

ADJUSTMENT, ACCULTURATION AND THE  
CULTURAL VOICE:  
EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL FAMILIES

By

Erica Grayson

Bachelor of Arts in English

Oklahoma State University

Stillwater, OK

2005

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate College of the  
Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree of  
MASTER OF SCIENCE  
July, 2011

ADJUSTMENT, ACCULTURATION AND THE  
CULTURAL VOICE:  
EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL FAMILIES

Thesis Approved:

Dr. Denise Blum

---

Thesis Adviser

Dr. Jan Carlson

---

Dr. Gary Webb

---

Dr. Reuel Hanks

---

Dr. Mark E. Payton

---

Dean of the Graduate College

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Denise Blum, for her continued support and valuable advisement throughout the duration of my project. In addition, I express appreciation for my thesis committee members who generously shared their time and provided helpful feedback throughout the process. I would also like express my gratitude to each of the international families who shared their experiences with me. Their candor and enthusiasm has made this project enjoyable.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. PURPOSE.....	5
II. BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW .....	14
Sojourner Stress and Challenges .....	14
Re-Entry Complications.....	15
Phases of Acculturation .....	17
Perceptions of English Language Acquisition .....	18
Importance of Native Culture.....	19
Anglo-Conformity.....	21
Influence of Parents .....	24
Perceptions of Education in the United States .....	25
III. METHODOLOGY.....	26
Introduction and Overview.....	26
Research Sample.....	27
Research Design Overview .....	29
Data Collection Methods .....	29
Data Analysis and Synthesis .....	30
Ethical Considerations .....	30
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	31
Limitations of Study .....	32
IV. FINDINGS .....	34
Sojourner Stress and Challenges .....	34
Re-Entry Anticipation.....	45
Anglo-Conformity .....	51
V. CONCLUSION .....	55
REFERENCES.....	58
APPENDICES.....	61

## CHAPTER I

### PURPOSE

International graduate students and their families, specifically their young children, may have difficulty adjusting to the culture of the midwestern United States and the associated different culture and education system (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010, p. 34); (Tong, Huang, & McIntyre, 2006, p. 203). These young students specifically may find difficulties with negotiating schooled identities in a new and different environment. In addition, the transition back to their native culture and educational environment after experiencing these changes, may potentially lead them to “experiencing anxiety about returning home” (Sherry et al., 2010, p. 34). Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to examine the experiences of international students enrolled in elementary or secondary school in a midwestern college town. Through this study, I have attempted to assess what challenges and successes these young students had with English language acquisition and adjustment to American culture and education and to assess any additional needs that could be met, in addition to support programs already in place. In order to potentially help facilitate smoother “cross-cultural transition[s]” (Arthur, 2003, p. 173) and in order to help make the international student’s experience more beneficial and enjoyable while the student and his or her family are located here in the United States, my objective is to pay close attention to the students’ opinions and feedback about their experiences. Thus, young international students and their families could benefit from this study, by having their cultural voices heard and understood (Chakrabarti, 2008, p. 4). Researchers have stressed that “In order to

understand different sub-cultures and minority students' adaptation processes, including feelings and experiences in US school settings, researchers and educators need to pay attention to students' own perceptions and voices that represent unique cultural characteristics and heritage related to their sub-culture" (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007, p. 100). Additionally, "the lack of understanding about diverse communication modes, values, and perceptions among culturally different families and between students and teachers leads to cultural misunderstandings and conflicts" (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007, p. 111). So, it seems that many practical benefits exist for examining these questions about this midwestern college town's international family population, and it seems necessary and beneficial to learn about and understand these "perceptions and voices" (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007, p. 100).

My experiences with international students piqued my interest in their social and educational experiences. I volunteer for a free local literacy service, meeting with international students for English language tutoring and conversation practice. During tutoring sessions with one international student, I learned a great deal about her family, including their experiences navigating the new culture. Her children and their experiences were frequent topics of conversation, including their adjustment to the curriculum and their navigation of the school culture in this midwestern town, their adoption of typically American traits and interests, their English and native language skills and how all of these factors could impact their lives in the future, once they returned to their home country. Talking with this woman, whom I now call a friend, made me wonder what other experiences international students and families might have here in The United States and exactly what resources were in place to help them.

United States statistics show that in 2009 alone, 895,392 non-immigrant students were admitted into the United States for education purposes and joining them were 40,956 spouses and children who also temporarily relocated to the United States for schooling (United States Department of Homeland Security 65). Likewise, in Table 223 in the United States Census Bureau's National Data Book, the data for 2007 shows that 23.4% of students enrolled in United

States elementary and secondary schools were “students with at least one foreign-born parent” (US Census Bureau, *Students Who Are Foreign Born*, Table 223). Additionally, 11.3% of K-12 students in the United States were “limited-English proficient” in 2007-2008 (Nat. Center for Ed. Statistics, LEP, Table 2). In fact, the American Community Survey data for 2007 (from the United States Census information) shows that 11.4 “percent of children 5 to 17 years old” in the Midwest “speak a language other than English at home” and that 350,000 of the 1,339,000 students who do speak other languages “have difficulty speaking English” (US Census Bureau, *Children Who Speak Other Language*, Table 231). More specifically, the United States Department of Education reported for 2007 that 26% of fourth-grade English language learners were reading at a basic level in Oklahoma elementary schools, which seems low compared to the 67% of native English speakers who are reading at a basic level (US Dept. of Ed., *Average Reading Scale Scores*, Table 124).

Considering these statistics, it seems relevant to examine what difficulties exist for young children of international graduate students in the process and period of adjustment to United States education and culture, specifically that of a midwestern town, and how it compares to their experience with education in their home country. In addition to examining the “cross-cultural transition” (Arthur, 2003, p. 173) of sojourners, or temporary visitors to the United States, my plan was to also focus on re-entry anticipation and how it might affect each student’s adjustment and acculturation prior to their re-entry. While I will not be able to interact with the students during and after their re-entry transition, I was curious to learn about how they might view the return to their home country in relation to their efforts to adjust to their new host environment and maybe to see if they experience anxiety about this. This research is important in order to highlight any additional needs that could be met while the student/family is located here in the United States and, most importantly, for preparation for their return to their home country. Ultimately, a better understanding of international families and their experiences in would be useful since, as Nancy Arthur points out “This information can be used as feedback to the local institution about

ways to deliver services for international students in the areas of marketing and recruitment, and design and delivery of student support services” (Arthur, 2003, p. 177).

Accordingly, there is a local resource center that provides a wide variety of programs, classes and activities that are intended to provide cultural experiences, improve language skills, and promote personal growth and enjoyment for both adults and children (Allen Interview). According to the staff, the center has an average enrollment of 90-100 children through age 17. The programs offered by this center are oriented toward international families, and include literacy-oriented classes and events, family game nights and craft nights (Allen Interview). The center also offers transportation services, shopping shuttles, assistance with required actions for international students, such as obtaining immunizations for children, as well as classes discussing issues with parenting in foreign cultures (Allen Interview). One staff member also reports that these services and programs distinguish this particular resource from many centers at other universities, many of which might have a general meeting room, but most of which have no comparable programs or services. This local center facilitates interaction between international youth and families in this midwestern town, and thereby impacts their experiences.

My aim in this study was to examine “sojourner adjustment”; sojourner meaning “those travelers who are expected to return to their country of origin after achieving their goals” (Sam & Berry, 2006, p. 193). Likewise, “sojourners go abroad to achieve a particular purpose and then return to their country of origin” (Sam & Berry, 2006, p. 182). Again, expressed by researcher Shirley Thomas, “the voices of students need to be heard so that we know their stories” (Thomas, 1999, p. 15). Understanding the unique predicaments that temporary residents of the United States face while navigating their new environment can provide valuable direction for new programs and efforts at inclusion or adjustment (Arthur, 2003, p. 177).

These students have also been described as “transcultural,” meaning “one who is moving from one cultural, personal and worldview to another and as they do so, they draw together their experiences to make a cohesive sense of their cultural experiences” (Thomas, 1999, p. 4).



Researcher Loukia Sarroub offers that “most immigrant populations” share “the desire to return to the homeland,” which “remains pervasive among settlers.” (Loukia, 2001, p. 393). Sarroub further points out that child sojourners “straddle two worlds, the literate world of school and the home world of religious and cultural values” (Loukia, 2001, p. 392), “with each foot planted in a different space” (Loukia, 2001, p. 400). “However,” in many cases, as Sarroub explains, “even the intimate spaces of domestic and ritual life, meaning, and behavior were shaped by the contexts of the larger society” (Loukia, 2001, p. 400). These observations seem to portray a life of delicate balance and some difficulty, which seems as though it could easily be overwhelming for a young student. Indeed, examples are provided of students experiencing alienation, difficulty, plural identities, while living in the United States. Sarroub tells the story of Layla, who “like all the other Yemeni American students, identified herself as Yemeni, Arab, and American, in that order” (Loukia, 2001, p. 400). Likewise, “She thought of herself, as the other hijabat did, as Arab and not “White,” a category reserved for “Americans...even though she was born in the United States” (Loukia, 2001, p. 400). This certainly seems as though it could cause difficulty with identity and self-perception if the student is functioning in a society in which he or she feels like an outsider.

So, by listening to the students’ opinions and experiences, and by considering their native culture, family dynamics and personality traits and behavior, my aim is to understand their adjustment process, difficulties and anticipation for the future in the context of their personal background and experiences. Since “unusual populations bring with them their own experiences” and “without hearing the voices of the students, we cannot be sure that we are planning or engaging the students in meaningful experiences” (Thomas, 1999, p. 28), it is important to listen to these students. Likewise, in order “to understand the adjustment difficulties of an individual sojourner it would be necessary to relate specific background factors, personality traits, and situational factors to the communication process” (Brein & David, 1971, p. 228). Therefore, my

discussions with the participants include a variety of background questions, in order to obtain an accurate report of their experiences.

In discussing how sojourners adapt and/or struggle to function and accomplish their goals in the United States, it is important to understand what adjustment, assimilation, and acculturation each entail. Adjustment, for example, is cited by Hechanova-Alampay, et al (citing Black and Gregerson, 1991) “as the degree of psychological comfort a sojourner has with the various aspects of a host culture” (Hechanova-Alampay, Christiansen, Beehr, & Van Horn, 2002, p. 460). Researcher Susan Dicker (citing Weinstock, 1969) defines assimilation as “the complete loss of original ethnic identity in an individual or group of individuals leading to absorption into the dominant culture” (Dicker, 2008, p. 53). Thus, according to Dicker, “The assimilating group, then, loses the traits that make it different, including its language” (Dicker, 2008, p. 53). Understanding these definitions helps to clarify and understand the sojourner’s experience.

Researcher Jacklyn Clayton makes the valuable observation that “children bring some special issues to the process of acculturation,” (Clayton, 1996, p. 6) and that “usually they have not had a say in the decision to make the move; often the move may resemble an uprooting wherein all that is familiar, that gives meaning to self as well as surroundings, is lost” (Clayton, 1996, p. 6). Most importantly, she writes that “the motivation factor for the children is survival in the context in which they find themselves” (Clayton, 1996, p. 6). Enculturation is defined as “a bipolar process of cultural transmission and transmutation” as well as “a construct, a process in a behavioral sense, that delineates the dynamics of transmission and transmutation of culture throughout human growth (Shimahara, 1970, p. 148) and involves “unconscious cultural conditioning and reflective responses to the cultural environment” (Shimahara, 1970, p. 148). Judging from these definitions of adaptation processes, the various ways in which international students adapt, assimilate and acculturate, adjust to culture and education in the United States bears examination. This examination is important because an ultimate goal should be increased efforts towards an “alternative form of nationalism...that respects cultural dualism and

negotiation” (Lee and Koro-Ljungberg, 2007, p. 95), rather than necessity of complete adaptation to United States culture and obliteration of the student’s native culture.

Examining elements of the international student’s educational environment here in the United States is important as well. For example, if a student has difficulty speaking the language of his or her new host country, that student’s adaptation and success can be negatively impacted (Lee, 2008, p. 35). This is because the student must constantly use language to interact with others while operating within this host culture (Lee, 2008, p. 35). Clayton stresses that “the responsibility of the host community in the adjustment of these...children cannot be overemphasized” and that “the role of the school (the term used here as a symbol of the total community of teachers, administrators, peers, programs) in enabling cross-cultural children to acculturate is vital.” (1996, p. 124). Furthermore, “for most cross-cultural students, school is the place of primary (and sole) contact with authority in the majority culture” and is where “cross-cultural students get an understanding not only of the language and necessary classroom behaviors, but also of the attitudes of the larger society” (Clayton, 1996, p. 124). Thus, I believe that examining the student’s experiences within his or her school is a vital aspect of examining his or her acculturation process overall.

