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## Multiple Perspectives on Educationally Resilient Immigrant Students

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*This study explores in an innovative manner the notion of resilience in a group of immigrant students. Structured interviews were used to explore resilience issues with immigrant students enrolled in university. Two interviewers collected and recorded data together, but conducted separate and independent analyses to explore differences in results due to their own cultural backgrounds. Findings suggest that the traditional concept of resilience—one based on studies of students from lower socioeconomic classes in school in inner-city neighborhoods that identify social competence, problem-solving ability, autonomy, and satisfaction with school as significant resilience factors—is limited. The findings in this study suggest that immigrant students represent a different pattern of resilience related to a strong cultural belief in the value of education and the support, often financial, provided by their families. Interesting differences in interpretation related to the first culture of the researchers suggest that “mirrored reflections” offers one way to capture differences in data interpretation resulting from researchers’ backgrounds.*

*Cette étude innovatrice porte sur la notion de résilience chez les étudiants immigrants. Par le biais d’entrevues structurées, nous nous sommes penchés sur des questions portant sur la résilience d’étudiants immigrants inscrits à l’université. Deux intervieweurs ont recueilli et enregistré les données ensemble, mais ont fait des analyses indépendantes et séparées, pour ensuite étudier les différences entre leurs résultats qui découlaient de leurs antécédents culturels respectifs. Les résultats donnent à penser que le concept traditionnel de résilience est limité quand il repose sur des études auprès d’étudiants provenant de classes socioéconomiques plus basses dans des écoles du centre-ville et quand il évalue la résilience selon la compétence sociale, la capacité de résolution de problèmes, l’autonomie et la satisfaction face à l’école. Cette étude permet de conclure que les étudiants immigrants représentent une autre forme de résilience qui est liée à une croyance culturelle dominante qui valorise l’éducation et à un appui, souvent financier, de la part de la famille. Des différences intéressantes dans l’interprétation des intervieweurs liées à leur culture d’origine indiquent que les ‘réflexions symétriques’ représentent une façon de capter les différences dans l’interprétation des données qui sont attribuables aux antécédents des chercheurs.*

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## Introduction

The number of immigrant students enrolled in schools in Canada continues to increase. In the Vancouver (Canada) school district, for example, 51% of the students enrolled are English-as-a-second-language (ESL) learners (Eddy, personal communication, Vancouver Placement and Reception Centre, 2003). However, a serious related problem is that immigrant students appear to have a high dropout rate. For example, Radwanski's (1987) Ontario study revealed that 53% of the ESL high school population left early, and Watt and Roessingh (2001) found a 73% dropout rate in Alberta. Similarly, Gunderson (2004) reported that 61% of the immigrant students he studied disappeared from the academic courses the province required for university entrance.

Tucker (2000) concluded that language minority students in general are at risk because they are more likely to drop out and less likely to attend college or university. The situation is not quite so simple, however. Planning and Institutional Research (PAIR) at the University of British Columbia reports that in 2000 47% of the students who spoke Chinese as a first language and who graduated from secondary schools went on to attend university, whereas 2% of those who spoke Spanish and graduated did so.

### *Resilient Students*

Immigrant students who succeed often do so against great odds. These students are often referred to as educationally resilient, and it is suggested that resilience features can be successfully taught to students (Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003). Roessingh and Watt (2003), having taught ESL students resilience skills, report a retention rate of 78% for immigrant high school students enrolled in their support program, an obvious success.

Waxman et al. (2003) note that the most widely accepted definition of educational resilience was that of Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1994), "the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life accomplishments despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences" (p. 46). Bernard (1993) identified four features that seem to be associated with resilient children: social competence, problem-solving ability, autonomy, and having a sense of purpose.

Waxman et al. (2003) further note that, "the construct of 'educational resilience' is not viewed as a fixed attribute but as something that can be promoted by focusing on 'alterable' factors that can impact an individual's success in school" (p. 1). They suggest that such practices include cognitively guided instruction, culturally responsive teaching, technology-enriched instruction, cooperative learning, and instructional conversations. Ability is not a necessary characteristic of resilience (Bernard, 1993; Gordon & Song, 1994; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990).

Most resilience studies focus on elementary-age students and on their family and personal backgrounds. A few studies, however, focus on older students. Reyes and Jason (1993), investigating resilience in a population of Latino students in an inner-city secondary school, reported that resilient students turned out to be more satisfied with school than nonresilient students, even though they came from families with similar socioeconomic status. Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) studied 2,000 Mexican-American high school students, finding that resilient students had more positive feelings about school and appeared to have received more positive feedback from teachers. Alva (1991) investigated grade 10 Mexican-American students considered to be academically invulnerable (because they overcame situations that were stressful in order to succeed and not drop out), concluding that these students "enjoy coming to school and being involved in high school activities" (p. 5). McClendon, Nettles, and Wigfield (2000) investigated an intervention program called Promoting Achievement in School through Sport (PASS) in 16 high schools. They noted that the program teaches resilience features such as engagement, encouragement, and involvement, and concluded that resilience features can be taught and that they do make a difference in student success.

