (line 87). Another reason that Ricky changed schools and picked his current high school was because his sisters previously attended that school. Primarily, he chose the school to be part of a high-quality sports-etude program which allows him to have a shortened school-day in order to train in tennis (line 89). Furthermore, he also mentioned that he disliked some of his old teachers and wanted to experience something new (line 89). Ricky's parents also encouraged him

to leave the school since the quality of education at the Armenian school may potentially be lesser than a mainstream high school (line 91). He further explained that he is happy with his decision especially since his French needed improvement and he was glad to tackle that sooner rather than later in his academic career (line 91).

**Pandemic Experience.** One consequence of the pandemic was that Ricky's class was unable to finish the French curriculum in elementary school due to the shutdowns but also because his teacher was absent and replaced by an Armenian teacher (line 69). Because of this, Ricky stated that he "felt a little behind compared to people that went to French elementary schools" (line 69, 259). Furthermore, although they had a small graduation ceremony at the end of elementary school, they never had the graduation party but are doing it this year instead (line 75). Ricky stated that "[he] just wish[es] that somehow if there wasn't any Covid-19 like it could have been a little bit earlier, because now we're almost in sec two so we don't need it as much as before" (line 85). They also missed their graduation trip to Quebec City which would have probably happened if there was no pandemic (line 259).

Due to the pandemic, Ricky's high school implemented class bubbles and therefore Ricky was unable to hang out with his cousin much although they would sometimes see each other during lunch (line 61). At the beginning of the school year, they were able to go outside and see students from other classes, but throughout the winter months they had to remain within their classroom during lunch (line 217). Ricky believes that if there was no pandemic, he probably would have made more friends in high school from different groups (line 261). He also explained that wearing a mask was "annoying [and he] would always have a headache at school" although they were finally allowed to remove them towards the end of the schoolyear once it started getting hotter (lines 263, 265).

Ricky recognized that a positive consequence of the pandemic was that it was easier to make friends by having class bubbles since students were constantly with the same group and therefore would talk to them more and get to know them better (line 105). Another positive consequence was that he believes that he got accepted to the sports-etude program due to Covid-19 since many competitors were unable to play any tournaments in order to get accepted to the program which opened a spot for him, and now that he is in, he gets to remain in the program since he maintained his grades and high ranking (line 109, 243).

Ricky disliked his online classes during the end of elementary school and found it difficult to adapt as he explains that it would sometimes be overwhelming, and the teachers were not all familiar with using technology (line 247, 249). Luckily in high school, they did not have many online classes except following Christmas break which was done as a preventative measure to reduce the chances of infection after the holidays (line 267, 269). He was tired of the pandemic come September and questioned why there were still so many restrictions although people are vaccinated (line 251). Although he understood that we have to be careful, he still wished things could go back to normal (line 251). He admitted feeling lucky since his tennis club was at least open for the sports-etude program despite it being closed to the regular public (line 253). This being said, he had not had a tournament in about one year (line 255).

### **Discussion**

The purpose of the study was to understand the perspectives and experiences of 5 students as they discussed their transition from a mono-cultural school to a heterogeneous community high school in Montreal. The individual case studies above revealed each students' perspectives of the transitional process. Here, I will draw on each of the five interviews to pull-together common perspectives that were held by two or more of the five male high school students. Although not originally planned, being that the participants all came from the Armenian



community and were previously attending either of the two Armenian private schools, this made it interesting to hear the perspectives of these students and discovering what experiences and thoughts overlapped and varied. In addition, links will also be made between the theoretical foundations of the project to the collected data to make relevant interpretations of the students' experiences.

### **Importance of Culture/Ethnicity**

The first theoretical perspective that founded my research interest in cultural perspectives included the ethnic identity formation process through which researchers have revealed the importance of exploration and achievement (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Inspired by personal experiences having transitioned from an ethnic elementary school to a multicultural high school myself, I sought to get a more recent perspective of students who underwent a similar transition in the last few years via interviews and discussion of art productions.

With respect to discussion of ethnic identification, three out the five participants (Steve, Simon and Gregory), reported being from mixed cultural backgrounds including Greek, Lebanese, and Jewish respectively, although all participants identified as being Armenian when directly asked. Ricky reported to be Armenian although his parents immigrated from Syria and Turkey. Interestingly, because of the history and genocide, there were two major periods of Armenian Diaspora which has led to Armenian citizens migrating to various surrounding countries and to North America (Makaryan, 2010). Therefore, as we can understand based on the students' backgrounds, although they all identify as Armenian, their families may originate from different countries. Furthermore, as described by students who were of mixed backgrounds, they tended to identify with one ethnicity or culture more than the other possibly due to attending an Armenian school, thus interacting more with the community. This shows that one parental ethnicity or cultural background may dominate over the other, especially when students attend a

mono-cultural ethnic school. Additionally, this speaks to the prevalence of mixed families which is the norm in this western multicultural society that we currently live in. Researcher Kich (1992) explains that the phenomenon of biculturality leads to finding a way to mend the two conflicting parental cultures into a joint identity and sometimes following a period of cultural exploration, they actively choose to identify with the culture that fits their values more or combine aspects of each.

Furthermore, although these students all identified as being Armenian, the ethnic display of behavior may be influenced by the environmental factors such as surrounding systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2006; Topolewska-Siedzik & Ciecuch, 2019). Thus, students reported that they engaged in more Armenian activities while in elementary school since they were submerged in the Armenian community at that time, but in high school they do so less. For example, Simon reported that he spoke Armenian mostly during elementary school compared to now, he only speaks Armenian with his grandfather. This being said he still respects his culture and language (line 88 of Simon's interview transcript). Furthermore, Ricky and others reported that in elementary school they participated in Armenian dances and were more involved in Armenian community events which is less the case since transitioning to high school (line 237 of Ricky's interview transcript). The only student who reported pursuing an activity to this day in the Armenian community was Steve who is still enrolled in Scouts. Thus, the Armenian cultural displays seem to have been more prevalent for the participants when they were surrounded by others who shared their culture. According to research, identity commitment can only be achieved after exposure to diversity and after having ample opportunity for exploration (Topolewska-Siedzik & Ciecuch, 2019). Thus, it is possible that students in the current study, having only lived through one full year of being exposed to diversity in an academic context, have still not completely committed to a specific cultural identity. Although they currently

identify as being primarily Armenian, it is possible that future experiences may alter their perspectives and identities.

The findings drawn from the five interviews also speak to another important aspect of cultural identity. All five male participants named that they were much closer to their Armenian elementary school friends than they are to their multicultural high school friends. Some participants described their Armenian friends and teachers as “family” and their elementary school as “home” and explained that this was because of the cultural aspect and tight community feeling. According to research, ethnic identity is achieved when the individual has a sense of belonging to their ethnic group and are involved in activities and traditions of the group (Phinney, 1996). It is evident that the participants all felt this belonging amongst their Armenian peers and teachers. This could be explained by having spent six to nine years in the same school with the same people which provided a sense of comfort and belongingness. Thus, from this perspective, the students in this study may have already achieved their ethnic identification based on their commitment to the Armenian culture.

A positive finding was that students were not bothered much about having transitioned to a multicultural school and interacting with different ethnicities for the first time throughout the last year. Students named either having played sports on ethnically diverse teams, communicating to people from around the world via YouTube or social media, or even traveling a lot which has previously exposed them to different cultures. Simon, Anthony and Gregory emphasized in their art component the difference in cultures between their elementary school and high school. Anthony was the only student who perceived some initial difficulty adapting to this drastic change in exposure to different cultures. All students noted that there was a drastic shift in ethnic composition between their two schools going from everyone being Armenian to only a few Armenians, if any at all. More emphasis was placed on the language difference between students

schools rather than the ethnic or cultural difference. For example, Gregory and Ricky explained that they were worried about not being as fluent in French as their peers at high school because they were more advanced.

In terms of generational effects, these students still appear to display a certain level of centrality concerning their membership to the Armenian community although some might display it more than others. All participants were born in Canada and all were considered either second-generation or third-generation immigrants. Interestingly, despite students attending an Armenian elementary school for six to nine years, some still expressed that their Armenian language skills are under par (e.g., Simon, Gregory). Thus, this speaks to the phenomenon of moving away from traditions and cultural behaviors with each subsequent generation.

