Teacher Strategies for Supporting Chinese Immigrant Students in Toronto Public Elementary Schools: Overcoming Challenges Caused by Cultural Transition, Parenting Styles and Personality.

By

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Abstract

With the increasing number of immigrant Chinese students studying in Toronto public schools, different kinds of challenges appear especially during the first school year. Those challenges prevent newcomer students from flourishing academically and socially. However, these students’ voices and difficulties have not been valued. This paper will specifically categorize the difficulties that newcomer Chinese students meet and points out the cultural, parental influence and personality factors contributing to these challenges. Most importantly, this study provides some coping strategies for classroom teachers to help newly arrived immigrant Chinese students to go through the first year of studying in Canadian public kindergarten and elementary schools. A qualitative study was conducted, including two semi-structured interviews of two teachers in Toronto public schools. The interviews reveal that Chinese parents tend to compare their child’s academic performance with peers and with the marks, their child earned in China. However, the two participants believed that culture was not a deciding factor causing challenges to newcomer Chinese students and lead to different academic and social behaviors in Toronto public kindergartens and elementary schools.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Research Study:

According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, mainland China had been the number one source of immigrants in Canada from 1998 to 2009. Many of these Chinese immigrants came with children since the children’s education was considered one of the most significant reasons why many Chinese families gave up their comfortable life in China and immigrated to Canada to form a fresh start. Paralleling with immigrants from other nations, a large proportion of Chinese immigrants chose to settle in Toronto. This trend had leaded to an increasing proportion of Chinese students in Toronto schools. A demographic study conducted by TDSB (Toronto District School Board) in 2013 suggested that 20% of students from JK to Grade 6 in TDSB were born outside of Canada, among which 4% of students came from China. Undoubtedly, these newcomer kindergarten and elementary students had experienced a variety of difficulties during the transitional period. However, the voice of those young children had been undervalued.

Personal Background and Interest in This Area:

After teaching English in China for over 13 years, I moved to Canada about two years ago with my husband and my four-year-old daughter. Indeed, much like other Chinese families, my daughter was the main reason why my family gave up our comfortable life in China and moved to Toronto. I imagined that she would be thrilled to learn in such a relaxing and fun atmosphere since she complained about not having enough time to play in her former kindergarten in China. However, the reality contradicted with my anticipation. During the first three months of studying in a public Junior Kindergarten in
North York region in Toronto, my daughter experienced isolation from her peers, loss of self-esteem and demonstrated violent behaviors, such as biting or kicking. Even though such violent behaviors disappeared by the end of the fourth month of her staying in junior kindergarten, it still made me to doubt our decision of moving to Toronto. Those three months had been the darkest moments of my life, which I would never hope to go through again.

I was worried that my daughter was an exceptional case during the transition from one country to another. Nevertheless, after many conversations with newcomer Chinese mothers, I learned that the majority of their children shared similar experiences. Such experiences made parents wonder whether moving to Toronto had more negative than positive impacts on their child’s education and well-being.

As a teacher candidate, I sincerely hoped that I could provide some help to these newcomer families, especially to these vulnerable students in kindergartens or elementary schools as they go through this transitional period.

The purpose of this qualitative research is to describe the challenges (caused by cultural adjustments and different parenting styles) encountered by newly immigrated Chinese students studying in Toronto public kindergartens and elementary schools. I hope that my research could categorize the specific difficulties those newcomer students may face, provide reasons behind these difficulties and offer some strategies for school teachers to use in their classroom.
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My Central Question:

What are some strategies that schoolteachers could apply in helping newly immigrant Chinese students to overcome challenges caused by cultural transition in Canadian public kindergartens and elementary schools?

Three Sub Questions:

What challenges did newly immigrant Chinese students face during the first 6 months after they began their study in Toronto public kindergartens and elementary schools?

What factors contributed to those challenges?

What strategy have teachers been applying in helping newcomer Chinese students in Toronto kindergartens and elementary schools?

Overview:

Chapter 1 includes the introduction and purpose of the study, the research questions, as well as how I came to be involved in this topic and study. In chapter 2, I review the literature on differences with education-related Chinese culture and Western Culture and influences of Chinese parental styles, compared with western counterparts. In addition, my literacy review covers mainstream classroom teaches’ strategies to help these newcomer Chinese students. Chapter 3 provides the methodology and procedure used in this study including information about the sample participants and data collection instruments. Chapter 4 identifies the participants in the study and describes the data as it addresses the research question. Chapter 5 includes limitations of the study, conclusions,
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recommendations for practice, and further reading and study. References and a list of appendixes follow at the end.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

1. Comparison between Chinese Education Culture and Western Education Culture:

History Background of Chinese Education-related Culture:

When Chinese culture is being mentioned, it mostly refers to Confucianism. According to Chen (2009), Confucianism was adopted as the official ethical and philosophical system around 200 BC government in the Han dynasty. Then, Confucius created a school and in Confucius’ lifetime, over 3000 students were believed to have been educated there. After his death, 72 of his direct students continued his legacy and continued the Confucius School. Later on, the imperial examinations, which started in 606 BC, selected government officials and were based on the teachings of Confucius. This continued until 1905 (Palmer, 2003).

The Imperial Examination has great influence upon Chinese formal education. Palmer (2003) describes one belief that the strict focus on memorizing the classics stagnated China’s advancement in science and technology by limiting innovative thinkers. With the passage of time, Confucianism was interwoven with Buddhism, which spread from India. This combination of Religion and Confucius education value stressed the value of the memorization of the beliefs and teachings of Confucius and now Buddha.

Ever since, Confucius had enjoyed a dominant position aspect of Chinese life. The situation changed at the later stage of the reign in Qing dynasty (1644-1912) due to the invasion by western countries and Russia and Japan. The second period that
Confucianism was being challenged was during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). In modern China, there is a revival of interest in Confucian classics among scholars and the public alike (Li, 2007) as cited in (Covent, 2013).

In Western culture, Socrates (469-3999BCE), who taught Plato who in turn taught Aristotle, was the comparative figure just like Confucius to Chinese culture. Palmer (2003) describes how the teachings of Socrates, as described through Plato’s dialogues, are believed to have given rise to the Socratic Method, which is still used today in Western education institutions and schools. This method involves using a series of questions aiming to dig deeper to get at the heart of the matter. However, asking questions of children is simply and more broadly a part of Canadian and other Western Cultures. This basis is of questioning the world around you and applying inductive and deductive. This style of teaching can be very antagonistic, necessitates that students think for themselves, and permits the students to question their instructor (Palmer, 2003). Socrates himself was known by the world for talking to people in the streets and asking them questions seemingly endlessly. He used methods of inductive and deductive reasoning that have come to form the basis of sound arguments in science and mathematics. The Socratic Method does not rely on memorization as the Chinese method did, but rather, on exploring all possible links and connections to a topic (Covent, 2013).

Reasoning to argument formation is the basis of the Socratic Method, and it is included in the modern Canadian classroom from elementary school (Tweed and Lehman, 2002).
use of inductive and deductive reasoning did not come directly from Socrates, but was greatly influenced by him.

