

The Experiences of Chinese Immigrant Students in  
Quebec School

Oymoon Au

A Thesis

in

The Department

Of

Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

February 2004

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*ISBN: 0-612-90996-4*  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The Experiences of Chinese Immigrant Students in Quebec

Oymoon Au

This study concerned itself with the particular difficulties that adolescent immigrants may have in adapting to school in the new country where a second language must also be learned. To explore this matter, 13 individuals who had emigrated from Hong Kong as adolescents were interviewed in order to gather their recollections of their experiences. It was found that learning French was especially difficult, due in part to their prior beginning knowledge of English and an attitudinal disposition that favored English.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my advisor, Dr. Ailie Cleghorn for her incessant guidance, understanding, and encouragement.

I express my sincere thanks to Annie Potter for her diligence in editing my writing.

I also thank my participants, who so cooperatively shared their experiences.

I appreciate and am grateful to the Concordia University. It is here, where I have had the chance to fulfill my life long learning dream.

I owe my gratitude to my family who have been supportive and given me confidence.

Finally, I thank God. It is my faith in Him that I became who I am today.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Canada is often called ‘A Nation of Immigrants’. The most popular choices for immigrants to settle are the provinces of British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, and Alberta as stated cited in Statistic Canada (see Table 1). Throughout the history of Canada, we learned that people from Europe, Asia, and many other places immigrated to these provinces to make a better life. Chinese people have been amongst the many thousands of immigrants who crossed the ocean to Canada hoping for better opportunities for themselves but mostly, for their children.

Table 1

#### Chinese Population 2001 Census

<u>Canadian Provinces</u>	<u>Chinese Immigrants</u>
Quebec	43,745
Ontario	404,250
British Columbia	307,990
Manitoba	9,185
Alberta	78,205
Saskatchewan	6,010
Newfoundland	520
Prince Edward Island	130
Nova Scotia	2,125
New Brunswick	1,215

Source: <http://www.cic.gc.ca>

According to Chan (1983) and Ashworth (1988), among other authors, thousands of Chinese gold miners landed in Victoria B.C. in 1858. Then others followed, mostly from the Guangdong province of Southern China. From 1880-1885, the construction of the Western section of the Canadian Pacific Railway brought a second influx of Chinese immigrants. Building the first railway across the country was the largest project undertaken by the new country of Canada. Andrew Onderdonk was an American engineer. In the year 1879, he began construction on a section of the Fraser Canyon for the Canadian Pacific Railroad. This section was very difficult to construct, so to save as much money as possible, he hired 17,000 Chinese labourers in 1881 from China. (Government of B.C. Archives, September, 2003).

Upon the completion of the railway, Chinese immigrants were no longer needed and their existences threatened the non-Chinese workers. Henceforth, a Head Tax was imposed upon all Chinese people entering Canada. This Head Tax was \$50 in 1885, and then later increased to \$500 in 1904 per person, which, at the time, was the equivalent of two years of wages. In addition to the Head Tax, the Exclusion Act was also implemented in 1923 to prevent job competition, since Chinese people worked harder and for lower wages

than the non-Chinese workers. This Act, besides restricting Chinese immigration, stipulated that every person of Chinese origin be required to register with the government, irrespective of whether they were staying or leaving Canada. During the period of exclusion, only 12 Chinese, who belonged to the privilege exempted classes, were admitted and 61,213 registered to return to China. Those who stayed were men without their families. These two forces placed a serious restriction upon Chinese immigration.

It was not until 1967 when Canada adopted a point system, The Immigration Act, to screen independent or economic immigrants that Chinese immigration to Canada began to grow. About 90,000 immigrants from Hong Kong, mainland China, and Taiwan came to Canada between 1968 to 1976 (Li, 2003). My mother, my siblings, and I were amongst these immigrants, who came to Montreal to join my father, who had been alone in Canada since 1955. The next major influx of Chinese immigrants, mostly from Hong Kong, occurred during the end of 1980s to the beginning of 1990s; Hong Kong a British colony, was due to return to China in 1997 and many families, who could afford to and could meet the Canadian economic requirement for immigration, started moving to Canada. These ten

years, 1985 to 1994, brought 353,000 Chinese immigrants to Canada, a vast increase (Li, 2003).

### *Personal Background*

Immigration, the up-rooting of lives from one's own familiar country to another completely strange land, has definitely many consequences. One of these will be that the children's education may be complicated. When children are very young, they may adjust quickly and easily. However, the adults and their adolescent children will surely encounter a few more problems (Bombas, 1981).

As mentioned previously, I immigrated to Montreal in 1966. I was then 12 years old, a young adolescent girl. I did encounter some difficulties adjusting to school and learning new languages (English and French). My own experience sheds some light in what I meant by "difficult adjustment".

I will always remember the day: On December 5, 1966, I got up early to get ready for my first day of school in Canada. My mother told me several times to dress warmly. I put on a short-sleeved under-shirt, a long sleeved thermal under-shirt, a white uniform blouse, a navy blue tunic, a pullover pure wool sweater, and finally over it all, I

put on my blue uniform cardigan. To protect my legs from the severe cold, I put on a pair of long thermal pants and then a pair of blue wool leotards. I was well bundled from top to bottom. Before putting on my winter coat, my mother checked me and nodded with satisfaction. I left home with fear and apprehension. I slowly walked to the school bus stop, which my father had shown me the day before.

The bus ride to school was strange. People were staring at me, some were smiling and others were pointing at me. Why were they behaving like that? About what were they talking? I wished that I could understand! I wanted to find somewhere to hide. However, there was nowhere to hide. I sat in the back seat of the bus alone. The bus ride felt like it lasted thousands of years. At last, it arrived in front of a big brown building with a huge concrete yard packed with white snow.

As I was getting off the bus, a tall man with a dark brown beard came up to me. I heard my name mixed with many other words. At that moment, I remembered my mother's teaching. She said in a solemn voice, "You, my children, have to be polite to people. You smile and you bow if someone is talking to you, even when you do not understand what was being said. The smile and the bow are to

show the person that you are listening.” I immediately lifted my head and gave a big smile and then I lowered my head to make a deep bow. That tall man shook his head and took my hand. We followed the group of children into the big brown building.

I stood at the door of a classroom similar to the one back home in Hong-Kong. There was a big desk in the front piled with books and exercise books. Facing the big desk were six rows of smaller wooden desks and chairs. A woman with white hair came towards me. She did not smile. She led me to the last seat of the second row. She said something and abruptly went back to the front. I stood for a while looking around the room not knowing what to do. Finally, I made the decision to sit down. I guessed that would be my seat in the class. I sat in my seat feeling lonely, scared, hot and itchy. I did not know if I could take off my cardigan or not. For the rest of the morning, I was sitting with tears in my eyes hoping this would end. The afternoon of the same day, I was sent to another classroom. As I entered the classroom, I saw some familiar faces. They were like mine. I sat down as I was told. The boy sat next to me started to whisper. He said in Cantonese, “In here, Miss Gilmore teaches us English.” A book was handed to me. We started to read line after

line repeating after Miss Gilmore. This way of learning continued for six months until the last day of grade six. I did not discover how much I had learned until I had to write an essay in the seventh grade.

One day the teacher of seventh grade handed us an article and, told us to read at home; then, the next day we were expected to write an analytical essay on this article in class. As I glanced through the article, I did not understand many of the words. I spent that night checking the vocabulary in the dictionary and memorizing the whole article, word for word, all three pages. The next day, I rewrote the entire article word by word. That was my very first English analytical essay!

For the next four years of High School, I studied Shakespeare, read short stories and wrote compositions. However, every time I wrote a composition, an essay, or anything to hand in, it always came back with many red marks and comments like, wrong grammar, use correct idioms, check your sentences. Several times, I went up to the teachers to ask how to correct my mistakes. None told me how. Instead, they repeatedly said, “You just keep reading and writing; eventually, you will learn how.” I obediently kept reading and writing; nonetheless, I did not learn how. I had tremendous difficulties in

expressing my ideas and thoughts clearly and correctly. I barely passed English at the end of High School.

In college, I studied a three-year program in Medical Technology. In this program, I studied all that was required but not English. Upon graduation, I started to work. I continued to read, but I did not write anymore. After eight years of reading only, I finally decided to go to University. For the first one and half year, I took English writing courses. These courses taught me basic English structure. For the first time, I was introduced, using a systematic method, to grammar, sentence structure, and various types of essay writing. My progress was slow but steady. After about five years of struggling, I can finally express my thoughts more clearly, albeit I still make some idiomatic mistakes and grammatical errors.

The above narrative describes my learning experiences as a new immigrant adolescent and the subsequent struggles with the English language. It is known that adolescence is a time of major change in a person's life. During this period there are several drastic changes in the areas of physical, intellectual, emotional, and social growth. To adjust and to explore new opportunity for growth, early adolescents need a safe, comfortable, and intellectually challenging environment.



Such an environment can encourage adolescents to feel competent, to have a sense of belonging, and to feel accepted by peers. Therefore, knowing these changes in the lives of adolescents and my personal experiences, I have wanted for a long time to conduct a study on Chinese adolescent immigrants' experiences in learning English. However, conducting such a study is less feasible in Quebec today, since Quebec's language of education has changed due to the passage of Bill 101 in 1977. The question now turns to their experience learning in French.

### *Quebec Education History*

Prior to the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s, the English language was the sociologically predominant language in Quebec, and especially in Montreal. It was the language of prestige and business. English was also the language of choice for immigrants when they settled in the province, and most of them settled in Montreal. During the quiet Revolution, the Francophone community, the majority of the Quebec population, began a movement of change. Thus, from the 1960s onwards, Quebec society was swept by the winds of change that has transformed it profoundly (Levine, 1990).

In the 1960s, the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission and the Gendron Commission were created, and Bill 22 was legislated to ensure the status of French as the official language in Quebec. However, the most radical change made in Quebec was the introduction of Bill 101 in 1977. This Bill made French the language of Government and Law, as well as the normal everyday language of work, instruction, communication, commerce, and business. In short, French was to be used everywhere in the province. In the education system, Bill 101 binds the children of immigrants to attend French schools until age 16, unless their parents had previously attended English schools in the province (Levine 1990).