Cultural, “non-verbal communication” plays an enormous role in the student’s communication within the classroom, as well as in society and everyday life in general (Lee, 2008, p. 36). Furthermore, “The cross-cultural students must learn not only the language, but also the explicit and implicit rules, assumptions, behaviors, and nonverbal communication – in short, the culture of the classroom and of this new homeland – if they are to make any sense, if they are to experience the congruence they search for” (Clayton, 1996, p. 8). Brein & David also offer that “the sojourner in his role as a stranger to a foreign culture needs to become aware of its implicit rules” (1971, p. 225). This is an additional, sometimes complicated and difficult additional element of “second language acquisition” (Tong, Huang, and McIntyre, 2006, p. 203). Additionally, Jerome Bruner’s concept of “folk pedagogy,” cited by Tobin, Hsueh, and

Karasawa, refers to the existence of “implicit cultural logic,” or “taken-for-granted practices that emerge from embedded cultural beliefs about how children learn and how teachers should teach” (Tobin, et al, 2009, p. 19). Likewise, the term “cultural capital” is introduced to “[mean] that schools were in the business of reproducing a particular culture” (Carnoy, 2007, p. 7). With so many cultural distinctions and ‘nonverbal forms of communication’ operating within the education system and in American society in general, many young international students must navigate their new cultural and educational environment essentially blind to the new culture. It makes sense, then, that the child sojourners who have been incorporated within United States and/or midwestern culture, might have difficulty adapting or adjusting to this new environment and that any difficulty the student has with language learning or cultural difference in an education context may impact many other aspects of his or her life.

## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the proposed research attempts to further understand the difficulties that the young K-12 children of international students face in adjusting to culture and the different educational setting, in this section, I refer to similar studies by several researchers, who examine the adjustment period of young international students in American culture. I also review additional research on various aspects of sojourner and immigrant experiences in the United States. Effort was made to find studies examining the acculturation process of adolescent students specifically, but literature was also chosen which was perceived to provide insight into the sojourner or immigrant experience in general, not necessarily specifically for adults or children. While there is much research on sojourner adjustment and the experiences of international students, both K-12 and adult, I have not seen research on the perceptions and experiences of these types of students and families. Therefore, I believe that my research is the first study conducted in this context, and provides insight into the unique experiences of students in this specific geographical and cultural location.

Through my literature review, I note a collection of conclusions/observations made by various authors regarding international students living in the United States and their education experiences. Using these observations as a guide, I examine the experiences of a select group of K-12 students living in a midwestern college town in order to further compare the observations

of other researchers (about the United States in general, or about another local community) in the context of the local community. In other words, the difficulties of international K-12 students elsewhere in the United States may not be relevant to the same demographic of students in this particular midwestern town. However, I anticipate that many of the difficulties may be the same, so this bears further exploration to see what unique distinctions or difficulties can be seen at the local level. In this section, I will address *Sojourner Stress and Challenges, Re-Entry Anticipation, Perceptions of English Language, Importance of Native Culture, Anglo-Conformity, Influence of Parents, Perceptions of Education in the United States.*

### Sojourner Stress and Challenges

Researcher Jacklyn Clayton discusses possible differences in attitudes of sojourners and immigrants about adjustment to their new host culture, stating that some theories might suggest, in sum, that “sojourners are here for a short period of time and do not experience the distress of having conflicting value systems for an extended time, and therefore adjust more quickly” than immigrant students, who are forced to adapt to the new culture “quickly and permanently” (Clayton, 1996, p. 129-130). While Clayton relays these theories in her work, she ultimately concludes that, from her observations, the experiences of sojourner students were similar to those of immigrant students, and it was “not the length or reason for their stay” which impacted the acculturation process, but a variety of different factors (Clayton, 1996, p. 130).

Likewise, it has been reported that “it is not uncommon to hear international students from non-English speaking countries report that they only understand a small portion of classroom lectures and discussions and, because of that, leave school everyday frustrated and exhausted” (Lee, 2008, p. 35). Thus, the “cognitive effort required” to function in the host environment can be psychologically draining to the international student (Lee, 2008, p. 27). Additionally, in his dissertation, researcher Lee (2008) points out that language barriers are capable of influencing by creating more difficulties, destroying confidence, diminishing academic

ability, although the student may be quite capable and intelligent, until he or she faces language barriers (Lee, 2008, p. 32). I am curious if this is the case for many international K-12 students and want to know if this affects the participants in my study and if so, to what degree.

Additionally, it has been reported that cultural, “nonverbal communication” becomes important (Lee, 2008, p. 36) to sojourner adjustment and, ultimately, “[t]he cross-cultural students must learn not only the language, but also the explicit and implicit rules, assumptions, behaviors, and nonverbal communication – in short, the culture of the classroom and of this new homeland – if they are to make any sense, if they are to experience the congruence they search for” (Clayton, 1996, p. 8). These observations lead me to inquire about what trouble, if any, students in this midwestern town have with ‘nonverbal communication.’ Also, Clayton discusses how “children in any school learn not only book knowledge, but also the values that are considered important in the society – the attitudes, behaviors, and world view that will bind them to others in their culture and give shape to their living” (Clayton, 1996, p. 7). Additionally, Clayton observes that “everything that is done in the school – in the classroom and the corridors, the lunchroom, the gym, the principal’s office – is done to direct and ease the transition of the child into the larger society” (Clayton, 1996, p. 7). For my purpose, this leads to a question of what happens when a student’s living is shaped for a society that he or she will only belong to temporarily, and how does that make them feel about the potential or inevitable return to their home country? Thus, questions about concerns and anticipated experiences about re-entry transition back to the native country were asked during the interviews.

#### Re-Entry Anticipation

Successful adjustment to the new host culture, while helpful during the sojourner’s stay in the foreign environment, can bring about additional difficulties during the student’s “re-entry transition,” or adjustment back to environment and culture of their home country (Adler, 1981, p. 344; Arthur, 2003, p. 175). Researcher Nancy Arthur cites Adler’s 1981 study when she offers that re-entry is more significantly “a psychological process rather than physical relocation home”

and “is defined as the re-acculturation of the individual to the home culture after an extended period of exposure to another culture” (Arthur, 2003, p. 175). It is understandable that students might feel further overwhelmed to be returning to their home culture if they have struggled to become accustomed to the host culture. Arthur observes that “the re-entry transition can mean leaving relationships, roles, and routines formed in the host country, access to lifestyle or material resources that are not available at home” and accordingly, these “students may have mixed feelings about reuniting with friends and family” or “may feel that going home means leaving parts of themselves behind” (Arthur, 2003, p. 174-175). This could be especially true about younger, elementary age students because they are forming their identities and personalities.

Researcher Nancy Arthur seems to support this view in her work on re-entry transition, and states that “neither international students nor their support system at home may be prepared for any re-entry difficulties” and that the “lack of appreciation for the degree of change that can happen while students study in another country increases the risk of ‘reverse culture shock’” (Arthur, 2003, p. 175). So, the sojourner and immigrant may experience the initial adjustment similarly, but the sojourner could experience more difficulty overall, due to the lack of awareness and preparation for the return home (Arthur, 2003, p. 175). This plausible and my study aims to further highlight the anticipation and concerns that these students and their families might have about the future return to their home country.

Furthermore, regarding the student’s return to his or her home country, “international students may have mixed feelings about reuniting with friends and family while simultaneously experiencing a sense of loss about leaving the host country,” which stresses the importance of addressing the eventual transition to ‘home’ at an early stage and asking what can be done to prepare younger international students for the experience of returning to their native culture (Arthur, 2003, p. 175). It is therefore important to examine the possible ways that this might happen with students here in the United States.



Additionally, young children of graduate students may see their mother or father adjusting to academic life in a new culture and they may do the same, only to be confronted by confusion and stress when they return to their native culture and academic environment, since perhaps “[t]he subtle process of internal change may not be apparent until students return to the home environment and gain personal awareness of just how much they have changed” (Arthur, 1996, p. 175). For example,

major changes take place as a result of acculturation, creating changes in people’s beliefs about school. That is, immigrant mothers may change their attitudes as a result of interaction and direct contact with the host society and culture. This research suggests that this process is dynamic in nature and that while the intensity and pace of change may vary, acculturation clearly leads to changes in people’s belief systems. (Zadeh, Geva and Rogers, 2008, p. 60-61)

Ultimately, as Brein & David point out, “some sojourners may encounter few adjustment difficulties upon returning home, while others may undergo a rather severe reentry crisis” (Brein & David, 1971, p. 216). Therefore, many students might need significant assistance coping with the transition while many others may not. Regardless, addressing the potential for problems is important, and actually is said to be “a prerequisite if individuals, institutions, corporations, home countries, and host countries are to maximize the benefits and minimize the problems of studying or working abroad (Westwood, Lawrence, Paul, 1986, p. 221).

#### Phases of Acculturation

In her research, Jacklyn Clayton stresses the importance of differentiating between the “process and the state of acculturation,” highlighting that “the process elicits a variety of strategies from the newcomer in an effort to feel comfortable in the new environment (Clayton, 1996, p. 5). Clayton details the ‘Phases’ of the acculturation process, beginning with “preparation and entry into the new culture” (Clayton, 1996, p. 5). The sojourner is then in the “spectator” phase, followed by a phase of “increased participation” (Clayton, 1996, p. 5). A phase of “shock”

comes next, with a phase of “adaptation” following (Clayton, 1996, p. 5). Finally, as Clayton describes, the sojourner relinquishes their “traditions, values and language” and adopts “those of the majority culture” (Clayton, 1996, p. 5).

The concept of a “U-curve” of adjustment is also addressed by several researchers. (Martin, 1984, p. 117-118; Hechanova-Alampay et al, 2002, p. 460; Brein and David, 1971, p. 219; Church, 1982, p. 542) and symbolizes a sojourner’s “decline in adjustment shortly after entering a foreign culture, which is followed by a recovery stage with a resultant increase in adjustment” (Brein and David, 1971, p. 216). The “W-Curve” concept “encompasses both the sojourner’s adaptation to a foreign culture and his re-adjustment to his home culture” (Brein and David, 1971, p. 216). Additionally, while he does not refute the theory of U-curve patterns of adjustment outright, researcher Austin Church emphasizes that “not all investigators have confirmed the U curve hypothesis” and that, for example, “not all students begin the sojourn with a ‘honeymoon phase’ or with a period of elation and optimism” (Church, 1982, p. 542). For my purposes, only the U-Curve model applies, since I will not be examining the students’ actual re-entry experience, but will only be asking them about their preparation and anticipatory feelings regarding such re-entry.

#### Perceptions of English Language Acquisition

My research also examines language acquisition, in an effort to learn about any difficulties that occur, and what benefits or detriments of learning English are felt by the students and their families. It is not surprising that sojourners and their families would make an effort toward acquiring the new language and developing a fundamental knowledge of the culture, since, at least to some, “A failure to master the nuanced use of English in speech and writing places a severe limit in the United States on one’s opportunity, and freedom, and the amount of money in one’s purse” (Hirsch, Jr., 1999, p. 136). On the other hand, however, “bilingualism” according to Hirsch Jr. “is the right of children not to lose or neglect their parents’ native language and culture when acquiring mainstream American culture” (1999, p.136). Likewise, a

“system of common knowledge and root attitudes” are important as well (Hirsch, Jr., 1999, p. 137), which seems to promote balance between adopting enough of the new culture for ease of transition and effective functioning within the new society and maintaining or retaining enough of the native culture to transition back into the sojourner’s native lifestyle. One example of this is given in the literature reviewed, which details that “as all nine participants learned English and spoke more fluently, bullying decreased and the students were capable of establishing friendships with Americans and other minorities” (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007, p.108).

### Importance of Native Culture

In understanding international students’ experiences in United States culture, I think it is important to consider the native culture of each student when examining their ‘cross-cultural transition.’ Understanding and considering an individual’s culture when evaluating adjustment and assimilation, specifically in relation to how one responds to another culture, seems vitally important because, as Jacklyn Clayton offers, “Culture is not just the unique, quaint ways of other people: all people are products of their own learned and shared behaviors” (Clayton, 1996, p. 127). Likewise, Clayton points out that “It is of utmost importance to be aware that, even in children, enculturation of their own cultural values has already taken place” and that “major areas, such as learning styles, writing styles, and world views, as well as more minor ones are all shaped by culture” (Clayton, 1996, p. 127). Therefore, in order to understand the student’s ‘voice,’ attention was paid to the prominent characteristics of their native culture during my interviews and data analysis.

Furthermore, researcher Sonia Nieto observes that “culture is significant, and...it can support learning” (Nieto, 2000, p. 289). For example, in Nieto’s book, she reports that researchers “found that a positive and enduring sense of cultural heritage – as manifested in strong ties to the ethnic culture and maintenance of native language – is positively related to mental health, social well being, and educational achievement” (Nieto, 2000, p. 290). Cultural contexts and “nonverbal communication” may be drastically different between cultures, and these differences can create

conflicts for the international student, who may not know how to respond to the specifics of the new culture or how to navigate this new culture (Akrofi, Swafford, Janisch, Liu, Durrington, 2008, p. 211), since “communication is more than language” (Clayton, 1996, p. 133).