### **Importance of Microsystems**

Throughout the interviews with the five participants, a recurring theme that was discussed was the importance of social systems for students throughout the transition to high school and more specifically, the importance of friends, family and teachers within the student's microsystem. In each interview, a clear theme emerged, that friends appear to be the most significant support to these young teenagers; this is consistent with literature about the importance of friendships for adolescent development (Brown & Larson, 2009). Four out of five participants in the current study discussed how they were very close to their elementary school friends and still "hang out with them" to this day. In these cases, the students communicated and spent time with their elementary friends more so than their new high school friends. In almost all the case studies reviewed here, students from a mono-cultural elementary school transitioned to high schools in which they did not know many people beforehand and almost none of them had friends from their elementary school attend the same high school. This phenomenon may be more common for students transitioning from a mono-cultural school than students transitioning from a

multi-cultural school system. Based on personal experience, the majority of students in high schools come from the surrounding neighbourhoods whereas attendance at ethnic schools may be from children travelling further distances for the unique educational experience. Weller (2007) found that multiple factors may explain choice of school including distance from home and familial SES, however many elementary school friends tend to become more distant during the transition to high school. This is contrasting the experiences depicted by some of the experiences of the participants in the current study who maintained strong friendships with their peers from elementary school.

As previously mentioned, some participants referred to their friends as family. Steve expressed that he was lucky to have a friend that he knew from elementary school which facilitated the adaptation to his new school. Gregory also acknowledged the importance of having made friends for his socialization and to help him throughout the school year with homework, for example. Anthony explained that no matter what activity he did, he was happy as long as his friends were there with him. Although each one of the participants worried about making new friends before transitioning to high school, once there, they all realized that it was easier than initially expected. This being said, due to the circumstances of the pandemic, students admitted that they made fewer friends than they could have under normal conditions. Anthony explained that groups in high school were much smaller than those of elementary school, but they were still very good friends. There appeared to be a sense of anonymity when the schools were large in size because it was difficult to know everyone compared to elementary school which was a smaller and more familiar school context. Furthermore, four out of five participants stated as advice to future high school students the importance of socializing and making new friends for one's well-being and adaptation to high school. This finding is related to previous research that has found that social support by various members of a system is linked with greater academic achievement

and specifically for immigrants it is also linked with better psychosocial adjustment (Newman et al., 2007; Hernandez, 2009). This also speaks to Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic model (1992) stating that a combination of both environmental support at various levels and individual factors combine to predict one's adaptation to change.

Another part of the microsystem that was important to students was family. Although less emphasized in the interviews with students, they all still acknowledged that parents helped with various factors related to school. Generally, all students who were interviewed were driven to school and picked up by their parents. Similarly, two participants mentioned that their parents also drove them to hang out with friends or to sporting events. They were also provided with support to purchase school uniform and supplies, to prepare for the first day. Nearly all the students could rely on their parents for help with homework if necessary, although they expressed growing more independent in that regard. Ricky was the only participant who spontaneously mentioned that his parents also helped to inspire him and motivate him to pursue his passions amongst other support. Anthony, Gregory and Ricky also mentioned that their family gave them some tips or advice before transitioning to high school to help them know what to expect. This is consistent with previous findings that indicate the importance of familial support before and during the transition to high school which has been shown to be linked with positive outcomes for students' adjustment (Grolnick, Kurowski, Dunlap, & Hevey, 2000; Newman et al., 2007).

Other support received by all students came directly from the high schools in terms of an orientation at the beginning of the school year which included help to navigate around the school, help to understand the rules and the functioning of the school and Covid-19 protective measures. Additionally, multiple students (e.g., Anthony, Gregory and Ricky) mentioned that their teachers in high school were extremely helpful in terms of communicating via email or being available for remediation in person to answer questions. Students all seemed to appreciate this and felt close to

their teachers in high school more than in elementary school in certain cases (e.g., Steve, Gregory). Research on the transition from middle-school to high school (ninth grade transition) has previously revealed a positive interaction between teacher-student closeness and academic achievement and engagement, which speaks to the importance of such relationships in school transitions (Longobardi, Prino, Marengo, & Settanni, 2016). The findings also corroborate a study by Bru, Stornes, Munthe and Thuen (2010), who revealed a stability in students' perceptions of social support received by teachers throughout the transition to high school.

### **Achievement Drop**

Nearly all students who were interviewed noted a drop in their grades at the beginning of the year which later improved towards the end of the year. Previous research is consistent with this finding that students experience a significant drop in achievement, motivation, interest and academic performance at the time of the transition to high school (Eccles et al., 1991; Alspaugh, 1998). Although we did not have archival data to track the changes in students grades, students were open about their decreased performance and this may have had a significant impact in their academic self-esteem. Previous research has indicated that level of academic self-esteem is strongly predictive of academic performance although generally low self-esteem in minority groups also predicts high academic achievement (Pullmann & Allik, 2008). This has been explained as a defense mechanism to protect themselves against potential failure (Pullmann & Allik, 2008). In order to corroborate this finding, future research should perhaps include a questionnaire or quantitative data component. The reason for this decrease was explained by the students as being unrelated to a lack of effort but rather having a more significant amount of homework which was harder in some instances. Ricky also mentioned that his teachers in high school did not communicate and give multiple tests or assignments due on the same day. This being said, students noted that certain classes were easier compared to their elementary school

while other students found the classes harder. One seemingly influential factor was whether the students attended a French or English high school. Gregory in particular noted that the advanced level of French used by peers and teachers at his high school made it difficult for him academically and socially sometimes because he would not always understand what was said or would not know how to appropriately respond in French. Language barriers have been linked to high academic dropout rates among immigrants (Wait, Roessingh, & Bosetti, 1996). Particularly in Quebec, immigrant students who attempted to integrate and learn the French language, have previously reported segregation, much difficulty making friends, and a lack of school participation due to the language and cultural barrier which mirror some of Gregory's reported concerns (Steinbach, 2010).

### **Unmet Expectations**

Due to the pandemic, there were various expectations that students had revolving around the entire transition from elementary to high school that were unmet. Students often brought up similar points as nearly all of them experienced the last year with the same type of school functioning. Although students came from two different elementary school which were both Armenian, both schools ended abruptly, and they completed their last few months of elementary school online. Students had a small graduation ceremony which reunited the cohort for one last time, however it was not as expected and there was no graduation party after the award ceremony. A few students mentioned that they also missed out on their graduation trip to Quebec City which was supposed to be the highlight of their elementary experience. One school held a graduation party for the students a year later. Not many studies that focus on this age-group have been published post-pandemic although one study in particular did reveal similar student experiences as the ones discovered in the current study (Leaton Gray, Saville, Hargreaves, Jones, & Perryman, 2021).



Concerning the beginning of high school, students expressed feeling as though the experience was not typical as they would have expected from seeing on TV and from hearing from others what high school is like. Particularly, students commented on not being able to move between classes and not having lockers. All schools implemented the class bubbles to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus therefore teachers mostly came to their classes and students remained within the same group the entire school year. Although most students revealed being disappointed about this, Gregory explained that it actually made things easier for them as they did not have to navigate through an unknown school. Furthermore, most schools had limited extracurricular activities and limited opportunities for interactions with the entire cohort due to factors related to the pandemic. This made their socialization experiences different than expected. Based on current knowledge, socialization through extracurricular activities is associated with many positive outcomes including greater academic achievement, reduced delinquency and dropout rates, as well as greater psychological adjustment (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005). This being said, it appears that first- and second-generation immigrants experience reduced socialization compared to native peers which is a concern for their adaptation (Cherng, Turney & Kao, 2014). Thus, the consequences of the pandemic may have longitudinal effects that have yet to be revealed related to reduced socialization opportunities during this crucial time of adolescent development.

### **Unclear Personal Identity**

Another finding that lines up well with previous research is that the majority of students when asked to describe themselves and their personal identity, had difficulty answering the question and were very hesitant. They had an easier time describing their hobbies when used as a prompt question. Steve, for example used one characteristic to describe himself and then turned to his mother a few times to ask her for help answering the question. Simon too answered with

one word initially, but in a questionable tone as if to say that he was uncertain how to answer the question. The other three were able to answer more definitively by providing some additional descriptive characteristics and hobbies, but we had changed the way that we asked the question in order to get more of a clear response by directly asking about hobbies and interests in addition to personal descriptive characteristics. The teenage years are the peak of identity formation process therefore, this was expected that they would not have a clear understanding of who they were.

### **Maturation**

Similarly, to their personal identity, students were not very perceptive to some of the changes that they might have experienced in the last year related to puberty or maturation, in general. Most students also had difficulty answering these questions about what changes they may have experienced. With prompting, most of the students realized that they have had some physical changes take place in the last year including growth in height, amount of hair, muscle tone, change in voice. Also, students perceived with further questioning that they also developed a greater sense of responsibility whether related to schoolwork and organization or independence to hang out with friends after school.