**Individualism and Collectivism**

In the literature on the differences between Western and Chinese education culture, many discussions focused on the comparison between individualism and collectivism (Chen, 2009). Western culture is typically characterized by individualism; while Chinese culture is represented as collectivism (Liang, 1975) as cited in (Chi, 2012) provided greater insights into this issue by exploring the social and political factors that contributed to the formation of such characteristics. He said that individualism and collectivism were in fact, two sides of a coin, and should not be viewed as opposite entities. In Chinese society, due to the lack of collective life, family members have developed close ties, and the individual’s rights were expected to give way to the whole family’s interests. In other words, the highly demanding duties and responsibilities of the family made up for the vacuum caused by the absence of collective life in the Chinese society. While in the Western society, it is a different story. The importance of collective life helped breed the sense of individualism, which means that an individual would practice his/her rights in the collective life (Chen et al., 2009).

**Respectful Learning and Self-generated Knowledge**

According to Tweed & Lehman (2002), Confucius emphasized the importance of “respecting and obeying the authoritative figures”. Confucius believed that students could learn from models with higher virtues by observing. Then, students can gradually develop
such virtues. As a result, students were encouraged to locate a figure who was so much superior to themselves and tried to learn from that figure by imitation.

Confucius also stressed that students did not need to concentrate on “questioning, evaluating and generating knowledge” (Tweed and Lehman, 2002). The reason is that Confucius believed that “worthy masters” (Tweed and Lehman, 2002) had already known the important truths. If students learned from those masters, they did not need to question the masters and seek the truth individually.

On the contrary, Tweed and Lehman (2002) also stated that Socrates “held self-generated knowledge in great esteem” and he stated that he did not teach students anything. Socrates just asked the right questions to probe the people, even a slave boy, to self-generate knowledge. Such knowledge was different from “beliefs that have been accepted from others”. Each person has to pursue the truth by himself instead of believing that truth is “prescribed by authority figures nor socially negotiated”. (Tweed and Lehman, 2002)

The focus on respectful learning may explain why Chinese students demonstrate a lack of independence and seem more obedient compared with Canadian counterparts.

2. Parental Influence:

Direct or Indirect Pathways
Parents play a significant role in children’s lives. Especially when children emigrate from China to Canada, they lose contacts with friends, grandparents; parents become the only source of trust and reliance. Research has suggested that parents have the capacity to influence children’s social development in two areas, both direct and indirect pathways (McHale et al., 2003). The direct pathway of social development refers to parents’ actively selecting, modifying or structuring children’s social environment to facilitate their peer relationships and interactions (Bronson, 2000) as cited in (Chen, et al., 2009). Parents may arrange schedules for children’s social activities, or provide instrumental support such as giving children rides to places (Bronson, 2000) as cited in (Chen, et al., 2009). Parents may also act as advisors or teachers in the family. Specifically, parents may enhance children’s social skills by giving them advice or discussing appropriate ways to interact with their peers in social activities (McHale et al., 2003).

On the other hand, the indirect pathways of social development include parent-child interactions, parenting styles, and an environment, which set the stage for later social development (McHale et al., 2003). For example, parents who have a close relationship with their children may provide a secure emotional base for their children to develop new social relationships outside of the home (McHale et al., 2003). Parents may also foster children’s social development by serving as a model through positive daily interactions with their children (Arthur et al., 1999) as cited in (Chen, et al., 2009).

**Social Economic Status**

In addition, the socioeconomic conditions of the family influence the amount of resources and opportunities available for children in their development (Conger & Dogan, 2007) as
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cited in (Cheah et al., 2009). The term SES has been loosely defined to indicate the levels of parental occupation, education, income, or a combination of these variables (Hoff-Ginsberg & Tardif, 1995) as cited in (Cheah et al., 2009). Many newly immigrated Chinese parents have lower SES compared with their EMS in China, which causes difficulties for fostering their children’s development. When Chinese parents immigrated to Toronto, it is rather difficult for them to get a job in their fields, because most of them lack the Canadian Qualification and working experience in Canada. Some of them are forced to undertake labor work with minimum wages.

Parental SES may influence levels of parental warmth in the family. Kohn (1979) as cited in (Cheah et al., 2009) suggested that compared with working-class parents, middle-class parents tend to be more supportive and concerned about children’s psychological states. Working-class parents, in contrast, are usually reported to be restrictive, value more conformity to authority, and set constraints on their children (Kohn, 1979) as cited in (Cheah et al., 2009). One explanation for lower-SES parents being more restrictive than higher-SES parents is that they need to do so to protect their children in unsafe (poor living areas) living environments (Kelley, Sanchez-Hucles, & Walker, 1993) as cited in (Cheah et al., 2009). Therefore; we can conclude that children in lower-SES families experience a lower level of parental warmth than those in higher-SES families.

Authoritative Parenting

Parental style is different in Chinese families compared with Canadian counterparts. In individualistic contexts, Baumrind’s (1971) as cited in (Cheah et al., 2009) stated that authoritative parenting style stressed the importance of being warm to children and
showing acceptance, and providing regulation which at the same time give children chances to reason and defend themselves. Also, autonomy granting, has been found to be associated with children’s early social engaging, cooperating, and showing moral concern for others people’s interests. However, “authoritarian parenting style” involves control children by physical force, use hostile language towards children, and regulation without any reasoning, which is associated with children’s aggressive behaviors and problems adjusting to the school or to the society. (Robinson, & Olsen, 2003). Parents in Mainland China have been found to apply more directive parenting style and lack to include the expression of warmth (i.e., authoritarian), which parallels with traditional Confucian beliefs of unemotional reservedness (Wu et al., 2002) as cited in (Cheah et al., 2009).

Similarly, X. Chen, Dong, and Zhou (1997) as cited in (Cheah et al., 2009) found that authoritative parenting was positively associated with Chinese children’s social ability, acceptance among peers, achievement at school, and outstanding studentship, and was negatively related to some difficulties when socializing with other students at school.

In the study conducted by Chen (2009), they predicted several reasons why mothers of immigrant Chinese children would tend to apply high levels of authoritative parenting. First, Jose, Huntsinger, & Liaw (2000) observed that Chinese American parents showed authoritative parenting style while their child is playing, accompanied with high levels of warmth and firm control towards their preschoolers. Second, their sample of mothers had received high level of education, which had been found to be associated with greater preferences of using authoritative parenting style in Chinese families as well as families from other cultural groups (Xu et al., 2005). Finally, in Chinese culture, children under
age of 6 should be treated with leniency and indulgence because children at this age (under 6 years old) is regarded as in the condition of not being able of have a great understanding of things and therefore should not be punished for their misbehavior (Ho, 1989) as cited in (Cheah et al., 2009). Instead, a lot of direction and guidance from parents should be given regarding the appropriate behavior (Cheah & Rubin, 2003, 2004) as cited in (Cheah et al., 2009).

When children pass 6 years of age, the attitudes of parenting change and Chinese parents tend to apply stricter discipline towards their children.