Additionally, as Clayton offers “In addition to observable behaviors that we attribute to culture, there is a vast array of implicit, assumed, learned patterns that people from all cultures acquire and take for granted” (Clayton, 1996, p. 78). Smiling in the classroom is one example that Clayton offers in her text, which is symbolic of a student’s success in some cultures, but the absence of a smile could be misinterpreted by educators, while it would be acceptable in the student’s native culture (Clayton, 1996, p. 82). Clayton also points out that along with physical characteristics, there are cultural differences to using language as well, since “speaking or writing another language is more than simply translating from your own; there are culturally shaped ways of expression that must also be learned” (Clayton, 1996, p. 32). Furthermore, there can be different perspectives on how to evaluate or gauge academic achievement in different cultures, which surely can be confusing, create complications for parents from other cultures, and perhaps even hinder education efforts (Zadeh, et al., 2008, p. 59).

For example, one difference reported is the “qualitative and process-based” “definitions of success and failure” in academics for western cultures as opposed to a “quantitative” focus for Iranian mothers (Zadeh, et al., 2008, p. 60). Another difference is that the western “focus [is] on critical thinking, applying knowledge and creativity” and the “practical utility of their school learning” (Zadeh, et al., 2008, p. 61), which is not necessarily the case in other countries, such as the “rote memorization” reported in Brazil (Clayton, 1996, p. 53). Thus, if a certain method or goal is promoted in the new culture that contrasts with the native culture’s educational goals or methods, it seems likely that the international parent may become frustrated and confused, which could impact the student’s academic success.

Furthermore, I have witnessed emphasis placed on “moral values” in addition to “academic subjects” in school systems in the United States and Zadeh says that this is also the

case in Canada, while moral education is considered the responsibility of “family and society” for Iranians and other cultures (Zadeh, et al, 2008, p. 60). As a result, parents from these cultures may not wish their children to receive ‘moral education’ from a different cultural perspective, especially when they anticipate an imminent return to their home country, culture, and set of moral values. Changes in parenting can also result from being in the new culture and environment (Zadeh, et al, 2008, p. 42-43). For example, many “immigrant mothers...may not be empowered with parenting strategies appropriate for Western culture” and “their traditional strategies may no longer be appropriate and sometimes may even ‘backfire,’ a concern expressed by numerous Iranian-Canadian mothers in this study” (Zadeh, et al, 2008, p. 60).

Likewise, the young students may receive positive feedback or reinforcement when they adopt American characteristics and negative feedback when they operate with actions or characteristics specific to their native culture (Clayton, 1996, p. 52-53). For example, during Clayton’s research, she observed that several of the teachers were slightly offended by one of the students calling them “Teacher,” rather than using their actual name (Clayton, 1996, p. 52-53). Clayton points out that, although these instructors misinterpreted the student’s address as disrespectful, it is actually a “term of honor” in the student’s native culture (Clayton, 1996, p. 52-53), and therefore, the student may become confused if reprimanded for using ‘teacher’ and similar terms.

#### Anglo-Conformity

While sojourners may make choices and adopt behaviors in order to make their transition to the new culture smoother, they may also face a problem of “Anglo-conformity, which asks them to discard their cultures and languages for mainstream American culture and English” (Dicker, 2008, p. 52), rather than experiencing and learning the new culture and language with little stress, while still functioning in their native language and culture. Dicker points out that both experiences are possible, but that although there is “cultural pluralism” along with “Anglo-conformity, the former [is] generally tolerated but the latter expected” (Dicker, 2008, p. 52). This

makes me wonder if this is happening with K-12 students in this particular town, and if so, to what degree? Again, this seems to be an important concern, specifically for young children, who are in the process of forming a personal cultural identity, especially if the child and his or her family plan to return to their home country.

Clayton describes one student participant in her study that struggled somewhat with his acculturation process and eventually experienced a “transformation in attitude and demeanor” when he “decided ‘to be more relaxed, to be more American’” (Clayton, 1996, p. 88). While the student did not go into further detail about this decision, it could be said to reflect a shift toward Anglo-conformity, simply altering personal behaviors to fit in to the new culture and society by necessity. This also reflects and supports Martin’s concept that sojourners adopt or “develop” new “reinforcers” to help them integrate themselves into the new culture they are placed in” (Martin, 1984, p. 120).

Akrofi, et al, point out that “students do not need to give up one culture to be able to work within another” (Akrofi, Swafford, Janisch, Liu, Durrington, 2008, p. 217). Instead, the idea that biculturalism “is a powerful gift” should be promoted (Akrofi, Swafford, Janisch, Liu, Durrington, 2008, p. 217). Another observation, made by sociologist Paulo Freire, is that “the dominant culture, associated with economic and political power, tends to impose its “superiority” on other cultural expressions” (Freire and Faundez, 1989, p. 74). He goes on to say that “that is why the much-vaunted cultural pluralism of certain societies does not, strictly speaking, exist” but would necessitate “a certain unity in diversity” if it did exist, which “presupposes mutual respect between the various cultural expressions making up the whole,” and which might not be present in many societies (Freire and Faundez, 1989, p. 74). Based on this theory, I was curious if this ‘cultural pluralism’ and respect could be identified in any aspect of the students’ experiences, or if they perhaps felt alienated or marginalized. Freire also offers that “it’s not education which shapes society, but on the contrary, it is society which shapes education according to the interests of those who have power” (Shor and Freire, 1987, p. 75). For example, researcher Leena

Chakrabarti, who, as mentioned earlier, conducted a similar study specifically on Asian Indian American students in Kansas, writes that “over time, assimilation into a new society dissipates the advantages of being able to draw on resources from the old country” (Chakrabarti, 2008, p. 21). Likewise, Dicker offers that “the accepting group, the ‘dominant culture’ or ‘core society,’ is more powerful than the group being accepted, and as such pulls the weaker one to it” (Dicker, 2008, p. 53). Accordingly, I observed how this culturally shaped education impacts young international students in the United States and tried to assess whether this poses any problems for them in anticipation for their return home.

A discussion of the classroom environment by Ira Shor depicts the school as “an area of political contention dominated by the authorities, where opposition ideas and democratic culture can be organized by those who want to transform society, and where student alienation prevents the curriculum from working” (Shor and Freire, 1987, p. 37). Freire’s work further stresses that “Literacy in dominant language supports dominant society, not oppressed (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 159), but on the other hand, is it not helpful for a student, especially a young one, to embrace additional opportunities to advance socially? Though it could be, and has been argued that the necessity to learn English merely fuels the problem of inequality (since English is the dominant language and American is the dominant culture), if an American student was a sojourner in Spain, he or she would most likely make efforts to learn Spanish and wouldn’t necessarily feel as though he or she was oppressed for having to learn the national language. The problem is that the student doesn’t always retain his or her native culture, which seems to be the case with several of the students I interviewed, and this does seem to further serve the dominant culture and support Anglo-conformity. This “cultural pluralism,” which would be necessary for students to remain connected to their home culture and language, while still functioning within their temporary environment is sometimes “seen as threats to national unity” (Dicker, 2008, p. 65).

Likewise, Lee and Koro-Ljungberg offer that, in their study, “as all nine participants learned English and spoke more fluently, bullying decreased and the students were capable of establishing friendships with Americans and other minorities” (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007, p. 108). This seems to support Dicker’s observations stated above, and raises questions about the attitudes of acceptance and respect for diversity of native US students. Certainly, it seems as though exercises in diversity and multiculturalism could help reduce or eliminate this bullying, if any exists in this particular location.

#### Influence of Parents

As the primary example of behavior for young international students, it is clear that parents are an important influence on children’s acculturation and ways of behaving in new environments (Harkins, 2001, p. 342). For instance, researchers have noted that “if parents of Japanese or other sojourning students view life in the host culture as a positive experience, their children are likely to do the same” (Harkins, 2001, p. 342). Likewise, “family experiences and the socio-cultural environment are influential factors forming children’s values and expectations” (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007, p. 109). Furthermore, research has shown “that the parents’ attitudes and the students’ family environment influenced their beliefs and values regarding other minorities and that, indeed, the parents might have served as unsuccessful cultural translators as well as negative examples of acculturation” (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007, p. 109). So, the parents (and other family members) could possibly serve as negative influences in some ways as well.

I think it is important to learn about each student’s family dynamics and examine how the student’s family environment might be affecting his or her acculturation process and educational experience by talking to the parents of the K-12 students. As researcher Harkins offers “community and parental engagement in and support of learning environments that capitalize on students’ backgrounds, home culture, and linguistic experiences must be encouraged” (2001, p. 342). Judging from these observations by other researchers, I anticipated that learning about the



parents' attitudes and participation with the child(ren)'s education and acculturation would be beneficial to my study as well, since the family (and specifically the parents) have been noted by these researchers as important factors (positive or negative) influencing a child's education and acculturation process.

#### Perceptions of Education in the United States

The reviewed literature illuminated learning differences between cultures as a potential cause of difficulty for young students. Thomas points out "collaborate learning" as an area where students may experience confusion and difficulty, due to differences in cultural mentalities (Thomas, 1999, p. 47-48). One of Clayton's participant students liked the active learning in the United States more than the memorization of her home country, Brazil, because "you don't memorize, you learn and it never leaves you" (Clayton, 1996, p. 53). Additionally, this student reported that "here, you have to show the teachers that you are responsible; in Brazil, you don't have to do that" (Clayton, 1996, p. 46). Researchers have also highlighted a "feeling of discrimination from the respected authority figures (for example, teachers)" which "decrease[s] students' positive perceptions of US culture and the school system" (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007, p. 105). These observations formed the basis for my examination of sojourners' perceptions of education in the United States.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction and Overview

In order to learn about the specific experiences international students and their families have with acculturation to American culture, I conducted personal interviews with both young international students and their parents, giving them an opportunity to express their cultural voices. Twenty-two participants were interviewed (detailed in the following paragraphs) and these interviews were conducted from January 2011 through March 2011 at the local resource center for students.

From these interviews, I intended to gain specific knowledge about what difficulties and/or positive experiences each family member had experienced with navigating their new temporary cultural environment and what experiences they anticipated during their re-entry to their home country. I also wanted to learn what recommendations these families might have to make these transitions and adjustments more beneficial for them. My goal in exploring this case study of families using “qualitative inquiry,” was to understand specific experiences, and hear the cultural voices, of a subset of the town’s residents, rather than a general and random overview of the population (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008, p. 69). Accordingly, I used “purposive sampling,” asking for participants who would provide insight into the experiences of a specific group (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008, p. 69). After obtaining IRB approval, I posted fliers (included as Appendix A) on January 13, 2011 and reposted on January 28 and March 4, 2011 asking for

participants. Participants were also recruited by word of mouth through a participant of the study. I was contacted by the first recruited participant approximately two weeks after the first fliers were posted, and though this participant was recruited solely through the fliers, the remaining participants were recruited by both the fliers and by word of mouth.

Although efforts were made to be objective and allow the data to direct the analysis, it is important to note that “qualitative studies are purposefully subjective and interpretive” and “therefore, issues of reliability and credibility are not addressed in the ways applicable to quantitative and experimental studies” (Thomas, 1999, p. 78-79). While collecting this data, I was careful to ask questions that did not lead responses. Instead, I asked broad questions, to allow the families to openly share their experiences, in their own way (please see Appendix B for a complete list of interview questions). Much of the data I collected and many of the experiences shared were from the parents’ perspective. Therefore, while I did speak directly with the children, and they were able to share their personal experiences, the information I gained from these groups of students are more from a family perspective than specifically from the child’s perspective due to the children being more comfortable in the presence of their parent(s) during the interview process (or vice versa).

### Research Sample

I interviewed twenty participants from ten different families. Seven countries were represented within this group of participants: Indonesia, Nepal, India, Vietnam, Uzbekistan, Korea, and Mexico. The ten children who were interviewed ranged in age from seven to fourteen years old, (five boys and five girls), and the ten parents who were interviewed ranged in age from twenty-nine to forty-two years old, at the time of their respective interviews, which were conducted during the Spring of 2011. The participants had been living in this particular town for varying lengths of time at the time of the interview, between approximately eight months and nine years. Two participants had been in the town for approximately eight months, three participants had been in the town one year, six participants had been in the town for two years,

five participants had been in the town for four years, three participants had been in the town for five years, two participants had been in the town for six years, and one participant had been in the town for nine years.

Each adult participant was asked to read and sign an Informed Consent form (please see Appendix C) and each child was asked to read and sign a Child Assent Form (please see Appendix D). Each participant was asked if he or she needed assistance reading or interpreting all or part of the consent form. Each participant was able to read and sign the consent forms on their own, without assistance. The participants were each provided a personal copy of their signed consent form for their records. Only two participants seemed to have some slight difficulty understanding my language and accent (meaning that I repeated or restated one or two questions before the participant understood the question); every other participant, parents and children, had little or no trouble understanding and speaking English effectively. Most of the participants were unsure of how long they would stay in this town and said that their length of stay depended greatly upon a variety of factors, including their own or their spouse's academic progress.

*Contextual Information:* Prior to the interview process I learned that many resources are provided for international families through a local residential center with many resources for international students, including after-school programs, cultural events, or neighborhood activities. Accordingly, I learned about this center by perusing the center's website and interviewing staff to find out about programs and resources available for international students. Five of the participants were local graduate students at and five were spouses of graduate students. I asked questions about this information in order to gain an understanding of each participant's lifestyle and environment.