Given extant research, and influenced by the call to focus on success rather than failure (Bempechat, 1998; Delpit, 1988), we chose to investigate highly resilient immigrant students who had succeeded in graduating from secondary school and were enrolled in a major university. The goal was to explore their success in order to discover whether there were strategies they identified as important. We believed that identified strategies might have the potential to inform instruction. A secondary goal was to explore a unique collaborative approach to qualitative research.

### *The Students*

Participants were volunteers who responded to posters advertising the study. The poster requested the participation of individuals who were registered students at the University of British Columbia, who had come to Canada as immigrants, and who had been enrolled in ESL classes before graduating from secondary school. It was noted on the recruitment poster that selected candidates would be paid \$50 to participate in an interview about their experiences. Fifteen individuals responded to the advertisement and were included in the study. There were 10 female and five male students: six from Taiwan, one from Thailand, three from Hong Kong, one from Colombia, one from the People's Republic of China, two from Korea, and one from Japan. Table 1 shows a breakdown of students' backgrounds.

Table 1  
Countries of Origin, Age on Arrival, Entry Year, Academic Major and Program; Years of Study at UBC, and Languages Spoken

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Origin</i>	<i>AOA</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Major</i>	<i>Program</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>Languages</i>
Ulrika	Taiwan	1.5	95	Science	Geology	3	Mandarin English
Ani	Taiwan	11.5	93	Science	Science	1	English Mandarin Cantonese Taiwanese
Naomi	Thailand	9	89	Arts	Sociology	3	English Japanese
Mari	Hong Kong	11	90	Arts	Political Science	4	English Mandarin Cantonese Japanese
Hugo	Taiwan	14	90	Science	Computer Science	6	Taiwanese Mandarin English Cantonese
Nansen	Colombia	20	90	Education	Teacher Education	1	Spanish English French
Maia	PRC	8.5	93	Science	Biochemistry	2	Mandarin English
Mark	Taiwan	13	93	Science	Computer Science	3	Mandarin English Taiwanese
Heather	South Korea	12	95	Arts	Foundations	1	Korean English Spanish German
Lora	Taiwan	14	95	Science	Math	2	Mandarin Taiwanese English
Robert	Republic of Korea	14	95	Arts	Art History	3	English Korean
Julie	Taiwan	11	93	Arts	Economics	2	Mandarin Taiwanese English
Beth	Japan	5	85	Arts	B.A.	3	Japanese English
Celeste	Hong Kong	9	87	Commerce	Marketing	4	English Cantonese Mandarin
Gabriel	Hong Kong	12	87	Commerce	Management	8	English Cantonese

## Methodology

Based on the results of a pilot study, a semistructured interview protocol was developed that included 17 items exploring students' backgrounds and their perceptions of their lives as immigrant students (see Appendix). The study was also designed to explore collaborative qualitative research in an interesting and unique way.

The collaborators in this study were Louis Chen (LC), a Taiwanese-American-Canadian who is enrolled in a doctoral program in the Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning Department at the Ontario Institute for

Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto; Jérémie Séror (JS), a French-Canadian enrolled in a doctoral program in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia; and Lee Gunderson (LG), a Norwegian-American-Canadian and professor in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia. LC and JS designed and conducted the study, recorded and transcribed the interview sessions, and analyzed the data. LG served as MA advisor for both LC and JS. LG helped to focus their independent studies on this study of resilience, in effect managing the collaboration.

Both JS and LC were present at each interview. Two roles were developed and alternated from one interview to the next. In one case JS would serve as the interviewer, following items on the semistructured interview protocol that participants had seen before their interviews. While JS conducted an interview, LC served as an observer-participant who would interject comments and ask related follow-up questions. In other interviews these roles were reversed. This procedure allowed the researchers to observe later any possible differences in response patterns related to the background of interviewer versus the background of participant.

The interviews were recorded using a minidisk recorder and were transcribed verbatim by LC and JS. Each transcription was reviewed and proof-read for errors by the researcher who had not done the transcription. In addition, extensive field notes were made by the observer-participant, and researchers' comments and initial reactions were also recorded after the sessions when schedules permitted. Results were sent to the participants for verification of the contents.