3. Chinese Children’s Characteristics:

Chinese children in Canada can be divided into two categories: children who are given birth in the Canada and children who emigrate from mainland China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan. Researchers have found that first-generation immigrant Chinese children are more likely to respect traditional Chinese values such as shouldering more family responsibility, and having a tendency to obtain better academic achievement, compared with American- or Canadian-born Chinese children (Chao, 2001). However, immigrant Chinese children tend to suffer from more psychological problems, such as experiencing different levels of depression and losing self-esteem (Harris, 1999). Even after controlling for parental education and income, the generational differences in academic performance and psychological adjustment in Chinese children remain magnificent.

Another factor may cause immigrant Chinese children to be attached with negative self-perceptions and feelings is that those children encounter difficulties during the transition
to the new environment (Harris, 1999). Compared with Canadian-born counterparts, immigrant Chinese children are likely to experience different socialization processes because they are expected to develop different social skills. Different from western countries, in Chinese society, the goal of socialization is to assist children to build up qualities which are conductive in group functioning. (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2002). For example, children in China are encouraged to learn to control themselves and develop group-oriented behaviors such as compliance and obedience to authority (Chen et al., 2003). Behaviors like shy, wary and anxious behaviors are endorsed by traditional Chinese cultures (Chen, Wang, & DeSouza, 2006). Nevertheless, such behaviors are regarded socially incompetent and maladaptive in North America (Rubin, Burgess, & Coplan, 2002), as cited in (Chen & Tse, 2010). Although recent findings indicate that dramatic changes toward the market-oriented economy in China have resulted in the “declined adjustment status of shy-sensitive children” (Chen, Cen, Li, & He, 2005) as cited in (Chen & Tse, 2010), the traditional culture maybe robust and continue to have great influence on Chinese Children’s development (Chen & Wang, 2009).

During the process of socialization, immigrant Chinese children tend to follow the expectations and requirements in Chinese culture in which they had been exposed to since they were born and before they immigrate to Canada. These children may maintain the attitudes and behaviors they have learned in China after immigration, at least for a certain period. These attitudes and behaviors remained may trigger challenges in social interactions because their behavioral styles may be perceived and responded to differently by other children. (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006) as cited in (Cheah et al., 2009). Certain behaviors, such as restrained and nonassertive may be acceptable in
China. However, peers in Canadian schools may not view these behaviors as appropriate. As a result, immigrant children may be regarded by others as deviant or incompetent and may be rejected or isolated by peers. These difficulties associated with socialization may lead to social dissatisfaction and negative self-feelings in immigrant Chinese students (Zhou, 1997). These social and emotional adjustment difficulties of immigrant Chinese children may be aggravated by other factors related to the transition to the new society (Zhou et al., 2003).

Furthermore, children born in Canada often form and maintain stable social networks in school, while immigrant Chinese children need to re-build their social relationships and even require new support systems. The difficulties in socializations and language barriers may prevent immigrant Chinese children from effectively communicating and showing their strengths in academic or social settings. Moreover, the foreign accent and different lifestyle may worsen their social adjustment difficulties (Zhou, 1997).

4. Teacher Strategies: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

In a multicultural classroom, (in which there are students from a variety of backgrounds, races, languages, ethnicities, and social groups), teachers should apply Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. Geneva (2000) set the definition of culturally relevant pedagogy as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them”.

Value Students’ Prior Experience and Knowledge
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According to Cummins et al (2006), “prior knowledge refers not just to information or skills previously acquired in a transmission-oriented instructional sequence but also to the totality of the experiences that have shaped the learner’s identity and cognitive functioning.” Even at the age of four or five, the English language learners did not come to Canada in blank slates. They bring their life experiences, their unique culture and language backgrounds to schools in Canada, which “makes them anything but a homogeneous group” (Handscombe, 1994) as cited in (Many Roots, 2005). Indeed, Chinese students bring to the classroom a unique set of previous experiences that often stem from their background (Jao, 2012) as cited in (Cummins, 2005).

Donovan and Bransford (2005, p. 4) as cited in (Cummins, 2005) point out that “new understandings are constructed on a foundation of existing understandings and experiences” (emphasis original). Prior knowledge, skills, beliefs, and concepts have great impact on what learners notice about their learning environment, how they categorize and explain their observations.

First Language Use in the Mainstream Classroom

The 2006 Ontario Ministry of Education publication Many Root, Many Voices states:

“If students are encouraged to maintain and develop proficiency in their first language while learning English, they benefit academically and socially, and their self-esteem is enhanced, when they are encouraged to. Research shows that language skills and conceptual knowledge are generally transferable from one language to another. First languages, therefore, provide a foundation for developing proficiency in additional languages. First languages also help students preserve vital links with their families and cultural backgrounds and a solid sense of their own identity.”

“Students’ first languages have an important place alongside English. Encourage English language learners to use their first languages in the classroom, as well as in
homework assignments. This will enhance their development of English language proficiency, support their sense of identity and self-confidence, and promote positive attitudes towards language learning among all students, including English speakers.”

In addition, schools can assist the transition of knowledge, ideas and feeling between home and school and across languages students use by welcoming a student’s home language (Cummins, et al., 2005)

Furthermore, by welcoming the first language (Chinese), classroom teachers can reduce the stress on ELL students caused by language barriers. So that these students only need to concentrate on developing their understanding on academic contents. After the contents related knowledge and skills are solidified, students can transfer them into an English context to develop their English language abilities (Gutstein, Lipman, Hernandez, & de los Reyes, 1997; Moschkovich, 2000) as cited in (Cummins, 2005).

**Use a dual-language approach**

Many Roots, Many Voices (2006) suggested, “As many everyday classroom activities and assignments can be adapted and enriched by allowing students to approach them using more than one language. Inviting students to use their first language as well as English enables them to draw on their strengths, including their existing academic, linguistic, and cultural knowledge.” For example, mainstream classroom teachers can give instructions in dual language and create “Dual Language Showcase Project” (Cummins, 2005, p. 589). Teachers can also encourage students to write dual language books by translation from the native language to the L2 (an additional language) (Babaee,
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2008)” or other multimedia and multilingual projects such as iMovie’s, PowerPoint presentations, etc. in dual-languages” (Cummins, 2005, p. 558).
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Procedure:

This research was conducted under the guidance of the Master of Teaching program in the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. It was a qualitative research by nature because the research begins with assumptions. Then the research uses an “emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establish patterns or themes” (Cresswell, 2013). The purpose of this research was to draw expertise experience in some areas of two teachers in Toronto, and provide help for teachers who teach classrooms with a high population of immigrant Chinese students. Semi-structured interviews with 12 prescribed questions were conducted to collect the primary data, which was digitally recorded and then transcribed. Even though the direction of this research had been targeted before entering this program, specific areas of this research were narrowed down and changed a few times based on pre-existing literature reviews and practical applications in real classroom settings.