*Demographic Information:* In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participant's background and current circumstances, I noted the participant's gender, asked for his or her age, native country, and number of children.

*Perceptual Information:* In asking the research questions, my aim was to pay close attention to the attitudes and perceptions of the participants, documenting their discussed or displayed attitudes toward the issues I address in my study. Therefore, I made notes about their responses to the interview questions and noted these perceived attitudes in conjunction to the responses given.

*Theoretical Information:* I began reviewing literature on sojourner experiences after developing the idea for this study, and searched for case studies of international K-12 students' experiences. I found several case studies and also expanded my review to studies of sojourner experiences in general, including those of adults. I also reviewed handbooks for qualitative research in order to prepare for the study.

#### Research Design Overview

During the review of literature, I made careful notes of concepts presented by the researchers that were relevant and interesting, as well as my thoughts, perceptions and questions. These notes prompted the development of research questions and, later, interview questions for the study. When I felt confident that the theoretical foundation for my study was strong, I applied for and attained IRB approval for personal interviews and began recruiting participants to speak with. During the interview process, I continued to review the literature and reflect on my notes and research questions as stated objectives. I analyzed each interview as it was conducted and also reviewed the interviews collectively at the end of the interview process. As I collected data, I compared the data with notes from the literature and continued to review and reflect on the literature itself in order to develop a 'findings' section to present these results.

#### Data-Collection Methods

I conducted twelve interviews and each interview was held at a local resource center for students, in a private room. The interviews took place from January 2011 through March 2011. I intended to record each interview, but only six recordings were audible due to a malfunction with the recording device. This malfunction was not detected until those interviews were completed

and no sound was present on those recordings. The participants were informed verbally that their interview would be audio-recorded, and information about the audio-recording was included in the consent form that each participant was asked to read and sign. Detailed notes were taken on a form I created for each interview, which consisted of the list of the interview questions (please see Appendix B) with space allowed between each question for notes. Careful attention was paid to document the interviews in writing following the oral data collection. The recorded interviews ranged from 8 minutes to 41 minutes. The average interview time was approximately 25-30 minutes. One interview was conducted with both parents and one child present, and both parents collaborated on providing responses to the interview questions. Seven interviews were conducted with one parent and one child present, and one interview included one parent with two children. I also interviewed three parents without their children present. I have attached a list detailing demographic information for the student participants, (included as Appendix F). Detailed notes were taken for each interview and these notes were coded, meaning that responses for each question were marked with an alphabetical code to match a specific subcategory of the *Literature Review* and *Findings* sections (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008, p. 95).

#### Data Analysis and Synthesis

Since “the interviewer must come to the transcript prepared to let the interview breathe and speak for itself” (Seidman (1998) cited in Bloomberg Volpe, 2008, p. 98), I attempted to rely on the data to shape the findings sections, listening to the audio recordings and reviewing the interview transcriptions multiple times to allow themes to emerge. After conducting the interviews, I marked each question and response on each form with a letter code to sort or code the responses. My specific “coding,” or “assigning an alphanumeric system to segments of transcripts” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008, p. 95) has been included as Appendix E. I then used these codes to group the responses by subcategory while analyzing and synthesizing the data. I created subcategories for literature review and findings, matching categories for each. I later narrowed the findings section to three categories: Sojourner Stress and Difficulty, Re-Entry

Anticipation and Anglo-Conformity, which were the most salient categories in the findings. I then re-read the sections and evaluated how each section answered the research questions and how each set of responses should be used to reflect the goals of the research.

#### Ethical Considerations

This study was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and all recruitment methods, questions, and materials were approved. Following IRB protocol, I posted fliers (included as Appendix A) on January 13, 2011 and reposted on January 28 and March 4, 2011. The first interview was conducted exactly two weeks after the first posting of the fliers. Participants were selected by “criterion sampling” and “snowball sampling,” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008, p. 191), meaning that I first requested parent participants who were graduate students and had children who attended elementary, middle school or high school in this midwestern town and then these participants recommended other potential participants who had similar circumstances. I interviewed participants as they contacted me, instead of compiling a list of participants before commencing the interviews.

#### Issues of Trustworthiness

Although I used only recorded interviews and observations from the parents and children to glean information about the participants, I made detailed notes both during and immediately after each interview, audio-recorded six of the interviews and reviewed these notes and recordings several times before synthesizing the data. Furthermore, highlighting the participant’s true voice and his or her direct statements lends credibility and dependability to the data collected. Although statements can be taken out of context in some situations, the responses used in this study were derived from questions about specific issues particular to the participant’s lives. The questions were open ended in order to allow participants to highlight what they understood as significant. The participants answered questions in response to a direct question about a certain issue and responses were coded according to salient themes. Each participant was only

interviewed once. It is not known whether the young students' responses were influenced by their parents' presence during the interviews.

#### Limitations of the Study

There are various factors that determine how students adapt, adjust or assimilate and "receptive skills are mastered before expressive ones" (Clayton, 1996, p. 32). Perhaps the students experienced difficulties, not yet having the capability to communicate his or her thoughts or feelings in the new language. Simply asking them questions about their experiences does not necessarily provide complete insight into their adaptation process, as different combinations of influential factors could be contributing to each student's personal experience, and the student may have difficulty expressing him or her self.

Clayton, likewise, addresses the limits of her study by illuminating that the sample of students she observed were of "fortunate" socioeconomic status but she also argues that observing these students can "offer insights" into the lives of other students as well who may not be as fortunate (1996, p. 10). Since the families I interviewed all shared the common experience of one or more parent being a graduate student, my participants seemed to be of similar socioeconomic status, at least while studying in the United States. Several parents discussed their limited funds, the inflation of prices in the United States compared to their home country, their efforts to keep scholarships, and their health concerns being covered by health insurance. While it seems that even a small difference in funding between families could make some difference, it also seems that these families are collectively struggling with the same financial difficulties as a result of being in the United States. Therefore, I feel that an accurate depiction of the financial difficulties of international families in general was adequately represented with the participants of my study.

In her dissertation, Shirley Thomas states that international parents might have difficulty opening up about their children to educators (1999, p. 42) and, though I am not an educator, prior to my interaction with international students, I questioned whether this might be the case with my



interviews. However, since I am not school personnel, nor in any position of authority, I feel that they were more inclined to answer my questions honestly. Since I asked them directly for their honest responses and assured them that their input would have no impact on themselves or their child, I felt that they were more at ease with me than this warning might suggest. I also expressed my desire to highlight their unique perceptions of United States culture and education and promote a better understanding of their experiences. Therefore, I tried to express that their honest responses would help, not hurt, them, and I believe the desired goal was achieved. Additionally, since the parents may have seen me at the student center while I was tutoring other students, they may deem me trustworthy and be more inclined to share their experiences with me. The parents' increased comfort could, in turn, impact the students' comfort and ability to answer my questions openly and honestly.

#### Chapter Summary

My literature review helped to direct my focus and inspired questions about the participants' experiences. Using "qualitative inquiry" and "purposive sampling" (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008, p. 69), I recruited the participants using "criterion sampling" and "snowball sampling" (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008, p. 191). IRB approval was obtained for the study and participants were provided, and asked to sign, a consent form (one each for parent and child). I relied on personal interviews to illuminate the voices of these international residents, audio-recording six of the interviews and making detailed notes both during and after each interview. Additionally, I assigned a code (listed in Appendix E) for each response and used this to synthesize and organize the data into sections of results. These methods facilitated an examination of the cultural voices of international families, learning about difficulties they may have with acculturation to their new environment.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

To obtain this data, I interviewed twenty-two participants from ten different families, all who had spent anywhere from eight months to nine years in the United States. Seven countries were represented within this group of participants: Indonesia, Vietnam, Nepal, Mexico, Korea, Uzbekistan, and India. From the interview data, I found three emerging themes: Sojourner Stress and Challenges, Re-Entry Anticipation and Anglo-Conformity. The participants of my study, while at times substantiating the research I had reviewed with their answers, were also able to lend a unique voice to their individual experiences. While I found many similarities while learning about their experiences, sharing these experiences highlighted the cultural voice of each international student.

#### Sojourner Stress and Challenges

While working with this data, my focus was to discover what experiences sojourner families have while adjusting to life in the United States and with what they might have difficulty. From their responses, I found that the participants in my study did experience some challenges with their efforts to adjust to their new surroundings. The challenges they reported were language learning and making friends. Understanding English and communicating in English was a common challenge reported by the students. For example, The parents of Waluyo, an eight year-old Indonesian student, reported that he had difficulty with “how to express feelings” and “at the time he had to make a poster about no bullying, and he say it’s really difficult for him, like to express [feeling]...” Likewise, when asked if English skills were

difficult for her, Kade, a seven year-old Indonesian student, also offered that learning the language and functioning in the culture was “a little bit hard...when I’m in kindergarten it was hard,” to which her mother responded “cause she just came here,” and because it marked her entry into the United States school system. Teresa, a nine year-old student from Mexico, also reported that she was “scared” during the initial months of her time in the United States, but now is “confident,” even though her mother reported that she was much more social in her native culture than she has been during her time in the United States. These reports show that the efforts to understand and function in the new, foreign environment was challenging for these students. With a foreign and, at times, dramatically different environment to adjust to, it is understandable that these students could experience some stress during their temporary stay in the United States, and that these three areas could create challenges for them.

Another example of this difficulty occurred during another interview with Waluyo, from Indonesia, who was somewhat reluctant to answer my questions, and relied on his parents to interpret many of the questions. I wondered if this was because he was anxious, or nervous speaking with me or simply had difficulty understanding my questions in English. At other times, he understood immediately and burst out with a ready response. Waluyo did not seem shy, and actually was active and lively. I also observed that Waluyo had difficulty paying attention to my questions, he left the room several times with his parents’ permission. He seemed to have difficulty understanding what was being said, and fidgeted, looked bored, and so forth. While this could merely be a factor of age or personality, this behavior could be a reflection of difficulty understanding English. Understandably, “coordinating two cultures and languages is a complex process involving considerable stress at different times during acculturation (Tong, Huang, McIntyre, 2006, p. 203) and “it is not uncommon to hear international students from non-English speaking countries report that they only understand a small portion of classroom lectures and discussions and, because of that, leave school everyday frustrated and exhausted” (Lee, 2008, p. 35). Likewise, Clayton offers that the students, whom she interacted with, reported and “reflected

resignation” in their demeanor and attitudes” (1996, p. 118) and that “being surrounded by a foreign language all day is an assault on the senses; trying to make sense of it, especially through only one channel (auditory), is very difficult; particularly early in the experience, it is enervating and exhausting” (1996, p. 48). Clayton also refers to one of the students whom she observes, reporting that the student needed a brief rest to cope with the tasks of paying attention to a foreign language and functioning at a comparable rate to the other native children, since “listening takes energy” (Clayton, 1996, p. 48). These observations reflect Waluyo’s fidgety behavior during our interview, and could explain some difficulties that international students have with scholastics and social interaction. This behavior, of course, could be due to a variety of factors, but I think that it bears notation. This could be further evidence that difficulty understanding English is a prominent challenge for international students in this midwestern town.

Furthermore, this particular challenge with communication could impact various aspects of the student’s life. For example, due to the ‘exhaustion’ of navigating a new culture and language, these international students may, unfortunately, experience a loss of hope, or a “dip in [the] feeling of high expectation” although they might have “arrived with a full reservoir of high expectations and hopes” and “were all very excited about the prospect of living in the United States” (Clayton, 1996, p. 118). Considering these difficulties, it is not surprising that the adjustment period for sojourners has been described as “unpleasant or disagreeable” by researchers and could certainly pose problems for sojourners (Westwood, Lawrence, Paul, 1986, p. 221). For example, Clayton describes Erik, one of the students she observes, writing that “the worst thing was that when he didn’t understand, he couldn’t explain what he didn’t understand” (Clayton, 1996, p. 34). Research has reported that “a sense of loss is particularly typical among adolescent sojourners whose still-developing identity comes from being with family and peers,” and this certainly could create complications with their adjustment and general wellbeing (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002, p. 459). The participants in my study seemed to echo these difficulties in their reflection of their early experiences in the United States, citing difficulty

making friends, navigating their new school and new city, and learning the language. These students also confirmed an observation that an experience of “elation and optimism” is not always common at the beginning of the sojourner’s stay (Church, 1982, p. 542), since some difficulties and complications were reported. This shows that, while seemingly resilient in many ways, the struggle to communicate as a way to adjust or assimilate could be extremely taxing on many of the international students in this midwestern town.