### *Problem Statement*

As a daughter of Chinese immigrants who has lived through these changes, I have had the occasion to observe the behaviors of many immigrant students, and particularly those of Chinese immigrant students. Although not documented, my personal observation was that some Chinese immigrant students who came to Quebec when they were in their early teens had difficulties adjusting to school. Some of these students struggled for one or two years in

French secondary school and discontinued, to later return to an English Adult Education system in order to complete their education. Some who were able to finish secondary school pursued post-secondary in the English CEGEPS and universities. Such outcomes have left me wondering why these Chinese immigrant students could not complete their education in French; or why they did not pursue post secondary schooling in French.

My own experiences in English language learning coupled with the above observations have prompted my interest in conducting a study on Chinese adolescent immigrants' experiences in French medium schools. This is the subject of this Masters' study. While immigrant adolescents from other non-English speaking countries may have similar difficulties, this study is limited to Chinese immigrant students. It would be beyond the scope of this study and this thesis to extend the study to other groups.

Immigration is not a one time historical event in the history of Canada, it is carrying on into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and it will certainly continue. For this reason, the importance of the education and language acquisition of immigrant children ought to be of continuing interest to all concerned.

### *The importance of this study*

It is hoped that the findings of the study will be of interest to educators and school administrators for several reasons. First, the responses will provide insight to help educators, counselors, and administrators understand at least this particular group of immigrant students. Second, if this study increases their overall understanding, it is hoped that additional or new plans to aid such groups to succeed academically will be put in place. Third, the insights gained from the findings could be incorporated into longer-term educational reforms which would benefit future generations of immigrant students to succeed. Lastly, it is hoped that these students and their community may use the findings to provide some of the necessary support to help future Chinese immigrant students from within their community.

### *Limitation of the study*

I am cognizant that my personal experiences and cultural preconceptions may have biased the formulation of the questions that this study explored. It is possible that the data and their interpretation are also biased. The validity of the findings may also be limited by the willingness of the interviewees to co-operate and to disclose their

feelings and recollections about their own experience. In addition, it is always difficult for individuals to report past experiences accurately since those experiences are colored by what has come afterwards. These comments thus underline the fact that the opinions expressed in this thesis do not necessarily reflect those of my thesis committee members or the Educational Studies program.

The study does not seek to generalize; the small group of individuals who reported their experiences stands on their own and speaks for themselves. This being said, reflection on personal experience can provide valuable information and insights for the planning of intervention and other programs that are intended to assist immigrants and others to adapt to new situations.

### *Organization of the thesis*

The thesis will be organized as follows. A historical background of Chinese immigrants will be discussed in the next chapter, Chapter 2. There is much diversity among the Chinese population: immigrants have come to Canada from mainland China, Taiwan, South-East Asia, and Hong Kong. It is hoped that a discussion of the historical background will clarify some of the

essentials and particularities of the immigrants from Hong Kong, the focal group in this study. The literature review, which helped to formulate the theoretical framework of this study, will make up Chapter 3. Chapter 4 will consist of the methodology used for this particular study, and it will be followed by an analysis of data in Chapter 5. Finally, Chapter 6 will include a discussion of the analyzed data, recommendations for further studies and concluding remarks.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Historical Background of Hong Kong

Hong Kong, at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, was little more than a backwater in southern China. Its inhabitants were mostly subsistence farmers, fishermen, and pirates. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Britain imposed an opium trade on China. China tried to stop the flow; however Britain waged two wars upon China to sell their opium. Finally Britain won. Henceforth, the Treaty of Nanking was drawn up and signed to give control of Hong Kong to Britain. This lease began in 1898, and expired on July 1, 1997. Since then, Hong Kong has straddled two empires and two worlds. It has been a continuing history of conflict and compromise between East and West; a history of “haves” and “have-nots” (Lord & Cheng, 1987).

According to some reports, during the early years of colonialism, Hong Kong did not attract a very desirable Chinese population from China. The inhabitants were generally looked down upon by the British as a useful race of ‘sub-humans’. There was practically no social mixing whatsoever. These attitudes carried over to the Chinese language as well. It was generally believed that “knowledge of Chinese warped the mind, destroyed common sense,

and unbalanced the judgment” (Fu, 1975, p.40). The governor between 1848 and 1854, Samuel George Bonham, went so far as to deny promotions to any of his subordinates who learned Chinese; he only appointed posts such as consuls and vice-consuls to someone who was ignorant of the language. However, Fu also noted some appreciation of Chinese characteristics. She wrote, “...Hong Kong Chinese, an enigmatic characteristic of self-sufficient which has been called a ‘clannish exclusivism’ (p.41). For example, those Chinese who could afford it would send their sons to Guang Zhou, a port city in southeast of China, rejecting an English education. They also had no desire to build bridges with European life in this Colony. Hong Kong, the British colony, existed in such a manner that the government was British and the population was Chinese, for some time, the two populations co-existed separately.

The colonialists’ desire was to encourage the people to look favorably upon the colonial government and become less “Chinese” in their ways. In order to acculturate the Chinese to British ways of behaving, the Chinese were to be educated in English. To best illustrate, Fu quoted Governor Hennessy at the Central School of Hong Kong in 1880,



It has been the ambition of nearly every man who preceded me in the Government of this Colony, and it has been the policy of all Secretaries of State who have written to my predecessors and myself—that Hong Kong should be made an Anglo-Chinese Colony, where Her Majesty should have thousands upon thousands of Chinese subjects, with a thorough knowledge of the English language—amenable to English law and appreciating the British constitution, loyal to their QUEEN, and a strength to this distant part of Her Majesty’s Empire. Our educational scheme will accomplish a practical result if it assists in achieving that.

(p.48)

Consequently, the ‘educational scheme’, instruction in the English language, slowly became the prestigious badge of the elite, for governmental offices and employment were open only to the English and later to English speakers (Fu, 1975).

That was the Hong Kong of yesteryears. What were the Chinese people’s attitudes toward English as the medium of

instruction in schools? And what is Hong Kong's school system like today?

It is known that Hong Kong returned to China in 1997, her governing policy has remained independent of mainland China. Therefore, the government policy and the school system of Hong Kong remain untouched by the Chinese government of mainland China.

Today, Hong Kong's schools fall into four categories: government, subsidized, grant-in-aid, and private. And these four types have further divided into Anglo-Chinese and Chinese middle schools. The Chinese middle school uses Chinese as the medium of instruction in all subjects except the English language; the Anglo-Chinese school uses English as the medium of instruction. In these schools, teachers use Chinese to teach Chinese language, history and literature (Fu, in Lord & Cheng, 1987). However, the Chinese middle schools are a dwindling minority and most parents of Hong Kong's students seek the Anglo-Chinese schools for their children. Why do these parents favor the Anglo-Chinese schools?

It was previously mentioned that English became the language of prestige and jobs were open only to English speakers. English was

the language necessary in the much coveted government positions as well as in the rest of the white-collar sector. Hence, in Hong Kong, success is still often linked to knowledge of English. Fu (1975) quoted Simpson's description in his writing, *Manpower and Employment Problem*, "A sound knowledge of English was rated equally as important as the graduates' intelligence or academic knowledge" (p.93). Consequently, parents of Hong Kong students still feel that more English is better and to be taught earlier is best. It is a rare kindergarten that does not start the ABC of English. English in kindergarten means better chances of getting into the better schools, of passing the necessary exams, of entering the University, of landing the better jobs. Therefore, very young children are drilled in the letters of the alphabet, colors, and numbers as well as in the spelling of simple words like 'cat', 'red', and 'girl'. They are expected to do considerable amounts of homework. Therefore, it can be seen that children in Hong Kong are put under pressure to learn English early in their young lives. However, what are the views of older students toward English learning?

To answer, two studies carried out by Fu in 1975 would shed some light. In the first study, she asked the following open-ended

questions to groups of middle school students from three different schools: (1) Do you like to study in English? (2) Do you like English-speaking people such as American and British people?

Her findings can be summarized as follows. The responses to the first question about the study of English indicated that most students found English to be an important international language; if learned well, they could have more opportunities for their future, whether it could be for job opportunities, to pass for entrance to university, or to communicate with other people. As one student summed it up, “On the whole, English is good for us to communicate with our future boss and governor” (p.155). The responses to the second question about their attitudes toward English-speaking people were not as expected because they focused on the language ability rather than on the people themselves.

Fu’s second study posed 28 questions to five groups of middle schools students from different sectors and schools. She grouped the responses to the questions into four major areas for purposes of analysis: (1) the importance of English; (2) attitudes towards using English; (3) attitudes towards Chinese culture; and (4) attitudes towards English speaking people (see Appendix 1). To these

questions, students were to choose from a number of possible answers. For the purposes of my study, I have drawn upon one particular area, which is the first section: the importance of English.

Fu found that the awareness of the importance of English in Hong Kong was overwhelming. Eighty-three percent of the respondents thought that English was necessary in order to get a good job. The same number of students agreed that English was important for their future. In addition, sixty-three percent of the students' parents perceived that English was an important subject, eighty-two percent agreed that English should be learned because it is an international language, sixty-two percent of the sample felt it was desirable for their spouses to know English, and eighty-seven percent felt that their children should know English (Fu, 1975).

In the light of the responses from these two studies, English appears to be seen as an important language to learn and the motivation to learn it is great.

To recapitulate, from an historical point of view, English was first imposed upon the existing Chinese population in the early years of British occupation of Hong Kong, but as time passed, the Chinese population itself, in the hope of obtaining better opportunities, sought

a firm knowledge of English. Therefore, we might assume that English still holds an extremely prestigious position in Hong Kong today. With this attitude embedded in their history toward English, how does this same population accept the challenge of learning other foreign languages when they immigrate to other countries?

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Literature Review**

In the introduction chapter, it was noted that some Chinese adolescent immigrants who came to Quebec post 1977 had difficulties adjusting to schooling in French; and eventually, some of them discontinued their schooling and switched to English medium schools. This phenomenon of drop-out or discontinuation has prompted the present study on Chinese adolescent immigrants' experiences Quebec schools today. What were the factors causing this occurrence of discontinuation? What are some of the findings from studies or researches relating to this topic? To have a better understanding, the following chapter will focus on the literature relating to this particular topic.