### *Separate Analyses*

Transcripts were analyzed separately by LC and JS using QSR N5 (formerly known as NUD\*IST). The program allows a researcher to explore large amounts of complex data and to create and code utterances to record ideas, to link ideas found, and to search for and explore recurring themes and patterns. These analyses were conducted separately to reveal whether the unique backgrounds and different cultural expectations and perceptions of the two researchers would be reflected in their findings. During this portion of the study JS and LC did not communicate with each other about their work, although they did individually consult with LG. They produced two separate sets of findings, exchanged their written results, and reflected on how their own sets of findings were the same as or different from their research partner's, and wrote a response; we termed this an exercise in "mirrored reflections."

## Findings: Resilient Students

### *Findings: LC*

Findings derived from LC's analysis showed that participants' resilience developed early at home through a kinship system that was clearly patriarchal in nature. Obedience to parents emerged as a dominant theme throughout the data; 10 out of 15 participants indicated a strong sense of obligation to please their parents. The notion of filial piety motivated them in pursuing their goals and purposes so that they left ESL programs and entered university as soon as possible.

Parents raise, they, they, also want you to be like the normal [mainstream] kids right? Also, uh, I think ... if I can get out [of ESL] as fast, really quickly, then I feel I've succeeded. (Lora)

yeah to be able to be here [at the University of British Columbia]. I guess, my mom was pretty proud of me. Like, like when her friends ask, "oh where is um, is your daughter going to university?" She said "yeah, UBC, science." I guess yeah, my mom's pretty proud of me. (Ani)

For myself um, if there is an indirect goal is probably to get into university, because I've been conditioned at the age of eight that I should get into university, and be successful in career. (Celeste)

Academic success and the maintenance of close interpersonal relationships at home were inextricably linked. In addition to the notion of filial piety that tacitly governed their perception of the world and their relations to parents, participants explicitly made it a goal to uphold parental expectations with regard to achieving high grades and aiming for an elite social status.

Students had the perception that success was expected to be a result of determination and hard work, resulting in determination to achieve high standards through strict self-discipline. Most participants proactively sought various means and resources that would enable them in their efforts to become proficient in their speaking and academic English proficiency. Participants suggested that clubs, sporting, and community events played a positive role in their English learning and social integration process. Such events were avenues through which they gained access to contextualized, socially meaningful English.

Yeah, I wanted to be like ... one of them [Canadian-born peers], yeah. So I like tried and tried (laugh), yeah. So um, that's why I started um, I had a part-time job, in "ABC restaurant" [a local Western-style restaurant] ... Yeah, you know I had a chance to, like go into like, some, Chinese company, you know that's Chinese-speaking. But I know, I

wanted to learn English, so, I applied for a job [at ABC restaurant].  
(Lora)

Um, I really wanted to fit in to the lifestyle here. That was one of the goals. So, you know, I knew that sports is a big part of life here, uh ... whereas it wasn't in HK, so, I'm ... you know, I made it a point to ... to learn, you know, various different sports, but uh I enjoyed it too, so that made it a little easier so, now I enjoy all kinds of sports, well so that was one of the goals, to learn the games, you know, to, to be able to interact with other people who played the game. (Gabriel)

The interview data also suggested that participants' resilience developed through their recognition of the importance of integrating into their immediate social contexts. In addition to becoming involved in the local community, they were also actively engaged in reading out-of-school material of various kinds such as newspapers, flyers, and popular novels in order to "tap into" knowledge about English and to access the common lingo they identified as helpful for interacting with their mainstream peers:

It wasn't till grade six that I realized ... my friends are all reading like ... the babysitters' club and ... and ... like young, young adults novels and I was stuck in like, reading like ... storybooks with pictures (sarcastic) and stuff like that ... so ... that ... yeah. It was then I realized "oh my god I have to start reading these other books," so the summer after grade 6 ... I like, like read like crazy. I read the Hobbit and all these other books ... and umm ... and ... LAUGHS ... the Hobbit was a big accomplishment for me at the time. (Maia)

For like, like the first whole year I just read the flyer that's all, and then after I know like a lot more, lots more um, vocabs I can start um, reading newspapers like real newspapers, like, the essays, reports. (Lora)

Specific strategies ... well TV is a pretty good tool (laugh) ... With the captions and with a dictionary ... well I just wrote down, like when I read, I just wrote down the new vocabularies, yeah, and try to memorize them and if I can try to use them, within in a few days, yeah. (Hugo)

These and other comments suggest that benefits derive from incorporating multiple forms of literacy practice and forms, both in and out of school, as an aid for developing students' language proficiency, as well as their academic resilience. As participants employed various self-initiated methods for improving their English proficiency, they also indicated that they practiced autonomy in their learning and social interactions. In the process of identifying and pursuing contextualized, meaningful forms of literacy, they became empowered not only because they could access the discourse of the

mainstream, but also, more important, because the new source of knowledge served as the means by which they could venture beyond the discourse of school and into a wider social context. There they were able to exert agency and establish social positions through a new discourse. Using and interacting with their self-identified relevant texts provided impetus for them to uncover “new” cultural meaning through electronic sources such as television (captions) and music lyrics.

