

From country...to Country:  
Collecting Life Experiences of Immigrant Children and Their Families

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A Thesis  
In  
The Department  
Of  
Education

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

June 2017

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**CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY**  
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**Master of Arts in Child Studies**

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## **Abstract**

### **From Country...to Country: Collecting Life Experiences of Immigrant Children and Their Families**

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In a country like Canada, where immigration represents the majority of the population growth (Morantz, Rousseau & Heymann, 2011), it can involve several challenges for the immigrants, adults and children. The act of immigrating is a complex process to go through and can result in a large spectrum of consequences for the individuals involved. However, the literature principally analyzed the experiences of adults and adolescents without any specific focus on children's journeys. Children's stories are different than the adults and they do perceive their immigration differently. The act of relocating to another society and hence, acculturating can alter children's development in relevant ways (Encyclopaedia on Early Childhood Development, 2011).

This qualitative study aims at exploring the life experiences of four Lebanese immigrant children and their mothers as they experience the process of immigration. Each participant was interviewed two times for a period of 45-60 minutes based on open-ended questions to allow them to narrate in-depth their personal stories and experiences. Additionally, children had the possibility to choose a play activity (e.g., drawing, figurines or blocks) to express themselves beyond their only words. The results from this study suggest that children's experiences diverge widely from their mothers and they feel and perceive their immigration process in a different way. While constantly missing their family, immigrant children try to negotiate between their native and host environments to find their way towards adaptation, sole indicator of a finally attained sense of belonging.

## Acknowledgements

First, I wish to express my gratitude towards my participants, mothers and children without whom this project would not have been possible. Listening to your stories, feeling your pain and witnessing your win was one of the most enriching processes I have gone through as a human being but mostly as an immigrant. I truly appreciate the time you have given me and I know how difficult it must have been to share your journey with a stranger. Thank you!

Next, I wish to thank my supervisor, Dr. Harriet Petrakos, for her insightful supervision and continuous support throughout this experience specifically but also my whole journey at Concordia. I enjoyed every conversation, every exchange of ideas and every step. You believed in me more than I did in myself, and for this I will always be grateful. You have been a great mentor for me and I would do it all again in a glimpse!

I also wish to thank my committee members, Dr. Diane Pesco and Dr. Miranda D'Amico, for their constructive comments and guidance but also for being part of this project since the beginning. You provided me with several opportunities to reflect on this topic allowing me to go deeper each time. Today, I feel honoured to share this study with you.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, here and in Lebanon. My son, Dany, the reason behind it all, I wish I heard your pain earlier. I wish I had answers back then. You were telling me your story in your own words. Today, this project is for you, the real motive that made me start asking questions about the impact immigration has on children. To my husband, you were there every step of the way to lift me up and make me smile when I needed to, for better or for worse. To my parents in Lebanon, I know how difficult it is daily for you to live without us. The strength you give me is everlasting and has no geographical boundaries.

To my friends, just by being there, each one of you helped me to reach my goal and complete this project with a smile.

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“From country...to Country”:

### Collecting Life Experiences of Immigrant Children and Their Families

Immigrant, immigration...in a country like Canada, where hundreds of newcomers arrive each year to settle with the dream of a better situation or at least “better than before”, these words have become part of daily life. In 2007, Canada’s migration rate was 7.3 arrivals per 1000 people, compared to 2.9 for the United States and 0.5 in Germany (Statistics Canada, 2011). Immigration now represents the majority of Canada’s population growth (Morantz, Rousseau & Heymann, 2011). It is a transformational process affecting not only the parents, but also their children (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2011). The word “affecting” involves this idea of producing a notable effect on the individuals present in this equation. Hence, immigrant families and children do not go through this experience without any consequences. Adults and children experience and perceive their immigration journey differently and in the long-term, carry its consequences in a different way. Moreover, the act of relocating to another society and thus acculturating will alter children’s development in important ways (Encyclopaedia on Early Childhood Development, 2011).

Consequently, we see that the classrooms are changing by becoming culturally and ethnically diverse, adding to the school challenges and “cultural incongruities between home and school life” (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000, p. 492). Nowadays, we have immigrant and non-immigrant children in schools. Many children are starting school in a host country, a country that is not their own. Globally, immigrant children are faced with several challenges resulting in a more complex school experience and also more

complex life than their non-immigrant peers. Immigrant children undergo more difficulties than non-immigrant children due to several social, cultural, emotional, and linguistic factors. They have two worlds: their home and their school, resulting in two identities that are evolving harmoniously or discordantly according to the cases. The concerns faced by immigrant children specifically are much greater than their non-immigrant peers since their language and culture of origin differ from the majority culture. Therefore, upon their arrival, immigrant children have to face a cultural, social and linguistic gap, which is non-existent for most of their country born peers. Thus, “many of these conflicts and adjustments place immigrant children at increased risk for psychosocial problems, school failure, drug use and other risk-taking behavior” (James, 1997, p. 98).

However, it appears that little work has been done on immigrant children. Most of the studies done so far tend to focus on adults and adolescents immigrants, even though immigrant children appear to be a vulnerable group. Relocating to another country is a challenging and stressful experience that requires that children adapt to a new environment and also to adjust on the psychological and social levels. Children leave behind their extended families, friendships, and the comfort of their familiar environment to migrate to another unfamiliar society. Children are required to learn a new language, adapt to a new social environment, and sometimes confront prejudicial situations. All of these factors will have major impact on children’s psychosocial adjustment (Chuang & Gielen, 2009).

Hence, the aim of the present study is to examine and understand the importance of collecting the life experiences of immigrant children and their families as they

experience the process of immigration and to analyze the possible impact that this act of relocating has on children. Evidence will show that investigating immigrant children is a delicate research process as it involves sensitive cultural considerations, specific life experiences, and individual social contexts (Kirova & Emme, 2007). Consequently, research focusing on immigrant children will provide insight into an issue that has been understudied in the Canadian context (Montazer & Wheaton, 2011).

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Immigrating to a New Country**

An immigrant is different than a refugee in the sense that he is “a person who has settled permanently in another country. Immigrants choose to move, whereas refugees are forced to flee” (Canadian Council for Refugees, n.d.). Immigrants and refugees differ also in their history, their experiences and most importantly, in the reason of their migration. Many refugees bring with them a traumatic personal history that made them leave their country, while many immigrants base their decision to relocate on a personal choice. The most important difference is the motivation for migration: refugees are involuntary newcomers while immigrants choose to move (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Therefore, it appears important to distinguish both populations for the purpose of this paper since their immigration journey, personal and familial experiences will also vary.

Also, we can differentiate children of immigrants from immigrant children. Children of immigrants refer to both host country-born and foreign-born children while immigrant children are foreign-born children who have migrated with their parents or family (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). These two groups not only differ by

their country of origin but also in their social and emotional adaptation (Portes & Rivas, 2011). Immigrant children face more challenges than children of immigrants, who do live in their country of birth after all. Consequently, integration and adaptation will be harder on them since it is toughened by their adaptation to a new country. However, children of immigrants and immigrant children have an important common denominator: immigrant parents (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Hence, the main focus of this paper will be immigrant children as their life experiences appear more challenging but more importantly, possibly influencing their development.

When they arrive to a new country, immigrant children and their families will have to endure many challenges, like adjusting to new habits, languages, socio-cultural systems, and societal rules. Subsequently, they will go through the process of *acculturation*, which refers to the adjustment to this life changes (Zadeh, Geva, & Rogers, 2008). Immigrating is not only hard but also challenging since a person should live with two different cultures and adapt to a host country and all the ecology surrounding it. Therefore, the complexity on all levels of this phenomenon makes it a difficult one not only for adults but especially for children. Consequently, immigration can trigger “acculturative stress”, which is the psychological impact of adapting to a new culture (Belizaire & Fuertes, 2011). Following to this, immigrant parents and children seek adaptation to the host country; with adaptation involving the state of being adapted and able to live, evolve and typically develop in the new environment. Children are a vulnerable group and they are caught in a distinctive position where they have on one side, their parents representing the influence of the country of origin and, on the other side, school and peers representing the new society (Montazer & Wheaton, 2011).

Children must go to school and interact with people in their new country, which is not the case for their parents.

### **Immigrant Adults vs. Immigrant Children**

Therefore, we see that most immigrant journeys can be marked by the existence of some serious psychological, social and mostly cultural costs. Relocating to a new country causes many challenges and concerns and it is up to the immigrants themselves to find their own ways in order to attain an “adequate” level of adaptation to their host country. Not only do they have to adjust to the new physical and geographical surroundings, but they also have to adapt to a new culture and language, and work hard toward establishing themselves on the social and financial domains in their host country (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007).

Children are divided between two worlds: their parents representing the country of origin and their school and peers, representing the new society (Montazer & Wheaton, 2011). Even if children have more possibilities than their parents to become fully integrated in the new country (Beck, Corak & Tienda, 2012), they are more susceptible to the impacts of immigration. “Children face special challenges in negotiating the divide between the private world of family and the public world of school and peers and thus are especially likely to embody the consequences of the conflict between the old and the new” (Montazer & Wheaton, 2011, p. 24). Moreover, we see that immigration will affect children differently than adults (Beck, Corak & Tienda, 2012). Immigrant children’s adaptation can be observed in terms of the existence of a sociocultural change leading therefore also to a sociocultural gap, cultural conflicts, family dislocation and the necessity to readjust to the new social environment (Chuang & Gielen, 2009). Following

the difficult and often challenging immigration experience, children are required to learn a new language, adapt to a new social setting, enter school and be part of an unfamiliar schooling system, interact with new peers but also, importantly, succeed in school. All of these factors will have an undeniable impact on their life experiences and how they will perceive this whole process, especially since they are part of two worlds at the same time.

In *Children of Immigration* (2001), Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco state:

“...surprisingly little systematic research has focused on the psychological experiences of immigrant children. Much of the work to date has either emphasized the adult immigrant experience or has examined the physical rather than psychological health of children.

What do we know about what it is like to be a child in a new country?” (p. 66)

### **Coping with a New Society**

Consequently, immigration is a whole journey that does not only involve the sole experience of leaving the country of origin to resettle in a new country, but more specifically, the overall social and cultural change, the search for this sense of integration and adaptation. It is this main idea of coping with a new society that is important here, which causes conflicts and adjustments to the new reality of life (James, 1997). Coping with a new society is not only physically adjusting to the host country but also refers to the adaptation that occurs due to the sociocultural change, the cultural conflict, the family dislocation when some members of the extended family stayed in the home country and this need for readjustment to a new social and cultural environment (Chuang & Gielen, 2009).

Coping with a new society implies that immigrant children will go through the process of acculturation and be at risk of acculturative stress, as discussed earlier.

Moreover, children might deal with acculturative stress in a confused way. Consequently, it seems typical that first generation immigrants experience greater acculturative stress than later generations and each coming generation will go through less stress (Belizaire & Fuertes, 2011). In this framework, when assessing the risks of immigrant children for any mental health problems (Kirmayer et al., 2011), it appears important to consider the immigration process in three phases: premigration, migration and postmigration resettlement. Each phase is associated with some specific developmental and psychosocial risks for immigrant children. The premigration causes the interruption of the usual social roles. The migration provokes this uncertainty about the citizenship, the cultural identity and might lead in some cases to exposure to violence and rejection, which can produce depression and other psychosocial problems. During the postmigration and resettlement, we see more hope and optimism, which can lead to a healthier state of mind. Consequently, an immigrant child must face three kinds of transition associated with these three phases of migration. Moreover, as children, they might be more sensitive than adults due to several factors related to their ages in each of these phases (Kirmayer et al., 2011). During premigration, their age and developmental stage at migration, the disruption of education and the separation from their extended family and familiar networks of peers are all factors that play an important role in the level and velocity of their adaptation. During migration, they might be separated from their caregiver, exposed to peer rejection or difficult living conditions. Finally, during the postmigration phase, there is this stress associated with the adaptation of the whole family, the obstacles of education in a new language, the acculturation and the acculturative stress and any discrimination and social exclusion experienced in school

and/or with their peers. All of these elements are to be taken into consideration when researching the impact of immigration on children and how they are differently or similarly affected than adults. Moreover, many children are not able to conceptualize their feelings or describe their journey. Therefore, this toughens the research on this topic making it a complex yet an enriching one.

This idea of living in two cultures or in-between cultures introduces the concept of biculturalism. Immigrant children live between their born country culture and their host country culture. Sometimes, these two cultures cohabit in symbiosis but in other situations, it might not be the case. Immigrant children attend schools in their new environment, interact with their peers and might also participate in other social and extracurricular activities but they remain part of an immigrant family. Their contact with both cultures is quite large and extensive. “New sources of identity for children derive from expanding involvement with peers, at school, in organized clubs, groups and activities” (Montazer & Wheaton, 2011, p. 52). Being bicultural brings not only ambiguities for immigrant children but also some kind of identity confusion (LaFromboise, Coleman & Gerton, 1993). Also, in the long run, immigrants might favor one culture over the other or prioritize a way of thinking over the other when confronted with daily decisions or other social situations. This may have consequences for children who are in school and for their parents who may not be aware of their children’s challenges regarding belief systems. Many times, it appears that the new culture might be eliciting changes in the original culture, or the native belief system. In a study aiming to investigate the effect of acculturation on the definitions and attributions of children’s school achievement (Zadeh, Geva, & Rivers, 2008), Iranian mothers (recruited in Iran),

Iranian-Canadian immigrant mothers (recruited in Toronto) and their school-aged children were questioned regarding their personal definitions of school success and failure. Using both groups' responses, the researchers demonstrated that mothers from the same ethnic cluster but not living in the same culture could have different conceptions of academic success and failure. While Iranian mothers reported that they value grades deeply as the sole indicator of their children's success, Iranian-Canadian mothers expressed that they like their children's ability to create an original science project and that they valued their academic learning. However, Iranian-Canadian mothers revealed that they also used to value grades more when they first arrived to Canada but that, after a few years in the Canadian school system, they were able to change their beliefs and monitor their children's success through other forms of evaluation systems. And, this difference applies also to their definitions of failure, with Iranian mothers using low marks and Iranian-Canadian linking failure to non-academic indicators, such as antisocial behaviors and immoral values. Consequently, those dissimilarities in beliefs may be the result of the existence of two different social and cultural environments and the impact that each culture has on the mother's beliefs systems. As for the children in this study, like their mothers, they had different perceptions due to the different environment in which they were developing. While Iranian children attributed academic success and failure to the one factor that is effort, Iranian-Canadian children expressed diverse factors such as interest, lack of interest and lack of effort. These findings also demonstrate the impact of the Canadian culture on the Iranian immigrant children as they now reflect more the North American culture than their own. This study showed how Iranian-Canadian children appear similar to the country-born children than they are to their

country-born peers. “A new set of beliefs may evolve as a result of the contact between the old set of beliefs characteristic of the country of origin and as a result of the new beliefs more characteristic of the host country” (p.66). Therefore, these findings reveal how these immigrants, specifically mothers and children, begin to develop a new set of beliefs, merging their own and their host cultures, allowing them to adapt to the requirements of their new environment. Some ways of thinking or doing might change naturally or be modeled according to the new daily life.

Thus, we see how coping with the new society affects the whole individual from his physical coping strategies to beliefs and attributions systems. We observe how new identities are being negotiated within this biculturalism and through acculturation. New immigrants are able to define a new identity for themselves but at different costs and across different contexts (Beck, Corak & Tienda, 2012).

### **Acculturation**

Consequently, biculturalism implies second culture acquisition and therefore what we defined previously as acculturation. As for the process of immigration, acculturation will involve also the whole family, parents and children. “Language and cultural learning for example, involve not only just the individual but the family, with parents and children commonly acculturating at different paces” (Portes & Rivas, 2011, p. 221). For immigrant children, the majority of their acculturation will take place at and through the schooling system (Beck, Corak & Tienda, 2012). Schools are a place where immigrant children will be in constant interaction with the host society and culture. They will be in contact with their peers and their teachers, they will communicate in a new language that might be new or different from their mother tongue, they will have to their homework

and comply to the schooling system regulations. In that sense, their contact with the new social and cultural environment will be deepened. This context provides a favorable one for the process of acculturation. Consequently, we can identify five models of second culture acquisition (LaFromboise, Coleman & Gerton, 1993). The first model, Assimilation Model, implies the loss of the culture of origin as the new culture is being acquired. However, this model is characterized by stress and anxiety until the individual reaches a sense of acceptance and belonging into the new society. This Assimilation Model implies the appearance of a new cultural identity but also, the loss of the “loyalty to one’s culture of origin” (p.397). Thus, we see that this Assimilation Model will not lead immigrant children and their families to an adjusted acculturation. Comparably, the second model, the Acculturation Model, implies the acquisition of the majority culture but emphasizes the fact that the individual will remain a member of the minority culture even when he will be active in the main culture. The third model, the Alternation Model, implies that the individual is aware of the two cultures and is able to alter his behavior to fit into the new social context (e.g., alternating language use or culture use). The main difference with the other two models is this bidirectional relationship between the culture of origin and the second culture, as opposed to the unidirectional relationship existing in the first two models. This implies a non-hierarchical relationship between both cultures, which are therefore on an equal level. Also, it seems that this model helps in managing acculturative stress in the sense that it does not negate the culture of origin and still provides a choice for the individual.