### **Impressions of Armenian School**

It was interesting to hear similar impressions from the majority of the participants in this study when describing their Armenian school. Although they came from two different Armenian schools, their comments were overlapping. A few students expressed how having the additional Armenian course in elementary school caused them some stress because there was a lot of homework associated to it and pressure to learn all the details. Three out of the five (e.g., Steve, Anthony and Gregory) students reported that the teaching styles and discipline methods were not appropriate to attain their goals. Simon expressed wishing that there was more emphasis on French since it is the main language in Quebec therefore they would benefit from perfecting their

French language skills for their futures. Students illustrated that there was a strong community and sense of belonging at their elementary school as everyone knew each other and it therefore felt like a big family or like home to them. Two students also emphasized that they loved the traditional Armenian food that was offered at the cafeteria.

In contrast, most male participants expressed liking their new school context for various aforementioned reasons including, friends, teachers, sports, classes and activities. This may in, part be explained by the initial honeymoon phase that has previously been described in the literature when exposed to a novel school environment which may fade over lengthened exposure to that context (Benner & Graham, 2009; Symonds & Hargreaves, 2016).

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the primary investigator, I was inspired by my personal experience for this project, I considered myself to have somewhat of an insider role since I could relate to the experiences that some of the students expressed having gone through a similar educational path. This being said, I come from the Greek community which is why I originally wanted to also include this and other Montreal communities in the study in order to have a wider perspective of experiences of students who come from different ethnic backgrounds but who all live through a similar transition to multiculturalism in high school. Given the circumstances, it was difficult to recruit participants from the planned communities therefore, the study ended with recruiting solely from the Armenian community. Thus, although originally, I defined myself as having an insider perspective, in the end, I was also considered to be an outsider since I was unfamiliar with the Armenian schools and community, thus experiences of students varied from my own in some ways. Although there were similarities between the Greek school such as having additional language course and learning about the religion and cultural traditions and history, it also differed slightly especially since it had an established high school much earlier than the Greek community

did. Furthermore, it appeared that most staff in the Armenian school were Armenian themselves based on certain comments made by the participants, although in the Greek elementary school there are still many teachers that are not at all Greek such as the French teachers.

Additionally, the focus of this project was to describe the experiences of students who decided to make this cultural transition during a global pandemic. This alone made me, as the researcher, take on an outsider role because I never experienced high school with the types of restrictions that these students illustrated in their interviews as a consequence of the protective measures imposed by the government.

Overall, despite the insider-outsider role that I, as the primary investigator took on, interviewing this population of students was easy for me because some experiences overlapped with my own. I informed the participants and their parents about my own education experience in a mono-cultural elementary school which inspired the current study. This may have been one factor that interested them in participating in the study and open to sharing their experiences with me. For one student in particular, Steve, he attended the same high school as I did, so we were able to discuss a few aspects with which I was familiar. Steve was also half Greek similar to the me which was another bonding factor. This being said, I was still considered an outsider due to the difference in age between myself and the students being interviewed which was evident in certain instances where participants were slightly more reserved in their responses. This will be further discussed in the limitation section.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Due to the current pandemic situation, we had to limit contact with the participants and therefore be conducting all the research from a distance. All parties were contacted via phone and communication with parents were primarily done through email and Zoom meetings. This made it that engagement in the study was at times difficult. There were a few times that meetings had to

be rescheduled. Nearly all participants arrived late to the meeting and had to be contacted to connect to the Zoom application. There were a few technological limitations throughout the research sessions, which included an issue sending the completed art production to the researcher during the meeting. Preventative measures were taken to ensure that the participants were comfortable with the technology (i.e., Zoom, Google Images and email).

Although the phenomenological approach is appropriate in representing the subjective experiences of the participants it is unavoidable that the data collected was, in part, influenced by the researcher's formulation of the art activity and interview questions. Therefore, some the research may be subject to a certain unavoidable degree of bias. This being said, adequate steps were taken to ensure transparency and credibility of the data. We attempted to represent the data in an unbiased fashion based primarily on themes that emerged within the data analysis stage and we used direct quotes from the participants whenever possible with few modifications for flow. Although in various instances, we paraphrased the students' reported statements, this was done to simplify and make the written analysis flow more easily for the reader. We used direct quotes whenever possible.

The final product of this project was very different than originally anticipated being that it only included one cultural community rather than the four that we tried to recruit. Unfortunately, due to various circumstances of recruitment, being in the midst of a pandemic and at the end of a long and challenging school year, the school-based recruitment was unsuccessful. It was challenging attempting to get in contact with the school principal or administration staff who were seldomly returning the voicemail and emails left for them. One Jewish school accepted to post an advertisement in their weekly newsletter to parents, but we did not hear back from anyone following that. Social-media-based recruitment was also unsuccessful. Multiple attempts were made to post advertisements on various Facebook community pages for each specific

ethnic/cultural community, however, there was little interest shown to participate in the study. Via Facebook, we also directly contacted parents who had children that recently graduated from ethnic schools but again, no response was received. There were a few potential participants that reached out from the Jewish community; however, they unfortunately did not fit the initial eligibility criteria and when we reached out upon the amendment approval to broaden the criteria, they were no longer interested in participating. The strict eligibility criteria limited the potential sample size.

During the recruitment, we found out that some of the targeted schools have joint high schools with the elementary schools in all of the cultural communities of interest. When we spoke to one administrator, she informed us that due to the pandemic, most students decided to continue in the high school since they were already familiar with their peers in order to prevent unfamiliarity and additional stress. She explained that this is not so typical compared to previous years where only a minority would continue on to the cultural high school. Therefore, the circumstances related to the pandemic caused another limitation for the initial project design and topic of interest. It would also be suggested that future studies that choose to replicate this one start recruitment earlier in the school year as it appeared that towards the end of the year, when we began our recruitment, school staff were burnt out. We were also informed by a few parents and administration, that school principals had taken a leave of absence a month or two before the end of the school year likely due to being burnt out since they had a challenging year managing the school during the pandemic. This caused some challenge in contacting the administration to present the opportunity to partake in our project because they were going through an adaptation period with the new principal.

Some students were slightly more timid and more limited in their responses to the interview questions compared to others. Although it was hard to identify these students in the

moment of the interview, while analyzing the data, the researcher noticed that there were a lot of gaps in some of the transcripts that could have been better understood if more follow-up questions were posed to those who were less detailed in their responses. This being said, all of the interviews lasted at least 40 minutes which was the original amount of time that we had expected to spend discussing with each student. Also, because we did not want to go too much over in the time, some interviews did feel somewhat rushed for students who had more to say. This can be considered one limitation to the current study in terms of organization of the interview. If any future studies choose to replicate the methodology, it would be important to consider allocating more time for the interview segment. Moreover, since we combined the interview with an art component that was discussed at the beginning, it would be important to provide more time for the entirety. Some students did not prepare the art component beforehand as was originally asked of them which also contributed to surpassing the expected time for dedicated to the interview. This was due to difficulty communicating with some parents before the interview to be able to thoroughly explain the expectations to them.

Another limitation was that the final sample only consisted of male participants although we originally attempted to recruit mixed sample. Therefore, some of the experiences discussed by participants may be more pertinent to males compared to females. It would be pertinent for future studies to recruit both genders in order to have more representative experiences. Previous studies point to gender differences in terms of connectedness to the school, academic achievement drop, and other psychosocial outcomes during the adaptation to middle school (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Researchers Sutton, Langenkamp, Muller and Schiller (2018) reported that African American males experience the greatest decline in academic achievement during the transition to high school although all males show a larger decline compared to females. This decline in academic achievement was conveyed by some of the male participants in the current study as well

although, most tended to catch up by the end of the year. Therefore, according to previous research knowledge, the phenomenological data presented here may be very specific to this population.

It would be pertinent to replicate this study with the other ethnic communities in a future study if better recruitment procedures could be used to draw somewhat of a comparison between the experiences from different ethnic schools. The results that were revealed in the current study apply specifically to Armenian students who transitioned to a multicultural high school amongst a global pandemic. Perceived experiences might differ amongst other ethnic communities in Montreal that also have specialized elementary schools. Previous research has indicated a large dropout rate for high school students that are considered to have English as their second language and to be at risk for school adjustment (Wait, Roessingh & Bosetti, 1996). Although this may not necessarily characterize the current sample, some high school students in Canada that attend mono-cultural elementary schools or that are considered more recent immigrants, may experience a harsher transition to multicultural schools.