### *Findings: JS*

JS’s findings highlight the importance of a patriarchal kinship system, which led to a sense of obligation felt by many of the students to succeed. Beliefs about the importance of education were intensified because most parents reinforced to the participants that they had moved to a new country to pursue a better education. This revelation made students feel responsible for familial immigration, and all the hardships and sacrifices that entailed. We emphasize here that students were under incredible pressure. Failing to get a good education meant letting the expectations of the family down and not valuing the sacrifices made by the family on their behalf.

I think one of the main reasons because one, we have relatives were already and, and they’ve been, uh, living quite happily here and they say of good things about Canada, and then it’s, it’s this school systems, you know, it’s uh ... a lot freer then, then the school system that you have in Taiwan, it’s not as rigid, and eh, plus they want me to learn English and, and want me to have, uh, fluent English skills so that would help me in the future, I don’t know how but (laugh), but that’s what they thought, so we decided to move. (Ulrika)

This pressure to succeed academically imposed both by parents and by the students themselves, should be considered in the context of the tremendous challenges students were facing. They had to do well academically despite taking courses in a foreign language. Paradoxically, they also had to do well while leaving as soon as possible the very ESL classes that were there to help them face the trials and tribulations of submersion in an English-only environment. These were significant obstacles to overcome.

### *Drawing on Social Capital to Succeed*

How did these students succeed in achieving and performing well despite the great odds against them? Analysis of the data suggests that the keys to their resilience were found in individual effort and in the existence of strong social networks that provided the support and resources they needed. These students skillfully drew on prior and carefully constructed relationships to help them succeed. This suggests a social rather than an individual definition of resilience, one based on a strong awareness and/or understanding (whether conscious or unconscious) of the strategies that allow one to access,



develop, and maintain relationships. These results resonate strongly with the work of Bourdieu (1986), who saw an individual's social achievement as determined at least in part by his or her social capital. Bourdieu defines social capital as

The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition ... which provides each of its members with ... a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. (p. 249)

All the students in this study displayed a strong developing social capital based on good relationships and strong networks: parents, peers, and teachers or tutors.

### *On the Importance of Parental Support*

Parents were identified as key individuals in students' success. Informants argued that their parents could not be replaced and that parental absence, whether physical and/or symbolic, often had drastic consequences on their academic and social performance. In this sense students revealed that parents were not only sources of pressure; parents were also described as individuals who had genuine interests in their children's successes and who displayed willingness to go out of their way to help them achieve.

Parents helped to keep students strongly connected to their home languages and cultures (a personal source of pride for most of the students) and also provided vital economic and emotional support. Parents willingly communicated and negotiated with schools to keep track of their children's progress. In one instance a family moved their child from one school to another and then back again in order to assure their daughter the best chances of success. Parents were also role models, often the source of a strong work ethic, and they fostered beliefs in the importance and benefits of education displayed by the students. Most important, parents ensured that their children had safe and comfortable environments in which to live and study. Access to books, dictionaries, transport to libraries and weekend schools, and the financial means to enable students to gain access to tutors were readily provided. The "successful" students in this study had parents who made resources available to them to support their learning.

Yeah, um, yeah, I think like the thing that really helped with my, my, um, my parents are both very supportive of, my education and, you know, and so, my dad always told me like, if I'm ever stuck in, a situation where I feel that, I, you know my level of, of competency in some area is not up to par and I need some extra help, like in terms of tutoring or whatever it was, that he's always said to be able to like, you know, get me the tutor or whoever I need to improve myself. And so, I

think that really helped, like, knowing that I could go, and asked for the extra help when I needed it. Yeah. (Beth)

Easy access seemed to be a cornerstone of the support these parents were able to provide.

I think the first [math] test I had a zero, so that's why my dad said, "Oh you should get tutoring classes," because he realized um, English is a really big problem ... So my dad would usually drive me to [tutoring sessions] and then wait there for me, like after an hour, and then [drive me] back. So in a way, I knew there is like, I have this responsibility of like studying, because my dad is sacrificing so much for me. (Ani)

### *On the Importance of Friends*

In addition to supportive parents, informants referred to the crucial role of friends from both the same linguistic-cultural background and from the native English-speaking (NES) community. Being surrounded by individuals who spoke the same language, especially just after enrolling in an all-English school, helped make the transition to the new school and culture easier and less emotionally difficult. These links offered friendship and support unimpeded by linguistic or cultural difficulties. Such friends also showed deeper understanding and appreciation of the difficulties faced by the informants, insights gained through their shared experiences as immigrant language minority students. It is interesting to note, for example, a student's opinion of who often made the best partners for practicing English.