Since the last two models apply more to the existence and development of a larger multicultural society than to the specific cases of immigrant families, we will not discuss

them in detail. However, they remain valid models of second culture acquisition. The fourth model, the Multiculturalism Model, implies that two or more cultures will remain distinct from each other even when individuals from those different cultures mingle together through work, school, or other social relationships. It is the essence of a multicultural society where all the groups involved work on maintaining and developing their own identities, acquiring tolerance regarding other groups, interacting together and learning each other's language. Finally, the fifth and last model, the Fusion Model, is the theory behind the melting pot societies where cultures will fuse to form a new culture (LaFromboise, Coleman & Gerton, 1993). These five models provide some valid explanations on what might take place when immigrants go through the process of second culture acquisition. Each one will apply depending on the situation and on the person's experience (LaFromboise, Coleman & Gerton, 1993).

We see that acculturation leads to the construction of a new identity for immigrant children. Following those five models of acculturation, the example of a study (Kanouté, 2002) carried out with school-aged immigrant children in Montreal shows how children learn to develop efficient identity strategies that facilitate the integration of their double identity. This study also synthesizes more precisely the acculturation models as experienced by children in Montreal. With its cultural and ethnic diversity, Montreal offers a very diverse schooling environment attended by immigrant children from different backgrounds. Therefore, Montreal schools appear to be an important institution for the socialization and integration of immigrant children. The author defines four models of acculturation: the integration model where both identities are synthesized and reconciled; the assimilation model where the culture of origin is assimilated if not

negated and the culture of the host country is chosen as the sole one; the marginalization model where immigrants experience difficulty reconciling both cultural codes and therefore stay distanced from their own culture but without getting invested in the host country culture; the separation model where the individual will shut himself in his native culture and reject the host country culture; and finally the individualism model where immigrants detach themselves from both cultures in order to define themselves as unique individuals.

The results of Kanouté' study (2002) of 183 children (71 non-immigrant and 112 immigrant) in Montreal show that immigrant children adopt the integration model and find it more efficient and useful for their adaptation and socialization, especially in school. This "integration profile" appears to be the most salient among all for the population of this study, followed by the individualism model. Finally, the author underlines that the preeminence of the integration profile over the others in Montreal might be due to the fact that Quebec and Canada promote a pluralist and diverse society. Moreover, many immigrant children have come to assimilate the idea that what is expected from them is to integrate the host society and become fully part of their new country.

### **The School: Fundamental Structure for the Research on Immigrant Children**

As the previous example showed, school is an important place for immigrant children and it is a separate environment that their parents have limited experience with and yet it is a large part of immigrant children' s daily lives. Schools represent an essential place to be in close contact with the new culture. Hence, immigrant families and schools could develop collaborative partnerships that may facilitate the eventual

integration of the immigrant children into the host society. It appears more and more that schools are the most effective way to do so.

If immigrant children want to be part of the host country, school offers the best and unique process for them to enhance their acculturation process. Acculturation can be facilitated through their school attendance. The process of integration will occur through the schooling system (Beck, Corak & Tienda, 2012). For immigrant parents and families, education is the best road to attain a better life (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2011) and therefore, school is the sole tool for this objective. Immigrants families attribute a valuable role to school adjustment and most of them see in schools, a road to participation and mobility (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Vedder, 2001). In school, immigrant children may feel deeply the difference between their own culture and the new culture (James, 1997), especially if they do not speak the dominant language. The school environment has this ability to deepen the differences and create a larger cultural gap for immigrant children. It is important to note, that because of their differences, some immigrant children might feel rejected by their peers or even their teachers, leading to some social and emotional distress, academic failure or even maladjustment. Moreover, it appears that positive adjustment to school will lead to a sense of belonging in their school community, which is an essential step in the overall adaptation of immigrant children (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007).

Therefore, we see how school appears to be a fundamental environment for conducting research with immigrant children. In addition, Montreal is home for more than 80% of immigrant and refugees in Quebec (Laaroussi, Kanouté & Rachédi, 2008). Hence, the schools in Montreal are attended by a large variety of immigrant children from

diverse origins. Immigrant families have learned to collaborate with the schools or to develop partnerships in order to help their children integrate the Canadian schooling system but also to enhance their academic success. Family-school partnerships are clearly important in North America schools. Therefore, they are good environments to conduct research with and on immigrant children.

### **Conducting Research with Immigrant Children**

Conducting research with immigrant children should be carried out with sensitivity and careful considerations, as this group of children is culturally different than their country-born peers. Several cultural and social matters should be taken into consideration in order to avoid cultural misunderstandings and biases (Kirova & Emme, 2007). Consequently, researchers should develop cultural sensitivity in order to investigate and interpret the experiences they are collecting. The major difficulty is to gain access to children's life experiences and therefore, it appears sometimes that children might prefer the use of drawings, games or other plays to communicate their feelings (Kirova & Emme, 2007). Hence, it might be important to consider innovative ways and experiences to capture authentic life experiences of immigrant families and children. Taking into consideration that words but also emotions can have different meanings across cultures, it appears sometimes relevant to support the verbal data with visual one in order to reach a better cultural understanding of the immigrant children's journeys without altering their narratives with cultural or social biases. For example, "emotions such as pride, shame and sadness have differing meanings in Chinese, Japanese and North American cultures" (Kirova & Emme, 2007, p. 90). Hence, when comparing emotions between cultures or through the cultural lenses of the researcher, we

should be aware of the cultural denotations they might have but also if they exist or not in some cultures. Cultural differences should always remain a priority when collecting and interpreting data with immigrant children.

Moreover, when conducting interviews with immigrant children, it is very important to think about the language barrier, as it appears easier for children to communicate in their native or other preferred language (Kirova & Emme, 2007). The essence of collecting their life experiences and emotions lies in their verbal communication (their own words and what they use to describe their feelings) and therefore, language is an important matter to consider. Children's voices and what they actually have to articulate to the researcher depends on whether they use their mother tongue to communicate, their host country language or if they are expressing themselves through an interpreter. Hence, the language consideration is very important at this level, especially when the purpose of the study is to capture human experiences (Kirova & Emme, 2007). Children should be therefore allowed to use their preferred language since it is the only way for them to provide more details to their narratives (Fontes, 2010). They need to find the adequate wording to express themselves truly and using their preferred language of communication is an efficient alternative to attain this. However, in the case where an interpreter is necessary, their role should be strictly defined and restricted to simple translation, in order to minimize any editing or cultural miscommunication they might do to the children's narratives (Fontes, 2010). Interpreters should be conduits only and not participants (Fontes, 2010). Therefore, taking into consideration the language of the immigrant children being researched should be one of important considerations to have in mind before setting up the interview. Children need to feel listened to and

understood in order to express their feelings honestly and language appears to be the sole alternative to capture the richness of their immigration journey.

Finally, as immigration is a culturally sensitive topic, interviewing immigrant children and their families should require some important preparations in order to reach a suitable level of trust between the participants and the researcher. Firstly, the tools used should be culturally sensitive in the sense that the questions and prompts could be valid with one particular group but not applicable to another (Suarez-Orozco & Carhill, 2008). When capturing the experiences of individuals, it is important to have culturally and linguistically adapted instruments to avoid biases. For example, some questionnaires could seek the wrong information due to some culturally biased translation. Therefore, often, the pre-existent instruments cannot be used or re-used and other specifically related to the purpose of the research should be developed especially (Suarez-Orozco & Carhill, 2008). Secondly, it appears essential to gather information on the cultural background of the children and their families in order to avoid any lack of information or cultural misunderstandings (Fontes, 2010). Helpful information could be the child's age, religion, household composition, country of origin, some information on the immigration itself, but also some general information on the participants' culture (Fontes, 2010). It is important for the researcher to arrive prepared to the interview by familiarizing himself with his participants. This step could prevent any cultural and social misunderstandings or offensive questions but also provides an important support for the interview itself. Hence, a preliminary interview with the families in order to get acquainted with the family history (their life before immigrating) and its members (their names) would be greatly appreciated by the participants and could create an atmosphere

of trust. Also, it is essential to be clear about the purpose of the interview, as it is difficult for immigrant families to trust “strangers”. Some might think that the purpose of the research is a governmental investigation concerning their status. Many immigrant children are not familiar with this interview process and therefore, the researcher should make sure that they understand the purpose and the context of the research (Fontes, 2010). “The more information that is provided about the context of communication, the better it will be for the interviewee” (Fontes, 2010, p. 292). Finally, the researcher should be patient with immigrant children as it is a complex process for them to talk about their immigration journey and describe their experiences in their own words. Parents do not always discuss with their children the reasons that made them leave their country and therefore, many do not know why and how they are living in their new country. Hence, immigrant children might use metaphors or other allegoric forms to express their feelings but also their personal conceptions of the events. Sometimes, their eye contact, nodding or corporal expressions could be a mean for communication. “The personal relationship is key to interviewing people from most cultures” (Fontes, 2010, p. 294).

### **The Lebanese Community in Canada**

According to the International Migration Office, approximately 200 million individuals are living outside their country of origin (Encyclopaedia on Early Childhood Education, 2011). In Canada, the 2006 Census showed that 20% of the population is foreign-born; it is the highest proportion attained in 75 years (Statistics Canada, Census 2006: Immigration in Canada, 2007). Formerly, immigrants used to come mainly from Europe. Nowadays, this is not the trend anymore with an immigration flow coming from

Asia and the Middle East (58.3%), Europe (16.1%), the Caribbean, Central and South America (10.8%), and Africa (10.6%) (Statistics Canada, Census 2006: The evolving linguistic portrait, 2007). In 2001, there was approximately 144 000 people of Lebanese origin living in Canada, making it the 6<sup>th</sup> largest non-European ethnic group in the country (Statistics Canada, The Lebanese Community, 2007). Moreover, the Lebanese community is growing considerably compared to the overall growth of the Canadian population. Between 1996 and 2001, its growth rate rose by 9%, while the overall population grew by only 4%. More importantly for the purpose of this research, in 2001, 49% of all those who indicated they had Lebanese origins had been born outside the country, while the remaining 51% were born in Canada (Statistics Canada, The Lebanese Community, 2007). Therefore, we see that approximately half of the Lebanese community is foreign-born and consequently, constitutes a large part of the immigrant population in Canada. The Lebanese population lives mainly in Ontario (41%) and in Quebec (34%). Also, the largest Lebanese community in Canada lives in Montreal. In 2001, almost 44 000 people of Lebanese origin made Montreal their home. Indeed, 30% of all Canadians of Lebanese origin chose to live in Montreal that year. On the other hand, there were just fewer than 20 000 Lebanese people, 14% of the total, living in Toronto, and a comparable number of Lebanese people residing in Ottawa (Statistics Canada, The Lebanese Community, 2007). Moreover, Statistics Canada reports that the Lebanese community is relatively young, with 29% under the age of 15. Consequently, the qualitative data resulting from those statistics demonstrate the importance of a research focusing on Lebanese immigrant children, especially in a multicultural environment like Montreal. Lebanese immigrant children represent a growing population

in the Canadian context and would therefore offer an interesting perspective to explore the process of immigration and collect lived experiences.

### **Present Study**

Immigration is a complex, social and cultural process for immigrant children. According to this framework, children may need to develop identity strategies in order to follow a healthy mode of acculturation and potentially integrate their new host country. However, coping with a new society implies not only acculturative stress but also the negotiation of a new identity that would reconcile both their native country culture and their host country culture. Biculturalism is not easy per se and children do experience an internal identity conflict.

Immigration is a very hard and complex process to endure. Consequently, if it is difficult on adults, it must be more difficult on children, who appear to be more exposed to developmental and psychosocial risks. Immigration may affect children differently than adults (Beck, Corak & Tienda, 2012). Moreover, and in this perspective, it is very important to highlight the matter of the age at arrival. Since in the long run, the objective of the immigration is to reach an adequate level of adaptation and integration in the host country, the age of the children seems to play a large role in this matter. Eight years old appears to represent the limit that can facilitate the long-term integration. “Long-term integration prospects of child migrants are significantly worse for those who arrive in the country after about eight years of age” (Beck, Corak & Tienda, 2012, p. 135). A late age arrival will engender more adaptation challenges for children due to the fact that they will have fewer years in school to benefit from. This concerns particularly children from non-Anglophone countries who must learn English

(Beck, Corak & Tienda, 2012), or in the case of this study and the Quebec context, who must learn French. “In this sense, migration impacts children differently according to their age” (Beck, Corak & Tienda, 2012, p. 155), with eight being a decisive age limit regarding the long-term integration.

The importance of school in the integration of immigrant children is undeniable. The more time they spend in school, the more they are in contact with the new culture and society resulting in a familiarization with their new world. School plays a role in the integration and further adaptation of the child, especially in areas with large immigration density where schools enable children’s assimilation to the schooling system. School is a unique environment where school counsellors, psychologists, teachers, educators and school nurses work together to promote the development of children and therefore, it offers many opportunities to identify and refer immigrant children that might display any psychosocial difficulties or developmental challenges. This is the only way to plan culturally adapted interventions (James, 1997). In this context, “several school-based programs targeting children have shown promise at improving adaptation to host society, and may be expanded to further involve parents” (Morantz, Rousseau & Heyman, 2011, p. 89). Therefore, the family, the school and if possible the community settings could collaborate and work together to provide an adequate environment and to help immigrant children in their transition. It appears that children cannot accomplish this vital task on their own and would require the help of their entire school and community environment.

In view of this information, the present study aimed at highlighting the importance of conducting research with immigrant children and in collecting their

experiences of immigration. In a country like Canada, where hundreds of immigrant children arrive each month, it was necessary to have insight and understanding into what children are going through as they make the transition to a new country. There is limited research on children's experiences, with many more studies on adults and adolescents' experiences and perceptions. While the majority of the research studies have been done on adults and adolescents immigrants, little work has focused on immigrant children despite the fact that this group may be more vulnerable and will likely experience challenges that will affect their development. Adults are the main focus of immigration research because the explanatory models related to immigration were developed in response to the issues faced by adults (Montazer & Wheaton, 2011). To underline this gap, we can restate Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001): "What do we know about what it is like to be a child in a new country?" (p.66).

As Montreal is a highly diverse and multicultural environment where hundreds of immigrant families arrive each year to settle and begin a new life in this host society, it appeared that there is a need for research focusing mainly on the immigrant child. Therefore, the aim of this proposed study was to use a phenomenological approach to collect and understand the life experiences of immigrant children and their families in order to show how adults and children saw and experienced the process of immigration and also to explore the perceived impact that this act of relocating has on children. The main purpose was to explore feelings, perceptions, experiences, lives and personal stories that reflect the immigration process. The following research questions guided this study:

- a. How do 8-11 years-old children who have newly immigrated to Canada (three years and less) feel and perceive their immigration to Canada?
- b. How do the parents talk about the effects of immigration on their children and what do they report about their immigrant children's perceptions of their immigration?
- c. How do children primarily and parents secondarily identify the changes they went through in terms of cultural, social and educational aspects of their lives?

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

Since this study aimed at being exploratory and investigated feelings and life experiences of children and their mothers, using a qualitative approach appeared to be a meaningful way to collect these immigrant children's journeys and perceptions of the process of immigration. Specifically, the participating children themselves were of high interest and very important to the purpose of this present study. Through their words and accounts of their lived experiences, a phenomenological research tradition was utilized in order to discover and describe the essence of the participants' lived experiences or knowledge (Hays & Singh, 2012). This research tradition highlighted the concepts of discovery, direct experience, phenomenon and subjectivity while emphasizing the participants' direct and immediate experiences within their worlds (Hays & Singh, 2012). A phenomenological approach ensured that the participants' perspectives were valued. But also, that the studied phenomenon was observed and understood through their eyes and words, as they were the sole bearers of their experiences. It is this idea of

understanding the essence of the lived experiences that can only be collected through the participants' own words and perceptions.

Consequently, in order to reach a level of understanding of this human phenomenon, the present study mainly based itself on in-depth interviews conducted with the participants. This method was the most reliable one to collect and describe the essence of the lived experiences and therefore, provided the relevant data for the purpose of this study. Interviews were conducted one-on-one with the immigrant children and their mothers in order to attain the most comprehensive qualitative understanding of their experiences and perceptions.