From this observation, it is necessary to further note that, while there are commonalities, there can be many varying factors to consider when discussing adjustment and acculturation. For example, Arti, an Indonesian mother, stated that “right now my children, two of my children is speaking well, but for my son, is very difficult to speak, maybe he shy, but I think or maybe there is difference for my daughters and my son.” In correlation, within one “self-efficacy” study, “[researchers] found that expatriates high in self-efficacy were better adjusted to their general environment, to interaction with host nationals and to work roles than those low in self-efficacy” (Hechanova-Alampay, et al., 2002, p. 462). Likewise, “gregarious children, not surprisingly, made an easier adjustment than the... shy” (Clayton, 1996, p. 16). Clayton’s observations of a student, Erik, in her study, contributed his eventual academic success to his “outgoing personality,” which she described as the “biggest factor in Erik’s adjustment to the US” (Clayton, 1996, p. 16). Further explaining the impact of personality on adjustment, Clayton writes that “emphasis on verbal communication is another priority in United States culture and another implicit assumption of the classroom culture; often, if a student is consistently shy or silent in class, he will have a hard time making friends or she is thought to be less than intelligent” (Clayton, 1996, p. 50). Additionally, “for the gregarious students, learning the language [means] more friends, which, in turn, [means] learning the language faster” while “for the shy students, the spiral slowed and almost degenerated as language developed at a much slower place” (Clayton, 1996, p. 68). Therefore, the difference in attitude between Vietnamese students Anh

and her brother, or between the other participants in the study, could be attributed to personality or self-efficacy, as well as external influences or language or cultural differences.

While there could be many possible explanations for these differences, they could result from a combination of factors. Therefore, even in the case of one individual student, it is difficult to say for certain why a student might have his or her specific experiences. For example, Brein and David offer that “the sojourner’s successful adjustment to an intercultural experience is highly dependent on his achievement of effective interpersonal relations with his hosts” (1971, p. 216), which seems to explain the difficulties particular students face with adjustment to the new culture. Regarding the child, Xuan, who demonstrated being uninterested in social methods of acculturation or adjustment, difficulty making friends and communicating with others in the host community could have created additional difficulties with adjustment, and he has, understandably, mixed feelings about his new environment. This, in turn, could be a common challenge among sojourners, and could result from a variety of factors. Furthermore, researchers have observed a “pattern of strain,” for international students that can be “curvilinear, suggesting that there may be different types of adjustment reactions and these may take a different path over the course of time” (Hechanova-Alampay et al, 2002, p. 469). Likewise, “although sojourners experienced increasing adjustment over time...self-efficacy, social support and cultural novelty predicted adjustment and strain at different times during the transition period” (Hechanova-Alampay, et al., 2002, p. 458, 469), which explains why the pattern and degree of adjustment, acculturation or assimilation, can be different from student to student, even while some similarities are shown. At the time of the interviews, each of the participants had been in the United States for varying lengths of time, but each of the young students had been in the United States for at least eight months. Therefore, the amount of time spent in the United States was not the most important contributing factor, since most of the students reported difficulty making learning the language, making friends, and adjusting generally upon first arrival in the United States, even though they had all spent different amounts of time in the United States, between

eight months and nine years. While it is not possible in this study to identify the causes for the unique experiences of each student, it is nevertheless to point out the differences between the students' experiences and highlight each student's 'cultural voice'.

Despite these difficulties with understanding and communication in English, all parents interviewed stated that their children were functioning satisfactorily, and that levels of achievement were satisfactory overall. So, despite the frustration they felt, the children did not shut down or stop trying, but continued to make progress. For example, Arti, a mother from Indonesia, stated that her daughter, seven year-old Kade, was getting "excellent" marks on schoolwork, and that she was a good student. Arti also added that "all my children like school here" and eight year-old Waluyo's parents said that he thought it was "easier in this school, always he say from the beginning," from his home country of Indonesia and that this made him happy. Abishek, a father from Nepal offered that his son is a "hard worker" and makes a great effort, although English, reading and vocabulary are somewhat difficult for him. About his eleven-year old son Mimik, he offered "he's making friends" and "he's working real hard in school...he's in a reading course and is working hard to meet state standards for reading for the next semester." These reports, in conjunction with the reported challenges these students face show that these children are resilient, adapting over time to their environment and developing the skills necessary to function within their new environment.

In addition to the issues with communication, making friends was another challenge that the sojourners reported experiencing during their adjustment period. When I asked the young sojourners who their friends were and how they met them, I learned that many of them had American friends, as well as friends from a variety of cultures, and also reported a gradual decrease in adjustment-related stress. For example, Anh and Xuan, brother and sister from Vietnam, reported that they experienced difficulty making friends when they first came to the United States. Xuan, in fact, reported continued difficulty making friends while his sister found making friends easier after being in the United States for one year. This could mean that, in the

cases of these students, the successful fostering of friendships was a positive contributing factor to their adjustment, giving them positive links to the new culture: children who are somewhat similar to themselves, of the same gender, of similar age, same experiences at school, and so forth (Hechanova-Alampay, et al., 2002, p. 462).

The benefits of friendships were further illuminated during my interviews when I learned that many of the children interviewed interact with other children of various cultures and backgrounds. For example, Mimik, was eager to talk about the various friends he had made from other countries, and his father seemed pleased that he was able to interact with such a diverse population of students. This interaction with other nationalities was, for some, (as it was stated by the parents) a departure from the environment of their home country. Arti, from Indonesia, for example, stated that her country was much less culturally diverse than the United States, and therefore, her interaction with students of other cultures was a new experience for her and her children. Just as each student's individual circumstances and personality traits may influence their adjustment to the new culture, "it is predicted that international sojourners who had a greater proportion of host national (American) friends would be more well adjusted and experience less strain" (Hechanova-Alampay, et al., 2002, p. 462). Therefore, although these children may have had difficulty making friends initially, their eventual interaction with students from other cultures helped to bolster their adjustment and acculturation and develop or improve the skills necessary to function in a foreign culture.

These friendships with students from other cultures were described fondly by the participants of my study. For example, Anh, from Vietnam, also stated that "meeting friends in ELL class is easy," and stated that she felt more of a bond with peers experiencing similar adjustments. Since they had many of the same difficulties that she had, she was able to relate to them and form close friendships. While Anh stated that she had no friends who were of the same nationality, she had friends from many other cultures. Mimik also reported having friends of many other cultures, as did Kade, from Indonesia and Teresa, from Mexico. Waluyo's parents,



for example, pointed out that he is “good friends with Chinese boy that live near our neighbor.” Mimik, likewise, has friends from his home country as well as from Africa, Vietnam, China, Middle East and United States. Kade’s mother also offered that “my children’s friend is from another country” and “it’s no problem.” In addition, Kade’s older sister, fourteen year-old Hijriya, discussed her friends, saying

I met them at school first, cause they’re trying to help me, cause I can’t speak English the first time I went to school. They helped me to go to the classes at school...I don’t have any Indonesian friends my own age...so I have friends from other countries, like the Middle East...and some are from here.

Hijriya’s experience is interesting because she reports being befriended almost immediately upon arrival at her school in the United States. This contrasts with the reports of other participants in my study, in which they recount difficulty making friends initially. In relation, through my literature review, I found that Clayton provides an opinion from one of her students that it is “easier...to make friends with people from other countries...because we seem to be in the same situation” (Clayton, 1996, p. 37). From the participants’ stories, it was made clear that making friends can be challenging at the beginning of the sojourner’s stay, and that the sojourners are inclined to become friends with other sojourners, though not necessarily with other sojourners from their native culture. In addition, it is reported that the friendships that are formed can positively impact the sojourner’s adjustment and acculturation process and create a more positive experience overall.

The children’s parents also reported satisfaction that their children were able to interact and make friends with other children from different cultures. Victoria, for example, said that she was pleased that her daughter, Teresa, was becoming “more open-minded” as a result of her exposure to other cultures through friends. Kade’s mother also said that “my children’s friends is

from other countries, and this is different,” since in their home country, the children would be in a much more culturally homogenous environment. The parents clearly recognize the value and cultural capital of cultivating friendships as an important aspect of adjustment and acculturation.

Judging from these interviews, there can be a dramatic variety of influencing factors for how these sojourners are acclimated to their new surroundings. For example, Anh from Vietnam reported that she had made many friends, despite having some difficulty interacting with others and navigating her school at the beginning of her stay in the United States. She also seemed positive about her experiences, saying that she enjoyed spending time with her new friends, learning English, and thought English culture was “cool.” Her brother, on the other hand, stated that he did not have many friends, wasn’t really interested in making friends and described American culture as “kinda bad, kinda good.” He stated that he just liked to spend time by himself and thought that learning English was “okay,” but difficult. This may not, however, be directly related to the child’s adjustment, and could be due to his personality, age, and so forth, rather than his experiences in United States. Interestingly, two of the male students I interviewed seemed somewhat distracted and restless during their interview; playing with nearby materials and even leaving the room on occasion. I wonder if this is due to a difference in gender behaviors, since the females I spoke with did not behave in the same way. Both male students were from Asian countries, so their native cultures are equally different from American culture (Brein & David, 1971, p. 217). Also, they have each been in the United States for about one year, so I wondered if these two students are in the same stage of adjustment and/or acculturation. These differences in attitudes and perhaps in adjustment progress highlight the diversity of experiences among international students, and reveals that each student has a voice to offer his or her experiences.

Another aspect of acculturation that was brought up during the interviews is climate. Many of the participants mentioned inclement or extreme winter weather as a drastically different aspect of American culture that is problematic for them at times. Accustomed to tropical climates,

several of the participants pointed out how this affects daily life, with one interviewee elaborating on how this affects food growth and consumption, and how she has noticed that Americans eat fewer vegetables and more meat compared to her native culture. In a monthly newsletter originating from the local resource center for students, I noticed a list of recommendations and helpful advice for functioning in winter weather that is intended for sojourners. Therefore, this resource center has addressed this and has made efforts to inform and assist international students in navigating and coping with a climate that may be drastically different for some. Perhaps, in addition, some sort of tutorial or course on how to stay safe and comfortable in winter storms and other potential stressors for new students would be helpful.

Another interesting, and inadvertent, challenging area of adjustment is the sojourner's interaction with his or her parents. Through my interaction with several international families, I met parents who seemed to genuinely support their children, and promote a positive adjustment to the new culture, for their children's happiness and wellbeing, even while they attempted to preserve their native culture. However, in this process sometimes language skills present challenges. For example, Arti, from Indonesia stated that "my children right now...this my younger, she just understand a little bit of [her native] language" and speaks English primarily "so I learn from her." I noticed dramatically different levels of English speaking ability within several families I interviewed, and thought it could potentially pose a challenge for the young students. If the parents' English skills were significantly inferior to the young students' skills, the children could perhaps feel some pressure to embrace American culture and further hone their language skills in order to support, or assist their parents (Thomas, 1999, p. 40-41). This could create a conflict with efforts to preserve the student's native culture and ties to their past. Anh and Xuan, for example, were more fluent in English than their mother, as were Kade and Mimik, although none of the participants reported this as a problem. Waluyo's relationship with his Indonesian parents actually contradicts this because his parents' English skills seemed superior to his own, and he seemed to rely on them for interpretation. Therefore, while I did notice a family dynamic

where the student was the most skilled at English language comprehension and communication, this was not the case in every family interviewed.

Furthermore, because the children's experience may be very different from the parents' experience, difficulties may arise, as researcher Shirley Thomas (1999) addresses in her dissertation. She writes that "many immigrant families find that the children gain cultural and linguistic knowledge at school, but family difficulties can result as their parents are not immersed in society in the same way" (Thomas, 1999, p. 39). Likewise, Thomas observes that "children often become cultural interpreters," taking on "language and acculturation skills more quickly than their parents," and thus experiencing "emotional contradictions between pressure to cling to family traditions and the new context they find themselves in" (Thomas, 1999, p. 40-41). Although in the case of international families in this town, in theory, at least one parent would be a student, and would have advanced English skills; the child might spend the majority of his or her time with the accompanying parent due to the graduate student's study schedule. This accompanying parent may or may not speak English well, and could therefore rely upon the young son or daughter to interpret, potentially placing pressure upon the child to quickly acculturate and adopt English skills. Ultimately, "spouses play a key role in the adjustment and academic success of international students" (Martens & Grant, 2008, p. 56) and, by extension, it seems that understanding the sojourner's family dynamics could help to understand the sojourner's challenges with adjustment and acculturation in order to make their experience as beneficial as possible.

Though there are programs in place which attempt to alleviate some of the challenges that these students face, (and are, to some extent, successful), these challenges are nevertheless real and legitimate concerns for international students living in this town, as evidenced by their reports. Therefore, their voices bear attention and examination to determine what issues exist and what potential changes could be made to assuage them.

## Re-Entry Anticipation

An additional focus of my inquiry was to examine what expectations the students and parents had regarding their prospective return to their home country. The most dynamic topics discussed during the interviews regarding re-entry anticipation were the curriculum differences and what complications they caused for the families, cultural differences including cultural norms, and the families' attitudes about returning to the home country.