The results are also very specific to this cohort of students because they were the first to transition to high school among the modern pandemic which caused unique experience for them that may never be repeated in the same way. Thus, the pandemic may have taken precedent in their recounting of their experiences which might have been focused on other topics or themes if the circumstances were different. Many of the reported findings related to the pandemic were mirrored in a study that was conducted in England (Leaton Gray et al., 2021). Some examples include not being able to participate in sports, feeling closer to classmates in bubble, developing student interests during the lockdown. Most studies published about the pandemic speak to the challenges of abruptly transitioning to online-learning during the last trimester of the school year which was also revealed in the recounted experiences of the current sample (Agustina & Cheng,



2020; Besser, Flett, & Zeigler-Hill, 2020). Furthermore, although some participants in the current study reported not being affected by the pandemic as much as others, there was still a disruption in regular functioning of all schools. Other studies have reported emotional well-being, social challenges related to the isolation experienced during the lockdown and distance learning for students at various education levels (Camacho-Zuñiga, Pego, Escamilla & Hosseini, 2021). Furthermore, similar to the incomplete grade-six curriculum that some students in the current study reported, major academic losses were found in schools in the Netherlands and students from lower SES households were found to be most significantly impacted (Engzell, Frey & Verhagen, 2021).

### **Implications for Practice**

Despite the challenges that we faced with recruitment and amendments that we made to the project throughout the recruitment phase in order to end with a decent sample size for a qualitative study, the findings revealed through the interview data gathered from our homogeneous sample were important. We were able to provide some insight into the unique experiences of students who were the first to transition out of an ethnic school and to a multicultural high school during a global pandemic. Although the experiences were meant to hear more about ethnic factors, findings did not emphasize this much. Rather, what was revealed about the pandemic seems to also be applicable to other students who are not necessarily part of the Armenian community. Furthermore, those findings that did relate to ethnic factors were broad therefore, may be applicable to students from other ethnic communities as well. The positive finding was that it did not seem to affect them in any significant way transitioning to a multicultural school after having spent so many years solely with fellow Armenians in an academic setting.

This study could provide some relevant base information to school administration as an evaluation of how students perceived some of the strict protective measures that were implemented over the last year to manage the transmission of Covid-19. Although with the vaccination campaign the situation is showing some improvement, we still cannot predict how the risk level might evolve in the future. Therefore, future students might experience similar restrictions and school functioning as was reported by this sample. Since one of the main themes discussed by students was their opportunities for socialization and given the importance of this for their development at this age, schools and parents should use this information to help students find innovative ways to maintain social interactions with a broader audience.

Furthermore, given that it was revealed that students perceived certain challenges and a limited support from certain systems during the transition to high school, it would be important to tackle these directly. It might be helpful to students to receive more evident preparation from their elementary schools prior to transitioning to high school to be able to reduce some of the pre-existing concerns. Furthermore, at the high schools themselves, there should perhaps be a small workshop that addresses some concerns once students are immersed in their new environment because some new and unexpected challenges may arise. Parents can also support their children by providing them with more clear language and availability to discuss concerns throughout the entire process. An ecosystemic approach to the transitional support is suggested to be most beneficial for students which would entail a multi-layered approach (Andrews & Bishop, 2012). Another idea to support students living through the important transition to high school is to perhaps set up some summer activities to help students make friends prior to starting classes in the fall which would likely ease some stress related to the adapting to a completely new environment. Previous research has indicated that the implementation of transitional programs that are longitudinal increase the student's positive adaptation to high school (Legters & Kerr,

2001; Andrews & Bishop, 2012). Some schools abroad have preparatory activities to allow students to visit the high school for a day prior to the transition to get a feel for it, or to be paired with older students in a mentorship program (Leaton et al., 2021). Although these types of practices were limited during the pandemic, they are not common in Montreal but would be beneficial to students to reduce some of the anxiety and stress that is related to the high school transition.

### **Conclusion**

In all, the reports gathered by students from the current sample were informative on different aspects related to the transition to multicultural high schools in the midst of a global pandemic. Despite some pre-existing concerns, most students enjoyed their first year in the new school and were pleasantly surprised that the transition was easier than expected and their adaptation phase did not last too long to some of the novel experiences. The pandemic appeared to have consequences that were mostly negative or neutral although some students found some positivity in the experience. Various supports helped students throughout the transition phase to somewhat ease the process.

To conclude, the experience of attending a mono-cultural elementary school is a rare opportunity in Montreal that certain ethnic communities are privileged to have. Based on the reports of the current sample, students make long-term connections with their ethnic peers and the school context often feels like home. This being said, they embraced the multicultural high school in the same way and were excited to experience novelty. The knowledge gained from the current study is useful for school administration to have in order to implement future transition programs for all students, not only those coming from mono-cultural elementary schools.

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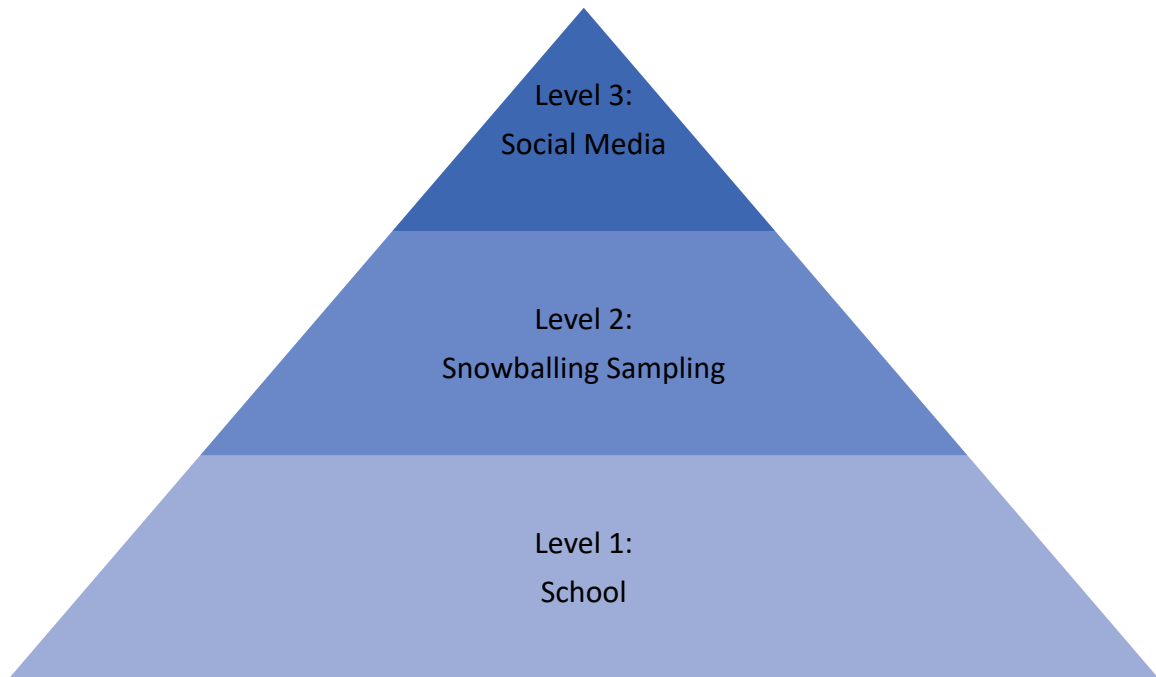
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## Appendix A