The topic of school drop-out is complex. In the case at hand, the participants in my study had dropped out or more accurately, discontinued their schooling before the end of secondary school or before starting their post secondary education. In each case, there was a switch in language of instruction, from French to English, the choice being open to adult learners. Nevertheless studies on school drop-out may provide pertinent insights on the importance of student attitude

toward a particular language, and the influences of motivation in learning a second language. In addition, studies on the effects of learning second languages are important so as to provide understanding into second language learners' experiences. It is hoped that the following literature review will help to elaborate the theoretical framework of my study on Chinese immigrant adolescents' experiences being educated in Quebec after 1977.

There are many important factors that contribute to immigrant adolescent students' drop-out or discontinuation from schooling. Among the factors thoroughly detailed in the literature are: Properties of language(s) to be learned, cognitive aspects of second language learning, attitudes, school context experiences, and motivation of the learners.

Studies indicate a number of factors related to the students' first or native language shape the learning of second language learning. Walqui (1997) writes that the difficulty in learning the target language is dependent on how different or similar the native and the target languages. She gives an example stating that native English speakers took 24 weeks to reach to an intermediate level in learning Spanish or Dutch; and in the case of learning languages such as Arabic, Korean,



or Vietnamese, 65 weeks were taken. If one transfers this same concept to a native Chinese speaker learning English or French, then a native Chinese speaker may have to take 65 weeks to reach an intermediate level in learning English or French since the two languages are very different.

Besides the above explanation of the linguistic distance in learning language, Walqui also pinpoints, with the substantiation of research studies, that there are great individual differences among learners in the ways they learn a second language. Some of these differences can be grouped together as learning styles, which are cognitive, physical, and social preferences for ways of learning. For example, some learners may be more analytical and thrive on picking apart words and sentences. And others may be more holistic, needing to experience overall patterns of the language in meaningful contexts before being able to make sense of the linguistic parts and forms. Understanding these linguistic and learning style differences is a step in being able to educate the immigrant students well. How then, should the immigrant students be educated? Should they be put in an immersion type of classroom? Will they succeed in it?

The class action – *Lau v. Nichols* – in which the Chinese community in San Francisco launch a suit against the San Francisco school system – stated,

There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education.

(Castellanos, 1983, cited by Genesee, 1987, p. 135)

This lawsuit explicitly revealed a problem that immigrant students were not able to learn or to be educated in this type of educational system.

In spite of studies show that many successes of English speaking students in second language immersion programs, Genesee (1987) contends that immigrant students who lack or have limited proficiency in English often experience academic failure in schools where the immersion programs are used.

It is understood that language learning in adolescence approximates the style of learning of adults. Thus if adolescents are expected to acquire the second language in an immersion type of classroom, learning may be hampered. A suitable approach must be

considered for teaching the immigrant students so that they can succeed academically.

The above mentioned factors can greatly influence the education of immigrant students: However, there are other factors to consider. A study carried out by Bruck (1985), (cited in Genesee, 1987) explored the reasons for students who dropped out of French immersion. The findings indicate that the reasons students dropped out were due mostly to attitude, motivation, and behaviour. These factors were considered more important than age of learner, learning style, or type of program. Henceforth, this present study will solely concentrate on factors such as learners' attitude, motivation, and experiences. It is well contended by Csilzsentmihalyi (1987) that "The chief impediments to learning are not cognitive. It is not that students cannot learn; it is that they do not wish to..." (p.115). Furthermore, Taylor (1987) also asserts, "attitudes to a language are generally considered to be significant in affecting the acquisition of a proficiency in that language" (p.152).

In terms of immigrant students' actual desire (or not) to learn French, Bailey and Gorland (1983) raise an important point. They highlight the point that English fluency in Hong Kong is considered

essential for all higher paid positions. It may be relevant also that those Chinese immigrants appear to maintain economic and familial ties to the homeland perhaps more actively than some other immigrant groups. Thus the place of origin may remain the point of reference. Further, the fact that English is increasingly a global language (Crystal, 1997) reinforces the importance of English at least in the mind of immigrants from Hong Kong. These studies support the research that suggests that English is likely to be the language of choice for most Chinese immigrants.

More recently, there are studies examining the relationship of cross-cultural adaptation together with communication (Kim, 1988). In her study, Kim writes, “a stranger’s successful adaptation is possible only when she or he is able to communicate effectively with the host environment” (p.85). She continues to say that in order to adapt well into the new culture, a person has to achieve certain competencies in areas such as the following. First, a person has to be able to communicate competently. Second, a person needs to understand how the members of their host society think. Third, a person needs to know how to behave according to the social roles as defined by the host society. Finally, the immigrant has to

psychologically favour the host culture. Again, this speaks to students being influenced by a number of factors, all of which affect motivation to stay in school and to learn.

It is quite clear that language proficiency is one of the important factors for adjusting well into a new culture. Spolsky (1972) writes,

Learning in school depends on interaction-interaction of the pupil with his teachers, with his books, with his peers-and all these interactions are mediated by language. School is not just a place that teaches language; most of its teaching takes place through language, and most of its learning depends on a pupil's ability to understand what his teacher says and what is in his books. Without communication between teachers and pupils, there is little chance of effective education. (p. 3)

In order to make sense of why some immigrant students learn well while others do not learn so well it is important to understand the key factors that may influence the learning of a second language. According to Littlewood (1984), to attain proficiency of any given language depends greatly on two factors. The first factor is

motivation. Two key points affect motivation: 1) Learners of a second language must clearly perceive the need to learn a particular language in order to communicate – instrumental motivation. 2) A positive attitude to learning is developed when the learners are favorably inclined towards the speakers of the language in which the matter is being taught – integrative motivation. The second factor relates to the opportunity for learning and the emotional climate of the learning situations. The opportunity for learning refers to how the learner perceives his or her opportunity to use the second language. The success of learning depends on the environment in which the learner learns. Indeed, Littlewood (1984) asserts that, “In an environment where learners feel anxious or insecure, there are likely to be psychological barriers to communication. Also if anxiety rises above a certain level, it is an obstacle to the learning process” (p.58); hence, the learners will encounter difficulties in acquiring the second language and in adaptation in general.

Lucas (1977, 1996) identifies different transitions as influencing the lives of secondary school immigrant students. She states, “These sociocultural, developmental, and institutional transitions may interact in ways that complicate the lives of these

students” (p.13). She suggests that, our identities are so linked to the language we speak that we will experience an identity loss when we try to communicate in a language in which we are not fluent. If the school does not provide sufficient support for the new immigrant students, then these students will undergo a difficult institutional transition. Therefore, an immigrant adolescent when faced with such a situation may ultimately fail in adjusting to this new culture.

Arnold (1999) also concurs with the fact that the affective aspects in second language learning are equally, if not more important as the cognitive aspects. *Affect* includes broad aspects of emotion, feeling, mood or attitude all of which condition behavior. The authors affirm that affect does influence greatly how the learners acquire a new language. Furthermore, they stress that “attention to affective aspects can lead to more effective language learning” (p.2), and that “as learners, they are influenced by their feelings and do not learn when anxious or stressed. Learning for them is most effective when it is personally relevant and when information is presented through different sensory modes” (p.7).

Arnold explains two key factors, individual and relational, that impact on a student’s ability to learn. Individual factors are the

personality of the learners. Anxiety, inhibition, extroversion-introversion, self-esteem, and motivation are some of the internal factors, which make up a part of the learner's personality. Each factor influences second language acquisition in its own way. They say if a learner is afraid to make a mistake, such fear will discourage the learner from trying to speak. Second, anxiety can make a learner nervous and afraid, and thus contributes to poor performance.

Relational factors relate to the realm of social interaction. For instance, are people in the environment empathetic towards the learners? Does the classroom facilitate learning so that learners receive guidance and are encouraged to participate? If the answers to such questions are negative, the authors suggest that the environment is not promoting a positive learning experience. Consequently, acquisition of second language will be greatly hindered. Language proficiency is important for learners because it helps in the overall adaptation process, which in turn will enable them to continue their schooling.

Many researchers have studied high school dropout among second language learners. One study (Fran-Ramos & Nieto, 1991) indicates that dropping out was a result of the learners' inability to



simultaneously learn the new language (in their case, English) and other academic subjects in the new language at the same time.

Other factors may also affect success and the inclination to dropout. Walqui (2000) contends that, “The belief that the student dropout rate is due to a lack of proficiency in English often leads educators to overlook the economic, cultural, academic, and personal issues that immigrant adolescents must confront on a daily basis” (p. 2). To rectify the situation she suggests that, “To engage immigrant adolescents in school, educators must provide them with avenues to explore and strengthen their ethnic identities and languages while developing their ability to study and work in this country” (Walqui, 2000, p.2). In order to succeed in school, these students need to be empowered and validated for who they are so that they will not be “lost” in the dominant culture.

Darder (1991) has also written extensively on this subject. She contends that hegemony is rampant in our society today, and particularly in our classrooms. She argues that the curriculum content and the teaching methodology in our education systems continue to perpetuate “the values and social relations that produce and legitimate the dominant worldview at the expense of a vast number of citizens”

(p. 19). Darder also refers to language domination. She demonstrates that the language of many bicultural, minority students is systematically silenced and stripped away by dominant culture values and beliefs that subtly support its inferiority to Standard English. She considers that “Language domination silences students’ voices and seriously curtails their active participation in school life” (p. 38), and strongly suggests that bicultural (immigrant) students need to be empowered particularly by strengthening their ethnic identity.

Studies relating to multicultural education have theorized about some of these factors. Particularly, the insightful works of Ogbu (1983, 1987, and 1991) have made major contributions to the study of minority education in North America and especially the USA by examining a variety of minority groups and their educational aspirations and achievements. Ogbu has focused his studies on both those minority groups that are considered more successful in education as well as those who more often fail in the school system. Ogbu distinguishes two major types of minority groups. He distinguishes between “voluntary minorities” and “involuntary minorities”. These two types of minority groups view their relationships to the dominant culture in completely different terms,

and they therefore differ in their patterns of coping with the difficulties encountered during the adjustment process. Ogbu categorizes voluntary minorities as immigrants who move to their host society usually by their own choice. They come to the host society with a belief and hope that their lives can be improved. On the other hand, he categorizes involuntary minorities as those who did not come to the host society by choice as well as those who were colonized internally, as was the case with Native Americans and some Spanish speaking groups in the South West of the United States. Ogbu notes that these groups often resent their situation; they did not choose it. He also observed that the voluntary minorities can engage in comparisons to their previous situation and feel that life has improved, or will improve for their children. The involuntary minorities have no such opportunity. These situations, according to Ogbu, play on the motivation of students to learn and succeed. He also raises the point that minority groups' perceptions of future opportunities will influence their view of and responses to schooling.