My, the other thing was that, native speakers would, uh, have a tendency to avoid you because, of the communication problem. Not because they're bad people, but simply because it's not easy, you know. That you have to actually make an effort to, communicate with somebody who don't speak the same language as you do. So then, then go find other ESL students, and, and I'm sure they'd be willing to speak English. You may feel like a fool at the time. But, but for, for the bigger picture, it's something you have to consider. (Robert)

Informants also stressed the crucial role that NES friends played in their social network. They were aware that their NES schoolmates were a source of English language and culture that went beyond what could be found in textbooks or the ESL classroom. NES friends helped them obtain key elements for their new Canadian identities as they guided them through the idioms, games, sports, and activities that allowed them to improve their English and to participate more fully in the wider school community.

Of me, they were just laughing because I did something funny, then, then, when they explain it to me I would laugh myself right, so yeah, that was fun, that as the first time I learned how to play "truth or dare,"

“spin the bottle” kind of thing (laugh). So that was, that was really fun, and then, just because there were, there were more girls like, cus’ the Caucasians are like girls, sort of thing, so I, I started hanging around them more then I would hang around the guy friends, just because they’re guys you know, so yeah, so that was, so my whole like, my whole grade 6 and grade 7 years it was basically like, balance of the two, yeah. (Mari)

Some reported that the English language and Canadian culture were not the only languages and cultures acquired. Three participants attending schools with a high population of Cantonese-speaking students reported learning to speak Cantonese as well as English. Learning Cantonese occurred outside of classrooms with no formal training involved. Students reported that they had simply picked up the language from “hanging around” and socializing with Cantonese speakers. In one interesting case, Ani, a Mandarin-speaker from Taiwan, stated that she thought she spoke Cantonese more comfortably than Mandarin:

Ani: Yes, yeah. I guess, yeah. For example now, I have a class, I have math class. I know a group of Cantonese friends and I know a group of Taiwanese friends. But then usually I would sit with the Cantonese people.

Interviewer: May we ask why? Is it just because of the language or, any particular reason?

Ani: I, I, I don’t know what to say to those Taiwanese people. I don’t know why. I would talk to them but then, I would just, I don’t know what to say to them. It’s like there’s no, nothing common between us.

Interviewer: Do you think it’s because just from the beginning in your class, there were lots of Cantonese people, then you didn’t have contact with Taiwanese people?

Ani: I think so. It’s like, I know all those like, media stuff. Like those actors and actress in Hong Kong but then I don’t know anything about Taiwan. So I guess, yeah I’m more like a Cantonese.

Ani: Yeah. Like, I don’t even speak Mandarin at all. The only thing I speak is Cantonese and Taiwanese at home. And then when I speak like, remember there was a girl here, she was Taiwanese. And after we went out, I was telling, I was talking to her in Mandarin, and then she said “are you sure you’re Taiwanese? You sound like a Cantonese. Your Mandarin’s pretty weird.” And then I was like, “I’m a Taiwanese!” Gosh, so I don’t know, I, well, my identity change.

Students stressed the importance of friends by emphasizing that ESL failure could be explained in terms of not being able to make friends. They

spoke, for example, of the loneliness and psychological despair that ensued when there was no one else in a school who shared their home cultures and languages. They also spoke of the dangers of isolation experienced by their friends who were limited to socializing in their own linguistic-cultural backgrounds. Such linguistic and social isolation often led to the inability to develop the English-language and social skills necessary to integrate successfully into the school community and to achieve academically.

Forging links that crossed the linguistic, cultural, and social barriers that separated ESL students from their mainstream classmates was considered crucial for success. The importance placed on these relationships by these students was clearly highlighted in the multiple, varied efforts they made to interact with people in the community, through volunteering, jobs, clubs, and so forth. It was also evident in the advice they gave to peers and teachers:

Interviewer: Uh, what, what advice would you give, to, to the students, as to, like specific things they can do to, if they, they want to repeat what you did?