### Sampling Process

**Figure 4.**

*Three-Tiered Sampling Strategy*

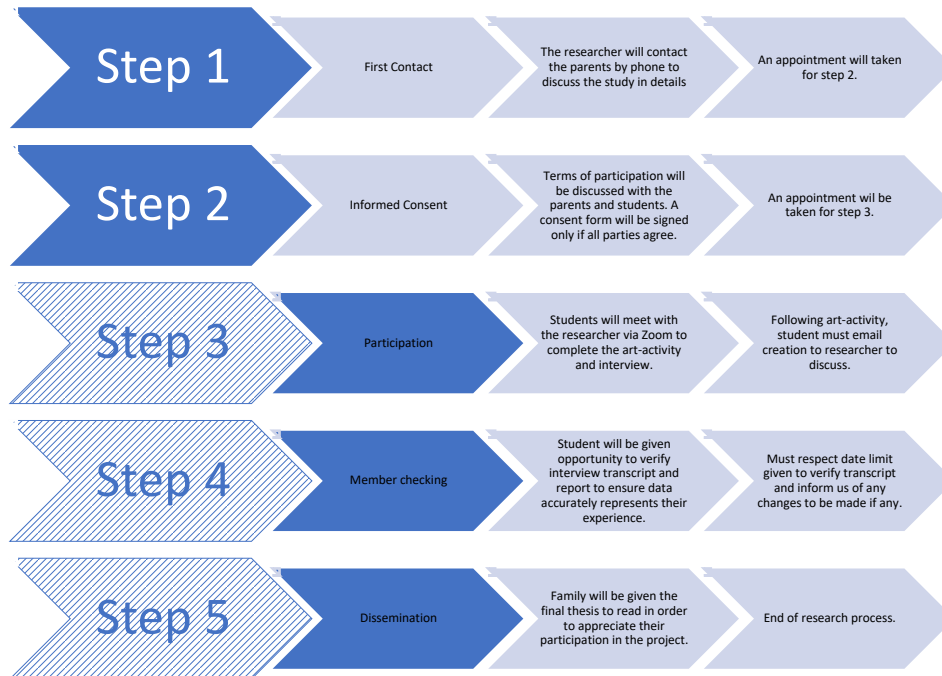


## Appendix B

### Research Process

**Figure 5.**

*Research Process*



## Appendix C

### Posters for On-line Recruitment

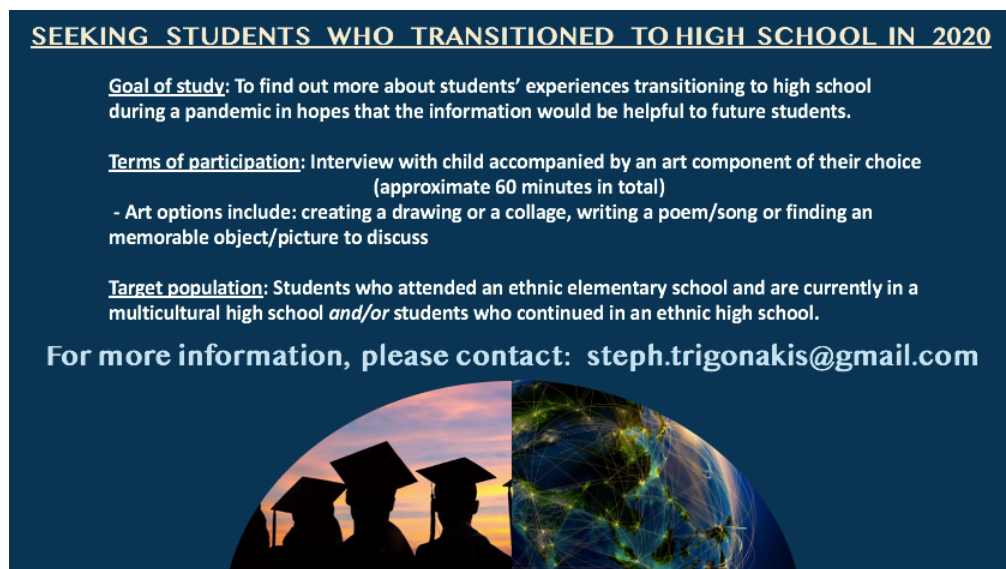
**Figure 6.1**

*Recruitment Poster Version 1*



**Figure 6.2**

*Recruitment Poster Version 2*



## Appendix D

### Assent and Consent Forms



#### INFORMATION AND ASSENT FORM (FOR YOUTH)

**Study Title:** *“Friends from Far and Close: The Transition to Multiculturalism in a School Context”*

**Researcher:** Stephanie Trigonakis

**Researcher’s Contact Information:** 514-458-8344/steph.trigonakis@gmail.com

**Faculty Supervisor:** Harriet Hariclia Petrakos

**Faculty Supervisor’s Contact Information:** (514) 848-2424 ext. 2013/  
hariclia.petrakos@concordia.ca

I am a student at Concordia University. I want to ask you if you would like to take part in a research study. A research study is a great way to find out new information about something that you are interested in - similar to a school project.

I am interested in learning about student experiences of transitioning from an ethnocultural elementary school (such as the one that both you and I attended) to a multicultural high school during a global pandemic. Specifically, I am curious about things like any challenges you faced, expectations that you had, supports that you may have received as well as differences or similarities between the schools. Also, I would like to know how the pandemic affected this transition.

I believe that you can give me some important information about your experience that would be helpful. This research is important because knowing this information could help future students.

To understand more about your experience, I will ask you to perform an art activity of your choice (i.e., either create a drawing, write a poem/song, create a collage, take pictures or



identify an artifact that represents your experience) and then we will have a discussion about your experience at both your elementary school and your high school. The interview will take approximately 40 minutes and will be conducted via Concordia's secure Zoom platform. You will be asked to perform the art component prior to the interview date so that you are prepared for the discussion. I will also record the interview via the Zoom application so that I can remember what you say and directly quote you in my thesis write up. You will be shown a summary of your transcript to let me know if there is anything that you want to remove or change before I present it to others.

If you choose to participate, anything that you share with me will only be used for this project. All data will be destroyed one year following the thesis submission unless we decide to publish the article in a research journal at which point you will be informed. You can also decide to stop at any point if you are feeling tired or uncomfortable. If there are any questions that you do not want to answer, we can skip them. You will be in charge of what you share with me.

If you decide to participate, you can ask me to destroy any information that I gather at any time up until two weeks following your interview date. After that, I will be writing my final thesis paper that will be presented to my research committee as part of my Master's. This will give me enough time to make any necessary adjustments.

You will also be provided with a summary of the thesis project once it is finalized so that you can appreciate your contribution to research. The entire thesis can be provided upon request.

If you agree to take part in this study after carefully reading and understanding the information presented above, you may sign to acknowledge your assent to participate.

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Name (student)

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Signature

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Date

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## INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM (FOR PARENTS)

**Study Title:** *“Friends from Far and Close: The Transition to Multiculturalism in a School Context”*

**Researcher:** Stephanie Trigonakis

**Researcher’s Contact Information:** 514-458-8344/steph.trigonakis@gmail.com

**Faculty Supervisor:** Harriet Hariclia Petrakos

**Faculty Supervisor’s Contact Information:** (514) 848-2424 ext.  
2013/hariclia.petrakos@concordia.ca

Your child is being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want your child to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

### A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is to explore and better understand the experiences that students have when transitioning from an ethnocultural elementary school (i.e., a cultural, ethnic or religious school) to a mainstream multicultural high school during a global pandemic.

### B. PROCEDURES

If your child participates, they will be asked to engage in a short arts-based activity followed by a semi-structured interview. Specifically, for the art component your child will have the choice to either create a drawing, write a poem/song, create a collage, take pictures or identify an artifact that represents their school experience. Following this, an interview will give them the opportunity to express their personal experience related to this type of school transition.

In total, participating in this study will take approximately one hour. We estimate that the interview will take approximately 40 minutes and will be conducted via Concordia’s secure Zoom platform. We will be recording the interview via the Zoom application in order to transcribe and directly quote certain statements in the thesis. For the art activity, since we are asking them to complete this prior to the interview, they can decide how much time to spend on it. We suggest

to not to take more than 30 minutes unless they choose to. In addition, sometime following the interview, your child will be provided with a copy of a summary interview transcript to verify whether they agree with the way the statements were written. This may take another 30 minutes. They can inform us if there is anything that they would like to change at this point from their statements.

You and your child will be provided with a summary of the thesis once it is completed so that you can appreciate your participation in advancing research. The entire thesis can be provided to you upon your request.

### **C. RISKS AND BENEFITS**

Although this is a low-risk study, your child might face certain risks by participating in this study. These risks may include: psychosocial distress or perception of discrimination or injustice while recalling their transition process. They can choose which questions to answer based on if they feel comfortable or not discussing it. They will also be allowed to stop or take a break at any point throughout the interview.

Potential benefits may include: developing a heightened self-awareness, appreciation towards school or home environments or interest in research.

### **D. CONFIDENTIALITY**

We will gather the following information as part of this research: your child's name, age, ethnic background, experience of their elementary school, experience of their high school, experience of the transition period.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form. That means that it will not be possible to make a link between your child and the information they provide. Results will remain confidential.

We will protect the information by keeping your child's information and data on a password protected device and physical data will be in a secure filing cabinet.

We intend to publish the results of the research in a thesis proposal. However, it will not be possible to identify your child in the published results. We will be using a pseudonym instead of your child's real name when discussing quoted examples in our paper.

We will destroy the information one year after defending the thesis unless we decide to publish the article in a research journal at which point you will be informed.

## **F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

You do not have to accept for your child participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do allow your child to participate, you can decide for them to stop at any time. You can also ask that the information that your child provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you do not want us to use your child's information, you must tell the researcher up to two weeks following the interview date.

*There will be no form of compensation for the present study.*

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your child's information.

## **G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION**

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to allow my child to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME OF CHILD

---

NAME (parent or guardian)

---

Signature

---

Date

---

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or [oor.ethics@concordia.ca](mailto:oor.ethics@concordia.ca).