With reference to involuntary minorities, Ogbu notes that a view that the future is dismal may include the lack of opportunity in finding desirable employment after graduating from school, and/or a

belief in the inability to learn a certain language well, or to adapt to a certain culture. He describes the minority groups' perceptions of a dismal future as "...caste like or involuntary minorities that usually experience more difficulties with social adjustment and school performance..." (p. 321). He continues that, "... other evidence suggests that the involuntary minorities do not really believe that they have an equal chance with white Americans to get ahead through education" (p. 325). In response to Ogbu's studies, the study by Matute – Bianchi (1991) on Mexican descent students in central California notes that these immigrant students do not fit neatly into either the voluntary immigrant or involuntary immigrant ethnic identification system because the minority students did not have a choice in immigrating to this host country (cited by Walqui, 1997).

Another response to Ogbu's studies, Tuan (1995) studied Russian and Korean immigrant high school students in Los Angeles. The study shows that both groups negotiated their paths to tertiary education and were successful. In spite of their achievement, their experiences were different. Korean students worked hard and ignored the discrimination against them; on the other hand, the Russian students were simply transferred to college since their former

schooling was more advance. Here, both groups, in Ogbu's terms, would be classified as voluntary immigrants since both groups' families moved to their host country for economic reasons. However, Tuan saw a different perspective. She suggested that the Korean students' experiences over discrimination may be perceived as a lasting threat. Therefore, if this were the case, the non-white voluntary immigrant groups may adopt some of the involuntary immigrant groups' characteristics (Walqui, 1997).

In the light of these findings, questions can be raised: "Do Chinese immigrants, who come from Hong Kong to Quebec, come voluntarily or involuntarily?" "And how willing are they to accept French schooling within a North American context?" Did they come voluntarily but unaware of what they would find? Did they find themselves in a situation that was comparable to that of involuntary minorities as described by Ogbu?

In reviewing the above literature, it can be seen that adjustment or adaptation to the new culture, and competency in a new language can be a perilous undertaking for immigrants. External forces such as social and institutional support and reasons for immigration are among the key factors that will motivate immigrant students to

succeed or not. Their own cultural values, beliefs, motivation, identity, and attitudes towards education also play an important role in the immigrant students' educational attainment. While the above studies looked at immigrants learning English as a second language, many of the findings could also be applied to immigrants learning French. However, there is one additional and important factor and that is whether Chinese students from Hong Kong would be as motivated to learn French as English (a now global language), given their history and the general prestige attached to knowing English.

Studies such as these by River (1996), and Swain, Lapkin, Rowen, and Hart, (1989) show that third-language learners are highly successful; they learn more language faster than second language learners. Also, their learning is more self-directed. These studies indicate that learning a third language is easier than learning a second language. As previously mentioned, the participants of this study had been socialized to consider English as their main second language, the language of academia and of the world of work; therefore, how would these Chinese immigrant students view French, their second or third language?

The review of the above literature generates some interesting questions:

1. What perceptions did Chinese immigrants, selected for this study and who, under the terms of Bill 101 attended French medium schools, have of their future? Could they be considered a voluntary or involuntary minority with regard to their self-perceptions as these related to schooling?
2. If adaptation to the host society depends on smooth sociocultural, institutional and other transitions, and if language competency is an important element of this process, can these Chinese immigrants be considered to have adapted to their host country? If so, when after their arrival did this occur, and what facilitated it?
3. If attaining language proficiency is greatly dependent on either an instrumental or integrative motivation among learners, then what kind of motivation, if any, characterized these individuals when they were still in school? Were they able to keep up with other academic subjects while learning French?
4. Lastly, were they well supported socially, academically, and emotionally by the social and educational communities?

To the extent that schooling of these students was seen to constitute a barrier to academic success, it is important to identify how this was so in order to ensure that the way is better paved for others. With these questions in mind, my study looks at the experiences that a group of Chinese new Canadians report having had as adolescents attempting to adapt to a new school system in Quebec.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Methodology

#### *Research Questions*

This study looked at some of the underlying factors that contributed to school discontinuation amongst a group of Chinese from Hong Kong who immigrated to Quebec as adolescents and who attended French-medium schools. The study gathered the participants' own recollections and perceptions of their experiences in school.

Several related questions were explored. Firstly, to what extent was the state of adolescence a factor in these individuals' experience? Second, was their initial expectation positive of what their schooling would be like? Did they know that the official language and the language of instruction in Quebec was French? Third, what kind of support did they receive from home and the community? What kind of support did they receive at school? Did they, for example, receive additional French as a second language classes?

### *Interview questions*

The following questions guided this study and formed the basis of a scripted interview.

1. What were their attitudes toward learning before arriving?  
And once in school of Quebec, did their attitudes change?
2. Did these students encounter any language barriers at school?  
What was the nature of these barriers?
3. Did they perceive studying in French as an enabler, or not,  
for future work and/or success?
4. Were they able to adjust to the new school culture? Why and  
why not?
5. Were they able to adjust to the new culture in general?
6. What motivated the students in school?
7. What support did these students have in school and in their  
family?
8. In what ways did they perceive that their experiences  
affected their academic performance?
9. Why did they choose English CEGEP and universities?

10. Did these former students believe that they became proficient in the use of French? If so, how?
11. To what extent, if at all, did these individuals see the host society as a place of opportunity? Alternatively, did they look on Hong Kong, their place of origin, as a place they would eventually return to?

### *Participants*

The participants in this study consisted of 13 individuals who are between 20 to 25 years old. They immigrated with their parents to Quebec when they were 12 to 16 years of age. The participants were all speakers of Cantonese and had learned a little English as a second language before they came to Montreal from Hong Kong. They attended public French-medium schools and switched to English-medium educational institutions at a later date. All 13 families were working class and thus unlike well-to-do immigrant families they were not in a position to send their children to private schools that were exempted from Bill 101 regulations.

### *Procedures*

This study being of an exploratory nature, data were collected through scripted interviews. Speaking personally to each participant allowed me to explain more clearly the information I was seeking, especially when the questions were organized to invite free-flowing answers.

In addition to making notes during the interviews, I audio taped the interviews to avoid omitting any crucial information. Moreover, audio taping the information allowed me time to organize properly the data at the analytic stage.

### *Ethical considerations*

Before interviewing each participant, I explained clearly the reasons for conducting the interview. All participants were invited to sign a consent form (Appendix 2) and were informed that they could withdraw from participating at any time, if so desired. Most importantly, they were also assured of the confidentiality of any collected information from the interviews, and that their names would not be used in any written or oral presentation of the study. Indeed,

the participants were assured that none of the personal information from the individual interviews would be divulged.

### *Research setting*

The research site was a church where the participants and the researcher worship. The first recruited participant was the son of the researcher's friend. This first participant introduced the next participant, and it continued. Then the researcher approached each one to seek his or her involvement in this study.

Each interview was carried out in a place of the participant's choice. They were all interviewed in a coffee shop, on a university campus, or in the church hall. Each interview took approximately one hour. The interviews were conducted in Cantonese.

### *Analysis of Data*

All the transcripts of the interviews were translated into English. These translated data were typed, carefully categorized, and delineated and compared to the notes taken during the interviews. The categorizations used to analyze the data were as follows:

### *1. Linguistic and personal background information*

This information provided data on the extent to which these former students had knowledge of French prior to arriving in Quebec. It also helped to understand their family background and how much support they received from them.

### *2. Students' experiences in learning French*

Here I was concerned with the pragmatics of language acquisition. How competent did the participants feel using French? Did they have problems expressing themselves? Could they understand their teachers and were they in turn understood? These issues addressed the immigrants' success in assimilating to the French culture and being successful in school.

### *3. Interviewees' expectation for success and actual academic performance*

These were responses to questions such as how well did they do in school? Did they think they could have done better? If so, why did they think they did not do as well as expected? The answers helped to shed light on possible underlying reasons for not 'performing' well academically or for leaving school.

#### *4. Interviewees' perception of their own future*

Here, I was interested to see the students' perception and expectation of school and beyond. Did they expect to do well if they stayed in school? Did they feel that they could succeed and do well? What were their occupational ambitions? Did they want to go to university? What did their parents expect of them? Did they feel that French would help them to succeed in their future?

#### *5. Significance of Self-Report Ratings*

A scale (Appendix 3) was given to each participant to rate his or her own French and English language skills at the present time. The self-rating was intended to provide a concrete indication of the participants' current language facility in French and English as well as their confidence in using each language. This information was included in order to facilitate the design of intervention for future generations of immigrant students.

Besides analyzing the data according to the above categories, the interviews provided an opportunity for additional information to be expressed. Finally, the findings were studied in light of details contained in the literature review with a view to providing new information, as well as clarifying existing knowledge. The goal of this

analysis was to determine if suggestions are needed to improve the support of Chinese immigrant students particularly from Hong Kong but also from other regions of China. The concluding section of the thesis will elaborate these ideas more fully.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Analysis of data**

The data were collected by audio tape. Since all 13 participants felt more comfortable to speak in Cantonese, and I, the interviewer, speak Cantonese fluently, the interviews were carried out in Cantonese. Then I first transcribed the audio taped data into Chinese. Then I translated the information into English.

As designed, this study analyzes the collected data in five areas:

1. Linguistic and personal background;
2. The participants' recollections of their experiences in learning French;
3. The interviewees' expectations and actual academic performance;
4. The interviewees' recollections of their perceptions of their own future; and
5. Their self-report rating of language abilities in French and in English.

Before going into the analysis of the interview data, two case descriptions will be presented as they show on the one hand how language learning can be a positive experience and on the other hand,

how it can be quite a negative experience. The two cases mentioned are at quite extreme opposites of each other. One recounts how positive support, from all areas, family, school, and community, helped a young woman to succeed in her studies. In contrast, the other describes a young man's very negative experience; lacking support of any kind, he said this led to frustration and reluctance to study further (Their stories are contained in Appendix 4 & 5).