Each of my participants reported that they were thinking about their family's re-entry transition, and many had taken measures to counteract or lessen any expected complications resulting from the adjustment. For example, participants noted that the curriculum their child presently learns in this particular town is on a different schedule than the curriculum currently being taught in their home country. Therefore, as reported by the parent participants, if their children have any chance of transitioning smoothly back into the school system in their native country, they must implement certain measures, including special schools, daily tutoring and additional classes as well as supplemental materials to add to their child's studies, sent from the home country by friends or family members. One mother described this to be "like home school," whereby she added assignments and activities to the child's regular curriculum to better match the curriculum of her home country. Waluyo's parents, for example, made it clear that "we start prepare for him" and "we ask our friend from our home country to send all the materials from the school and we download it, and we print it out and allow him to read and practice...." Likewise, Hijriya, a fourteen year-old student from Indonesia, reported that in her home country, "there's more subjects in school, and they're more difficult than in America." When asked about her re-entry in relation to the more difficult curriculum, she said "yeah, that would be the hardest part, because my mom told me I'll have to have a tutor every day to learn the new subjects." Anh's mother, from Vietnam, also pointed out that her daughter would be "close to graduating from high school" when her family returned home, but would most likely "not be accepted" into higher education in her home country, because her studies in America did not match the curriculum

required there. These differences in curricula created some stress in the lives of the sojourners and their families, according to my participants, and were represented as a complication, albeit a necessary one.

While neither the parents nor the students reported that their education in the United States was necessarily or specifically subpar, one parent, Victoria, from Mexico, did say that she thought students were able to make more mistakes without repercussions than they would in her home country. Her opinion, in fact, was that the teachers were more lenient with the students than they would be in many other cultures, but that, as a positive result, there was perhaps less stress and more general flexibility for the student, rather than strict emphasis on academic achievement. Victoria also stated that school is “more strict” and “serious” in her country, while school in the United States promotes more creativity and encourages the child to do his or her best, rather than stressing out about schoolwork. Her daughter, Teresa, also offered that “learning is different here” in the United States, but that she “[likes] both the same.” Additionally, Udbala, a parent from India, thought that the information learned for each grade could be increased in the United States. She stressed that students are capable of learning much more than they are expected to in U.S. schools and could benefit from a challenging curriculum. She elaborated, however, that in her home country, the curriculum is challenging and extremely stressful compared to the curriculum in the United States. Echoing this, Arti said that “In my country, I think, especially for elementary, the students’ teacher or maybe the system just press the students...many students stress when the time to test come...we can see many students sick ...and many assignments too.” In contrast, she says, here “the teacher to more creativity for students...and more confident...I like the system for here...” Likewise, Yuliya pointed out that students in her home country in Central Asia would do very well on difficult math problems, but would be unable to understand logic questions, and she stressed that the curriculum in the United States is based on logic and critical thinking rather than quantitative knowledge, as in some other countries. It makes sense, then, that students would have a difficult time adjusting back to the school culture and curriculum

of their home country after acculturating to the U.S. school setting. The experiences of these families illuminate the complications with re-entry and transition back into the native education system, which by extension creates a challenge for the student and family during their stay in the United States, simply due to their re-entry anticipation and the stress of preparation for the future transitions.

In addition to the differences in curriculum, other cultural and societal differences were brought up during the interview questions regarding re-entry anticipation. All but one of the participants stated that they anticipated some difficulty when they returned home, because they had been in American culture for long enough to acquire American cultural characteristics. Anh and Xuan, for example, reported that they anticipate experiencing difficulty transitioning back into their native culture primarily because they have worked hard to acquire English and adopt aspects of American culture, saying that they “will probably forget some things” in their native language by the time they return home and it “might take awhile” to regain these language skills. Additionally, the students mentioned how different the weather is in this region of the United States than in their home country, as did Arti and Kade. They also said that America is more “modern,” compared to what they are accustomed to, and that “everything is more expensive” than in their home country. Clayton’s observation that “everything that is done in the school – in the classroom and the corridors, the lunchroom, the gym, the principal’s office - is done to direct and ease the transition of the child into the larger society” (Clayton, 1996, p. 7) reflects these situations, since these sojourners are functioning in, and being prepared for a society in which they will only temporarily belong. Therefore, judging from the statements of these participants, the anticipation of re-entry transition could be multi-faceted, and may significantly complicate adjustment and acculturation for these students.

These cultural differences were further illuminated when Kade’s mother, Arti, scolded her slightly for sitting slouched in a chair with one foot on the chair seat. She stated that this seating position is “not polite,” and asked me about rules on how children sit in the United States.

When I told Arti that I thought many children sat this way in the United States, and while an adult might ask them to sit up straight in certain situations, I thought that many people were somewhat accustomed to seeing them sitting this way. She explained that “there are many rules in my country and...in here no” and that she has told her daughter not to become too comfortable with American mannerisms and etiquette, because she will only be here a short while longer, and then will need to be prepared to abide by the rules of the home country. She said that “in my country, it’s opposite..., we ‘press,’ and for the confidence, I like here.” Additionally, Yuliya, a mother from Uzbekistan, also told me that she had to write a letter to her son’s school asking to help interpret and explain the rules to him, because he was being punished often for the same offense and did not understand why. This shows that there are many aspects of a new culture that could be confusing for an international student and that this confusion could sometimes be detrimental to their academic success.

These complications could, as Arti feared, create challenges for the student upon their return to their home country. For example, my interview with Kade, a seven year-old from Indonesia, revealed such a situation. During the interview, Kade was told by her mother, presumably for the first time, that she would probably be placed in an international school when she returned to her home country, because she speaks English fluently, but no longer speaks her native language fluently. After her mother revealed this information, saying “maybe I will put my daughter in international school...because she didn’t understand well [native] language,” Kade gasped, expressing her shock and even seemed disappointed at the idea that she wouldn’t be able to easily transition back into life in her home country, but would be in a ‘different’ educational environment. Additionally, since the participant’s home country has a more homogenous population, she may be challenged in re-entry after interacting with such an international representation of children in the classroom. Due to a possible “lack of overlap between cultural norms, values and beliefs” (Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007, p. 109), the student may have picked up traits and cultural distinctions that will conflict with his or her native culture. However, in



Kade's case, when she does return, and perhaps when she has been living in her home country for an extended amount of time, she may begin to re-identify with her native culture. Considering that there can potentially be many dramatic differences between cultures, Kade's placement in a special school upon return to her home country could be appropriate and necessary, especially since she is transitioning from a racially, culturally diverse environment like the United States to a more culturally and racially homogenous environment.

Though the somewhat stressful differences between cultures exist, my parent participants reported positive feedback on their children's education and cultural experiences in the United States. According to the responses I received from parents and students, the prospects are more positive than negative, even considering the potential difficulty transitioning back into the native country, and the experience with a diverse population is viewed by these students and their parents as a benefit or attribute rather than a detrimental or problematic experience. All of the parents said that they were satisfied overall with the experience their children had gained while in the United States, despite the difficulties they had experienced. Additionally, these parents thought that their children would be different upon return to their home country and culture because they would be more open-minded, having interacted with a diverse population and having acquired new language skills. For example, A Spanish-speaking family in this study embraced learning English and simultaneously made efforts to preserve their native culture and language. The mother, Victoria, commented that she was "happy that Theresa speaks English very well, and is also fluent in Spanish," and that her daughter was also extremely proud of her native heritage and language. Therefore, though they have learned English and are functioning members of American society, they are not disregarding their native culture, but are in fact, celebrating it. Accordingly, due to their efforts at maintaining a bicultural lifestyle and their frequent visits to their home country, the family is anticipating few complications with the re-entry into their home culture. Victoria and her daughter were the only participants who said they expected minimal with their re-entry to the home culture. Echoing Victoria's statement, during

our interview, Abishek, Nepalese father to Mimik, stated that “there is no bad or good culture, and no harm in learning about other cultures, but it is important to keep ties to the home culture.” Thus, although the parents make efforts to remain in touch with their native culture, they also value the experience that their family is having in the United States.

This appreciation for their family’s experience in the United States is in anticipation for their son’s or daughter’s future. For example, Abishek also feels that his son has a better education in the United States than in their home country , since Abishek had “no bench and desk” and only had “really dusty chalk,” and would “sit on the ground,” with “no books”, and “no quality education.” He believes, therefore, that his son will have many opportunities in his future, even after returning to his native country, due to his experience in the United States. So, while Abishek does want his son to retain his native culture, he is supportive of his son’s education and experience in the United States. Arti also said that her daughter, Kade, would be an excellent candidate for higher-paying, more desirable jobs in their home country because of her English skills, saying essentially, “you know, in my country, if somebody have English, special English language, they can find better job this way and right now I think English is...starting now many international schools in my country.” Therefore, these parents are contemplating their child(ren)’s future, and anticipating the best plan for each child’s re-entry transition, and also conscious of fostering positive adjustment and acculturation during their time in the United States.

Despite the concerns for the future, participants also reported excitement when asked about their future return to their home country. Kadhiroli and Udbala, mothers from India, both separately reported that they were extremely excited to see their family and friends and that they were sad that their children were missing bonding experiences with family that they left in their home country. Arti, likewise said that “I think every person have happy to go back to their country because we close to family...and in my country, no winter,” which illuminates her excitement to return to her native environment and support system. When asked how she felt

about returning to her home country, Kade, Arti's daughter, exclaimed "good," with enthusiasm, clearly expressing her excitement. These positive attitudes toward the return home were a common theme among the interviewees. Therefore, it seems that, although the families do anticipate some difficulty when they return, they are in the process or preparing for the transition, in hopes that their return can be as pleasant as they imagine it could be.

### Anglo-Conformity

Another theme that emerged from this study was Anglo-conformity, which, for the purposes of this study, examines how acculturated the student participants are to American culture, and at what cost to their ties to their home culture. I was curious about the extent to which the students adopt American culture and lifestyle norms, and what problems that could pose for them. Regarding Anglo-conformity, I was most interested in exploring the family's ties to their native culture, their ties to American culture, and any positive or negative effects of their connections to American culture.

In what ways do sojourner families maintain a connection with their native culture? Although each of the young student participants functioned in American culture by wearing American clothing, watching American television, eating American food, and so forth, each family reported participating in certain activities and maintaining certain traditions in order to preserve their native culture. Many participants cited "culture nights" for example, as a popular way to promote the native culture for some, and learn about new cultures for others. Likewise, many of the students and parents I spoke with said that they enjoyed "festivals" celebrating holidays, which are specific to their native culture. Abishek, for example, stated that "sometimes there are some celebrations" that allow him and his family to participate in aspects of their native culture. One mother from India, Udbala, said that she and her family coordinated with other parents from India to teach groups of their children about aspects of their native culture. This, she said, helped them to retain their native culture by interacting with others in a supportive, learning group environment, which seemed more effective than expecting the child to learn solely from

the parents. Arti, a mother from Indonesia offered that “we can participate in the celebrate of my country...” and that she had the opportunity to “make the traditional dress in my country in the...international festival.” These activities, provided as resources to the students’ families, or by the families themselves (in Udbala’s case), aid the students in remaining connected with their native culture, preserving their identity and preparing them to re-enter their home environment.

In conjunction with the reports of ties to native culture, my experiences with this small sample population of young international students seems to suggest that many of them formed a bond with United States culture, and therefore may be more inclined to abandon aspects of their native culture in lieu of adopting culturally-specific traits that will help them function within their immediate cultural environment. For example, the students had all adopted an interest in United States movies, music, television, were all wearing American clothing (though one child’s parent was wearing clothing specific to their native culture). The children reported interest in American movies such as “Megamind” and “Mean Girls 2,” as well as American television shows, such as “What Not To Wear,” a program on The Learning Channel. It was clear from their responses that they were all involved in American culture. Only one child reported that his favorite music was specific to his native culture. The other child participants reported mainstream pop and rock music as their favorites, with many interviewees giving names of American pop stars, such as Selena Gomez, Hannah Montana/Miley Cyrus, Justin Bieber, Victoria Justice and Michael Jackson as their favorites. Additionally, Yuliya, a mother from Uzbekistan, offered that her two sons “love American food, like hamburgers and pizza” and often “attend sleepovers with other students,” which is an activity that did not happen in their home country in Central Asia. Therefore, even though efforts are made to preserve connections to the native culture, and even though these students most likely see some aspects of American culture in their home country, these students are immersed in American culture while in the United States, and are clearly actively participating in it.

From the responses of the students, it became clear that benefits exist for participating in, or acculturating to, American culture. Adopting aspects of American culture makes sense for these students because if they participate in this culture, such as watching the same television programs and listening to the same music as the American students, they may have an easier time communicating, since there are more options for commonalities in topics of conversation. This, accordingly, could assist them in making friends, whether from America or from other cultures. Waluyo, from Indonesia, exemplified this while discussing his love of football, which has developed since he has been living in this midwestern town. When asked if he liked sports, Waluyo's father said "absolutely, every time...the local university have big home game, he enthusiastically turn on the tv and follow all the movements of [football players]." His father also said that "He always act like them when he plays with his friends." Waluyo's desire to adopt the football culture of this midwestern town shows that, while he may genuinely be interested in sports, he could also be adopting prominent aspects of the culture of his host country. Listening to mainstream American pop stars and watching popular American television gives the students a foundation for camaraderie and communication that they might not otherwise have had.