## **Appendix E**

### **Instructions for Art-Based Activity**

“For the first part of the session, I will ask you to complete an art activity. For this task, you can choose to either draw or create a collage using images that you gather from Google Images. Your task is to create two images that represent your school experiences. On one paper (or page on Microsoft Word) I would like you to create an image representing your elementary school experience and on the other an image representing your high school experience. You can choose to represent any aspects that were or are important to you from each context. You can include anything that you wish. Use your creativity but with the theme in mind. You will have approximately 20 minutes to complete this task. Please let me know once you are finished. I will remain present, but this is not to make you nervous in any way. You can take extra time if you need so do not worry too much about completing the task too quickly. Do you have any questions? Do you know how to use Google Images or do you have the material needed to create a drawing? (If the student chooses Google Images review some steps with them on how to create a collage.) Once you complete this task I will ask you to send a copy of the art that you create to my email so that I can see it. We will then discuss the creation together so that I can ensure that I understand the meaning to your choices.”

## **Appendix F**

### **Instructions for Semi-Structured Interview**

“We will now continue with the second part of the session which entails an interview. During the interview remember that it is important that you feel comfortable to share whatever you please. Your identity will remain anonymous therefore, you do not have to worry about others discovering what you said. This being said, remember that if you share sensitive information with me regarding the safety of you or someone in your surroundings, in certain circumstances, I may have to share this with the appropriate adult. Otherwise, feel free to answer my questions in any way that you believe is most relevant. I am interested in your experience and your perspective on different topics. There are no right or wrong answers. You are the expert and in the one in charge. At some points I may ask you to elaborate simply so I can be certain that I understand what you mean or to get more information about certain points that you bring up. Also, you may choose whether or not to answer my questions. If you do not feel comfortable answering please just let me know and we could move on. If at any point you feel like you need a break or cannot continue for any reason please let me know. I want you to feel comfortable, but it is important that you communicate with me any needs or concerns that you may have. Do you have any questions before we begin?”

## Appendix G

### Semi-Structured Interview Template

(Prompts to be used in the case that the participant is less expressive)

1. Can you please **describe** to me what you drew or chose to represent using the various images (or why you chose those images for the collage)?
  - a. What importance do these elements have for you?
  - b. What was your experience at your elementary school?
  - c. What was your experience at your high school?
  - d. What are the similarities (if any) between your elementary school compared to your high school?
  - e. What did you like or dislike about your elementary school?
  - f. What do you like or dislike about your high school?
  - g. *Varia... Ask the participant to comment on specific parts of the image if there is something notable.*
  
2. What were some of the **changes** that you experienced during the transition to high school? Categorize them by positive, negative or neutral changes.
 

Example:

  - a. School work?
  - b. Responsibilities?
  - c. Socially?
  - d. Physically?
  - e. Personal identity?
  - f. Other?
  
3. What was the most difficult part of transitioning to high school?

4. What was the easiest part of transitioning to high school?
5. Was there anything that worried you about the transition beforehand?
6. Was there anything that you were looking forward to about the transition beforehand?
7. What are some of the **supports** that you received (if any) to help with this transition period?

Example:

- a. From elementary school?
  - b. From high school?
  - c. From family?
  - d. From friends?
  - e. Other?
8. What helped the most during this transition phase?
9. What helped the least during this transition phase?
10. Do you have any ideas of specific things that could have helped ease the transition phase?
11. Since you previously attended an elementary school with others who shared your ethnicity, what were the major **differences in terms of culture** between the two schools?
  - a. With which culture (yours or mainstream) do you identify with presently and did it change from when you were in elementary school?
  - b. For extracurricular activities, which cultural group do you choose to surround yourself with (yours or mainstream) and did this change from elementary school?
12. Do you feel like your inner circle (i.e., friends) changed at all after the transition? If so, how?
13. Do you feel like your identity changed at all after the transition? If so, how?
14. Were there any other major changes that you perceived during this transition?



15. How did the pandemic situation impact your transition from elementary to high school?
16. Based on your own experience, do you have any advice that you would give to those in the grade below you as they prepare to transition into high school in September?
17. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about that experience that was not already mentioned?

## Appendix H

### Support Resources

- **Suicide Prevention Hotlines:**
  - Crisis Service Canada: 1833-456-4566
  - Suicide Action Montreal: 1.866.277.3553.
- **Mental Health**
  - Depressives Anonymous: 514-278-2131
  - Ordre des psychologues de Quebec : 514-738-1881
  - Kids Help Phone : 1-800-668-6868
- **Emergency**
  - 911
- **Info-Santé:**
  - 811

\*Please ask the researcher for specific resources for your individual needs

## Appendix I

### Journaling Process

Date	Researcher's Thoughts
2021-01-09	<p>While working on the thesis proposal, I am reminiscing on my elementary school experience. Being as I was one of the only students in my cohort to be of mixed backgrounds, I often stood out of the crowd. I remembered my parents telling me that they could easily pinpoint me in the school shows since I was one of two blondies in my grade. Thinking back, this made me reflect on how you can be considered a visible minority based on a few characteristics depending on the context that you are being compared to.</p>
2021-01-10	<p>While reviewing the questions that will be part of the semi-structured interview for the project, I wanted to ensure that they are phrased in neutral ways to avoid leading the participants to respond in certain ways. I realized that creating the questions allowed me to reflect on my own experience and on how I would have answered the questions if I were being interviewed after elementary school.</p> <p>What stands out of my own experience related to the topic of the current project was that a large majority of my elementary school cohort attended the same high school as I did. Approximately 11 out of 65 students attended my high school which was the most compared to any other high school that my other friends transitioned to. I remember considering myself lucky to have that many people that I know attend the same high school.</p> <p>Another memory that popped to mind was concerning my first day of high school. I picture myself meeting in front of the school and gravitating to my elementary school friends. We were a large group who all found each other and remained together for the first moments of school. We were then led inside for an orientation and to be assigned to our homerooms. I was disappointed that none of my friends were in my homeroom, but I quickly made new friends. One of my first friends was Italian and the other was Pakistani. This was the first time that I had friends that were not Greek. Once in my regular classes I was surprised to see how many other students were Greek although they did not necessarily speak Greek. In my first few months of school, I made multiple new friends that were mostly Greek. One of my other close friends was Jewish but mostly all of my friends were from Greek or Italian families.</p> <p>Being a shy person, I was very worried about making friends before starting high school but knowing that I had some friends attending the same school eased the process. When high school began, I remember being anxious on days that my friends were not present at school. Reflecting back, those days allowed me the opportunity to venture to make new connections with acquaintances that I did not know so well.</p>

2021-01-23	While writing the thesis proposal, I continue to reflect on my own experiences attending a Greek elementary school. I realize that my own centrality level is medium especially since I come from a mixed background. This being said, I am extremely proud to be Greek although I do not always display the traditional Greek behaviors. I appreciate my culture, language and traditions, however when compared to other peers that were fully Greek, I did not display as much “Greekness”. I also do not speak as well as other students due to having a lack of consistent opportunities to practice my Greek. Especially following the death of my grandfather in 2018, I had less and less opportunities to practice Greek. I still speak Greek with my grandmother and some Greek friends and family members, although I fear that once my grandmother passes, I will have significantly less opportunity to speak Greek and I may lose some of my fluency.
2021-01-24	I am reflecting on the inclusion of four ethnicities in the current study. I believe that it is the correct choice as to not be only focusing on my own ethnic and cultural background but rather be inclusive to others in Montreal who might also be experiencing similar situations. This being said, I am worried about how open these ethnic school might be to accepting this type of research. When discussing the project with family, they commented that this project might be difficult and that certain ethnic communities might be resistant to partaking in the project since it is possible that some of the finding might bring negative light to their school or cultural community. I intend to minimize any negative findings and solely use a neutral tone when presenting the findings. The goal is not to condemn any schools or cultural communities but rather to bring light to some experiences of students since it is a topic that has rarely been discussed in the past research. If any information discussed by students is relevant the goal would be to bring light to the experiences to be able to improve ways of functioning to assist students with this transitional phase in their lives. I believe the information gathered from this study, although focused on ethnic communities, may also be pertinent for the general public.
2021-04-15	I just received ethics approval and am immediately deciding which ethnic elementary schools to contact. I have decided to only start by making contact with one school from each community so that I am not overwhelmed with participants since I only need a minimum of 8-12 students.
2021-04-19	I made my call and emails to four ethnic schools, one from each community. I realized that since it is close to religious holidays for the Greek and Islamic communities, I may have delayed responses by the schools. I will try to follow-up with them in a week or two.
2021-05-07	Since it has been over two weeks that I have contacted ethnic schools to request that they contact me to discuss the project, I am starting to get nervous and have doubts about the recruitment process. I am feeling slightly pressured and under a time crunch in order to be able to finalize the project in time to meet the deadlines. I decided to call more ethnic schools. In total, I contacted around 10 different schools and have reached out to multiple