The analysis of the interview data is intended to provide rich detail as to how it felt for these former students to come to Quebec and to attend French medium schools when they had already been socialized to consider English as their main second language, the language of academia and of the world of work.

In the literature review, it was already mentioned that the studies by River (1996), Swain et al. (1989) show that third-language learners are highly successful; they learn more language faster than second language learners. However, it was also previously mentioned that the participants of this study had been socialized to consider English as their main second language, the language of academia and of the world of work; therefore, one can assume that these participants' experiences in learning French (the third language)

would be much easier. However, looking into the interview data, these participants had only been exposed to the English language a little, they had not actually learned the language well. Therefore, it can be considered that learning French was closer to being a second language than a third language.

The following will be a detailed analysis of the data according to the five areas mentioned above.

#### *Linguistic and Personal background*

This section will first show the characteristics and personal background information of the 13 participants, followed by an analysis of each section. The main characteristics of the interviewed participants are as follows. First, their age range was 11 to 16 when they immigrated to Montreal. There were six females and seven males. They all spoke Cantonese with a little knowledge of English. Concerning their knowledge of French prior immigration to Quebec, only 3 out the 13 participants had three to six months of tutorials in Hong Kong.

There were four areas of information on the participants' parents. First, their knowledge of English prior to immigration was

that 4 out of 13 fathers knew English well, one father's knowledge of English was adequate, four knew a little, and four did not know English at all. And 6 out 13 mothers did not know English, five knew a little, and two knew English adequately. The second area was the information concerning about their parents' knowledge of the French language. The response was that three fathers and one of the mothers had three months of tutorials prior to immigration. The third area asked if their parents knew about the educational law of Quebec and that their children were obligated to attend French medium schools. 11 out of 13 knew about such law. The last question asked if their parents preferred their children to attend French or English medium school. Six answered that their parents preferred their children to attend English medium school; and five parents preferred them to attend French medium school. Two of them did not have any preference.

The interview also elicited information on the kinds of supports, if any, the participants received. There were two types of supports that were provided for the participants. The first support was that the participants' parents provided tutorials for their children to help them

with their homework, and the second was that the parents offered support themselves.

The responses to the first type of support were that with all 13 participants, two had more than three years of tutorials, two had two years, five had one year, and one had less than one year of tutorials. However, there were 3 out of the 13 participants who did not have tutorial at all.

The responses to the second type of support were as follows. One participant's parents stressed academic success by pushing him to work very hard. Nine participants' parents had no particular involvement in their children's education, but they expected them to finish university. Two participants' parents attributed their academic success to their parents' incessant support and help (see Appendix 4 for details). One participant attributed his academic failure to his parents' lack of support and understanding of their roles (see Appendix 5 for details).

The above data brought out some essential points. First, all of the participants learned a little English, but not sufficiently to speak or to write. Second, most of the participants had no knowledge of French or only three months of tutorials in Hong Kong. Third, most

of the parents had no knowledge of the French language. Fourth, while all participants attended schools with French instruction, half of these parents preferred their children to attend English schools; however, they did not have the financial means to support private English schooling. Fifth, these participants were from working class families, yet 10 out of 13 of the participants' parents without hesitation provided tutorials to help their children with homework. However, concrete help from parents themselves was minimal. Only three parents were able to help with homework.

#### *Participants' experiences in Learning French*

Chen (2002) cited Ghosh and Ray (1995), "the Quebec Ministry of Education established special programs fostering linguistic integration in French schools with the classe d'accueil (welcome classes) in 1960s..." (p. 13). The purposes of welcome classes are to enable the non-French speaking students to master the language of instruction, so they may integrate as quickly as possible into normal French classes. These classes consist of special full-time classes with reduced student/teacher ratios for immigrants who have been in the

country for less than five years. Below is the information collected from the participants concerning their experiences in learning French.

One participant spent two and a half years in welcome classes. Three participants had two years. Six participants had one and a half years, and three had one year of welcome classes. They reported that there were many Chinese students in these classes, approximately 80 to 90 percent.

The curriculum and method of teaching these classes focused on the French language with basic grammar and vocabulary being emphasized. Math, gym, and geography were also taught in French. The majority of the participants explained that they were taught with videos, copying new vocabulary for dictation, singing French songs, reading articles for comprehension, and some organized outings to familiarize them with the French culture. In spite of these varied strategies, all of the participants said that welcome classes did not prepare them sufficiently for regular classes.

After having spent time in welcome classes, they were moved to regular classes. Their experiences were varied. First, after having attended welcome classes, the participants were promoted into different regular classes. Four participants went to Transition classes,

where they learned at a slower pace and using simpler vocabulary. These participants revealed that the transition classes helped them to adjust. However, six participants went directly to regular Secondary II, where they were expected to keep pace with francophone students. Three out of the 13 participants transferred to English High School as soon as they turned 16.

The data also reflected some of their experiences after having moved to regular classes. They expressed that they were unable to communicate, unable to participate in class, and were demoralized after having failed in some of the regular subjects during the first year. During the remaining years of their secondary school, they were still not able to communicate well. They only understood most but not everything of the class content. They had difficulties in subjects that required language skills; they only passed them marginally even when they studied hard. And their studies relied on the use of a dictionary, private tutorials, and memorization, without comprehension. Their progress was very slow. Due to these circumstances, they described their emotional states during those years as “demoralized”, “resentful”, “fearful”, and “helpless”. For examples, one participant said, “Once in class, I took too long to answer the teacher’s question; she did not



wait and asked someone else. I felt so helpless and useless”.

Another participant recounted thoughtfully, “When I failed many of the tests, I felt so inadequate. I did not know what to do. I felt so lost and miserable”. Consequently, in addition to their negative emotions, they had no confidence in what they did.

In summary, the data show that the participants did not think welcome classes were effective in terms of equipping them for further study in French. The experiences during their secondary school years could be described as negative. However, one positive comment from four participants was that the transitional classes, which followed the welcome classes, helped them to adjust into the regular stream. They found that the transition classes helped them to adjust better because they were taught all the same subjects at a slower pace and in simpler language. It would seem that the use of language in the transition classes was dovetailed to their needs.

#### *Interviewees’ expectation of success and actual academic performance*

The interviewees were asked to recall their expectations for success in school. Virtually all of the respondents in the study

reported lowering their expectations or simply suspending them.

They recalled just wanting to pass. When asked to explain, they cited the barrier that they felt the need to learn via French presented to them.

They were not able to communicate or understand. No matter how hard they tried, they were not able to do well. In turn, they lost their self-confidence and motivation. For examples, one participant said,

*“If I had studied in English, I think I would have been able to do*

*better. It was the issue of language, which lowered my grade. If I*

*could have improved my language skill, I definitely would have done*

*better.”* Another recounted, *“While studying in French, I had no*

*expectation. I failed. When I switched to English schooling, I did as*

*well as expected.”* And another said, *“When I was in Hong Kong, by*

*studying hard I got very good marks. However, in French school, no*

*matter how hard I tried, there was only minimal progress. Therefore,*

*I lost confidence. I just wanted to pass without really setting any*

*expectation.”* (see Appendix 6 for more the direct quotes from the

interviewees).

### *Interviewees' perception of their own future*

The participants were asked about the influence of their schooling on future career opportunities. They were asked if they would have done well if they had stayed in the French school system. What were their occupational ambitions? Did they perceive studying in French as an enabler or not, for future work and/or success? And why did they choose English CEGEP or university?

Almost all the participants thought they would not have done so well if they had gone to French CEGEP or universities. Nevertheless, they saw the fact that they had studied in French secondary schools as an enabler to finding work in Montreal. They also found that knowing more than one language is always beneficial, even if they are not fluent. However, more than half of the participants changed career choices because of what was to them a language barrier. They found that they were not able to learn either French or English well, and so they chose to study in a field that requires less language skills; this was generally different from what they really desired to study. For example, one chose to study Mathematics instead of Education, and another chose to study Geography instead of Law. But then, why did they choose to move to English CEGEP or universities?

The move to English CEGEP or universities was influenced by the following factors. First, they felt that it would be more difficult to study at the university level via French. Second, they perceived English to be easier and they used this language more in their daily lives. Studying via English was seen to broaden their opportunities for the future. Some participants responded as follows when asked why they chose English CEGEP or Universities,

*“English is easier in my opinion. There are more opportunities for immigrants. It is more global. English is more useful in Hong Kong.”*

*“If I have gone to a French University, I would not have done as well. English is a global language. Knowing English offers more opportunities.”*

(see Appendix 7 for more direct quotes from the interviewees).

#### *Self-Rating Report:*

As previously mentioned the reason for the participants to rate their own French and English language skills at the present time was to provide an indication of how they considered each language at this time in their lives. It was also to find out if they have difficulties today in using either language. The interviews demonstrated that the

participants valued English more than French. They believed that it was very important for them to be fluent in English, but not French. Again, we see the persistence of attitudes that favor the learning of and use of English, despite the fact that the respondents are living in an officially French speaking province and show no signs of moving out (see Table 2 and 3 for details).

Table 2  
The importance of knowing English and French fluently

	English	French
It is important to me to be fluent in	Not at all – 0	Not at all – 1
	Slightly – 0	Slightly – 7
	Moderately – 3	Moderately – 5
	Very essential - 10	Very essential - 0

Table 3  
The participants' rating of their present skills in English and in French

	English	French
Listening comprehension (as in a classroom)	Poor – 0	Poor – 3
	Some difficulty – 1	Some difficulty – 4
	Good – 6	Good – 4
	Very good – 4	Very good – 2
	Excellent - 2	Excellent – 0

Reading comprehension	Poor – 0 Some difficulty – 3 Good – 5 Very good – 4 Excellent – 1	Poor – 3 Some difficulty – 7 Good – 2 Very good – 1 Excellent – 0
Writing ability	Poor – 1 Some difficulty – 5 Good – 4 Very good – 3 Excellent – 0	Poor – 8 Some difficulty – 3 Good – 2 Very good – 0 Excellent – 0
Comprehension during informal interaction	Poor – 0 Some difficulty – 2 Good – 7 Very good – 3 Excellent – 1	Poor – 4 Some difficulty – 6 Good – 2 Very good – 1 Excellent – 0

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

From the data provided in this study, the reasons for the participants to switch from the French-medium schools to English-medium institutions can be summed up in terms of attitude based on experiences both in Hong Kong and after their arrival in Canada. They did not feel the need to stay in the French education system when they reached to adult age. They were not motivated to stay in French medium schools. Due to the fact that they arrived in Canada as adolescents who already believed that English was the language to be learned, it is evident that they needed much more support in school than they received. This could have included information sessions for themselves and their parents as well as ‘adjustment counseling’ – in Chinese – from guidance personnel.