### **Recruitment and Ethics**

In order to collect the most expressive and real data on children's perceptions of their immigration, purposeful sampling appeared to be the most adapted sampling method to select the participants for the present study. In qualitative research, purposeful sampling is selecting the most adequate participants based on the amount of information they provide about a phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012). Therefore, for the purpose of the study, it implied selecting participants according to the criteria set for the research and based on the previously stated research questions. The criteria were established in order to gather the largest number of information-rich cases for the phenomenon of immigration and this prior to sampling the participants (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Subsequently, the criteria that were initially proposed in this study were:

- 1) Children aged between 8 and 11 years old
- 2) Immigrants in Canada (newly arrived) of less than three years
- 3) Belonging to one community, the Lebanese community

Those three main criteria were developed in order to provide the most rich and valuable information possible. For the first criteria, the age range included participants who were likely to be more capable at expressing their feelings, narrating their experiences, and exteriorizing their emotions than their younger peers. For the second criteria, the lapse of time since immigration permitted recollection and narration of the important events related to the main phenomenon. A period of time longer than three years might have lead to incomplete narrations, especially by children. Also, for children who might not have gone back to their country of origin during the years spent here, remembering experiences that occurred more than three years would have difficult. Finally, it was important that the participants did not obtain their Canadian citizenship at the time of the interviews, in order to avoid the cultural confusion that might have been engendered by a double identity. Lastly, it was decided to base the present study on one unique community, since the cultural nature of these life experiences could be compared across participants if based on one community only. Moreover, the research was more homogeneous in its facts, data and participants. Also, as the researcher is from the community investigated, her insider role allowed for a clearer and faster understanding of the experiences expressed and also of the language used. Finally, to gain a better understanding of immigrant children's life experiences and to reach a clear vision of this phenomenon, immigrant mothers were also interviewed. Their testimony was an essential addition to their children's narrations, and provided important data that might have been missing from their children's interviews and context for understanding the background of these families. Consequently, this reinforced even more the choice of the phenomenological approach for this present study as it was the most reliable qualitative

way of collecting and understanding what immigration was through the eyes and words of the selected participants.

Ethics approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at Concordia University by the researcher and a Certification of Ethical Acceptability has been allocated accordingly. However, as the recruitment process began, finding the initially proposed number of five to eight participants meeting the three selected criteria appeared to be more difficult than expected. Several factors hindered the recruitment process: finding families that would meet all three criteria at once, the complexity to gain Lebanese immigrant families' trust and investigate their personal history and the difficulties to reach a large number of participants. Through social media groups destined for Lebanese immigrants living in the Montreal area and word of mouth (see Appendix I for the recruitment ad), the researcher was able to recruit two families. The first one, a mother and her child, met the three criteria. But, the second family, a mother and her three children, did not meet the "not having the Canadian citizenship" criteria as the children were born in Canada but left at a younger age. Yet, they did not have any significant memories of their first days in Canada. The researcher met with the mother alone in order to gather their family information and history. Afterwards, this specific case was presented to the master's supervisor and committee members who agreed to allow the recruitment of these children because they actually went through the process of immigration when they came back to Canada and therefore, their stories would be interesting for the study. Moreover, after consulting with the committee regarding the number of participants, it was approved to base this study on those two families, resulting therefore in two mothers and four children.

Consequently, the two mothers were contacted by phone as an initial way to inform them about the study, its aim and the procedures to be followed. They were encouraged to discuss all those details with their children and seek their consent to participate. Mothers were provided with information letters in French, as per their requests. Following this, the researcher contacted the mothers to set a date for the first interview between the researcher and the mother alone.

There was no need to use a translator as the researcher could communicate in Arabic, English and French. The participants were therefore able to use their preferred language of communication without the use of an intermediary, which was French for all of the six participants. In addition, the mothers expressed their preference to conduct the interviews at their homes. Hence, the twelve interviews were carried out at their private homes according to a schedule that suited mothers and children.

### **Participants**

Purposeful sampling allowed us to recruit two families, two mothers and four children. Mothers signed consent forms for their participation and also on their children's behalf (see Appendices G and H for Information and Consent forms). Also, children's oral consent to participate in the study was obtained for each child during the first interview (see Appendix E for children's oral consent form). To ensure complete anonymity, it was decided that the participants would be coded with numbers according to the order of interview, that is Family 1 was the first to have been interviewed and Family 2, the second one. Also, the same applied for the mothers (Mother 1 and Mother 2) and the children (Child 1, Child 2, Child 3 and Child 4).

Table 1 provides a resume of the relevant demographic information for each family. In addition, a brief summary of the participants will be presented.

**Family 1.** Family 1 included Mother 1 and Child 1. This family was Lebanese but they lived most of their lives in Dubai, United Arabs Emirates. Accordingly, Dubai was considered as their country of origin in this study. Mother 1 was working as an Arabic teacher in a French school in Dubai. Child 1, a boy, was eleven years old and was going to a secondary school next year. They immigrated to Canada in 2013 all together with the father. They did not obtain the Canadian citizenship yet. Mother 1 was not working. After the interviews ended, Mother 1 gave birth to a girl.

**Family 2.** Family 2 included Mother 2, Child 2 (girl), Child 3 (girl) and Child 4 (boy). This family was Lebanese. However, they all had the Canadian citizenship since Mother 2 first came to Canada in 2002 with her husband. Her three children were born there. Shortly after the birth of her last son, Child 4 who was one year old at the time, she went back to Lebanon alone with her children, where they stayed for almost five years. Her husband did not visit them in Lebanon during this whole period. In 2014, she decided to come back to Canada to be reunited with him, among other reasons. Three months later she got divorced from her husband and was now living alone with her three children. In the meantime, their father went back to Lebanon and apparently, the children were not in contact with him anymore. At the time of the interviews, Mother 2 was not working but was seeking employment. Child 2 was twelve years old, Child 3 was ten years old and Child 4 was eight years old.

Table 1

*Participants Demographic Information*

| Family     | Age of Child | Home Country            | Years in Canada | Nationality | Canadian Citizenship |
|------------|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------|-------------|----------------------|
| Family 1   |              |                         |                 |             |                      |
| • Mother 1 |              | Dubai                   | 3               | Lebanese    | No                   |
| • Child 1  | 11 years     | (United Arabs Emirates) |                 |             |                      |
| Family 2   |              |                         |                 |             |                      |
| • Mother 2 |              | Lebanon                 | 2               | Lebanese    | Yes                  |
| • Child 2  | 12 years     |                         |                 |             |                      |
| • Child 3  | 10 years     |                         |                 |             |                      |
| • Child 4  | 8 years      |                         |                 |             |                      |

### Data Collection

Two kinds of methods were used to gather data for the present study. The first method of data collection consisted of in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with the child and his/ her mother (see Appendices A and B for interviews protocols). The interview with the mother aimed at finding out the reasons of departure, why they chose this country in particular and the context of the first few days of arrival, the changes they went through, the presence or not of any parental strategy to preserve the old country memory. More importantly, this helped in contextualizing the family history of the immigration experience. In addition, her opinion concerning her child's adaptation and the role that school played in his integration, were both valuable elements for this study. We saw how immigration affected the whole family and how important it was to identify the circumstances surrounding the immigration (Suarez-Orozco C. & Suarez-Orozco M., 2001).

In addition, the interview with the children aimed at collecting their words and their perceptions of their experiences. Consequently, the questions were simpler and were adapted to the children's perspectives. Firstly, the questions asked about contextual data

to see what the children remembered. Secondly, the objective was to gather information regarding their new life, their school and friends and to identify the process of immigration and any changes that occurred. Thirdly, the aim was to assemble data concerning their new life per se in search of integration and adaption elements.

Both interviews were divided into three main parts in order to separate the three periods of time during their immigration journey but especially to facilitate the discussion for the participants. Three periods of time were used: before the immigration took place, during the immigration and after immigration. Those three periods created a canvas of the lived experiences where the connections between the departure, the changes, and the perceptions were highlighted. This allowed us to point out any links between these time events. Questions were both semi-structured and open-ended. This encouraged the participants to express their feelings, experiences and perceptions without restricting them by close-ended responses. A conversation style was used in order to create trust between the participants and the researcher. Moreover, the researcher also shared a few of her personal stories during some of the interviews, which allowed the participants to express and narrate their stories freely without feeling judged.

A second method to collect data from the immigrant children was a play activity allowing them to express themselves freely and discuss their feelings and experiences by possibly projecting onto pretend play (see Appendix C for the play activity procedure). The children had the choice between drawing, using small figurines to enact a feeling or a scene and/or constructing something freely with blocks. The researcher provided the material for all of the three activities and allowed the children to choose which one they would like to use and play with while they discussed their immigration journey. This

method was helpful especially in the case where a child was not able to express himself /herself clearly in words. This game allowed the participants to express themselves “in a non-verbal manner that may access deeper aspects of his/her understanding and/or experience of a phenomenon” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 278). One example of the objectives of such a method is “Offerings” (Bloomgardern, 1997), which is a technique developed for assessment and art therapy that can be used with children and adults. Using clay figurines, “Offerings” grant the participants with a way to release unconscious material (Bloomgardern, 1997) while encouraging projection. Clay figurines offer the participants the possibility to speak in a metaphoric language while remaining in a flexible play situation. Metaphors are an important language for children who choose to project themselves into the figurines rather than expressing in words. Metaphors can tell a story, suggest something or include a message (Bloomgardern, 1997). Subsequently, using this kind of play encouraged immigrant children to project themselves and allowed them to express themselves using a metaphoric language of their choice, which appeared clearly during some of the activities carried out with the youngest children. This method brought insight on their experiences.

Among four children, three chose to carry out those activities while one did not express any interest. Moreover, among those three, two requested to do two activities and not only one. The findings will expose a deep understanding of the children’s perspectives that was revealed by those play activities. Collectively, “being able to present findings in both visual and verbal formats allows a thicker description of participants’ experiences” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p.282).

## **Procedure**

Before starting the formal interviews as described previously, mothers were given a letter informing them of the purpose and specifics of the present study (see Appendix F for information letter to mothers). Moreover, written consents were gathered for all participants during the first round of interviews (see Appendices G and H for information and consent forms). Participants were interviewed in person and in their homes. Mothers were interviewed alone without the presence of their children and their children were interviewed separately.

Interviews were recorded and complemented with field notes to record any emotions, changes of facial expressions, silences and pauses. The interviews were carried out at two times based on the three periods of time discussed earlier. Firstly, the initial interview aimed at collecting data concerning the “before the immigration” experiences as this period provided valuable family history while setting the context of the immigration process. Also, this first interview with the mothers collected the demographic information of the family. Next, the second interview examined the “during the immigration” and “after the immigration”. The play activities chosen by the children, took place during the second interviews with the children. Children gave their consent to the researcher to take pictures of their construction and/or drawing and the ones who drew, gave the drawing to the researcher as a present. The interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes, sometimes longer with the mothers, as it appeared that they enjoyed sharing their stories. After the interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed and the participants’ names were changed to numbers in order to ensure confidentiality and preserve their anonymity.

## **Data Analysis**

In the present study, the data consisted of twelve transcribed interviews with the mothers and the children, field notes and the aforementioned transcribed play activity as well as the children's discussions during their play. To preserve the essence of the participants' words, the interviews were coded in the initial word document and they were transcribed into using Microsoft Word and coded using the track changes option of the program. Both the computer and hand coding were used alternatively to highlight the recurring themes. In order to code the data, it was important to remember that this is a phenomenological study exploring participants' realities. Hence, the choice of the coding techniques was based on understanding the depth and meaning of the essence of these experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012). For the First Cycle Coding, the best method to understand the phenomenon of immigration was the In Vivo Coding since it was appropriate for "studies that prioritize and honour the participant's voice, as code refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 91), especially that this kind of coding uses the participant's own language for codes (Saldaña, 2013). Certainly, the data that emerged after the First Cycle Coding was numerous and spread over the twelve interviews. Therefore, in order to regroup those codes in broader categories, the Second Cycle Coding allowed us to reorganise and reanalyse the data. As the aim of this study is to observe immigrants' journeys, Focused Coding appeared to be the adequate method to categorize the data, as it searched for the most frequent or significant codes to develop, "the most salient categories" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 213). The Second Cycle Coding resulted in the emergence

of the relevant themes of this research, the findings that lead to the participants' experiences (see Appendix D for the coding sample).

### **Data Authenticity**

In order to ensure credibility, several strategies were used to try to reach an adequate level of rigor. Member checking was ensured during the last encounter when the researcher summarized the data with the mothers who agreed on their accuracy.

Triangulation of data sources (the interview of the mother and her son/daughter) and triangulation of data methods (preliminary conversations, main interviews, observations, field notes, play activity) provided authenticity to the study. Furthermore, the use of the In Vivo Coding made sure that the participants' own words were kept and safeguarded but also utilized to grasp the findings of the study. Additionally, regular meetings with the research team, supervisor and volunteer graduate student who participated in the coding, were carried out to guarantee that the findings and interpretations were analyzed eliminating bias and representing the authentic experiences of the children and their mothers.

### **Findings**

The qualitative analysis of the twelve interview transcripts conducted with four immigrant children and two mothers explored how these individuals experienced the immigration process but also, how the children discussed their journey and how they felt about leaving their country. It appears important at this point to revisit the research questions to outline the inquiry that guided the analysis of the data:

- a. How do 8-11 years-old children who have newly immigrated to Canada (three years and less) feel and perceive their immigration to Canada?

- b. How do the parents talk about the effects of immigration on their children and what do they report about their immigrant children's perceptions of their immigration?
- c. How do children primarily and parents secondarily identify the changes they went through in terms of cultural, social and educational aspects of their lives?

Moreover, the activities in which the children participated with the researcher (e.g., drawing, figurines play and/or construction blocks) complemented their words and added on some important details that the interviews alone could not reveal. In other words, these activities helped the children to express their feelings and to discuss them more comfortably. Multiple data collection methods were used extensively and complementally and were integrated to discover these children's perceptions. Before proceeding with the presentation of the findings, it is essential at this point to present each participant of this study, mother and child, in order to contextualize the findings.

### **Presentation of the Participants**

**Family 1 (Mother 1 and Child 1).** Mother 1 and Child 1 were both born in Lebanon. The mother lived all her childhood in the United Arab Emirates and then came back to Lebanon when she was around twelve years old. In 2004, she got married and left for Dubai with her husband. They lived there for approximately eight years before coming to Canada. First, they came to do the landing and obtain their permanent resident cards in April 2013 and came back for good, on July 4<sup>th</sup> 2013. Mother 1 was a teacher in Dubai. Child 1 was born in August 2005 in North Lebanon but he lived all his life in Dubai, with his parents, where he attended a French school. The family immigrated to

Canada three years ago, when Child 1 was eight years old. At the time of the study, Mother 1 was pregnant and was soon to give birth to a girl. Therefore, they have been living all three of them in Montreal for 3 years now. The reason that made them immigrate to Canada was to offer a better education for their son and also to escape the economical crisis that was going on in their country at that time:

For our son, it will be something new, a new life for his future, for his education, for the universities. They are renowned here. So all of this, it is indeed positive  
*[Translated]*.

**Family 2 (Mother 2 and Child 2, Child 3 and Child 4).** Mother 2 was born in Lebanon. When she got married, she moved to Canada in 2002 with her husband at the time, where she gave birth to her children. After few years in Canada, she went back to Lebanon with her three children aged five, three and one at the time. Her husband was supposed to follow them but he never did. After four years and a half in Lebanon, Mother 1 decided to come back for good to Montreal with her three children on September 2014. Mother 1 considered that this date represented the date they immigrated to Canada even though her children were born here and they all had the Canadian citizenship:

They grew in Lebanon. They don't know that they are born in another country. It's just to show you that my children do not remember anything about Canada. So, for them, it's new country *[Translated]*.

Each of the three children lived the immigration process differently. The reasons that made them immigrate to Canada were firstly to be reunited with their father, who stayed here the whole time, and secondly for a better future for the children and a nicer quality of life. Moreover, Mother 1 stated that the second time was her decision while the

first time was not since she first came to Canada only to follow her husband. At the time of the study, Mother 1 was divorced and she was living alone with her three children now aged twelve, ten and eight years old. They have been residing in Montreal since a little more than two years now.

### **Leaving the Country for the Mothers**

After transcribing the twelve different interviews, it appeared that leaving the native country was a different process for the mothers and for the children. Both groups experienced the departure differently. For the mothers, three main themes linked to leaving the country emerged: (1) immigration by choice, (2) the importance of the date of arrival and, (3), how being a parent facilitated the decision to immigrate.