Participants:

Due to the limited number of participants in this research, it was essential to identify and select two candidates with experiences of teaching newly immigrated Chinese students in Toronto kindergarten and elementary classrooms. One of them is a grade 3 teacher, Mary, with 12 years of teaching experience in a classroom with a high percentage of immigrant Chinese students, while the other one, Rose, is a new teacher with 2 full years of
kindergarten teaching experience with approximately one third of students are from China. Since the researcher assumes that new and experienced teachers apply different strategies in helping a particular group of students, the researcher hopes to find the differences, in coping strategies to help immigrated Chinese students, between teachers at different stages in their teaching career. In addition, these two participants are from two different schools with a different percentage of immigrant Chinese students located in the North York region of Toronto. The reason for choosing these two different Canadian schools is that immigrated Chinese kindergarten and elementary students have a different school atmosphere, with more or less familiar faces, and familiar language speakers accompanying them, especially at the early months of arriving in Canadian Kindergarten classrooms. The challenges those students face within these two schools were expected to vary.

**Instruments of Data Collection:**

The sources of data of this qualitative research were collected from two semi-structured in person fact to face interviews. These two interviews were conducted in early January and early February. The 12 questions were sent to the participants a week prior to the interview, which would provide participants time to think the questions thoroughly. The interviews were recorded then analyzed. Prior to the interview, the participants were informed that they could stop the interview or withdraw this research at any time.

**Data Collection and Analysis**
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After each interview was conducted, it was promptly transcribed. Then I began to read and reread the transcribed interview data. I used different colored highlighter markers (or underlined, used asterisks, made charts or tables, etc.) to highlight the important quotes and insights in the interview data. I made notes to myself as I went along. Since the literature review was used as a guide when constructing interview questions, it was also used as a guide when identifying recurrent themes in the interview data. Many themes that arose in the current literature were also evident in the findings of my interviews. There are five themes or ideas that continued to appear throughout the interviews. The first theme is on challenges newly immigrant kindergarten and primary school students face. The second theme was on stages newly immigrant kindergarten and primary school students experience during the first six months.

The third theme was on newcomer Chinese students’ performances academically and socially. The fourth theme focuses on factors contributed to these challenges, stages and performances. And the last theme was on teachers’ coping strategies to help newcomer Chinese primary and kindergarten students.

**Strengths**

One of the strengths of this research is the focus on immigrated Chinese kindergarten and elementary students. The top is highly focused and specifically targeted. Students in this study are between four to twelve years of age. This focus will help teachers identify coping strategies and parents of this particular age group of immigrated Chinese students to understand the Canadian education and understand the challenges their child is facing.
Ethical Review Procedure

Prior to this qualitative research study, an ethical review has already been conducted by the review board for the Master of Teaching Program. It stated that data were only collected from participants who are educators working at schools, including teachers, staff and principals. Interviewees were contacted in advance. With the acceptance of being interviewed, the participants were presented with a letter of informed consent. The interviews were conducted outside of school time and at the participant’s convenience. The participants were also informed that they could stop the interview and withdraw from the study completely at any time. A draft of the Letter of Informed Consent has been attached in Appendix A.

Limitations:

According to the “Guidelines for Research Projects Master of Teaching (MTRPS) 2013-2014” document, “the research will be qualitative (not quantitative) where [student] will interview 2 or 3 teachers who are strong (e.g., exemplary) in a particular area.” This guideline restricted the researcher to interview parents of newly immigrated Chinese students who were studying in Toronto kindergarten and elementary classrooms. Their voice cannot be reviewed in this study. However, the different parental style and expectations play an extremely important role in children’s cultural transition. The researcher could only obtain information from educator’s perspectives.
Chapter 4: Findings

This MTRP examined challenges that newly immigrant Chinese students face, factors contributed to these challenges and coping strategies the classroom teachers used in Toronto elementary schools. The chapter 4 outlines the overall findings from the data collected during two face to face interviews. The first interview was approximately 28 minutes long. The second interview lasted about 33 minutes. The questions can be found in Appendix B. The two interviews were digitally recorded and were promptly transcribed and meticulously analyzed for common themes and ideas.

The two participants are TDSB elementary school teachers. The first teacher, Mary, has been teaching kindergarten for two years after she graduated from University in 2012. Now Mary is teaching HSP in the morning and special education in the afternoon. The second participant, Rose, currently teaches grade 3. She has been teaching for 13 years. The first reason why I chose those two participants was that I would like to compare the insights of a new teacher and an experienced teacher in terms of strategies of helping newly immigrant Chinese students. Another reason why I chose Mary and Rose was that the schools where they teach are in North York region with a large population of Chinese, especially newly immigrant Chinese families.

Several themes emerged during the interviews and those themes have been categorized to present the ideas in a more cohesive manner. The thematic groups are arranged as follows:

- Challenges newly immigrant kindergarten and primary school students face
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- Stages newly immigrant kindergarten and primary school students experience during the first six months
- Factors contributed to these challenges, stages and performances
- Teacher’s coping strategies to help newcomer Chinese primary and kindergarten students

Challenges newly immigrant kindergarten and primary school students face

Language Barrier

During the two interviews, both of the participants were asked to identify the difficulties newly immigrant Chinese students face in the first six months after beginning school in Canada. The two teachers pointed out the biggest challenge was the language barrier. Both of the teachers expressed that insufficient English made it impossible for newcomer Chinese students to understand the teacher’s instructions and deprived newcomer students’ confidence to participate in class. Mary stated, “To them (newcomer Chinese students), just the teacher is opening her mouth. They have no clue what is going on because they cannot understand the language.” Rose supported this idea, “They (newcomer Chinese students) do not have the vocabulary. They do not have enough words to tell you what they want to say. That is the biggest frustration.” Those newcomer Chinese students were unable to communicate with the teacher and the peers “because they (newcomer Chinese students) understand if they communicate, they are not getting anything back because the teacher or other students cannot understand them.”

Not only do immigrant Chinese students lack the ability to communicate with teachers and peers about the academic related topics, but also they lack the ability to ask questions.
about the basic needs due to the language barrier. For example, they might not be able ask the teacher to use the washroom. According to the Rose: “They (immigrant Chinese students) are scared. They will not ask the teacher to go to the washroom. Sometimes even in grade 3, they have accidents because they are afraid to ask the teacher to go to the washroom. And it happens all the time. (They are afraid to ask questions about) Something simple, (like) asking the teacher to go to the washroom.” Insufficient English vocabulary prevent newcomer Chinese students from addressing even basic needs such as using the washroom, let alone expressing their opinions and communicating with peers and teachers.

Culture Shock

Both participants agreed that newly immigrant Chinese students experienced a stage of Culture Shock. According to Rose, “It is a new country. It is a new school. They (newcomer Chinese students) have no clue what is going on. They might hear one or two words they understand. But it is usually a big shock. And some of them are nervous; some of them get anxious.” Mary shared this opinion, “Chinese students come from a more homogeneous environment in China when it comes to the culture. So when they come here to the Canada, they see different cultures, you know, people. It is a lot of stimulus taking.” The gap between the familiar homogeneous Chinese culture and diversified Canadian culture is significant. Newcomer Chinese students tend to be overwhelmed by Canadian traditions such as celebrations. As Mary mentioned, “In the sudden, they (newcomer Chinese students) have been told about all the traditions we have here and things we celebrate. However, they might not have been exposed to those
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things. It is kind of a lot of things to take in the first 3 months.” Indeed, accepting the traditions and celebrations may be difficult for a Chinese student who just arrived at a Canadian school.