Gabriel: Um ... Oh ... Um ... One of them was probably to interact with people, with diverse backgrounds, and so ... I think that's key to, to learning, English, because then you're forced to speak it. If, if they don't speak your mother tongue, you know, how are you going to communicate with them, but with the language, that you, you know, speak in common, and so, that would be English, in Canada, and so that's one thing. Um, another things was, um, to get involved with different activities, um, like I was saying, for me it was sports that helped me, for other people it could be joining different clubs, or different extra-curricular activities, although I know it's hard because when you don't speak the language, it's hard to join the clubs, but, you know, get involved, like, you know, I mean outside school, um ... do different things, you know. If you have a hobby, you know, go find other people with the same hobby, and um, and you still can do it, you know, so, that would help you, improve your, your, your language skills, because you have to ... Yeah.

Lora: I can always remember [teachers] tell us to make more friends with Caucasian people with Canadians right, but they just tell us they don't show, they don't show us how right. You know it's really difficult. Even if like you say "hi" to the Canadian people or the other speak, English-speaking people right, they might just say "hi" to you and that's it right (laugh). Cus' they, they know you're ESL students, yeah. Lots of them they wouldn't, even you know it's not like they're bad or anything, they're nice too, but they know you don't speak English like, at that time, you're just, you're learning, they don't want to spend the time like, talking slowly to you, yeah it really depends on person to per-

son right. So I would suggest the teacher like, to find some Canadian, who are willing to do like talk to us, yeah, who are willing to like learn from us too. Maybe they want to learn Chinese too right. Yep, that'll be a good idea. Yeah cus', it's really hard to meet someone or to find someone who's willing to like learn English slowly with you right, they just want to make friends with you but make friends is ok like "hi," "hello" like next time you see them "hi how are you " right, but after that, that's it (laugh). Yeah, you don't get into the next step.

### *Teachers Who Really Get to Know Students*

The students we interviewed spoke of the importance of teachers and tutors in their lives and learning. Most argued that they had benefited from good relationships with teachers and tutors. The best were those who (a) were able to get them talking and engaged in a conversation; (b) took time to get to know them on a personal level; and (c) offered one-on-one individualized educational and emotional support, in addition to teaching English/content. Interviewees were also aware of factors that made it difficult for teachers to engage in such relationships (limitations on teachers' time, lack of resources and/or support—especially for ESL teachers—and the effects of larger class sizes). Regardless, they urged other immigrant students to do their best to interact and develop deep and engaging relationships with teachers.

Results suggest a definition of resilience that links academic and social success to social capital and to the collaborative nature of the educational process, a process in which success or failure hinges on all participants having a chance to work together in a multi-person juggling act. The absence of such a collaborative social network leaves students isolated, much less likely to overcome the tremendous challenges of being immigrant minority language students.

### *LG: Mirrored Reflections*

This study was designed to explore issues related to the educational resilience of immigrant students who had successfully navigated courses in a language different from their own first languages, had completed secondary school, and had entered university. It was designed in response to a call for more qualitative-based detailed ethnographic designs that recognize the context that surrounds the educational experience (Breen, 1998; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Norton & Toohy, 2001). It was also designed to employ an interactive qualitative methodology or "inquiry in which researchers collect data in face-to-face situations by interacting with selected persons in their settings (field research)" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 395). McMillan and Schumacher add that the goals of such research is to explore "individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions" (p. 395). There was an additional goal: to explore differences in findings and inter-

pretations originating from the cultural differences of the researchers themselves. We explored researcher bias or the effects of a researcher's background on research findings broadly through mirrored reflection. In essence, two researchers-individuals stood on both sides of a mirror, mirroring each other's movements, and in the process helped each other see themselves through similarities and differences in their analyses.

JS and LC were present at all the interviews, either in the role of interviewer or participant observer. They each kept field notes. They each had a dataset of transcribed interviews that had been checked by participants for accuracy. They each used QSR N5 to analyze the transcripts. Data analysis, however, was completed separately, without consultation or discussion. Their findings were developed entirely separately.

There was agreement between the two that some major themes arose from the data. Both found that immigrants' initial experiences in a new country and in the school system were extremely difficult. Both found that student support systems were important, especially the family. Both found that experiences in the home country and culture were important in immigrants' journeys from one culture to another. JS noted the importance of support systems, and LC pointed out the difficulty of the conflict students experienced between their parents' expectations and the realities and expectations of the school system and Canadian culture. LC's interpretation focused on Confucian views of learning and duty to parents and family, whereas JS's interpretations focused on the social structure of support systems. LC was convinced that the data showed students had an "Asian definition" of success, that is, to achieve a high level of education and job status to be able to care for one's parents. JS found examples of North American values, that is, being successful because one is doing what one wants to do, or being successful because one has to give back to society or to participate in society. Both provided examples to support their views substantially.