**Immigration by choice.** Both mothers stated that immigrating to Canada was their personal choice. They were not compelled to change country but in the contrary, moving was made based on a personal decision and willingly. Even after few years into their immigration, Mother 1 and Mother 2 had this in common to clearly state that this choice was the right one to make. However, even if the basis of such a choice was voluntarily, there was always a reason behind it. In both cases, we found that there was an event in the life of each family that made them take and accept this decision more rapidly but also to be determined to go through with it. Mother 1 was living in Dubai, where there was a financial crisis around 2008. With too many payments to meet and school fees, it was difficult for Family 1 to make it through the month. The cost of life in Dubai was very high compared to the basic salaries and therefore, it became a very expensive country for the average family. Moreover, this country lacked the governmental financial assistance that is present in the North American countries. Also, the husband was laid off

his work in a country where hiring preferences went towards the locals. Altogether, the situation of Mother 1 and her family was difficult before immigrating to Canada. This made the decision easier. “We thought that we would finally find some stability here and that our child will be fine. The government helps families here... We were all excited to come” (Mother 1) [*Translated*]. When surviving was a difficult process, the decision to start over in another country became the best if not the only alternative. In addition to this, the North American universities were very appealing for this family. The idea of Child 1 being able to attend, study and later on graduate from one of these well renowned institutions represented another step towards immigration. As for the case of Mother 2, she was also seeking a better quality of life for her children and the schools and universities in Canada were also a factor that she was leaning towards. This is why Mother 2 remembered exactly what made her conscious that this was the best decision for her family. During a social event, a simple discussion with one of her friends made her realize that she should go back to Canada for the sake of her children’s future but also, to be reunited with her husband. Therefore, in this specific case of Mother 2, even though her first time in Canada was not her personal choice, she proudly claimed that coming back years later was done willingly and that it might be one of the best decision in her life. “Suddenly, you decide that it is not enough and that you need stability, and you look for a better future for your children” (Mother 2) [*Translated*].

Consequently, the interviews with the mothers revealed that there was always a reason or an event for leaving the country of origin but this did not lessen the fact that immigration was made purely and willingly based on their personal choice. Mother 2 reported that even if she left people behind in her country, her decision to go away was

free from any obligations but tinted by the search of a better life, of something better for her children. She added: “This time, it was my choice and I took this decision freely” *[Translated]*.

**The importance of the date of arrival.** Subsequently, when asked about the days that passed since their arrival, Mother 1 and Mother 2 reported that they could never forget this date. It appeared that the date of their arrival in the new country became a significant one for them, or as Mother 2 described it: “a date that you do not forget, an important date for your new life. I call it the start of my second life” *[Translated]*. Both Mother 1 and Mother 2 remembered the exact date of their arrival to Canada. More than the date stamped on your passport, with the date of arrival started the count. The count of the days spent as an immigrant, the count of the days spent in Canada, with these days becoming months and then years. For these immigrant mothers, the date of their arrival seemed to represent the anniversary that they celebrated each year. They used this date to count exactly the number of days they have been living in Canada. The first conversations with both mothers started with “I have been here for...years” as if it was crucial for them to insert this detail into each communication, as an important detail of their family history. Mother 2, who came back to Canada, articulated that: “even after decades of immigration or after obtaining the Canadian citizenship, the number of years spent in the host country will remain part of any immigrant’s identity” *[Translated]*.

For me, the researcher, it was September 23 2010, for Mother 1 July 4<sup>th</sup> 2013, for Mother 2 September 15 2014. Each year, at this exact date, every immigrant will remember his arrival, his/her loss, and his/her pain and each year, he will be reminded of

the decision he/she took, the people he/she left and the people he/she met in the new country.

**Being a parent facilitates the decision to immigrate.** As an adult, the mothers reported that it was not easy to start over by changing country, changing friends, changing habits. However, when the reason was strong enough, this change became easier for a person. This is how being a parent did seem to facilitate the choice to immigrate. Seeking a better quality of life for your children appeared to be the strength that every parent needed not only to take this decision but more importantly, for being entirely convinced that this is better for the children. The mothers felt that when you become a parent, there was a change in priorities and the well being of the children started to motivate your decisions. For Mother 2, being a mother made her reconsider her decision to come back to Canada, even though she started a new life and had a good job in Lebanon. She would have never thought that she would not only come back to the cold but moreover, that it would happen willingly:

It is like my priorities changed and this convinced me of my decision to immigrate even more. Now, my priorities are happiness, security and a better quality of life for my children. My children are now my reason and if they are happy, then I will be happy too wherever I am [*Translated*].

Happiness, security and a better future for her children weighted valuably in her decision to leave her country, her family, her friends, her way of life and start over a life that she considered less sociable but more family-oriented. Now, after two years in Canada, going back to Lebanon was not even an option she would consider. Mother 1 did not deny her need to see her friends, to go out and drive in Dubai but she admitted that

her priorities have changed and when she thought about her son's education, those things became less important. Her son's integration made her forget what she left behind and incited her to find alternatives to what she was lacking in this new country. "I would like to go see my friends and go out and have fun with them like we used to do. But, if I think as a mom now, I think about my son's education and I forget the rest" [*Translated*].

Yes, immigration affected the whole family but when the priorities changed, the effects were lessened by the objective, the search of a better future for the children. For them, we can and we will do it. In the long run, this would be more rewarding than a social gathering with childhood friends. It was all about "doing what is right as a parent", about being more and more convinced of the immigration decision.

### **Leaving the Country for the Children**

As much as this process affected the mothers, leaving the country undeniably affected the children but in a totally different manner. Perhaps children did not reason about this issue but they were emotional about it: they did not think about the future but only saw and felt the present. For the children, the main themes revealed regarding their leaving the country were: (1) fear, (2) children are not prepared for immigration, (3) leaving the family and (4) bringing one object as a memory.

**Fear of the unfamiliar.** Even if the immigrant children did not articulate the word "fear", we could sense that it was on their mind the day of departure. For most of them, this was due to the unfamiliarity with the country of destination. They were going to a country that was very far from where they were living. They explained that they could see it was very far on the map. Moreover, it was this idea of "moving to", taking all the personal belongings to live somewhere else. Child 1 stated that he was afraid but also

happy at the same time. For Child 3, the idea of taking the plane took over his fear and made him forget it for the duration of the trip. It was truly understandable for those children to experience fear when faced with this situation and at the same time to feel excited about this new adventure.

Moreover, most children seemed to express this feeling when they went through any changes or instability in their lives so, in this specific situation, it did appear typical for the feeling of uncertainty to surface (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Even adults could deal with fear and consequently, leaving the native country for immigrant children may generate fear, apprehension and in some cases acculturative stress (Belizaire & Fuentes, 2011).

**Children are not prepared.** This aforementioned feeling of fear was mainly engendered by the fact that these immigrant children were not prepared to immigrate. Firstly, they were not prepared geographically and did not know where was Canada and how far it was from where they lived. When Child's 1 parents announced that they will immigrate to Canada, Child 1 looked it up on the map and he noticed how far it was from Dubai. He knew that there will be snow in Canada, but did not know about the cold or any other relevant information. "I didn't know which country Canada was...or how to spell Montreal" [*Translated*]. As for Child 3, he did not know anything about the host country. Child 2 remembered only the zoo from the time they were there. Therefore, we saw how children lacked any preparation before coming. Adults in the contrary had the ability to attend workshops held by the Embassies. Mother 2 recognized the importance of preparing children. She suggested the creation of some interactive games that could teach through play about Canada: the weather, the snowsuits, the French accent and some

specific expressions that could help in smoothing the immigration process for the children.

It was this idea of familiarizing them with the unfamiliar so that when they land, the new country would not seem so new. The small knowledge they might have could reassure them by lessening the gap between them and the unknown. Adding to this lack of preparation, we also noticed that most parents did not sit and discuss their own reasons for leaving the country. Most children had either deduced what motivated their parents to leave or had asked and received a “child-friendly” reason or, in most cases, did not know why they left. Child 1 and Child 2 were the only ones that answered the question about why they left stating that their country became expensive. However, their words did not reflect children vocabularies, rather they repeated what they have been told. “We came here for my education. Canada’s universities are in the best rankings worldwide” (Child 1) [*Translated*]. Did they truly understand why? Do they think those reasons were justified? Those questions remained uncertain. Child 3 and Child 4 answered that they did not know why they left Lebanon and they did not ask their mother. Only Child 2 articulated that the main reason they left Lebanon was to be with their father who stayed in Canada. For her, this was a reason she could accept as a child and internalize. This was a personal and close reason that could justify the pain they all felt when they left their families and countries. Other than that, the financial reasons or the better quality of life might be logical and reasonable reasons for us adults, but for the children, they remained quite abstract to apprehend and made the leaving even harder because they did not truly understand the reasons why they left.

And, this lack of preparation and understanding did not simplify the immigration process for the children. In the contrary, it added on to this feeling of fear discussed previously and to how they saw the host country as the unfamiliar country, the country that was not theirs.

**Leaving the family.** In this whole process of immigration, leaving the family appeared to be the hardest step for the immigrant children. In Lebanon, people are not only attached to their nuclear but also to their extended family. Children are often left in the care of the grandparents whose role is to help their children raise their grandchildren or at least offer any kind of help. You can always count on your family. Visits are made weekly if not daily. Therefore, it was not uncommon to see children deeply attached to their extended family (grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins). Family ties are valued over friendships and they are always a priority for most of the Lebanese. Subsequently, the extended family had the same prominence in the lives of Lebanese children as their nuclear family. This is why, leaving the native country meant leaving the family and immigrant children knew that their family would not accompany them. This was the main source of the pain caused by the immigration. When asked about what he would change in his life in Canada, Child 1 stated that he would bring his family there. The thing he missed the most in Canada would be his family:

“If I could change something, I would bring all the people that I know and love here. I will bring my family and I would make all the people that I don’t like disappear from Canada” *[Translated]*.

It appeared that the family was the first thing immigrant children thought about and missed. For them, it was and always would be the most important thing in their

country. For Child 2, Child 3 and Child 4, family was the essential component of their drawings or figurines play. They all inserted their extended family in their creative expression play and mentioned how difficult it was to leave them behind. Child 4 drew all his family (the one in Lebanon and his nuclear family in Canada) on the same page as it represented his wish to have them all in the same country. Moreover, he added a broken heart next to his own picture of himself in Canada and a full heart next to his picture of himself in Lebanon. Even though, Child 4 did not show those feelings during the oral interview, he did express them during the activities and he was able to explain them to the researcher through his drawing. Field notes on this precise moment of the interview revealed the sadness in his eyes and how it was a difficult topic for him.

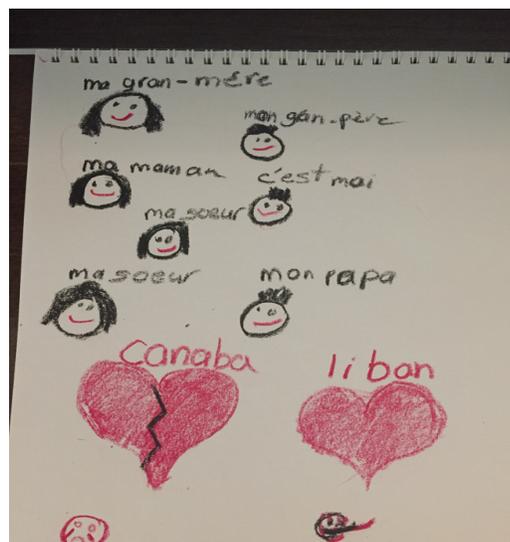


Figure 1. Child 4 drawing.

Child 3 said “happy summer” while drawing all her family together thinking about the idea of spending the next summer vacations with her loved ones. She counted exactly eight persons (grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins) that she would like to bring back with her to Canada, and specified, “Yes...only them” [Translated]. Reflecting

on her extended family made her remember the departure day and her grandfather's tears and sadness. Moreover, she added that her younger brother (Child 4) cried a lot on that day.



Figure 2. Child 3 drawing.

We see that for all the children the departure appeared to be all about the family. For these immigrant children, leaving the country meant essentially leaving the family to go to another country that seemed to be very far away. And, it was this factor that may make the process difficult and hard to assimilate.

**Bringing one object.** Following this idea of leaving the family behind, all the children disclosed that they brought an object with them from Lebanon that they all still had. For Child 1, it was construction blocks. For Child 2, it was a piggy bank. For Child 3, it was the religious picture of a Saint and for Child 4, it was pictures of herself and her family in Lebanon. When asked about those objects, they all seemed attached to them even if they did not look at them or use them often. The important thing was that it came with them in their luggage when they came from Lebanon. It represented what they left

behind and it was crucial to hold on to it. Child 1 did not play anymore with those blocks but he still kept them. Child 2 did not keep any money in her piggy bank and it was a bit broken from the trip but she will always keep it. As for Child 3, she searched for the pictures under her clothes behind the drawer in her closet, which clearly showed that she did not look at them very often but she knew where they were and she seemed attached to those memories. Child 4's picture was torn on the corners and the colours have faded but he kept it on his desk, behind his crayons. Those specific objects came with them and they were here to stay, despite the years that have passed in Canada. Subsequently, bringing one object from the country appeared to be important for immigrant children, as their sole purpose went beyond their material use but rather touched to something sacred for immigrant children, their memories. They reminded them of something that they needed to hold on to; they reminded them of their "before immigration" period.

### **Arriving in the New Country**

After reviewing what leaving the country signified for the immigrant mothers and their children, we discussed the second step of the immigration process, the arrival at the host country. Four themes appeared to be relevant in this part: (1) the first few days in the new country, (2) the Canadian weather, (3) missing the family vs. missing the country and (4) the language barrier for the children.

**The first days in the new country.** The first days after the arrival brought novelties in the lives of immigrant mothers and children. Everything was new and everything was being renewed in the same time. I would personally call it, "the honeymoon phase" of the immigration process. The family members had this unconscious feeling to be on a vacation or a fun journey where everything was new and

where the novelty was producing excitement and discovery: a new home, new furniture and maybe some touristic activities. Mother 1 narrated how first days were exciting on the whole family with the search of a new home and buying new furniture. Their excitement was increased by the fact that their new Canadian home was bigger than their old apartment in Dubai. Moreover, she stated that her son, Child 1, was curious to discover the city and its people and was asking many questions to his parents. Excitement and positivity were recurring words with Mother 1 when talking about this first phase in the host country:

We were all excited and optimistic. A new apartment, new furniture, new school, new life...everything was new and we could start a new life...we started dreaming about this new life that was waiting for us here in Canada. A new country. *[Translated]*.

The first few days were all about discovery. It was like a vacation where tourists visited a new country. Except in this case, immigrants were here to stay. Mother 2 described the first days as “easiest than expected” since her children were not only happy to reunite with their father but also to play in the park and in their basement. Moreover, they were busy preparing for their school and this diminished the effects of the immigration process on them:

The first few days were very fast for them. They did not even have the time to be sad. It's like we rushed the first days. We started preparing for school. It's like they didn't have enough time to live through their grief. At the beginning, I felt like they were going to school and they didn't understand what was truly happening to them. But, I think it was positive because they were so busy trying

to make new friends and learning the language that they did not notice the change of country at the beginning [*Translated*].

When asked about his first few days in Canada, Child 4 described happy play and the assembling of the furniture while Child 1 told the story of his birthday in a special restaurant and the smile he had at this moment reflected this happiness. Consequently, we see that the arrival to the country clearly began with a happy phase. This phase seemed to play an important part in the immigrant children's first impression of the host country as they all labelled it as joyful. Their memories of this period were positive and this can only have a beneficial effect on the continuation of their journey.

**The Canadian weather.** Upon arrival, the first aspect of the country that immigrant mothers and their children recalled was the weather and more specifically, how colder it was than their native country. Mother 1 stated that the Canadian spring was different here because it was a cold spring: “ All the people were welcoming spring but I said to myself if this is spring...it was not spring for us anyway” [*Translated*]. Mother 2 remembered how cold it was at the airport in September. They came wearing light clothes, as it was still summer in Lebanon: “ I remember that a cold wind hit my face” [*Translated*].

Additionally, it seemed that the weather was a recurrent theme in the children's dialogue. They all remembered the cold upon arrival, the time it took them to get dressed in winter or also when it was still cold in spring. Also, the snow played an important role in this theme, as it is was a novelty for immigrant children. It was something they lacked in their native country and something they liked in the host country. Child 4 recalled his excitement when he made a snowman for the first time in Canada. He actually preferred

the snow and the winter season to the beach and summer. For Child 1, the cold without the snow was something he disliked and he actually really enjoyed snow games. Child 2 narrated the hard time she experienced with the snow suits at the beginning but, she smiled now stating that she got used to her snow overall and that it had become part of their daily life.

Therefore, the weather appeared to be a constant reminder of the immigration but also an important component of the Canadian life. You cannot discuss your journey in Canada without mentioning this invariable constituent.

**Missing the family vs. missing the country.** The transcription of the twelve interviews revealed a recurrent theme amongst all of them: the participants were all primarily missing their extended family and not the country itself. These immigrants did not seem to actually miss their country as much as they missed the persons they left behind, their families and friends. Mothers were able to clearly articulate this distinction. Mother 1 discussed the friends she left in Dubai and how difficult it was to trust people now or to make the same kind of friendships here.