_Different School Atmosphere_

- **Routine**

Newcomer Chinese students might be confused about the routine of Canadian school. As Mary stated, “They do not understand why we have to stand still during the Canadian Anthem. They were standing there, staring at other students singing. They looked so puzzled and even scared. They did not know what was going on why all of a sudden everyone stops everything and begins to sing.”, Rose told the researcher. It is no wonder that new immigrant Chinese students feel puzzled because they have never heard the Canadian National Anthem and they did not know what the expected behavior is during the singing or playing of the Canadian National Anthem.

Another routine that puzzled newcomer Chinese students was recess. In China, after every period of 45 minutes, students have a recess of 10 minutes. Then after the two periods in the morning, they have a break around 20 minutes. During the recess, they can go to the washroom and play with peers. Usually students are not allowed to raise their hand and ask the teacher to go to the washroom because students are expected to go to the washroom during the break between every period. It is a different situation in Canadian schools. “It seems that they do not understand why we only have one recess in the morning and they do not know when to go to washroom,” commented
Mary. Undoubtedly, even the routine of Canadian school is puzzling to newly immigrant Chinese students.

- **Group Work vs Individual One on One Task**
  When asked about the students’ performances during group work, the two teachers commented that newcomer Chinese primary students do not have enough experience in group work. Rose stated that Chinese newcomer students seemed “confused and lost” during the group work. In addition, they tend to be quiet during the group work. Mary said, “in terms of group work, I find those students who might not be confident in the group. But when I am sitting beside them one on one, they are more confident. Therefore, they are just afraid of making mistakes in front of their friends. But when you are talking to them, I find I can get more from them if it is just one on one.” It is Chinese culture of afraid of losing face prevent some of Chinese students from participating during the group work.

- **Paper vs Hands on Tasks**
  In China, students rarely have chances to do hands on activities. Most of time during the class, students just sit in rows, listening to the teacher, writing down the notes or copying words on the blackboard. Their work is paper based. When new Chinese students arrive in Canada they feel more comfortable with paper-based tasks assigned by the teacher. It is just Mary stated that new immigrant Chinese students are “more successful with pen/paper tasks.” After those immigrant Chinese students studied in Canadian school for a few months, those students became more comfortable with hands on activities and make improvement in those areas. Rose commented “However, I also noticed that with time, they (newly immigrant Chinese
students) also flourish with music and other play based, you know, play based environment in the kindergarten, explained this idea. Unfortunately, Mary did not mention this point.

Less Family Support

During the interviews, both teachers pointed out that many Chinese parents did not have enough English language skills to provide help to their child. “I find that with newly immigrant families from China, even parents do not have a lot of experience with English. Sometimes they say to me “I do not know how to help my child because I do not even understand”. Therefore, I think that is why sometimes parents get frustrated. ”, commented Rose. Just like their child, immigrant Chinese parents are experiencing different culture and language when they arrive in Canada. It is also the time for parents to adjust to life in Canada. Naturally, they could only provide limited help to their child in this new country with the new language.

Stages newly immigrant kindergarten and primary school students experience during the first 6 months.

Silence, Observation, Imitation, Participation

When asked about different stages that new immigrant Chinese students experienced during the first 6 months after they arrived in Canadian public kindergarten and elementary schools, both of the teachers mentioned that students were very quiet due to limited or no understanding of the English language. Then, they spent time observing; they used their eyes to watch what their teacher was doing and what their English-speaking peers were doing. They listened to the language that their peers
were using and tried to understand the teacher’s instructions by careful observation. According Rose, “I found Chinese immigrant students always, or not only Chinese students, ESL, they will observe. They will watch more. It is not they do not want to do it, they just not always understand what they need to do. They just watch more as opposed to participating more.” During the observation, newcomer Chinese students tried to imitate their teacher and their peers. After imitation, the newcomer Chinese students began to participate in class activity. “I find once they (new immigrant Chinese students) found more comfortable. Then they start to participate slowly. ”, Rose told the researcher.

This opinion echo was echoed by Mary, “So they kind of go through this silent stage, watching everything around them, listening to everything around them and they will start to pick up things and try to start speaking with their peers, with their teacher.” New immigrant Chinese students experience the stages of silence, observation, imitation, and participation within the six months or a year after they attend Canadian public kindergarten and elementary school.

Factors contributed to these challenges

*Shifted Family Dynamics and Different Parenting Styles*

Many Chinese families choose to send one parent and the child to Canada, while another parent stays in China working and paying for the family. This situation is particular popular in the school in which Rose is teaching. Rose commented, “At least in our school, we have a transient community. By transient, I mean one parent
is still in China, and the other parent is here with grandma or grandpa.” The
newcomer child has lost the stability of their family and the responsibility of taking
care of the child sometimes shifted to the grandparents since the one parent in
Canada sometimes had to work as well. Nevertheless, the grandparents did not have
enough English language skills to take care of the grandchild. “I find grandparents
usually do not speak English. When they are taking care of grandchildren, or the
students, how are the grandparents teaching or helping?” worried Rose. Naturally,
newcomer Chinese students did not get enough support at home compared with their
peers.

When asked to comparing Chinese parenting styles with parenting styles from other
ethnical family, the two participants gave slightly divergent responses. Mary told the
researcher that Chinese parents like to compare their child’s academic level with
peers; they would like to know “Where their child is at so they can now where to
move for the next step”. As for the parents of Rose, she felt that newcomer Chinese
parents care more about their child’s marks. “They (parents) want the numbers and
letters. They want A+. They want 100%. They pushed, and they pushed.” Rose also
mentioned that newly immigrant Chinese parents liked to compare their child’s
marks in Canada with the ones in China. Parents often asked the teacher B, “Why
did my child not get A+? My child got A+ in China when they were in grade 2.” The
high expectations about the child’s marks tend to “add more pressure to their newly
immigrant child.” added Rose. Rose also noticed that Chinese parent’s tend to
compare their child’s marks in Canada with their marks in China. Parents concern
center on students’ marks and the extra “push” definitely adds extra pressure to newly immigrated Chinese students.

However, Rose believed that all parents were the same no matter what country they were originally from. “All parents want the same thing from their children. “Rose commented, “We all want our children to be successful under any circumstance.” Even so, Rose admitted that newly immigrant Chinese parents are more concerned about their child’s academic performance. She said, “It all depends on some sacrifices parents made. To bring their child, their family to Canada to live, what they have to sacrifice in their country to come here. If parents had invested all this time and money to bring their child here to get a Canadian Education then chances are that parents are going to push their child a little bit more to be more successful. To give them everything they need to be successful, to learn English. Otherwise, why would you come all the way here to do that?” Rose held the view that it was the sacrifice Chinese parents made in order to come to Canada made them to push their child further. Nevertheless, Rose believed that for grade 3 students, she cared more about the progress each individual student made from one term to another.