Both found that students had a love-hate relationship with ESL courses. They believed that they provided important support, but they also represented a perceived roadblock to the important academic courses they required to graduate. Both also noted that there was a broader and more fundamental paradox. Students believed it was vital for them to interact with native English-speaking students, to learn both language and culture, and to respond to a great social pressure for them to fit in and a desire to belong to a community. However, both found that students had difficulty joining the main stream. Consequently, they returned to their own communities of individuals from the same cultures and first languages for support.

JS and LC disagreed, however, about the degree to which students in the study interacted with individuals from outside their own cultural and linguistic groups. LC identified it as a major factor, whereas JS thought that the

success of these students was in part due to their ability to interact with a wider variety of individuals, including native English speakers. It seems clear to LG that there were differences in findings related to the researchers' backgrounds, but then, this is his interpretation. It is also clear that there were major accords in findings. There was a particularly interesting discussion between JS and LC:

LC: In response to the comment about people who feel part of Canada despite the fact that their ethnic backgrounds are different, didn't it seem to you that most of our participants interacted very little with people outside of their ethnic backgrounds?

JS: Yes ... and no ... some of them did interact with people from outside their ethnic backgrounds, or groups where ethnicity was not the defining criteria for membership. For example, I think we saw examples of students who had formed memberships in groups where religion and similar interests were the defining criteria. In these cases, it seemed to me that their interactions were quite varied.

LC: In regards to rising above the dominant culture ... majority students may not feel that way but they are aware that they are in a culture that they feel comfortable about calling it their own, whereas immigrant students have the tendency to perceive the dominant culture as belonging to someone else.

JS: I think interactions with other students outside ethnic backgrounds were more difficult to establish, but that they were established nonetheless. That's true ... it has to do with ownership.... Or membership. Unless you are born in a community, whenever you enter a community, there will always be that feeling. As applies to the case of ILMS and it is something that is negotiated (here I go again stressing the role of interactions) when you enter a community with people inside of it.

LC: Yes, they were established, however, were close friendships established? Surely they interacted with people outside of their ethnic backgrounds every day (bus rides, shopping) but I am not sure these interactions progressed beyond the level of acquaintances.

JS: I think the interesting question that we could ask, is whether people in the majority language culture are really willing to let these guys, in give them membership. Hmmm, How about close friends that Mari reported. Or that Beth and Naomi reported. Or the fact that Robert reported that he mostly socialized with non-Koreans. There are also the deep relationships they established with teachers/tutors. These did not seem superficial.

LC: Good question, are they willing? Multiculturalism has taken a new definition to mean "non-white."

JS appeared to interpret parental findings in a positive fashion, whereas LC's findings seemed more focused on the negative consequences of parental factors. LG believes that this difference in particular can be explained by differences in the researchers' cultural backgrounds. No findings were diametrically opposed. It is also clear that the findings of this study can add in interesting ways to the research literature in student resilience.

## Conclusion

Educational resilience in the present study was defined as immigrant students who had completed high school and entered university. This is a limited definition of the term. It would be interesting, for example, to research those immigrant students who had graduated from university or those who graduated from high school and had successfully entered the work force.

Past research has identified a number of variables associated with educational resilience: social competence, problem-solving ability, autonomy, having a sense of purpose (Bernard, 1993), satisfaction with school (Reyes & Jason, 1993), and students receiving more positive feedback from teacher (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997). Waxman et al. (2003) suggest that resilience is not fixed. They conclude that some features can be successfully taught to students.

Findings of the present study add to the concept or model of educational resilience in a number of interesting ways. Immigrant students are less likely to complete high school than nonimmigrant students. In addition, educational resilience appears to differ across immigrant groups (Gunderson, 2004). Spanish-speaking students who complete high school in British Columbia are less likely to attend university than Chinese-speaking students (PAIR, 2004). LC and JS were surprised that the overwhelming majority of the volunteers in the present study were Asian. Considering the PAIR statistics, this result was not unusual.

The concept of educational resilience is one developed by researchers who have investigated the performance of students who generally come from lower socioeconomic classes in schools in inner-city neighborhoods. None of the students in the present study is representative of this population. Instead, they were immigrant students from families who had the resources to support their children's learning significantly. These students faced the incredibly difficult task of having to succeed in academic courses in a system where the language of instruction was not their first language. They were positive about tutors and teachers who seemed to have taken a special personal interest in their development. They indicated these educators were



positive influences on their school careers. However, overall, the factors that helped them to be educationally resilient are different from those factors found in other studies and therefore add significantly to the resilience model.

Students in the present study were resilient because they believed strongly in the importance of education. Indeed, this strong belief was part of their first cultural heritage. There was consensus in this study that Asian families are convinced of the importance of education and strongly influence their children toward the same view. Indeed, the predominant feature of students' resilience was a nearly overwhelming dedication to succeed in school. But there is an added feature: students in this study had access to other forms of support not readily available to students from other socioeconomic groups—their parents employed tutors.