This section will be devoted to a discussion of the findings in relation to points raised in the literature review. In addition, conclusions will be drawn and recommendations will be suggested.

## *Discussion*

Ogbu (1983, 1987, and 1991) studied, as previously mentioned, different minority groups and their educational aspirations and achievements. In one study, he categorized immigrants as voluntary and involuntary. These two different groups have different responses toward their host countries. While the voluntary minorities embrace and adapt to the host countries well, the involuntary minorities resent their situation. Ogbu also notes that if the immigrants view their future as dismal this too may create difficulties in adaptation. The question that Ogbu's work offered to this study was: Did the Chinese immigrants come voluntarily but find themselves in a situation that was equivalent to that of involuntary minorities as described by Ogbu? More precisely, can adolescent immigrants who have already taken on attitude that favor English, be compared to involuntary minorities? In that adolescents do not make the decision to immigrate but are at the mercy of their parents, they may indeed have similar feelings as the involuntary immigrants as described by Ogbu.

From the previous chapter and the analysis of the interview data, we have learned that the parents of the participants chose to emigrate because of the political situation of Hong Kong. Although the parents



knew that their children would be required to attend French schools, half of those parents would have preferred their children to receive an English education. In spite of this preference, their parents did not have the financial means to pay for private English schools.

Most participants attributed their academic dissatisfaction to the fact that they were not able to learn French well, and that the language barrier limited their future career prospects choice. They believed that learning French would disallow them to work elsewhere, even Hong Kong. Their perceptions of their situation, somewhat resemble the sentiments of the involuntary minorities. All participants chose to move to English-medium education institutions when they reached an age when they could make that choice independently.

From the interview data the important causal factors relating to attitude toward language learning were that first, English is a global language. Taylor (1987) asserts, "Attitudes to a language are generally considered to be significant in affecting the acquisition of a proficiency in that language" (p.152). The questions generated from the above assertion were these: What were the participants' attitudes to French language learning? Did they wish to learn? Obviously, from the data, the participants found French very difficult to learn. It

was hard for them to do well. They felt that learning French could impede their future prospects. Most importantly, they saw that French is not a universally used language, English is. And they believed that armed with English, which is a global language, they would have better opportunities. These attitudes would not encourage them to learn French.

Second, Bailey and Gorland (1983) raise an important point that helps to explain the negative language attitudes of the participants of this study. They emphasize that English fluency in Hong Kong is considered essential for higher paid positions. They concur that historically people in Hong Kong are socialized to view learning English as crucial to obtaining better work opportunities. Therefore, it would seem that the participants in this study continue to hold the same view. It is also not a surprise that the data showed most participants saying that they would have gained better results if they had studied in English secondary schools. All of the participants stated that the reason for them to move to English CEGEP was because they wanted to study in English, assuming that this would provide them with better opportunities in the future. Another reason for changing from French to English schools was that they believed

that English is a universal language, which most people learn as a second language. This concurs with Crystal's findings (1997), who stated that English is a global language and that most places around the world do speak or learn it as a second language.

Both Littlewood (1984) and Csilzentmihalyi (1987) have illuminating points on how attitude can influence motivation.

Littlewood (1984) raises two important factors that influence the learning of a second language. The first factor is motivation, which can be attained if the learners of the second language clearly perceive the need to learn that particular language in order to communicate.

The second factor is that the learner must be able to have the opportunity to use the second language in order for the motivation to learn to be present. Did the participants of this study perceive the need to learn and see the opportunity to use French? To some extent, the answer to this question is positive. Most participants needed to learn French well enough to pass through secondary school. However, they did not need to learn it to communicate outside of school or with friends, because there was an alternative. In the first year of their welcome classes, Chinese students made up 80-90 percent of the student population. In addition, their community consisted of mainly

Chinese speaking people; they did not see the need to communicate in French at all, except in school. Furthermore, the participants wanted to maximize their future career opportunities and perceived that English would help them in this. We are reminded here of Csilzsentmihalye's (1987) statement, "It is not that students cannot learn; it is that they did not wish to learn..." Most participants managed as best they could, and then when the opportunity came they moved on to English schooling.

Other factors that influenced the participants to switch from French to English instruction were that of their second language learning experiences. They recalled that after moving from welcome classes to regular classes, most participants experienced difficulties for various reasons. Since they were not adequately prepared in the welcome classes they could not communicate easily during their first year in regular class. They could not interact with the teacher or with French speaking students, and their improvement was very slow through out Secondary school. Their understanding of spoken French remained limited. These experiences correspond to findings reported by Spolsky (1972) and Kim (1988). Both authors discuss the importance of communication competency in cross-cultural adaptation.

That is, language competency is important in adaptation to a new culture. For immigrant students to stay in school, they must require language proficiency. If the participants in this study were not able to understand or be understood, as they stated, and if they tried very hard in their studies, yet did not attain results that met their expectations to the point that they lost confidence, then how could they adapt and how could they be motivated to stay in school and learn?

Many of the participants moved from the welcome classes straight to regular French taught classes, and met with such difficulties in coping and grasping academic content that they became discouraged. To avoid stress and disappointment, all participants eventually switched to English language institutions for their higher education.

Positive learning experiences facilitate and promote effective learning. The literature review also identified the importance of the affective aspects in second language learning. Arnold (1990) and Horwitz and Young (1991) concur that affective aspects are as important if not more important, than cognitive aspects. The authors affirm that affect does influence greatly how learners acquire a new language. They state that if learners are anxious, stressed, fearful, and

so forth, they may have difficulties in performing and consequently the acquisition of a second language will be greatly hindered. It would appear that much empathy is required to help immigrant students through what is often a long and difficult period of adaptation.

The participants reported that the teaching methodology of the welcome classes did not adequately prepare them for regular class instructions; they continued to have difficulties throughout their secondary school lives. In the two cases previously discussed, both participants revealed that the teachers of welcome classes were not very helpful, and passed judgment on them if they did not do well. Since they were not able to communicate well, they were uncomfortable about asking the teachers for help. And on top of their difficulties, they felt perturbed in class because other students sometimes mocked their mistakes. All the participants echoed similar feelings, which alone would have been sufficient to interfere with learning the required language. Lacking confidence in their ability to use and fully understand French, it is not surprising that they chose to continue their education in English. These findings confirm those of Fran-Ramos & Nieto (1991) who indicate that dropping out of school occurs as a result of learners' inability to learn a new language and

other academic subjects in the new language at the same time. The interviews revealed that most of the participants had these difficulties, and that poor language skills did affect their academic progress in every way.

Lastly, supports from all areas are important to successful learning. Even though many participants had tutorial support to help with homework, in most cases parental support was minimal. The reasons for parents not providing personal support may well be attributed to their lack of knowledge in both languages and to not knowing how to support their children when they themselves were also struggling with the new environment and in their everyday lives. Arnold explains that if the people in the school environment are empathetic towards the learners and if the learners receive guidance and encouragement from others, learning will be promoted. Walqui also contends that if educators (and parents) overlook the personal issues that the students must confront everyday, students' learning will be hindered. Case one and two (Appendix 4 &5) had illustrated this point well. On the one hand, Sue's parents gave all sorts of help and encouragement. They sat with Sue to practice her presentation, even though they did not comprehend the content. However, they

tried hard to make suggestions. They encouraged Sue to participate in other social activities so that she could learn and adapt to the new Quebec culture. In school, Sue received good feedback and encouragement from teachers, which were instrumental to her achievement. However, on the other hand, Tom's experiences were much the opposite. His parents assumed that he should perform well in school since his sister was able to do well. They were completely oblivious to his struggles. They felt shame when they were summoned by the school officials to deal with Tom's problems. Tom was quite isolated since he was not permitted to socialize after school, and this prevented him from making friends. All in all, these two stories pointed out that support is crucial for successful learning. Sue's story illustrates what is needed; while Tom's, a disappointment.

### *Conclusion*

It can be seen from the above discussion that many different factors contributed to the participants' negative attitude toward learning when they were new to the Quebec school system, and still adolescents. Their experiences depleted their motivation to continue their study in French medium schools. In addition, their experiences



in second language learning were also obstructed by lack of support in school and at home. Therefore, it is not surprising that the participants in this study chose what they needed to do in order to continue their studies with fewer difficulties. To conclude, the findings of this study were congruent with the factors elicited from the literature review, and did cause school drop out from one type of setting, into another.

To summarize, some of the reasons causing the participants to discontinue French schooling were their negative attitude, lack of motivation, and negative second language learning experiences. Therefore, it is not difficult to conclude that their negative experiences, their unenthusiastic attitudes, and their lack of desire all contributed to their decision to switch to English instruction as soon as they could.

The ministry of Quebec's aim is to support all immigrants to learn French and to assimilate into the Quebec culture. It is therefore important to document those circumstances which prevent this goal from being achieved to the extent and satisfaction of all concerned. This is what this study has attempted to do, finally offering the following recommendations.

### *Recommendations*

Firstly, teacher education programs need to include much more knowledge about the immigrant experience, especially when immigration occurs during adolescence.

Secondly, greater use of transition classes seem warranted. Coupled with this is the need for careful observation of individual student's progress so that the timing of placement in regular classes is appropriate for each student.

For one teacher to meet all student need is an impossibility. Therefore, it is also important to set up obligatory peer tutorials. There are studies done to indicate the peer tutorials are successful. Stauf (1999) illustrates that out of a need for students, Bainbridge College in Georgia has started a peer-tutorial program, which recruits, trains, and retains tutors. Stauf describes that not only do tutors get the chance to help others with school work; they also achieve personal academic accomplishment, increased self-esteem, rewards, and recognition. Thus, we see that one student supporting another can lessen a teacher's load and is an effective way to learn. In this particular case, not only the students in need get helped, in addition, the tutors themselves have positive gain.