**Different School Atmosphere**

The atmosphere in Chinese schools is different from the atmosphere in Canadian schools. It is teacher-centered instead of student-centered. As Rose stated, “But in Taiwan, it is very strict. They (students) sit in rows. The teacher stands in the front, teaches everything. They (students) just sit quietly. However, Canadian teachers are very
interactive. We incorporate many hands on activities. There is also a little bit of student first hand explorations. So (just) even the teaching methods are different. So I find when you know that, when you have children coming in, and Chinese immigrants. They are not necessarily exposed this kind of teaching methods. So it is new for them”. It is true that in Chinese schools, students are mostly being taught by teachers. They lack the initiative to explore, to think or to experiment. Also, when a Chinese student has already been educated in China, they were used to this kind of teacher-centered teaching methodology, which would add difficulty when they began their studies in Toronto. Rose commented, “By grade 3, they have already had the experience to grow up in Asian country. Coming to Canada, the teaching method is different. So not only are they coming to a new country, learning about the country, but also they are learning a new way of how the teacher will teach them.”

The difference between Chinese education system and Canadian education system is “huge” according to Mary. In China, it is a standardized education system. All students from the same grade in one province use the same textbooks and take the same test at the fixed date. It is just Mary commented, “I am just assuming, the content, the curriculum are very standardized there.” However, in Toronto, teachers have more freedom to choose materials to cover the curriculum expectations. Mary told the researcher, “We have a curriculum. That is something expected. But every teacher does kind of differently, expect different things. There is no real standardized type way of teaching. So that may be something is a shock for them (students) as well. ”. The shifted education system add difficulties to newcomer Chinese students. “They (Chinese immigrant
students) have been kind of used to the structure. Here is a little bit less structured. ” , commented by Mary.

*Students’ Unique Personality and Different Learning Habits*

The two teachers firmly believed that students’ learning-styles and study habits, their performances during the group work and participation in the class mainly depend on their personality. The native language of students’ speaking or the culture that they are from is not a deciding factor. If the student has an introvert personality, he or she might keep quiet during the group work or reluctant to participate in class discussion. On the contrary, if the student is outgoing, he or she will participate more when their English are improved. Mary stated, “I truly believe that work habits and learning style are largely based on the personality of individual. You know whether they are introverted or extroverted. I have seen Chinese students excel in both settings.”

Similarly, Rose told the researcher, “It more depends on students, their disposition, and personality. Not so much necessarily the language they are speaking per say.” Rose also mentioned that students would continue their learning habits and study style after they began their learning journey in Canadian schools. She told the researcher, “So if they are hard working in China, always learning things. They do their homework. Chances are, that kind of habit, does not change when they come to Canada. Eventually, they come the point how they behaved in China. They will behave the same in Canada. But just adding piece of learning English.”
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Culture Differences

During the interview, when asked about the factors contributing to newcomer Chinese students’ academic performances, learning styles, both of two participants believed that culture is not the key issue influencing immigrant Chinese students’ performance at Canadian kindergarten and primary schools. According to Mary, “It (students’ cultural background) could be a part of it. But again, I think I see kids at such a young age, like 4 to 5. They have not had as much experience as to kind of mold them into or allow them to understand if their culture is demanding something from them or expecting something from them to kind of bring something to the school environment and allow them to act like that at school.” This idea is shared by Rose, “It does not depend on they are Chinese immigrants, or person or Canadian. It more depends on students, their disposition, and personality. Not so much necessarily the language they are speaking per say.” The two teachers agreed that culture is not an important factor, which influence students’ academic and social performance at school.

Teacher’s coping strategies to help newcomer Chinese primary and kindergarten students.

Empathy/Understanding

During the interviews, the two participants both used their own personal experience to relate to their newcomer Chinese students. Rose used her personal experience of teaching in Taiwan to understand how her Chinese ELL students feel after they came to a Canadian school. She stated, “It reminds me of my experience in Taiwan. I did not understand anything.” Mary compared her newcomer Chinese students with her father
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who immigrated to Canada when she was a child, “I think of how I would want him (her father) to be treated. Although it sounds like a weird scenario or connection. Like him coming, here was a struggle to begin with. A lot of children experienced kind of same thing. You know they are going to places they do not know where they are going, what they are going to learn, and what languages. I can only imagine how confusing that is, stressful, and maybe even scary. Putting myself in their shoes.” Both of the teachers try to relate their personal experience with what their newly immigrant Chinese students going through. Therefore, they can have empathy and have a better understand of their newcomer Chinese students.

Conference with Parents

Both teachers emphasize the importance of conferencing with newcomer Chinese students’ parents. Mary mentioned that by communicating with students’ parents, “they (parents) can give any information about the past school and explain how their child is. I know that helps a lot. Doing proper assessment to see where they are at in terms of math. Literacy is difficulty. They would not be able to. That is why talking to the parents is informative.” Rose not only echoed Mary’s idea, but also mentioned that by talking with parents, she can give them suggestions of how parents can provide help for their child after school. Rose recommended, “Parents can let their child watch English TV, sending the child to different programs where other children are speaking English. We always recommend continuing reading in your own language because you still need the same skills to read in English language.” Even though both teachers emphasize different purposes of communicating with newcomer Chinese parents, they both agreed that
conferring with parents was essential and “informative”.

**Understand Students’ Cultural Background**

When asked about the strategies of helping newly immigrant Chinese students, the two participants all commented that teachers needed to be mindful about their students’ cultural background. As Rose stated, “I need to be mindful about the cultural norms. They (newcomer Chinese students) do not like to share their ideas if they are not so sure about their answers.” Rose mentioned another point, “I found they (newly immigrant Chinese students) are reluctant to ask questions.” It is true that in Chinese culture, students are not encouraged to ask questions.

**Pair up Newcomer Students with Students Who Can Speak both Chinese and English**

Both participants stressed the importance of paring newcomer Chinese students with other students who can speak the same language. By doing so, “the child (newcomer Chinese student) feels a little bit more comfortable and can learn things from them (other students who can speak Chinese) as well.” commented Mary. Rose, “Paring up can make them (newcomer Chinese students) feel more comfortable, strengthened her opinion. Because when you have, some people who speak the same language with you. At least, when you have the question, you can turn to the other student and ask them”

**Visual/Technology Assistance and Make Accommodations in Lesson Planning**

During the interview, two participants both stated that they used visuals and technologies in their lesson planning and communicating with newcomer Chinese students. Mary told
the researcher, “I hang the pictures of daily basic English words, such as Washroom, Drink Water, Recess, etc., on the wall. If they (newcomer Chinese students) want to do something, they can simply point to the picture… planning activities where they can be successful. Even the language may be like a barrier for them. Maybe try to do things like a drama or music they do not need to talk or communicate. You know something they can feel successful.” Rose downloaded a translator in her computer to help her to communicate with her immigrant Chinese students. Definitely, using visuals and technology is an effective way to bridge the communication gap between the teacher and newcomer students.