However, children experienced more complexity to clearly articulate in words this difference between missing the family and missing the country. However, when put together, their answers demonstrated this differentiation. While drawing, Child 3 counted exactly eight persons she would like to add to her life in Canada. Moreover, she built with the blocks three towers with different heights and labelled the tallest one as Lebanon since it included more familiar persons in her life.



Figure 3. Child 3 blocks construction.

Child 4 drew all his family on the same page, which may be a way to put them all together in the same country. He added that he truly missed them and this saddened him. Consequently, it appeared clearly during this study that the sense of belonging that existed within these immigrants was in fact a sense of belonging to an extended family or to a network of persons and not to a country. Of course, they would agree that they missed the country that gave them their primary citizenship but this remained at the surface. Deep inside, immigrants missed their families and their new life in the host country could be complete with and only with those persons.

**The language.** When considering another country, the language was an important factor to take into consideration. In Lebanon, all the students must choose a second language in school, either French or English. Therefore, when arriving in Canada, most immigrant children did not encounter a problem of understanding. However, for the case of this study and the province of Quebec, the French language differed from the French used in Lebanon or any other Arab country. They were aware of the different accents, the expressions and the wordings. This resulted in some challenges with communication, as if they were speaking a different language. Moreover, even if this was not the case, using French daily and continuously was not the same thing as using it only at school. The

proficiency became harder too. Child 2 remembered that when her mother told her they would move to Canada, she made sure to practice her French with a friend from France. Moreover, she stated that there were some specific expressions that she still had difficulties with:

I knew that people speak French there (*Canada*) and for me French wasn't that easy so I made sure to speak more. So, this helped me to know more French.

*[Translated].*

Mother 2 also underlined the accent, a strong component of the Quebecer culture. She even suggested the creation of an interactive game that would teach children the language and expressions in order to facilitate the communication at school. Both mothers expressed their worries regarding the language in Quebec and how it was troublesome for their children at the beginning. Mastering the language took time and it could create difficulties for the children's integration or even discouraged them at the beginning. However, they agreed that the language barrier could be rapidly crossed with the daily immersion in a French environment but also with the French classes for newly arrived children. Mother 2 praised how the government ensured the efficient integration of immigrant children into the school context and provided them with the correct tools to communicate with their peers.

### **Living in the Country for the Mothers**

As for the departure of the native country, immigrant mothers discussed how they lived in the host country differently than their children. Their perspective on immigration made it a different process for both groups and it was relevant to clearly distinguish both experiences in this study. For the mothers, the events were felt through their parent

lenses. Subsequently, we identified five main themes for the mothers: (1) the positive attitude of the mothers, (2) the constant comparison, (3) their strategies to maintain the original culture, (4) the cultural differences and (5) how mothers perceive the changes in their children.

**The positive attitude.** Immigrant mothers needed to adopt a positive attitude in this whole immigration process. Being and keeping positive did not only help them to get over the difficulties but this also provided some support for their children to get through the obstacles. When the children looked at their mothers and saw a happy face or some optimism, they tended to follow on this example or at least found a strong shoulder to lean on during the difficult times. However, if they saw their mother sad and insecure, they were less positive themselves. Therefore, we saw that Mother 1 and Mother 2 took on this positive attitude from the start and kept their negative or sad moments far from their children's eyes. This appeared to be important for them and for their children.

Mother 2 mentioned her positive attitude extensively. Despite the fact that it was not easy for her, she had to keep a positive attitude because she knew how her enthusiasm would impact her children and would therefore either smooth their integration into the host country or, in the contrary, toughen it. For her, children felt if the parents were unhappy and this would not help them:

Children will follow the example in front of them. Without giving them guidelines, they will do as you do. They will look at you and see that you are at ease, that you appreciate your new life and that you are enjoying. They will follow the example and like this, without knowing, you are transmitting them a way to adapt, a new sense of belonging to the new country. But if you close yourself and you only

show sadness and nostalgia, they will do the same. You have to set the example, at least for them [*Translated*].

Children were satisfied if the parents were. According to Mother 2, her positive attitude made her children love the country and see the good side of their immigration. In this way, she helped their transition and integration. On this note, Mother 1 came to Canada with a positive attitude. She stated many times that they were all excited and positive towards coming and living here. She made everything possible to make her son feel happy and comfortable. She made sure to answer all his questions in a neutral and encouraging manner in order to make him love their new surroundings. Even now, after few years, she tried to continue on this path despite her missing her country and its values. She did not criticize the new country or show any remorse for the sake of his son.

Accordingly, if mothers were happy then children were happy but also conversely, if children were happy then mothers were happy. Everything was linked and would affect the family. In order to keep on going and cultivate this optimism, immigrant mothers will always be seeking the reasons that made them come but also and more importantly, the good reasons to stay. Mother 2 always reminded herself that she made the right decision by coming to Montreal. She thought about the security, the electricity and the water...all of those vital reasons that made her come and today, stay. But, as a mother, the future of her children and the many opportunities of this new country were good enough to feel convinced but also relieved of her choice: “ In Lebanon, having a microwave and a toaster were a kind of luxury while here, I was able to afford them ” [*Translated*]. Mother 1 stated that when she thought as a mother, Canada was the best

country for her son despite some cultural differences that she cannot accept. However, she was convinced of her decision and would not have done it in any other way:

I don't regret anything. If I want to be selfish and think only about myself, I would go back to Dubai. It's my country but for (*Child's name*) I am convinced 100% of my decision [*Translated*].

At the end, the most important matter for immigrant mothers seemed to be that they were trying to convince themselves of their decision to immigrate since not a day would pass by without asking themselves the question: "did I took the right decision by coming? ". And on the long run, it was this conviction that will be the essence of their happiness. Even if they achieved a certain level of happiness and conviction towards their decision and lives, immigrant mothers always seemed to have this feeling of guilt for uprooting their children from their familiar environment and their families. This feeling of remorse may always be there deep inside and may resurface when the family is faced with a difficult situation or hard times. "Did I made the right decision by taking them from their grandparents? Maybe I should have stayed just a few more years...His grandmother would have helped him..."(Mother 2) [*Translated*]. All those questions were invariable and omnipresent, making any feeling of rightness always fragile and in constant need of positive reinforcement. When faced with some cultural challenges, Mother 1 always asked herself if she took the right decision by uprooting her son from a familiar environment. In addition, when her son started to stutter upon arrival, Mother 2 had this immense feeling of guilt that she was able to overcome when she thought about the reasons that made her leave and made her stay.

Subsequently, we saw how the process of immigration affected the whole family and how mothers needed to find a way to transmit a positive outlook to their children symbiotically.

**The constant comparison.** It is undeniable that with every change there will always be some kind of comparison between the countries. And, it was the case with immigration. Immigrant mothers and children tended to compare their country of origin to their host country. Mothers compared and analyzed the differences but children compared and missed the extended family. Mother 2 stated that, willingly or unwillingly, she kept comparing both countries and what they were offering her and she found a large gap between the two. For her, their basic needs (e.g., security, access to clean water, electricity 24h) were met in Canada. It was true that she now had less meaningful people in her life compared to Lebanon but her priorities, as a mother, would always take over her feelings of missing her family:

When you lived something else, you start comparing unconsciously. You keep comparing both lives, both ways of living. You compare the laws and human rights. You cannot not compare every day and here, you find a difference  
*[Translated]*.

It was possible that every immigrant compared and will always compare the two worlds. Sometimes, he/she might find relief in this constant comparison and sometimes, he/she will find grief. In both cases, this unavoidable comparison may serve a purpose. When children compared, they missed their extended families and friends and for their mothers, the opportunities and lack of resources in their native country gave them reassurance that this was a better choice for their children. Child 4 missed his

grandparents and he clearly expressed this feeling with his drawing when he drew a broken heart in Canada and a full heart in Lebanon. When comparing both, he said that he was happier in Lebanon because he had his extended family around him. However, since she was older, Child 2 discussed more positive aspects in her new environment. For her, there were fewer people in her life now but at least here, she found that people understood her and that she was accepted for who she was. This was why, Canada and Lebanon were on the same level for her: they both had positive things to offer her: "I can express myself here. I can be myself and this is important, this changes everything" [*Translated*]. Mother 1 compared the two countries too. She found differences in her network of friends. In Dubai, friends were like family and she seemed to miss this in Canada. She felt the difference with her neighbours who always kept a certain distance, as opposed to the open doors in the Arab Countries.

Subsequently, comparing was a normal part of the immigration process. In a way, it helped to soothe their pain and created a certain peace of mind but it could also generate some mixed feelings towards the new society, because they seemed to always talk about missing the extended family.

**The strategies to maintain the culture.** Immigrating to a new country did not mean the negation of the culture of origin over the new culture. Immigrant mothers both agreed on the fact that it was important for them to maintain their culture. This is why they seemed to discuss some strategies to preserve their culture, for example, the protection of one essential element: the language. For many cultures, language is the most important aspect as it represents the best way to communicate and exchange ideas and opinions in their native language. Since their mother tongue was different from the host

country's language, the mothers seemed to talk about the conservation of their native language. Both Mother 1 and Mother 2 spoke Arabic at home. Knowing that children would work on their French at school, both mothers decided that at home, they would speak Arabic. They did not seem to have a problem with their children speaking perfect French as long as the Arabic was still preserved. More importantly, since children did not have the right to speak Arabic in school, it became the only language spoken at home. Mother 1 took this strategy even further by watching the Arabic National Geographic channel with her son, reading in Arabic and listening to Arabic music and news in the car. Also, she was very keen on teaching her son Arabic history. She wanted him to have two points of view and then, to have his own opinion based on the two sides. She brought Arabic history books with her and made it her duty to read them with her son. For her, other elements were also important to maintain: religion and food. Mother 1 was a religious person and in this sense, she wanted to transmit religious values to her son. This is why she taught him how to pray and insisted that he should do his prayers daily. Moreover, she affirmed that she wanted their native culture to remain dominant over the new culture. She was not against taking some aspects of the Canadian culture but she firmly believed that the values of her culture were more important. We could see how keeping her own identity was very crucial for Mother 1 and she was using these ways to maintain the Arabic culture as a primary influence in her son's life:

Long before he was taught History in class, he knew about history in the Arab World. I want him to have two points of view. One day, he will become a Canadian citizen. But, he is Arabic and he is Lebanese. He belongs to the Arabic culture and this is what interests me. *[Translated]*.

Child 1 seemed to be quite receptive and accepting of this. During the interviews, he did not mention any troubles with any of the Arabic or Canadian cultures but he stated that he did enjoy speaking some Arabic with his friends since it was forbidden to do so in school. Mother 2 was less inclined towards the original culture stating that it was very important to take the best from both cultures and mix them equally in order to attain a healthy level of integration. For her, it was important to keep in touch with the extended family in Lebanon, to speak Arabic but it was also central to combine equally Canadian values to her own. She still cared about some Lebanese celebrations like Independence Day and they all attended the mass in Lebanese. She considered that there were some habits that should not be stopped just because they moved to another country. Both mothers also mentioned still cooking Lebanese food for their children in order to maintain the culinary tradition in their lives.

We see the importance of keeping their own identity and safeguarding their roots in the host country. It was a continuous task for the mothers to carry out this selective acculturation process where they weighted the components to include in their children's lives and which ones to exclude. At the end, both mothers agreed on the fact that Lebanon was still and will always remain the country of origin and therefore, it was essential to preserve their values and traditions in this new country.

**The cultural differences.** Since both countries are different in their values and contexts, it was normal for immigrant to feel some cultural differences between both cultures. For the children, this theme did not seem to prevail in the interviews. But, for the mothers, it was something that came up more for Mother 1 then for Mother 2. Mother 1 faced some cultural challenges with a teacher who she believed seemed to show

discrimination towards her son. She also had to answer to some questions asked by her son regarding some aspects of the Canadian life that did not meet her own values: “He asked me about tattoos. I don’t understand them but here, they are everywhere.”

*[Translated]*. Therefore, we see that it was also a difficult task for her to adapt to the new culture all the while trying to maintain her own beliefs and values.

It appeared somehow complex for the immigrant mothers to manage what was different and what was unfamiliar to them. Mostly, they felt the need to protect their children from “what is not right for us and what is different from us” (Mother 1) *[Translated]*. These immigrant mothers tried to lessen the cultural gaps by making them less evident and trying to provide explanations for their children without criticizing the other culture but by remaining within the limits of their own culture. For Mother 2, the cultural differences were less challenging, as she seemed more open to change and novelty. Maybe this was due to the fact that she already lived in Canada once... Nevertheless, she stated that there were some things that were not acceptable for her own values and she tried to make her children understand this without negating the host culture. She insisted on making the most of both in order to facilitate her children’s integration and adaptation.

**How mothers perceived the changes in their children.** Immigration impacted the children and both Mother 1 and Mother 2 noticed some changes in their children. Mother 1 felt that her son was positive and excited upon arrival. The “honeymoon phase” was a happy one for him and he was eager to settle and start over in the new country. She described it as positive process for him, better than expected. However, she could clearly see changes when they came back to Canada from their multiple vacations in Dubai.

Every time they came back, he was sad and it took him several months to get used to the country again. She felt his grief and the efforts it took him to get back on track. And, she noticed this change after every vacation they took since they arrived to Canada. Mother 2 noticed changes in her three children. According to her, they all experienced immigration differently and at their own pace. Even with the same parent, children's experiences differed. Child 2 was still attached to her native country and her friends in Lebanon. She never let go of them and was less open to integrating this new society. She still missed her friends and recalled special memories with them and did not seem to be making real friends in Canada. Child 4 started stuttering when they left Lebanon and his problem persisted for about one year and a half. Mother 2 still felt that he constantly missed his grandparents and she clearly perceived a feeling of sadness in him. He encountered several difficulties integrating to the new school and he was deeply nostalgic of his old country. Even two years later, she felt that he changed: although he was calmer, he seemed sometimes withdrawn. Mother 2 was even surprised by Child 3 who rapidly integrated her new school and environment. She seemed in her own territory. In Lebanon, she had some difficulties at school and her attitude was not always accepted. However, the teaching techniques in Canada were more child-centred and she felt at ease and understood by her teachers and peers, which enabled her an easy integration into the new environment. She found what she needed here. For Mother 2, Child 4 seemed to be the one who suffered the most from their immigration because he was the youngest and was less able to understand and assimilate why they left their loved ones: "I think he was the most affected of the three upon arrival and even now after two years" [*Translated*].

Consequently, we see that mothers clearly perceived the changes their children went through and they were articulated as: sad, happy, withdrawn, positive.

### **Living in the Country for The Children**

Mothers and children seemed to experience living in the country differently. The mechanisms they used to cope and the feelings they expressed differed somewhat. Children were more vulnerable and more sensitive. Their experiences showed that they did indeed suffer from the immigration process and this change impacted their feelings and their lives. So, for the children, five main themes surfaced: (1) missing family over the country, (2) the importance of friendships, (3) Lebanon is still the country of origin, (4) younger children vs. older children, (5) immigration changed children.

**Missing family over country.** The mothers discussed missing their family although the children seemed to miss the extended family more. All the children discussed that what they missed the most in their “before immigration” period was their family. And, by family, they meant the extended family with the prevalence of the grandparents, who, as mentioned earlier, also took the role of essential caregivers in the lives of Lebanese children. Child 2 missed the most “the people there”. When asked what she could bring from Lebanon to Canada if she had a magic wand, Child 3 answered “my family” without any hesitation. Additionally, the family was a recurrent theme in their drawings and/ or figurines play. They all built their family or included individuals from their family in the activity and for the ones who also chose to draw, they also portrayed their extended family as the most important persons in their lives.



Figure 4. Child 2 figurines play

**The importance of friendships.** The interviews with the children also revealed a very interesting theme. All the children highlighted the importance of making, having and keeping friends. Changing schools did not bother them as long as they were making more friendships. More schools meant that they could make more friends. Even if they were not in contact with most of them or even if they had not communicated in a while, they were still described as their friends. They seemed to believe that friends would remain friends. Child 1 changed schools three times over the course of his stay in Canada and he named many friends that he was able to make all over these institutions. When asked about his friends, he took a moment to count them despite the fact that he did not see most of them. Moreover, he stated that he was happy to go to high school because this would be an opportunity for him to make new friends, new friends to add on his list: “I wasn’t scared (*to change country*) because I made many friends in one day only” [Translated]. This contradicted a bit his mother’s statement that her son did not invite his friends at home or did not express often the need to invite them. Child 2 stated that her friends were “magnificent and simply perfect” even though her mother added in another

interview, that she thought that her daughter Child 2 did not seem to have real friends. Child 2 said that she had a group of friends with whom she spent most of her time. This contradiction between mother and daughter might be explained by the fact that for the children, when it came to friends, quantity was more important than quality. The mother thought that her daughter did not have real friends while the daughter thought she had because they were numerous. Child 4 counted eighteen friends, even though he was the youngest of all the participants and had fewer years in school to make new friends.