Darder (1991) argues that the curriculum content and the teaching methodology in our education systems continue to perpetuate “the values and social relations that produce and legitimate the dominant worldview at the expense of a vast number of citizens” (p.19). So it can be argued that studies should be done continuously to see if the curriculum content and teaching methodology is both personally relevant, and that information is presented in different ways. If the voices and identity of immigrant students are encouraged, they are likely to feel more at ease participating in classes.

Parents of the immigrant students, too, should receive relevant information concerning their children’s education so that they can provide effective support. This information could include details of curriculum content, duration of welcome classes, supports given by the schools, time schedules for peer tutorials, and regular parent and teacher meetings (with interpreters) could be scheduled to provide information on their children’s progress.

In this study, the participants’ desire to learn English was based on their belief that learning English was more beneficial than French to their future career. Although it is not yet a politically viable suggestion, these are hints that one day the education system may be

truly bilingual, allowing all students the opportunity to be proficient in French and in English.

To conclude, the above and other recommendations could be prepared in a pamphlet and given to all immigrant families on arrival. In this way, the Quebec Education Ministry, as a kind of welcome, could be the responsible agency for delivering the necessary information to those concerned, so that they could be better armed to tackle their particular circumstances with confidence and, in turn, with success.

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**APPENDIX 1**  
**QUESTIONS POSED BY FU (1975)**

1. Some people say that English should be learned because it is an international language.

- a. I strongly agree with this statement
- b. I agree with this statement
- c. I neither agree nor disagree with this statement
- d. I disagree with this statement
- e. I strongly disagree with this

2. Some people say that English should be learned because it will help us get to know English speaking people better.

- a. I strongly agree with this statement
- b. I agree with this statement
- c. I neither agree nor disagree with this statement
- d. I disagree with this statement
- e. I strongly disagree with this statement
- f. n.a.

3. Some people say that English is necessary in order to get a good job in Hong Kong.

- a. I strongly agree with this statement

- b. I agree with this statement
- c. I neither agree nor disagree with this statement
- d. I disagree with this statement
- e. I strongly disagree with this statement
- f. n.a.

4. In terms of my own future as I see it now, I think English is

- a. Very important
- b. Important
- c. Slightly important
- d. Unimportant
- e. n.a.

5. How important is it to your parents that you study English?

- a. Very important
- b. Important
- c. Neither important nor unimportant
- d. Unimportant
- e. Very unimportant
- f. n.a.

6. If I get married, I would want my spouse to know English.

- a. Better if spouse knows English

- b. Spouse must know English
- c. Not necessary for spouse to know English
- d. No comment
- f. n.a.

7. If I have children in the future, I would want them to know English.

- a. Better if children know English
- b. Children must know English
- c. Not necessary if children know English
- d. No comment
- e. n.a. (Fu, 1975, pp.160-167).

**APPENDIX 2**  
**CONSENT FORM**

This is to state that I agree to participate in a study being conducted by OYMOON AU of THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT of Concordia University.

**A. PURPOSE**

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to complete the researcher's study. This study is to understand the Chinese immigrant students' experiences in studying French Secondary schools in Quebec.

**B. PROCEDURE**

I will be interviewed and asked to answer some questions. During the interview, the interviewer will take notes and my responses will be audiotaped. The interview will take one to two hours at a place of your preference. For example, it can be in coffee shop, home, or church etc... At the end of the interviews, I will be participating in a round table discussion with all other participants.

The information will be stored in the interviewer's house and they will be destroyed once the study is completed. The findings can be obtained at any time when requested and the study will be available for reading if so desired. I understand that there is minimal risk in doing this particular study, because I will only be asked to respond to questions pertaining to my experiences in studying in French. My identity will not be disclosed at any time in any written or oral report of the study. My participation in the study will only be known to those who take part in the group discussion.

### C. CONDITIONS FO PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences. Should I desire to withdraw from the study, I can telephone the interviewer to withdraw, or I can simply withdraw during the interview time.
- I understand that my participation in this study is to be kept absolutely

CONFIDENTIAL (i.e., the researcher will know, but will not disclose my identity in the written or oral presentation of the study. And none of the personal information from the individual interview will be divulged at the group discussion).

- I understand that the data from this study may or may not be published. If it will be published, I will be informed and my permission is sought.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

WITNESS SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

For any question or concern before or after the study, the participant may contact the interviewer at (514) 733-6827.

(The study and consent may be carried out in Cantonese and English,  
if the participant has difficulties in responding in English only.)

### APPENDIX 3

#### PRESENT LANGUAGE ABILITIES IN ENGLISH AND IN FRENCH

How important is it to you personally to be fluent in English and in French?

	English	French
It is important to me to be fluent in .....	Not at all _____ Slightly _____ Moderately _____ Very essential _____	Not at all _____ Slightly _____ Moderately _____ Very essential _____

Please rate yourself in each of the following skills in English and in French.

	English	French
Listening comprehension (as in a classroom)	Poor _____ Some difficulty _____ Good _____ Very good _____ Excellent _____	Poor _____ Some difficulty _____ Good _____ Very good _____ Excellent _____
Reading comprehension	Poor _____ Some difficulty _____ Good _____ Very good _____ Excellent _____	Poor _____ Some difficulty _____ Good _____ Very good _____ Excellent _____
Writing ability	Poor _____ Some difficulty _____ Good _____ Very good _____	Poor _____ Some difficulty _____ Good _____ Very good _____



	Excellent _____	Excellent _____
Comprehension during informal interaction	Poor _____ Some difficulty _____ Good _____ Very good _____ Excellent _____	Poor _____ Some difficulty _____ Good _____ Very good _____ Excellent _____

## APPENDIX 4

**Case One: Sue is 24 years of age now. During the interview, she quietly recounted her French schooling experiences as we sat across from each other. Her story is translated from Chinese as follows:**

*All through my secondary schooling in Montreal, I had French tutorials. If not, I would have had difficulties catching up. After having attended welcome classes for one and a half years, I began Secondary two in the second half of the year. Welcome class teachers were good. They helped very much, using a lot of different types of activities. For example, there were word games then dictation, outings, singing games...etc. However, when I was promoted to regular French classes, it was different. The class was big; teachers were not able to pay attention to the needs of different students. Teachers usually favored good and bright students, therefore, I felt quite desolate and wanted to give up, especially during orals. Teachers did not help, instead they passed judgment saying that I should not have been promoted, that I should have stayed in the welcome class. Nevertheless, I took that as a motivational force to work hard. I wrote out everything in advance, and then memorized*

*every single word I wrote. Then I practiced with my parents two weeks in advance. Then, when I had to do my oral, I just recited whatever I memorized. As a result, my mark improved. The rest of the other subjects, including composition, also improved because of the tutorial classes which my parents insisted I took. By Secondary four, I went to enriched class (class for students who were doing very well). I don't think English class was very good because there was not enough time assigned per day. Nevertheless, I worked just as hard so it was alright. The best motivation was when the teacher said she thought that I was able to do well. So I continued to try my best to remain in the enriched class.*

*There were mathematics, geography, history, and music, these were regular classes; except French. In addition, there was one class of English.*

*I was not a good student in Hong Kong. I failed most of the subjects. Since I was an immigrant and had been placed in a welcome class, I was able to do well in word dictation. Moreover, Math was more advanced in Hong Kong, so I was able to do well there too. So I told myself that I was able to get good marks. Of course my parents were the greatest supporters and encouragers; they both did whatever they*

*were able to do to help me, even when they did not know French. They sat through all my practices and gave me suggestions for compositions and projects. They did not force me, only encouraged me. My Father knows English, not Mom. Dad also took 3 months of French in Hong Kong. He had a very good attitude toward learning French. The immigration process was a fog to me, my parents planned everything.*

*In the Welcome class, I was not able to communicate. Regular history class was difficult. I always sat in the front. I listened intently. I made notes, and wrote the sound of words in Chinese besides the unknown words; when I got home, I looked up every word in the dictionary and memorized everything.*

*I was very shy. I did not ask questions. I only listened. In Secondary four, most of the students were with me since Secondary two, so I became familiar with them, and was more courageous when asking questions. I had no problem in listening; but I had difficulties in talking. I had to repeat several times in order for teachers to understand me. By Secondary five, I think I became very fluent. I socialized with all French-speaking students. I adapted well and joined some community activities. I like Canadian education; it does*

*not just pack me up with knowledge as in Hong Kong. Here, teachers challenge us to use our critical thinking.*

*My parents were very helpful. They encouraged me to participate in other activities outside of school. For example, during Secondary five, I participated in 'Encounter of Canada'. It was expensive, but my parents gave me the support, wanting me to learn everything about this society. They were happy that they had decided to immigrate to Canada. They believed that their choice was instrumental for the family to stay close and spend more time together. Moreover, immigration gave me an opportunity to study, and I did it and succeeded.*

*The teacher in the Secondary two was not so appreciative of me. Nevertheless, I told myself that I was capable and I tried to improve my mark gradually. Overall, I did well.*

*I worked very hard. At times, it seemed quite impossible.*

*Nonetheless, I pulled through. When I graduated from high school, I was the fifth highest. I was not very smart. The other four were extremely smart and they worked hard. Then I told myself if I worked hard enough, I too would be able to do well.*

*My accomplishment was mostly due to the teachers' feedback, which was the most important. Without encouragement and feedback, I do not think I could have performed so well. It was important for the teachers to encourage and motivate me, and not to refute or punish me. In addition, I think it was my family's support and encouragement to which I am truly indebted.*

*I chose to go to English CEGEP after five years of French schooling. My French was good. However, I was shy to use English because I did everything in French. My parents and I thought that since I did not know where I would eventually work and because I had learned English when I was in Hong Kong, it would be ideal to go to English CEGEP to improve my English language skills. Then I would speak and write three languages. It was difficult at first, but after 1 year of English CEGEP, I was able to keep up. After two years of CEGEP, I thought it would be easier to go to an English University. I already had enough French language skill to communicate, so continuing in English was ideal. Since English is a universal language, it is always beneficial to learn it.*