	friends to help with recruitment if they know anyone that attends or works at an ethnic school.
2021-05-10	I recontacted the schools as well as other ones to try to boost my recruitment process. I am feeling slightly disappointed that my Greek school has yet to contact me despite me informing them that I was an alumnus. I feel let down by the Greek community especially having completed 12 years in Greek school myself. I truly expected to have an insider role which would have given me access to the administration and to facilitate recruitment, but so far this does not seem to be the case.
2021-05-16	Since I have still not heard back from any schools, I decided to move on to the next phase of recruitment being media-assisted recruitment. I spent the entire day researching Facebook groups specific to the ethnic communities of interest to my study and posting my ad on multiple pages. I am hopeful that some of these will help in finding some participants for my study.
2021-05-16	<p>I desperately contacted my Armenian classmate to see if she had anyone that she knew that could help me find participants for my study. At first she was uncertain that she knew anyone but finally she gave me the contact information of a family friend who works at one of the Armenian schools.</p> <p>I also contacted an old teacher/principal from my Saturday school to see if she could potentially assist me with recruiting Greek students for my project. Unfortunately, she is no longer the principal. She provided me with the contact information for the new principal and informed me that she would likely help with the project. I immediately contact the Greek-school principal and leave a voicemail and email with our contact information requesting a call back to discuss the project.</p> <p>I had a sense of hope for the recruitment as I truly thought that I made a great link to my old principal and that they would assist me with finding participants. It was decided at this point that I could also recruit students who were still attending ethnic high school, in order to draw a comparison to those students that transitioned out. I was therefore excited about the change in the project and was confident that things would turn-around for the better.</p>
2021-05-17	We make contact with an Armenian school administration staff who was open to discussing our project. She sounded enthusiastic about helping us. She informed us that she would try to bring up the project to the principal of the school in order to determine how they can offer help.
2021-05-21	Our Armenian classmate provides us with the contact information of a friend who accepted to have her son participate in the study. I immediately contact the mother via phone to provide an overview of the project and to schedule a meeting with her son. I am feeling a sense of relief since I finally secured a first participant. I am thinking to myself that I must complete the interview asap in order to maintain their interest in the study. The mother informed me that she would however prefer to do the interview after her son finishes school towards the end of June. We agree to this but decide to meet with her son to explain the study beforehand. We set up a meeting for next week.

2021-06-01	I still had not heard back from any of schools or friends. I was very disappointed that all the efforts have failed in finding any participants.
2021-06-07	We speak to the same Armenian school administration staff that we had spoken to previously. She informs us that due to the school laws they cannot directly help with recruitment for this project. This being said, she suggested providing a few contacts to her family friend (my classmates mother) who would then be able to relay the information to me as it would be considered community-based recruitment via word-of-mouth.
2021-06-08	I spoke to my Armenian classmate who provided me with another two contacts of potential participants. I was feeling extremely relieved and enthusiastic. I immediately reached out to the parents to secure the participation of their sons. I was a bit concerned that up to this point I only found Armenian students who were males. After reviewing the study's goals and inclusion criteria, I understood that for the purpose of this project, it was not much of a problem to have such a homogeneous sample. I would still continue efforts to recruit other ethnicities but if I ended up with all Armenians it would still be acceptable.
2021-06-09	After discussing with my co-workers who have been attempting to help me find participants at the Jewish and Islamic schools, it was suggested that I create a poster that is slightly more informative instead of attaching a separate explanatory blurb. I created a new poster as requested and sent it to my coworkers. They informed me that they shared it with their children's schools. The Jewish school accepted to post it in their weekly newsletter to parents and alumni.
2021-06-13	I relaunched the social media recruitment campaign by re-posting my ad and by reaching out directly to parents who I knew had children that graduated from an ethnic elementary school in 2020. Unfortunately, only one person replied, however their child was not interested in participating in the end.
2021-06-	My Islamic classmate reached out to see how my project was coming along. I thought that was very kind. She offered to help me find Islamic participants. She translated and posted my ad on an Islamic communication platform. I was thankful for her gesture.
2021-06-20	My Jewish co-worker asked us if we received any replies from parents for participating in the study. We inform her that we have not heard anything yet. She provides her opinion that the art component might have been a factor the students did not like as it seems to require additional work for the students. She also suggested that having a compensation might help recruit participants. I thanked her for her advice. I also took into consideration the compensation but since I had recruited five participants which was enough for the study to be completed, I would not change the procedure at this point. This being said, I consider still offering a gift-card to students in order to thank them following their participation.

## Appendix J

### Field Notes

Date	Note	Source of Information
2021-06-10	I was informed that the principal at the Jewish elementary school that was contacted to help with recruitment had taken a leave of absence due to being burnt-out. Upon further discussion, it was discovered that this was the case for a few schools. Therefore, this made it that staff did not know who to direct our inquiries to about the project recruitment. This could explain why schools were not returning our calls due to having a difficult year because of the pandemic and having a shortage or turnover of administrative staff.	Jewish co-worker
2021-06-07	I was informed that this year was different compared to other years in terms of the number of students who chose to transition out of the Armenian schools. Due to the pandemic, many parents and students decided to remain in the Armenian school since they were familiar with the staff and peers which provided a sense of comfort. Only a minority of students (approximately 5-10 students) transitioned to mainstream high schools and the rest remained in the Armenian school. This information is important for recruitment as it could explain why it has been such a challenge to recruit participants.	Armenian school administration staff member/Family friend of Armenian classmate
2021-06-01	I was informed by my co-worker that the Islamic schools extend to high school and a majority of students decide to stay in the ethnic schools thus only a minority transition to mainstream high schools. This could explain why it was difficult to recruit participants that fit the inclusion criteria of the current study	Islamic co-worker
2021-05-16	I was informed by my old Greek-school principal that there is now a high school that some students choose to continue in following elementary school. Although I knew that this was a project that was hoped for in the past, I was never aware that it was accomplished. By looking on Facebook, I also discovered that	Greek-school principal/teacher

	2020 was the first cohort of students to graduate from the Greek elementary school.	
	Sourp Hagop school extends until grade 8 while Alex Manoogian school extends until the end of high school. Both schools are private. The primary languages are French and Armenian.	School websites



## Appendix K

### Sample Interview Transcripts

#### Transcript Sample 1: Steve

	Pseudonym	Steve			
Lines	Speaker	Transcrip of Interview with Kris	Cycle 1 Coding (in vivo)	Cycle 2 Coding (key words)	Cycle 3 Coding (themes)
139	Interviewer	And why would you say, I mean of course it's difficult at the beginning, but was there any specific reason why it was hard for you and the first couple of weeks?			
140	Student	Uhh because I didn't talk to anyone.	Didn't talk to anyone except the one friend. Didn't know anybody	Reason for Challenge	Importance of systems
141	Mother	Because you didn't know anybody		Not knowing anyone	
142	Student	Except for the one friend.		Not talking to anyone	
143	Interviewer	Ok and then you started to feel more and more comfortable after the weeks went by?		Friend	
144	Student	Yea.	Started feeling more comfortable as weeks passed	Adapting	Adaptation to novelty
145	Interviewer	OK did you guys have any my group projects to do or any other activities as a way to bond during class times or it was mostly after class that you would bond with them?			
146	Student	Mmm I mean we had some projects and I only did it with my close friend	Did projects with close friend	Close friend School project	Importance of systems
147	Interviewer	Ok so when when was the ideal time for you to make friends?			
148	Student	Uhh, I'd say after class... Lunch.	Made friends after class or during lunch	Socialization Lunch Free-time	Unstructured moments
149	Interviewer	OK so I guess, sorry just to be sure, you said in the beginning, you were not in class until October right and then in October everything opened up and you ...			
150	Student	No well I went to school in September but then there was just two Covid cases in my class for October like 2 weeks I didn't go. Then for three days I went, then it just closed again so.. Then I went in November. So I barely had any days in October at school.	Went to school in September. Two Covid cases in class. In October didn't go to class. Then went for three days. Then closed again. Then went in Novemeber. Barely any days in October	Consequences of Covid Changes in functioning School closures Covid cases	School functioning Consequence of pandemic