Consequently, we may ask ourselves if this importance of making countless friends may be to consider friends as a substitute for the family they left behind. In Lebanon, they were surrounded by many people and hence, they may have felt the need to find a replacement for their loved ones. In this context, friends seemed to represent something familiar and stable in their lives and they seemed to state that the more friends they had, the better they felt. It may create a sense of belonging in this new country, to be known by as many as possible to feel accepted but also part of this new world.

**Lebanon, still the country of origin.** Despite the fact that immigrant children seemed to be torn in-between two countries, their country seemed to remain Lebanon. They considered themselves Lebanese before anything else. They missed their families over their country but they were Lebanese. When asked if they considered Canada or Lebanon to be their country, all of the children answered unanimously Lebanon. Even though Child 3 had the Canadian citizenship since she was born there, she thought of herself as Lebanese. Her brother, Child 4, also Canadian stated that his country was Lebanon and that if they put both countries next to each other, Lebanon would still remain more important than Canada. Child 1 said that he was Lebanese and that, even

after obtaining the Canadian citizenship, he would still be Lebanese: “Lebanese now and Lebanese after the Canadian passport” [*Translated*].

Therefore, it was revealing that the Canadian citizenship appeared to be only a formality for immigrant children as they still identified themselves with their country of origin. There was a strong feeling of being Lebanese, of belonging to Lebanon even though the country itself was not missed per se. This feeling of belonging to the native country was more important to them than being Canadian, especially for Child 2, Child 3 and Child 4 who indeed were Canadians by birth. Hence, we could say that even though children immigrated to another country, their identity seemed to be linked to the native country. They did not seem to reject their native country, especially at this early time when they only spent two or three years in Canada. Maybe this finding would not have been so salient with children who have been here for many more years.

**Younger children vs. older children.** The different interviews did not reveal any differences in how boys and girls described their journey. However, the participants described differences with regards to age. Indeed, younger children appeared to show that they were affected more by the immigration than older children. Among the interviewees, Child 1 and Child 2 were the oldest and Child 3 and Child 4 were the youngest.

According to both mothers and based on the children’s interviews, Child 3 and Child 4 seemed to be the most challenged by the immigration process with Child 4 having more difficulties with the changes than Child 3. Child 4 started stuttering when his mother told him that they will be leaving Lebanon and this problem lasted one year and a half. His sister confessed that he was the only one who cried on their departure day. In addition, his drawing clearly showed a broken heart to indicate his life in Canada and a full heart,

for his happy life in Lebanon. Also, his mother noticed the changes and stated that he was the most affected one of her children. It was only recently that he started to express himself more, to initiate social interactions and to be less withdrawn. Mother 2 clearly stated that Child 4 had changed and that he was not the same boy as the one who was living in Lebanon. The interview with him was very intense as there were many moments of silence and sadness. When he talked about his grandparents during the first interview, he had tears in his eyes. On the other hand, Child 1, the oldest of the participants, started his immigration journey on a positive note and was optimistic about the changes. Mother 1 added that now he even defended Canada over Dubai, without criticizing the latter. Also, Child 1 clearly expressed his living preference in Canada and not in Dubai anymore: “I still love Dubai now but I don’t love it like before...I love Canada and Montreal. We can go to the parks and do activities and play soccer and there is Black Friday” *[Translated]*. Also, Child 2 clearly said:” Canada is better...In Lebanon, there are bombs but spending vacations is fine but not living” *[Translated]*.

One explication of this matter could be that the older children were able to understand the reasons of leaving the native country and were truly capable of accepting those reasons as logical. Both Child 1 and Child 2 knew the reasons and they appeared not only informed but also convinced that this was the right decision. Moreover, this allowed them both to verbally articulate their preference of country (Canada) and the fact that they were happy here, which was something that younger children were not able to do. Child 3 answered that she did not know why she left Lebanon but she thought that it was due to the fact that it was expensive. However, since she could not elaborate on this answer and appeared puzzled, we could deduce that it was not something that she was

able to understand and thus, accept. Child 4 did not acknowledge any reasons. Perhaps not understanding why they came may have truly affected their resistance to immigration and therefore, younger children would be more vulnerable to the impacts of immigration. Leaving their grandparents or other attachment figures may very likely cause more stress for a younger child.

**Immigration changed children.** Hence, this brings us to one important finding, the result of all the aforementioned ones: immigration impacted and changed children. This tremendous change in children's lives may have ramifications in the future. The oldest children seemed to cope with such a changes, but younger children were more prone to sadness and difficulties to manage their grief. This is why the activities conducted with them appeared important, as they were able to reveal some hidden feelings.

Also, children perceived the changes in the dichotomy of states they qualified as happy vs. sad. They felt that they were happier before coming and that, after immigrating, they lost or lacked something. They changed, positively or negatively. Even their mothers noticed their changes. For these families, the impact was real and parents were aware of some of the change of behaviors and provided the necessary support for their integration into the host society.

### **The School**

The literature clearly demonstrated the importance of school in the integration of the immigrant children. An analysis of the interviews also revealed the school as an important environment for adaptation. More specifically, two themes emerged as

important: (1) the school as an important structure for the adaption, (2) the school as a way to make new friends.

**School and adaptation.** School appeared to have a crucial role in the integration and later on the adaptation of immigrant children. The days spent in school seemed not only to be beneficial for them but also for the development of their language. The more time they spent in school, the more they seemed to be interacting with the new culture and society. The immediate result of such an immersion may have had a direct familiarization with this new environment. The interviews with the mothers revealed that they fully agreed with the fact that school played a role in the integration and further adaptation of their child. It seemed that in areas with a large density of immigration, the schools were welcoming and facilitated the assimilation of the immigrant children into the school system. Mother 2 felt that the schools were welcoming towards new immigrants and she noticed the efforts they put into helping the immigrant children adapt to their classes. Moreover, she described the “welcome classes” that introduced immigrant children to French language and culture and helped them overcome their language barrier.

Of course, schools are very sensible towards newcomers. It’s like they do everything they can to help immigrants. They are welcoming and nice. Because my children were nicely greeted in school, they integrated the environment more rapidly. I think the schooling system is very good and this is exactly what my children needed and lacked in Lebanon [*Translated*].

“Welcome classes” were not perceived as only teaching them French but they also facilitated their integration into the Quebecer society. Mother 2 affirmed that the

schooling system in Canada worked to provide a smooth academic and psychological adaptation to the new country. Moreover, she claimed that her daughter, Child 3, reacted better than she expected to their immigration because she found her place in school where she felt understood and loved. Mother 1 stated that schools in Canada “offer a package where you learn mathematics, physics, French but also many other important things” *[Translated]*.

Additionally, all the children expressed their fondness for their schools and their teachers highlighting the fact that they found their place in school. Also, since they could not communicate with their native language in school, immigrant children may be able to differentiate this new environment from home, making it their own. They may have access to a setting their parents have less of an influence upon, therefore, attending schools seemed to help them adapt and learn about the new culture, especially if they felt welcomed in school.

**Schools as a way to make new friends.** As mentioned previously, immigrant children felt the need to have many friends. And, they saw schools as a way to meet new people and include them in their lives. Child 1 changed schools three times and in each one, he recalled new friendships. Moreover, it appeared that this change did not bother him because of the opportunities it offered him to make new friends. Now, as he was getting ready to go to high school, he expressed his happiness that the friends he met in the second school will join him in the same secondary institute: “ Yes I am happy *(to change school)* because I will make new friends too” *[Translated]*. This indicated the second important role of the schools for the immigrant children: making new friendships. Child 3 narrated that “we moved a lot, so we changed schools a lot so now I have many

friends” [*Translated*] and she added that what she liked in her new life in Canada was this possibility to meet new friends in every new school she attended. Child 4 happily counted eighteen friends throughout the schools he went to.

Changing school did not seem to bother them since they made new friends. More than integrating the children academically, the schools appeared to offer a social integration for immigrant children. They may have given them opportunities to enlarge their social relations in the new country, to have more people in their lives, to compensate for the people they lost when they immigrated to this new country.

### **Adaptation**

Adaptation is the final step that every mother wished for her child. At the end, being adapted signified that the child has made peace with the moving and finally found his place in the host society. The three important themes related to adaption were: (1) adaptation was a process, (2) adaptation varied among children and (3) adaptation did not negate the country of origin.

**Adaptation was a process.** Adaptation did not take place overnight. It was indeed a continuous process that needed roots in order to grow and develop coherently. Mother 1 was satisfied with her son’s adaptation. She felt that her son was happy here in Canada and that he was finally at ease in the new society. When she criticized something in Montreal like people’s way of driving, Child 1 immediately took the defense of the new country by comparing it to Dubai. In addition, Child 1 stated during one of the interviews that he would like only to spend his vacations in Dubai and not live there anymore. It took time for the children to love the country, to create their routine and find their happiness. It was not about forgetting the native country or stop missing the family but to

integrate those components positively into their new life. For Mother 2, adaptation was not easy and took time and a lot of work:

Two years is a lot but it is not enough. It is true that most of the work has been achieved in two years but you cannot stop there. You have to persist helping them integrate the country continuously. It's true that they don't need close monitoring after two years but it's a nonstop task to find positivity in the new life.

*[Translated]*.

There was an incessant search for optimism. This was why one of her advice to other mothers would be to avoid going back and forth for a period of two years. For her, children needed “to cut the umbilical cord” *[Translated]* and make their peace with the new situation. Not going will allow them to understand the host society but specially *to “tame it”* (Mother 2) *[Translated]* to be able to integrate it peacefully. For her, all of her children are now adapted even if they still strongly missed their family. One did not necessarily exclude the other.

**Adaptation varied among children.** Every child seemed to live the immigration process differently. Mother 2 noticed differences even among siblings. Her three children experienced this journey in different ways, despite the fact that she was consistent with her approach to help them make the transition. There was no normal or unique path to go through, she suggested, but the children's experiences were different. Child 1 had a positive experience from the start. Child 2 had a rough start and needed more time to adapt. Child 3 found her place rapidly. Child 4 had difficulties before even leaving Lebanon and still encountered some troubles to adapt.

Every child received and assimilated the outcome at his own pace. It was true that older children appeared to adapt faster (Child 1 and Child 2) since they were able to understand the reasons for leaving. Child 1 and Child 2 were the only ones to claim that they did not want to live in their native country anymore and that they found their happiness here in Canada. Their positive attitude allowed them to adapt and go through their journey with more optimism than the youngest children who required more efforts. Younger children might have felt less secure and more stressed. Subsequently, it appeared that every child had a different path during this transition process that may have been related to their age and personality and experiences in school.

**Adaptation did not negate the country of origin.** Making the adaptation into the host society did not mean forgetting about what they left behind when they came here. We saw earlier that safeguarding the roots was very important for survival and therefore, adaptation did not negate the existence of the country of origin. In the contrary, they continued to miss their extended family and still valued their new life. Having a healthy adaptation required the memories to remain present. Like Mother 2 stated: “we should have both to enjoy the new one with optimism” [*Translated*]. All the participants only had positive statements when talking about the country of origin. It was true that Lebanon lacked drinking water, electricity and even security but the participants never criticized their homeland. Immigrant children remained proud of it and felt a sense of belonging to their country of origin.

Finally, it appeared these immigrant children were proud of their original background and host environment together. They did not seem to criticize one over the other. Remembering and safeguarding the roots helped them deal with the challenges of

the new life. Perhaps, full assimilation may have a negative impact on immigrant children and it may erase their identity. This was discussed at length by Mother 1 and Mother 2, who both tried to help their children maintain their native culture while accepting the host culture.

### **Discussion**

The fundamental purpose of this study was to explore how 8-11 years old children perceive their immigration journey into the host country. In order to reach the most accurate image of these life experiences, it was necessary to interview both the mothers and the children. Overall, it seemed that the mothers' narratives complemented the children's stories. Both brought valuable information regarding the immigration process and revealed a complex process. From my personal experience, I have experienced immigration as a challenging process and perhaps even more challenging for my son. Immigrant children may be considered to be a vulnerable group. "Children face special challenges in negotiating the divide between the private world of family and the public world of school and peers and thus are especially likely to embody the consequences of the conflict between the old and the new (Montazer & Wheaton, 2011, p. 24)". Therefore, research addressing this important gap regarding children and immigration is necessary to consider the impact on the whole family. In a country like Canada, where hundreds of children immigrants arrive each month, it is necessary to explore and understand how children are going through this process and to consider the children's perspectives.

Although each family but also each child in this study pursued his own path through the immigration journey, several common themes emerged.

### **Selective Acculturation and Integration Model**

This study clearly highlighted the concept of biculturalism, this idea of living in-between cultures. Immigrant children have two worlds, the one they come from and the one they live in. For them, both entities did not seem to be clearly separated and they seemed to blend in depending on the context. The only thing that was voiced by all the children was they came from a country that was different from the one they lived in now. They left their family to come here. Children did not understand the concept of identity or biculturalism and therefore were not in the position to discuss it. However, the interviews allowed the scrutiny of this theme. They all claimed their Lebanese roots. Additionally, the interviews with the mothers permitted to add on their words by emphasizing the fact that the Canadian culture was indeed permanently present in their lives. “New sources of identity for children derive from expanding involvement with peers, at school, in organized clubs, groups and activities” (Montazer & Wheaton, 2011, p. 52). Being bicultural brought not only ambiguities for immigrant children but also some kind of identity confusion (LaFromboise, Coleman & Gerton, 1993). Much of the perceptions that each of the mothers shared during the interviews revealed that they did not always integrate at all levels the new culture in their children’s lives. When asked about the Canadian culture, one mother stated that she took the best of both cultures. One mother still favored her native culture over the new one while the other was open to any cultural outcome but both mothers did not negate the host country cultural and social interaction. Biculturalism was present in these immigrant families’ lives with some important differences between the children. We cannot say that all the children in the study had a bicultural identity. Indeed, some were drawn to one culture and its components rather

than the other. Moreover, one mother stated that she wanted their native culture to remain dominant over the host country culture. In view of this information, we may ask ourselves if this is indeed true biculturalism or just living with two cultures distinctly separated from one another with one being more of a focus in the family. Further work is needed to study the acculturation process, more precisely how new identities are being negotiated. New immigrants may be able in time to define a new identity for themselves but at different costs and across different contexts (Beck, Corak & Tienda, 2012).

This leads us to the significance of selective acculturation: the incorporation of the new beliefs, culture, language and habits in order to preserve the native culture and values, resulting in an eventual equilibrium between life in the familial sphere and life outside the familial sphere (Portes & Rivas, 2011). “Rejecting parental cultures may facilitate joining an amorphous mainstream, but often at the cost of abandoning those social and psychological resources that assist structural mobility. The available evidence supports the paradox that preserving the linguistic and cultural heritage of the home countries often helps migrant children move ahead (...) (Portes & Rivas, 2011, p. 240)”. This study revealed that selective acculturation was clearly considered by these mothers because they were concerned about the preservation of the original culture or at least, of some important parts. Moreover, it could deeply facilitate the integration of immigrant children and therefore, their long-term adaptation. The analysis of the mother’s interviews exposed how they selected essential components from their culture and made efforts to maintain them daily alive in their lives. The important cultural elements (e.g., food, religion and language) were precisely selected in order to be combined to the everyday routine. Alejandro Portes and Alejandro Rivas highlighted the concept of

selective acculturation. It is a strategy employed by parents “where the children can learn the language and culture of the host society while preserving their home country language, values and customs- simultaneously gaining a solid foothold in the host society and maintaining a bond with their parent’s culture (p. 225)”. In this specific research, a selective acculturation, as defined by A. Portes and A. Rivas, would represent the happy medium in order to facilitate the acculturation, adaptation and further assimilation of children immigrants in their new country. It is what one of the mother qualified as the best combination of both. While incorporating the new beliefs, culture, language and habits, selective acculturation may help to preserve the native culture and values resulting in an eventual equilibrium between life in the familial sphere and life outside the familial sphere. However, this selection process varied among mothers with one mother trying to reach a fair equilibrium and another one still inclined towards her native culture. Selective acculturation may sustain the cultural capital from the home country. It seems that to reject the parental cultures would not be beneficial for immigrant children’s psychological well-being. However, “preserving the linguistic and cultural heritage of the home countries often helps migrant children move ahead (Portes & Rivas, 2011, p. 240)”. This latter statement was consistent with the narratives from the children of this study who appeared to follow a path towards adaptation, despite some grief and regrets about their loss.

At this point, it would be interesting to revisit four strategies through which the process of acculturation occurred (Zadeh, Geva, & Rogers, 2008): the assimilation strategy where individuals will reject their cultural identity in favor of the host culture, the separation strategy where the native culture will be preferred and interaction with the

host culture will be somehow avoided, the integration strategy where both cultures will be preserved on a daily basis and the marginalization strategy where there is no interest in maintaining in any of the two cultures. This model was consistent with the perspectives of the participants of this study who were following the integration model of acculturation and who seemed to be preserving both cultures. Immigrant children preferred to adopt the integration model and found it more efficient and useful for their adaptation and socialization, especially in school (Kanouté, 2002). Themes related to selective acculturation and the integration model of acculturation were consistent throughout the interviews with the mothers mostly and completed by the children's narrations of their lives.