Students in the present study sought earnestly and worked diligently to fulfill their parents' and their own expectations for success against great social and emotional odds. Most indicated that they continued to struggle in their work at university against the great odds created by studying academic courses in a second language. They were resilient, but they felt that the difficulties associated with their struggles were often nearly too much to bear. And even for members of this privileged group, life was difficult and many reported that many of their friends had failed.

Educational resilience is complex. The present study reveals that resilience may also involve culturally related beliefs and views about the value of education. These beliefs and values are extremely powerful. They propel students to sacrifice much of their social life in order to direct their energies to their studies. Economic level in this study appeared to be a significant factor, giving parents the ability to support their children's learning. It is, therefore, vital to conduct research into educational resilience in populations from lower socioeconomic immigrant groups. Indeed, we agree with Bempechat (1998) who noted, "we will learn a great deal about promoting school success by studying those students who seem to defy the odds" (p. 5).

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## Appendix: Interview Protocol

1. Please tell us about your life before coming to Canada?:
  - What languages could you speak? read? write?
  - Why did you come to Canada?
  - How did you feel about coming to Canada? (Excited, nervous, happy etc.)
  - What kind of education did you receive prior to coming to Canada?
2. Tell us what happened when you arrived in Canada?
  - How long did you wait before going to school in Canada?
  - How did your parents choose your school?
  - What were your initial reactions to your school?
3. What was it like to be an ESL student in the Vancouver area?
  - What did you think of the experience? Why?
  - Did you have to overcome any difficulties? How did you cope with them? How did you feel about that?
  - What were some of the advantages/disadvantages of the ESL program?
4. Tell us about how you studied when you were an ESL student?
  - What strategies did you use to learn English?
  - How much time did you spend doing homework?
  - Did you have any extra help (tutors, native friends, extra classes)?
5. Tell us about how you study now. Has anything changed?
  - How do you prefer to study for your school subjects? Why?
    1. Alone 2. In pairs 3. In groupsHow do you prefer to study for English?
    1. Alone 2. In pairs 3. In groups
6. What were your goals when you were an ESL student and how did you go about achieving them?
  - Was going to university one of your goals?
  - Was becoming an active member of Canadian society one of your goals?
  - Do you feel that you have achieved all/any of these goals?
  - What goals remain?
7. How would you rate your English language skills? 1=weak; 5=fluent.  
Reading: 1 2 3 4 5 Writing: 1 2 3 4 5 Listening: 1 2 3 4 5 Speaking: 1 2 3 4 5
8. Some would say that as an ex-ESL student who is now attending university, you have been quite successful. What do you think of this?
  - Would you consider yourself a successful student? Why or why not?
  - How would you define a successful student?
9. How has your own personal background influenced your success as a student?
  - Do you feel that your mother tongue helped or hindered you as an ESL student?
  - Do you feel that there were any parts of your own personal culture which have helped or hindered you?
10. Where do you feel most comfortable socializing?
  - At UBC? Where?
  - Outside of UBC? Where?
11. With whom do you feel most comfortable socializing?

- Do you find yourself socializing with members of your own linguistic background?  
Yes or no? Why?
- 12. Which language do you feel most comfortable socializing in?
  - When you are angry or upset, which language do you use to express yourself?
  - Which language do you think best suit your personality?
- 13. In terms of your values and lifestyle, do you view yourself as:\_\_\_\_\_. Why?  
For example: Chinese, Canadian, Chinese-Canadian, Canadian-Chinese
- 14. Has English helped you to become a Canadian? How/Why not?
  - When you speak English, do you feel like a Canadian?
  - When you speak English, does it remind you that English is not your first language?
- 15. What advice would you give to other ESL students now in the same situation as you once were and who would also like one day to be able to attend university in Canada?
  - Is there anything you did when you were in school that you would really recommend to someone else?
  - Is there anything you did which you would not recommend to someone else?
- 16. What advice would you give to instructors who work with ESL students?
  - Was there anything that an instructor ever did which you felt made a big difference in helping you succeed and integrate as a student/Canadian?
  - Was there anything that an instructor ever did that you felt was particularly destructive or negative?
  - Was there anything that you wish instructors had done which was not done?
- 17. What advice would you give to parents of ESL students?
  - Was there anything that your parents ever did which you felt made a big difference in helping you succeed and integrate as a student/Canadian?
  - Was there anything that your parents ever did that you felt was particularly destructive or negative?
  - Was there anything that you wish your parents had done which was not done?