### Transcript Sample 2: Simon

	Pseudonym	Simon			
Lines	Speaker	Transcript	Cycle 1 Coding	Cycle 2 Coding (Key words)	Cycle 3 Coding (Themes)
183	Interviewer	OK and what did you do to find new friends at the beginning?			
184	Student	Usually, they talk to me I don't let them I'm too shy to go up to them	He would let others talk to him. He is shy to go up to others	Making friends Shy Let others approach him	
185	Interviewer	OK so some people came up to you and then you started talking? (Mhmm, head nod) OK and maybe... I know we're going to talk about it later... but maybe you can talk to me a little bit about like the pandemic... So because you guys had to stay in your bubble like how did this affect you making friends?			
186	Student	It didn't really affect me because since we didn't go to other classes and had to stay with the same group, it didn't really affect me... So like it was my first year and I knew I wasn't going to get that many friends so like literally I really didn't mind. Wearing a mask, I didn't really care about that.	Pandemic didn't affect him much. Didn't go to other classes. Had to stay with same group. He knew he wasn't going to get many friends the first year. He didn't mind. Didn't care about wearing a mask	Affect of pandemic (neutral) School functioning Consequence of Covid-19 Strategy to rationalize Making friends Wearing mask	Expectations Consequences of pandemic
187	Interviewer	OK so would you say most of your friends that you made were from your your bubble or did you make other friends ?			
188	Student	Yeah from my bubble.	Made friends from bubble	Making friends Class bubble Consequence of Covid-19	Friend-making process Consequence of pandemic
189	Interviewer	And how about like a lunch did you get to interact with other students from other bubbles or not at all?			
190	Student	No we had to stay within our own bubble. But other kids go in other bubbles (sorry?) Other kids go in other bubbles but like I already have my own group from my own class...	Had to stay within own bubble. Other kids go in other bubbles but he already had his own group from his class	Class bubble Break Friend group	Consequence of pandemic

### Transcript Sample 3: Anthony

	Pseudonym	Anthony			
	Speaker	Interview Transcript	Coding Cycle 1 (in vivo)	Coding Cycle 2 (Key Words)	Coding Cycle 3 (Themes)
164	Student	Oh, I guess I tried new activities, and I became more open to talking to people, because in the beginning of the year I was like more like shy and stuff, but I think that I've like learned to like, open up, talk to people. I'm more friendlier. and yeah I think that's the main. Those are the main things.	Tried new activities. Because more sociable, open to talking to others. Was shy at beginning but learned to open up. More friendlier.	New activities More sociable/More open Friendlier Shy Timeline/Progression Adaptation	Maturation Adaptation to novelty Interest/extracurriculars Friend-making process
165	Interviewer	Okay, perfect. And another quick question before you went to this high school, would you say that you mostly hung out with like Armenian kids or did you have like other sources of like socialization outside of school with, like other kids from other cultures, we were in elementary?			
166	Student	Um, yes, as I, as I said I have family friends, and I also have a YouTube channel, and I can really like chat with people from all around the world so that's like really nice. So like I've made a few friends online that are for. Yeah, that are different and. But yeah it's it's so when I was elementary I reached out to many different people from different ethnicities.	Sources of socialization, family friends, Youtube channel. Chat with people from all around the world. Made new friends online that are different. Reached out to different people from different ethnicities.	Sources of socialization Family Friends Youtube Channel International Friends Different ethnicities	Friend-making process Perception of culture/ethnicity
167	Interviewer	Okay, perfect. Alright, so no I'm going to go into the next one. So, what would you say was the most difficult part for you to transition to high school?			
168	Student	The most difficult part was definitely the homework and the work that we have to do. It was drastically different from elementary, it was like very different. Like the first day bang 17 assignments...	Most difficult part of transition to high school was homework and all the work. Drastically different from elementary. First day got bombarded with assignments.	Difficult Homework Difference between schools Drastic change Overwhelming	Adaptation to novelty School functioning
169	Interviewer	That's a lot to take in all at once. Are your parents helping you? I'm not sure if in elementary were they helping you more with your homework compared to high school or?			
170	Student	Yes in elementary they helped me a little more because I was a little younger, but now I'm more responsible and I do most of it on my own. If I need help for like a question I can like go ask them or something. But yeah it's mostly me.	Parents helped more with homework in elementary because younger. More responsible now. Do most on own. He can still ask for help with certain questions.	Parental help/support/involvement Homework Independence/Autonomy Age difference Progression Changes in schools	Perceived support Maturation/responsibility

### Transcript Sample 4: Gregory

	Pseudonym	Gregory			
	Speaker	Transcript	Cycle 1 Coding (In vivo)	Cycle 2 Coding (Key words)	Cycle 3 Coding (Themes)
47	Interviewer	And in what we would you say that your school felt like home?			
48	Student	Like, since the community, community was Armenian and like now the community is French... It's a bit like weirder. Because like when I was in the Armenian community, it felt like I was really there, like, like it was home. But now that in French, like, even though I know French well, I still feel like home, just not as much as I did in my elementary school...	Community was Armenian. Now community is French. Weirder. Armenian community felt like he was really there, like home. In French school, still feels like home but not as much as elementary	Community Armenian Vs. French Varying degrees Home Difference between schools	Perception of culture/ethnicity School context Comfort level
49	Interviewer	Okay, so I guess, would you say that like feeling like home it's me because you're familiar a bit more with culture (Yeah) and the language, and all that, and compared to know, it's a bit different? (Yeah). Okay. Alright. And also, like you said here it was also much smaller, so I guess it is your high school a lot bigger now (Yeah) like you're there. Okay, so did that help, because it was smaller, I guess that's also why I felt a bit more homey because you knew everyone. I guess now you only knew like a few people or not as many as before?	Familiarity with culture and language. Different. Elementary was smaller. High school is bigger.	Familiarity Culture Language Difference between schools Size School organization Home Knowing people	
50	Student	Yeah, but I'm sure like the next two years, I'm going to get used to the school.	He's sure he will get used to school in next two years.	Adaptation Timeline: next few years Anticipation	Adaptation to novelty
51	Interviewer	Yeah. Alright. And so next, "the hardest part for me was seeing how bigger the school was so I would sometimes be lost." Okay, what do you mean by	Hard. Bigger school. He would sometimes be lost.	Hard Getting lost	
52	Student	Like on the first day of school, like I didn't know where to go. And still now sometime... Well we have four different activities to choose from: music, dance, acting... I forgot the last one... art! ... And, well, because of the pandemic, like, we're not supposed to move classes to classes, the teachers come to us. But because we have our activities, we need to go like, different places each time. And I'm in the dance class. So each time, like, each time we have a different class we have to go to a different studio, over and over again. Which I always get lost which class we have to go through. Even today, like... well school's over... But if there was still school, I would still be lost.	First day, didn't know where to go. Still now. Four different activities to choose. Music, dance, acting, art. Because of pandemic didn't move classes. Teacher would go to them. For activities went to different places each time. He's in dance class. Each time, different class, different studio. Would still be lost today	Getting lost Navigation Choice of art activity Music Dance Acting Art Consequence of Covid-19 Expectations vs. Reality Class/Studio Timeline: still School functioning/organization	School functioning Consequence of pandemic Navigation of school Interest

### Transcript Sample 5: Ricky

Pseudonym	Speaker	Interview Transcript	Cycle 1 Coding (In vivo)	Cycle 2 Coding (Key words)	Cycle 3 (Themes)
80	Student	Everything ended online. We saw each other for the graduation ceremony, not the party. And then I saw them at Baskin Robbins	Elementary ended online. Saw friend for grad ceremony no party. Saw friends at Baskin Robbins	Online learning Abrupt end No graduation party Consequences of pandemic	Consequence of pandemic Unmet expectations
81	Interviewer	Okay, so Baskin Robbins, I guess you guys would meet up, like your parents would just go drive you to Baskin Robbins and you would meet your friends like that? (Yeah.) Okay, so I guess it was different than what you expected that from finishing elementary school?			
82	Student	Yeah and towards the end of sixth grade, every year, there'll be a graduation like trip, to Quebec city, and all my class, we were really bummed because we didn't get ours (Right) and that was like the whole, that was a that was supposed to be the best part of elementary school, everything would build up to that. Everyone would talk about, "Oh just wait till you get to grade six and you have to do that trip, it's amazing!"	Typically graduation trip at end of grade 6 to Quebec. Class was bummed since it was cancelled. Supposed to be best part of elementary. Build up. Older students would talk about trip	Consequence of pandemic Graduation trip Travel Sad Anticipation/build up Let down	Unmet expectations Consequence of pandemic
83	Interviewer	Oh and you never got. You guys never got the opportunity to do it unfortunately. (Yeah.) Okay, well, hopefully, you can still I guess, plan something with friends like separately. And maybe it's not going to be a whole trip to Quebec City, but just to still see them or. (Yeah) And it's great that you guys are going back for graduation this year. Are you looking forward to that?			
84	Student	Um yeah I'm really excited for it. I just wish somehow if there wasn't any Covid like it could have been a little bit earlier, because now it's, we're almost in sec two so we don't need it as much as before. (Right) Now we're just maybe like, see our friends. Okay, but other than that, for the graduation itself, we don't need it...	Excited for grad party this year but wish there wasn't Covid to make it earlier. Now almost in sec 2 so it's not need as much. Now will serve to see friends.	Excitement Grad party Consequence of Covid Purpose of graduation party Socialization Meet with friends	Unmet expectations Consequence of pandemic