### **The Fundamental Role of School**

The interviews with the participants demonstrated the essential role played by the school in the integration and further adaptation of immigrant children. School allowed them to be in close contact with the new culture because it occupied a major part of their lives. It is indeed through the schooling system that acculturation will take place (Beck, Corak & Tienda, 2012). Both mothers agreed on the fact that school played an important role in their children's current adaptation. One of the mothers praised the "welcome classes", but described mostly how schools rapidly integrated her children in the system, which gave them a place in the host country. One of her children felt better here than she did in Lebanon because teachers were able to understand her more. Another child said that she felt understood in school and she thought she could be herself. Changing schools did not seem to bother these immigrant children and they did appear at ease in the schooling system. No one expressed any trouble or felt rejected as an immigrant student.

In the contrary, both mothers and children talked about feeling welcomed and greeted as a newcomer.

The fact that immigrant children did not speak the majority language did not trouble in any way this positive feeling of belonging. The only rule they had to apply was to avoid speaking their native language in school, which was perceived as providing them with the opportunity to strengthen their learning of the French language. This latter was also a way to integrate the society more quickly and therefore, adapt. This study established how immigrant children were caught in a distinctive position where they had on one side, their parents representing the influence of the country of origin and school and peers, representing the new society (Montazer & Wheaton, 2011). Since children must all go to school, their acculturation seemed to be facilitated through their school attendance. By being in constant contact with the new culture (through the school itself, the teachers, their studies, their peers, the new language, their new routines...), children experienced more deeply the host country environment and consequently, acculturation seemed to take its natural course. The stories from the participants all echoed that school played a valuable role in the children's immigration journey. Moreover, in North America, schools were now so culturally diverse that they came to understand the fundamental role they played in the immigrant children's adaptation process.

### **The Importance of Friendships**

An important finding that emerged from the interviews revealed the importance of making friends in the lives of immigrant children. Friendships were numerous and diverse. One of the children counted eighteen friends and he was only eight years old. The other one stated that changing school was "a good thing" because she made new

friends. Immigrant children all showed their enthusiasm towards multiplying friendships while their mothers claimed that they did not have close friendships. Hence, we can see that quantity seemed to be more important than quality of friendships for the children. Peers appeared to have provided an emotional sense of belonging and acceptance, but also a concrete help with homework, language translations and any school orientation issues (Suarez-Orozco & Carhill, 2008). Moreover, having friends in the host country was an opportunity to have sources of information on the school culture (Suarez-Orozco & Carhill, 2008). When talking about the good components in Canada, most of the immigrant children recalled many friends. Perhaps friends were present for them in a time where they needed them. Friends might have acted as guides or helpers when immigrant children felt disoriented and therefore, having many friends was a valuable asset for the immigrant children.

Additionally, and what is more important here for this study, peers have taken the valuable role of protector against loneliness and embarrassment (Suarez-Orozco & Carhill, 2008). This latter could explain logically the abundance of friendships in their lives. Friends offered comfort against the solitude experienced by many immigrant children. In other words, having friends was perceived comforting. Also, peers may be considered “bolsterers of self-confidence and self-efficacy providing emotional sustenance” (Suarez-Orozco & Carhill, 2008, p. 98). Host country friends may have encouraged and supported the immigrant children by boosting their self-confidence and this was vital in their situation. After immigrating and leaving behind their familiar environment and the most important persons in their lives, immigrant children did not only feel disoriented but also felt insecure and lost. Perhaps peers played an important

role in helping them through this emotional stage. The youngest participant but also the one who was the most affected, was the one who named the most friendships. Even though he did not verbally communicate a lot of feelings during the interviews and more with the activities, he felt supported by his eighteen friends. Therefore, perhaps peers provided academic information, trusting relationships, a sense of security and stability. Those elements may have facilitated the development of the children's adaptation in the host country. Finding a place among social relationships can only enhance the act of becoming fully part of the new environment.

### **The Age of Immigrant Children**

Previous literature demonstrated the importance of the age at arrival of immigrant children (Beck, Corak & Tienda, 2012). The age at arrival may play an important role in the long-run integration and adaptation of children. Eight years old appeared to represent the limit that can facilitate the long-term integration. "Long-term integration prospects of child migrants are significantly worse for those who arrive in the country after about eight years of age" (Beck, Corak & Tienda, 2012, p. 135). A late age of arrival might create more adaptation challenges for the children since they will have few years in school to benefit from. "In this sense, migration impacts children differently according to their age (Beck, Corak & Tienda, 2012, p.155)", with eight being a decisive age regarding the long-term integration. The data collected from this study showed that age seemed to be important during immigration. Older children seemed to have reported fewer challenges than youngest children and they seemed more at peace with the reasons they immigrated because they understood these reasons better. However, the interviews brought a nuance to what the literature discussed earlier: younger children may have

benefited from more years in school but they were more affected emotionally. The valuable distinction here was that children younger than eight years old might indeed adapt more easily on the long run but upon arrival, they were the ones that truly expressed negative feelings about immigration. Two children from the interviewees were younger than eight at their arrival in Canada and they were the ones who expressed more sadness during the interviews and the activities. Perhaps, even though they will spend more years in school and therefore have more contact with the host society than their oldest counterparts, these effects may be perceived in the long run. In the short run, the two children who arrived when they were younger than eight years old expressed more loss and grief.

### **The Transitional Object**

Another important finding that emerged specifically from the interviews with the children was this idea of bringing one object with them. All of the children brought an object from their country of origin to the new country and they still hold on to it after all these years. Despite the fact that most of them did not use it very often, they still kept it with them and treasured it. Additionally, the excitement they exhibited while showing and talking about their object revealed a certain sense of attachment that concur with this idea of transitional object (Winnicott, D.W, 1953). Transitional objects in this context may appear to be a material possession selected by the child himself and to which he decided to attribute a special value linked to the fact that this object came from his home in his country. In this framework, the transitional object could represent an intermediate between the children's idealized country and their new world (Winnicott, D.W, 1953). It was coming with them from their home to this unfamiliar environment.

Immigrant children may have used this object to transition from the secure surroundings of their extended family and country of origin to the less secure new environment of the host country. In other words, these transitional objects may serve a function: to help them transition to another stage in their lives. Immigrant children appeared to have developed an increasing sense of attachment to these objects. Perhaps, they became an important intermediate between their post-migration and migration phases. Consequently, this act of bringing an object with them might be seen through this concept of transitional object, a materialistic possession that would help them transition from one stage to another and this both internally and externally (Winicott, D.W, 1953).

### **Role of the Researcher**

In this particular study, the researcher acted as an insider per se as she first arrived from Lebanon to Canada in 2010 as an immigrant. Therefore, the researcher was able to understand and to empathize with the stories narrated by the mothers. Moreover, she was also able to feel what the immigrant children expressed as her son went through some of the same challenges during his immigration journey. Hence, we can say that the researcher was able to use her personal experience objectively in order to attain a level of understanding that was useful during data collection and processing.

Conducting the interviews was a difficult and easy process at the same time. Difficult for the memories they brought back, the emotions involved and the events that were mentioned. Some of the findings allowed me, the researcher, to self-reflect on the events that constituted my personal immigration journey. The two different experiences of the mothers made me question my decisions and some of the ways I decided to manage my own son's grief. Now, I ask myself if I truly provided him with the right tools

to adapt to the host country. Some of the events and stories were not hard for me to grasp and interpret. Today, I know that I had mixed feelings during the interviews, but it was important for me as a researcher to distance myself in order to control my subjectivity and depict the experiences as they were presented to me. Keeping a personal reflection journal to discuss with my supervisor was helpful in eliminating any bias and in listening to the families' stories from their perspectives.

This study was a complete self-enriching experience for me as a researcher but mostly as an immigrant and today, as a Canadian citizen. Driven by a personal interest and in search of answers, this research provided me with some true introspection.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Despite the fact that this qualitative study contributed to the lack of literature on the effects of immigration on children, it is important to highlight some important limitations. Firstly, the small sample size (two mothers and four children) based on one specific community only, the Lebanese community, makes transferability of findings to this small community and other families who have a similar immigration experiences. This type of research is not designed to lead to generalizable findings. Future researchers could possibly consider a more in depth study across different contexts and communities to obtain a broader range of experiences and stories from different cultural groups in Montreal.

Secondly, the limited literature on children's immigration made it difficult to compare these families' experiences to other families across Canada. Moreover, there was a greater lack of literature on immigrant children in the Canadian context despite the

great waves of immigration that touches the country each year. This suggests that additional research capturing children's perspectives can provide valuable insight.

Finally, another limitation of this study would be the complexity of developing a trusting relationship with immigrant children. Conducting interviews with immigrant children was not only culturally challenging but also a difficult process to accomplish. The researcher was introduced to the mothers through a common friend, which facilitated the flow of conversations. Also, it was indeed easier to develop a somehow trusting relationship between adults. However, children required more time to be able to open up and express their feelings and experiences to a stranger. One of the children asked his mother why should he talk with the researcher since he did not know her. This might explain why the child-centered activities allowed some of the children to reveal more than the interviews did. Perhaps several meetings on a regular basis over a period of time with the children would have helped to enhance this relationship and to allow them to share more details with the researcher. Further studies with a similar purpose could have a certain period of time allocated only to creating a trusting and familiar relationship between the participants and the researcher before the interviews are conducted.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study on the life experiences of Lebanese immigrant children in Canada included some valuable implications for practice. The findings revealed that the children in this study who immigrated to Canada were indeed not prepared to immigrate. Upon arrival and afterwards, they seemed to express some confusion and stress. To facilitate the integration, several school-based programs could be offered for newcomers in order to familiarize them with their new environment. Those activities may take the form of

child-friendly workshops, parent-child interactive activities or even mentorships with host country peers (Morantz, Rousseau & Heyman, 2011). “Welcome classes” to strengthen the French language may not be sufficient alone and should be completed by other meaningful initiatives. School- based creative workshops could help immigrant children in expressing their frustrations and help them to have better school experiences (Rousseau, Benoit, Lacroix & Gauthier, 2009).

Seeing that there is an increasing number of immigrant children in schools and that they may be facing daily challenges and concerns, it seems crucial to learn to recognize and refer children showing psychosocial difficulties for psycho-social support services (Morantz, Rousseau & Heyman, 2011). Identifying challenges early in life may further impact the future of these children. School plays a role in the integration and further adaptation of the child. It is a unique environment where counsellors, teachers, educators and nurses can work together to help the family. Therefore, it offers many opportunities to identify and refer immigrant children for support for any psychosocial difficulties or developmental challenge and an effective way to plan culturally adapted interventions (James, 1997). In this context, “several school- based programs targeting children have shown promise at improving adaptation to host society, and may be expanded to further involve parents” (Morantz, Rousseau & Heyman, 2011, p.89).

In a country like Canada, where hundreds of children immigrants arrive monthly, it is necessary to understand first- hand experiences of these children in order to perceive what they are going through and to understand their realities based on their own perceptions. This type of work bridges the gap in the literature that is limited to the

experiences of adults and adolescents with restricted perspectives on children's experiences and perceptions.

“And yet surprisingly little systematic research has focused on the psychological experiences of immigrant children. What do we know about what it is like to be a child in a new country?” (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2011, p. 66).

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## Appendix A

### PARENTAL PROTOCOL INTERVIEW

Date & time: -----

Interviewee(s): -----

Location: -----

Interviewer: -----

*Before beginning this interview, I would like to thank you for your participation in this study on children and immigration. More specifically, I am interested in collecting your immigration journeys and how your child has undergone this process. This is why your child's words are very important for the purpose of this research, as I will mainly focus on them. I am interested in finding how your child specifically and you have experienced your arrival and settlement to Montreal and how it impacted your child. Please be assured that your identity will remain anonymous and that everything you share with me will remain confidential and will not be disclosed outside the academic context of the research. Do you have any questions before we start?*

#### Demographic Information

1. Tell me about your family:

*Prompts:*

- *Place of birth, language spoken at home, highest level of education obtained*
- *Occupation*
- *Religion*
- *How many children do you have? What are their names and ages? Who is attending school or daycare?*
- *How long have you been living in Montreal? Did you arrive as a resident or as a refugee?*
- *Is there anything you would like to add regarding your family?*

#### Before Immigration

2. Next, I would like to understand the period that directly precedes your arrival to Canada or more precisely, what we can call the “before immigration” time.

*Prompts:*

- *When did you arrive to Canada? Do you remember the exact date, the one that is stamped on your passport? Tell me what you remember about arriving here.*
- *Tell me more about the reasons that made you immigrate to Canada.*

- *Why did you choose this country? Was it a mutual choice with your spouse?*
- *Did you stay in Canada since your arrival or did you visit Canada before deciding to settle there for good?*
- *How were you feeling? Were you sure and confident about your decision at that time or were you cautious or scared?*
- *Did you experience any specific event in your home country that facilitated your decision to leave?*
- *Is there anything you would like to add regarding this “before immigration” time in your life?*

### **During Immigration**

3. Now, I would like to talk about the immigration process in itself, your arrival to Canada. Please feel free to share any events or emotions with me as I have undergone the same process as you and therefore, I can totally relate to what you are saying.

*Prompts:*

- *Tell me about your first few days here. Were they more difficult than expected or easier?*
- *What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of your arrival to the country?*
- *Did you notice any changes in your child’s behavior?*
- *Was it easy or rather difficult on him/her?*
- *Can you describe the process that your child went through?*
- *Does he talk about his home country (e.g., like comparing his native country to his host country, expressing any feelings towards any or both countries)?*
- *Since your arrival, did you go back to visit Lebanon? If yes, when and for how long? Can you tell me more about this trip and specifically about your child’s attitude and behavior before, during and after this trip?*
- *Do you talk to him about Lebanon?*
- *Tell me about the strategies, if any, you are using with your child in order to preserve his original culture, set of beliefs and language?*
- *Is there anything you would like to add regarding this “during immigration” time in your life?*

### **After Immigration (in another interview)**

4. Now that we have discussed your before and after immigration and all the events that took place during those times, I would like to know more about the period that came after your settlement in Canada, “the after immigration” time.

*Prompts:*

- *Now that you have settled and that days have passed, how do you feel about your decision to come to Canada?*
- *Are you now accustomed to living here? How do you see this?*
- *What is your opinion towards the school system here? Do you think that it played an important role in your adjustment to the life in Canada?*
- *How do you feel about your child's adjustment? What do you do now to try to help your child adjust? Do you incorporate the new beliefs, culture, language and habits into your native culture? Do you value one over the other?*
- *Do you have anything you would like to add regarding this "after immigration" time in your life?*

## Appendix B

### CHILDREN PROTOCOL INTERVIEW

Date & time: -----

Interviewee(s): -----

Location: -----

Interviewer: -----

*Before beginning this interview, I would like to thank you for your participation in this study on children and immigration. More specifically, I am interested in collecting your immigration journeys and what you felt when you came to Canada. This is why your words and your personal stories are very important to me. I am interested in finding how you have experienced your arrival and settlement to Montreal and to see what changed for you and in you since you came. You are free to say anything to me and if you feel the need to stop the interview, we can do it at anytime. Please be assured that your identity will remain anonymous and that everything you share with me will remain confidential and will not be disclosed outside the academic context of the research. Do you have any questions before we start?*

#### Before Immigration

1. First, I would like to discuss with you the time period that directly precedes your arrival to Canada, when you were still in Lebanon.

*Prompts:*

- *Can you describe to me your old home? What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Lebanon and your old house?*
- *What do you feel when you think about this time in your life? Is there a specific feeling that you feel?*
- *Do you know the reason that made you leave Lebanon with your family and live here now? Did you ask your parents about it?*
- *What do you think the reason is? What do you think about this reason?*
- *How did you react when your parents told you that you were going to live in a new country? Were you happy, scared or normal?*
- *How did you prepare for your arrival to Canada? Did you do some research or asked questions about the country?*
- *Did you pack something special with you from Lebanon? If yes, what is it and why? Do you still have it?*
- *Do you have anything that you would like to add regarding this time period?*

### **During Immigration**

2. Now, I would like to talk more about your arrival to Montreal and everything that happened after. The events and how it was for you in this new country. Please feel free to tell me anything and if you need to pause and think, please do.

*Prompts:*

- *What do you remember about your first few days here?*
- *Is there anything specific like a story or something that happened to you or your family that comes to your mind when you think about your arrival to Montreal?*
- *Can you describe to me your new home? Can you talk more about your new life in Canada (e.g., what do you like the most, what do you hate the most, what would you change)?*
- *What is the language you speak the most outside home?*
- *Can you tell me about your school?*
- *Can you tell me about your friends? Do you know which countries they come from?*
- *Are you still in contact with your friends from Lebanon?*
- *Do you have anything that you would like to add regarding this time period?*

### **After Immigration (in another interview)**

3. Now that we have discussed your before and after immigration and all the events that took place during those times, I would like to know more about the period that came after your arrival to Montreal.