With the benefits, however, there are also negative impacts, and participation in American culture might sometimes mean that the student participates in activities specific to their home country less frequently, or adopts characteristics that clash with the foundations of his or her native culture. During my interviews, I only had one participant express concern about the negative impact of American culture on her children, saying that her daughter was preoccupied with capitalism, materialism, and consumerism of American culture and that her daughter had developed an unpleasant arrogance, resentment and demand for expensive clothing since being in the United States and interacting with American students. Interestingly, she also stated that her daughter "definitely sees a difference between herself and American students." It is understandable that some sojourner families may be cautious of potential negative impacts of adopting aspects of American culture, and it has been reported, at least for one cultural group,

that “Yemeni families who have remained in the United States... have feared that “American” culture might have a negative impact on their children and their way of life” (Sarroub, 2001, p. 398). While only this one participant pointed out negative effects of interacting within American culture, it is understandable that the contrast between a student’s native background and his or her new environment could create conflict.

Furthermore, despite the fact that none of the students directly identified his or herself as an outsider, their perceived ‘difference’ was alluded to in discussions of how they struggled when trying to navigate a new school, bonding with other students with similar circumstances more readily and easily than with American students. However, recognizing such differences and even highlighting them does not have to bring about a negative situation. Clayton emphasizes that “...to have one’s difference positively acknowledged when one is in the minority is to celebrate one’s identity” (Clayton, 1996, p. 131). Therefore, even if the student participates in, and adopts aspects of American culture, he or she could still thrive and preserve their cultural identity with the proper support and resources. In this way, the local resource center is invaluable for students, because of its atmosphere of community, coupled with regular events and activities that highlight specific cultures. Overall, I found that quite a few of the participants in my study adopted aspects of their new American environment but still reported close ties with their native culture and had positive anticipation for their re-entry into their native culture.

From the reports it can be seen that, despite the one negative report of the mother whose daughter was resentful of her native culture, adopting aspects of American culture was not a problem for all but one student in my study. Furthermore, as stated in the section on Re-Entry anticipation, the negativity this family has experienced with regard to American culture could be due to a variety of factors, and may not necessarily be indicative of common experiences among international students. The other students I spoke with seemed excited about American culture, but also expressed desire to retain their cultural identity.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

For this research project, I interviewed twenty-two participants from ten different families (all who had spent anywhere from eight months to nine years in the United States) in order to gain an understanding of their experiences as sojourners. Seven countries were represented within this group of participants, including Indonesia, Vietnam, Nepal, Mexico, Korea, Uzbekistan, and India. From the interview data, I found three emerging themes: Sojourner Stress and Challenges, Re-Entry Anticipation and Anglo-Conformity. From these interviews, the participants were able to share their experiences with me, thereby sharing their cultural voice.

Despite the perceived difficulties that were illuminated through sources in the literature review, I found the student participants to be resilient, with reports of academic and social success in adjusting to life in the United States. Although difficulties were discussed, only one parent expressed significant concern for her child's adjustment, and the concern was focused on a specific occurrence, which could be caused by a variety of factors. The children that I interviewed are resilient, despite the obstacles and even while they note that their experiences have been difficult at times. Overall, it appears that these students are able to function and navigate socially within several different cultures, which will serve them well in the future. This resiliency and increase in global experience may be a continuing trend, with the continuation of graduate or K-12 students crossing geographical and cultural borders for the purposes of education.

As a result of this study, it became clear that efforts to organize social groups of international students with families in the United States, and activities and events for them, is extremely important for support and to make the acculturation process more beneficial. The participants offered that their interaction with other students, especially sojourners, was helpful for their acculturation and adjustment process. Likewise, participants stated that cultural events were a way for families to remain connected to their heritage. Therefore, these group activities and events play a large role in adjustment and acculturation for these students, since the support system that they cultivate through these events is valuable. Clayton emphasizes the importance of activities that are appropriate and able to be accomplished by cross-cultural students, in order to “[boost] their self-esteem as they go about the job of acculturation” and “help...their classmates to accept them more easily as peers rather than pariahs.” (Clayton, 1996, p. 91), since often “they are surrounded by language (and hence, activities) that [are] beyond them” (Clayton, 1996, p. 90). This, essentially, could help to “[build] self-efficacy,” which, as discussed earlier, has a significant impact on positive adjustment (Hechanova-Alampay, 2002, p. 472). These activities and their lasting effects could help bolster the resilience of these sojourner students and their families. Therefore, universities, organizations and school systems should continue to organize such events, judging from the feedback from these participants.

Additionally, other implications for these findings exist for universities and other organizations. While this study highlighted the sojourner’s cultural voice, there are other aspect of the sojourner’s stay in The United States, Oklahoma, that could be addressed. For example, it could be useful to examine the differences in behavior and the adjustment processes between males and females in the sojourner experience. An examination of the various programs offered for sojourners, their operating details and the participants’ perceptions of the programs. Likewise, it would be useful to further examine what specific difficulties these sojourners have with the curriculum in their temporary home. Furthermore, it would be ideal, as a follow -up study, to interview the same participants once more after their return to their native culture to allow them



to share their experiences with re-entry, and their adjustment back into their native culture and educational system. These additional questions would be worthwhile, and would further serve to highlight the cultural voice of each sojourner in the study, and to gain a better understanding of their needs as a collective population.

Ultimately, there are many implications for education in this research, since “the realities of a students’ cultural and life experiences cannot be ignored in an education context and we cannot understand these realities if we do not ask the students about them” (Thomas, 1999, p. 28). It has been stated that the goal of individuals attempting to educate children “isn’t to protect children from problems, but instead to put them in situations where they can experience problems and struggle to find solutions” (Tobin, et al., 2009, p. 156). Indeed, some amount of difficulty seems to be inevitable when young children are faced with learning and functioning within a new cultural environment. However, perhaps some difficulties could be alleviated or prevented with increased awareness of their perceptions of the host environment and of potential complications or difficulties. These findings, or similar studies, could help, then, to guide universities and other institutions or organizations in developing programs and planning activities, essentially making resources available for international students to make their experience more beneficial. By understanding the sojourner’s cultural voice, their needs can be better determined and met.

\*Names have been changed for data reporting purposes

## REFERENCES

- Adler, N. J. (1981). Re-Entry: Managing Cross-Cultural Transitions. *Group & Organization Studies*, 6(3),
- Akrofi, A. K., Swafford, J., Janisch, C., Liu, X. and Durrington, V. (2008). Supporting Immigrant Students' Understanding of U.S. Culture through Children's Literature. *Childhood Education*, 844, 209-218.
- Allen, A. Personal Interview. 31 Mar. 2011.
- Arthur, N. (2003). Preparing International Students for the Re-Entry Transition. *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, 37(3), 173-185.
- Brein, M., and David, K. H. (1971). Intercultural Communication and the Adjustment of the Sojourner. *Psychological Bulletin*, 76(3), 215-230.
- Carnoy, M., Gove, A. K. and Marshall, J. H. (2007). *Cuba's Academic Advantage: Why Students in Cuba Do Better in School*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Chakrabarti, L. (2008). *Educational Experiences and Academic Achievement of Asian Indian American Students in a Midwestern University Town in the United States: A Multiple Case Study*. Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations. (AAT 3320231)
- Church, A. T. (1982). Sojourner Adjustment. *Psychological Bulletin*, 91(3), 540-572.
- Clayton, J. B. (1996). *Your Land, My Land: Children in the Process of Acculturation*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Department of Homeland Security. Office of Policy. Office of Immigration Statistics. (2010). *2009 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*. Retrieved from [http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/yearbook/2009/ois\\_yb\\_2009.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/yearbook/2009/ois_yb_2009.pdf)
- Dicker, S. (2008). U.S. Immigrants and the Dilemma of Anglo-Conformity. *Socialism and Democracy*, 22(3), 52-74.
- Freire, P., and Faundez, A. (1989). *Learning to Question: A Pedagogy of Liberation*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Freire, P., and Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*. Vol. 4. 6 vols. Critical Studies in Education Series, Edited by Paulo Freire and Henry A. Giroux. Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey.

- Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction*. New York: Longman.
- Harkins, L. F. (2001). Understanding the Acculturation Process for Kaigaishijo. *The Educational Forum* 65, 335-343.
- Hawley, S., Chavez, D. V., and St. Romain, T. (2007). Developing a Bicultural Model for Academic Achievement: A Look at Acculturative Stress, Coping, and Self-Perception. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 29(3), 283-299.
- Hechanova-Alampay, R, Beehr, T. A., Christiansen, N. D., and Van Horn, R. K.. (2002). Adjustment and Strain among Domestic and International Student Sojourners: A Longitudinal Study. *School Psychology International*, 23(4), 458-474.
- Hirsch, Jr., E. D. (1999). Americanization and the Schools. *The Clearing House*, 72(3), 136-139.
- LaFromboise, T., Coleman H. L.K. and Gerton, J. (1993). Psychological Impact of Biculturalism: Evidence and Theory. *Psychological Bulletin*, 114(3), 395-412.
- Lee, I., and Koro-Ljungberg, M. (2007). A Phenomenological Study of Korean Students' Acculturation in Middle Schools in the USA. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 6(1), 95-117.
- Lee, J. (2008). *Stress and Coping Experiences of International Students with Language Barriers During the Acculturation Process*. Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations. (AAT 3347146)
- Martens, V. P., and Grant, P. R. (2008). A Needs Assessment of International Students' Wives. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 12(1), 56-75.
- Martin, J. N. (1984). The Intercultural Reentry: Conceptualization and Directions for Future Research. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations/IJIR*, 8(2), 115-134.
- National Center for Education Statistics. United States Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences. Digest of Education Statistics. (2009). *Average reading scale scores of 4th and 8th-Graders in public schools and percentage scoring at or above selected reading achievement levels, by English language learner (ELL) status and state or jurisdiction: 2007. Table 124*. Retrieved from [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09\\_124.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09_124.asp)
- National Center for Education Statistics. United States Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences. Digest of Education Statistics. (2009). *Number and percentage of all schools that had any students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or who were limited-English proficient (LEP) and percentage of students with an IEP or who were LEP, by school type and selected school characteristics: 2007–08. Table 2 under Characteristics of Public, Private, and Bureau of Indian Education Elementary and Secondary Schools in the United States*. Retrieved from [http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009321/tables/sass0708\\_2009321\\_s12n\\_02.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009321/tables/sass0708_2009321_s12n_02.asp)
- Nieto, S. (2000). *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*. New York: Longman.

- Oklahoma State University. (2010). Academic Ledger Fall 2010. Student Profile Download. Present Student Body, Page 5, under Residency. Retrieved from <http://vpaf.okstate.edu/IRIM/StudentProfile/2009/PDF/2009PresentStudentBody.pdf>
- Oklahoma State University, Family Resource Center. (2011). Family Resource Center. Retrieved from <http://www.reslife.okstate.edu/frc/>
- Sam, D. L. (Ed.), and Berry, J. W. (Ed.) (2006). *Cambridge Handbook of Acculturation Psychology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sarroub, L. K. (2001). The Sojourner Experience of Yemeni American High School Students: An Ethnographic Portrait. *Harvard Educational Review*, 71(3) 390-415.
- Sherry, M., Thomas, P., and Chui, W.H. (2010). International Students: A Vulnerable Student Population. *Higher Education*, 60(1) 33-46.
- Shimahara, N. (1970). Enculturation – A Reconsideration. *Current Anthropology*, 11(2), 143-154.
- Shor, I., and Freire, P. (1987). *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education*. Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc.
- Thomas, S. (1999). *Dancing on a Moving Carpet: Gifted Bilingual Immigrant Students' Perceptions and Experiences*. Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations. (UMI 9936124)
- Tobin, J., Hsueh, Y., and Karasawa, M. (2009). *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited :China, Japan, and the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tong, V. M., Huang, C. W. and McIntyre, T. (2006). Promoting a Positive Cross-Cultural Identity: Reaching Immigrant Students. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 14(4), 203-208.
- United States Census Bureau. The 2010 Statistical Abstract. The National Data Book. (2009). *Children Who Speak a Language Other Than English at Home by Region: 2007. Table 231 under Education: Elementary and Secondary Education: Special Topics*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2010/tables/10s0231.pdf>
- United States Census Bureau. The 2010 Statistical Abstract. The National Data Book. (2010). *Students Who Are Foreign Born or Who Have Foreign-Born Parents: 2007. Table 223 under Education: All Levels of Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2010/tables/10s0223.pdf>
- Westwood, M.J., Lawrence, W.S, and Paul, D. (1986). Preparing for Re-Entry; a Program for the Sojourning Student. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 9(3), 221-230.
- Zadeh, Z. Y., Geva, E., and Rogers, M. A. (2008). The Impact of Acculturation on the Perception of Academic Achievement by Immigrant Mothers and Their Children. *School Psychology International*, 29(1), 39-70.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

**INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**  
**WITH ELEMENTARY OR JUNIOR-HIGH AGE**  
**CHILDREN**

I am interested in learning about young international students' experiences with education

I am writing a paper about education for my master's thesis and would like to talk with International graduate students with children in the local school system, and their children, who would like to share their experiences with me.