Encourage Reading Books in Their Mother language (Chinese) or Dual Language Books

Both participants emphasized the importance of reading books in students’ mother language (Chinese). According to Mary, “They (newcomer Chinese students) know how to read in their language. Therefore, they would probably be fast reader in English as well. Because there are a lot of things, (such as) how to open a book, where the cover is. All these things are similar. When you already did it in China, it takes away all that instruction. If they know nothing about reading that puts them in a different level.” Rose recommended students to borrow dual language books from the school library. “They will have English speaking words and they will have their native language speaking words. We try to accommodate as much as we call. So they do feel more comfortable.” said Rose. Even though the purposes of recommending students to continue reading or being read the Chinese books or duel language books varies, the two teachers agreed on the continuity of self-reading or being read the books in Chinese.
Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, I will connect my findings to the literature and research questions posed in this project. I will also reflect on how I have grown as a researcher and an educator through carrying out this research project. Lastly, I will explore the implications of the findings of this research and offer some suggestions for both classroom practice and future study.

The Literature and the Data

During the process of reviewing the data collected from the two interviews, I was cognizant of the fact that many of the findings that emerged were parallel to the literature presented in Chapter 2.

The strategies that were stated by the two participants echoed with what was examined in the literature review. These strategies included, incorporating students’ first language in lesson planning, encouraging parents and students to keep reading books in students’ mother tongue and valuing previous knowledge learned in their native country (Cummins et al, 2006). The two teachers also mentioned that common strategies they used included paring up newcomer Chinese students with students who can speak the same language, as well as using visuals and technology to enhance the understanding of newly arrived immigrant Chinese students. Both teachers acknowledged that they should be aware of their students’ cultural norms in their teaching and plan lessons accordingly, reflecting suggestions made in Many Root, Many Voices (2006).
As the literature review noted, newly arrived Chinese parents often provided limited support to their child. The reason for this is that when they immigrate to Canada, the family dynamic changed. In some families, only one parent came to Canada with the child and childcare was supported with the help of grandparents. In many cases, both parents and grandparents have limited English, which deprived them from guiding their child in both direct and indirect pathways (McHale et al., 2003), such as facilitating peer relationship and interactions. In addition, like their child, immigrant Chinese parents are in the process of understanding, learning and adjusting to the Canadian culture. It is difficult for parents to provide guidance to their child in the contents that they have not understood yet.

Both of the teachers interviewed in this study believed that the newcomer Chinese child’s unique personality played a significant role in academic and social settings at school in Toronto. Chinese students with introvert personality tend to participate less and students with extrovert personality tend to participate more in classroom activities and discussion. Nevertheless, Mary and Rose agreed that, despite their personality, most of the Chinese newcomer students were very quiet, anxious at the beginning due to the language barrier, and afraid of making mistakes to lose face in front of peers. This idea echoed the content of “negative self –perceptions and feelings that immigrant children have may also be understandable because of the difficulties that they encounter during the transition to the new environment” (e.g., Harris, 1999. Like all children, Chinese students have unique
and different personalities, yet they still experienced certain common stages and shared similar difficulties after they arrived at a classroom in Toronto.

One particularly interesting finding in this study is that Rose mentioned that Chinese students were afraid to raise hands to ask questions, even ask the teacher whether they could use the washroom. The reason why this finding is interesting to the researcher is how such a trivial thing bothered immigrant Chinese students. People might regard it as something simple, but for those newcomer students, how and when to raise hands to ask permission to use washroom in English has been worrying them every day. In the first six months studying in a full day kindergarten in Toronto, the researcher’s 4-year-old daughter rarely used washroom because she was afraid to ask the teacher for permission. Rose’s comments on this situation supports the previous literature how Chinese students were trained to be obedient, waited for teachers to give them permission and not encouraged to ask questions (Tweed and Lehman, 2002).

Furthermore, Rose commented on how immigrant Chinese students learn best through observation. This parallels with respectful learning (Tweed and Lehman, 2002) as stated in literature review. In respectful learning, students learned from masters, who serve as an exemplar for students to follow. When Chinese children studied at school in Toronto, teachers and some of peers would be regarded as authoritative figures or masters. Immigrant Chinese students would spend time watching them how to speak and how to behave in different settings and try to imitate those figures. Choosing authoritative figures, regarding them as examples, observing them and eventually copying their words
and actions is the common process for newcomer Chinese students to learn in Toronto schools.

Both of the teachers stated that Chinese parents often compared their child’s academic performance with their peers or with their previous marks in China. As Rose mentioned Chinese parents care more about “letters and numbers”. It seems that Chinese parents are more result-driven or results orientated. This is because in Chinese schools, students are evaluated by their marks. Every time after mid-term or final-exam, teachers rank students based on their marks and inform parents their child’s position in comparison with the rest of their classmates. When Chinese parents come to Canadian schools, they expect the same practice and need to be informed the ranks of their child in comparison with their classmates. After they realized that such ranking did not exist in Canadian schools, Chinese parents tend to compare their child’s marks in Canada with their mark from China. Rose explained that the sacrifice Chinese parents made in order to start a new life in Canada also might be a factor causing comparison. Chinese parents gave up their well-established career in China and immigrant to Canada. They want their child to obtain higher achievement to balance the sacrifice they made in the process of immigrating to Canada. That is why they push their child harder in academic studies. Comparing their child’s academic marks with peers’ marks or with previous marks in China becomes an important indicator whether their sacrifice of moving to Canada is a worthy action. This finding was not mentioned in any of the literature selected for review.
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A significant contradiction of the findings of this study is that both teachers did not believe culture was as a contributor to academic and social performances that newcomer Chinese students demonstrated. As Mary explained that due to the young age, immigrant Chinese kindergarten students may not understand what expectations Chinese culture demanded of them in social and academic settings. However, in the literature, more emphasis had been put on cultural factors related to students’ academic and social behaviors. As Palmer (2003) describes Confucianism later interwoven with Buddhism emphasized the value of memorization in Chinese education while exploring all possible links and connections to a topic was the essence of Western education culture (Covent, 2013). Nevertheless, the two teachers did not mention that Chinese students tend to memorize more and make fewer connections to a given topic. The two participants stressed that students’ personality is the key to decide their academic and social performance in Toronto schools.

Connections to Research Questions

In the process of discerning the key findings of this research, I was mindful of the initial research questions outlined in Chapter 1. The main research question was: “What are some strategies that schoolteachers could apply in helping newly immigrant Chinese students to overcome challenges caused by cultural transition in Canadian public kindergartens and elementary schools?” As noted in chapter 4, teachers need to demonstrate and show empathy to new immigrant Chinese students, pair them up with other students who can speak both Chinese and English, conference with parents to
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obtain information about students, use visuals and technologies, be aware of Chinese education culture norms, and make accommodations if needed.

When drafting my interview questions, I designed my questions based on the three sub questions. The three specific areas are challenges that newcomer Chinese students’ face, factors caused those challenges and teacher’s coping strategies for dealing with those challenges. The findings address the research questions for the most part. However, based on personal experience and first-hand information with my own daughter, I assumed that culture is a major factor contributing to the difficulties those newcomer Chinese students encountered both academically and socially during the first six months after arrival at Canadian schools. Nevertheless, the findings of this project did not support this assumption.