*Prompts:*

- *Do you feel that you miss your old life in Lebanon or even that you miss Lebanon?*
- *What do you miss and what do you not miss?*
- *Can you tell me what is different now in your new life? Can you tell me now what is the same between your old life and this new life?*
- *Would you like to bring something from your old life or native country and put it in this life you have in Canada? If yes, what?*
- *Do you feel that something is missing? Would you like to change something in this life? If yes, what?*
- *When you hear the name Canada, what is the first thing that comes to your mind?*
- *How do you see Canada? Do you see it as your country?*
- *Do you like the celebrations that take place here like Halloween for example?*
- *What do you like and what don't you like?*
- *How do you feel about spending your next summer vacations in your home country?*

## Appendix C

### Play Activity Procedure

#### 1. During the first interview, the play activity was introduced:

« Je vais te poser quelques questions sur toi, sur ce que tu ressens, mais aussi sur le Liban et sur le Canada. On va parler du moment où tu as quitté le Liban pour venir ici à Montréal, comment tu te sentais dans ta nouvelle école puis tes nouveaux amis et si tu as des questions pendant qu'on parle, tu peux me les demander à n'importe quel moment. Et, on va se voir une deuxième fois pour continuer notre discussion et **puis quand on va se revoir, je te demanderais peut-être de me faire un dessin ou j'ai aussi des petits jeux. Tu pourras choisir une activité et si tu ne le veux pas, tu ne le feras pas.** C'est comme tu veux. On va donc se rencontrer 2 fois pour parler de toi, de ce que tu ressens. Tu vas me raconter ton histoire et moi je t'écouterai. Si à tout moment, tu ne veux plus continuer à parler avec moi, tu pourras le dire à ta maman ou à moi et on ne se rencontrera plus. Je ne vais pas être triste ou fâchée. Au contraire, je te remercierais d'avoir essayé et même d'avoir un peu participé. Alors, est-ce que tu as envie de partager ton histoire avec moi ? »

#### 2. During the second interview, the play activity was carried out:

##### ➤ Child 1 (11 years)

« Maintenant j'ai apporté avec moi quelques activités que je voudrais te proposer. Mais tu as le droit de refuser et de dire non. Il y'a 3 sortes d'activités. Maintenant qu'on s'est rencontré 2 fois, qu'on a parlé de Dubaï, d'avant de venir ici, de tes 2 vies et de ton nouveau pays. Est-ce que tu as envie de me faire un dessin sur cela? J'ai des crayons de couleur et du papier. Ou bien aussi construire quelque chose avec ces Lego ? Peut-être, tu veux me construire quelque chose en rapport avec ce que l'on a discuté avant. Et, puis j'ai aussi ces figurines si tu as envie de me faire un petit jeu de rôle. »

Child 1 did not want to carry any of the proposed activities.

##### ➤ Child 2 (11 years)

« Maintenant, je ne sais pas si tu as envie mais je vais te proposer 3 activités. Si tu n'as pas envie tu peux refuser. Par exemple, faire un dessin pour moi. J'ai des crayons et un cahier. Peut-être me construire quelque chose si tu aimes. J'ai apporté aussi des figurines pour faire des jeux de rôles. Ce que tu as envie, sur tout ce qu'on a discuté ».

Child 2 chose the figurines play without hesitation and carried out her activity without any directions.

➤ Child 3 (10 years)

- a.** « Si je te dis maintenant entre ces 3 activités: me faire un dessin, ou on peut jouer avec les personnages ou on peut construire quelque chose avec les Lego, laquelle tu préfères?  
 - Je peux faire avec les 2 ?  
 - Oui bien sûr, tu peux faire avec les 2 (figurines et Lego). Sur le Liban, sur ce qu'on a discuté. Après, tu pourrais m'expliquer ».

After carrying both activities, Child 3 wanted also to draw.

- b-** « - Je peux dessiner aussi ?  
 - Oui, tu as envie ?  
 - Oui.  
 - Je veux bien que tu dessines.  
 - Je dessine quoi ?  
 - Qu'est-ce que tu as envie ? Tu peux utiliser toutes les couleurs. »

➤ Child 4 (8 years)

- a.** « - Ok, je vais te proposer 3 activités. Faire un dessin de ce que tu veux mais sur ce qu'on a parlé. Si tu ressens quelque chose dans ton cœur, tu peux le dessiner. Ou tu peux faire avec les Lego pou tu peux faire un petit jeu comme ça avec les personnages et puis tu pourrais me parler en faisant l'activité. Ok ? (Il montre les crayons de couleur).  
 - Tu veux dessiner ?  
 - Ok.  
 - Alors, on va faire un dessin. Qu'est-ce que tu as envie de dessiner ?  
 - Ma famille.  
 - Ta famille du Liban ?  
 - Oui.  
 - Ok. Tu peux faire comme tu veux et utiliser les crayons et couleurs que tu veux. »  
 (Il commence à dessiner)

After drawing, Child 4 asked to play with the Lego.

- b.** «- Tu as envie de rajouter quelque chose sur ce dessin ou bien de me dire quelque chose ?  
 - Euh...maintenant, est-ce que je peux faire des Lego ?  
 - Oui si tu as envie. Tu veux ?  
 - Oui.  
 - Ok. Tu peux aussi m'expliquer ce que tu construis si tu veux ».

## Appendix D

### Coding Sample

#### 1. First Cycle Coding: In Vivo Coding

##### Sample taken from the first interview held with Child 1

« **Donc tu trouves que ce sont de bonnes raisons ?**

Oui oui. Puis ici la qualité de vie. Là-bas c'est moins genre ici, tu sais que tu es protégée mais là-bas, avec toutes les explosions. Dès fois quand ma mère allait au travail, il y'avait des bombes puis j'avais toujours peur que c'était elle. Parce que à chaque fois, ils disent que c'est dans downtown et puis elle, elle travaille là-bas. Dès fois, j'avais de petites inquiétudes mais ici, si elle va travailler au downtown, il n'y a aucune qu'il y'ait une bombe qui explose. Fait que il y'a ça aussi.

Oui oui. Et, est-ce que tu te souviens quand ta maman t'a dit que vous alliez venir vivre au Canada ?

Je ne me souviens pas très bien.

**Tu te souviens comment tu as réagi ?**

Ben, j'étais contente parce que aussi j'allais voir mon père. Parce que après 4 ans, je voulais le voir. Et aussi, parce que j'allais prendre l'avion (rires). En plus, pour le Canada, les années que j'avais passées au Canada, c'était beau.

**Donc tu étais plus contente. Tu n'avais pas peur ?**

Ben, en fait j'étais contente et à la fois un peu triste vu que j'allais laisser toute la famille puis tout ça pour venir ici. C'est ça. »

Comment [1]: ici, la qualité de vie

Comment [2]: là-bas avec toutes les explosions

Comment [3]: il y'avait des bombes puis j'avais toujours peur que c'était elle.

Comment [4]: De petites inquiétudes.

Comment [5]: Une bombe qui explose.

Comment [6]: Ça aussi.

Comment [7]: J'étais contente parce que j'allais voir mon père.

Comment [8]: J'allais prendre l'avion.

Comment [9]: Le Canada c'est beau

Comment [10]: J'étais contente et à la fois un peu triste

Comment [11]: J'allais laisser la famille pour venir ici.

#### 2. Second Cycle Coding: Focused Coding

- ici, la qualité de vie
- là-bas avec toutes les explosions
- il y'avait des bombes puis j'avais toujours peur que c'était elle.
- De petites inquiétudes
- Une bombe qui explose
- Ça aussi
- J'étais contente parce que j'allais voir mon père
- J'allais prendre l'avion
- Le Canada c'est beau
- j'étais contente et à la fois un peu triste
- j'allais laisser la famille pour venir ici

- **Reasons for leaving for the children:** ici, la qualité de vie- là-bas avec toutes les explosions- il y'avait des bombes puis j'avais toujours peur que c'était elle- De

petites inquiétudes- Une bombe qui explose- J'étais contente parce que j'allais voir mon père

- **Knowledge of the host country/ preparation:** J'allais prendre l'avion- Le Canada c'est beau
- **Leaving the country for the children:** j'étais contente et à la fois un peu triste- j'allais laisser la famille pour venir ici

**Appendix E****CHILDREN'S ORAL CONSENT FORM****(8 to 11 years old)**

Hello! So today, I am going to ask you a few questions about yourself, about your feelings but also about Lebanon and Canada. Also, we will discuss the time when you left Lebanon and arrived here in Montreal, how you felt in your new school and with your new friends. If you have any questions while we are talking, please ask me. At the end, you can choose between drawing anything you want about your move from Lebanon to Canada or even make up a small play with small figurines about coming to Canada or just act out something using these toys. If you don't want any of these activities, you don't have to do it. Over the next several weeks, we will meet two times to talk about you and your feelings about coming to Canada. You will be telling me your story and I will be listening to you.

If at any time, you do not want to continue talking with me or do any of these activities, you can tell your parents or me, and you will not have to meet with me anymore. I will not be upset. In the contrary, I would say thank you for having tried or even participated for a small part. Would you like to share your story with me?

## Appendix F

### INFORMATION LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

I am a student from the Department of Education at Concordia University and I am interested in exploring children's understanding of their immigration process and how it impacted them. Under the supervision of Dr. Petrakos, the aim of the study is to understand, from the children's points of view, the meaning they give to their immigration process and how do they feel about it. This will be carried out by interviewing the participants and asking them to talk about three crucial time periods in their lives: i.e. before, during and after the immigration to Canada.

When you consent to participate in this study, I will do around two interviews with you and your child. They will take approximately 30-60 minutes each. During this time, I will ask you questions about your immigration journey and your child's too. I can carry out the interview in English, French and/ or Arabic. The entire interview will be audiotaped. A short follow-up interview, either in person or by telephone, may be requested to obtain clarifications or elaboration on your responses.

All of the information in this study will remain confidential and your child's real name will not be included in any of the results reported in the study.

A benefit of participating in this study is that it could allow you to explore your views and beliefs about your immigration process, as well as reflect on the changes that took place inside your family and how it affected your child.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me, Dana Naoufal at 514-214-1617, or my supervisor Dr. Harriet Petrakos at 514-848-2424 ext. 2013.

Sincerely,

Dana Naoufal



## Appendix G

### INFORMATION AND CONSENT- MOTHERS

#### INFORMATION AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

**Study Title: “From Country to Country: Collecting Life Experiences of Immigrant Children and their Families”**

**Researcher: Dana Naoufal**

**Researcher’s Contact Information: [d\\_naou@education.concordia.ca](mailto:d_naou@education.concordia.ca)  
(514- 214 1617)**

**Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Harriet Petrakos**

**Faculty Supervisor’s Contact Information: [hpetrakos@education.concordia.ca](mailto:hpetrakos@education.concordia.ca) (514-  
848-2424, ext. 2013)**

**Source of funding for the study: N/A**

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

#### **A. PURPOSE**

The purpose of the research is to learn about the life experiences of children and their families who immigrated, especially how this process changed and impacted the lives of immigrant children.

#### **B. PROCEDURES**

If you participate, you will be asked to take part in two one-on-one interviews for this study, which will take place in a quiet location of your choice (e.g., home, coffee shop). If the interviews with your child are to be conducted at home, the door will be left open. The interviews will last about 30-60 minutes and will be audio-recorded. The interviews could be conducted in Arabic, English and/or French if you choose to speak in any of these three languages. You understand that you will be contacted for another short interview (no longer than 30 minutes) by telephone to clarify some answers or to provide some additional information that would be required for the study. You understand that you will be asked permission to use any quotes from your interview in the reporting of the results. You understand that all information that you share during the study will be kept confidential by not including names or identifying information in the reporting of the results.

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

You might face certain risks by participating in this research. These risks include intense emotional feelings regarding topics related to your child and immigration journey's memories. Should you experience distress during your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Harriet Petrakos (514-848-2424ext. 2013), a licensed psychologist and she will provide you with the appropriate resources.

You might or might not personally benefit from participating in this research. Potential benefits include the opportunity to explore your views and experiences regarding your immigration process.

This research is not intended to benefit you personally.

### **D. CONFIDENTIALITY**

We will gather the following information as part of this research: your name, your family information and the details regarding before, during and after your immigration journey to Canada.

By participating, you agree to let the researchers have access to information about you and your child. This information will be obtained from you and your child solely.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research, and except as described in this form. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be coded. That means that the information will be identified by a code. The researcher will have a list that links the code to your name.

We will protect the information by changing all the names provided by you and/or your child, not sharing the data collected with anyone that would not be part of the research.

We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify you in the published results.

We will destroy the information five years after the end of the study.

#### **F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

You and your child do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you do the interviews but then decide to withdraw from the study, you can do so up to one week after all your own interviews are done and therefore, all your data will also be withdrawn from the study prior to analysis and publication.

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

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

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

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

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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

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



## Appendix H

### INFORMATION AND CONSENT- PARENTAL CONSENT FOR THE CHILD

#### INFORMATION AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

**Study Title: “From Country to Country: Collecting Life Experiences of Immigrant Children and their Families”**

**Researcher: Dana Naoufal**

**Researcher’s Contact Information: [d\\_naou@education.concordia.ca](mailto:d_naou@education.concordia.ca)  
(514- 214 1617)**

**Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Harriet Petrakos**

**Faculty Supervisor’s Contact Information: [hpetrakos@education.concordia.ca](mailto:hpetrakos@education.concordia.ca) (514-  
848-2424, ext. 2013)**

**Source of funding for the study: N/A**

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

#### **A. PURPOSE**

The purpose of the research is to learn about the life experiences of children and their families who immigrated, especially how this process changed and impacted the lives of immigrant children.

#### **B. PROCEDURES**

If your child participates, he/she will be asked to take part in two one-on-one interviews for this study, which will take place in a quiet location of your choice (e.g., home, coffee shop). If the interviews with your child are to be conducted at home, the door will be left open. The interviews will last about 30-60 minutes and will be audio-recorded. The interviews could be conducted in Arabic, English and/or French if he/she chooses to speak in any of these three languages. You understand that your child will be contacted for another short interview (no longer than 30 minutes) by telephone to clarify some answers or to provide some additional information that would be required for the study. You understand that your child will be asked permission to use any quotes from his/her interview in the reporting of the results. You understand that all information that your child shares during the study will be kept confidential by not including names or identifying information in the reporting of the results.

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

Your child might face certain risks by participating in this research. These risks include intense emotional feelings regarding topics related to him/her and immigration journey's memories. Should he/she experiences distress during his/her participation in this study, please contact Dr. Harriet Petrakos (514-848-2424ext. 2013), a licensed psychologist and she will provide you with the appropriate resources.

Your child might or might not personally benefit from participating in this research. Potential benefits include the opportunity to explore his/her views and experiences regarding his/her immigration process.

This research is not intended to benefit your child personally.

### **D. CONFIDENTIALITY**

We will gather the following information as part of this research: your child's name, his/her family information and the details regarding before, during and after his/her immigration journey to Canada.

By allowing your child to participate, you agree to let the researchers have access to information about him/her. This information will be obtained from your child and you solely.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research, and except as described in this form. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be coded. That means that the information will be identified by a code. The researcher will have a list that links the code to your child's name.

We will protect the information by changing all the names provided by your child, not sharing the data collected with anyone that would not be part of the research.

We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify your child in the published results.

We will destroy the information five years after the end of the study.

#### **F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

Your child does not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If he/she does participate, he/she can stop at any time. Your child can also ask that the information he/she provided not be used, and his/her choice will be respected. If he/she does the interviews but then decide to withdraw from the study, he/she can do so up to one week after all his/her own interviews are done and therefore, all your child's data will also be withdrawn from the study prior to analysis and publication.

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

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

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

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

CHILD'S NAME (please \_\_\_\_\_  
print)

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

## Appendix I

### RECRUITMENT AD POSTED ON SOCIAL MEDIA

#### Recruitment Ad to Participate in the Study



I am currently enrolled in the Child Studies Master Program in the Department of Education at Concordia University.

For my thesis, I will be exploring the life experiences of Lebanese children and their families who immigrated to Canada, especially how this process changed and impacted the lives of immigrant children. The interviews will be conducted with the mother and her child.

I am looking for participants meeting the following criteria:

- Lebanese children between 8 and 11 years-old
- Immigrants in Canada (newly arrived) of less than 3 years
- Speaking one of the two languages, English or French

If you and your child wish to participate in this study, please contact me and I will gladly provide you with all the information.

Dana Naoufal  
MA Child Studies  
514 214 1617  
[dana.naoufal@gmail.com](mailto:dana.naoufal@gmail.com)