*It was difficult to study in English at first. However, after half of a year, it became easier. It helped that I had learned English in Hong Kong.*

*French schooling is an asset if I choose to stay in Montreal and besides, knowing one more language is always an advantage; even if I go to Toronto to work. Now, my French is less fluent because since graduating from French high school, I have not had an opportunity to practice and use French. Therefore, I feel that my French is not adequate to seek employment here in Montreal.*

*My parents did not have too many expectations. However, they did make suggestions. For example, when I wanted to study music, my parents asked me if that was a life style I would prefer. They also asked me how I would use music to gain employment in Canadian society. Therefore, I thought about it and decided to go into science. Now I still speak French with colleagues. If ever I return to Montreal, my studying in French will still be an asset to me. It will be useful.*

*When new immigrants first arrived, Chinese friends are important to help them adjust. However, I suggest to new immigrants that openness to other cultures and people is also important. Secondly, be careful about how they make friends, some friendship*

*can be beneficial, while others are detrimental. Thirdly, every one must study hard, it is important for the future. It is worth it. Fourthly, parents should support their children's education by making suggestions and by encouraging them. Lastly, parents should give any form of help they can, especially private tutorials. Those five years of tutorials were the key to my success.*

*Welcome class teachers were very helpful, trying to communicate and help me adjust. Regular class teachers were very harsh, without any understanding of what the lack of skill in a language might mean. They favored the brighter students. However, I think they should pay more attention to the ones who need help. Give them help, either in or after the class. It is very important that there is open communication from parents so that they can help their children.*

*English grammar is easier, I hope in High school that the English classes are of a better quality now than before. Provide more readings.*

*If a high quality of English teaching had been offered in High school, then I would have chosen French CEGEP, because French is more*



*difficult. However, English would have had to be offered at a higher standard if I was to truly learn it well.*

## APPENDIX 5

**Case Two: Tom is 20 years old now. As I interviewed him, he recalled many unhappy incidences and experiences in Secondary School.**

*I came to Quebec when I was nine years old. I finished grade four in Hong Kong, and I had studied English as a second language.*

*My parents knew that I needed to go to French school. Thus, they sent me to study French with a French speaking woman before immigrating. However, most of the students did not pay attention in the tutorial classes because it was during a hot summer holiday.*

*My family wanted me to study French in school. I usually liked new adventures, but studying in French was too much of an unknown.*

*Mom knows English well; but father's knowledge of English is only adequate. Both of them do not know French at all.*

*Upon arrival, I went to welcome class to learn French. I only learned French without any other subjects, not even English. The teacher taught me the alphabet, grammar and vocabulary. This was difficult because I was confused with the English alphabet and pronunciations.*

*I had to write a journal every week, without knowing how to write because I had limited vocabulary. Other methods included coloring*

*in a picture to learn the names of colors, and bingo to learn numbers.*

*In my class, there were a few Chinese students.*

*I attended Welcome class for one and half year. During these one and half years, I learned some simple things. In January of the next year,*

*I went into regular class. In the regular class, I was not able to communicate with the teacher or my peers. I was not able to catch up. For example, I did not understand grammar. I was not able to do dictation because I did not know what the teacher was reading.*

*Writing was the worst, especially when the teacher read aloud what I wrote so others could laugh at my writing.*

*When I first immigrated, I really did not understand anything. I did not know any one whom I could ask for help. When I went to grade five, I still felt that I did not know anything. I was only able sometimes to ask one or two questions. I listened mostly because I could not understand or communicate. Not until the first year of secondary school, did I began to understand a little better. Moreover, I got to know some French-speaking friends.*

*Learning French made me feel inadequate. My marks were always in the 60s or just passed. To finish High School, I had to change to three different High Schools. Only the last one had a remedial class. I*

*changed from the first High School because of the school board's requirement. The second school had one side of the building teaching French and the other English. It was good because I made some friends from the English side and was able to communicate in English. I felt less isolated. Although I had made friends in the second High School, I still had to change to the third school because of bullying. I had wanted to change school since grade eight, but my family ignored me. They thought if my sister could succeed, I should also succeed. Why bullying? I do not know why they bullied me. They beat me up. When I informed the school administrators, they did not help because the principal was also afraid of being beaten up. My family thought that I was the chief troublemaker. Constantly asking to see school officials annoyed my parents. All these events affected my attitude toward school. In a strange environment and in addition to bullying, I was extremely unhappy. When in grade nine, I told my parents if they would not help me to change schools, then I refused to go. Finally, they relented.*

*The most difficult subject was French language. I barely passed math and science. I had to repeat grade 10. If I had had another chance, I think I could have done better. I was not satisfied. However, I was*

*not able to help myself then. My parents were not able to help either. I did have private French tutorial. A French teacher came to my home once a week for 2 hours. She would look at my homework. And she helped me to write my French composition. The private tutorial helped and my marks improved. However, in retrospect, I think it did not help me to learn French because I left most of my work for her to do. I was still not able to understand well and communicate well. No one helped me to adjust to my new environment. For social life, I stayed with my Chinese friends; we helped each other to adjust. When I was young, I was not permitted to go out with friends until grade 9 and 10, and then I started to go out to socialize. During High School, if I had a problem, I only talked to friends. I had difficulty communicating in class with teachers. Sometimes after school, I might go ask a teacher something. I would not ask during class, because students would make fun of me. Then they would bully me. My parents thought if my sister could study well then so should I. They did not say that they were comparing my sister and me, but I think they did. I did not think I could ever meet my parents' expectation. Out of these three difficulties, language, bully, and laziness, language was the key to my entire problem. In grade 10, I*

*did a language ability evaluation and it showed that my language aptitude was not too good. I would feel uncomfortable about communicating in either French or English and I preferred to communicate in Chinese. I really do not know what I want to do in the future. I am quite apprehensive because of my language skills. I changed to English CEGEP because I wanted to avoid French. I think learning in French, is more problematic for me. Now, learning in English I do not think I have a problem. However, my laziness will hinder my studies. Furthermore, I speak English more than I speak French. The reason for changing to English was mainly that I find French is so difficult.*

Appendix 6  
Participants' expectation

*The direct quotes from the interviewees*

- If I was given another chance, I would do better.
- If I had studied in English, I think I would be able to do better.  
It was language difficulties, which lowered my grade. If I could improve my language skill, I definitely would do better.
- While studying in French, I had no expectation. I failed. When I switched to English schooling, I did as well as expected.
- I am doing better now in English university. I could have done better if I studied in an English school.
- I passed; however, I was not very satisfied.
- It did not meet my expectation at all.
- I started to meet my expectations in university. In French school, I did not bother to set expectations; I just kept studying to pass.
- Due to the barrier of language skill, I was afraid to set high expectation. I do not think I had my potential.
- Yes eventually, after having acquired some language skill and with other helps, I reached my expectations.

- I was not able to do as well as expected in French. Once in English school, I did much better.
- I was not able to communicate well. It was difficult to be motivated. Therefore, I do not think I met my expectation.
- When I was in Hong King, by studying hard I got very good marks. However, in French school no matter how hard I tried, there was only minimal progress. Therefore, I lost confidence. I just wanted to pass without really setting any expectation.
- I knew I could do better; but I did not. Once I transferred to English school, I started to be motivated and did much better.



## Appendix 7

The participants' responses pertaining to their perceptions of their future

*Would they have done well if they had stayed in the French school system?*

- 12 participants answered negatively. Only one participant answered positively because her parents gave her great support.

*What were their occupation ambitions?*

The following are their responses,

- I was apprehensive about the future because of my poor language skills. I was not doing well while studying in French school. Presently, I still have difficulty.
- Language is my problem. So, I tried to study in a field that requires less language skill; even if I did not like it.
- After transferring from French to English High School, I did quite well and am now working in the field of hotel management. I enjoy it.
- I am interested in Science and Mathematics. Presently, I am studying in Mechanical Engineering. After moving from

French to English CEGEP without the language barrier, I believe strongly that now school is now better in preparing me.

- I wanted and liked studying, therefore it did not make any different whether I studied in French or English, I would have studied well. However, English did make the difference. I did better in terms of marks.
- I wanted to study journalism. Since I have difficulties in language skill, I chose to study Commerce instead.
- I studied as I planned. My parents helped me to actualize my chosen career.
- I wanted to be a teacher. Since I thought my language skills were not good enough, I chose to study Commerce.
- I wanted to study Law. I changed to study in Geography because Law requires better language skills.
- Teaching was my choice when I was in Hong Kong. However, since moving to Montreal, I have changed to studying Mathematics and Accounting to avoid languages.
- I wanted to study Commerce. Now I am studying Mathematics as it needs less language skill.

*Did they perceive studying in French as an enabler or not, for future work and/or success?*

- All participants thought that having studied in French helps, in terms of staying and working in Montreal.

*Why did they choose English CEGEP or Universities?*

- I know English and often use English more than French. I changed to English mainly because I found French too difficult. I changed to avoid French.
- French is too complicated. I had studied French in High School already. Now I study in English and it is much better.
- I kept failing in French so I changed to English High School.
- I followed all my friends who chose English CEGEP after French High Schools. English is universal or global. French is limited to Quebec. It was easier to study in English, as I had learned a little English in Hong Kong.
- I changed to English because I was not able to do well in French. English is an international language. I learned English first in Hong Kong. French is too difficult.

- It was my personal choice. I did not study hard enough to build a good French foundation. I changed to study in English to make life easier.
- English is easier in my opinion. There are more opportunities for immigrants. It is more global. English is more useful in Hong Kong.
- Five years of French schooling gave me a good foundation in the language. I did not know where I would work and since I learned English in Hong Kong, my parents and I thought it was best to go to English CEGEP to improve my English.
- I had learned English already in Hong Kong. I did not want to study in French, and English is more useful.
- If I have gone to a French University, I would not have done as well. English is a global language. Knowing English offers more opportunities.
- French is useful only in Quebec. English is more global. Most importantly, I did not have a good foundation in French; I did not want the trouble in studying French CEGEP or university.

- I did not want to study in French. I was not able to do well; I thought that continuing to study in French would waste my time. I was old enough to go to CEGEP.