Implications:

During the process of researching, I encountered various difficulties, which I had not anticipated. One of the biggest challenges was to find research participants to interview. The narrow direction of my study restricted the choices of my potential interviewees, who had to work in a public school with a high population of new immigrant Chinese students. In addition, the tight schedule of public schools around Christmas time limited some teachers to participate in the study. Some of them mentioned, “I do not have time to be part of this study or any other things besides teaching”. This idea had been echoed during the interview. The two participants both mentioned that time limitations prevented them from better helping their students, especially new immigrant Chinese students. This research helped me to understand that teachers need to take or be willing to make time to
spend with students, especially with students who are in greater needs. It is true that there is never enough time. How do teachers maximize classroom or instructional time every day to provide assistance and guidance to students definitely requires careful consideration and planning.

**Recommendations:**

*Culturally responsive teaching*

This study reminds the researcher that teachers need to practice culturally responsive teaching. Cultural norms, specifically in this paper, Chinese cultural norms, need to be considered in daily teaching practice. Teachers need to understand that Chinese students are reluctant to ask questions not because they lack interests. On the contrary, not raising questions shows their respect to the teachers. This is because in their minds teachers are “authoritative figures” (Twitter, 2002), who should not be questioned. When new immigrant Chinese students address the classroom teachers as “teacher” instead of using a title such as Ms. Smith, teachers do not need to feel less respected simply because it is a common way for Chinese students to address teachers. In addition, Chinese students may not respond well to instructions given as a question. If a teacher makes a request such as “Can you tidy up after you finish?” to a new immigrant Chinese student, the teacher should be prepared for a response of “No” or for having their requires ignored. Because, for them, a teacher is simply asking a question, which does not require actions and clearly is not regarded as instructions that they should follow. New immigrant Chinese students respond well to direct requests such as “Please tidy up after you finish.”
Respect students’ previous knowledge and unique personality

As a teacher, it is essential to respect students’ previous knowledge, especially knowledge from their former non-Canadian schools. New immigrant Chinese students might be able to explain the concepts in Mandarin or Cantonese but might not be able to explain their understandings in English. According to Mary, it usually takes about a year for immigrant Chinese students to have basic English to communicate with peers and teachers. As a teacher, we need be mindful about finding ways to uncover students’ previous knowledge. For example, we can ask other students to translate immigrant Chinese students’ words into English or we can ask them to draw pictures to explain their ideas or use google translation to understand our new immigrant Chinese students, which can encourage them to participate more in class activities and discussions.

Parental involvements

Both interview participants emphasized the importance of involving parents. Communication may be a challenge but efforts must be made to invite and welcome parents. This can be achieved through involving a professional translator provided by the board or school, or experienced student ambassadors from older grades. The home/school partnership is especially important for newly arrived students and will enhance and build a more positive relationship between home and school.

Limitations

One of the significant limitations in this study is the small number of participants interviewed. Only two teachers were interviewed. As well, both teachers worked in the
former North York region of the TDSB. This is a part of the GTA where a number of newly arrived immigrants tend to settle. The study would have been enhanced, if there had been an opportunity to interview teachers from various areas both inside and outside of the GTA. It would have been interesting to see if students from different family background experience different challenges during their first year in schools.

**Further study**

During the interviews, the two participants stated that culture was not an important factor contributing to newcomer Chinese students’ performances academically and socially in Kindergarten and Grade 3. However, in the literature review, emphases were placed on cultural influence especially with newcomer Chinese students. The researcher hopes to further the study on students in older grades, such as grade 5 or grade 6 and find out whether students at an older age might be influenced more by the culture they were from, specifically, Chinese culture. It would yield further information if student and/or parent information could be gathered and a more complete picture would be formed.

**Conclusions**

When newly immigrant Chinese students arrived at a Toronto public elementary school classroom, they experienced a variety of difficulties, such as a language barrier, cultural shock and distinct school routines and teaching methodology, compared with Chinese public elementary schools. Teachers need to take these factors into consideration. The first factor is education related cultural norms, especially education related cultures such
as Respectful learning and Self-generated Knowledge (Tweed and Lehman, 2002). The second cause is parental influences in that Chinese parents tend to compare their child’s marks with other students and compare the marks in Canada with the marks in China. Providing exemplars to show parents might be an alternative way for them since they can compare their child’s work with exemplars, instead of with peer’s work. The most important factor based on the data collected from the two interviews were students’ unique personality, which decided the students’ academic and social behavior during the group work and individual work.

This research also emphasized the strategies that classroom teachers used in Toronto public elementary schools. Those strategies included: encouraging parents and students to keep reading Chinese books; welcoming the first language (Chinese) at classroom; paring up newcomer students with other students who can speak both Chinese and English; being aware of the Chinese education-related cultural norms and individual student’s personality; using visuals and technology to ease the pressure caused by the language barrier and making accommodations accordingly. In other words, we need to understand the needs of these newly arrived Chinese students so, as their teachers; we can best help them to adjust to schooling in Ontario. Many Voices, Many Roots is a great resource for classroom teachers to refer to in the process of helping immigrant Chinese students, or any newcomer students regardless of background.
References:


Appendix A: Letter of Consent

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Date: ___________________

Dear ___________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am doing a research under the title of “Teacher Strategies for Supporting Chinese Immigrant Students in Toronto Public Elementary Schools: Overcoming Challenges Caused by Cultural Transition, Parenting Styles and Personality.” For the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program, I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Angela MacDonald. My research supervisor is Donna Duplak. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 40-minute interview that will be tape-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the
TEACHERS FACILITATE IMMIGRANT CHINESE STUDENTS

interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher name: Rong Yao

Phone number, email: dawny_765@hotmail.com

Instructor’s Name: ____________________
Email address: _________________
Phone number: _________________

Research Supervisor’s Name: _____________________________
Phone #: ___________________

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Rong Yao and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: _______________________________
Name (printed ) _____________________________
Date: ______________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions
1. Could you please briefly share with me your history as a teacher? For example, how long have you been teaching and how many schools have you taught?

2. Can you describe the cultural diversity in classes you have taught, with a specific focus on your current class?

3. In terms of students’ learning-styles and study habits, did you observe any differences between your immigrant Chinese students in comparison to your Canadian-born, English speaking students?

4. In observing students during group work and individual work, what are some differences between immigrant Chinese students and Canadian-born students?

5. In your experience, what are some transitional stages a newly immigrant Chinese student experience in six months and a school year?

6. What are some difficulties in acculturation your immigrant Chinese students face in the first three months studying in your class?

7. What are some of the strategies you use to help those immigrant students to cope with difficulties?

8. Do you feel that immigrant Chinese parents have similar expectations for their children’s education, including academic achievement, character and behavior training?

9. Can you describe differences that you have noticed between the parenting styles of your immigrant Chinese parents and that of the Canadian-born, English speaking students’ parents?

10. If a newcomer Chinese student arrived in your classroom, what would you do to help him or her?

11. In your experience, what are the challenges in helping immigrant Chinese students?
12. In terms of practice culturally responsive teaching, what kind of assistance do you hope to obtain from the school or from the community?