If you would be willing to participate in a 15-30 minute interview to provide your experiences

please contact me at 918-232-5052 or [erica.grayson@okstate.edu](mailto:erica.grayson@okstate.edu)

## APPENDIX B

The following questions about the children were asked of the parents:

1. What is your name, age? Where are you from? (Nationality, home country)
2. Are you a student? If so, which program?
3. Family Dynamics – Is your spouse with you? How many children do you have?
4. Did you study English in your home country? How would you describe your child's (children's) English speaking ability?
5. How long have you and your family been in the U.S.? How long have you and your family been in the United States?
6. What is your child's self-perception of his/her self? How does he/she identify specifically with her/his native culture? In what ways does she/he identify specifically with American culture? How do you think he/she has changed since being in The United States?
7. Are you involved in any programs, classes, etc. at the student center or anywhere else? If so, which ones?
8. Do you have any other family members in the U.S.? If so, where, and how often do you see them?
9. What is your anticipation for the future, when you and your child/children return to your home country?

The following were asked of the children/young students:

1. What is your name, age? Where are you from? (Nationality, home country)
2. Tell me about your family - do you have brothers/sisters? Why are you in The United States?
3. What is your favorite television show here in the United States? Favorite movie?
4. What music do you like?
5. What is your native language, what language do you speak in your home country?
6. Is learning and/or speaking English difficult for you? Easy? Fun?
7. Where do you go to school? Can you tell me about your school?
8. What do you like about school? What is hardest for you at school?
9. What do you do besides go to school? What do you like to do?
10. Who are your friends and how did you meet them? What do you like to do together?
11. Have you had any difficulties with anything? Language, etc.?
12. How would you describe American culture? What is different here from your home country?
13. Are you taking any extracurricular activities: sports, music, dance? Could you tell me more about that?
14. What has been the hardest thing for you to adjust to here?
15. Is there anything you would recommend to make your education experience here in The United States better?
16. Are you excited and/or eager to go back to your home country? Why or why not? Do you think anything will be different for you when you return? If so, what?

## APPENDIX C

### **INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR PARENTS**

**PROJECT TITLE:** Adjustment, Assimilation and the Fate of the Cultural Voice<sup>1</sup>:  
Experiences of International K-12 Students

**It is completely voluntary for your child to answer my questions about education. If you or they decide not to participate, or decide to stop the interview at any time, there will be no problem.**

**INVESTIGATOR:** Erica Grayson, Bachelor of Arts in English, Candidate for Master of Science in International Studies

#### **PURPOSE:**

I am a graduate student at OSU, completing a Master of Science degree in International Studies. For my thesis, I am would like to interview International graduate students and their families, specifically their children who are K-12 students living and going to school here in the United States. This research is intended to help me (and others) gain a better understanding of the education experience of international students, specifically elementary and junior high age students. The questions I will ask are to learn about your child's personal experiences with the culture and education. I am interested in the classroom, school environment, resources that are available (language and otherwise), and what other resources might be helpful in learning English, etc. I would also like to learn about what experiences your child has had adjusting to a different culture and educational environment, (what has been good, bad, helpful, unhelpful, difficult, etc.) during this adjustment period and what you think and/or hope will happen in the future, when you return to your home country.

#### **PROCEDURES:**

The parents/international students who choose to participate will be asked the following questions about their child's/children's experience during their individual interview:

10. What is your name, age? Where are you from? (Nationality, home country)
11. Are you a student? If so, which program?
12. Family Dynamics – Is your spouse with you? How many children do you have?
13. Did you study English in your home country? How would you describe your child's (children's) English speaking ability?
14. How long have you and your family been in the U.S.? How long have you and your family been in your current city?

---

<sup>1</sup> Inkyung Lee and Mirka Koro-Ljungberg. "A Phenomenological Study of Korean Students' Acculturation in Middle Schools in the USA." *Journal of Research in International Education* 6, no. 1 (2007): 100.

15. What is your child's self-perception of his/her self? How does he/she identify specifically with her/his native culture? In what ways does she/he identify specifically with American culture? How do you think he/she has changed since being in the United States?
16. Are you involved in any programs, classes, etc.? If so, which ones?
17. Do you have any other family members in the U.S.? If so, where, and how often do you see them?
18. What is your anticipation for the future, when you and your child/children return to your home country?

The following questions will be asked of the children/young students:

17. What is your name, age? Where are you from? (Nationality, home country)
18. Tell me about your family - do you have brothers/sisters? Why are you in The United States?
19. What is your native language, what language do you speak in your home country?
20. Is learning and/or speaking English difficult for you? Easy? Fun?
21. Where do you go to school? Can you tell me about your school?
22. What do you like about school? What is hardest for you at school?
23. What do you do besides go to school? What do you like to do?
24. Who are your friends and how did you meet them? What do you like to do together?
25. Have you had any difficulties with anything? Language, etc.?
26. How would you describe American culture? What is different here from your home country?
27. Are you taking any extracurricular activities: sports, music, dance? Could you tell me more about that?
28. What has been the hardest thing for you to adjust to here?
29. Is there anything you would recommend to make your education experience here in The United States better?
30. Are you excited and/or eager to go back to your home country? Why or why not? Do you think anything will be different for you when you return? If so, what?

If you decide to talk with me for this research, our talk will be audio taped and I would like to talk with you separately from your spouse, if possible. I would like you to be with your child when I talk to him or her about their experiences, for their comfort. All of my questions could take between 15 and 30 minutes, but our talk should not last longer than 30 minutes.

**RISKS OF PARTICIPATION:** Talking with me for this research should not create any problems or difficulty for you. Please feel free to tell me if any question makes you uncomfortable.

**BENEFITS:** By talking with you and your children, I hope to better understand the problems that your children might face in adjusting to the culture and different educational setting in The United States, determine what things could be improved and to learn about what good things they have experienced, what things they enjoy, etc.

I hope that by talking with you, my research can provide insight and more understanding in order to help find ways to make international students' (and families') educational experiences better.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Any written results of the information you tell me will not include your name or any other information that could identify you or your child. The information you give will be combined with the opinions and responses of other participants for analysis, to ensure confidentiality. If I do quote you directly, I will use another name to identify you, but won't use your real name. While I am analyzing this



information and writing the thesis, it will be kept private and will be stored on my personal, password-protected computer at my home, which is only accessed with the appropriate key. Any backup copies of the data, and any transcripts of the information will be stored at the on-campus office of my advisor, Dr. Denise Blum, but no one else should have access to this information. A list of alternate names to be used will be kept in an electronic file on my computer, and will be kept separate from all of your responses, in order to protect your identity. Your responses may be shared with my advisor, Dr. Denise Blum, but no one else will have access to the data. The information I collect will be kept for no more than two calendar years, until approximately January 31, 2013, as the information will be analyzed and reported in my thesis and will be kept until the thesis has been written and defended. After this period of time, all of the information will be permanently deleted or erased from all electronic devices and any paper copies of transcribed interviews will be shredded. The interviews will be recorded using a voice recording application on my phone. These voice files will then be uploaded immediately after each interview is conducted, erased from the phone, and stored electronically on my computer (which is password protected) in a file separately from both my personal files and the other interview data. The audio data will only be typed out and/or analyzed by myself. A typed copy of the interview questions and responses and a backup copy of the data will be stored in my advisor's office on campus and will only be transported, if necessary, via locked bag. There should be no foreseeable risks to keeping this information private.

**CONTACTS:**

Erica Grayson  
123 W. Maple, Apt. C  
Stillwater, OK 74074  
(918) 232-5052  
[Erica.grayson@okstate.edu](mailto:Erica.grayson@okstate.edu)

**Advisor:**

Dr. Denise Blum  
214 Willard Hall  
Stillwater, OK 74078  
(405) 744-3461  
[d.blum@okstate.edu](mailto:d.blum@okstate.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

**PARTICIPANT RIGHTS:**

It is your choice to participate in this research or not and you may choose not to participate at any time, for any reason without negative effects.

**SIGNATURES:**

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it of my own free will. A copy of this form has been given to me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I certify that this document has been explained before the participant has been requested to sign it.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Parental Signature for Minor**

I have read and fully understand the consent form. As parent or guardian I authorize

\_\_\_\_\_ (print name) to participate in the described research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Name (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I certify that this document has been explained before the participant has been requested to sign it.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX D

**Child Assent Form**

Dear Student:

I would like to hear about your experiences with school and learning. I am writing a paper about education and would like to talk with you and your family. You don't have to talk with me and you can choose not to answer any of the questions during our talk. You can stop talking with me whenever you want if you decide you don't want to answer any more questions. Your name will not be on any of the answers you give in my paper. Answering my questions should take about 15-30 minutes, and your mom or dad can stay with you while you talk with me. If you would like to tell me about yourself, I have a form for your parent(s) to sign. If you have any questions about what I am doing, or any of the questions I have for you, please ask me.

Sincerely,

Erica Grayson  
Graduate Student  
Oklahoma State University

I have read this form and agree to help with your project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(your name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(your signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(date)

## APPENDIX E

### METHOD OF CODING

Code (1 <sup>st</sup> Synthesis)	Section Focus	Code (2 <sup>nd</sup> Synthesis)	Section Focus – 2 <sup>nd</sup> Synthesis (most significant findings)	Related Research Question (s)
SS	Sojourner Stress and Difficulty	SS	Sojourner Stress and Difficulty	What experiences do sojourner families have adjusting to life in The United States? What do they have difficulty with?
RE	Re-Entry Anticipation	RE	Re-Entry Anticipation	What do these sojourner families anticipate for the return to their home country?
PH	Phases of Acculturation	SS	Sojourner Stress and Difficulty	What experiences do sojourner families have adjusting to life in the United States?
EL	Perceptions of English Language	AC	Anglo-Conformity	What experiences do sojourner families have adjusting to life in the United States? What resources are in place to assist sojourner families with this transition? What other resources are needed to make their experience more beneficial?
NC	Importance of Native Culture	AC	Anglo-Conformity	What experiences do sojourner families have adjusting to life in the United States? What do they have difficulty with? What do these sojourner families anticipate for the return to their home country?
AC	Anglo-Conformity	AC	Anglo-Conformity	What experiences do sojourner families have adjusting to life in the United States? What do these sojourner families anticipate for the return to their home country?
IP	Influence of Parents	SS	Sojourner Stress and Difficulty	What experiences do sojourner families have adjusting to life in the United States? What do they have difficulty with?
ED	Perceptions of Education in the United States	AC	Anglo-Conformity	What experiences do sojourner families have adjusting to life in the United States? What resources are in place to assist sojourner families with this transition? What other resources are needed to make their experience more beneficial?

APPENDIX F

STUDENTS' INFORMATION

<u>NAME</u>	<u>GENDER</u>	<u>HOME COUNTRY</u>	<u>TIME IN UNITED STATES</u>
Kade	Female	Indonesia	2 years
Hijriya	Female	Indonesia	2 years
Mimik	Male	Nepal	1.5 years
Waluyo	Male	Indonesia	8 months
Xuan	Male	Vietnam	1 year
Anh	Female	Vietnam	1 year
Maaran	Male	India	8-9 years
Teresa	Female	Mexico	5 years
Baasim	Male	India	10 years
Sun Hi	Female	Korea	4 years

VITA

Erica Grayson

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: ADJUSTMENT, ACCULTURATION AND THE CULTURAL VOICE:  
EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Major Field: International Studies

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in International Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2011.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in English at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2005.

Name: Erica Grayson

Date of Degree: July, 2011

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: ADJUSTMENT, ACCULTURATION AND THE CULTURAL VOICE:  
EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL FAMILIES

Pages in Study: 65

Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science

Major Field: International Studies

Scope and Method of Study: International graduate students and their families, specifically their young children, as sojourners, can experience difficulties adjusting to the United States and its associated different culture and education system (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010, p. 34); (Tong, Huang, & McIntyre, 2006, p. 203). These young students constitute a particular cultural adjustment because they are neither immigrants nor refugees. Little research has been done concerning the sojourner child. These children not only experience challenges with negotiating schooled identities in a new and different environment, the transition back to their native culture and educational environment after experiencing these changes, may potentially lead them to “experiencing anxiety about returning home” (Sherry et al., 2010, p. 34). Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to highlight and examine the experiences of international sojourner students enrolled in elementary or secondary school in a Midwestern college town. Throughout this study, I have attempted to assess what challenges and/or successes these young students had with English language acquisition and adjustment to American culture and education and to assess any additional needs that could be met, in addition to support programs already in place. By understanding the voices and experiences of these sojourners, efforts can be made to create a more supportive environment. For this research project, I interviewed twenty-two participants from ten different families (all who had spent anywhere from eight months to nine years in the United States) in order to gain an understanding of their experiences as sojourners. Seven countries were represented within this group of participants: Indonesia, Vietnam, Nepal, Mexico, Korea, Uzbekistan, and India. Through the interviews, the students were able to share their experiences and cultural voice.

Findings and Conclusions: These students reported difficulties with language learning and communication and making friends. These students and their families also reported that they were anticipating their re-entry and supplemented their curriculum to more closely match their home country. Efforts to retain knowledge and practice of native culture-specific norms were also reported, highlighting the sojourners’ efforts to prepare to make a smooth transition back to their home country. Through my interaction with these students, I learned that they are resilient, despite the reported challenges. Highlighting the students’ challenges and successes provides insight into their experiences and allows them to share their cultural voice.

ADVISER’S APPROVAL: Dr. Denise Blum

---